

Research Article

Perceiving Madan Bhandari and People's Multiparty Democracy: A Conceptual Review of Political Awareness Among Young Students

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A B S T R A C T

This article looks into the idea of political awareness among Nepali youths by examining their political perception, with special focus on bachelor-level students in Kathmandu. Political identity construction among the young generation matters a great deal because today's students are tomorrow's citizens, voters, and leaders. Even so, we still know little about how Nepali youths, fundamentally the college students, come to know and remember leaders of the past, such as Madan Bhandari Bhandari, and how they relate themselves to his political idea of People's Multiparty Democracy (PMPD). We also know little about how this memory connects with the wider question of democratic awareness among the young generation today. This review article brings together existing studies on political socialisation, youth identity, collective memory, and political communication in Nepal. It builds a conceptual understanding of how young university students might know, remember, and perceive Bhandari and PMPD. The review suggests that Nepali youth are not cut off from politics even though many of them keep some distance from party activities. Most students are likely to recognise Bhandari as a respected national figure, but their grasp of PMPD as a complete political idea may remain partial. The article creates discussion on political education and proposes a design for future empirical research using in-depth interviews with young students.

Keywords: Political Awareness, Political Political Identity, Madan Bhandari, PMPD, Political Political Socialisation

Introduction

Nepal has gone through many political changes in the last few decades. The country moved from absolute monarchy to multiparty democracy, then through a long conflict, and later into a federal republic. Through all these changes, the youth of Nepal have remained an important political

force. Students and young people took part in the 1990 movement for democracy, in the peace process after the Maoist insurgency, in the writing of the 2015 constitution, and more recently in the Gen Z-led protests of 2025. Each of these moments shows that young people in Nepal are not simply bystanders in politics. They often stand at the center of political change.

At the same time, there is a quiet question that runs through all of this activity. How much do young people actually know about the political ideas and leaders that shaped the system they now live in? Among the leaders who shaped modern Nepali politics, Madan Bhandari holds an important place. He was the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist), known as CPN (UML), in the years after the restoration of democracy in 1990. He is remembered for developing the idea of People's Multiparty Democracy, often called PMPD, which tried to bring together multiparty competition with socialist goals suited to the Nepali context (Hoftun, Raeper, & Whelpton, 1999).¹ Bhandari died in a car accident in 1993, while he was still building this idea. Even after his death, PMPD has continued to guide the political thinking of CPN (UML) (Dhakal, 2023).²

Today, more than three decades have passed since Bhandari's death. Most bachelor-level students in Nepal were born well after he passed away. They know him mainly through family stories, party programmes, statues, the names of academic institutions, roads and bridges, school textbooks, and social media posts shared around his birth and death anniversaries. This raises an important question for political communication and civic education. Bhandari's approach was not simply theoretical. He was also a skilled communicator who understood how to carry his ideas to ordinary citizens, students, workers and farmers through speeches, rallies and direct engagement (Karki, 2023).³ His rhetorical skill and political clarity made him one of the recognised faces of post-1990 Nepali politics. How do young people, who never lived through Bhandari's time, come to know and understand him and his political idea today? Do they see him only as a symbol, or do they also understand the substance of PMPD?

This review article tries to look closely at this question. Though the researcher has interacted to observe and develop the idea about the issue with students in a significant number of colleges from several colleges, it does not present new field data collected through surveys or interviews. Instead, it brings together existing research on political socialisation, socialisation, youth identity and political communication, both from Nepal and from outside, in order to build a clearer picture of how Nepali university students might be coming to know and remember Bhandari and PMPD. In doing so, the article also hopes to lay the groundwork for future empirical research that can put these same questions directly to bachelor-level students through in-depth interviews.

This question is also worth asking for a journal such as State, Society and Development, which carries the name and concerns of the Madan Bhandari Foundation. Various institutions connected to Bhandari's legacy continue to

publish his collected works and organise programmes on his political philosophy. Yet the audience for such efforts is changing quickly. The students of today live in a media environment shaped by smartphones, social media and short video content, very different from the political environment when Bhandari was alive. Students basically at the bachelor's level are much, much more impactful in the ecosystem of information sharing (Paudel, 2026b).⁴ Understanding how the present generation receives and makes sense of this political legacy is therefore not only an academic exercise. It is also useful for institutions, political parties and civic educators who wish to keep historical political ideas alive and relevant for young Nepalis.

Statement of the Problem

Much of the research on Nepali youth and politics looks at participation. Studies ask whether young people vote, join parties, attend rallies, or take part in protests (Adhikari, 2026; O'Neill, Poudel, & Maharjan, 2020).^{5,6} This is useful work, but it leaves out a quieter part of political life. Before a person decides to act politically, some idea of political identity already exists in their mind. This identity is built slowly, through family conversation, school lessons, religious or cultural events, friend circles, and now, very strongly, through social media (Snellinger, 2013).⁷

Madan Bhandari and PMPD offer a useful case to study this quieter part of political life. Bhandari is one of the most visible figures from Nepal's post-1990 political history. His picture appears in party offices and offices; his name is used for roads, bridges, hospitals and colleges, including the very institution associated with this journal. Bhandari's Rhetoric in the 1990s Political Dynamics (Karki, 2023).³ provided the foundation for this review's discussion of Bhandari's political communication style and its significance for PMPD's transmission and reception. Karki's application of classical rhetorical analysis to Bhandari's public speeches revealed the sophisticated communicative strategies that underlay PMPD's political effectiveness and identified lessons for contemporary political communication.

Yet there is very little research that asks how today's students actually understand him. Do they see him as a CPN (UML) leader only, or as a wider symbol of multiparty democracy itself? Do they know PMPD as an actual set of political ideas or only as a name they have heard during election seasons?

This gap matters for two reasons. First, it matters for political science and communication research, because it touches questions of political memory, generational change and how ideology travels across time and generations. Second, it matters in a practical sense for institutions connected to Bhandari's legacy, including the Madan Bhandari Foundation and CPN (UML) itself. It is because

if young people only recognise the symbol and not the substance, a political idea risks becoming an empty image rather than a living philosophy.

The present review article addresses this gap at a conceptual level. It does not yet have the benefit of original interview data from bachelor-level students. However, by reviewing what is already known about youth political identity, memory and media use in Nepal, it tries to build a reasoned picture of how such an empirical study could proceed and what it might expect to find.

It is also worth noting why Kathmandu colleges in particular deserve attention in this discussion. Kathmandu hosts a very large share of Nepal's bachelor-level student population, drawn from almost every district of the country, alongside long-established constituent and affiliated colleges of Tribhuvan University and others. Student unions, party offices and national media houses are all concentrated in the capital as well. This makes Kathmandu a natural setting for thinking through how political memory of a national figure such as Bhandari travels among a young, diverse and highly mobile student population, even though students from outside Kathmandu may experience some of these processes somewhat differently.

Objectives of the Study

This article has three main objectives. First, it aims to clarify the concepts of political awareness, political identity and identification, and to connect them with the specific case of Madan Bhandari and PMPD. Second, it aims to review existing research, mostly from Nepal, on youth political socialisation, memory, and media use, in order to understand how young people generally come to know political leaders and ideas. Third, based on this review, it aims to suggest how university students in Kathmandu, studying from first the first to fourth year of their bachelor level, might be knowing, remembering remembering, and perceiving Bhandari and PMPD, and PMPD and to propose a research design for an empirical qualitative study that could test these ideas directly through in depth in-depth interviews.

Basic ideas on political awareness, identity, and identification

Before going further, it is useful to make clear what is meant by "political political awareness", "political political identity and identification", and "identification". These three ideas are related, but they are not exactly the same.

Political awareness

Political awareness means having some basic knowledge about political life. This includes knowing about leaders, parties, government institutions, laws, and political events, both past and present. A person with political awareness

can follow news, understand simple political debates, and recognise major political figures. Political awareness does not require deep expert knowledge. It is closer to what Almond and Verba (1963).⁸ called a basic civic orientation, where citizens have enough information to take part in public life in a meaningful way.

For young people, political awareness usually grows step by step. It starts with simple recognition, such as knowing the name of the prime minister or a famous leader from the past. It then grows into a fuller understanding of why that leader or event matters. In the case of Madan Bhandari, political awareness would mean knowing who he was, what party he led, and roughly what PMPD stands for.

Political identity

Political identity goes one step further than awareness. It refers to how a person sees themselves in relation to political life. A person's political identity may include their sense of belonging to a particular ideology. Such as being left-leaning, left-leaning liberal, or conservative, or it may include a felt connection with a particular party or movement (Erikson, 1968).⁹ Political identity is part of a person's wider identity, alongside caste, ethnicity, religion, gender, and regional background, all of which are important markers in the Nepali context.

Political identity is not fixed. Especially for university student youths, it is still forming. A student may feel drawn to a party because of family background, because of a teacher's influence or because of friends, without yet having a fully settled political identity. This is normal, and most studies of youth political identity treat the bachelor-level years as a formative period rather than a finished one (Sears & Levy, 2003).¹⁰

Political identification

Political identification is closely linked to identity, but it usually points to a more specific act, that of associating oneself with a particular party, leader or political symbol. A student who says "I support CPN (UML)" or "I follow Madan Bhandari's thinking" is showing political identification. This identification can be strong or weak, and it can also be partial, for example, admiring a leader without necessarily supporting the party that leader belonged to.

In the case of Bhandari, this distinction becomes important. A student could identify with Bhandari as a respected national figure, admired across party lines for his sacrifice and clarity of thought, without identifying with CPN (UML) as a party. Alternatively, a student could identify strongly with the party label without knowing much about Bhandari's actual political theory. Both situations are possible, and both deserve attention in any study of youth political identity in Nepal.

Taken together, these three ideas, awareness, identity, and identification, give a useful frame for asking how university students relate to Bhandari and PMPD. A complete picture would look at whether students are aware of Bhandari at all, whether his life and thought have become part of how they understand their own political identity, and whether they identify with him personally, with PMPD as an idea, or with CPN (UML) as a party, or with some combination of these. These three concepts also interact with each other in everyday life. A student might first become aware of Bhandari through a school programme, then slowly build identification with the idea of multiparty democracy through college debates and social media discussion and only later develop a settled political identity of their own. This article treats the three concepts as connected steps rather than separate categories, since this matches how most youth actually experience political learning in real life.

Understanding Bhandari and PMPD

To understand how today's students might know Bhandari, it is useful to first recall who he was and what PMPD actually means. Madan Bhandari was born in Dhungesanghu of Taplejung district in eastern Nepal on June 27, 1952 (14th Asar 2009). He became active in left politics from his student days, during the Panchayat period, when party politics was banned under the absolute monarchy (Hoftun, Raeper, & Whelpton, 1999).¹ Over time, he rose to become the general secretary of CPN (UML), one of the major communist parties formed after various left groups came together.

After the restoration of multiparty democracy in 1990, Bhandari faced a difficult question that many communist leaders around the world were also facing at that time. Could a communist party accept multiparty competition, or should it continue to aim for a one-party socialist state? Bhandari's answer was PMPD. Aryal (2023, p. 25).¹¹ has stated, "Madan Bhandari communicated his political philosophy through mass rallies, interviews with the media, and official party documents. His concept of People's Multiparty Democracy (PMPD) received formal endorsement at the Fifth National Convention of the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist–Leninist) [CPN (UML)] held in February 1993, where it was adopted as the party's guiding political doctrine." He argued that a communist party could, and should, work within a competitive multiparty system while still aiming for socialist goals suited to Nepal's own situation (Dhakal, 2023).² This was a careful balance between accepting liberal democratic structures and keeping a leftist economic and social vision.

PMPD also placed importance on building alliances. Bhandari believed that CPN (UML) needed to work together with non-communist forces, including the Nepali Congress, in order to protect and strengthen the newly restored

democracy (Dhakal, 2023).² This was not always an easy position within his own party, since some members preferred a harder ideological line. Even so, PMPD slowly became the guiding political theory of CPN (UML), shaping how the party explained its place within Nepal's multiparty system (Dhakal, 2023).²

Bhandari did not get the chance to fully develop or apply this theory (Bhandari, 1995).¹² He died in a car accident in 1993 (3rd Jeth 2050), while serving as leader of the opposition in parliament. His sudden death turned bridges and public buildings carrying his name into common across the country, including many roads, bridges, and educational institutions, such as the very college the writer is associated with.

This split between Bhandari as the historical political theorist and Bhandari the public symbol is an important bridge to the present discussion. Over three decades, as fewer and fewer people remember him personally, the symbolic image, a respected, almost saintly figure, may travel further and faster than the actual content of PMPD. Hachhethu (2021) has noted a broader symbolic pattern in Nepali party politics, where parties that began as ideology-centred organisations have slowly become more focused on holding power, with less attention paid to ideological education within their own ranks. If this pattern is also true for how the CPN (UML) communicates Bhandari's legacy to the youngest generation, then students today may know Bhandari's name and image quite well, while knowing much less about PMPD as an actual political theory. This historical background sets up the central puzzle of this article. Bhandari was, above all, a thinker who tried to work out a serious political theory for Nepal. Yet the way political memory usually works, especially for younger generations who never met the person being remembered, tends to favour image over argument.

Theoretical frameworks relating political memory and identity

This article uses three related theoretical ideas to make sense of how students might come to know Bhandari and PMPD. These are political socialisation theory, collective memory and media framing theory.

Political socialisation theory looks at how people learn about politics over the course of their lives. Early work in this field, such as that of Hyman (1959).¹³ and later Easton and Dennis (1969) (1969), argued that political learning begins early, often within the family. Children absorb basic political attitudes from parents long before they can vote or fully understand political issues. As young people grow older, schools, peer groups, religious institutions and, in recent decades, media and social media, all add further layers to this early foundation (Sears & Levy,

2003).¹⁰ In Nepal's context, political socialisation has its own special features. Many Nepali families have a long history of attachment to a particular party, sometimes going back to the Panchayat-era resistance movements or the 1990s people's movement. Students growing up in such families may inherit a basic political identification with CPN (UML), the Nepali Congress or another party, even before they fully understand the ideology behind that party (Snellinger, 2009).¹⁴ Bhandari, as a major figure of the CPN, the CPN (UML)'s history, would likely enter such students' political awareness through this family channel, alongside school events and party programmes. The second idea, collective memory, comes from work on how societies remember important figures and events, especially after the person concerned has died. Collective memory is not simply personal memory passed down unchanged. It is shaped and reshaped by media coverage, institutions, monuments, anniversaries, school curricula, etc. For a leader like Bhandari, who died young, collective memory often becomes simplified into a few strong, easily recalled qualities, such as honesty, sacrifice or vision, rather than the full complexity of his actual political writing. Whenever a leader dies suddenly and is later remembered mainly through symbols and anniversaries rather than direct personal contact. This pattern is common across many countries, not only Nepal.

The third idea, framing theory, comes from media and communication studies. Framing theory holds that media coverage, and now social media content, does not simply present neutral facts. It selects certain aspects of a person or event and makes them more noticeable, while leaving other aspects in the background (Entman, 1993).¹⁵ Agenda-setting: Agenda-setting research adds that repeated media attention to certain topics also shapes what audiences consider important to know about, even if it does not directly tell them what to think (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).¹⁶ Applied to the case of Bhandari and his political thought, this suggests that the way newspapers, party media and social media frame him during anniversaries, often focusing on his personal sacrifice and sudden death rather than the detailed content of PMPD, would strongly shape how today's students come to know him.

Taken together, these three theories suggest a clear expectation. University students are likely to know Madan Bhandari mainly through inherited family and party connection, connections reinforced and simplified by collective memory practices and media framing around his image and sacrifice, with comparatively less depth on PMPD as a structured political theory.

Methodology

This article follows a conceptual review approach rather than an empirical research design. The aim of a conceptual

review is not to test a hypothesis with new data. It aims to bring together existing knowledge in a structured way in order to build a clearer picture of a problem and to prepare ground for future empirical work (Snellinger, 2013).¹⁴ To gather material for this review, the author searched academic databases and journal repositories that carry Nepal focused Nepal-focused research, particularly Nepal Journals Online (NepJOL),¹⁷ along with the website of Madan the Madan Bhandari Foundation (MBF), (MBF) and relevant books on Nepali political history and party politics. Search terms included combinations such as 'youth political participation Nepal', 'political socialisation socialisation Nepal', 'Madan Bhandari PMPD', and 'political identity students Nepal'. Priority was given to studies that focused directly on Nepali youth, students or political parties. This article is concerned with the behavioural practice of political communication in a Nepali context rather than general international theory alone. International theoretical works were included only where they helped explain concepts such as political socialisation, socialisation, collective memory and framing, which have a long history in political psychology and communication research.

Sources were selected based on three simple criteria. First, the source had to be directly relevant to youth political identity, awareness or memory or directly relevant to Madan Bhandari and PMPD. Second, preference was given to peer-reviewed peer-reviewed journal articles and academic books over informal or unverified online material. Third, where Nepali studies were available on a topic, they were given priority over similar studies from other countries, in keeping with this journal's own focus on Nepali state, society and development issues (MBF, 2026).

It should be said clearly that this review does not include new interviews or new field data collected from any empirical and structured quantitative and qualitative research methods. However, dozens of young students from different colleges at the bachelor level were talked with for knowing their concept, perception and awareness of politics, leaders, parties and political ideologies, particularly Madan and PMPD. The reasoned conclusions presented are built from existing literature and theory, not from direct testimony of students themselves, although their views have made a contribution to form- and writing-ideas to write and express in this review article.

Limitations of the study

This article has clear limitations that should be stated plainly. It is a conceptual review, built from existing literature, related This article has clear limitations that should be stated plainly. It is a conceptual review, built from existing literature, related theory, and the trends of practices seen in the common observation, not from new field data. The patterns suggested in the discussion

section, regarding sources of knowledge, the gap between symbol and substance, generational distance, and the role of party institutions, are reasoned expectations rather than confirmed findings. Real students may show patterns that differ from what this review suggests, in ways that only direct research can reveal.

Results and Discussion

Perceiving Bhandari and PMPD

Drawing on the theoretical framework above, the likely sources through which students come to know about Madan Bhandari and PMPD are as follows.

Sources of political knowledge

Family remains an important first source. Many Nepali households carry some political memory across generations, often tied to a particular party or movement (Snellinger, 2009).¹⁴ A student whose parents or grandparents were active in the 1990 movement or who have long supported CPN (UML), is (UML) is, is likely to have heard Bhandari's name from a young age, often along with simple, positive descriptions such as "a great leader who died too early." This early exposure builds a basic, mostly symbolic, awareness, well before the student reaches college.

Media and social media form perhaps the strongest and fastest-growing source for the wider student population, including those without direct family or party connection. Bhandari's birth anniversary and death anniversary are marked each year with newspaper articles, television programmes, and, increasingly, social media posts from CPN (UML) leaders, party pages, and ordinary users. These posts typically share short, easily remembered messages, quotations attributed to Bhandari, and images, rather than detailed explanations of PMPD as a theory. Given how strongly Nepali youth now rely on social media for political information (O'Neill, Poudel, & Maharjan, 2020),¹⁹ this kind of brief, image centred image-centered content is likely to be the main channel through which a large share of students, especially those without party or family connection, connections, build their picture of Bhandari.

School and college education form an important source, though one that may be weaker than expected. Nepali: The Nepali school curriculum gives limited space to detailed political history and history and even less to the specific theories of individual leaders, beyond brief mentions in social studies textbooks. At the bachelor level, students studying subjects directly related to politics, journalism, sociology, or public administration are more likely to encounter Bhandari and PMPD in a structured way, for example, through courses on Nepali political history or media studies. Students in other faculties, such as science, management, or humanities subjects unrelated to politics, may receive much less formal exposure.

Party structures and youth wings also form a very significant source, relevant mainly for students who are already politically active. Nepali colleges, including those in Kathmandu, have a long tradition of student unions linked to national political parties (Hachhethu, 2021). Students connected to the CPN (UML-aligned-aligned student union) are likely to receive more detailed exposure to Bhandari and PMPD, often through party literature, training sessions, and anniversary programmes. For these students, Bhandari is less a distant historical figure and more an active reference point used in everyday student politics.

Finally, physical and symbolic markers act as a quiet but constant source. Bhandari's name appears on roads, bridges, hospitals, and educational institutions across the country. Students who study, travel, or seek treatment at places carrying his name are repeatedly exposed to his presence, even without actively seeking out information about him. This kind of passive exposure can build simple recognition, even though it teaches very little about PMPD itself. Taken together, these sources, family, sources—family, education, party structures, media and social media, and physical symbols, suggest symbols—suggest that most bachelor bachelor's level students in Kathmandu are likely to have at least some awareness of Bhandari, built mainly from family background, media exposure exposure, and physical symbols, with a smaller group of politically active or politics adjacent politics-adjacent students having deeper exposure through party structures and relevant coursework.

Symbolic recognition and ideological understanding

Another theme that follows from the literature is the likely gap between recognising Bhandari as a symbol and understanding PMPD as a worked-out political theory. Collective memory research generally shows that, as the distance between an event and the present grows, public memory tends to simplify around a few strong, easily repeated qualities (Entman, 1993). For Bhandari, these qualities most often include personal honesty, sacrifice, sharp intellect, and an early, sudden death. These qualities travel easily through short media formats, family stories, and party rhetoric because they require very little background knowledge to understand or repeat. A short video clip or social media post can easily convey the idea that "Bhandari was a great, honest leader who died too soon," without conveying anything about the specific arguments of PMPD regarding party competition, class alliance, or socialist transformation within a multiparty system. By contrast, PMPD as an actual political theory requires more background knowledge. This is a heavier intellectual demand than simply recognising Bhandari's image or name, and it is the kind of demand best met through structured education or party training rather than passive media

exposure (Hachhethu, 2021). To properly understand it, a student would need some basic sense of Marxist political theory, some knowledge of Nepal's political history before and after 1990, and an understanding of how CPN (UML) positioned itself in relation to other communist and non-communist parties.

This suggests a likely pattern among bachelor-level students. A large majority are likely to recognise Bhandari by name and image and to associate him with positive qualities such as honesty and sacrifice. A smaller group, mainly students with party connections or students studying politics, journalism, or related subjects directly, are likely to have a working understanding of what PMPD actually argues. An even smaller group may be able to explain PMPD in some detail, perhaps describing its specific ideas about multiparty competition or class alliance.

This is not a problem unique to Bhandari or to Nepal. Similar patterns appear whenever a political theory is closely tied to one person who died before the theory could be fully tested and explained over time. Younger generations everywhere tend to inherit the symbol of such leaders well before they inherit, if at all, the detailed argument behind the symbol. What may make the Nepali case worth close attention is the scale of the symbol building around Bhandari, through the naming of public places, regular anniversary programs and continued party use of his image, compared with the relatively limited space given to PMPD itself within general education or popular media discussion. If this pattern holds, it carries an important implication for organisations connected to Bhandari's legacy, including the Madan Bhandari Foundation. Continued symbolic commemoration, while valuable for keeping his name alive, may not by itself be enough to keep PMPD alive as a living political idea among the youngest generation. Closing the gap between recognition and understanding would likely require more direct, structured engagement.

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while valuable for keeping his name alive, may not by itself be enough to keep PMPD alive as a living political idea among the youngest generation. Closing the gap between recognition and understanding would likely require more direct, structured engagement.

Generational distance and historical memory

Another theme worth discussing is generational distance. Bhandari died in 1993. Most bachelor-level students today, whether in their first or fourth year, were born well over a decade after his death, generally somewhere in the early to mid-2000s. This means that, unlike their parents or grandparents, today's students have no personal memory of Bhandari at all. Everything they know about him comes secondhand, secondhand, through family stories, education, party material or media content. This kind of generational distance changes how political memory usually works. Generations that lived through a leader's time often carry strong personal impressions, formed through direct experience of speeches, rallies or news coverage at the time. Generations born after the leader's death instead inherit an already processed, already simplified version of that leader, shaped by three decades of retelling, commemoration and selective media coverage (Snelling, 2013).¹⁴

For Bhandari specifically, this generational distance may interact in an interesting way with Nepal's recent political turbulence. Today's bachelor-level student has grown up with frequent changes of government, coalitions and, more recently, the 2025 Gen Z-led protests against the established political class. Many of these protests expressed frustration with the very party system that Bhandari's PMPD had hoped to strengthen and stabilise. A student forming their political identity in this environment may end up holding two views at once. They may still respect Bhandari personally as an honest historical figure, separate from present-day party politics, while at the same time feeling frustrated with the current state of multiparty democracy that PMPD itself once defended. This possible split between admiring a historical figure and distrusting the present political system deserves direct attention in future research. It is the kind of nuanced, sometimes contradictory attitude that is difficult to capture through simple yes or no survey questions but is well suited to in-depth, open-ended interviews, where a student can explain, in their own words, how they hold both views together.

In this context, Mishra's (2023).²⁰ work on building human capital underscores the importance of integrating political consciousness with skill development to empower youth for national progress. Similarly, emerging research on AI-driven analytics, digital financial disclosure, and AI architecture in higher education highlights the relevance of technological literacy and critical thinking in shaping politically aware,

future-ready citizens (Celestin & Mishra, 2025a, 2025b; Ananda & Mishra, 2025).²¹⁻²³ Thus, a conceptual review of PMPD among young students must consider not only ideological understanding but also the broader ecosystem of human capital, digital competence, and ethical leadership as articulated in recent scholarly contributions.

PMPD and current Nepali politics

It is also a prime concern how PMPD's continued relevance, or lack of it, might be perceived by students living through Nepal's current political moment. In September 2025, Nepal witnessed large-scale, organised youth-led protests, organized mainly through social media platforms, which led to major political change at the national level. The literature on Nepali youth politics had already suggested PMPD, stating that young Nepalis remain capable of taking action when they feel sufficiently motivated. While staying distant from escapable of assumed structures for much of the time (Ad26).⁵ This recent history creates an interesting backdrop for thinking about PMPD's place in student political thinking. PMPD, as originally argued by Bhandari, assumed that a stable multiparty system supported by alliance building between left and non-left forces was the right path for Nepal's democratic future (Dhakal, 2023).² Three decades on, many young Nepalis appear frustrated with this very multiparty system, seeing it as slow, factional and disconnected from ordinary people's daily struggles as reflected in the demands raised during the 2025 protests.

It is reasonable to expect that bachelor-level students hold mixed views on this point. Some students, particularly those connected to CPN (UML) or its student wing, may continue to see PMPD as a relevant and even necessary framework, arguing that the problem lies in how parties have failed to live up to PMPD's original vision rather than in the vision itself. Other students, especially those who took part in or sympathised with the 2025 protests, may see PMPD and multiparty democracy more broadly as part of an older political order that has not delivered enough for the younger generation. A third group, likely a sizable one, may simply not connect their everyday political frustration with PMPD as a specific named theory at all. Since, for many students, frustration with politics tends to be expressed in terms such as anger at corruption or unemployment rather than in terms of named ideological frameworks. These differing positions matter for any future research on this topic. They suggest that researchers should be careful not to assume a single, uniform student view of PMPD. Instead, in-depth interviews would need to explore how individual students connect or fail to connect Bhandari's historical theory with their own everyday political experience and frustration.

Sustaining the legacy: The role of the party and institutions

The concerns about the role of CPN (UML) and other institutions connected to Bhandari's legacy in shaping, and possibly limiting, what students come to know about PMPD. Hachhethu (2021).¹³ has described a broader shift among Nepali political parties, away from cadre-based, ideology-centred organisations and toward larger, more loosely organised, power-seeking parties. If CPN (UML) has followed this broader pattern, then internal-organisational and annual programmes or sharing a quotation on social media require comparatively little organisational effort. Teaching PMPD in real depth to a new generation of students in a way that goes beyond slogans. It requires sustained educational effort, trained teachers or party workers, accessible reading material and platforms where students can ask questions and debate rather than simply receive information.

Where such structured educational effort exists, for example, through student wings, political science and journalism departments, or special seminars organised around Bhandari's anniversaries, students connected to these spaces are likely to develop a deeper and more accurate understanding of PMPD. Where such effort is weak or absent, the image of Bhandari is likely to spread further than the substance of his theory. This happens simply because images and short messages travel more easily than full arguments, especially through social media.

This points to an institutional responsibility that goes beyond commemoration alone. The goal should not be only to remember Bhandari but also to keep PMPD alive as a usable political idea for the next generation. The institutions linked to his name would need to invest specifically in structured and accessible education about PMPD aimed directly at university-level students rather than relying mainly on symbolic commemoration to carry that work on its own.

Diversity and differences

It is also worth considering that bachelor-level students in Kathmandu colleges are not a single, uniform group. They come from different caste and ethnic backgrounds, different genders and different parts of the country, often moving to Kathmandu for higher studies while their families remain in other districts. These differences are likely to shape how students relate to Bhandari and PMPD as well.

Family political memory discussed earlier as an important source of awareness is not spread evenly across Nepali society. Households with a longer history of engagement with formal party politics, often urban and historically more privileged in terms of caste and class, may pass on more detailed political stories than households where political life

has centred more on local or community level community-level concerns than on national party history (Hachhethu, 2021).⁸ This does not mean that students from less politically engaged family backgrounds know nothing about Bhandari. Media, school and physical symbols remain widely shared sources, but it does suggest that the depth of family-transmitted knowledge may vary by social background.

Gender may also shape engagement, though perhaps in a more complex way. Existing research on Nepali youth political participation is not always focused specifically on Bhandari. Pointing to continuing gaps in women's direct involvement in formal party structures and student unions, even as young women remain highly active in civic and social movements (Adhikari, 2026).⁵ If this pattern extends to engagement with PMPD specifically, female students might be somewhat less likely than male students to encounter Bhandari through direct party channels. Male students engage themselves in party channels to encounter Bhandari while still encountering him through family, school, media and symbolic exposure in broadly similar ways.

Regional background adds a further layer. Students who grew up in districts with a strong CPN (UML) presence or in areas where Bhandari's name carries particular local meaning, such as his home district of Taplejung and the wider eastern hill region, may carry a stronger and more detailed sense of his life story than students who grew up in regions where other parties have traditionally been more dominant.

These possible differences across caste, gender and region as well as other differences are important to keep in mind. These are not as fixed conclusions but as questions that future empirical research should examine directly.²⁴ Well-designed research with different quantitative and qualitative approaches and methods like surveys, observation, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, etc. would benefit the study from including a sample that reflects this diversity. Treating bachelor-level students in Kathmandu as a single, uniform group with one shared way of knowing and remembering Bhandari and PMPD may be insufficient to bring out the actual picture.

The way forward: Enhancing political communication and education

The discussion above points toward several practical implications. These implications are both for political education and for how institutions connected to Bhandari's legacy communicate with young people.

Developing simple but accessible concept materials

There is a need to move beyond symbolic commemoration alone. Anniversary programmes, programmes, statues and

social media posts are useful for keeping Bhandari's name visible. But they are not enough by themselves to build real understanding of PMPD. Institutions such as the Madan Bhandari Foundation, along with CPN (UML)'s educational and youth wings, could think about developing simple and accessible material specifically aimed at bachelor-level students. The materials must be written in plain language rather than heavy political theory language that explains PMPD's main arguments and its continuing relevance to current debates about Nepali democracy.

Utilising social media as a political communication and mobilisation channel

Keeping in mind how strongly today's students rely on social media for political information, any effort to deepen youth understanding of PMPD would need to take social media seriously as a primary channel, not as an afterthought. Short videos, simple infographics and interactive discussion formats are likely to reach far more students than printed booklets or formal seminars alone. At the same time, such content would need to go beyond simple slogans and quotations and instead try to explain in clear and simple language. Making the young students know why PMPD mattered for Nepal's transition to multiparty democracy and how its core questions about party competition and alliance building remain relevant today.

Building open communication systems for PMPD discourse

Given the apparent tension between respect for Bhandari as a historical figure and frustration with the present political system as seen around the 2025 protests, educators and communicators should be careful not to treat these as contradictory or as a problem to be corrected. Instead, this tension can be used as a genuine starting point for discussion. This discussion should allow students to explore, in their own terms, what parts of PMPD's original vision they still find useful and what parts they believe have not been honoured by present-day politics.²⁵ Such open discussion is likely to build more lasting and more honest political understanding than messaging that simply asks students to admire Bhandari without space for critical engagement.

Developing hybrid and integrated media channels

Communicating PMPD only through either the social media platforms like Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, or the hybrid mediaaagram, etc., or the traditional ones, including print or broadcast media, cannot be sufficient. To make Madan Bhandari and his political thought of People's Multiparty Democracy more familiar and popular among the people, especially the students and youths, a hybrid media system can be chosen as the communication channel. All sort sorts

of the means of transferring and exchanging messages in at the interpersonal level, interpersonal, group and mass level levels with the use of all types of media like newspaper, newspapers, magazine, magazines, , radio, television, online portals and social media as well as the alternative media should be used simultaneously as an integrated, collaborative and hybrid media systems.

Integrating political ideology, including PMPD, into formal education

Colleges and universities have an important role to play. Departments teaching political science, sociology, public administration, journalism and mass communication are natural spaces where Nepali political history and ideology, including PMPD.^{26,27} can be taught in a structured and balanced way. This does not mean promoting any one party's view but rather helping students understand major political theories that have shaped Nepal's democratic journey in the same way that students elsewhere study major political theories from their own national history. Including a clear discussion of PMPD within courses on Nepali political communication or mass communication theory, alongside global theories already taught in such courses, would help connect global frameworks with local political thought.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This article set out to explore political awareness among Nepali youth through the specific case of how university students might know, remember and perceive Madan Bhandari and his idea of People's Multiparty Democracy. Rather than presenting new field data, it has tried to bring together existing knowledge on political socialisation, socialisation, collective memory, media framing and Nepali political history in history in order to build a reasoned, conceptual picture of this question.

The review suggests that bachelor-level students in Kathmandu are unlikely to be completely cut off from knowledge of Bhandari. Family background, education, social media, party connection and physical symbols such as roads and institutions named after him all work together to build at least a basic awareness of who he was. At the same time, a review suggests that this awareness is likely to be stronger on the symbolic side, recognising Bhandari as an honest and respected leader who died young. On the substantive side, understanding PMPD worked out political theory about party competition, class alliance and socialist transformation within a multiparty system becomes more significant. The gap between symbol and substance is not unusual, and it is not necessarily a sign of youth disengagement from politics. Recent events, including the youth-led protests of 2025, show clearly that Nepali

young people remain capable of strong political action and strong political feeling. What seems less certain is how directly this political energy connects with named historical theories such as PMPD, as opposed to general frustration with present-day governance and party behaviour.

For institutions connected to Bhandari's legacy, including the Madan Bhandari Foundation, this article suggests that continued symbolic commemoration, while valuable, may need to be matched by more direct, accessible educational effort aimed specifically at university-level students. If the goal is to keep PMPD alive as a living political idea rather than only a respected historical memory.

This article is expected to be understood as a starting point rather than a finished answer. The reasoned expectations laid out here call for testing through direct, in-depth interviews with bachelor-level students themselves, across a reasonable number of colleges in Kathmandu. And such empirical research should be in a series conducted more frequently and in a continuous and large-scale manner.

Finally, the implications mentioned above point clearly toward the value of direct, in-depth research with students themselves rather than relying only on assumptions built from existing literature, however carefully reviewed. Such a study building directly on the conceptual groundwork laid out in this article would allow future researchers to move from reasoned expectation to grounded, evidence-based understanding of how Nepali youth actually know, remember and perceive Madan Bhandari and his idea of people's multiparty democracy. After all, the most useful next step would be an empirical qualitative and quantitative study using deeper study methods.

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