

Interview with

Dr. Manik Ratna Bajracharya

By: Dr Rabindra Man Shrestha, Dr Asal Acharya



**Dr. Manik Ratna
Bajracharya**

Born in 1945, Dr Manik Ratna Bajracharya is the senior dentist in Nepal. He graduated from Government Dental College, Bombay in 1968 and earned FDSRCPS from the Royal College of Physicians & Surgeons, Glasgow in 1978. Dr Manik has a longstanding clinical and administrative experience, he worked in government health service for thirty five years till he retired in 2004. He has served as the Chief Dental Consultant of the Government of Nepal. He has the privilege of being Founder of Nepal Dental Association, Nepal Oral Health Society and Nepalese Association of Oral & Maxillofacial Surgeons.

Here is the excerpt of the interview which describes more about Dr Manik and historical aspects of Nepalese dentistry.

Q. Sir, let's start with the history of dentistry in Nepal; who is the first qualified dentist of Nepal?

A. In the decade of 1940's, few early dentists emerged in Nepal. There used to be a confusion regarding the first one. During the dentists' meeting held in 1971 AD (2027 BS), we all came into a consensus that Dr Basanta Bahadur Rajbhandari was the first qualified dentist of Nepal.

Q. How was the practice in dentistry in olden days?

A. As far as I remember, there were traditional dental clinics in Na:ghal, where some were practicing dentistry for a long time, their names include Astha Man, Ghana Man, Shiva Man, Bajir Man etc. Later, Bir Hospital opened the first dental department, which was inaugurated by the Crown Prince Mahendra in 1953 (2009 BS).

Q. Were all early dentists recruited in government health services?

A. Yes, it looks like that. Dr Basanta Bahadur Rajbhandari was the Head of the Dental Department at Bir Hospital. Dr Dwarika Man Rajbhandari and Dr Krishna Gopal Baidya joined Nepalese Army. Then appeared Dr Raj Bhai Shrestha, Dr Mesh

Bahadur Shrestha and Dr Buddhiman Shrestha in the year 1964; they were the first Nepali dentists to obtain BDS degree. All of them joined government service but were posted outside Kathmandu valley. Initially Dr Rajbhai was posted in Birgunj, Dr Mesh Bahadur in Nepalgunj and Dr Buddhiman was in Biratnagar.

Q. Who were your contemporary dentists?

A. In the beginning we were very few qualified practicing dentists, but there was not any personal clash. We all were doing well individually and independently. I graduated in September 1968 from GDC Bombay, then I returned Nepal on 1st January 1969. Earlier, Dr Bina Kansakar graduated from the same college in 1967. Then, Dr Kishor Kumar (KK) Pradhan graduated from Madras and Dr Girvan Kumar Sharma graduated from Patna in 1969. In early 1970's more dentists graduated, they include Dr Triratna Manandhar, Dr Mira Malla, Dr Iswari Nepal, Dr CP Upadhaya, Dr Mira Joshi, Dr Narahari Kharel, Dr Shambhu Man Singh etc. Dr Damdung Tenjing and Dr Basu Bishta of that era had untimely death due to illnesses. All of them were in government health services; Dr KK Pradhan and Dr Shambhu Man were in Nepalese Army.

Q. Why couldn't we see the inflow of Nepali dentist in 1950's?

A. It was because of the fact that there was no government scholarship seat during that time. I think many had studied dentistry in self finance; few of us had a chance to study in Colombo Plan scholarship.

Q. How did you start your professional service?

A. Initially, I started working in Bir Hospital as a volunteer for six months. I was posted to Koshi Zonal Hospital, Biratnagar during 1969-1970 as the post was vacant after Dr Budhiman left the job. I was transferred to Lumbini Zonal Hospital, Butwal in 1970-1972, then to Kanti Children Hospital, Kathmandu in 1972-1975. Meanwhile, I was selected to pursue FDSRCPS in UK during 1975 to 1978. After I returned from UK, I joined Bir Hospital in 1978. I became Chief Consultant of Government of Nepal and Head of Dental Department, Bir Hospital in 1995 after Dr Mesh Bahadur retired. I worked in Bir Hospital as Head of the Department till I retired in 2004.

Q. How were you selected for FDSRCPS?

A. I was selected from the government for further studies as a senior dental surgeon/ Class III Gazetted Officer.

Q. What did you study in UK?

A. I had studied Fellowship in Dental Surgery in the Royal College of Surgeon of England, which is the post graduate institute. We had to study everything about dentistry. They could ask anything in the exam, I was asked to extract an impacted tooth in final FDS RCPS clinical examination. The course is divided into two parts. The first part (Primary FDS) comprise of the exam, which can be taken if you have experience of five years after BDS. To appear second part (Final FDS) of examination, we had to work at least one year in UK. I worked at Eastman Dental Hospital London, then I cleared second part exam from Royal College of Physician and Surgeons of Glasgow in 1978. Additionally, I worked in Oral Surgery Department as Honorary Registrar at Canniesburn Hospital, Glasgow for six months under Prof. KF Moos.

Q. How were the complicated oral surgical procedures treated during those times when there were no oral surgeons?

A. I heard Dr Mesh Bahadur used to place arch bar and interdental wiring for fracture cases and General Surgeons used to perform emergency oral surgery cases. After I returned from UK, I started oral and maxillofacial surgical cases in Bir Hospital. At that time, oral surgery was only performed in Bir hospital, later cases were started in Army Hospital by Dr KK Pradhan and Dr Bishnu Bahadur Bastola. Some cases, I used to refer to India. Subsequently, Dr Narahari Kharel, Dr Prashanta Shrestha, Dr Kush Raj Shrestha, Dr. Suraj Ram Bhakta Mathema, Dr Shakti Shakya had joined Bir Hospital to operate oral surgical cases.

Q. How are the present generations of dentists?

A. I do not know all but I am very happy most of them are competent. Moreover, the dentists who studied in Nepal are equally good as the ones trained abroad.

These days almost everyone has dental problem. It is good that we have more dentists now. When we have more dental clinics we can provide more service. Some may argue that there is unemployment problem for growing number of dentists, but if you plan properly I don't think there is a lack of employment. If the awareness is raised, everyone starts visiting the dentist, even the present number of dentist will not be sufficient. The treatment provided by general dentists and specialists are different so one should focus on their area of specialization. I feel specialists should provide the care mostly in three disciplines namely Orthodontics, Surgery and Prosthodontics.

Q. Sir, what were your other professional and academic involvements?

A. I was Chief Dental Consultant of the Government of Nepal from 1995 to 2004 and Advisor to National Oral Health Strategy Program during 1996-2000. I was also appointed as Honorary Visiting Professor of Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital from 1982. I was Chairman of Nepal Oral Health Society during 1983-2000, Overseas Representative of Royal College of Physicians & Surgeons, Glasgow during 1989-1999. I was elected Vice President of South Asian Dental Associations' Federation in 1995 in SADAF Conference held in Dhaka. I was the Founder President of Nepalese Association of Oral & Maxillofacial Surgeons from 2011-2014.

Q. You have been represented twice in medical

council, what has been your experience?

A. Probably I was the first one to be nominated as Executive Member of Nepal Medical Council from the dental fraternity. I have served the Council during 1992-1996 and 2000-2004. There have been three members from the dental fraternity in NMC since 2000. Among them, two members are nominated from the government and one is NDA President. During 2000-2004; myself and Dr Shaili Pradhan were nominated from the government and Dr Praveen Mishra represented NDA. We raised a voice for dental committee in NMC; which was approved. As the senior-most, I was appointed Chairman of the Dental Committee. During our tenure, medical council started licensing exam for medical and dental graduates, Kathmandu University developed curriculum for MDS program and introduced postgraduate program at the colleges in Mangalore and Manipal in India.

Q. Why was Kathmandu University's distant MDS program halted?

A. I was in the inspection team in Mangalore and Manipal for KU's PG program. We found that the institutes were fantastic, well equipped. As the Manipal colleges were already running PG programs with qualified faculties, the training for our students would be very good. So, we gave affiliation for MD, MS and MDS programs, subsequently many Nepali students studied there during 2003 to 2011. Later after the intervention from Dental Council of India, the program got cancelled.

Q. How was your involvement in Nepal Oral Health Society?

A. I was the Founder President of Nepal Oral Health Society, which I served for seventeen years from 1983 to 2000. We organized joint World Dental Federation (FDI) and Nepal Oral Health Society Conference in 1997 with about one hundred dentists present in the country. It was the first international dental conference in Nepal.

Nepal Oral Health Society was recognized by FDI at its conference in 1993 in Germany. In 1994, I attended annual FDI conference in Vancouver as the representative from Nepal Oral Health Society and also as country's Chief Dental Surgeon. At the end of my tenure, the Society organized FDI centenary celebration in the year 2000 in Kathmandu.

I was conferred with the Fellow of the International

College of Continuing Dental Education (FICCDE) by the joint committee of ICCDE and Asia Pacific Dental Federation (APDF) in 1999 in Singapore.

Q. What was the dispute between Oral Health Society and Dental Association?

A. Nepal Oral Health Society was founded in 1983, which was much ahead of the establishment of Nepal Dental Association, the later being established in 1990. The society is the first social dental organization in Nepal for community services. It used to operate dental clinics in Kathmandu, Namche and Sankhu; and organize many dental camps in the country. While NDA was not active, its responsibilities in national and international arena were rightly performed by Nepal Oral Health Society. The society represented in different international platforms. In 1993, the Society was granted Regular Member of FDI. Later, when NDA committees became dynamic and active, it claimed for regular membership of FDI. During 1998-99, NDA Executive Committee had held discussions with the society office bearers regarding the legitimacy of Nepal's representation in FDI. Subsequently, the FDI decided to grant regular membership to NDA and associate membership to Nepal Oral Health Society in 2000.

Q. What has been your role in Nepal Dental Association?

A. When NDA was not registered, there was an ad hoc committee to form the organization. The committee suggested of naming it as 'Nepal Dental Society'; I convinced to rename as Nepal Dental Association. NDA got registered in 1990. I was the Founder Member and represented twice as the Executive Member.

Later, NDA has always lobbied for the formation of Nepal Dental Council. Mostly, the discussion only focused on whether the dental council was required or having the representation in medical council is adequate. I personally feel that, dental council is a must as we have larger number of dentists in Nepal.

Q. How does the government view dental/oral health? Do you think dentistry is neglected?

A. In our country dentistry is focused mostly centrally, it could not flourish effectively in periphery. But I don't think it is neglected. In fact, the government authorities give equal recognition to every department. The government however



fails to prioritize and give importance to oral health sector. Therefore, we need dental council and there should be someone to fight for dentistry. I continue to give suggestions and recommendations, and I have tried my best to uplift the dentistry in Nepal.

Q. Sir, why Oral Health Division could not be materialized?

A. When the issue on Oral Health Division was raised in the program of health services; there were very less number of dentists for supporting it. Even after the formation of NDA, it could not focus on formulation of the division and the Dental Act. The major things that have been done were: National Oral Health Survey and formulation of National Oral Health Policy in 2004/2005. Since then not much has been done from the government sector.

Q. Sir, Please tell us about your private clinic experience.

A. I started private practice only after I returned from UK in 1978. I had opened dental clinic in different places of Kathmandu. I established 'Kathmandu Dental Home' at Jyatha in 1989. It was started with the concept of 'first dental home' in Nepal with minor OT and in-patient facility with all other dental services. I used to work in private clinic after I returned from hospital duty. These days I mostly focus on consultations as per need.

Q. What are your proud moments in life?

A. To name few; development of dental department in Bir Hospital for oral and maxillofacial cases,

establishment of Nepal Oral Health Society, Nepal Dental Association and Nepalese Association of Oral & Maxillofacial Surgeons. I always feel privileged to be among few pioneer dentists who met the landmark meeting at Hotel Shankar sometime in 1971 (2028 BS), which paved the way to the foundation of Nepal Dental Association.

I have been felicitated by Nepal Dental Association, Nepalese Association of Oral & Maxillofacial Surgeons and Govt of Nepal.

Q. Sir, please tell us about your personal and family life.

A. My family comprise of my wife, two sons, their spouses, two granddaughters and a grandson. My wife Nilam used to work as an education counselor at British Council, Kathmandu and now she is Chairperson of Kathmandu Dental Home. My elder son Manil is an Endocrinologist and his wife is Pediatrician and my younger son Manish is a Dentist and his wife also dentist.

Q. What is your life's philosophy?

A. My philosophy is based as "Don't do anything to others which you don't want to be done to you" and "Do good be good". I highly appreciate philosophy and activities of Brahma Kumaris to bring peace and happiness in our daily life and to the whole world.

JNDA