
Book Review

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Book: *Navigating Higher Education in Nepal: Historical Perspectives and Future Directions*

Author: Tirth Raj Khania

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The author of the book *Navigating Higher Education in Nepal: Historical Perspectives and Future Directions*, Professor Doctor Tirth Raj Khaniya, is the former Vice-chancellor of Tribhuvan University (2072 BS – 2076 BS), a former member of National Planning Commission of Nepal and the Vice-president of the then Higher Secondary Education Board currently known as National Examination Board. Furthermore, he has involved himself continuously for a longtime in the activities of higher education in Nepal through national and international different projects.

Khaniya's current book *Navigating Higher Education in Nepal: Historical Perspectives and Future Directions* consists of altogether two hundred and twenty-five pages out of which two hundred and three pages are readable. It has total seven chapters: i) Historical Development of Higher Education in Nepal; ii) Major Issues and Challenges in Higher Education in Nepal; iii) Politicization of Higher Education and University Teachers; iv) Politicization of University Students; v) The Way Forward for Nepal's Higher Education and Tribhuvan University; vi) Fading Human Civilization Causing End Traps, and vii) Humanistic Higher Education at Central Campus, TU Overcoming End Traps. Though the author himself introduces each chapter and the entire book as a whole in the preliminary pages under the section 'introduction', however, one encounters the following discussion so far the wit works:

The first chapter 'Historical Development of Higher Education in Nepal' introduces Tribhuvan University (TU); the initial and modern higher education development in Nepal typically marking the timeline of 1950 AD as a major democratic political departure during the Rana and the Panchayat regims, and afterwards, and the struggle for establishing TU; the

consolidation phase; re-emergence of the private sector in education; concept of 10+2 by scrapping the Proficiency Certificate Level (PCL).

Likewise, the second chapter 'Major Issues and Challenges in Higher Education in Nepal' concerns with the upcoming third and fourth chapters. This second chapter elaborates how the extreme politicization in higher education hampers the implementation works for reform sincerely gained from different recommendations. It deals thematically how Nepalese higher education is deprived of the advancement of new technology, a knowledge-based economy, entrepreneurial higher education, and the young products having necessary expertise and skill with strong commitments for Nepal's development. The author sees crystal clear that there is a whim of opening new university in the political leaders in Nepal by ignoring the reports of higher education. For example, in the series of opening Agriculture and Forestry University in Chitwan, the author being a member of The Education Task Force, 2057 BS and later the stakeholder of TU as its Vice-chancellor later on, has the tussle with government agencies for many years because the new university opening activity of the government was against the report of the taskforce. In fact, the this taskforce had recommended the government of Nepal that instead of opening the new university by capturing the resources of TU's campuses, the Rampur Agriculture Campus (TU); Prithvi Narayan Multiple Campus, Pokhara; Mahendra Morang Multiple Campus, Biratnagar, and such other constituent campuses of TU should be given the shape of new university as per their specialties. Likewise, instead of converting Aayurveda Campus of TU, Kirtipur, into Institute of Aayurveda, the government passed the act of new university, Vidushi Yogmaya Aayurveda University from the House. The writer claims that due to such irrational acts of the government, there is no proper mechanism of regulating the central and other regional universities of Nepal. The University Grants Commission (UGC) is fail to coordinate its full duty to all these universities. Even the autonomy of TU and its institutes is being challenged by such works of the government. The author, however, finds that traditional curricula; no clear policy for big financial support to the higher education; long time to publish the result; allowing foreign universities to open colleges in Nepal but failing to monitor those sharply, and discontinuous vacancy of TU Service Commission demoralizing the faculties are some other grave challenges of TU and Nepalese higher education.

In this series, the third chapter 'Politicization of Higher Education and University Teachers' deals with the author's broad vision that the Nepalese politics has influence in higher education through 'stakeholders' who are in code of 'UPIG', where U stands for Users who are students and their organizations; P stands for Providers who are the leadership and the management of the university; I stands for Influences who are the political parties, and G stands for Governance who is no one but the government. The writer demands freely the academic freedom and the institutional autonomy from the Nepalese politicians for the better performance of TU and other higher educational bodies. While describing the political involvement, Khaniya seeks the moral obligation of the university teachers in TU how they forcefully take interest to save the ground of real students due to the unethical brutality on

them by state mechanism and also by their Rastravadi Vidyarthi Mandal to sustain the despotic during the Panchayat system. He proudly mentions that some twenty-five university teacher and core-staffs who are fired from their jobs while standing in the side of autonomous of the university and the academic freedom. The history shows the three additional academicians have to be degraded as job punishment only for the reason they opposed the Panchayat supporter police in the premise of TU, Kirtipur on 5th May 1975 Monday. According to the writer, the university teachers have been opposing in the favour of democracy and the academic freedom to any kind of despotic rule of the Panchayat or such other in Nepal which can be understood even by the life sacrifice of Assistant Professor Hari Raj Adhikari on 8th April 2006 Saturday. He sees that the politics of university teacher in Nepal is in worst form as they are soaked with the ideology based party politics. He even blames as 'university teachers do not look into why Nepal's higher education is in crisis'. So, the author has grave concern but his blame is not cent per cent correct because many serious other university teachers also do investigation and write in journals including myself, Prof. Dr. Ridish Pokharel, Prof. Binil aryal, and so on so, he needs to write by improving the language that 'more than average university teachers do not ...' He is irritated to see the dramatic selection of TU's Vice-chancellor in a controlled vacancy by same politically coloured Maoist the then Chancellor of TU and the Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachand' in 2024.

The chapter fourth 'Politicization of University Students' is interlinked with chapter third, however, the author pens here about student politics. The author marks the Students' Movement of 'Jayatu Sanskritam', i.e., the victory to the cause of Sanskrit during the Rana reign in the beginning of 1950s is the first such movement in Nepal. He mentions that there are records of the major students' movements in the following Nepali years as in 2008 BS (causing B. P. Koirala to resign from the then home ministry); 2021 BS; 2023 BS (associated with DIG Narayan Singh); 2026 BS; 2029 BS; 2032 BS (above mentioned in May of 1975); 2036 BS (for political referendum but in the disguised form of students' demand on entrance test and semester system); 2046 BS (for restoration of democracy), and 2062/063 BS (in 2006 AD for major political changes direct to the federal democratic republic in Nepal). However, the writer reads only the students' unrests of 'Jayatu Sanskritam' before 1950 AD and 2036 BS (1979 AD) are of academic credible and rest are for the political benefits for the sake's of the political parties.

Here, the author Khaniya learns in the Nepali history that while the Nepal Students' Union (established in 2025 BS and near Nepali Congress Party) purely opposes historically the Panchayati party-less and any tyrannical ruling in Nepal, the pro-Russian Nepal National Students' Federation (established in 2007 BS) shakes the hand with the Panchayat so there is fraction and the emergence of pro-Chinese another All Nepal National Free Students' Union (in 2025 BS). But there was one more such students' group called Swatantra Rastravadi Vidyarthi Mandal, popularly known as *mandale* and established in 2025 BS by the royalist, in which the students were less but the street gangsters and hooligans were more because their motto was to help the Panchayat rulers to sustain in power by finishing the real

students' groups available in the country. The author is serious that even today when the Nepal is in the federal democratic republican state after ten-years' long the Maoist insurgency, no students' wing is serious for academic reforms in TU and higher education like 'Jayatu Sanskritam' and the Action Committee of April 9, 1979 (Chaitra 27, 2035 BS).

The chapter fifth 'The Way Forward for Nepal's Higher Education and Tribhuvan University' is an insight for future plans on higher education in Nepal. The writer seems confirm that without enabling the higher education, it is difficult to fulfill the spirit of the current constitution of Nepal, 2015 AD which has the provisions of competitive multiparty democracy, human rights, fundamental rights, civic freedom, periodic elections, durable peace, socialism, the rule of law, and so on. He elaborates immediate needs of TU for its academic upliftment into many sub-heads where 78.7 per cent of the total Nepalese students study for higher education. He points out that the qualified faculty members, engaging them in the research activities, upgrading its infrastructure, revising the curricula etc. can only elevate TU. In fact, he focuses on the creation of employment, seeking many resources for financing in higher education, restructuring TU as per the requirement of its federal form, more autonomy to the constituent campuses, government providing work to the student and teachers, need for community university, internationalization of higher education, regulating the foreign university-affiliated colleges and so on as a whole for better higher education in Nepal. Here, he finds the Nepalese UGC a weak mechanism to regulate universities so he strongly demands more authorities to UGC and establishing the separate QAA office for quality assurance and accreditation work of the higher academic entities.

Similarly, the chapter sixth 'Fading Human Civilization Causing End Traps' is full of urgency why university education for human is a must. To prove this, he mentions different fading matters and humanitarian dykes like human civilization because of human being self-centred, selfish, techno-addict, power loving and dehumanized through excessive use of advanced technology and capitalism. He adds the end of ethical politics (politics ends because all the politics is for making capital and even the Marxist/state capitalism is visibly seen in China and other communist countries; ideology ends because of left-right politics of 19th – 20th centuries are irrelevant now, and history ends in the version of Fukumaya because there is triumph of liberal capitalist democracy after the collapse of extreme communism). There are further ends of science; humanism, and Kaliyuga (Kaliyug is the last Sanatan Hindu's Age in which there are only fading things and after which the Satyayug is believed to begin in which the new beginnings will raise the hope).

And the last seventh 'Humanistic Higher Education at Central Campus, TU Overcoming End Traps' chapter is purely the future goal of the author about TU where he wants to carry it and in which form when he becomes its Vice-chancellor once more time. The soul of this chapter is the author proposes grandly that TU should be a centre of humanity to restore its values by focusing its area through humanities, liberal arts and social sciences. He repeats the term to overcome the 'end traps'. Therefore, he suggests strongly that 'higher education should be for spiritual direction for enlightened salvation'. He apparently says that TU should be developed as a global centre for humanistic higher

education by focusing the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (FoHSS). He is sure that it can be easily done through establishing the Central Campus, Kirtipur (TU) which will focus on Nepal's vedic tradition, Yoga, meditation and so on collaborating with Bharat's Brham Kumari Rajyog University, the pipelined Pashupati University, and the Central Department of Sanskrit (TU). It is notable that he is diplomatically aloof here that if TU is limited to the FoHSS only, what there will happen its current programmes of other faculties it is carrying equally.

Thus, to estimate the book author is a pure democrat in his writing in *Navigating Higher Education in Nepal: Historical Perspectives and Future Directions* and he is very serious to seek any ray of the hope for improvement of higher education in Nepal just like T. S. Eliot is in the quest of searching new life in the barren earth as picturised in his famous poem 'The Waste Land'. However, Khaniya is hopefully positive and a dynamic academic leader in Nepalese history who has perfect vision for driving TU and the higher education. He accepts secularism but he strongly advocates the eastern philosophy of religion and life for long lasting peace of mind.

The author has consulted more than one hundred book, article, report, papers and so on from historically remote past to the present political and academic affairs in Nepal and global sphere so the book is upto date. In fact, the reviewer strongly recommends any Nepalese academician who desires to lead the university from campus level to central authority level whether it is in TU and other university here to read once to lead it successfully in the tenure, however, it is a good dose for lover of knowledge.

The book seems to be written in a hurry so it has some humanly mistakes in the writing mechanics and proof readings. It is hoped that the future print will be more academically pure by taking care of following suggestions: keeping uniformity; some date corrections; grammar correction at some places; matching the coherent and consistency; some misprints; misplaced table from proper place; name mistake; proper citation, and removing the condition of boring while foregrounding the same matter/idea frequently coming throughout the text.