

Lord Shiva's Temple at CNAS: A Divine Light in Academia

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ABSTRACT

This paper, written on the auspicious day of the inauguration of the Lord Shiva's temple within the premises of the Center for Nepal and Asian Studies (CNAS), Tribhuvan University (T.U.), Kirtipur, Kathmandu, focuses on the role of the CNAS in the promotion of literature and cultures, and highlights the academic importance of CNAS for T.U. It is centered on the festival of Shiva Raatri. Culturally, Lord Shiva is revered as the Lord God of Gods and Goddesses (Devo Ka Dev Adidev and Kalo Ke Kal Mahakal). Shiva's philosophy guides human intellect, wisdom, and knowledge in the search of the essential meaning of life. It has applied a qualitative research approach and engages readers in understanding the true essence of such exploration. What does the research analyze? It reflects one's own self-image, shining through the presence of Lord Shiva's temple (Tattva Gyanaeshwar Bhagawan) in the CNAS courtyard. In short, it culturally encourages envisioning and understanding the self-identity through the divine grace of Lord Shiva's teaching. It symbolizes an inner lighthouse, guiding from darkness to light, from illusion to reality, and from mortality to immortality. Recognizing His divine presence fosters power and courage and elevates one's mind, character, and moral stature.

Keywords: Lord Shiva, divine culture, research, exploration, knowledge and wisdom.

INTRODUCTION

It is believed that ignorance disappears, and knowledge or wisdom manifests on Lord Shiva's Night. In the Hindu scripture, He (the Lord Shiva) is regarded as the God of Gods (*Kalo Ka Kal Maha Kal and Devo Ka Dev Maha Dev*). On the occasion of *His Raatri*, the Tribhuvan University Center for Nepal and Asian Studies (CNAS) introduced two historic programs on March 8, 2024. The first event provides insight into how language, culture, and heritage have been profoundly witnessed and validated through the exploration of knowledge and wisdom. It demonstrates that people's actions are shaped by their socio-cultural environment. The second event was a talk program that literally inspired individuals to cultivate inner wisdom, emphasizing how one should acquire skills and knowledge through personal introspection and perseverance. These two programs, held on the same day, were highly significant, serving the purpose of exploration of knowledge and wisdom. Shiva Raatri (the Night of Lord Shiva) grants access to the power of knowledge and wisdom among university teachers, students, and research scholars. The research study culturally integrates various elements, which remain unexplored unless actively pursued. Shiva's name is

solemnized as *An Exploration of Knowledge and Wisdom*. His temple has been established in the courtyard of the Center for Nepal and Asian Studies (CNAS) Office, Tribhuvan University, Kirtipur, Kathmandu. It is the day of "Maha Shiva Raatri". Why is *His Raatri* (The Night of Lord Shiva) culturally significant?

The word 'Annaprāśhan' (अन्नप्राशन) is a Sanskrit term. The Lord Shiva's followers and devotees enthusiastically gather on the occasion of His Anaprashan Day. In our Hindu tradition, Anaprashan also refers to a baby's first solid food ceremony. It is believed that an invisible figure takes a visible shape on this day. It becomes like a bright vision. This day is culturally and literarily popularized through the mantra of eminent philosophers, pundits and the priests of Vedic rites. This ritual also assumes the function of a carnival near the foundation of Lord Shiva's temple. This ceremony is associated with the literary and cultural traditions recognized by well-known and respected pundits and priests. These literary and cultural proceedings reach a climax highlighting the significance of Shiva Raatri ("The Night of Lord Shiva"), while the

second event introduces a new exploration of knowledge and wisdom. Their functions contribute to the pursuit of knowledge. The study of exploration begins in a state of calm and tranquility, not through force or a restless mind. Consequently, these two functions are closely intertwined. They take place between 7:00 AM and 1:00 PM. The Executive Director of the Center for Nepal and Asian Studies (CNAS), Dr. Mirgendra Bahadur Karki addressed the CNAS students and audience during the second event at 12:15 PM. Professor K. K. Agrawal, President of South Asian University, New Delhi and an eminent professor of Science was the chief guest. He is recognized for completing his Ph.D. at the age of 27. I came across his name when the CNAS Executive Director, Dr. Karki, introduced his short biography during the talk program.

As a Ph.D. scholar in English, I felt tempted to compare Prof. Agrawal's academic achievements with Nepal's first Ph.D. scholar in English. Prof. Dr. Mohan P. Lohani, the former Head of the Central Department of English, Kirtipur, Kathmandu, who was awarded doctoral degree in AD 1967 from Banaras Hindu University, India, at the age of 27. This observation led me to reflect on the evolution of education over time. The two systems—one traditional and the other modern—differ significantly. Question arises: Why was education in the past seemingly smoother and more accessible, while the modern education is increasingly complex and challenging? Interestingly, Prof. Agrawal did not address this issue at the function, nor did the audience raise questions about the difference between the old and new education systems globally. For me the contemporary education has become a complex and often confusing mix of ideas and approaches. Prof. Agrawal also asserts that this dilemma in education can only be resolved through self-exploration and wisdom. According to his analysis, self-exploration enables individual to transform negativity and unutilized potential into meaningful contributions for the greater good.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

In Gayatri Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" one of the most notable lines from her essay is entitled "*The subaltern cannot speak*." This line captures the major argument of Spivak's work, which critiques the ways in which the Western intellectuals, including postcolonial theorists, have regrettably ignored or silenced marginalized voices. Spivak deliberates on how the subaltern (a term she uses to describe oppressed or marginalized groups) is often unable to speak for themselves because they are disqualified from the structures of power and discourse that would allow them to be heard. She, further, tries to give a voice to the subaltern through Western academic and political contexts, but it is difficult and challenging because they remain framed within

those same power structures. As a result, the subaltern's true voice is silenced, and their experiences are interpreted by others. For example, Spivak's *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999) affirms: "The truth of culture, in my view, is the battle for the production of legitimizing cultural explanations" (340).

The two-day function—one on the "*Exploration of Knowledge*" and the other on K. K. Agrawal's talk on "*Study Yourself*"—signifies a methodological approach to self-exploration. This method provides insight into learning about oneself and others by engaging in internal exploration. Such introspection serves as a source of wisdom and knowledge, which can be pursued, as Agrawal encourages individuals, through learning, examination, and investigation. All of these begin with self-inquiry. According to Swami Vivekananda's *Hindu Dharma* (2078 B.S.), "All people could never adopt this teaching of self-existence because it is too subtle. To understand this is too difficult; it requires a very keen knowledge and courage. This philosophy is not accessible to everyone, and you are not the first among the three groups" (*Hindu Religion and Its Philosophy*, 2078, pp. 92–106). Vivekananda's teachings help me understand who I am. This strongly suggests to me that the milk of a lioness can only be contained in a golden vessel. The same investigation of self-inquiry is evident in the essay *The Ideal of Craftsmanship* by C. Wright Mills (2024), who states that "it is not that self-development is an ulterior goal, but that such development is the cumulative result obtained by devotion to and practice of his skills" (p. 94). The methods and materials used in this study have been derived from the exploration of knowledge and wisdom as presented by several eminent scholars. This is particularly evident in the following teachings.

Prof. Agrawal's philosophy is highly inspirational, akin to the perspective found in Jawaharlal Nehru's story entitled *The Buddha Story*, where he states, "personality counts today as ever, and a person who has impressed himself on the thought of mankind as Buddha has, so that even today there is something living and vibrant about the thought of him, must have been a wonderful man" (Nehru, 2004, p. 134). Similarly, Rabindranath Tagore's philosophy asserts that "moral law is the law of humanity" (Tagore, 1996, p. 46). This study employs qualitative inquiry to explore issues related to knowledge and wisdom. According to Frederick Erickson (1986), qualitative research methodology "seeks to discover and to describe narratively what particular people do in their everyday lives and what their actions mean to them" (p. 87). Edward Said (1993) also emphasizes the importance of meaning-making, stating that qualitative research "identifies meaning-relevant kinds of things in the world—kinds of people, kinds of actions, kinds of beliefs and interests—

focusing on differences in forms of things culturally that make a difference for meaning" (p. 85). Additionally, Said's *Orientalism* (1978) observes that Orientalism often functions "as a form of radical realism, which attempts to identify the East as fixed and unchangeable" (p. 98). The methods and materials explored in this study align with the theme of knowledge and wisdom, which was further reinforced through a talk program organized on the auspicious occasion of Lord Shiva's festival. Lord Shiva is regarded as the incarnation of unadulterated wisdom, making this event particularly significant for intellectual and philosophical exploration.

Justification of the Issues

While addressing the audience the Executive Director of CNAS, Dr. Mirgendra Bahadur Karki critiqued the modern education system, stating that it has become significantly longer in duration compared to precious educational systems. Perhaps Dr. Karki sought to emphasize that education today takes much longer than in the past. In this context, I recall the former Public Service Commission member Prof. Dr. Ram Mohan Mahato's statement: "Life is short, and knowledge is long." In the present day, students must spend more years earning their kindergarten, high school and university degrees, including diplomas, postgraduate degrees, and Ph.D. The convener of the talk, Dr. Karki, invited Prof. Agrawal on the occasion of the inauguration of Lord Shiva's statue. The event was held on March 8, 2024, during the Maha Shivaratri festival. Dr. Karki named the statue *Tattva-Gyaneshwar*, linking Lord Shiva (*Tattva-Gyaneshwar*) to the pursuit of knowledge and wisdom. Before Prof. Agrawal's talk, Dr. Karki inspired the audience by emphasizing that cultural legacy serves as a source of new exploration and knowledge. On the occasion of Maha Shivaratri, Dr. Karki welcomed Prof. Agrawal to the CNAS Office for the inauguration of the Lord Shiva's *Praneshwar Puja* and his talk, which aimed to encourage, revive and revitalize cultural heritage of Nepal.

Accompanied by Agrawal's spouse Dr. Karki participated in the *Darshan* as a blessing during the inaugural function of Lord Shiva's *Praneshwar*, a stone-crafted deity. Prof. Agrawal stated that culture is a source of great merit, contrasting Eastern philosophical traditions with Western approaches, which, according to him, often exhibit blind faith in *Darshan*—a concept deeply rooted in Eastern beliefs. In this context, Prof. Agrawal sought to illustrate the principles of Eastern *Darshan* through the mythological story of Pygmalion. In this tale, Pygmalion's wife preserves his lifeless body, praying daily for his revival. Her prayers are ultimately answered by Providence (divine power) and one day, Pygmalion is restored to life through her unwavering hope and devotion. The philosophy of Eastern *Darshan* exemplifies the power of conviction, as demonstrated by Pygmalion's wife, whose firm

determination and self-confidence brings her husband back to life. Prof. Agrawal emphatically encouraged the CNAS students and audience, stating that modern society has often undermined its own language and culture. Universities, thus, neglect the very foundation of their intellectual and spiritual heritage.

I, Language and Culture

To attain a profound understanding of knowledge, we must promote our own language, culture, and the natural world, which sustain and nurture us. Prof. Agrawal illustrated this idea by pointing out that temples dedicated to Lord Shiva can be found in various parts of the world. However, the act of establishing a new site of worship within one's own heritage represents a fundamental experiment in cultural continuity and belief.

Currently, the rate of student migration is at an all-time high, driven by the appeal of modern civilization. Many students are fascinated by foreign cultures, languages, literatures and traditions. Chris Barkar (2002) opines that obviously my wish is to have been in this this objective where I have not been; I hope readers will bear with me. Being captivated by new and modern explorations that do not inherently belong to them, they continue to be tempted as well as drawn towards external spheres of heritage, language, and culture. Prof. Agrawal urged CNAS scholars and audience to critically reflect on their educational journey, asking themselves, what they seek to accomplish through their studies.

Prof. Agrawal introduced the idea that scholars in higher education should actively engage, revive, and revitalize the contents of their own curriculum. By doing so, they can find meaningful connections to their own sources of knowledge and skills. Prof. Agrawal, further, emphasized that every student possesses valuable intellectual resources that can contribute to new discoveries within their own academic domains.

Addressing the students at CNAS, Prof. Agrawal posed a thought-provoking question: *If you cannot first learn about yourself and understand the contents of your own identity, how can you connect your language, culture, heritage, and civilization to those of others?* He encouraged students to develop a creative approach to learning, emphasizing that by drawing from their own studies, they can acquire innovative tools for new inventions, knowledge, and skills.

II, Image of a Deity

Prof. Agrawal introduced another philosophical concept

derived from Hindu *Darshan* (philosophy), emphasizing the ability to perceive the image of a deity through the power of one's own will and insight. He highlighted the significance of two powerful phrases: "I can do" and "Can I do?"—which, despite their similarity, carry profoundly different results in their meanings.

The first phrase, "I can do," instills confidence and awakens curiosity about one's own capabilities. It reinforces self-belief and encourages a proactive approach to life. In contrast, the second phrase, "Can I do?" suggests doubt and uncertainty, as it places reliance on external validation rather than self-assurance. This hesitation can misguide individuals, preventing them from realizing their true potential. As a result, Agrawal warned that those who remain unaware of their own *Darshan* or philosophy risk of losing their purpose, whereas those who are awakened to attain success. Agrawal's inspiring approach to gaining knowledge is both deeply philosophical and reflective. This approach is similarly reflected in the way a researcher frames a teaching activity in the text *Meanings into Words Intermediate Workbook: An Integrated Course for Students of English*, authored by Doff, Jones, and Mitchell (1984). Their instructional method encourages both teachers and students to engage with the material through hands-on experience—by "doing it yourself" (Doff et al., 1984, p. 12).

Prof. Agrawal's teachings encouraged young individuals to become dedicated learners by reflecting on a fundamental question: "What do you expect to be in your own image?" His philosophy serves as a stimulating lesson, urging individuals to engage in self-exploration and intellectual growth. The pursuit of knowledge and wisdom (*Tattva Gyaneshwar*) reinforces this principle, emphasizing the importance of recognizing the distinction between what we aspire to be and what we teach future generations to become. In Prof. Agrawal's opinion, the world cannot be meaningfully understood through the question "Can I do?" unless individuals first cultivate self-identity and confidence in their own abilities.

III, Place of Nature in Human Life

Prof. Agrawal presented a compelling idea that nature provides unwavering support and cooperation—but only if we first learn to understand ourselves. He urged individuals to explore nature's grandeur through deep introspection and awareness, posing thought-provoking questions: What gifts have human beings received from nature? What can they do in return to honor her greatness and glory? Prof. Agrawal inspired the audience to dedicate their efforts toward preserving nature, emphasizing that environmental degradation results from humanity's neglect of its beauty and

significance. According to him, both artistically and naturally, human life cannot survive, thrive, or find renewal without maintaining harmony with nature. Yet, despite this intrinsic connection, people continue to overlook nature's presence in their lives. Dr. Karki introduced a new perspective on self-awareness and *Darshan* (spiritual vision) through the sacred representation of wisdom—*Tattva Gyaneshwar Bhagawan*. During the *Puja* (ritual worship), the word *Bhagawan* (divine being) is invoked through the priest's *mantras* (sacred chants), reinforcing the spiritual essence of self-exploration and enlightenment.

IV, COVID-19 Hindrance

Prof. Agrawal referring to COVID-19 pandemic 3 years ago, stated that it did not only disrupt people's lives but significantly hindered economic progress, migration patterns from rural to urban areas, and advancements in education and industry. Additionally, the cost of technological tools and devices has skyrocketed, making them less accessible. The devastating impact of COVID-19 has derailed the functioning of multiple social sectors, including healthcare, education, and the environment. For instance, schoolteachers, yoga instructors, university students, and professors were forced to withdraw from in-person (physical) activities. Consequently, reliance on digital platforms and technological devices such as iPhones, iPods, and other smart tools surged, making them an integral part of daily life. As a result, people began purchasing these technological devices based on their financial capacity, often out of necessity rather than choice. Today, the dependency on these tools continues, shaping both professional and personal interactions in an increasingly digital world.

Prof. Agrawal engaged the audience with his thought-provoking insights on self-knowledge and *darshan*, emphasizing that we are constantly surrounded by subtle experiments in our daily lives. From day to night, every moment of the 24-hour cycle, humans exist in close interaction with the fundamental elements of nature. This is a cosmic spirit that occurs in the pedagogical space (Lenz Taguchi, 2010). Therefore, developing a keen and refined wisdom to discern and understand these surrounding elements is essential. He urged CNAS research students and audience of the program to pursue intensive specialization in their respective fields.

To illustrate this, Prof. Agrawal referred to the philosophy of Jagadish Chandra Bose, an eminent scientist known for his contributions to botany, biology, physics, and even science fiction writing. Quoting from Bose's

groundbreaking research, which demonstrates that plants possess a power of perception, he suggested that life and physics are interconnected (Bose, 2020). Similarly, the 2nd International Conference on Global Plant Humanities

(GPH25), held at Hotel Mall in Kathmandu on May 2–3, 2025, highlighted the vital role of plants in our lives (GPH25 Organizing Committee, 2025).



Figure-1

Gagliano, M. (2020). **Plant perception:** The ability of plants to sense and respond to the environment by adjusting their morphology and physiology. *Botanical research has revealed that plants are capable of reacting to a broad range of stimuli, including chemicals, gravity, light, moisture, infections, temperature, oxygen and carbon dioxide concentrations, parasite infestation, disease, physical disruption, sound, and touch.* The scientific study of plant perception is informed by numerous disciplines, such as plant physiology, ecology, and molecular biology. (p. 789)

Prof. Agrawal encouraged the audience to pursue and idealize self-action with full determination. His speech, indeed, advocates a path of positivity, emphasizing the importance of self-exploration in the pursuit of knowledge and wisdom.

CONCLUSION

Prof. Agrawal, both literarily and culturally, encouraged Nepalese students to recognize the positive impact of education. He further suggested that the first step toward learning is to believe in ourselves. His natural, cultural as well as literary sight (dristi or darshan) emphasized the development of positive thinking, which can lead to genuine

knowledge gained through self-effort. This approach of natural, cultural and literary sight or view helps individuals acknowledge that both good and bad outcomes occur, whether knowingly or unknowingly. To sum up, Prof. Agrawal's doctrine asserts that "things usually prefer good outcomes, which arise from discussion." He was in possession of deep-rooted knowledge and skills, which naturally serve as an inevitable and valuable lesson that is derived through the exploration of wisdom. Prof. Agrawal proposed a collaborative initiative for Nepal, in his role as the President of South Asian University, involving three key areas: a joint Ph.D. program, a joint conference, and joint collaboration for the benefit of SAARC countries, including Nepal. According to Prof. Agrawal, these three levels of academic engagement have the potential to enhance our academic output and foster meaningful exchanges. During the talk, Dr. Karki assured Prof. Agrawal that he would convey these ideas regarding educational integration to the Vice Chancellor of Tribhuvan University and other concerned authorities to further nurture and advance the project.

Scope for the further study

This paper opens up new avenues for future research, including the philosophical and educational implications of Lord Shiva symbolizing protections, destruction and reconstruction as well as wisdom, knowledge and cosmic consciousness. Further research could delve into the cultural significance of the Maha Shivaratri in academic discourse, the contrast between traditional and modern education systems, and the role of self-inquiry and exploration in contemporary pedagogy. Comparative studies involving Eastern and Western epistemologies, spiritual and ecological wisdom, and the influence of plant practices on cognitive development could enrich interdisciplinary dialogues. Similarly, analyzing the intersection of cultural heritage, identity, and academic self-realization may offer valuable insights for curriculum innovation and latest education model attuned to digital technology.

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