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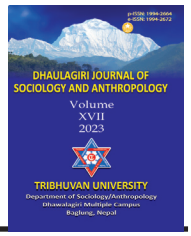

Interview with Professor Laya Prasad Uprety

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Introduction and Background

Born on March 7, 1957, in a lower-middle peasant family in Ewa village of Aatharai Rural Municipality of the Terathum district in eastern Nepal, Professor Laya Prasad Uprety began his teaching career in 1985 at the joint Department of Sociology/Anthropology (DOSA) which was later called Central Department of Sociology/Anthropology (CDSA) at the University Campus located at Kirtipur under the Tribhuvan University (TU), Kathmandu, Nepal. Upon the formal institutional split of CDSA into two separate disciplines (Sociology and Anthropology) in 2015 as per the recommendation made by an academic committee constituted by the TU under his chairmanship, he continued teaching anthropology at the Central Department of Anthropology (CDA) where he served as the first tenured Head of the Department (HOD) for 29 months. He got eventually retired from his teaching career on March 6, 2020. He received his high school education at Pokhari High School, Aatharai, Terathum, college education at Mahendra Ratna Multiple Campus, Ilam, TU, and university education at DOSA, TU, and DOSA from Ateneo de Manila University, the Philippines. He holds PhD in Anthropology, from Tribhuvan University, Nepal. Married to Mrs. Bina Khatiwada who is a botanist by her disciplinary training, he is blessed with two children, namely, Dikshant and Labisha. Of the two children, the first one is the son who has earned his PhD in Ethnomusicology from the University of Indiana, USA and is currently settled in North Carolina with his family (wife and daughter) where he is involved in professional research. The second one is a daughter trained in Development Policy from the University of Barcelona, Spain who currently works as a Social Scientist at the International Irrigation Management Institute (IIMI), Nepal Country Office. Prof. Uprety has made a significant number of academic publications in the forms of journal articles, seminar papers, book chapters, books (both single-handedly and collaboratively written and edited), and professional reports in the development sector to his credit. Dr. Man Bahadur Khatri and Prof. Madhusudan Subedi interviewed Prof. Uprety on the 27th of January, 2023 and the excerpts of the interview have been presented underneath seriatim as per the order of questions asked.

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Question 1: You were the first batch student of Anthropology at Tribhuvan University (TU). What factors or who influenced you to study Anthropology? What was the imagination to be an anthropologist during your college life?

Candidly speaking, I happened to be one of the first batch students accidentally. Succinctly put in other words, I had passed my undergraduate level (BA) majoring in Political Science in 1980 with Merit. I was the first student from my college in the Ilam district to secure first division at the B.A level in a protracted period of 17 years after its establishment in early 1960. Albeit I was awfully bad in the English language due to my poor background in high school education (because all six very competent graduate teachers of the school were arrested by security forces on charges of their involvement in communist party political activities and the school was merely run by the unqualified political outfits of the partyless Panchayat system known as Mandlaes those days), I did pretty well in compulsory English at BA level securing marks closer to distinction (i.e 80% and above). Given the fact that English teachers had good job opportunities those days, I had a hankering for majoring in English Literature at my undergraduate level but the college even did not have the necessary number of lecturers for teaching Compulsory English. It followed as a corollary that I was compelled to study Political Science as my major because the college had three lecturers to teach it. In 1980, owing to the ubiquitous scarcity of English teachers in the colleges under TU, an institutional decision was made which stated that baccalaureates (regardless of their major) who had secured marks above 60 in Compulsory English would be allowed to be enrolled in the MA English program. Soon after this decision was made by the TU, there was tremendous pressure on me from the entire college faculty of the Humanities and Social Sciences to join the English department. There was an assurance for my college teaching job even if I was placed in the Third Division—a function of the severe scarcity of English lecturers. Even though I had no college background in English Literature, I came to Kathmandu to pursue it. Indeed, it was for me a "hard nut to crack". In 1980, the late Prof. Kedar Bastola who was my Principal at Ilam college got transferred to the Central Department of History at the University Campus, Kirtipur upon the expiry of his tenure. I was domiciled at Putalisadak close to his rented-in apartment. I used to see him often because I had nothing to do until I was admitted to the MA level in English Literature. One day he shared the good news. He said, "Laya, a new department of sociology and anthropology has just opened under the TU system. I advise you to pursue one of these disciplines. Given the fact that they are new to Nepal, and you will be a student of the first batch, there will be a good job opportunity for you. Abandon the plan for English Literature study. Give me the carbon copy of your BA transcript together with your application, I will take care of its submission." Then, I got back to my room and pondered over his suggestion. I thought that his suggestion would place me in a better professional space provided I could secure First Division in one of these new disciplines. Then, the following day, I gave him the application together with a carbon copy of my BA transcript for departmental submission. He facilitated the entire process of application. He also informed me about my selection in the good order of merit and then I was finally admitted to the DOSA. Thus, the whole credit goes to the late Prof. Bastola for inspiring me to pursue anthropology. When this development took place for my study, the late Prof. Rajendra Subedi (former HOD of the Central Department of Nepali) who also taught me Nepali Literature at my intermediate level in Ilam college also encouraged me to pursue one of the new disciplines. As soon as the admission process was over, I started inquiring about anthropology as an academic discipline. In this process, I found that Bed Prakash Upreti (who happens to be one of my lineage brothers from an adjoining village of my provenance) had earned PhD in Anthropology from the University of Wisconsin, USA in 1975 under Prof. J. Hitchcock, the author of the book " Magars of the Banyan Hills". Dr. Upreti was already a "Thulomanchhe" (bigwig) because he was then working in the capacity of the Secretary in a newly created institution called " National Population Commission". I presume that it prepared a national population strategy in 1983. He was from the background of a rich peasant class and his advanced academic training in a new discipline from the USA had placed him in the highest professional position. His successful case example also became a motivating factor for me to study anthropology assiduously with good marks in my MA. Obviously, there were expectations for grabbing university teaching position, joining research institutions , and seeking expert position in the development industry.

Question 2: This was a new subject with few faculty. Could you describe your experience and situation of teaching and learning conditions in anthropology? What were the opportunities and challenges in teaching and academic growth of this subject?

Albeit granting an MA degree in Anthropology through research had started in the early 1970s at the Institute for Nepal and Asian Studies (now Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies--CNAS) under the TU system, institutional teaching of anthropology as a new discipline commenced in 1981 with the establishment of the DOSA. Anthropology teaching by both new (such as Prof. Ram B. Chettri, Prof. Om P. Gurung, Prof. Padam Lal Devkota, Prof. Dilli R. Dahal, and Dr. Navin K. Rai) and old (such as Prof. Dor B. Bista) faculty was conventionally excellent. New faculty members were grounded in disciplinary traditions of prevailing theories and methods and extremely committed to the teaching profession. Prof. Bista was an asset to the

department who had accumulated a considerable amount of ethnographic research experience which gave an enormous amount of benefits to new students aspiring to be wannabe anthropologists/ethnographers. I must also share that I was trained as a graduate student by Prof. Chaitanya Mishra (arguably the best sociologist of Nepal) in "research methodology" and "sociological perspective on contemporary Nepali society" (with a focus on the political economy approach). Likewise, I was also trained in "classical and modern sociological theories" by Dr. Krishna B. Bhattachan, an eminent sociologist and ardent advocate for the rights of the indigenous peoples of Nepal. But despite the excellent faculty at DOSA, the overall conventional teaching methodology was just a "banking system of education" as critiqued by Brazilian educationist Paulo Freire. Unambiguously, it was a systemic problem. Albeit graduate students were relatively good at gaining conceptual, theoretical, and methodological underpinnings with the sincere and persistent support of the faculty, they were severely handicapped in " creative writing"—a function of the systemic non-focus on this dimension of learning. Given the fact that students were evaluated annually based on writing the answers in four hours per paper, "rote learning" was universally underscored. Candidly speaking, even the best student in the class had to face Herculean challenges in accomplishing simple creative writing. The first required creative writing for the graduate students was the "MA thesis" followed by the preparation of the "village profile" (which was a requirement for graduate students to be submitted to the almost moribund office of the National Development Service of the TU). Producing these academic documents with zero training in academic writing for an entire two years period for MA was indeed a "hard nut to crack". The learning situation was severely constrained by the dearth of theoretical and methodological literature on anthropology both in the TU central library and bookstalls in the market. Graduate students had to entirely depend on the materials shared by the faculty. Nonetheless, Nepal-related anthropological or ethnographic literature could be found at the library of the CNAS and even in the bookstalls of the market. There were opportunities for graduate students after the completion of their MA level to be employed at the new campuses of TU, at private research organizations and development organizations. I think that the only solution to the problem of teaching anthropology at TU was to create more research-based anthropological literature by the indigenous anthropologists and teach it which would result in the subsequent academic growth of anthropology through its enrichment.

Question 3: At TU and Ateneo de Manila University in the Philippines, what types of theory and research trends were common at that time? What were the similarities and differences in the teaching-learning environment in these universities? What exciting experience did you get as a student of Anthropology?

Both in Nepal and the Philippines, graduate students used to be taught some similar anthropological theories which included evolutionism (both classical and neo), diffusionism, structural-functionalism, Marxist anthropological orientations, cultural materialism, psychological approach to anthropology, symbolic theory, etc. But in the Philippines, I got an opportunity to study several development theories too such as "modernization theory", and "neo-Marxist theory" (with a special focus on dependency theory and world systems theory), integrated rural development approach (IRDP), people-centered development theory, etc. I also got to know about peasant society studies conducted by anthropologists.

In Nepal, I think that most of the indigenous anthropologists who had made disciplinary contributions before my graduate studies and during my study period included Dor B. Bista, Bihari K. Shrestha, Dilli R.Dahal, Navin K. Rai, Drone P.Rajuria, Bed Prakash Upreti, Khem B. Bista, Hikmat B. Bista, R.R. Regmi, etc. Likewise, exogenous anthropologists included C. F. Haimendorf, J. F. Fisher, J. Hitchcock, L. Caplan, D. Holmberg, Kathryn March, D. Messerschmidt, T. E. Fricke, etc. They conducted anthropological fieldwork for the production of "ethnographies" of different ethnic groups. But some of them had also conducted ethnographic research with a focus on "change and development". More specifically, the works of indigenous anthropologists such as Dor B. Bista on "People of Nepal", Bihari K. Shrestha on "Thakuris of Diyargaon" of Jumla, Dilli R. Dahal on the "Dhimals", and "Poverty or Plenty" of Ilam district (his doctoral research), Bed Prakash Upreti on "change in Limbu-Brahmin interrelationship" from Aatharai Terathum (his doctoral research), Ram B. Chettri on "migration and social change" (his graduate thesis work), R. R. Regmi on the "Dhimals", D. P. Rajuria on the "Tharus", N. K. Rai on the "Chepangs", etc. could be taken as a few examples of anthropological studies by Nepali senior anthropologists. Exogenous anthropologists such as C. F. Haimdondorf''s work on "Sherpas of Nepal", L. Caplan's work on " land and social change" among the Limbus of Ilam, J. F. Fisher's work on "Magars", A. Macfarlane's work on "resources and population" among the Gurungs, D. A. Mersserschmidt's work on the "Gurungs", etc. could be taken as some of the noted ethnographic studies. D. Holmberg had studied "myth and ritual among the Tamangs" and Kathryn March had studied "Tamang women". C. J. Wake produced an academic work on " Bikas" (development) of Nepal from the Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies. T. E. Fricke had worked on "Tamang's demography and domestic process" with the deployment of ecological theories of anthropology. These are a few sample studies conducted before and during my graduate studies. The exhaustive list is not possible to share in this interview.

In the Philippines, both indigenous and exogenous

anthropologists in the mid-80s had no longer been engaged in producing general ethnographies. There was a trend of delving into a more specific issue for producing the anthropological outcome—a function of a long tradition of university education begun by Spanish and American colonial powers. Anthropologists were also geared towards producing "critical ethnographies".

The approaches to training graduate students were different in both countries. Ours was centered on along the line of Frerian critique of the "banking system of education". In other words, the professors were the active distributors of knowledge and students were the passive receptors. There was very little or no participatory or interactive approach. As indicated above, there was zero focus on "creative writing". Students had to pass an internal assessment of each paper (for which 20% was allotted), pass the final exams (of 80% weightage), write and defend a thesis and submit a village profile report. In the Philippines, during my two years of MS course, I encountered every course professor coming to the first introductory class with his semester course outline, reading list, and requirements to be met. He/she used to speak for almost three hours on that day only. Then, it was the responsibility of every student to come to the weekly three hours class with the preparation by reading the assigned materials, making the presentation as asked by the professor, and participating actively in the discussion process. He/she would only intervene if there was unclarity in the discussion of themes. He/she would always maintain his/her evaluation record. In every paper, there were generally four requirements for a semester which comprised: weekly reading and presentation as well as participation in discussion, three short-term papers (about 7-10 pages in length), one full-term paper (16-20 pages) on a specific topic (which could be on the theoretical or empirical issue), and one written exam (which could be three-hours open book exam in the classroom or overnight exam). In open book exams, the professors used to give a hypothetical problem that was required to be addressed by applying the theoretical/methodological approaches studied in a particular course. So books had no relevance for the exam because you have to answer the question innovatively by grasping the very essence of the theoretical/methodological approach. You have nothing to copy from the book. You have to have your ingenuity. For overnight exams, the professors used to leave a set of questions (approximately six) at the desk of the Department Secretary, and the students were asked to collect them at 5 p.m., prepare answers in written form overnight and submit them at 8 a.m. sharp to the Secretary the following morning. Any term papers and exam answer books submitted after the deadline were rejected outrightly. There was no institutional culture to rebel against the professors. Professors' decisions were taken as the final ones. Surprisingly, I also learned that provided the professor is fully convinced of the academic excellence of a particular student, he/she would also waive some of the exam requirements of a course. Sometimes, I was asked by professors to submit one major requirement only such as the final term paper. But I had to attend the classes regularly with a thorough preparation of the weekly reading list. After passing all the semesters with satisfactory grade points, graduate students were required to take the Comprehensive Exams of the core papers (theories, methods, and specialization areas of the discipline), and only then they were institutionally permitted to carry out thesis work after the successful proposal defense. In a nutshell, I learned about the "creative writing culture" in the Philippines which was later instrumental in my academic and professional writing and publications.

For me as a graduate student, the exciting experience was understanding the notion of "holism"—the very hallmark of anthropology.

Question 4: You were a bright student and had international linkages but you enrolled in your Ph.D. in Nepal. What were the opportunities and challenges while doing Ph.D. in anthropology from Nepal?

I think the better adjective to describe me would be "hard-working" instead of "bright". Had I been a bright student, I would have opted for "science" because it was the prevailing trend during the period of my high school graduation. Very honestly speaking, I competed twice for my PhD after my MS from the Philippines. But on both occasions, candidates who had less competence than me in the academic track record of performance were selected. Then, I decided not to pursue PhD Meanwhile, I got my promotion to the post of "Reader" through a competition based on my Kirti (academic publications). Then, Prof. Ram Bahadur Chettri and Prof. Dilli Ram Dahal started advising me persistently to quicken the steps for my Ph.D. enrollment. They even warned me that I would not be a professor without my PhD degree (because its weightage in promotion was 12 marks for internal competition and 25 marks for open competition). Their advice was indeed valid because both were my well-wishers ever since I became their graduate student. As a corollary, I got enrolled at the TU system for my PhD. under Prof. Ram Bahadur Chettri (as my Supervisor) and Prof. Dilli Ram Dahal (as my Co-supervisor). Indeed, Prof. Ganesh Man Gurung (the current Chancellor of Gandaki University) was also my second Co-supervisor as per the then university requirement who always inspired me very brotherly for my academic progress. I am grateful to all of them.

But on the substantive issue, I need to dwell on it with a trenchant critique. There is generally a more colonized mindset among many Nepali people (including those from university) to degrade any university degree including PhD earned indigenously and therefore, there is a large number of students every year going to India for earning their PhD with the anticipation that "foreign PhD would bring them more academic prestige" (Bideshko Bidyabharadi

Ma Bade Izat). I was also shared by some of my close colleagues that even my graduate students were learned to have told, "why has Laya sir enrolled PhD at the TU where the prospect of gaining specialized knowledge is virtually non-existent"? In my case, I wanted to earn PhD from the TU system with a relatively good academic performance and contribute to changing the colonial perspective of people. My PhD thesis was externally evaluated and the evaluators included Prof. R.J. Fisher of Australia and Prof. Donald A. Mersserschmidt of the USA who found my thesis satisfactory in quality at the international standard. And I was permitted to sit for the oral defense without any revision. My examiner of oral defense was Prof. Donald A. Mersserschmidt who appreciated my thesis during the defense session. Anthropologists and other social scientists in Nepal can have a look at my publications and assess whether or not a scholar with PhD. from the TU system has the academic credentials. With the advanced training from TU, I have been able to work in more than two dozen development organizations (both national and international) for conducting applied research and writing professional reports with policy implications which are generally appreciated by the employing organizations. Nonetheless, the onus of assessing my professional works lies with the galaxy of anthropologists and social scientists of Nepal.

Question 5: Your works focus on customary natural resource management practices of Nepali peasants. You have a book entitled "Peasantry under Capitalism in Contemporary Nepal: Macro and Micro Narratives" (2021). You have also co-edited a book entitled "Peasant Studies in Nepal" (2018). What are the issues of peasants in Nepal?

My doctoral thesis was centered on the indigenous model of sustainable resource management, particularly in the domain of irrigation in western Tarai. So was my MS thesis work on the indigenous practice of irrigation in the mid-hill of Nepal. I also call such a model "customary natural resource management practice". What I found was that once peasants have the genuine "felt need" for resource exploitation for sustaining their livelihoods, they have the potential to craft "institutions" needed for "water acquisition", and "resource mobilization" (both in cash and kind), "water distribution" (with equity considerations), "conflict management" (for settling intra-systemic and inter-systemic water resource-related disputes), and system management (i.e routine and emergency repair and maintenance). I found peasants maintaining such indigenous irrigation systems for hundreds of years with no external support. Indeed, our peasants, in my opinion, were and are the "professors" of the sustainable and equitable resource management model but the new development model imposed by the western world (which developed itself through brutal colonization and nurturing the institution of slavery) instituted a professional culture of ignoring the "indigenous knowledge" of peasants from the so-called Third World. More specifically, with the onset of the "modernization paradigm" in the development regime, I have seen government institutions, with the support of donor communities, supporting such systems for their rehabilitation and developing new irrigation systems in a "supply-driven" approach but such external support has not yielded the desired result—a function of top-down development model. Rather peasants have been rendered "dependent" on outside agencies and as a corollary, there is the demise of the indigenous model of resource "sustainability". Therefore, I am an ardent advocate of the "indigenous development model". What is happening in the country as elsewhere is aping the "western-centric development model" blindly and there is the gradual ruin of our age-old customary practices of resource management. The result has been the increasing dependence of peasants on development agencies. One can see that our peasant indigenous agricultural system has now been diametrically ruined in the name of modernization of agriculture labeling it "primitive". All the modernization interventions from 1951 to now have only ruined our peasant indigenous agricultural system turning Nepal into a "food-deficit" country. I believe that new science must not replace indigenous science, rather it has to contribute to promoting it through a collaborative approach to producing a "synergistic effect".

"Peasant Studies in Nepal" (2018) was one of my co-edited books which offers a general situation analysis of Nepali peasants in a fragmented way. More specifically, besides offering a conceptual understanding of peasants and their culture, it contains a political-historical perspective on the peasants' struggle, peasants' culture in the mid-hills, the situation of marginalized peasants from the Tarai, the government's past effort of land reform (which resulted in a fiasco), food security perspective, and human right perspective on land rights. I would claim that this collective effort was one of the first efforts made by Nepali anthropologists (in collaboration with a couple of other social scientists) in the peasant studies of Nepal. However, except for one chapter by Prof. David Seddon, all other chapters are indited along the line of the bourgeois social science perspective.

My recent book entitled "Peasantry under Capitalism in Contemporary Nepal: Macro and Micro Narratives" (2021) is written with a Marxist perspective. In a nutshell, the book tries to proffer a picture of the debates and discourses on peasant societies and cultures in a theoretical way with historicity; global debates on neo-liberal capitalism and its impact on Third World peasant societies; national level macro agricultural policies and strategies along neoliberalism; accumulation by dispossession through the demise of a communal mode of production, and penetration of capitalism in the rural hinterland and concomitant changes in peasant culture, society, and

economy.

Based on my research carried out to indite the above new book, a number of issues have been identified among the Nepali peasants as follows: (i) gradual decline of the local autarky of the peasant economy in the domains of seeds, manures, and food-grains (due to the new culture of promoting hybrid seeds of the agro-multinationals, use of their chemical fertilizers and pesticides and peasants' trend of switching from the traditional culture of growing diverse crops for household consumption to cash-generating monocultures which has resulted in the food production decline and rise in food import on perennial basis); (ii) new culture of keeping the land fallow triggered by the dearth of productive hourehold labour (due to overseas outmigration for earning remittance because their agriculture could not sustain them and the main trigger is that their agricultural commodities could not compete with the heavily subsidized Indian agricultural commodities which have been universal in Nepal in all district capitals and local markets facilitated by the road connectivity); (iii) burgeoning growth of comprador capitalism in the peasant societies and total demise of indigenous cottage industry (i.e increasing penetration of sundry ready-made clothes, utensils, shoes, and other household commodities in the trade regime which worked as a disincentive for local production of traditional commodities triggering unemployment); (iv) total disinterest of political parties in power, mainly the so called left parties, for implementing the scientific land reform to abolish the absentee-landlordism and make the real tillers as the real land owners (despite the formation of three high level land reform commissions by them while they had headed the governments), etc. The last issue has impeded ensuring the social equity and transformation of agriculture to boost agro-based industrialization in the peasant society of Nepal along the line of east Asian societies such as Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan (a renegade province of the People's Republic of Communist China). Of late, my research process after my retirement from the university has indicated that the most pressing peasant issue is: "how to protect our organic indigenous peasant agriculture from the rapacious capitalism which is hell-bent on destroying it for its ever-increasing profits through the monopoly of the markets of GMO seeds and its patenting, its chemical fertilizers and pesticides?".

Question 6: You have been working mostly on the development sector, what is your understanding and finding about the theory of the development of Nepal?

As a graduate student of anthropology in the early 80s and a fledgling development professional in the mid-80s, I was enchanted to learn development theories and carry out development research (albeit minimally) in the process of building my academic and professional competence. Then, after 1990 also, I continued teaching development anthropology and anthropology of development and conducting development research. In this long span of my professional career, I learned that "development" in Nepal has been understood and practiced as influenced by "development paradigms" of the western world. More specifically, multilateral development agencies, namely, World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) which are heavily influenced by the USA and its allied partners have a preponderant influence on shaping the development strategies of Nepal. There have also been influences from Asian Development Bank (ADB), UN development agencies, bilateral development agencies, and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs). As a corollary, there was an emphasis on modernization processes in the 50s/60s, IRDP in the 70s, structural adjustment programs in the mid-80s, people-centered development in the 90s, and a rights-based approach after 2000 (until now). I have the feeling that all these externally influenced development models practiced in Nepal seem to have produced some "apparent socio-economic and political transformations" but I contest that these "so-called transformations" have deepened our "underdevelopment" in Nepal through the infusion and strengthening of comprador capitalism over time which has been instrumental in dismantling our age-old sustainable agriculture and cottage industry (including the modern industries). Given the fact that Nepal has been historically integrated into global capitalism after the conclusion of the ignominious Sugali treaty in 1816 AD, Nepal has been a market of the "finished commodities" from the capitalist world including India and China and a supplier of some raw materials from agriculture and forest sectors and huge productive labor resource to the capitalist world. The government data have shown that there has been a reduction in poverty after the restoration of the multiparty system in 1990. In my opinion, the reality is different. The largest labor-absorbing agricultural sector is destroyed in the name of modernization on the one hand and there is growing de-industrialization in Nepal after the onset of the decadal conflict in 1996. But we officially generate data showing that there is poverty reduction. In my view, this is a "spurious analysis" that is misleading the general public. Poverty is reduced only because of the colossal amount of remittance earned by our productive migrant labor force (which is shown in my peasant ethnographic study of 2021) and hence, the analysis is "spurious" (because there has been an insignificant employment creation in agriculture and industry sector). Of course, there has been some development of the service sector in the urban and semi-urban areas which is also the response to the burgeoning remittance economy. Ideologically, I would argue that Nepal would develop sustainably only if "indigenous capitalism" is developed through the accumulation of indigenous capital and its investment in agro-based industrialization and Nepali commodities are indigenously consumed with the framing of strict national policy to generate capital for

reinvestment in agro-industrialization until Nepal reaches a "take-off" stage. Government must have a consensually agreed policy to discourage the use of foreign commodities which will pave the path for "national savings" for indigenous development. More trenchantly, the backbone of "comprador capitalism" must be broken irreversibly. All developed countries have historically protected domestic markets from the competition of foreign commodities and we must do the same. We have seen that foreign aid has not been instrumental in our industrial development. Rather it has created a middle class of consumers of the industrial commodities produced by the capitalist world.

Most of us living in the capital city of Kathmandu who claims to be anthropologists have also been the beneficiaries of this western style capitalist development process in Nepal. There has been their "embourgeoisement" over the years because of their association with international development partners involved in the development industry. I had also been a part of this process for three and half decades and hence, I deserve to be profusely chastised because I worked to justify the western-centric unsustainable development model at the grassroots. Nonetheless, my work with them gave me first-hand experience with the workings of their capitalist development model which has enabled me to critique them (otherwise, it would have been impossible). As indicated above, there are anthropologists in Nepal (including myself) who have researched indigenous practices of resource management in different peasant societies and advocated for their promotion in development regimes through the crafting of national policies/strategies. Their works have explicitly shown that indigenous practices of resource management have the potential of maintaining sustainability and hence, they must be continued with policy and resource support from the government. Of late, I have been involved in the study of the peasant society of Nepal with the political economy framework. Reiteratively, my preliminary study has shown that albeit there have been "transformations" in our peasant society because of the adoption of neoliberal development policy since 1992 and Nepal's integration into regional and global capitalism, they all have created "underdevelopment" in Nepal because of its "satellite" or "periphery status".

The cosmetic political changes of Nepal of the last three and half decades after overthrowing the partyless Panchayat political system with the absolute monarchy in 1990 by the popular movement led by so-called democratic and left political forces have miserably failed to induce "changes" in the living standards of common people. Since then, neo-liberalism has been adopted as the overarching economic development theory initiated solely by the Nepali Congress government in 1992 which was unquestionably accepted by left political forces including the Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist and Leninist (CPM-UML) and Maoist Centre (despite their occasional grievances when they are not in power). I can see that our "underdevelopment" continues in this neo-liberal world until there is a political consensus among the major political parties on our "indigenous development model" that focuses on " indigenous production", "employment of productive labor force" and "use of indigenously produced commodities" by the Nepali citizenry/government offices/ private sector for creating capital to "reinvest" in our capital generation/regeneration. We can never develop unless "our rice bowls are filled with our own domestically produced foodgrains". If we do not follow this trajectory of development, we continue to be further "underdeveloped" and "beggar" for foreign aid and such status will trigger the loss of our "sovereign decision-making power"-- the function of the dictates of multilateral development institutions.

Question 7: You were the Head of the Department at the Central Department of Anthropology and during your tenure, you organized several national and international seminars that supported publishing the outputs as conference proceedings and books. How did you manage to organize them and what particular role you played?

Generally, in Nepal, there is a feudal trend to give all the credit for institutional success to the leadership which is highly unreasonable in a democratic, rationalist world. All the credit goes to my faculty colleagues who supported my institutional agenda wholeheartedly to make CDA academically vibrant. Department had limited financial resources for organizing such national/international seminars. The seminar organizing teams of the department worked sincerely for securing funding by developing critical proposals to satisfy the donor requirements. In the case of "peasant studies in Nepal", a collaborative approach was adopted for developing professional-cum-academic partnerships with a civil society that had a long experience in the advocacy campaigns for agrarian and land rights. As a corollary of such collective effort, half a dozen such seminars were organized in a short period of 29 months. The seminar outputs were manifested in the forms of proceedings, and books that have been subsequently prescribed as graduate teaching materials. My role in the entire institutional initiative was to set the academic agenda, get it collectively approved through the regular departmental meetings, support the seminar-organizing teams in developing necessary proposals for securing funding, and facilitate entire event organizing efforts administratively. More objectively speaking, the publications of books such as " Peasant Studies in Nepal", and " Kinship Studies in Nepal" can be taken as landmark ones. But other proceedings were also equally important because of their high academic value in anthropology. Given the fact, no one in this world in the past, present, or future is free from criticisms (as Buddha noted in his monumental Dhammapada), our departmental works are

also not free from criticisms because there are errors in the eyes of critical readers.

Question 8: You worked as a co-editor of the Occasional Papers in Sociology/Anthropology which was published by the Central Department of Sociology/Anthropology, Tribhuvan University, Nepal; similarly, you were also a co-editor of SASON Journal and Editor-in-Chief of the Nepalese Journal of Qualitative Research published by the Local Initiative Promotion Trust, Nepal but could not publish on the regular basis. What types of challenges have you faced, and what you would like to suggest to publish a journal by the Central Department of Anthropology?

Occasional Papers in Sociology/Anthropology was the official journal of CDSA which began its publication in 1987. There have been 12 volumes of it. I worked as a co-editor from volume 6 to the last volume 12 continuously. After the publication of the 12th volume, there was a persistent effort by faculty to split CDSA along disciplinary lines. For almost three years or so beginning in 2012, I saw the birth pangs for the establishment of new separate departments. Finally, the university authorities constituted a "feasibility study academic committee" of five members under my chairmanship which submitted its report to the Office of the Rector recommending the need of establishing separate departments for their disciplinary specializations and developments. And finally, there was a confirmation from the Rector Office about the formal institutional split—an implementation of the recommendations of the Uprety-led academic committee. After the publication of 12 volumes, there was no amicable ambiance for its publication because the then leadership failed to garner the necessary academic support and as a corollary of it, the journal publication met a natural demise forever. I could do nothing after the separation of the two disciplines. The Journal of Sociological/Anthropological Society of Nepal (SASON) called hereafter "SASON Journal" was begun by Prof. Dilli Ram Dahal and me after 25 years of the establishment of the society. Prof Dahal was elected as the Chairman and I was elected as the General Secretary. On the day of our election by our esteemed members of the general assembly, we both declared one point agenda, that is, the commencement of journal publication. We published two volumes during our tenure of two years. But we continued working as co-editors for the other three volumes also and for the subsequent three volumes, there was also the support of Dr. Bipin K. Acharya in the co-editing process. We both stopped working thereafter and then, there has been the discontinuation of the publication of this journal. Well, I am told that SAON still exists institutionally but I have not seen any new publications of it. Prof. Dahal, myself, and Dr. Acharya co-edited a couple of books too (namely, Readings in Sociology and Anthropology, and Current Dynamics of Transforming Nepal) for SASON. To promote ethnographic or qualitative research academically in Nepal, I led a small team to publish "The Nepalese Journal of Qualitative Research" in 2007 which continued up to volume 5. It also died a natural death because the fissiparous tendency appeared among the stakeholders in the institution called Local Initiative Promotion Trust. Given the fact that I am now retired from the TU system, I have now decided to complete some academic work single-handedly in the regime of 'peasant and agrarian studies' at my convenient time. I have now no energy for running to collect journal articles, edit them and publish them. The greatest challenge to publishing a journal, as I have experienced, is the lack of collective spirit to work in a time of need.

During my tenure as the Head of the Department (HOD), a departmental decision was made to publish the "Nepalese Journal of Anthropology" in the first meeting of the CDA. As a result, an editorial board under my leadership was constituted for taking initiative. I do not blame anyone but I must confess that I failed to galvanize the academic effort—a function of my overburdened responsibilities for teaching MA, MPhil, and PhD students, handling administrative responsibilities, facilitating seminar-organizing efforts, and editing as well publishing proceedings and books. More importantly, I had to face daily challenges/obstructions posed by non-cooperating university authorities appointed along the party lines and non-students claiming to be student leaders representing the sister organizations of major and minor political parties which claim that all transformations in this Himalayan land have been possible because they struggled against an age-old feudal political institution. As a university professor with an utter lack of political party affiliation and personal culture against any form of Chakari (sycophancy), I had to struggle a lot for my academic survival, and therefore, my dream to publish a departmental journal remained unrealized. As a well-wisher of CDA and a student of anthropology, I advise all the faculty of CDA to be united for materializing the publication of it, and the institutional leader must have an unflinching commitment for its accomplishment and support the editorial committee with necessary resources for publication. The editorial committee must have a high of level academic commitment to realizing the dream project because "lip service' never works in such noble work.

Under my headship, an important academic tradition was also initiated at CDA, that is, Prof. Dor Bahadur Bista Memorial Lecture. This was a lecture initiated to pay tribute to Prof. Bista which was annually delivered by an eminent anthropologist. Prof. Ram Bahadur Chettri and Prof. Dilli Ram Dahal delivered the first and second lectures respectively and this annual lecture tradition was discontinued after my retirement. Printed lecture copies used to be distributed among the audience because one principal academic goal of this lecture tradition was to create anthropological literature on contemporary global

and Nepali anthropological research trends and practices. I still advise the CDA leadership and faculty to resurrect this tradition.

Question 9: You have been supervising many PhD students and you have also been working as a Co-Supervisor, an internal or external examiner of the PhD scholars at Tribhuvan University and other Universities. What are the weaknesses and strengths of supervision of PhD students at Tribhuvan University and what are your suggestions to students and faculty for the quality of the research and writing?

Yes, I have worked as the Supervisor and Co-supervisor of the PhD students of Anthropology within the TU system. I have worked as an internal and external examiner of PhD theses both within TU and outside it in Nepal. I have also worked as an external examiner of PhD theses in foreign countries. The most commonly observed weaknesses noticed in the process of supervision and examination are as follows: (i) failure in the problematization; (ii) failure in developing a specific conceptual framework; (iii) relative failure in choosing the appropriate theoretical perspective; (iii) failure in specifying the clear-cut epistemological and ontological assumptions of the study; (iv) less analytical dimension and weak interpretation in the core empirical chapters (in most cases, virtually non-existent), and (v) poor theorizing. Nonetheless, as per my long academic observations, these issues have also been addressed by a handful of students of PhD level which I consider the relative strengths both within and outside TU. My suggestion for PhD students and faculty would be genuine perseverance in understanding the theoretical underpinnings of the social science research methodology in general and anthropological research traditions and practices in particular and applying them in one's research context and issue with 100 percent commitment to contributing to the generation of "theoretical" or "pure" knowledge. Put differently, a lack of perseverance and academic commitment leads to perfunctoriness only for earning a degree.

Question 10: You took an opportunity to serve as a Head of the Department of the Central Department of Anthropology, Tribhuvan University. How do you like to share your experiences with us as a lesson? What are the major challenges to building higher academic standards at the Central Department of Anthropology, Tribhuvan University, Nepal?

I have had the experience of serving as the HOD of CDA for a relatively brief time. Succinctly put, my personal experiences indicate the following: (i) academic transformations in a discipline are possible provided the leadership has a clear vision for short-term, medium-term, and long-term strategies collectively owned by the faculty; (ii) the more united the faculty, the more result-oriented would be the department, and (iii) the autonomous functioning of a department or a university to produce quality human resource is contingent upon the macro-political ambiance of the country which underscores "meritocracy" as opposed to "patrimonialism". Two major challenges for building higher academic standards at the CDA would be (i) self-resource-generation for conducting own institutional academic research and publishing their outcomes for academic audiences (both national and international), and (ii) institutional contribution to strengthening the academic capacity of the teaching faculty of the anthropology departments of other campuses under the TU system.

Question 11: Sociology and Anthropology were established under a joint department in 1981. In 2015, separate departments are established. How do you remark on the growth and development of anthropology after 2015 at the TU system?

I have sensed that there has been a growing specialization in anthropology, particularly after the implementation of the MPhil program which started before the establishment of CDA in 2015. To the extent possible, the MPhil program had underscored exclusively anthropological theories and methods as well as optional papers with anthropological perspectives. Only anthropologists were the teaching faculty. As indicated above, when anthropology was recognized as a separate discipline as per the recommendation made by the academic committee constituted by the TU under my chairmanship, a lot of specialization papers were added with the support of all faculty members. There have been theoretically, methodologically, and empirically grounded papers. The course-based PhD program in anthropology is another disciplinary development after the establishment of CDA. Although I know that "self-praise is no recommendation", I have often been shared by foreign noted anthropologists (who have worked in Nepal for their doctoral and other academic research) that "CDA's curricula of MA, MPhil. and PhD are of international standards". This is indeed a remarkable growth and development of anthropology from the time of the joint department in 1981 when there was only one specialization paper in Anthropology entitled "Ecology and Subsistence" (a course of Ecological Anthropology) which was also grudgingly offered by the department after our three-day long strike (that demanded at least one specialization course).

Question 12: The curriculum of anthropology at Tribhuvan University has been revised several times. You are actively engaged to finalize various papers from the beginning of the course to date. What are the strengths and missing contents in the anthropology curriculum of MA, MPhil/Ph.D. courses in Nepal?

In my opinion, all the crafted courses of all three levels are generally excellent as indicated above—a function of the institutional growth in terms of the numerical strength of the trained human resource in anthropology over the years. Reiteratively, papers crafted are strong in theoretical, methodological, and empirical orientations. If possible, a few courses could be crafted for graduate studies (depending upon the availability of faculty). These could be (i) anthropology of agrarian and peasant societies (with a focus on Nepal); (ii) urban anthropology (with a focus on Nepal), and (iii) society, culture, and economy of the Nepal Tarai: anthropological perspective (because there is a disproportionate focus on the Tarai historically). My trenchant critique of the entire anthropology discipline and its courses is that "we in Nepal teach largely a bourgeois anthropology" and there are no or very few political economy and critical perspectives embedded in our courses. I am equally responsible for this situation. Therefore, it would be better for anthropology in particular to craft a few courses on "Marxist Anthropology" and its variants and offer them. I initiated one such academic course in 2015. In the contemporary world, Marxism has very high relevance because neo-liberalism in the past three decades or so has created more "yawning gaps" in income inequality triggering the possibility of perpetual societal conflict in the world. Hence, understanding such brute reality requires an understanding of the political economy perspective in the academic world. This is possible. See in the US, Prof. David Harvey has been always offering courses on "Readings on Marx's Capital" for nearly half a century. There is a crowd of graduate students (from different disciplines) every year in his class to understand the crux of political economy. Whether we agree or not, I have the understanding that the relevance of Marxism is increasing in the contemporary world and Nepal because of the increase of economic inequalities which triggers further inequalities in health and education sectors (we can see the Oxfam's 2023 report presented at World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland which shows that world's one percent super-rich has pocketed two-thirds of the global income in last two years as reported by The Guardian on the 16th of January, 2023). Given the fact that we are the denizens of a resource-poor country, we in anthropology have the propensity to choose specialization optional courses that have the immediate possibility of "employment" in the development sector. Well, this is not unusual because we need jobs after graduation. Idealism alone does not work in the real world. But my point of emphasis is that CDA can play a balanced approach in implementing academic courses with a focus on both specialization optional courses with potential applied dimension and political economy perspective courses that augment critical consciousness. Whether we agree or agree to disagree, I am experientially convinced that "only Marxism can help us understand the growing inequalities under the contemporary rapacious neoliberal capitalism because its interpretations are dialectically oriented which are eventually geared to generating "change" in human society for addressing them.

Question 13: Looking at your deep engagement in anthropological works almost your whole life; what theoretical and methodological contribution have you made to anthropology in general and Nepal in specific? What are the missing areas in anthropological teaching and research?

Modestly speaking, I am trained by my professors to apply a theory or a set of theories to guide my research undertaken on a specific issue in its entirety. More specifically, following R. K. Merton, I would say that a theory has a bearing on empirical research through the provisioning of a set of concepts (which he calls a battery of concepts) and methodological orientations. I would further argue that a theory (which is a proven hypothesis with empirical substantiations) helps the researcher to explain and interpret the empirical findings within the boundary of a theory or a set of theories. Put differently, the strict application of a theory or a set of theories keeps the researcher on the right track. Granted this general trend of the deployment of a theory or a set of theories, I have attempted to use a theoretical framework developed by Nobel Laureate E. Ostrom in my doctoral research, that is, "theory of governing the commons", a theory that was developed to counter the "theory of the tragedy of commons" (a theory developed by G. Hardins) in the late 1960s. Ostrom argues in her theory that the common property users have the potential to "craft institutions" for the overall resource appropriation, equitable distribution, resource mobilization, conflict management, and system maintenance which result in the sustainability of resource regimes in a given community. I have tried to apply this theory in my academic research and I found it useful in my study of peasants' customary practice of water resource management for irrigation in the Rupandehi district in western Tarai. I would affirm that I have reconfirmed the theory through my empirical research. I think that this is also a contribution to Nepalese anthropology. My PhD thesis has been an example for many other PhD, students as reference material. In the development industry sector, I have worked with a multitude of multilateral, bilateral, and international non-governmental institutions. There I have attempted to deploy a "theory of change" in my applied research that a particular institution/organization has preferred over. These "theories of change" range from "sustainability theories" to "empowerment theories". I think that CDA has to make additional effort in days to come to teach graduate students practically for liking a particular theory in explaining a particular empirical issue in the form of required assignment under a methodology course because this has been missing in our graduate teaching.

Question 14: Social sciences are the least preferred subjects in Nepal and the political leadership and bureaucrats rarely acknowledge the importance of social sciences. What do you think about the future of social science in general and anthropology in particular?

In a poor country like Nepal, the primary objective of attaining education is to ensure "livelihood" which is generally more possible through the study of "scientific disciplines" such as engineering, western medical science, computer science, agronomic and veterinary sciences, and other related technical disciplines. We have personally seen since the 1950s that people trained in these disciplines are most sought after by both public and private institutions. Employment in these institutions ensures predictable income triggering social status in a feudal society. Theoretically, "development" in Nepal meant "technocratic development" right from the beginning—a function of the "modernization" paradigm. Modernization development theory, to the best of my understanding and experience, did not emphasize the "social science expertise" from the very outset. I have been told that development institutions such as WB and IMF as well as ADB had no place for anthropologists in the 1950s, 1860s, 1970s, and even up to the mid-1980s. There was the employment of "hardcore economists". Anthropologists began to be employed in these institutions after the onset of the "people-centered development" paradigm in the 1980s. Realistically speaking, the overall development focus of Nepal until now has been on " technocratic development". Social sciences are never accorded priority by any government (be it that of democrats or leftists). As a result, the Nepali government has ignored the implementation of a study report submitted by a three-membered committee of eminent social scientists headed by Prof. Pitambar Sharma which had strongly recommended establishing "Social Science Research Council" almost a decade ago for the promotion of social science research through institutional funding and coordination.

In the private sector also, the comprador bourgeoisie have also zero interest in social science research. Their only objective has been to import foreign commodities (both luxury and consumable) and maximize "profits" by fleecing the consumers. As anthropologists, we have the understanding that the major problems (economic, social, cultural, political, and scientific/technical) facing the country today can only be solved through empirical research in a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary way. Hence, social sciences in general have a good scope in the days to come. In the case of anthropology, there is even more scope in Nepali society because our disciplinary hallmark is "holism". We as anthropologists can work from the domains of culture and social structure to the domains of climate change. I would share the idea that the development of social sciences including anthropology is positively correlated with the state of development of a country. For instance, western society (which has been the role model of the capitalist development for the so-called Third World) seems to have emphasized the importance of social science research in the process of its industrial transformations. We can see the "enlightenment era" and the subsequent growth of social sciences in European industrial society.

Question 15: You have been supporting the Editorial Team of the Dhaulagiri Journal of Sociology and Anthropology (DJSA). What are the specific suggestions to the editorial Team? How shall we continue this journal, what area should we focus on, and how can we develop higher quality and visibility of the published paper?

My only two suggestions for DJSA would be: (i) allotment of some space in the journal to publish articles on ethnography (both theory and practice) for the enrichment of methodology used in anthropology, and (ii) planning and implementation of a journal scheme to publish special issues of the journal occasionally on a "particular anthropological/sociological/ methodological theme.

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