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Original Article

Navigating Self-Induced Exigencies in Kathmandu University's Vision 2030: A Critical Autoethnographic Currere

Hem Raj Kafle*

Kathmandu University School of Education, Lalitpur, Nepal

Email: hemraj@kusoed.edu.np

Abstract

In November 2016, the Vice Chancellor of Kathmandu University proposed Vision 2030, marking the university's Silver Jubilee. The vision comprised six conceptual pillars termed Silver Jubilee Initiatives. I joined the Vice Chancellor's office in March 2017 with an assignment to study and document the Initiatives and worked till January 2021. In this article, I inquire the facets of my engagements through the lenses of rhetorical situation, critical autoethnography and currere. From rhetorical situation, I utilize the concepts of exigence, audience and constraints focusing on my initiatives and related discourses. I subscribe critical autoethnography to peek into those critical moments where institutional culture and dynamics of competition and power relations constrained or facilitated my efforts as a researcher and communicator. Currere provides me with a pathway to document my experiences from the perspective of exposure, learning, education, and realization. This critical autoethnographic currere, overall, reveals my pursuit of Silver Jubilee Initiatives to have been institutionally edifying despite the absence of acknowledgement, and personally rewarding despite my inability to disseminate the results of my inquiries.

Keywords: *Vision 2030. Silver Jubilee Initiatives. Rhetorical Situation. Critical Autoethnography. Currere.*

The Context

As you walk southward from the administrative building of Kathmandu University (KU) in Dhulikhel, starting from its west side along the circular road past the fast-food café and taking a few strides to the left, you will spot six signposts to your right standing along the western edge of the Silver Jubilee Park. The six signposts from north to south read Quality,

*Corresponding Author.

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Impact, Equity, Global Engagement, Identity, and Innovation. In the middle of them stands a larger signboard in blue containing the KU logo and the tagline, KATHMANDU UNIVERSITY SILVER JUBILEE INITIATIVES VISION 2030. I become a bit nostalgic and reflective every time I arrive at the spot. Except past midnight till dawn, the park is filled with strollers, students and villagers. Each time I reach there I wonder if the strollers can say something about the six signposts and the tagline if asked of their understanding and impressions. I, in fact, do not ask anyone anything. It is already a place for recreation and relaxation, and more so on Saturdays and public holidays. A random first-time visitor might regard the posts as the remnants of a recent ceremony. Someone not very aware of the nature of a higher education institution might consider them decorative items. And someone with a fresh acquaintance to KU, such as a student or a new faculty member, might take them as emblematic of something it projected for the year 2030. But what about the perception and experience of those familiar with the inception, evolution and fate of Vision 2030? What of myself who spent more than four years pondering upon but being able to produce very little for the six initiatives? How did I educationally grow from my exposure to the Silver Jubilee Initiatives (SJI) from November 2016 to January 2021? This paper aims to address this question through a critical autoethnographic lens adopting the rhetorical structure of currere.

Research Motivation

I heard of the Silver Jubilee Initiatives (Vision 2030) in November 2016 during a regular faculty meeting. The four-year tenure of the incumbent Vice Chancellor (VC) was going to end in mid-January the following year. The way my colleagues talked of the vision sounded as if the outgoing VC wanted to leave behind an agenda for his successor or to have a new roadmap for himself if he got a new tenure. I did not take the speculations seriously at that time because I was not interested in leadership transfers at the university. But I got a chance to read and translate the highlights on the initiatives for the VC's graduation speech of November 2016. The VC's intention was apparent. Like any leader who succeeded the founder, he wished to forge a direction for KU on the occasion of its silver jubilee. I also construed at that time general indifference and apathy towards Vision 2030. I think it was either an expression of an *ad hominem* fallacy towards the leadership, or an inability of the general university public to understand the essence of the initiatives. But, the idea of the initiatives and their composite vision appealed to me as related to symbolic convergence theory, the branch of rhetoric I had extensively worked on in my doctoral research. The theory entailed two broad assumptions. The first is that "communication creates reality," and that "reality is not fixed but changes as our symbols for talking about it change" (Foss, 2018, p. 105). The second maintains that "symbols not only create reality for individuals but that individuals' meanings for symbols can converge to create a shared reality or community consciousness" (Foss, 2018, p. 106). The theory's basic direction for me would be that an informed discourse and engaged communication about the proposed initiatives could lead to a broader understanding and acceptance of Vision 2030. In addition, this postulation overall meant a need for me to help "modify in some way the exigence" (Farrell & Young, 2009, p. 33) of indifference exhibited towards the vision.

It is obvious why I aim to pursue the six initiatives at this point. As a practicing rhetorician, I have always been intrigued by the fact that Vision 2030 was proposed by a leader envisioning KU's new era following its silver jubilee, and that he had invested four-year tenure trying to implement his vision's foundations – the initiatives. And it is reasonable for me to critically revisit my own connection with the initiatives; I worked at the VC office for nearly four years reflecting and documenting the bases of implementing Vision 2030. The four years

proved for me one of the most happening periods of my life as a faculty member and apprentice of administration and marked an era of intense experience, learning and growth.

Research Methodology

I take three perspectives along to peek into my work at the VC office: rhetorical situation, critical autoethnography, and currere. Taking these three together for a single discourse might sound ambitious on the surface. But I perceive an intriguing cross-pollination of concepts befitting the context of the Silver Jubilee Initiatives, which I venture to examine through a critical-reflective lens. I call it critical-reflective in the sense of it emanating from the experience of my being positioned in a problematic, conflict-prone, academic-cultural setting of a university. Rhetorical situation, as postulated by Bitzer (1992), involves "a complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence" which can be "completely or partially removed" or modified if "human decision or action" is constrained by discourse (p. 6). In other words, rhetorical situation denotes such an occurrence that induces human responses to the level of altering the impact of that occurrence itself. Critical autoethnography documents through an individual's reflective account "the ways cultures are created and compromised through institutional, political, social, and interpersonal relations of power" (Jones, 2018, p. 5). The perspective, thus, underlines the promises of autoethnography to permit "both personal and cultural critique" (Boylorn and Orbe, 2014, p. 17) of the experience of having undergone a problematic, discursive situation inside an academic institution. Currere is a form of narrative adopted by an individual for "re-experiencing prior, even archaic, forms of life" (Pinar, 2020, p. 50) while tracing the patterns of growth and transformation in an educational setting. In other words, it is "a conversational process" in which, to recount their academic knowledge, researchers "reactivate the past, reconstruct the present and look to the future by talking with themselves, with figures across time and space" (Wang, 2017, p. 110).

Bitzer's (1992) theory of rhetorical situation underlines three concepts, such as exigence, audience and constraints. An exigence is an event or an occurrence "marked by urgency" or "something waiting to be done" and can be modified by the influence of discourse (p. 6). Audience entails "those persons who are capable of being influenced by discourse and being mediators of change" (p. 7); and constraints consist of "persons, events, objects, and relations" that have the power to "constrain decision and action needed to modify the exigence" (p. 8). In this paper, I take exigences for those actions of mine that induced others to react to and I was obliged to respond to (with discourse). I also documented those consequent acts which I had to further respond to. In my case, the audience comprised of the people who listened to me, read me and acted to alter the exigences or those that tried to alter my position so that similar acts could be prevented. Likewise, my constraints imply the boundaries I had to set for myself so that the situation could be altered or retained against interferences; and also, the warrants I had to fortify so that the discourse could be effective. I adopt critical autoethnography for its being the "study and critique of culture through the lens of the self (Jones, 2018, p. 4). I also espouse its critical and reflexive approach for examining what Reed-Danahay (2017) terms the "positions and positionings of its narrator within systems of inequality" (p.149) within their "institutional and professional contexts" for "a better understanding" of their selves through "a more vigorous reflection on the institutional practices and fields" where they "operate" (p. 152). More particularly, I take critical autoethnography to reflect the self-induced exigences in the context of working for Silver Jubilee Initiatives tackling power relations inside the university, while managing conflicting priorities, and ethical dilemmas.

I take currere both as a theory and a method. As a theory, it calls for the elucidation of one's educational experience through the "power of contemplation, reflection, introspection, and imagination" (Baszille, 2017, p. vii), and "emphasizes the interaction between academic knowledge and life experience" (Wang, 2017, p. 111). As a method, currere presents a four-phase discourse structure "looking at relations between academic experiences, life histories, identity, and social (re)construction" (Beierling et al., 2014, p. 2). The four phases include regressive, progressive, analytical, and synthetic moments of one's life (Montgomery, 2022, p. 85). The regressive phase puts me back to the crucial moments of learning in the past, where I attempt to understand self "as a product of history" (Smith, 2013, p. 5) and "assess the events" that form my "learning experiences" (Montgomery, 2022, p. 84). In the progressive moment, I imagine some possible extensions and applications of my learnings. Here I reflect on "the possibilities for the future in terms of how they manifest themselves in the present" (Smith, 2013, p. 5). In the analytic phase, I present a "self-reflective analysis of the past and the future" (Smith, 2013, p. 5). In the synthetic phase, I make sense of the present by drawing insights from the past, present and future (Pinar, 2020, p. 50) so as to draw inferences on the self in the present demonstrating "how it exists in the present moment" (Smith, 2013, p. 5). Thus, in totality currere presents itself as "a reflective and engaging methodology of the self, demanding reflection on the individual's experience so as to engender a more extensive understanding of how one's personal history and aspirations for the future shape the individual in the current moment" (Smith, 2013, p. 5). In my case, currere functions as a discursive guideline for crafting a semi-autobiographical account of my educational efforts, encounters, experiences, and imaginations. Coupled with currere, critical autoethnography engages me "in process of becoming" and because of this, guides me through "ways of embodying change" (Jones, 2016, p.2). Naturally, as warranted in currere and autoethnography, I take recourse to a chronological retrospection of my work at the VC office. I subsequently triangulate the retrospection with the notes from my diaries. Equally I utilize my Facebook statuses, personal blogs posted on my webpage (https://hkafle.com.np), and poems featured on my poetry blog (https://biskunofletters.blogspot.com).

Delimitations and Ethical Considerations

Considering the expansive possibility of merging three concepts, I delimit this reflexive paper to specific dimensions. For rhetorical situation, I deal with only the self-induced exigences and related audience and constraints. Currere naturally delimits my narratives (including the exigences, audience and constraints) to only those exposures that are related to learning, mentorship, self-grooming and growth. Critical autoethnography draws those self-critical narratives in the light of learning, mentorship, self-grooming and growth placed in a setting and time of power relations at the university. I observe the ethical considerations underlined in autoethnography having understood that both critical autoethnography and currere respect and represent the norms of autoethnography. Thus, I consider self as "part of a community of others who will inevitably be described in relation to the self" and, therefore, observe informed consent, and protection of anonymity. I respect the privacy concerns of those who have been very close to me and honor the code of confidentiality required of an autoethnographer (Chang, 2008; Starfield, 2019).

Discussion

I move forward in my discussion with retrospection. My older son completed his Secondary Education Examinations (SEE) at the end of March 2017. My wife advised me to take him on an outing somewhere because the examinations had exhausted him. I took him to

our village in Morang because I had an errand there. In the morning of March 29, I got a call from the VC. The conversation, among other topics, included a statement that disturbed my peace of mind. He said, in a casual yet assertive tone, "*I want you to work with me in my office. Will you meet me to discuss things as soon as you return?*"

Regressive Phase: Entry, the Obligation?

The casual-sounding conversation featured above was much more than small talk. I could sense from the clause 'I want you to work with me' that it was a whistle for an exposure of a life-time significance for me if I understood what it signified. I instantly remembered this aphorism from Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe (1958), "A toad does not run in the daytime for nothing" (p. 20). Why would a VC call an assistant professor without a reason and a purpose? I did not think I was not qualified for any such entitlement, but my desire to remain a low-profile faculty member was being overpowered. On the positive side, it would be an opportunity to serve the apex office of the institution that had a vision **"**to become a world-class university devoted to bringing knowledge and technology to the service of mankind**"** ("Who We Are"). What would I do at the VC office? I remembered the stories of two faculty colleagues who previously served the office and found themselves willing to quit for having to sacrifice academics. In the hours following this conversation and before I travelled back to the university, my mind was occupied with conflicting speculations about 'working with' the head of the institution.

As someone with a keen interest in rhetoric and critical thinking, I pondered the implications of working at the VC office. Was it an offer, a proposal or a directive? Though it sounded like a proposal, it certainly was a directive because it was from the VC. And it had come following his recent re-appointment to the office. People opined that the administration was undergoing silence after a storm, which equally sounded like silence before a storm. It was what Bitzer (1992) called a "rhetorical situation" involving "a complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence" (p. 6). I only had to check my competence for tackling the 'potential exigence.' If I decided not to work with him, it would mean a refusal to help the head of the institution and probably losing his trust in my potentials. It would mean an entry into the 'complex of persons, events, objects, and relations' if I accepted the offer. But it was already an exigence, "an imperfection marked by urgency … something waiting to be done" and something "capable of positive modification" through "discourse" (Bitzer, 1992, p. 6). I had an opportunity to lead or be led by the discourse that would help dispel the storm, if any.

I wanted to listen to my well-wishers' opinions regarding this prospect. First, I told my dad that the VC had asked me to work in his office. He just quizzed, "Will you like working directly under your executive head?" I asked my wife of her opinion. "I don't know," she replied, "You are always at the university from 7 am to 7 pm. Say yes if you can fit the new duty within those twelve hours. And, we are already too late for promotion to associate professor and saying no to the VC wouldn't help." I called one of my well-meaning colleagues to take his guidance. "It's worth considering. If the VC is bent on having someone in his office and wants you, you must accept it because anyone but you would be a wrong choice for the office." I also shared the news with a relative acquainted with the university. "Sounds great," he approved the idea with enthusiasm, "What are you waiting for? It's an opportunity to learn, grow and contribute to the institution. The VC is just a medium." I knew that no one would be against the idea of my joining the VC office. My reflections on this new exigence reminded me of a rustic Nepali adage: "a needle-like entry for a ploughshare's exit" (Kafle, 2016, p. 17). I felt drawn towards the undefined assignment. When I arrived at the university, I met the registrar and inquired about the genesis of the VC's proposal. He confirmed that he was aware

of it because he had recommended my name. "What am I supposed to do in that office?" I wanted clarification because clarity in the registrar mattered to me. He replied with a tinge of seriousness in his face, "VC wants someone good at communication – writing and organizing meetings. Anyway, do not say no to him. You know what I mean." The message was straightforward; they had selected me for my aptitude in writing and communication.

I met the VC and asked why he would not recruit a staff proficient in English and Nepali. He rather countered me in a mood of presenting a long tirade, "Why can't I utilize your expertise? Why can't I have a qualified faculty member to help my office? Do you want your VC to run his office without someone who can decode his intentions? No is not the answer I expect from you, *Dr. Saab*." I sensed that he was determined and wanted me to be ready. I clarified that I was not unwilling but would prefer to work in a dedicated office with dedicated resources recruiting one or two competent staff. He asked me to prepare and present my plans. I left his office with a question that no one would answer right then. Was I supposed to relocate there fully or devote additional hours after my regular duty? Myriads of images and scenes conflicted inside my mind. Everything for a while spoke of the future as uncertainty, as something "other than it should be" (Bitzer, 1992, p. 6). I drafted a memo and emailed it to the VC the same afternoon. Titled "New Responsibility at the VC Office," the memo proposed formation of a separate 'unit' or 'wing' and listed as many as twelve tasks it would perform. I anticipated a positive response, and commitment to form a unit. I was resolute that I would take challenges only when there was a dedicated office, a dedicated team and resources. As the memo served to clarify my intent, I began a more concrete plan on a new team and a new division. I had to respond to the rhetorical exigence – the call to serve the VC office. The memo formed the first response, limited to being read and reflected upon by the VC. I needed to prepare a broader and more critical proposal to be tabled at KU's Executive Council. It would then demand heated discussion because, on the surface, it would look like an appendix. My critics and competitors, if any, would try to prevent the 'needle' from metamorphosing into a 'ploughshare.'

Progressive Stage: Reward or Responsibility?

I now reflect upon the circumstances in which I joined the VC office and get mixed feelings. What if I had refused? Could I do so without getting someone ready to replace me? Was I so obliged? Probably, for apprehension that the head of the institution would be disappointed in the offing of a potential vacancy call for promotion, I explored no alternative but joined the office having managed all the regular responsibilities. If taken optimistically, the time ahead was not without rewards even if without appreciation and reasonable reciprocation. I was going to experience the proper utilization of my training as a rhetor/rhetorician. My training in rhetoric and communication was going to be useful and applicable if I used and applied it appropriately. My academic progression thus far had been without an internship and work-based learning to contextualize my degrees. So, at least post-PhD, I was entering into a setting full of potential exigences calling for strategic responses and impelling me to devise solutions to unanticipated bottlenecks. Because it was the apex office of a federal university in Nepal, my presence and contribution would be paramount except during hours highly confidential for the executives where my presence was inappropriate. I would be too exposed, too occupied and too expected during critical hours, especially when there were meetings, delegations and deliberations. After all, I also owed the university a major investment in my postgraduate education – Doctor of Philosophy – and I had to genuinely pay back by agreeing to serve through crucial assignments.

Constraining the Self. I needed to define my constraints so that I could secure my time as a faculty member, a unit coordinator and, above all, a family man. The constraints in the given situation constituted what Bitzer (1992) would call "beliefs, attitudes, documents, facts, traditions, images, interests, motives," all existent at the institution. To be a bona fide member at the VC office demanded both "operative" documents, and those "originated or managed" (Bitzer, 1992, p. 8) by myself as a perceived rhetor and methodist. A decision from the Executive Council about the formation of my office (conceptualized by myself) and an appointment letter from the registrar would make my work legitimate and implementable. If I had a genuine agenda mandated by a set of Terms of Reference (ToR), I would be discouraged from performing anything *ad hoc.* For this time, focusing on a study of the Silver Jubilee Initiatives would be the most appreciable responsibility for a faculty member with training in writing and discourse. The same mandate would be included in the justification of the office formation and addition of other staff. All critics, cronies and competitors would be judicious in their criticisms and compliments. When I walk past the Silver Jubilee Park, enter the Multipurpose Hall to the west border, or stroll inside the archive hall at the basement of the administrative building these days, the emblems of Vision 2030 bring afresh to me the details I present here as part of my currere, or those I will never document in absence of purpose. Each exposure to these symbols urges me into "reflections on the possibilities for the future in terms of how they manifest themselves in the present" (Smith, 2013, p. 5). But I have lived four years past the moment of history when claiming credits would thus make sense as expressed in poetic form in the above boxes.

If you want me to work for change,
Give me resources;
If not resources,
Give me authority;
If not authority,
Give me courage;
If not courage,
Give motivation;
If not motivation,
Give a silent nod;
If not a nod,
Keep complete silence;
If not silence,
Never talk about change.

(20 May 2017)

They gave me a lump of wax,
A pile of feathers,
And asked me to build wings
To fly to the sun,
I rolled the wax
Into little candlesticks
With little threads in them
And lighted my little home

(21 April 2018)

Future from Now. Hypothesizing this paper as the first-ever autoethnographic account of the historic Vision 2030, I venture to propose that even though the vision itself is nowhere to be remembered in 2030, the six concepts will remain indelible unless a more radical and deleterious vision overshadows these. But how would quality, the essence of the university mission (Quality Education for Leadership), evaporate unless the mission itself is changed? How would we be oblivious of innovation at a time when fear of low student intake gives fever to program leaders during each enrollment time all year round? While identity is a character to be perennially enhanced and retained amid local and global competition, there is no dispute about the infinitive significance of impact in the same circumstance. Likewise, while respect for equity has evolved as political, social and cultural priority of a public institution, global engagement stands as a pre-requisite of a university in the face of heightened global competition.

I am now a professor and Associate Dean, trained in the proximity of university leadership. I have seven years more to serve this University, if not in leadership but always as a professor. I cannot imagine myself surviving as a professor without concern for and concentration on quality, innovation, identity, equity, impact and internationalization. I have not either imagined the closure of the directorates like 'Research Development and Innovation,' 'Admissions, Equivalence, Scholarship and Alumni,' and 'Human Resource Management' and the divisions like 'Global Engagement,' 'Community Engagement,' 'Coordination and Communication,' Event Management and General Services,' 'Inventory and Property Management,' 'Procurement and Land Management,' and 'Canteen Services and Security Management' ("Office, Directorates and Divisions"). These offices are the offshoots of the plans to materialize Vision 2030 and drive the institution in different capacities at present.

Analytical Turn: Expansion, the Necessity?

I now present a "self-reflective analysis of the past and the future" (Smith, 2013, p. 5) by recounting the exigences caused by my presence at the VC office. To continue the narrative, I waited for a definite response to my memo to the VC. Although I had no intention of putting the VC office under ethical pressure, I decided to remain firm in my belief that starting without a dedicated workstation, team and resources would leave me nowhere. My key asset was my credibility as a teacher, and I would secure and nurture it. I would go to my existing office at 7 am, perform my daily chores as the teacher and coordinator till noon and move to the VC office only after the morning classes were over. Overall, I did not like to compromise my regular schedule. I was convinced that advocacy of quality, identity, innovation, impact and equity in the public made sense only if I adhered to these in my actual context. If I compromised my routine work, any work on behalf of the VC office would prove snobbish and hypocritical.

While I waited for a concrete roadmap, I attended the major functions of the VC office. I prepared a proposal for a new division underlining its scope and ToR and submitted it for approval by the Executive Council. The Council decided on the formation of the office in May 2017, but I did not receive any confirmation and appointment letter even when the decision matured. The delay was suggestive; there was general apathy in the implementing authorities that the VC office should have a strong complement manned with experienced faculties. I nevertheless continued to attend to my assignments in the apex office while also pestering on the dispatch of my appointment letter and ToR. If the implementers were apprehensive of my intent and ability, they should rather have hurried to bind me with ToR than allowed me to occupy the office at my will. I thought that they were testing my professionalism and patience. I enjoyed being tried that way as an opportunity to learn and grow. These little encounters formed the hidden curricula that I had never thought of documenting and treasuring before.

Nothing But SJI. I was annoyed by the delay in communication but did not report it to the VC. Since I had taken that assignment as an internship, or work-based learning, I had to try solving my problem myself. It was my problem because it had ensued due to my presence there. To borrow Bitzer's terms, it was my rhetorical situation, I was both its rhetor and its audience and had to "alleviate the exigence" (Farrell & Young, 2009, p. 33) no matter how complex it was. Later, because I was insistent, they issued a circular in mid-July on the formation of the new division and selection of a team to operate it. As ingeniously planned, the scope of the division, among others, was to run discourses on the Silver Jubilee Initiatives. Two key responsibilities among the twelve assigned to the division, consequently, were to (i) "manage/facilitate all communications done from, through and to the VC office in line with the Silver Jubilee Initiatives"; and (ii) "prepare research-based, book-length elaboration of the Silver Jubilee Initiatives – documenting global trends, delineating KU's foundations and suggesting frameworks for implementation."

We had brief highlights of each initiative preceding the November 2016 convocation. I decided to include these in the immediate issue of Kathmandu University Silver Jubilee Initiatives – Vision 2030 (2017, pp. 11-12), an official bulletin published under VC's supervision. The inception-time radars for 'quality', among others, included "facilitating high quality research works through funding and matching opportunities, implementing quality improvement projects in service areas, incorporating teachers' feedback on classroom and other institutional support and assessing job satisfaction among employees." The indices of 'impact' involved "building 'model/lab-schools' in terms of pedagogical approach in rural Nepal, supporting local culture/art/music through documentation, training and dissemination; identifying ways to partner with local and national institutions to build synergistic collaborative opportunities, and revising curriculum to prepare space for mentored project opportunities." Similarly, 'equity' entailed "assessing current access of the academic programs and services to disadvantaged communities, exploring funding sources to help support disadvantaged communities, and developing outreach programs to help motivate and prepare high school or bachelor level students to know about the different opportunities existing in KU." Furthermore, 'global engagement' had points such as "instituting policies that helped provide adjunct or other appointment to interested visiting scholars from the diaspora community, preparing a platform that helped link the pool of expat volunteers to concerned schools or departments, and establishing dedicated cells to help arrange programs for international students and scholars." 'Identity' signified "creating a branding process of KU, establishing a communication center to coordinate all information collection and timely dissemination through media, and developing a cell to proactively communicate to the alumni and other beneficiaries." Finally, 'innovation' involved "identifying, documenting, elaborating and promoting innovative activities in academics, research and service; and exploring how innovative approaches (in teaching, evaluation, etc.) could be built within existing academic programs to enhance the quality of education."

The circular on the formation of the new division spoke only of my implicit recognition but not an explicit appointment as the leader of the new division. I did not mind this, though. I understood it as a signifier that I had the choice to be focused on my original duty and could respect the new division only to the extent of respecting my modesty and ethos. The scope for a 'research-based, book-length elaboration of the Silver Jubilee Initiatives' sufficed to direct my academic strengths toward reading, discourse and writing. I attended every possible public meeting at the VC office, encoded every potential reference to any of the Silver Jubilee pillars and documented anything that could serve my purpose. My earliest exercise was to apply the lens of Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) by Bormann (1972) which explained the process of forming (rhetorical) visions through discursive acts among functional groups and teams.

I considered adopting SCT because of my exposure to it as a guiding theory of my PhD research at KU during 2009-2015. The theory would help me examine the individual Silver Jubilee pillars for their genesis and structure in line with what Cragan (1981) termed "a method for sorting out and evaluating public discourse which may provide parameters and a rhetorical structure for the phrase, 'the rhetoric of'" (p. 69). In this sense, Vision 2030 and its components could be popularized through catchphrases such as the 'rhetoric of quality' or 'rhetoric of innovation' or 'rhetoric of identity.' Such popularization would take both negative (as shallow) and positive (as serious) implications but would unfailingly establish the existence and perpetuation of discourse. If we disseminated at intervals their relevance to the university, the university family would realize the need to gradually engage with, internalize and implement the initiatives.

I still sensed a general indifference and suggestive apathy of the majority of University members towards the Silver Jubilee Initiatives. Rarely anyone talked of Vision 2030 in more than half a year after its first dissemination in November 2016. A call for broader ownership

of Vision 2030 was necessary if the university respected the vision of its leader. As one assigned to study the initiatives, I was supposed to explain, in Bormann's line, that Vision 2030 was a product of the attempt to seek a common ground among the university members. The term 'symbolic' suggested the presence of language and shared narratives while 'convergence' referred to the experience of an "exhilarating meeting of the minds" through sharing "the same opinions and emotions" (Bormann, 2006, p. 724). SCT explained visions in the light of the presence of personae that owned or disowned visions, actions that reflected such ownership or denial, scenarios where the sharing or rejection of the visions took place, warrants (principles) that legitimized the visions, communities that formed around the visions, cues that such community members identified with and the stories/myths they felt attached to. As a new aficionado of rhetorical visions, I believed it was possible for us to make the university members' minds meet someday. We only needed to try to meet the minds in comfortable settings with convincing elucidations.

My first public presentation on the Silver Jubilee Initiatives took place one evening in the third week of July, a week after the circular that the new division had been formed. I spoke briefly to the non-teaching staff about the progress of my study into Vision 2030. I designed the following table (Table 1) to facilitate the study and documentation, comprising the concepts of Symbolic Convergence Theory as the lens for elaborating the Silver Jubilee Initiatives. Though the concept might have looked cryptic to the audience, I tried to explain that each pillar could be elucidated in layman's language. The vision entailed high extensity because each constituent initiative could be elaborated across six dimensions informed by the theory of symbolic convergence. For example, the study would begin by documenting the milestone achievements (institutional sagas) of the university and its constituents from the inception till date. Secondly, it would explore the ideas that might have inspired each of the initiatives. Another significant component was to take note of the inherent protagonists who would idealize and extend the initiatives, and the antagonists who would possibly resist implementation. Likewise, the study would highlight both the outcomes-oriented programs and possible disruptive/degenerative acts at the university. Then it would delineate both internal and external scenarios (physical settings and political-cultural spaces) where the positive and negative acts took place. Finally, it would register the inherent and evolving warrants for forging Vision 2030, and legitimizers for implementing and establishing the initiatives. Table 1 below shows the SJI based on SCT.

Table 1: Theme Table for SJI Based on SCT

KATHMANDU UNIVERSITY SILVER JUBILEE INITIATIVES

Study Milestones

Initiatives	Institutional Sagas and cues (milestone achievements)	Competitive Visions		Actors		Settings		Actions		Warrants/ Legitimizers
		Positive	Negative	Protagonists	Antagonists	Internal	External	Positive	Negative	
Quality										
Innovation										
Identity										
Equity										
Impact										
Global engagement										

That evening, I also presented a plan for the book-length report that the study would generate. It was supposed to have five units. For instance, unit one would contain the outline of global and local trends, unit two the achievements of KU in the last 25 years, unit three the elaboration of the initiatives and targets for the post-Silver Jubilee phase, unit four the frameworks for achieving the targets and, unit five the conclusion and recommendations. I envisioned the six initiatives as big as a project as a doctoral thesis. Considering the interdisciplinary eclecticism reflected in Table 1, study on the initiatives could yield volumes of academic work at a university setting. What could a new PhD like me see but the productive potential of an assignment thrust on him. As I scroll through the notes prepared during my tenure at the new division, I sense in my work a spirit of persistence and competitiveness. I appear to have been engrossed in an undefined mix of zeal, showmanship and audacity. I worked for the division almost single-handed during 2017. My team members remained in constant communication supplying necessary documents as requested. The registrar's office allowed me to recruit two persons at the end of 2017, one officer and one support-level staff. I was asked to lead a fair selection process according to the university guidelines on recruitment. We selected a young lady for the officer position and a young man for the position of support staff, both alumni of KU. The officer was entitled to communication and documentation, and the support staff for photography, videography and management of the archive.

The new recruits proved resourceful, uncompromising in quality and outcomes oriented as expected. I constantly mentored them on the virtues of interpersonal relationships, team coordination and individual focus on the operations of the VC office. With their active involvement, we accelerated university-wide documentation on the plans and strategies related to Silver Jubilee Initiatives and Vision 2030. Because the VC office staff were persistent, and the division representatives working at different venues coordinated, we began to receive drafts of plans and strategies focused on the initiatives and the vision. A two-day policy and coordination meeting held at an outreach center in February 2018 featured presentations by offices of deans, directors and leaders of other functional divisions. The meeting was rich in terms of elicitation, exploration, input, reflection and documentation. I was excited at the prospect of being able to complete my self-assigned document on Silver Jubilee Initiatives and Vision 2030. But the ensuing days had more unexpected deviations and entanglements in our share. I could not focus on the documents tenure until May 2019.

Audacious Instances. When you work with integrity and a sense of purpose, any surreptitious act of a group of critics presents itself as an exigence to be throttled by an act of discourse. Within half a year of my entry into the new division, I had nurtured astuteness and a sense of scrutiny towards any proposition that came off hand in collision with the given policies. I received occasional teasers from around, sometimes in written forms and other times as oral messages. For example, a printed document I was asked to read and comment proposed to establish a secretariat under the office of the registrar. It emphasized gatekeeping all agendas to the Executive Council meeting, and implied censorship on the works of the VC office. I explained to the VC the intent of the proposal and asked him to consider not approving it. I stressed that if the Executive Council had felt the need of a secretariat, the legitimate secretariat under the VC office could be activated and expanded. As he consented, I prepared one document modifying the intent of the aforesaid registrar-office secretariat, focusing its scope on the expansion and consolidation of Silver Jubilee Initiatives. I submitted the modified guidelines but did not do any follow-up about it in the ensuing days. For me it had only been a 'thing other than it should be' and drawn my attention as someone "capable of being influenced by discourse and being mediator[s] of change" (Bitzer, 1992, p. 7). I was told later that the proposal was deferred as untimely.

I continued to make my critical presence felt in the days ahead. At the turn of 2018, I asked the VC if he wanted me to prepare a list of to-dos for the new year. On his green signal,

I prepared a five-page strategic plan with the objective: "To ensure Productive Intervention of the Office of the Vice Chancellor in the Advancement of Kathmandu University." Among several reform suggestions, the document stressed redistributing the service units and revising the organizational structure, creating offices to directly oversee one or another Silver Jubilee Initiative. I made sure to discuss such revision with a few administrative officers and incorporated their opinions. I knew that the plan would disappear with discarded papers because the objective and the redistribution agenda would alarm the critics and contenders. I knew I was not going to do any follow-up, either. The document was just a caution to the head of the institution that achieving even a small chunk of Vision 2030 required navigating countless obstacles for even costless agendas. The plan and to-dos disappeared during 2018 as expected. Like in some other instances, I even waited for it to make a round in the administrative offices and land finally on my table for an opinion. Documents I prepared for the VC often got forwarded to me for 'review and feedback purposes.' The plan for 2018 did not surface, though. I resubmitted it with a slight revision for the year 2019. It moved ahead that year, albeit slowly, because there was a change in leadership in the administrative wing. Consequently, several new sections emerged signaling the hope of accelerating the works for the Silver Jubilee Initiatives. The units like Community Engagement, Event Management, Security Management, Procurement and Property Management became operational in their respective offices. We prepared guidelines for these units as they became inevitable performers at the university.

The 2018 strategic plan was an audacious act on my part. I had drafted it to show my understanding of the reforms needed at the university. It also reflected my realization that if my efforts helped bring transformation, not to make any effort would be my incompetence, naivety and an act of selfishness. The days ahead saw the formation of new academic departments at different schools of KU. The new division at the VC office continued taking up new assignments and coordinated with other newly formed units. We continued KU Insider with more classified arrangement of content corresponding to the Silver Jubilee Initiatives. We got school-wise color codes defined and applied in the school-related souvenirs. Most importantly, we got the university webpage designed with a new look and dynamism. As a perceived coordinator of communication, I led some of these activities and provided input for others. I continued discussing with the executives the prospects of introducing outcomes-focused programs. Wherever and whenever possible, I mentioned the ongoing documentation on Silver Jubilee Initiatives even though the work was obstructed by distractions and different priorities. I kept recommending names of faculties whenever the VC wanted them to take up crucial assignments and fill up vacant positions. I held the need for transformation at the core of my proposals and reports, and emphasized the welfare of students, faculties and staff in all interactions with the executives. I, in fact, experienced a big irony overall. The general university public appeared to regard me as a privileged power-monger. For example, my long-awaited, well-deserved promotion to Associate Professor in June 2018, which coincided with my tenure at the VC office, was rumored to be an offshoot of my proximity to the central administration. My wishers considered me a victim of circumstances, such that I was a very good teacher turning into a bad administrator. Very few close colleagues appreciated the way I was managing the conflicting priorities across academics, administration and family. My condition was that the VC had cumulative demands on me, while I was not ready to compromise my performance as a faculty and head of the department. These pressures were making me tougher, though, at times, I felt the tinge of exhaustion and resignation.

Despite reasons to diverge, I kept on thinking and taking notes on the Silver Jubilee Initiatives. Something had to be done for an apparent shift from the original conceptualizations of the initiatives. I discovered two interesting categories in the six pillars. Three of them (Quality, Innovation, and Identity) were explicitly concerned with internal consolidation of the

university. Three others (Equity, Impact, and Global Engagement) represented the drive for externalizing the university's programs. I decided that adopting the initiatives as programmatic rather than random concepts would give clear insights for forthcoming plans. I reflected further to elucidate the aspects of internalization and externalization and prepared a short seminar with an intent to disseminate the concept to faculty colleagues. My first academic sharing of Vision 2030 took place on 24 May 2019, titled "Critical Inquiries through KU Vision 2030," which I presented to the faculty members of my own department. The crux of my presentation was to take the six initiatives to the classrooms, and the session was intended to generate useful feedback from colleagues. The discussion helped me prepare a list of actions for transformation at the university. I termed it "Mission Classroom" and submitted a memo to the VC and the registrar on 18 June 2019, with the subject line, "SJI Notes and Checklists for Immediate Implementation." I expected a meeting for discussion, which could not take place for certain reasons. The memo on Mission Classroom delineated several performance areas for the administration and faculty members alike. For example, the quality milestones for classrooms included such commonplace yet crucial aspects as the upgrade of amenities, classroom hygiene, classroom management and delivery, student well-being, recruitment and induction of competent teachers, and regular updates of curricula and assessment systems. Likewise, innovation involved the fundamentals like local research-based classes, teacher innovation, transfer of teacher skills to students, documentation of student research and startups, classroom-community linkage, and classroom as laboratory. The points for identity consolidation, among others, entailed alumni network, social activities within and beyond the campuses, establishing program-wise signature features, branding of programs through student initiatives, and enhancing faculty credibility.

The agenda of externalization including equity, impact and global engagement could be equally relevant for university classrooms. I underlined such points for equity as giving equal attention to each student's growth and evolution, ensuring assistance to the neediest and the most deserving students, taking class projects to the community where relevant, involving students in faculty-led projects, and accelerating career guidance and psychosocial counseling. Similarly, the dimension of impact covered ideas like inculcating university initiatives in the students, the positive influence of faculties on students, the university's impact in society through student successes, and mobilization of students as ambassadors. Finally, the idea of global engagement underlined the factors like promoting student exchanges where applicable, running online courses with expats (foreign or Nepali diaspora), short-term visits of foreign experts, inter-university projects with foreign students, supervision and mentoring by faculties from partner universities, and networking with former professors working abroad. I did not receive any feedback for the memo on Mission Classroom. Though delay in response was natural in that the officials were too busy to spare time for such abstract subjects, but such prolonged non-response was somewhat itchy for me considering my promises to bring doable recommendations. I very often reminded myself that I had not stretched my working hours just for the sake of drafting memos and emails with no apparent consequences for the students. Subsequently, I submitted a follow-up memo to the VC on 20 October 2019, entitled "Tasks for Immediate Attention" in which I emphasized, among others, the urgency of implementing the Silver Jubilee Initiatives by activating the functional units and reorganizing traditional offices. I submitted the memo this time, too, without expecting a response, but for personal assurance that I had not given up my agenda for Vision 2030. Later, on 19 February 2020, in a policy-level meeting held in one of the outreach centers, I took a chance to present among the university officials a proposal entitled "SJI for Implementation as Mission Classroom." My recommendation was about observing 2020 as a classroom year, suggesting the urgency of refocusing the transformation of classrooms. This was also a testimony of my inflexible pursuit

of the agenda on Vision 2030. The presentation invited thorough appreciation, with one or two senior officials admitting having heard the idea for the first time.

Anything But SJI. The later phase of my work at the VC office was marked with several undesired entanglements beyond the major agenda, and shadowing Vision 2030. I was acting unofficially as the spokesperson and officially as the chief of communications and information officer. Such role, unexpectedly, involved responding to 'Right to Information' appeals, tackling journalists' questions, debating with frequent agitators, and communicating to the university stakeholders in such an assuring tone that despite any foreboding of conflicts, the leadership was committed to quality education and wellbeing of its students, faculty and staff. The last months of 2019 and the first of 2020 were the most happening times at KU. The six totems of Silver Jubilee Initiatives were torn into rags by the staff and faculty agitating against the administration and restored to their designated places only when the agitation subsided. Vision 2030 turned like a pipedream, disowned by a majority as if the six initiatives constituted a hoax. When COVID-19 hit the university in March 2020, the idea of mission classroom got shattered because classrooms were shut down. But, implicitly, the initiatives gradually sought utterance in the leadership's willingness to allow the university to run with classes and assessments. Classes and assessments had to go online making the urge for quality, innovation, identity, equity, impact and global engagement circumstantially primary. The leadership was quick enough to switch to virtual activities, trying to make the initiatives manifest in the way students did not lose their study years just because we could not address the crises. My engagement as the chief of communications was limited to attending policy meetings, giving opinions when asked and helping the staff document the decisions and statuses. I developed disinterest for VC office work because deep involvement was not possible, and I had to refocus on my students who were struggling to cope with the calendar messed up by COVID-19. I did not mind being asked to stay away from the committee formed by the office of the registrar to further work on the Silver Jubilee Initiatives. I shared my work with the committee and concentrated on my pedagogical activities. I knew later that the committee could not do much amid the COVID-induced chaos. When I recently asked the then-coordinator for anything he had about the committee's work, he could only send me the original copy of Vision 2030, and the research schemes I had prepared as expressed in poetic form in the above box.

Will someone
Teach me
Art of
Endless patience,
The patience
To count
Countless instances
Of indecision,
The indecision
About whether
The bird
Should fly
With wings
Or without?

(1 August 2018)

Synthetic Moment: Overcoming Apathy

My official involvement with Vision 2030 ended in January 2021, following the appointment of a new VC and my resignation as the chief of communications. The six signposts at the Silver Jubilee Park, the banners inside the Multipurpose Hall, and the descriptions inside the archive hall keep reminding me that they are staying at the university longer. I do not see myself anywhere advocating the revival of the study on Vision 2030, nor does anyone appear to initiate an inquiry into their relevance in the days ahead. Nobody would at least deny the perpetual integration of the six pillars in university life. At this point, I can only try to make sense of how my perspectives changed during the eventful four years. Now, as a currere observer, I can only explain how I exist "in the present moment" (Smith, 2013, p. 5), educated

by rhetorical situations I was exposed to during those four years, the possibilities I imagined, the discourses I devised or tackled and the actualities I experienced.

The Silver Jubilee Initiatives signify an unfinished project to me as would Vision 2030 to its advocate, the former VC. I term it unfinished because I could not bring out a research-based report as planned and much of what I did in private did not become public. I acknowledge at least one scholarly work titled "Critical Inquiries on Kathmandu University Silver Jubilee Initiatives Vision 2030" carried out by one of my colleagues for the Research Development and Innovation Directorate in 2021. This unpublished research report analyses the graduation speeches of the-then VC from the perspective of how the six pillars of Vision 2030 were represented in his official addresses. Publishing this work after a thorough review and revision would mark the first academic contribution involving the initiatives. The six signposts at the Silver Jubilee Park remind me of an era when the university promised a revival of positivity, optimism and productivity. Any future academic leader can be inspired to introduce their own, revise or revive the initiatives because the concepts are universal, pervasive and evolutionary at the same time. I developed an interest in the Silver Jubilee Initiatives in November 2016 and joined the VC office in March 2017 with an intent of pursuing an internship. Working at the university's apex office certainly had rewards. I could closely witness and participate in four years of my university's 29 years. If anyone asks me what I learned during those years, I say this: "If you have a history, write it; or be prepared to forfeit it to someone who is most willing to erase your name**"** (Kafle, 2021, "If You Have…"). I do not, however, imply that all successors intend to unlearn the precepts of their predecessors rather, in the course of creating their own legacy, they might allow the former's footprints to fade and disappear in the absence of acknowledgement and critical review.

My self-declared internship at the VC office informed me the way different categories of people formed as an institution grew. I discerned four distinct types at my university: those who sacrificed, those who compromised, those who complied and those who confronted (Kafle, 2021 September). The first type comprised the founders who forewent individual priorities to build a public institution. The second type included those who compromised their priorities by being motivated to work within the framework set by the founders. The third were those who sought employment at the institution and agreed to work under professional terms of reference, rarely willing to promise extended contributions. The fourth type comprised those who advocated rights over responsibilities and mobilized like-minded contenders to critique the first and second types. I discovered that most of the leader's productive time at a public organization would go to responding to the fourth category. Moreover, I observed how some leaders functioned through comfortable and critical times. In comfortable times, they built ideals of telescopic value no matter whether the ideals stood on solid foundations of reality. They struggled to protect those ideals at critical times no matter whether they had solid resources for protection and sustenance. During and through my tenure, I understood that the success of leaders largely depended on placing the right persons in the right positions. One's performance depended on one's compatibility with people and resources as much as the position offered. People and resources constrained one's dynamism no matter how much qualified and trained one was. I developed a level of apathy towards leadership roles at the end of my tenure. This was because of having to take up more than two roles at a time. I have recorded the tenure as one "full of breaking points" and considered it futile in the days ahead to invite headaches by taking up both "challenging and languishing seats in any public institution" (Kafle, 2022, "The Last Semester…"). If not for all kinds of leadership positions, I wished to stay away from those where I would be supposed to fulfill promises without resources and collegiality.

But there was no emancipation for me. Leaving the VC office only meant being released from the coordinator of the new division and the chief of university communications. I continued my role as the head of the department with a declaration not to take any other after

it expired in February 2022. I did manage to remain free till April 2022 before requesting a transfer to a new venue. Then, again, my new dean asked me to take up leadership as the head of a department. I expressed my preference to remain without administrative roles but relented when he convinced me of the need to work for the growth of the department. I thought my dean adhered to Plato's (1997) idea of handing responsibilities to those who were "most reluctant to govern" rather than those who were "most eager" to take high posts (p. 7). I admire Plato for this timeless counsel that a state (say institution) governed by a disinterested leader would be more peaceful than one governed by one obsessed with position and power. Hence, I accepted a leadership role in the new department. The six signposts at the Silver Jubilee Park and those two non-teaching staffs selected by me for the new division are the embodiments of my incomplete project with Vision 2030 though they all might claim a presence of completeness in themselves. I am in a position now to assert that even though the merits of Vision 2030 may not have been appreciated, not a single person has so far registered its demerits. The discourse may revive and continue someday.

Epilogue

The regressive moment of my currere in relation to the Silver Jubilee Initiatives was marked by the phone call from the VC in March 2017. This unexpected invitation was the actual exigence that included those people as preceptors who warranted it as an opportunity for learning, growth, and visibility at Kathmandu University. The situation involved the constraint of not being able to refuse the invitation and the possibility of being able to work with certain privileges. This embodied the phase of learning and satisfaction that the university leadership trusted my potential and my well-wishers wanted me to accept challenges beyond my comfort zones. I did not experience the immediate progressive moment as expected. My principal mission of producing a book-length study of Silver Jubilee Initiatives did not materialize during my tenure and remained unfinished forever. My dream to attract readership from within the university and beyond was unfulfilled. But the consequences of my decision to join the VC office were more than anticipated and more significant from the point of view of learning from challenges. I got an opportunity to assume a spokesperson's role, albeit unofficially, being appointed the information officer and chief of communications, though unprepared for such non-teaching roles. Thus, I will always bear two concession statements for life. First, my self-declared internship was complete and substantively tenured. Who gets to be an intern for about four years in a university's executive office? Second, I have adequately paid back the university for investing in my graduate studies. This is by serving in more than three roles (Teacher, Coordinator/Head, Chief of Communications, and Spokesperson) for nearly four years. I think these fairly managed parallel roles could equally pay for the trust of leadership in my potential as an expert in communications.

In the analytic phase, at least four major exigences ensued following and due to my joining the VC office. Foremost, a new division was formed in response to my proposal. The Executive Council members were the primary audience and decision makers. But the implementing officials imposed a momentary constraint on my work by not disseminating the formation for reasons I did not try to delve into despite mounting suspicion and lowering motivation. Subsequently, the formation of the division made way for another major exigence: the collection of school-wise action plans and discussion of the same at the outreach center, involving deans and other officials and signaling my progress without constraints. Thirdly, I ventured into proposing the redistribution of the organizational structure with new offices to be led by officers and managers. This created a ripple by inviting resistance and delay from the same implementing officials. The proposal was brought to table and considered for gradual implementation only after leadership change at the registrar's office. This scenario taught me

the fact that delay and resistance against a change were embedded in leadership, and leadership change would at times be the immediate path of progress. Fourthly, I regard the agenda of mission classroom as the final key exigence of my tenure at the division. While the human agents – mainly the executives and deans – would not resist gradual enhancement of classrooms, agitation of staff and faculties followed by COVID-19 lockdown fully constrained the mission. I now attribute this failure to the fate of the university, over which I had no control. Although I participated in the mitigation of the agitation's negative impacts by constant engagement with faculty and staff, COVID was an insurmountable exigency in the offing. I, nevertheless, was a part of the discourse that set agenda for approving the transition of teaching-learning to virtual mode. The synthetic moment of my currere stretching till date marks the stage of realization and strategic decisiveness against the apathy for leadership positions. I left VC office with the resolution not to opt for any position in the central administration. When I took up leadership of a new department later in June 2022, it was with greater patience for challenges and deeper understanding of the constraints of leadership.

This text exemplifies my urge to document the discursive backdrop of the six signposts at the Silver Jubilee Park of Kathmandu University. As much as their underlying narratives and the opportunity to select them as a subject of academic study, the signposts constituted an exigence for me both during and after my tenure at the VC office. My intent for scholarly representation through the lenses of rhetorical situation, critical autoethnography and currere saves this work from being a plain sequence of events during and after tenure. I conclude the paper with my key learnings. First, if you wish to take, you should take a leadership position as it comes (no matter how confusing) and leave it as you should (consolidated and least confusing). Second, some exigences may annoy you for a time and dissipate themselves, while few prove life changing. In any case, you must cherish the experience and move forward. Third, constraints teach you how to expand, and how to forge reasonable strategies of expansion. Fourth, when you operate in a competitive environment, a lot of people condition you to find your path of movement and growth, while only a few may show you such path. Finally, leadership is not a thing to be shunned; it is an opportunity to work for the opportunities of countless others in that a timely decision can bring a series of learning worth a lifetime.

Data Availability Statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the corresponding author, without undue reservation.

Conflict of Interest

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ORCiD ID

Hem Raj Kafle https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8616-9576

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