

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

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Virtual Conference and the Annual Lecture of the Council

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Namaste and good afternoon to you all.

First of all, I would like to thank the current Chairperson and the Executive Committee of the BNAC for organising this event to mark its 20th anniversary and for inviting me to say a few words on this occasion. I would like to congratulate all of you on the 20th anniversary of this organisation and thank you for joining the BNAC and supporting its activities. I am delighted to see so many of you, friends, colleagues and well-wishers of the BNAC, and am pleased that the BNAC has blossomed over the years, attracting scholars from a broad range of disciplines to its activities.

When we established the BNAC at SOAS in May 2000, at the turn of the last century and the last millennium, a sizeable number of scholars at British universities and research institutions were already researching a wide range of aspects of Nepal, but there was no common platform for us to come together and share our ideas. That is why Professor Michael Hutt, Professor David Gellner and I thought that it would be a good idea to have an intellectual platform in the UK on Nepal and decided to gather information about as many scholars in the UK as possible whose work focuses on Nepal and right away we identified 62 scholars. It was our intellectual millennium project and it has turned out successful!

We were encouraged and supported in our endeavours by the then Nepalese Ambassador to the UK, the late Dr Singha Bahadur Basnyat. Unfortunately, he passed away last year, and I would like to take this opportunity to pay a tribute to him. He was a man of vision and action. He was known as the ‘singing ambassador’ in London as he himself used to play the violin beautifully and sing Nepali songs to entertain his guests at the Embassy.

To begin, we invited all 62 scholars to a meeting at SOAS. 46 people attended this meeting at which we decided to establish the BNAC. For our founding Chairperson I was going to propose Professor Michael Hutt, but he beat me to it and proposed me. I had no opportunity to decline as everybody in the room clapped to endorse his proposal.

After the proceedings of the day, we had organised - with the help of the Ambassador and the then Director of SOAS Sir Tim Lankester - a cultural programme in the Brunei Gallery, where the establishment of the BNAC was announced. The guest of honour was राष्ट्र कवि the National Poet of Nepal late Madhav Ghimire, who sadly passed away earlier this year. After the cultural programme we all were invited to a sumptuous Nepali dinner hosted by the Ambassador at the Embassy.

I had the privilege to chair the BNAC for the first ten years during which we established an annual lecture programme and an annual day conference. We also organised talk programmes

and seminars focussed on thematic issues and on contemporary issues relating to Nepali politics, law, history, economy, culture, geography, biodiversity, demographics, infrastructure.

When I was appointed by the United Nations as its Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Cambodia in 2009, I had to travel frequently to Cambodia. For this reason, I stepped down from the Chairmanship of the Council and we elected Professor Michael Hutt of SOAS as the new chair. When he in turn became Dean at SOAS University of London he wished to step down from the Chairmanship of the Council and we elected Professor David Gellner of Oxford to lead the organisation. Both of them provided a sterling service to the BNAC and I would like to thank them very much on this occasion. They have contributed and given so much to the academic study on Nepal. Now we are fortunate to have Dr Krishna Adhikary of Oxford at the helm of the BNAC. The BNAC has gone from strength to strength since its establishment and I wish the BNAC every success in the future.

Thank you for your kind attention.