

Chairperson's Speech to Mark the 20th Anniversary of the Britain-Nepal Academic Council

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Virtual (Zoom) Ceremony and the 18th Annual Lecture of the Council

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(Note: This speech was presented along with the PowerPoint slides, which provide further details and are found here: www.bnac.ac.uk/publication/bnac-20th-annive...y-ppt-ka-5-11-20/)

Your Excellency Ambassador, Distinguished friends, and Well-wishers of the Britain Nepal Academic Council.
Namaste, and good afternoon!

My name is Krishna Adhikari. I am the Chair of the Britain Nepal Academy Council.

Today I have the immense pleasure in welcoming you to this programme to celebrate the 20th Anniversary of the Council.

On the 23rd of May 2000, the BNAC was formed in an august gathering of researchers, academics, and other well-wishers, at SOAS London. SOAS is the birth place of the BNAC and continues to be its home, where we regularly organise our Annual Nepal Lecture. Unfortunately, this year the Covid-19 pandemic has made our lives very difficult; we are unable to meet physically, and have had to opt for a virtual reception instead, to welcome our friends and speakers.

We are fortunate that all three founding officials of BNAC: Chair, Prof Surya Subedi, Secretary Prof David Gellner, and Treasurer Prof Michael Hutt are still very active in the Council, and I am delighted to have their attendance today. We will hear later from Prof Subedi on the background and experience during the early years of the BNAC.

BNAC was formed to serve and support the scattered but substantial and still growing community of UK-based academics, students and researchers whose geographical focus is Nepal or its cultural extensions throughout the world.

Let me run through the outline of today's programme. The major highlight for today is the Annual Lecture. In this first half an hour session we will have some remarks from the founding chair, Prof Subedi, and our guest, the Nepali Ambassador. Before switching to the Annual lecture, we will be introducing this year's PhD Dissertation Prize winners, and hear brief thoughts from one of them.

I believe many people in the audience are familiar with the BNAC's activities. However, I think it is relevant to review and highlight some of them today.

First and foremost, the Annual Nepal Lecture is one of the oldest and the most important programmes that we have. It began in 2002; and ever since it has been a vehicle to promote academic and scholarly links between Nepal and the UK. In order to nurture this idea we have devised a system to deliver the Annual Nepal Lecture by Nepal- and Europe-based speakers in alternate years. Today we are presenting the 18th lecture in the series. These lectures have covered a broad range of subjects including literature, democracy, public health, research, environment, development and higher education.

Bringing distinguished speakers from outside the UK would not have been possible without generous support from the individuals and firms who love and care the BNAC, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank them again.

We have decided that it is now time to expand the scope of the lecture; and from 2021 onwards, we will also keep this forum open to the speakers who are based outside Europe. About a third of our speakers were women, but we acknowledge that we need to work more to bring about gender parity.

One of our most liked programmes is the Nepal Study Days, which are popular among students, researchers and even established academics. The first study day was organised in 2005, and until 2009 our programmes concentrated either in Oxford, SOAS or UCL. Now we rotate it to different universities. To reflect the growing number of people doing research in or on Nepal, and growing interest to the programme, the Nepal Study Day became 'Nepal Study Days' from the 2011 programme organised in Cambridge. From the 2018 Durham programme, we have been running parallel sessions in order to accommodate as many papers as possible.

The papers presented in the Study Days come from diverse field of studies, and have helped the BNAC to evolve as a multidisciplinary institution. However, unfortunately, we have not been able to accommodate enough papers from the field related to the hard sciences. Nonetheless, we see both the scope and potential to attract them in the future.

Unfortunately, we had to cancel the programme this year, but we have decided to organise it online next year, to be coordinated by Dr Tejendra Pherali of Institute of Education-University College London. Please look out for the call for papers soon.

In order to engage, recognise and celebrate good research conducted by the student researchers, we initiated the BNAC PhD Dissertation Prize in 2017, and to mark the 20th Anniversary, this year we have offered two prizes.

There has been very encouraging participation. We would like further diversify the service, and have decided to welcome applications from outside South Asia and Europe, too. We will soon be advertising a new call.

The BNAC also functions as a civil society organization in expressing solidarity or sharing concerns through occasional statements on important issues related to Nepal or the Nepali diaspora.

Let me share with you an example: on 1st Oct 2016, we issued a statement expressing concerns on the CIAA intervention to the Social Science Baha. We felt the CIAA intervention was unfair and politically motivated. There was outpouring of solidarity and endorsement to our statement from academics and researchers related to Nepal, from all over the world. The Baha knocked on the door of the Supreme Court, and eventually the court's decision to clear the organisation of all charges endorsed the faith and trust we put in the Baha.

The BNAC organises occasional lectures, seminars, round tables, in addition to all of the above. I would like to note, as an example, that we organised an important academic workshop to mark the bicentenary of the Britain-Nepal relations in 2016, and the proceedings of the programme have been published as a special issue of the European Bulletin for Himalayan Research (EBHR), guest edited by historian John Whelpton.

I would also like to recall that our colleagues at the BNAC, especially Prof Michael Hutt, have played important role in in keeping the EBHR running, which currently is being looked after by our European colleagues.

We are proud that BNAC members come from diverse fields, with expertise and research useful for Nepal's policy process. In an effort to engage them constructively in policy dialogues, we initiated a venture with DFID Nepal, though this has been interrupted by the current pandemic. We are proud to

join forces with the Social Science Baha, Centre for Himalayan Studies-CNRS, The Association for Nepal and the Himalayan Studies, and Nepal Academic Network Japan in organising the Annual Kathmandu Conference on the Nepal and Himalaya.

We have also initiated the Martin-Chautari-BNAC Lecture series from 2019. I would like to encourage BNAC colleagues to take the opportunity of sharing their research in this forum.

We are grateful for the collaboration of various UK-based Universities and Higher Education Institutions, as well as the Nepal Embassy and other Diaspora community organisations. Our colleagues have been collaborating formally or informally with various HEI in Nepal, and we are even working to formalise these relationship with institutions in order to increase research exchanges and co-produce knowledge for our mutual benefits.

The BNAC Executive Committee is made of researchers and academics from various UK-based universities. We have tried to make the system as democratic as possible. In order to allow rotational representation, and provide opportunities for newcomers, we conduct elections almost every year. We will be electing four members next year. We would like to welcome you to join and serve the Council.

For more information, please visit our website. We have produced a brochure. There are various ways to stay in communication and get engaged. Please consider taking out membership of BNAC -- of which there are three types: life, ordinary and associate. We have kept the fees reasonably low to encourage new members including research students. Please follow us on Facebook and Twitter, and more importantly subscribe to our mailing list to stay updated.

Finally, I would like to remind you the fact that BNAC does not run any research projects itself. It is a small voluntary organisation. We do not have staff to work for us, and we fully depend on the voluntary support of the members and well-wishers, who go a long way to keep the organisation active and useful. Though what we have achieved is limited, we certainly can aspire to be bigger and better, and for this we count on your ideas, love and support, as ever! I would like to wish you all and request you to stay with us until the end of the programme.

Thank you.