

## Editorial: Existing Trends, Research Prospects for Sudurpaschim Province, and the Role of Academia<sup>1,2</sup>

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This is the topic that holds great significance for the future of the Far West, highlighting the crucial role that academia can play in shaping that future. Far West is the land of remarkable diversity, rich in culture, tradition, natural resources, and human potential; yet it is the land of untapped opportunities, waiting to be explored through research, innovation, and knowledge driven development. Academia is not just the place of teaching; it is catalyst for transformation. Universities, research centers, scholars, and intellectuals can shape the future of the far west through research and innovation.

### Essence of education

Acquiring knowledge means refining man's consciousness; inspiring in search of truth, protection of justice. Ultimate significance of man lies in the enlightenment and creative role toward the well-being of humanity. Possession of knowledge along with best conduct is essential. At the same time, intellectual, economic, moral, and cultural upliftment of man is possible only with value based quality education. Here are some widespread and insightful precepts:

सा विद्या या विमुक्तये (education liberates)

सत्यम् शिवम् सुन्दरम् (Truth is auspicious and beautiful)

सत्यमेव जयते नानृतम् (Truth is victorious not falsehood)

असतो मा सद्गमय, तमसो मा ज्योतिर्गमय, मृत्योर्मा मृतंगमय (Lead me from untruth to truth, from darkness to light, and from death to immortality)

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The ocean of knowledge is infinite; and the real knowledge makes man humble. Bertrand Russell opines that knowledge without humility (humble, kind, and empathetic) has remained the significant problem round the world; the opposite of humility is arrogance, selfishness, and pride. Knowledge deprived of compassion and wisdom is also futile. The essence of Bhagawad Gita reads like true knowledge to be backed up by wisdom and humility, appreciating the suffering of others and motivating us to eliminate such sufferings. There is no human activity more auspicious, holy and prosperous than the acquisition of knowledge backed up by wisdom; man automatically imbibes it with complete perfection (नहिज्ञानेनसदृशंपवित्रमिहविद्यते । तत्स्वयंयोगसंसिद्धः कालेनात्मनिविन्दति ॥). Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, a notable subaltern theorist, has also established that intellectuals to speak for the voiceless and ensure justice to the lowest strata of society.

### **Institutional perfection, research, and autonomy**

Ancient Gurukuls are said to have supported by the public. They had the freedom to decide the subjects to be taught, design their own curricula, pedagogy, and methods of evaluation. Various disciplines and skill based courses were learnt. Gurus were facilitators in showing the path how to perfect the instruments of learning. Raghavendra Tiwari, the VC of Central University of Punjab, in 48<sup>th</sup> TU convocation stated six stages of learning prevalent in Gurukuls—Listening, Abhyas, Understanding of meaning, Phala, Arihavada (study of explanatory texts), and Upapatti (attainment of conclusions)—which are found similar in Benjamin Bloom's Taxonomy formulated in 1950s in America, the hierarchy of educational goals— Remembering, Understanding, Applying, Analyzing, Evaluating, and Creating—largely associated with three domains called cognitive, affective, and psychomotor. Tiwari further categorized six types of teachers in Gurukul in ancient times— **Adhyapak** (information provider), **Upadhyaya** (impartor of knowledge along with information), **Acharya** (developer of skills), **Pandit** (provider of deep insight into a subject), **Drishta** (impartor of visionary views on a subject and making pupil think in that manner), and **Guru** (awakener of the wisdom leading from darkness to light)— which are relevant thoughts even for today. Only from hard work, continuity, and patience can one transform oneself into Guru from Adhyapak.

Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> century requires skill development, entrepreneurship, incubation, and startups, along with promotion of traditional knowledge through research collaboration with various sectors. Research centric universities are the high ranking universities in the world in recent times. The first and foremost step towards innovation,

development, and advancement is collaboration between academia and society. Investment for R & D in the universities eventually turns into the investment to promote industries.

Nurturing Excellence in Higher Education Project (NEHEP), envisioned by UGC Nepal which is currently under implementation, has provided wide scope for advancement of HEIs under two significant components. Component one covers improved employability/ entrepreneurship/ collaborative research; strengthening governance and financing of HEIs; widening access to quality higher education; and digital connectivity in HEIs. The focus of the first component has been extended as market driven autonomous courses, training, collaborative research, entrepreneurship, widening access to quality education, online teaching learning, and digital administration. The second component has been provisioned for capacity development of HEIs— institutional autonomy, research/ innovation/ patents, standardization of teaching learning, accountable/ competitive financing, digitalization/ connectivity, tuning with international universities, and establishing inter-university/ academia industry partnership.

#### **Academia in the far west**

Society requires a set of institutions to deal with peoples' aspirations. Public campuses have been established by community to meet their goals of quality higher education. Government has also established lots of such institutions to deliver services to people. Far Western Province of Nepal boasts universities, community campuses, and constituent campuses. Far Western University, Dasrath Chand University, and Dadeldhura Teaching Hospital have been the remarkable achievement recently in the establishment of high level academic institutions in the province.

HEIs are not just the places for teaching and learning of traditional academic courses. Society at large can be benefitted by various activities of the institutions. It is very difficult to establish an institution, and even harder to update, upgrade, and maintain its prestige. HEIs have greater extension potentiality. They can help upgrade and develop traditional skills, knowledge, and technology. Enhancing entrepreneurial culture, through innovative practice can affect the youth of the nation greatly.

Chinua Achebe, Nigerian Nobel Laureate and Professor, once wrote that they had been teaching the same courses at the University of Ibadan that were taught in British universities. The Britishers suggested them to constitute the courses for themselves,

according to their needs and interest. This could really make them independent. National and regional priorities may differ from place to place. Priorities and problems of Far Western province are also typical. Academia in the far west must help people in this region by making intervention in exported knowledge, actively taking part in research and development activities. UGC has envisioned highest level of autonomy for the QAA certified colleges also. Lumbini Banijya Campus has phased out all of the TU courses replacing them with self-designed autonomous courses. In order to make such intervention, capacity development of the faculty is expected. Such capacity can be developed only through our collaboration with community and industry. Research and innovation can extend the horizon of our academia.

There have been numerous research institutions in Kathmandu. Social Science Baha, Martin Chautari, Nepal Academy, researchers from various universities have been exploring various aspects associated with Kathmandu valley— its history, culture, civilization, art, literature, architecture, settlement, urban design etc. Indigenous technology and vernacular knowledge have been explored upon in numerous researches. Store of knowledge has been expanded. Universities have been formulating courses related to Kathmandu and its civilization.

### **The way forward**

Far Western Province has still been remained unexplored in academic research. This region is rich in culture, rituals, mythologies, and vernacular tales. Research on natural resources, landscape, and indigenous technology are still lacking. Far West has enormous potentiality in the areas like tourism, agriculture, herbal medicinal aspects, hydropower, and so on.

What can academia do to foster research and innovation? Intellectuals and academicians can accelerate the pace of investigation and discovery. Research funding and fellowships of various sorts are available. HEIs should make massive increment in research budget. UGC has been encouraging HEIs for the formulation of quality research policies. Institutions must equip themselves with technology and research infrastructure. Research Management Cells, Research Centers, and departments must be active in managing research infrastructures, workshops, conferences, faculty research, student research, research collaboration and so on. Quality journals, research activities, dialogue, discussion within academia, and public discourse can enhance knowledge formation in this region.

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In spite of all efforts, Far West has remained least developed region so far in the areas of research and innovation. This has affected negatively in impactful policy formation, quality education, development, and so on. Research and innovation also paves the path for impactful curriculum, market driven local curriculum, and teaching learning. Recently, high level academic institutions like Far Western University, Dashrath Chand University, and Dadeldhura Teaching Hospital have been established. All campuses including QAA certified ones must keep themselves upgrading in terms of institutional strengthening, their systemic development, research, and innovation. Universities in this region need to accelerate their pace and justify their true existence.

### **Conclusion**

Now it is time for call to action. Knowledge and wisdom are to be put to the centre of our conduct. Academia is not a bystander and knowledge user but a partner, guide, leader, and knowledge creator. Professors are highly trusted persons in developed countries for their ground breaking innovation, for their contribution to society and humanity at large. Academic institutions are ideal places for higher level of ethical moral values they have created. We academicians must utilize every moment we get for the transformation of our institutions, developing best practices, imparting ideal values. Now it is time for commitment, as educators, students, researchers, and policy makers, to harness knowledge with purpose, to investigate with passion, to build a future that our province not only deserves but also proudly celebrates.

*Contemporary Research: An Interdisciplinary Academic Journal* (CRAIAJ), the peer reviewed, indexed, JPPS star rated, online/ print biannual publication of Ghodaghodi Multiple Campus, Kailali welcome original research related to various aspects of the far west of Nepal for the upcoming issues.