

Chairperson's Report to the GM of the Britain-Nepal Academic Council

16 April 2019, University of Edinburgh

By

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Welcome to the GM and thank you very much for coming. The BNAC was formed in 2000 to promote academic and scholarly links. The community of UK-based academics, students and researchers whose geographical focus is Nepal or its cultural extensions throughout the world is growing every year. BNAC has also attracted and served the needs of researchers from across Europe, and at times from even further afield. This is evident even in the level of participants in Nepal Study Days. We could accommodate only 32 papers and two posters this year, and there are about 65 people who are attending the conference. Next year the BNAC is turning 20 years, and we are pleased that some of the key individuals who played roles in founding the organisation are still active in it.

Here I briefly report some of our important activities during the past one year.

1. Last year we elected a new set of Executive Officials (here we are in front of you today), trying to work hard in serving the BNAC on your behalf. There are altogether 14 members in our executive team, including two co-opted members. This year we held elections for four EC members. We will later present the outcome of the election process, but I would like to take this opportunity to thank the four retiring members, and welcome those who are (re)elected.
2. BNAC Executive Committee met twice in the past 12 months, and we have worked well as a team despite our own other heavy commitments.
3. PhD Dissertation Prize: Following the success of the first PhD Dissertation Prize in 2018, this year again we organised the Prize competition. A panel of judges comprising Stefanie Lotter, Sara Parker, and Padam Simkhada serviced the Prize Committee this year. We had eight high-quality papers submitted and Samuele Poletti, of this very University (Edinburgh), won the prize for his PhD dissertation chapter 'The good, the dead and the Other: Chronicles of a Nepali Phantasmicide'. We awarded the prize to Dr Poletti yesterday. Bishnu Prasad Choulagai came in second place. We aim to continue with this scheme, and shall be discussing this in another item today.
4. The 16th The Nepal Study Days 2018 organised in Durham was successful. We introduced a parallel panel system, which generally worked well. I hope you will agree that this year's conference in Edinburgh jointly organised by the University of Edinburgh and Royal Botanical Garden so far has been very successful. Please join me in thanking the organising team, namely *Jeevan Sharma, Ian Harper, Monalisa Adhikari, Pia Noel, and Radha Adhikari* of University of Edinburgh, and *Mark Watson, Colin Pendry, Bhaskar Adhikari, Heleen Plaisier* of Royal Botanical Garden Edinburgh for their hard work in making this event a success. We shall be reflecting later on this. Next year (2020) the NSDs will take place at UCL.
5. SSB conference: BNAC, along with SSB, CNRS, ANHS, and Japan Nepal Network, have been organising the 'Annual Kathmandu Conference on Nepal and Himalya' on a yearly basis for the last 7 years. Last year the conference went well, with 156 participants, about 60% of them Nepalis or Southasians. This year Punam Yadav and I are representing the BNAC in the organising Committee. We offer UK participants the facility of registering through BNAC and last year nine people used the service. If you are thinking of attending the event this year, please feel free to use our services. This year the conference will take place on 24-26, July 2019, and there are over 80 exciting papers and panels accepted. BNAC has been making small financial contribution, and this year also we will be providing £500 as one-off payment. We decide on a year-by-year basis, considering our won financial health.
6. The 16th Annual Nepal Lecture was delivered by Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka, on 1 November 2018 at SOAS London. The lecture on 'Belonging to Academia? Higher Education, Inequality, and Development' was well attended, and we also live casted the event through our Facebook page. The 17th Annual Nepal Lecture will be delivered by Emeritus Prof. Yogendra Yadava, who is a foremost linguist of Nepal. His lecture on

‘Linguistic diversity in Nepal: its implications for mother tongue-based multilingual education’ will be very relevant for we are observing international Year of Indigenous Languages. I hope you will be able to attend this exciting event on 14th November 2018, at SOAS. Prof Martin Gaenszle, University of Vienna, Department of South Asian, Tibetan and Buddhist Studies, has kindly agreed to deliver the 18th Nepal Lecture in 2020.

7. Statements and representations

- Just to remind you that on 1 October 2016, BNAC issued a statement expressing confidence in the SSB and opposing the intended actions of the CIAA. 105 plus academics and researcher across the globe signed our statement, which at that time made a good impact in Nepal. In December 2018, The Supreme Court of Nepal has quashed the actions taken by the CIAA and the District Administration Office, Lalitpur, against Social Science Baha. This is a vindication of the stand taken by us.
- On 14 November 2018, we wrote to the BBC World Service expressing our concern at their decision to close the 50-year-old UK base of the BBC Nepali Service, along with the removal of the position of London-based reporter/journalist (with effect from mid-Dec 2018). Though the position could not be saved, BBC is understood to be arranging their South Asia Diaspora reporter to cover the news and issues related to the Nepali diaspora in the UK.
- On 15 February 2019, we issued a statement expressing a concern about the lack of any investigation into the allegations of sexual harassment and misconduct levelled against a leading retired academic in Tribhuvan University, and about the lack of appropriate internal mechanisms of redress within the university. We urged all the universities in Nepal to institute a policy on sexual harassment and misconduct. I believe that our statement has been received well by media and concerned authorities.

8. Meetings and coordination:

- I met Dr Ilic Jovan, Head of the British Council, on 19 July.
- We are cooperating with the Merging NepSocs, a confederation of Nepali student societies from more than 50 universities in the UK.
- KA and DG were consulted for advice regarding setting up of a provincial university in Pokhara.
- Martin Chautari (MC) has proposed for BNAC for a joint annual lecture or reading workshop in Kathmandu. BNAC has reacted positively to this approach, and we are working on the modalities. If you are going to be in Kathmandu and would like to do some activities, such as giving a presentation or running a reading workshop, please get in touch with us. We may be able to assist you.
- I have held a series of meetings with the DFID-Nepal office and we have agreed to have BNAC- DFID-Nepal engagement in discussing and reflecting on their Nepal policies and programmes. The first event will take place tomorrow. If we decide to continue, and hold any specialised discussions in future, members with relevant expertise will be contacted to see if they are willing to contribute.

9. Fundraising: Most of BNAC’s activities are organised through membership fees, but we do need sponsorship to be able to bring speakers from outside for Annual Lecture. This year we do not have any sponsorship, though we have approached a couple people. Any idea in this regard will be welcome.

10. Websites and social media pages: In July-September 2018 our website was down due to issues with nameservers and a substitute site was organised. We had a new address (www.bnac.org.uk) in the interim. Later we were able to restore the original site and now both addresses are linked up.

11. The BNAC brochure has been updated.

12. Once reports from BNAC officers are complete, we will have an open and informal discussion, and your ideas and views to guide the BNAC in future will be welcome.

Thank you.