

## Interview with Laxmi Keshari Manandhar

Laxmi Keshari Manandhar passed her MSc in Botany from India and gained a post graduate Diploma in Women and Agriculture from the Netherlands. She has undertaken many training courses related to marketing, agriculture, rural development, and gender whilst working as a professor in Padma Kanya multiple campus T.U. As Head of the Central Department of Home Science and Women Studies she played a central role in introducing the women's P.G Diploma into the University. She has a range of published work from "Human Physiology and Microbiology (Nepal, 1995)", "Participation of Farm Women in Vegetable Production and Marketing" (Netherlands, 1990) to "Gender and Democracy in Nepal", ed (Nepal, 2001). She is currently a retired Professor, Tribhuvan University and is the President of BPW Kathmandu.



### Kathmandu Business and Professional Women

The Federation of Business and Professional Women Nepal (BPW Nepal) serves as a forum to articulate the interests and problems of women in Nepal, particularly those related to working women. Through its Polytechnic and job oriented trainings, FBPWN offers women and girls the opportunities to develop their professional, social, and intellectual skills and increase their value in the workforce. FBPWN Nepal is one of the country members of International Federation of Business and Professional Women (IFBPW) since 1985

Kathmandu BPW is one of the active chapters of FBPWN in Nepal. It works for Socio-economic empowerment of women and besides it also works in the field of gender, women's legal rights, and leadership development, microcredit for women and reproductive health/right.

### Can you tell us about your family background and your childhood memories?

I was born in 1943 in New Road, Kathmandu. I am the eldest daughter of Bhakta Bahadur Manandhar and Chandra Kumari Manandhar among their three daughters. My father died at a

young age from a heart attack. My parents used to inspire us all to study well. In my childhood I used to be told that all females should study hard. It was against the prevailing expectations that women had to get married to a rich husband to have a happy life. In my family there was more importance given on getting an education in order to have a happy life. So I continued my studies but my younger (2<sup>nd</sup>) sister didn't continue because she got married at an early age. My youngest sister passed her Master's degree. I passed my school level education from Kanya Mandir High school. In a similar manner my intermediate and graduate study were completed from Tri-Chandra Multiple College, Tribhuvan University Nepal. For my Master's degree I went to India to study Botany from Patana University which I completed in 1965. I also completed the Post Graduate Level Diploma in Women, Extension, and Agriculture in The Netherlands in 1989. In addition to this I have taken various national and international training courses related to Gender and Development, Marketing Management (USA), Sustainable agriculture and rural development, enterprise development, and others. I have also participated in various workshops, seminars, and conferences as well as publishing various national/international text books of higher studies. I remember as a child I wanted to be a medical doctor but this could not happen due to my health problems which prevented me from attending the exam for Medicine.

### What is your present position and who has inspired you?

I have been a Professor for thirty seven years at Padma Kanya multiple Campus, Tribhuvan University until I retired in 2005. Whilst I was there I was Head of the Central Department for Home Science and Women Studies. I was mainly inspired by my mother she always encouraged me to study and continue my studies to higher education. I believe that as a result of this I was able to reach the position within the University and in my work today. Today I am the President of Kathmandu Business and Professional Women (KBPW) and I am an executive member of Business and Professional Women (BPW Nepal) also.

### What are your main achievements and what challenges have you faced?

During my institutional works and interactions with organisations I have witnessed the empowerment of women. My work has led me to various parts of the world which I feel is a personal achievement. I have a lot of experience comparing the status of women in Nepalese society to other parts of the globe; this is a next achievement for me. I was also proud to present a paper on the status of women in Nepal at a workshop in Australian National University Canberra, Mount

Vincent University, Halifax, Canada and Oregon State University USA. Having opportunities to represent Nepal in various parts of the world has been one of the greatest opportunities for me.

Talking about challenges, the main challenge is the political condition of Nepal for everyone working in Nepal. A person who is just a citizen and not a member of any political party, and it is very difficult to find work in any field in Nepal. Also, whilst working at Padma Kanya Campus, the greatest challenge I faced was passing the curriculum of Women's Studies from the Senate of Tribhuvan University. The Faculty Board and Academic Council of Tribhuvan University consisted majority of male professors who always criticized the women's studies programme, at that time and said this is not a discipline to be taught to students. If women's studies are necessary to be taught in the university then men's studies should be also.

### What are your future plans?

I plan to continue to work and interact with students in the future as I love students. I also love to interact with my friends, sharing news, ideas, and information. I plan to do more of that but now I am retired. I am also very fond of travelling so I plan to travel different parts of world.

### What suggestions do you have for other women?

It is very difficult to make aware low income groups and illiterate women about the gender issues because they have problems concerning their day to day needs. So I first suggest them to develop their earnings side by side with other issues like gender issues. I suggest them to work with micro credit and collect some earnings because cash is a very essential factor in every aspect. I also suggest to my member friends (juniors) to develop leadership qualities to manage organisation properly.

Recently New Constitution has been proudly approved and announced by constituent Assembly. We all are very happy.

#### **Qualitative Analysis in Action**

Qualitative Analysis in Action provides open access to interviews undertaken with inspirational women of Nepal. In doing so it creates an environment where these women experiences can be explored, examining the gendered experiences of meanings of inspiration.