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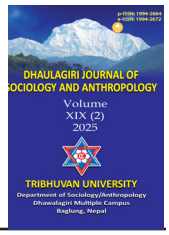

Interview with Dr. Prem Bhandari

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Introduction and Background

Dr. Prem Bhandari is a distinguished social scientist and a member of the International Advisory Board of Dhaulagiri Journal of Sociology and Anthropology (DJSA). Dr. Bhandari was born and raised in rural Nepal, where he began his academic pursuits. His educational journey continued across Kathmandu, Chitwan, Thailand, and the USA, covering diverse fields of study including biology, agricultural economics, rural development planning, and rural sociology and demography. Dr. Bhandari completed his PhD in Rural Sociology and Demography from the Pennsylvania State University, USA. His research interests are broad, spanning fertility, migration, rural livelihoods, population health, and the socio-economic and cultural determinants of social change, with a particular focus on Nepal and South Asia. His current research focuses on factors contributing to profitability in agritourism, visitor attractions, and activity diversification in agritourism. His academic career spans several prestigious institutions, including Tribhuvan University, Nepal; the University of Alberta, Canada; the University of Michigan; and the University of Maryland Eastern Shore. In Nepal, Dr. Bhandari has contributed to applied research in social science through the Institute for Social and Environmental Research-Nepal (ISER-N). In addition to his roles in teaching, research, and Extension, he has been deeply engaged in national and international research collaborations, hosting and participating in conferences, mentoring scholars in Nepal and the U.S., and serving as an editor for academic journals. His positive attitude, warm heart, simplicity, and willingness to share his valuable time, experiences, and skills, and his contribution through publishing research articles in food security, migration, and research methods for the DJSA have encouraged us to get to know him better. We believe his life trajectory will serve as a profound source of inspiration for emerging scholars to shape their own lives. We are thankful and extend our sincere gratitude to Dr. Bhandari for accepting the proposal for a written interview, in which he has generously and thoughtfully engaged.

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Question 1: Could you please share in detail about your family background (Birthplace, information about your parents, marital life and children, educational journey from primary school to university)?

Answer: I thank the Editorial team, and specifically, Dr. Khattri and Professor Subedi, for this opportunity to talk about my life. I felt that delving into others is more interesting than studying and exposing oneself.

I was born in 1963 to a blessed Bhandari family in Ranikot, now Ward #5 of Sharada Nagar Palika, Salyan District, Nepal. I was raised in a big joint family of late Sher Bahadur Bhandari/Bishnu Bhandari (grandfather/ grandmother). I am the youngest son of the late Jit Bahadur Bhandari and the late Shavitra Bhandari (Rana). My elder brother Dilli Bhandari and I grew up with our mother and grandparents until they passed away.

As a sociologist and a demographer, I know that childhood experiences shape an individual's future behaviors. Thus, a little bit of contextual background. At the time, my hometown had a natural environment, and everyone in the community was closely connected to nature, living a rural folk life: no roads, no electricity, no tap water, and no modern amenities (until 1994 AD/2050 BS). The nearest primary school (grade up to 5) was within 30 minutes of walking and a high school (grades 6-10) within an hour of walking. Now, the context has changed significantly, with a variety of modern amenities and services.

I am blessed to have married Usha (daughter of the late Gopal B. Thapa and Gauri Thapa, Bagar, Dang) back in 1989 AD (2046 BS). Currently, we (my beloved wife, Usha, and two sons, Ashish and Abesh) have been settled in the U.S. since 2000 AD (2056 B.S.). I would not be at this stage and place without their love and dedicated support.

My educational journey started in my hometown in Salyan. I completed primary school (grade 1-5) from Mahendra Ratna Primary school (now a higher secondary school) and high school (SLC - school leaving certificate) from the Tribhuvan Public High school (from grade 6-10), one among the three high schools in the district.

There were no colleges nearby. I completed my intermediate of science (I.Sc.) from Tri-Chandra Campus, Kathmandu. Then, I joined Rampur Campus, Institute of Agriculture and Animal Science (IAAS), Tribhuvan University (T.U.), Rampur, Chitwan, Nepal, for my further studies. I completed B.Sc. in Agriculture (Agricultural Economics) in 1987. Immediately after completion, I joined the position of Assistant Lecturer (Assistant Professor) in the Department of Agricultural Economics at IAAS. After about a year of teaching at Rampur, I was transferred to Lamjung Campus, a branch campus of IAAS, in 1988. Then, in 1990, I was transferred back to Rampur and got a tenure. In 1991, I joined the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) in Bangkok, Thailand for my M.Sc. in Rural and Regional Development Planning studies and completed in 1993 and returned to IASS to continue my service at T.U.

In 1994, I received the opportunity to join the Irrigation Management Systems Study Group (IMSSG) as a Faculty Associate, led by Dr. Ganesh Shivakoti. In 1995, after the establishment of the Population and Ecology Research Laboratory (PERL), I joined PERL as a Faculty Associate. The PERL had implemented two longitudinal panel studies – one in Social Science/Demography and the other in Environmental Studies. These NIH (National Institute of Health, USA) projects were the joint ventures between the Tribhuvan University, Nepal (led by Dr. Ganesh Shivakoti) and the Pennsylvania State University, USA (led by Dr. William G. Axinn, who later moved to the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, USA). At PERL, I also had the opportunity to work as a Field Coordinator from 1997-2000.

In 2000, I was admitted to the Department of Rural Sociology and Agricultural Economics at Pennsylvania State University, USA, to pursue my PhD Studies in Rural Sociology and Demography (a dual title degree program at Penn State) under the supervision of Dr. Leif Jensen and Dr. Shannon Stokes (Co-Chairs) and graduated in 2006. There, I had the opportunity to study under the supervision of Drs. Gordon de Jong, Diane McLaughlin, Stephen Matthews, and Richard Steadman (currently at Cornell University). I also worked in Natural Resources with Dr. Al Luloff, in the Department as a Research Associate after my graduation, and left Penn State in 2007.

Question 2: We understand that your university educational journey began in Nepal, continued in Thailand, and culminated in the United States. Please describe your academic experiences across these countries, particularly focusing on differences in theoretical and practical rigor. What were the most significant or insightful lessons you gained from each University?

Answer: I am privileged and fortunate to have my basic education in Nepal that framed and widened my horizon of viewing things outside of village world - my worldview – seeing things, way of studying things, examining them, and understanding the nature with a wider but focused lens. More importantly, I really feel proud of my birthplace – the home of *the Sanatan* religion, my exposure, learning, and practicing of eastern philosophical knowledge and wisdom, the birthplace of Lord Buddha, the country of Mt. Everest, and, more importantly, the welcoming brotherhood and sisterhood with big hearts.

I learned the value of studying hard and making it a value of my life right from the beginning of my school days. I realized that even things that look small are not small, and things that look easy are not as easy as they seem. Now, I remember Prof. Arland Thronton a renowned sociologist (https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/

s11113-019-09551-0), at the University of Michigan with whom I had the opportunity to work for several years reminding us "**no job is a small job**."

Moreover, as a student of science, my college education at Tri-Chandra Campus taught me that "persistence combined with quality is important." Continuing with this, the education at the bachelor's level (as a student of Agriculture) shaped my views on the real-world application of education (but with some focus on research). Overall, the education I received in Nepal was more general (perhaps due to the level of education), more theoretical (and less research focused), however, less practically oriented (bookish, classroom-centered with less application). Conversely, in the name of respect for Gurus and elders, I refrained from asking questions. It could be true only for me, I accepted everything our Guru taught us or our elders advised us. No questioning! When I came to Thailand and the U.S. for my graduate studies, I realized a serious lack of it in me. The next verse from Dr. Shannon Stokes, my Professor and Mentor at Penn State and Prof. Arland Thronton put inside me "**Asking doesn't harm**."

My education at the Asian Institute of Technology, Thailand, added the scientific rigor in learning worldviews, questioning them, and thinking broadly and questioning issues surrounding me. The education at the Pennsylvania State University, USA, added many things – real-world application of various theories in explaining phenomena using a variety of theoretical windows. I found that education here is just not about accepting what the mentor says; it is about critical thinking and questioning, generating alternative thoughts, and explaining those thoughts or explanations with logic (with the application of theories or the application of science) and evidence. Here, I started learning things, going deep and looking at things minutely.

One **interesting** example that always strikes in my mind is "the Malthusian Theory of Population." As a student of economics at the Tribhuvan University, I thought that once upon a time (nearly 200 years ago in 2000) there was a person named Thomas Malthus, who propounded the theory of population. Now, both the person and the theory are limited to history books. However, as a student of Social Science, Demography, and Natural Resources at Penn State, I learned that this theory still exists and could be relevant in a variety of settings (with some modifications). When we start explaining demographic/population change, this theory is the starting point of the discussion or argument. Now my worldview to look at Malthus has totally changed – from "there was Malthus who propounded the theory of population" to according to the Malthusian theory "population increases geometrically, and food increases arithmetically." I learned that the ideas or thoughts never die.

Question 3: Your academic focus has evolved from Agricultural Economics at Tribhuvan University (TU) to Rural Development Planning at Asian Institute of Technology (AIT), and later to Rural Sociology and Demography at Pennsylvania State University, USA. What key factors influenced these shifts in your academic trajectory?

Answer: A short answer is – this is not by choice – or I prefer to say due to "god's grace." Whatever came to my shoulder, I accepted it.

When I passed the school-leaving certificate (SLC), I had no clue whether I would be able to further my education or, if I did, which discipline to pursue. The nearest campus was located in Ghorahi, Dang (about 2 days of walk) or in Nepalganj (4-6 days of walk). Since my hometown was connected to Nepalganj due to traditional trade route for daily necessities such as salt, kerosene, clothes, stationery, tea, and sugar, our family decided to send me to Nepalganj for campus admission. However, as the regular admission was over, I couldn't join and went to my aunt and uncle's house (Durga Rai and Bir Bahadur Rai) in Kailali District. My aunt and uncle's family encouraged me to go to Kathmandu for higher studies. This opportunity changed the trajectory of my whole career.

Here, I explored the pros and cons of various disciplines. Then, I decided to get admitted to the biology group with the expectation that if I got a good grade, I could get the opportunity for a Colombo plan (for a medical science degree). I joined the intermediate of science (biology) at the Tri-Chandra campus. I passed I.Sc. with a grade good enough for getting the rural quota for a Colombo plan in B.Sc. in Agriculture, but not for medical science. Rather than planning for an Agriculture degree, I decided to continue B.Sc. in science with a major in Microbiology. One day, two of my friends asked me to go to Rampur Campus for B.Sc. Agriculture admission. First, I decided not to go. They insisted that we could become an agriculture officer (*hakim*) after graduation in 3 years. With that expectation in mind, we went to Rampur, Chitwan. Fortunately, or unfortunately, I was the only one among the three accepted for admission. Once again, I got confused about whether I should leave my colleagues. Later, I joined Rampur campus. Now my dream has changed to be an agricultural officer. I enjoyed it there and got good grades. As a student of science, I learned the value of hard work in academic achievements. I completed B. Sc. in Agriculture with a major in Agricultural Economics.

Immediately after completing my bachelor's degree, I joined the Department of Agricultural Economics to teach courses in Agricultural Economics. My dream once again changed from an agricultural office to a university professor. As a faculty member of Tribhuvan University, my dream was to pursue higher studies in Agricultural Economics. But this opportunity was not available inside Nepal. Unlike these days, getting scholarships for higher studies outside of Nepal was virtually impossible. The Asian Institute of Technology, Thailand, was among the

popular and highly respected institutions that offered scholarships for higher studies in the region. I applied for M.S. in Rural and Regional Development Planning program (closest degree next to Agricultural Economics) and received admission with a full scholarship. I spent nearly two years (May 1992 to December 1993) to complete my education, and returned to Rampur Campus to continue my existing position in Rampur.

At the time, Prof. Bill Axinn from the Pennsylvania State University and Dr. Ganesh Shivakoti, Rampur Campus, Tribhuvan University, were in the process of implementing the Chitwan Valley Family Study (CVFS) (https://cvfs.isr.umich.edu/) to study population dynamics, rural social change, and environmental change. I was fortunate to join the team as a faculty associate. I worked there for about 6 years. In 2000, I went to Pennsylvania State University (Penn State), University Park, to join the Rural Sociology and Demography (a dual title degree) in the Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology. I completed Ph.D. degree in 2006. Despite my strong intention to return to Rampur and serve the University, due to ongoing political turmoil in Nepal and several other factors, I decided to stay here. Thus, all the paths I walked for my academic (and disciplinary) journey happened by chance, not by choice. I don't know how far I can stretch this trajectory of a curved line.

Question 4: You have a diverse professional background, including roles as a lecturer at Tribhuvan University in Nepal, a research scientist at the University of Michigan in the USA, and more recently an Extension professional (in agritourism and agricultural marketing) at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore (UMES). What motivated these transitions, and what challenges and opportunities have you experienced along the way?

Answer: Once again, not by choice. However, I am fortunate to have taken all different roles – Teaching (Tribhuvan University, Nepal and University of Alberta, Canada), Research (University of Michigan, USA), and Extension (University of Maryland Eastern Shore, USA) during my professional career. These are the three core goals of the land grant university systems worldwide.

The main motivating factor for taking a teaching role at Tribhuvan University, Nepal, was my passion for higher studies, which germinated at the Rampur campus. The most important challenge was the fear of speaking in front of people. More importantly, I was teaching my own previous batchmates from undergraduate studies and close friends during my hostel life in Rampur campus. Having lived at the residential campus of Rampur during my Bachelors' studies, we had developed intimate relationships with several of my colleague-students. So, developing a student-teacher relationship was a big challenge. After a first couple of weeks/months of teaching, I learned to wear different hats at various occasions, for example, a teacher inside the classroom and in matters of teaching-learning, and a friend outside the classroom. This became even more challenging when a roommate (for three years at the hostel) and a close friend of mine joined graduate studies at Rampur. However, my experience of wearing separate hats helped me overcome this challenge. By this time, I had really enjoyed teaching, and it became a passion.

Between 2007 and 2009, I taught at the University of Alberta, Canada, a different context, as an instructor. Since I was equipped with the knowledge and skills learned from Penn State, one of the great universities in the U.S., I had confidence in teaching. The Nepali-English accent was a major challenge. However, students liked the way I taught.

In 2009, I joined a research position at the University of Michigan. This was a major shift from teaching to a research role. Our research field was in Nepal (the CVFS). I enjoyed this role because I already had experience working on this research in Nepal. We also started courses on state-of-the-art social (survey) research methods from the University of Michigan to teach research-based applied skills to scholars in the South Asia region. My teaching experiences and field research experiences in Nepal really helped me excel in this role. Indeed, a great course that I really enjoyed. In this role, finding research grants was the major challenge.

Currently, I am fully engaged in an Extension-based role – the application of research and teaching experiences with real-world applications. This experience is quite different. I wanted to experience the Extension-based position. The major challenge in this position is the difficulty in establishing direct contact or communication with farmers in the U.S. context. First, their number is small. Second, unlike visiting farms in Nepal, access to farmers in the U.S. context is quite challenging because it is not possible to share farmers' contact details to maintain privacy. Third, trust building for us as outsiders is another challenge. Despite this fact, this position is interesting, and I am enjoying this role.

Having experience in all three roles, I feel there is a significant coordination gap among Research-Teaching-Extension professionals. Despite "coordination" being a buzzword globally, its real-world application is a challenge. Those who are teaching (with research) have the knowledge of teaching (and research) but most of them have no experience of Extension. Those engaged in Extension have field-based knowledge and experience, but they are not directly responsible for sharing or exchanging their experiences with students and other research scholars. Those engaged in research have evidence-based knowledge, but there is no sharing with students or farmers. Effective communication among these three disciplines has remained crucial as always.

Question 5: You have expertise in designing, implementing, and analyzing large-scale surveys. Could you share your experience how you ensured

the quality and integrity of data including collection, cleaning, and management?

Answer: I was trained in social research methods during my M.Sc. studies at the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT), with some exposure during my B.Sc. agriculture studies at Rampur. I got an opportunity to deep dive into the world of real world application of state-of-the-art of methods and techniques evolved at the Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan in 1995 when I joined the Chitwan Valley Family Study (CVFS, https://cvfs.isr.umich.edu/) at the Population and Ecology Research Laboratory (PERL) – a joint venture between Rampur Campus and currently with the Institute of Social and Environmental Research-Nepal and the Penn State (and University of Michigan later on). Quality control in social science research, like every other discipline, is crucial but even more challenging. It becomes even more challenging when research is multilevel and longitudinal (panel) in nature.

To me, quality control begins at the very stage of a research cycle - with the identification of a relevant research problem to analysis, interpretations and drawing conclusions (Groves et al., 2010). In between are several crucial stages such as research design (sampling and measurement), data collection, supervision and management, post data collection processing and analysis, and interpretation of results. Quality control is important at every stage. For instance, you may have identified a relevant research problem to be addressed. If your research design (sampling and/or measurement) has flaws, that adversely affects your findings and, therefore, the conclusion and policy implications. Further, you may have a sound sampling design, or you may have designed a high-quality survey instrument; if you failed to prepare a complete sampling frame or failed to train your interviewers using a systematically developed interview protocol, this would result in poor-quality data, resulting in poor-quality findings influencing our conclusion. Thus, keeping your eyes open at every stage of your project is essential to minimize errors (Groves et al., 2010).

While it is not possible to write everything here, I suggest designing a research protocol for every stage of the research cycle (e.g., sampling, instrumentation, question asking, pre- and post-data collection editing and supervision protocols, data cleaning protocol, to mention a few) and following it seriously at every stage of implementation. One hundred percent quality control is not possible in social science. Our goal is to minimize total error (more specifically, the measurement errors) (also read errors from a design perspective as well as a quality perspective) (see Sources of Errors in Groves et al., 2010 for detail). Quality control is a team effort. I always believed in and practiced "**Either do the highest quality work, or not do it.**"

Reliability and Validity are two concepts that are commonly used to assess the quality of a research (Carmines & Zeller, 1979). While the concept **reliability** is associated with the instrument we use to measure our concepts or phenomena (for example, whether the instrument is measuring consistently (repeatedly) what it is supposed to measure), **validity** is associated with the quality of data – if you measured what you intended to measure (a machine measuring your weight (75 kgs.) should be measuring the same weight (75 kgs.) consistently, but not something else. We should always keep these two concepts in mind.

Question 6: You have experience in impact evaluations (e.g. projects funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)). Could you share the approach to designing impact evaluations, and some of the practical lessons learned, particularly your experience from countries such as Nepal, Cambodia, Congo, and Haiti?

Answer: Thank you for asking me to share my experiences on impact evaluations. Just to make it clear to readers, I had the opportunity to contribute to several impact evaluation projects as a quantitative analyst (a statistician/data analyst/survey management specialist), including one in Nepal (funded through USAID to the University of North Carolina), and several USDA-funded projects in Cambodia, Haiti, and Congo through KonTerra, Washington, D.C.

The purpose of Nepal's evaluation was to design, implement, and evaluate a scalable capacity strengthening intervention for Health Facility Operation and Management Committees (HFOMCs) to ensure issues related to gender and social inclusion (GESI) in maternal, newborn, and child health (MNCH) and family planning (FP) services. Baseline data were collected from case and control households from the selected districts of Nepal (please refer to the Baseline Report: https://www.measureevaluation.org/resources/publications/tr-15-114.html and the Endline Report: https://www.measureevaluation.org/resources/publications/fs-17-239/at_download/document) [accessed Dec 13, 2025]. The USDA-funded evaluations in Cambodia, Haiti, and Congo were similar in nature. Broadly, these evaluations focused on assessing the impact of school feeding programs for pre-primary and primary school students on their school achievements through improving their health outcomes.

Impact Evaluation: Let me briefly introduce the concept. Simply put, impact evaluations are designed to assess the effects of interventions on the social or behavioral changes as stipulated by the project. In general, impact evaluations use the Theory of Change (similar to the Law of *Karma* in Vedic literature) framework. In more technical language, if we change the quantity of a variable of interest (the independent variable or experimental stimulus), it changes another variable (□□□ dependent or

outcome variable). Impact evaluations are grounded in the theory of causality – (a) there is a relationship (correlation) between two interest variables, (b) the relationship is asymmetrical, i.e., a change in one variable (independent) brings changes in the second variable (dependent variable) but not vice versa, and (c) a change in one variable brings changes to the second variable regardless of the actions of other factors (Bailey, 1994).

Evaluation Approaches Used: (True) Experimental designs that utilize randomization are among the most appropriate approaches to impact evaluations. However, in social science, it is not always possible to randomize. Therefore, quasi-experimental designs are commonly used (Campbell & Stanley, 1963). There are several approaches. However, in all settings I was involved, a before-and-after approach with an experimental group (participants receive an experimental stimulus) and a control group (participants do not receive an experimental stimulus) was employed to assess the impacts.

The interest variables were measured in both the control and experimental groups (no proper randomization was possible) at two (or three) times (such as baseline-endline or baseline-midline-endline). An experimental stimulus was provided to the experimental groups after each baseline, and no stimulus was provided to the control groups. In the absence of true randomization, the propensity score matching (PSM) technique was used to match control and experimental groups, wherever possible. The impacts were assessed using mean comparisons and the difference-in-difference (did) approach – a commonly used technique to assess impacts, wherever appropriate.

In social and behavioral science research, finding an appropriate comparable participant in the experimental and control groups is virtually impossible. This is a major challenge. To address this challenge, in USDA-funded projects (in Cambodia, Haiti, and Congo), a propensity score matching (PSM) technique was used to identify similar case and control group members. For this, the availability of data (the sampling frame) with several characteristics is important to match control and case groups. We need certain characteristics measured for both the case and control group participants. This is another challenge. However, in Nepal's project, this was not feasible. One district was considered a control district, and two other districts were the experimental districts. The spillover effect was among the challenges faced by scholars. Another challenge is clustering of participants within schools or within the community (geographic space), which makes research even more complex. In either case, selecting appropriate comparison groups was a major challenge.

For such studies, attrition between panels is another challenge. Response rates in most developing countries are quite impressive compared to those in developed countries if studies are designed to collect data from individuals/households. Spillover effects, as noted earlier, pose a serious problem for comparisons between the experimental and control groups when there is a possibility of information and knowledge sharing (about an experimental stimulus) between them. For example, if the experimental stimulus is useful and can be shared (e.g., knowledge and education), this could be shared among control group samples, ultimately affecting the purpose of the project (impact assessment).

Question 7: You have significantly contributed to the social science research in Nepal, particularly in agricultural change, human fertility, and migration, to mention a few. Could you share some of the findings that you seem interesting to share?

Answer: Having a background in agriculture, social research, and social demography, I have furthered my interest in this area of scholarship. I had the opportunity to expand my knowledge in areas of agricultural change, human fertility, and migration using the rich and world-famous quantitative data we collected through the Chitwan Valley Family Study (CVFS). A couple of interesting findings are below.

Family Labor and Agriculture Change. Being a student of agriculture, I had learned and also taught to students the obstacles of Nepali agriculture - that Nepalese agriculture is stagnant, the productivity is constant or declining over time, farmers are not using technologies, and so on. I wanted to empirically examine the factors associated with the use of labor-saving technologies (such as fertilizers, pesticides, and machinery) in agriculture. I empirically tested the hypothesis that the availability of family labor, or the surplus labor or working hands at home) could have some influence. Indeed, the findings suggested that households with more working hands (more labor at home) were less likely to use labor-saving technologies (Bhandari, 2006). Thus, reducing human pressure on farmland was necessary to promote technological use. My next research question was, what factors would promote or diminish moving farm households to off-farm work? This could be one way to lessen pressure from the farmland. At the time I was working on this issue (between 2000 and 2005), a large majority of farmers were in farming, and only a small fraction of them were exiting farming. I examined the factors that inhibit or promote farm exit. From a household/community capital perspective, while land holding (natural capital) was among the inhibiting factors to livelihood change, education (human capital) was among the promoting factors to livelihood change in rural areas (Bhandari, 2013).

Agriculture Change, Human Fertility, and Migration. Continuing this, my research also focused on the migration of family members from a household to domestic and international destinations. One of my papers on relative deprivation and migration (Bhandari, 2004) provided evidence that if a household is deprived of land

as compared to their neighbor, that household would have an increased likelihood of sending household members away from home for work. Back then, deprivation was more associated with the access and ownership of land. I believe this theory (relative deprivation and migration) still holds true in Nepal and many developing countries. Similar to this, our paper on individual material aspirations increases the chances of individual migration from Nepal (Thornton et al., 2019).

Reducing human fertility was an important policy in Nepal during 1990s and 2000s. In an agrarian context like Nepal, our other research examined whether the use of labor-saving farm technologies influences human fertility (having more or fewer babies) in a household. Using the longitudinal panel data from Chitwan, the results provide evidence that if a household uses labor-saving technologies, fewer babies will be born to that household. This implies that such households do not need extra hands to support on the farm and therefore, they will be inclined to have fewer babies (through contraception, delayed marriage, child spacing, and more) (Bhandari & Ghimire, 2013).

No need to iterate, migration has been very common among rural farming families in Nepal these days. While we need labor at home for farming, on the other hand, more individuals are moving out. Our next question was: If a farm household uses labor-saving technologies at home, it will generate surplus labor. Thus, the surplus labor saved by using technologies will move out from home. Our results provided the evidence that the individuals in farm households who used labor-saving farm technologies were more likely to migrate than those who did not use farm technologies (Bhandari & Ghimire, 2016).

More research also focuses on food security issues in Nepal. I have Co-edited a book entitled "Principles and Practices of Food Security: Sustainable, Sufficient, and Safe Food for Healthy Living in Nepal" (Rasali et al., 2020) (https://napaamericas.org/Book-food-security) and published several articles (for example, Bhandari, 2018; Bhandari et al., 2020). Other research focuses on remittances and women's health. There are quite impressive findings in the food security of Nepal that couldn't be discussed here due to space limitations. The empirical findings are quite relevant to Nepal's context as well as the context of other developing countries.

Question 8: Your research on agritourism is compelling. Could you share your findings and explain how agritourism can support the economic sustainability of smallholder farmers in countries like Nepal?

Answer: My research in agritourism is based in the U.S. context. Agritourism, where the active farms allow the public to visit farms for education, recreation, entertainment, active involvement, and, importantly, for the purchase of farm-fresh and value-added products directly from producers. Although an age-old practice, agritourism has been an alternative to diversify their income sources and for their sustainability. It is gaining momentum worldwide with the passing of the law in 1985 in Italy. It is equally growing in Maryland and in the U.S., where my research is focused.

My research in agritourism, at this point, is focused on examination factors influencing visitor attractions and the profitability in the U.S. Specifically, this research has examined the roles direct on-farm and off-farm sales approaches such as an u-pick, sales at a farm stand/ farm store, community supported agriculture (CSA) or subscription farming, and sales at a farmers' market on visitor attraction to a farm and its profitability.

Moreover, agritourism itself is an income diversification strategy through offering a variety of activities or experiences to visitors on the farm. Our research provides evidence that diversification of activities or experiences increases visitors to a farm, resulting in increased profitability. Additionally, on-farm direct sales, such as the selling of products and services through a u-pick and farm stand/store, attract more visitors. Other research focuses on various direct sales approaches used by agritourism operations by the commodities they produce, such as animals, crops, value-added products, and a combination of these products.

In the U.S., agritourism is particularly important for small and medium-sized farms ranging from a few acres to a couple of hundred acres. Agritourism is appropriate for them, as these farmers cannot compete with large farms due to lower production efficiency, smaller scale of operation, limited market control, and lower resource-use efficiency, due to limited access to required resources and technologies. Thus, while the exit rate of small and medium farms is alarming in the U.S., many of them have found agritourism as an alternative source of income. Be mindful that the small and medium farms in the U.S. are like the large or largest farms in Nepal. While the evidence could be relevant to some extent to Nepali agritourism, the situation for Nepali agritourism could be quite different than that in Maryland and in the U.S.

Question 9: You have worked on projects related to urban gardening for biodiversity, food security, and well-being. What are the unique challenges and opportunities associated with urban agriculture?

Answer: The world's population is nearly 8 billion now. It is estimated that the global population will reach 10 billion by 2050. This means food demand is increasing and will continue to increase. Nearly 870 million people around the globe lack access to and utilization of sufficient, safe, and nutritious food over a period for healthy living. Moreover, the urban population is also increasing, implying that the population grows, and the land needed for growing food is shrinking. By 2050, 68% of the population will live in urban areas. This population will increase the demand for

food tremendously. Despite technological advancement, the available arable space alone will not suffice the demand for an ever-increasing population. Global food production is further challenged by climate change. This situation has necessitated the use of additional land, including very limited space available in urban areas, to grow food for healthy living.

More recently, the urban populace is producing additional food using the available space around them - roof-top gardening, backyard gardening, community gardening, vertical gardening, and climate-controlled greenhouse gardening, to mention a few.

We had the opportunity to work with urban gardeners of the Greater Baltimore region, one of the largest and most densely populated areas of Maryland. Implemented by the University of Maryland Eastern Shore Extension, this project was designed to educate and provide support services to urban gardeners. While the availability of land itself is a major challenge, time management and the knowledge of the significance of fresh, green, and healthy food and living were among the challenges. More importantly, the urban populace is detached from nature gardening. They are accustomed to buying food from the local grocery store. They do not have time to spend on gardening, and they lack the necessary knowledge and skills for growing greens and the benefits of eating greens. Those who are used to eating food directly purchased from stores do not trust garden produce or even they hesitate to touch the soil, grow food, and eat them afresh.

Recently, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, more urban people are attracted towards gardening as they understand the value of fresh food, and physical and mental exercise for healthy living. These urban gardeners also grow food in containers, vertical gardening, tiered gardening, produce microgreens, and practice rotational cropping on small-scale land. We see that there are opportunities to grow fresh, save costs and greenhouse gases, and save the environment.

Question 10: You also contributed to a project focused on climate-smart agriculture and forestry practices. Could you elaborate on the major practices promoted through these initiatives?

Answer: The climate has been adversely affected by ever-increasing greenhouse gas emissions, and as a result, the climate is changing dramatically worldwide. Agriculture itself is a significant contributor to greenhouse gas emissions. At the same time, agriculture is among the most affected sectors of the economy due to climate change.

Understanding the significance of agriculture in mitigating climate change, the University of Maryland Eastern Shore Extension implemented a climate-smart agriculture and forestry practices project with the support of USDA, NIFA. This project promoted alley cropping as an important climate-smart practice with two goals: generating short-term and long-term income for farmers, and lessening greenhouse gas emissions to protect the climate in the future. Here, fruit trees (such as fig, persimmon, apple, peach, etc.) that take time to grow fruit, and generate economic return over a period were planted in rows, and vegetables (such as bell pepper, tomato, sweet potato, watermelon, eggplant, etc.) or bushy fruits (such as blueberries) were planted in alleys. These fruit and vegetable species are known for sequestering carbon than others. In the short run, the vegetables and bushy fruit species (such as blueberries) would provide economic return to farmers while the trees mature. Later, when the trees grow and mature, they will start fruiting, and the farmer will begin generating economic returns by selling produce. Minimum tillage was also practiced. The impact is yet to be determined.

Question 11: You are also engaged in a project titled "*Need for Educating Socio-Economic Implications of Heirs' Property at the Community Level*." Could you explain what "heirs' property" is, and why it poses a critical issue for marginalized farmers and landowners?

Answer: Since this educational study is confined to the U.S., my response will focus solely on the context. Overall, a heir's property is a form of land collectively owned by individuals or family members arising from intestate succession (with no officially recognized legal title), often resulting in clouded titles, fractional ownership, and legal vulnerability.

In the U.S., this tenure system is prevalent among African American landowners in the South and poses significant challenges to sustainable land use. As the land belongs to more than one individual, often intergenerational, the joint owners of this property cannot secure loans for further development, often resulting in lower productivity and abandonment.

In the U.S., between 1910 and 2017, there has been about 89% decline in land due to the heirs' property problem. One of the main reasons is the complexity of resolving this issue, and many farmers with clouded property are either unaware of it or unaware of how to fix it.

This study was designed to provide education to the public about heirs' property. Although various land tenure systems are available worldwide, I am not sure whether this type of land tenure is prevalent in other countries. It's not easy to describe it and its implications in a short paragraph. Please see: https://www.mdpi.com/2073-445X/14/10/2070 (Khadka et al., 2025) often resulting in clouded titles, fractional ownership, and legal vulnerability. This tenure system is especially prevalent among African American landowners in the Southern United States and poses significant challenges for sustainable land use, agricultural development, forest management, and conservation. This paper presents an interdisciplinary review, research,

and analysis encompassing legal studies, environmental policies, and rural social science to examine how heirs' property status leads to diminished productivity, land underutilization, disinvestment, and involuntary land loss. Key issues include barriers to accessing USDA and NRCS programs, an inability to implement long-term land management plans, and an increased risk of partition sales and tax foreclosures. This review also examines demographic trends, regional concentration, and the broader socio-environmental impacts of insecure land tenure. Current policy responses, such as the Uniform Partition of Heirs Property Act (UPHPA for details.

Question 12: You also contributed to developing a *Refugee Well-Being and Adjustment Index*. Could you share what that index is and how the index was developed?

Answer: Self-reliance is the ability (social and economic) of an individual, a household, or a community to meet its needs over a period. A Self-Reliance Index, also known as the Well-being and Adjustment Index, was developed to understand the self-reliance of refugee households of Ecuador and Egypt. I was not involved in the earlier stage of developing this index; however, I used the data to create this index.

A rigorous approach was used to create this index and to verify the self-reliance of refugee households**.** The tool development and refinement process for tool development included a literature review, expert consultations, key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and workshops (see Leeson et al., 2020 for details).

First, the review of existing literature on self-reliance identified common domains related to health, education, food security, shelter, and livelihoods, along with various indicators within each domain. Then, experts were consulted and interviewed to identify additional resources and to understand the components that contribute to refugee success. Several key informant interviews followed this. The team also held several focus group discussions to identify their priority areas for measurement. These focus groups provided insights into the lived realities of the refugee experience in Lebanon, as well as their addressed and unmet needs.

Finally, a practitioner workshop was organized with 16 participants from 11 organizations to develop indicators they found most relevant and useful. At the end of the workshop, participants developed and recommended 24 questions for further refinement.

The index was then revised, and practitioners were consulted for a final review. This tool confirmed 12 items: (1) income, (2) employment, (3) shelter, (4) utilities, (5) food, (6) healthcare, (7) transportation/mobility, (8) education, (9) community involvement, (10) safety, (11) documentation/residency-status, and (12) well-being. The tool development process focused on measuring a household's ability to meet its basic needs over time. These twelve domains featured a five-point measurement scale (5 being the highest score and best outcome for the refugee household).

The index was piloted in Lebanon, Ecuador, and Egypt. Ecuador was selected for its relatively liberal refugee laws, including the right to work, and Egypt was selected to compare Lebanon findings with Syrian refugee households in Egypt. However, Lebanon was excluded due to a lack of panel data. In Egypt, a large majority of clients were from Sudan or South Sudan. Other refugees were Eritreans, Syrians, Ethiopian, Somali and from other countries. In Ecuador, nearly all clients were Colombian with a small fraction from Congo, Cuba, Haiti, Syria, Sudan, Venezuela and others.

In Egypt and Ecuador, a total of 261 (167 cases in Egypt and 94 cases in Ecuador) were interviewed at both baseline and endline. This panel group is used for analysis. This pilot and panel data provide a unique example of humanitarian programs tracking holistic progress toward self-reliance over time, highlighting how a simple tool could be used more widely within the sector. For this purpose, panel data from Ecuador and Egypt were used for cases that could be matched between baseline and endline. First, frequencies and percentages of 11 indicator variables used in the self-reliance analysis were assessed (excluding utilities due to reporting issues). Due to space limitations, the results are not described here (see Leeson et al., 2020 for details).

Next, a composite index of self-reliance was created by summing up the values of 11 indicators of self-reliance. This was appropriate because all items were measured on a similar scale ranging from one to five (six in education). The lower value indicated a lower self-reliance scale, and a higher score indicated a higher self-reliance scale.

Question 13: You had the opportunity to work on several funded grants/scholarships/ awards in your career. Would you share your efforts to achieve these achievements?

Answer: Indeed, I wouldn't have achieved much without collaboration with other colleagues. I would simply say – interest, hard work, diligence, and turnover of high-quality work on time. Do your best, and others will do the best for you.

Question 14: You have served as a Collaborator in several projects. What are the key benefits and challenges of research collaborations, particularly between institutions?

Answer: I had the privilege of serving as a collaborator on several research projects. Collaboration brings challenges. It depends on your role. The main challenge

is your exposure to a newer context and the environment (social, cultural, physical, and natural, to mention a few) that you were not exposed to before.

However, collaboration opens the door much more to opportunities than to challenges. No one is complete. Collaboration makes things happen quickly, efficiently, and completely. You learn from others. You broaden your knowledge, experience, and skills, and you widen your worldview. At the same time, you get a chance to share your knowledge, experiences, skills, and worldviews with others who were not exposed earlier.

You must be serious about what you share about yourself, your culture, and your nation. The first exposure shapes the horizon of others to view you and those like you (e.g., loving vs. hating). You are the global ambassador. What and how you share with others shapes their perception and beliefs about you and others like you. You are not only the expert, but you are also the boss of your situation. You must be respectful to your collaborators.

Question 15: Based on your educational background and lessons you've learned, what are your thoughts on the future of social science fields in the context of agricultural development and food security, especially in developing countries like Nepal? What role can these disciplines play in addressing global challenges?

Answer: As long as human existence persists in this world, the significance of social science and social science research will continue to grow. More importantly, with the rapid advancement of mass/virtual communication, technology, and the evolution of artificial intelligence (AI), the world is rapidly changing. These technological advances are influencing human existence and thus, the social sciences in both ways – positively and negatively. While the world is technologically shrinking, the new generation is exposed to a wide variety of media outlets. More importantly, with the advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) tools such as ChatGPT, GenerativeAI, and others that can outperform the human brain, even human existence could be jeopardized in many ways, influencing human institutions and organizations. Since the pace of growth of AI-influenced machines is fast-changing, challenges have surpassed the speed of human research and evidence. Thus, I believe there is no end to the field of social science.

In agricultural development and food security, I expect significant advancement. Although the world is facing food insecurity challenges, particularly due to an ever-growing population as well as climate change, I am confident that the recent developments in technology and science will have a tremendous impact in producing more food; however, addressing food insecurity by making it available will be an added challenge. How will the unemployment created by AI-powered machines, such as Robots that replace a significant number of people, cope and afford food without having incomes? The stratification as a result of unequal access to these technological advancements will harm food access and the utilization of safe and nutritious food over a period. Thus, how the future governments will make necessary changes to make the food available to a larger group of alienated individuals marred by disparity created by AI will have a major say.

Question 16: You have served numerous student research committees, advising both master's and Ph.D. students. What do you believe is the most important role of mentor in a student's academic and professional development? Could you share an example of a student project that you found particularly impactful?

Answer: I am fortunate to have supervised several M.S. and Ph.D. students in Nepal and in the U.S. Let me first share my experience and philosophy behind teaching-learning.

My studies up to my undergraduate level were shaped by a teacher-centered educational context in Nepal. I have observed and experienced this context both as a student and as a university teacher. A teacher/mentor in Nepal is seen as an expert who knows everything and, therefore, is the center of attention. S/he is 'all in all.' Knowledge is passed from a teacher to students, and whatever a teacher teaches or shares is the gold standard. There is limited space for verification and very limited space for a critical thinking-driven argument. I could be too harsh. This used to be the truth. But this has been changing more recently.

My higher education (M.S. from the Asian Institute of Technology, Thailand and Ph.D. from the Pennsylvania State University) experience was in a student-centered context where ideas, values, and experiences of the participants of the teaching and learning process are valued, logical arguments are expected and respected, critical thinking is emphasized, and practical solutions to societal problems are reviewed, explored, discussed, debated, and accepted/rejected.

Shaped by the latter experience, my teaching/mentoring philosophy is truly guided by a student-centered *participatory learning approach*. This allows students and teachers/mentors alternative ways of thinking and explaining phenomena. *I* believe that teaching and learning is effective only when a teacher creates a lively and interactive classroom environment such that both teachers and students freely and comfortably share and exchange their ideas, knowledge, skills, and experiences about a given subject matter. Here, the content is the center of attention, not the teacher (*Participatory learning approach).* This approach, I believe, values the ideas and experiences of the participants – here, teacher-students – and motivates or encourages them to think critically. Motivated by this, I put strong emphasis on creating an inclusive, appropriate, and comfortable environment that

stimulates students to present their ideas and ask questions in class so that they learn by doing and apply the state-of-the-art research methods and techniques to address real-world challenges.

Simplicity vs. complexity in the teaching process. In general, I have observed two categories of teachers: (i) those who follow *simplicity* in classroom teaching, versus (ii) those who follow *complexity*. Teachers who follow simplicity make students feel that the subject matter under consideration is interesting, useful, and not difficult to understand. Therefore, learning is possible. Such teachers begin delivering the content using simple day-to-day experiences with examples relevant to the subject matter. I believe that this approach increases clarity in conceptualizing the subject matter and enhances understanding. This approach also helps students develop confidence in it, no matter how complex the content is.

Another group of teachers delivers the content as if the subject matter is complex. Only the teacher knows about it or has the capacity to understand this complex subject matter. They give the impression that learning is difficult for everyone. Such teachers often discourage students from asking questions or participating in classroom discussions. I believe this approach discourages critical thinking, thereby lowering students' confidence and reducing their motivation to engage in it. I situate myself with the first category of teachers who believe in *simplicity over complexity,* and I practice this approach in the classroom.

Accessibility is a key factor in fostering successful teaching and learning. I believe that easy and comfortable access to students through regular in-person meetings, e-mails, and phone conversations enhances the teaching-learning process. Students should feel supported by their mentors/advisors. Emphasizing this, I always extend my arms and mind to the students.

In line with the philosophical ideas, I enjoy working with students, and they have enjoyed this approach. Students I worked with enjoyed the new and emerging challenges or problems to be addressed. To the best of my knowledge, they have learned state-of-the-art tools and techniques to address problems.

To mention a few examples, one student examined factors that contributed to intergenerational change in occupation, the other student empirically verified the participation of indigenous and non-indigenous local-level political leaders in their participation in the agricultural development planning process, and the other student examined the influence of globalization – the market access, the use of mass communication technology, and the exposure to mass communication media - in addressing food security/insecurity challenge facing rural people of Nepal. Each of them has deeply learned about their research problem, and we worked closely together to address it empirically. I believe the students really need a mentor's time and hands when they need them. This is the stage when they need a mentor the most. I am confident the empirical findings from this research will have important implications in Nepal.

Question 17: You have been involved in many volunteer training programs in Nepal. How and why do you enjoy volunteering, especially for Nepali graduates and scholars?

Answer: "***Janani Janmabhūmishcha Swargādapi Garīyasī (***जननी जन्मभूमश्चि स्वर्गादपि गरीयसी)I am proud to have served the birthplace for several years after my graduation from college. I am proud to contribute to academia and research in various capacities. In addition, as the founding General Secretary of the Association of the Nepalese Agricultural Professionals of America (NAPA), I continued to establish academic relationships with Nepali universities and students to build their capacities in various aspects. I am honored to spare my time to support Nepali students and scholars by teaching and supervising their research using the knowledge and skills I have in state-of-the-art social science research methods.

Thanks to modern technology (such as the internet, Zoom, and other variations), which has made this possible remotely. If we pour a spoonful of water into a glass (in places or regions where it is needed), it makes a big difference. But if we add a gallon of water to a big pot or a river (or where it is not needed), that does not make a difference. I am proud to be adding a little to a place in need. I would continue to add where there is an opportunity till the end of my life.

Question 18: You have been contributing as the Member of International Advisory Board of *Dhaulagiri Journal of Sociology and Anthropology,* regularly submitting and reviewing papers for each issue. What are some of the most common issues you encounter while reviewing manuscripts, and what suggestions would you give to young scholars to improve their chances of getting published?

Answer: Once again, thank you for providing me with this opportunity to serve as a member of the advisory board. I feel extremely privileged and honored to contribute to this journal for several years. This makes me especially proud when the knowledge shared through this journal travels to the hands of countless scholars living thousands of miles apart. I am committed to serving in the future as well.

I am also proud to share that this journal has grown so much professionally. The articles I have reviewed are systematically developed and well-crafted. This reflects the quality and standard of this journal. A few articles, specifically from young scholars and students, although lacking a systematic flow from framing the title to the end, summary, and implications, the editors of this journal have been kind enough to lend their hands to get to the destination (publication).

In my experience, most articles are descriptive in nature, and a couple of them are not guided by a clear theoretical and/or conceptual framework. Some articles present theories but that are not directly aligned to the problem under investigation. My suggestion for young/naïve scholars is to think about the research cycle when writing a scientific paper. Start from your research problem/research question, why this is significant or relevant to your research design, sampling, and instrumentation, data collection, data analysis, and your findings and conclusions. Some articles propose a different objective, but their findings and conclusions fail to answer their questions. Just think – are you driving through a rugged terrain or through a smoothly paved road?

Alignment of your story from the title to the end – summary and conclusion – is important. Read – Read – Read yourself. Do not hesitate to ask for feedback or critical comments from other reviewers (your peers, teachers, supervisors, seniors, and more). Incorporate comments and feedback from your peers or reviewers. We all like appreciation, but not critical comments. This is a significant problem among us. Listen to your heart and the hearts of others.

Not reading the author's guidelines is another important concern. Carefully read the scope and guidelines for authors before you prepare and submit your article. Is the area of investigation as per the scope? Have you followed the guidelines seriously? Some scholars prepare articles without properly following the guidelines and wait for feedback from the journal. By that time, your article gets rejected. I would suggest aligning the article with the guidelines as much as possible so that desk reviewers and editors do not have to reject it right away. If you received a resubmission decision from the journal with a major or minor revision, you are so close to getting an acceptance response upon revision and timely resubmission.

Question 19: Finally, do you have any suggestions for the Editorial Board to improve the quality and visibility of the *Dhaulagiri Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*? In your opinion, how can life become more meaningful through working voluntary work?

Answer: Finally, thank you once again for the opportunity to share my lived experiences to our larger audience through this revered journal of *Dhaulagiri Journal of Sociology and Anthropology (DJSA)*. I feel privileged and fortunate to have this opportunity.

The wonderful editorial team has accomplished a lot while maintaining the highest standards possible and is striving hard to climb the steep slope ahead. Continue this effort. Sustainability of this journal is a major concern. I believe the team should work together to find ways to generate savings through donations (or subscriptions) by continuing to maintain its highest quality. We should also reach out to a wider scholarship to expand its scope. DJSA could benefit from reaching out to young scholars to publish and encouraging readership in classrooms, where possible. We could organize meetings, webinars, and workshops about how to publish articles with DJSA. These efforts will increase its readership and result in more submissions. DJSA should continue to provide mentorship to young scholars for publishing articles. I am not sure, but a column led by students, mentored by seniors, to give students space would encourage them. Continue to move forward in the direction to make the list of Qn journals and also to increase impact globally. Together, we can make a difference. Finally, I would love to share the quote by Margaret Mead: ***"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."***

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