

Nirajan Kafle

The Alumnus



I was working on a text called *Niśvāsamukha* for my PhD thesis. To work on this text itself was a challenging job as we had only a single surviving manuscript, and the language, Sanskrit, employed to write the text is different from the standard one. On top of that, the text was also unpublished. For these reasons, it was taking a long time. Most of the preparatory work for my thesis was already completed during a research stay (2008-2010) at Pondicherry under the direction of Prof. Dominic Goodall (EFEO, Paris/Pondicherry) and at home in Kathmandu. When I came to IAS it was all about a final revision and writing a proper introduction and conclusion under the joint direction of Prof. Peter Bisschop (Leiden) and Prof. Goodall. I had already prepared the critical edition, annotated translation of and basic introduction to the *Niśvāsamukha*, and an edition of the five chapters (chapters five to nine) of the *Śivadharmasaṅgraha* for an appendix. In addition to this, I had prepared verse indices of both texts, and bibliography.

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WHEN AT THE Nepal Research Centre/Nepal German Manuscript Project (NRC/NGMCP), from 2011-2014, I was engaged in cataloguing Nepalese manuscripts and reading Sanskrit texts. This was a very good position for work and reading experience, but my PhD thesis was put on hold. Prof. Dominic Goodall then put me in touch with Prof. Peter Bisschop at Leiden University. Prof. Bisschop showed a keen interest to take me on as his doctoral student and helped me enrol at the University. Although we started our cooperation through Skype, it soon became clear we would need to meet in person. And so he suggested that I apply for the Gonda Fund. I did so, and fortunately the scholarship was granted. As soon as I received this news, I prepared for my journey, travelling from the highest mountain to the lowest country, the Netherlands.

As I prepared the necessary documents for my visa, my wife also expressed her desire to accompany me. And so we planned our trip together; the whole process proved to be very complicated and tiresome. I had to go through several governmental offices, and the Dutch embassy in Kathmandu had stopped granting visas, which meant we had to travel to Delhi. Then, exactly one day before our journey to Delhi, my wife collapsed and lost consciousness. The doctors could find

no immediate explanation and declared that she would be fine – but I was hesitant to leave the next day. But in the end, of course we decided to go. Our visit to the embassy in Delhi was successful, and after seeing a bit of the city we headed for the Netherlands.

As soon as we reached Leiden, via Schiphol Airport, we forgot all the troubles and complications that we had gone through. Leiden is such a small, clean and beautiful city, without much traffic, crowds or noise. Parts of the city are intermed with tree-lined canals. It was the month of September when we arrived and the trees were full of autumn's yellow leaves. This made the city even more beautiful.

We arrived on a Sunday; IAS was officially closed, but the institute had kindly arranged the apartment keys for us. Our apartment was located in a building where many other scholars closely related to IAS were staying. The apartment also was a place to meet many international scholars. Every now and then we would have dinner and lunch meetings, during which we could learn about various cultures and customs of different people. The apartment was located conveniently; just a short walk to IAS, the University and the markets, and also easily accessible by bus from Leiden Central Station. In addition, nearby there was a well-kept, beautiful

garden. I went there several times for walks. There were big trees with beautiful branches, a green meadow, and a small house for birds. Going there was quite refreshing.

On the first morning, I was invited to the *Skandapurāṇa*-meeting (reading of the text) by prof. Bisschop at University of Leiden. The plan was to read and prepare a critical edition of the text. Prof. Bisschop's project had been going on for some years, and I had never had the opportunity to read this text before. I was delighted to start my stay in Leiden with the *Skandapurāṇa* reading, which went on to last a week.

On that first day I also went to the IAS building on the Rapenburg. Sandra van der Horst showed me around the institute, introduced me to the staff, and informed me about the facilities. I was thrilled to hear I would be permitted to stay at the office and work until midnight if I so wished. I had never enjoyed such a facility before. And so I settled into work; generally I would work from home in the mornings and then go to IAS and work until I became tired for the day. After a while I noticed that no one really registered my comings and goings, and so I asked why this much freedom was given to the scholars at IAS? One of the staff members replied: you are a grown-up and you know what to do and what not to do. I realized that the freedom we received in point of fact made me more responsible for my work and duties.

IAS would also organize different academic, historic and cultural events. Every month there would be a lecture, giving scholars the opportunity to present their work. I was particularly helped by the training session that IAS organized for its fellows, to help them present their own research to a large audience. As I had never before received such training in my life, it was very interesting and helpful for my academic life. I highly praise this innovative activity. Every so often, excursions to the Museums in Leiden and Amsterdam were arranged. For me, this sort of event provided much knowledge about the history and culture of the Dutch people.

After the first week of reading the *Skandapurāṇa*, I also started meeting with Prof. Bisschop to read my thesis. During my 6-month stay in Leiden we met on a regular basis. He went through, patiently and carefully, my entire thesis with a tireless dedication and made many insightful changes to the text. In particular he devoted special care to the arrangement and argument of the introduction. As a result of which, I was able to submit my thesis to Leiden University in June 2015. I later returned to Leiden to defend my thesis. IAS financially helped me to make this visit, and many staff members attended the event. I am extremely grateful to IAS and its staff, from whom I acquired much more than I had ever expected.

Looking back on my stay in Leiden, I can certainly say that it was an amazing experience, academically, socially, socially and culturally. Leiden University's excellent library facilities are lacking in my country Nepal, where I would never have been able to complete my thesis. I am now looking forward to my next challenge: working again with Prof. Bisschop, on his new project called 'From universe of Visnu to universe of Siva'. I am already looking forward to going back to Leiden.

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