

JOURNEY TOWARDS ENVISIONING A LIVING EDUCATIONAL
LEADERSHIP THEORY IN THE CONTEXT OF NEPAL: A CONTEMPLATIVE
EAST-WEST AUTO/ETHNOGRAPHIC INQUIRY

Chet Nath Panta

A Thesis

Submitted to

School of Education

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Education (Educational Leadership)

Kathmandu University

Dhulikhel, Nepal

November 2022

© Copyright by Chet Nath Panta

2022

All rights reserved.

Doctor of Philosophy in Education (Educational Leadership) thesis of *Chet Nath Panta*, entitled *Journey Towards Envisioning a Living Educational Leadership Theory in the Context of Nepal: A Contemplative East-West Auto/Ethnographic Inquiry* was presented on 7 November 2022.

APPROVED

November 7, 2022
Assoc. Prof. Dhanapati Subedi, PhD
Thesis Supervisor

November 7, 2022
Assoc. Prof. Hem Raj Kafle, PhD
Thesis Supervisor

November 7, 2022
Asst. Prof. Shesha Kanta Pangeni, PhD
Head of the Department (Educational Leadership)



November 7, 2022
Prof. Peter Charles Taylor, PhD

External Examiner


November 7, 2022
Assoc. Prof. Chetanath Gautam, EdD

External Examiner

November 7, 2022
Prof. Bal Chandra Luitel, PhD
Dean/Chair, Research Committee/ Thesis Supervisor

I understand and agree that my thesis will become a part of the permanent collection of the Kathmandu University Library. My signature below authorizes the release of my thesis to any reader upon request for scholarly purposes.

November 7, 2022
Chet Nath Panta, Degree Candidate

DECLARATION

I, at this moment, declare that to the best of my knowledge; this thesis is original; no part of it was submitted earlier for any other research degree candidature to any university. Furthermore, I declare that I have only used those resources referenced in the inquiry.

November 7, 2022

Chet Nath Panta

Degree Candidate

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my father Lila Prasad Panta, mother Juna Panta, wife Bina Panta, daughter Prakriti Panta and son Prabodh Panta.

ABSTRACT

An abstract of Chet Nath Panta's thesis for the *Doctor of Philosophy in Education (Educational Leadership)* was presented to Kathmandu University School of Education on November 7, 2022.

Title: *Journey Towards Envisioning a Living Educational Leadership Theory in the Context of Nepal: A Contemplative East-West Auto/Ethnographic Inquiry*

Abstract Approved:

Prof. Bal Chandra Luitel, PhD
Thesis Supervisor

Assoc. Prof. Dhanapati Subedi, PhD
Thesis Supervisor

Assoc. Prof. Hem Raj Kafle, PhD
Thesis Supervisor

This contemplative inquiry, as a critical and creative exploration, is a revealing saga of envisioning the trajectories of the school leadership journey (e.g., the unfoldment of narratives of ups and downs as well as pains and tears) of mine along with my participants (headteachers, teachers, members of reference group and critical friends) embracing the intent of living leadership values and practices. The inquiry navigates the journey of an authoritarian being and a democratic participatory

becoming as a headteacher, where I find myself as a living contradiction and embracing it as a part of life; I endeavor to create a *satva*¹-like learning space at school.

This journey of constructing, deconstructing and reconstructing leadership paradigms through collaborative navigation embodies our shared living values, narratives of hope, ups and downs, setbacks and resilience. Showcasing how my participants and I nurtured school leadership practices and critiqued the conventional and stereotypical leadership approaches (such as being an authoritarian figure, being confined to control and delivery), I envisioned a living educational leadership theory-small ‘t’ uncovering new pathways embedded in our grounded practices with unfolding awareness through an East-West auto/ethnographic lens (combining the East's and West's philosophical and wisdom traditions), i.e. lens of critical spirituality to understand the Nepali school leadership context and explore the logic behind the complementarity of East and West.

The inquiry unfolded a multi-layered identity and my embodied living leadership values as a headteacher seeking new ways, challenges, and opportunities to create a collegial learning space at school. As a journey of critical engagement and empowerment, this multi-faceted inquiry (*e.g., the blend of Western-induced paradigms such as interpretivism, criticalism, post-modernism, and integralism, and Eastern Wisdom Traditions: seven interconnected ways of being, knowing, and valuing based on the Chakra model of epistemology- cultural knowing, critical knowing, self-knowing, relational knowing, communicative knowing, visionary knowing, integral knowing*) inspired me to theorize my experiences and my ground of being and becoming (but not limited to) as a school leader and understand the nuances

¹ In Vedic philosophy sattva denotes purity, goodness, harmony, and creativity

of educational leadership with a transformative sensibility. It further explored the possibilities and promises of a better school embracing humility, care, connection, empathy, and compassion through the lens of critical spirituality. Multiple logics and genres helped me to unpack our layered selves in terms of thinking, viewing, and believing.

The overall structure of the dissertation is based on a post-formal structure employing a maverick approach informed by post-anthropocentric thinking. I have used auto/ethnography as an empowering, humanizing and challenging genre of life writing informed by post-modern sensibility. Like an autobiography of a Yogi, this soulful inquiry has been a constellation of my and my participants' lived experience (s) as H/teachers. This incredible spiritual journey has pushed me along transformative pathways explaining my culturally embodied self by embracing evolving consciousness. This inquiry is also like the *Bhrigu-Varuna* model of inquiry (self-inquiry through *tapas*²) or the Aruni- Svetaketu model of inquiry (*Tat Tvam Asi - Thou Art That-* that is you). It suggests redefining and deconstructing conventional disempowering and disengaging educational leadership approaches and perspectives by embracing the intent of inter-being, knowing, and valuing being self-critical and critical of others. This study explored a small 't' educational leadership theory (not a perfect, but a tentative and transient one) embodying my lived experiences (but not limited to) through an East-West epistemology (critical spirituality). Small 't' praxis includes nurturing a proactive mindset, fostering care, connection, compassion and impressive empathy, embracing humility, empowering the agency of teachers and students, self-probing myself as an agent of change and agency with newfound

² Tapas is a Sanskrit word meaning devotion, austerities, and penances

sensibilities and emerging trajectories of educational leadership perspectives in the context of Nepal.

This inquiry might create a space for a new discourse on context-based educational leadership theories exploring a dialectical relation between small 't' and capital 'T' educational leadership philosophies, which will be relatable to generate a shared living educational leadership space nurturing humility, care, compassion and criticality as a fusion of Western-induced critical perspectives and Eastern Wisdom Traditions. I want to enact practically an emergent transformative leadership praxis creating a collegial, collaborative, and productive learning space at school through pragmatic envisioning.

November 7, 2022

Chet Nath Panta

Degree Candidate

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I extend my deep gratitude to the principal supervisor Prof. / Dean Bal Chandra Luitel, PhD, for his constant mentoring and guidance. Dear sir, you are the epitome of inspiration and a life guide for me. Similarly, I acknowledge the continued support of my supervisors, Assoc. Prof. /Assoc. Dean Dhanapati Subedi, PhD and Assoc. Prof. Hem Raj Kafle, PhD. All of my supervisors- a trinity of knowledge and wisdom have untiringly supported me in creating my space of being and becoming a transformative school leader. I am profoundly grateful to Sthaneshwar Timalisina, PhD, Professor (Religions and Philosophies of India) at San Deigo State University, California, United States for his inspiration and thoughtful insight to explore the arena for a dialogue between Eastern and Western approaches incorporating ancient Gurukula models tracing from *the Upanishads*. I extend my humble gratitude to my external examiner Peter Charles Taylor, PhD, Adjunct Professor of Transformative Education at Murdoch University, Australia for his thought-provoking critical comments and precious suggestions to enrich my inquiry informed by intercultural epistemology (East-West symbiosis). Similarly, I am deeply grateful to my external examiner Chetanath Gautam, EdD, Associate Professor of Educational Leadership at Delaware State University, USA for his constructive feedback on the nuances of educational leadership and heart-warming appreciation. I would like to mention one of his remarks- *The study demonstrates exceptional originality of the theme and displays creativity and insight*. Thank you, sir for availing the time to examine my thesis.

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to Prof. Jai Raj Awasthi, PhD; Prof. Laxman Gnawali, PhD; Assoc. Prof./ Assoc. Dean Prakash Chandra Bhattarai,

PhD; Lava Deo Awasthi, PhD, Assoc. Prof. Tikaram Poudel, PhD; Asst. Prof./ Acting Head Shehsa Kanta Pangen, PhD, Asst. Prof. Suresh Gautam, and Asst. Prof. Binod Prasad Pant for their encouragement and input to improve my thesis. Thanks are due to Parbati Dhungana, PhD and Shree Krishna Wagley, PhD, Siddhartha Dhungana, PhD, Asst. Prof. Bharat Neupane, PhD scholar, Indra Mani Shrestha, PhD Scholar and Shankar Dhakal, PhD, for their critical input and insights, which have indeed become instrumental in bringing the thesis to its present form.

I sincerely thank my colleague Niroj Dahal, PhD scholar, for his input and assistance in APA formatting. I acknowledge the encouragement of my colleagues Basanta Lamichhane, PhD Scholar, Tara Poudel, PhD Scholar, Bhawana Shrestha, PhD Scholar, and Deviram Acharya, PhD Scholar. I thank KUSOED administrative staff members Mr. Ganesh Khatiwada, Mr. Raju Maharjan, and Mr. Dil Kumar Shrestha for their support.

My research participants deserve my deep gratitude and appreciation. Without their invaluable input, I would have never been able to complete my PhD research journey. I must thank University Grants Commission (UGC), Nepal, for granting me a fellowship (Young Category) to carry out my doctoral project, which has been instrumental in its timely completion. I thankfully acknowledge the generous support and encouragement of Mr. Hari Govinda Shrestha, Mayor, Mr. Chirnajibi Poudel, Chief Education Officer, and the entire Mahalaxmi Municipality. I am thankful to all my colleagues at Shree Sisneri Secondary School, Mahalaxmi Municipality-9, Lalitpur, for their incredible support, collaboration, and encouragement. Moreover, I am grateful to Mr. Mohan Krishna Tandukar, chairperson of the School Management Committee, for his remarkable support and constant encouragement.

Last but not least, my deep gratitude to my parents and all the well-wishers. I am equally thankful to my wife, Bina, for her incredible support and understanding. Without her sacrifice and unconditional support, I could have never achieved this academic feat. My daughter Prakriti and son Prabodh deserve special appreciation as you are my source of inspiration, hope, and dream.

Nama Shivaya!

Chet Nath Panta, Degree Candidate

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS	viii
ABBREVIATIONS	xiv
LIST OF FIGURES	xv
GLOSSARY OF SANSKRIT AND NEPALI TERMS.....	xvi
PHASE I: ICE-BREAKING PHASE	1
CHAPTER I.....	2
JOURNEY TOWARDS INQUIRY: EXPLORING THE PEARLS	2
The Inception of My School Leadership Journey	5
A Crow in the Fog	11
Articulating My Inquiry Agenda: Braving the Uncertainties.....	15
Purpose of Inquiry	18
Overarching Inquiry Question.....	19
Rationale of the Study	19
Research Methodology: A Bird's Eye View	20
Metalogue and Way Forward.....	21
PHASE II: ENGAGEMENT PHASE.....	24
CHAPTER II.....	25
JOURNEY TOWARDS THE FIELD OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP: FLESHING OUT INQUIRY QUESTIONS	25
Getting Started: Embracing Auto/ethnographic Review.....	25
(Re)conceptualizing Leadership.....	27

(Re)conceiving Educational Leadership	30
Educational Leadership as Merely an External Phenomenon	32
Educational Leadership as Limited to Technical Performance	33
Educational Leadership Philosophy as Grand Theories	34
Educational Leadership Research Lacking Agency-Driven Leadership for Change	35
Transformative Leadership	37
Understanding Contexts in Educational Leadership	40
Research as/for Transformative Professional Development	42
Conceptual and Theoretical Reorientation	43
Transformative Learning Theory	43
Knowledge Constitutive Interests	45
Living Educational Theory	47
Critical Spirituality	49
Three Gunas (<i>Sattva</i> , <i>Rajas</i> , and <i>Tamas</i>) as Spiritual Compass	51
Metalogue and Way Forward	53
CHAPTER III	54
JOURNEY TOWARD RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	54
Eastern Wisdom Traditions	55
My Spiritual Upbringing: An Epistemological Evolution	55
Spiritual Epistemology in Leadership	64
Seven Interconnected Ways of Knowing, Being, and Valuing	68
Cultural Knowing	72
Critical Knowing	74
Existential Knowing	78

Relational Knowing.....	79
Communicative/Practical Knowing.....	81
Visionary Knowing.....	82
Integral Knowing.....	83
An East-West Auto/ethnography as Transformative Research Methodology	86
Narrative Portrayal	90
<i>Currere</i> as Transformative Narrative Portrayal	91
<i>Lila</i> as Multiperspectival Method of Writing: A Cosmic Playfulness	93
Meaning Making through Multiple Logics and Genres	94
My Inquiry Space and Participants	99
Quality Standards	103
Trustworthiness	104
Verisimilitude	105
Pedagogical Thoughtfulness.....	105
Critical Self-Reflexivity	106
Vulnerability.....	108
Svatah-pramanya-vada	110
Ethical Issues.....	111
Confidentiality and Anonymity	112
Ethics of Care	112
Ethics of Compassion	112
Ethics of Humility	113
Metilogue and Way Forward.....	115
CHAPTER IV	116

JOURNEYING INTO CONCEIVING LEADERSHIP ROLES: BREAKING THE COCOON.....	116
Venturing into Uncharted Territory	116
Retrospection for Setting the Stage.....	118
No More a Queen Bee: Demystifying the Myth	123
Trajectories of Leadership Journey	126
Unlearning and Relearning Leadership Approaches.....	131
Taking a Proactive Turn.....	134
Quest for Unfolding <i>Sattvic-like</i> Identity	139
Envisioning Possibly a Transformative Space	145
Metalogue and Way Forward.....	159
CHAPTER V	161
JOURNEYING FOR CARING LEADERSHIP: BEING IN THE SAME BOAT ...	161
Setting the Scene: Exploring Possibilities.....	161
Getting into the Shoes	164
Respecting Feelings and Thinking of Team Members	167
Humility for Care, Compassion and Inclusion.....	170
Leadership as Epitome of Empathy and Gratitude.....	176
Metalogue and Way Forward.....	180
CHAPTER VI.....	182
JOURNEY WITH COLLEAGUES TO EMBRACE PEDAGOGICAL CHANGE: RIDING THE ROLLERCOASTER.....	182
Catalyzing Role of a Headteacher: Keep the Ball Rolling.....	183
Systemic Thinking and Reform.....	185
Turning Apathy to Calling	190

Teacher Engagement as Empowering Teacher Agency.....	194
Student Engagement: Unveiling the Colourful Butterfly.....	197
Insights from the Gurukula Models	202
The Bhrigu-Varuna Model of Inquiry/ Pedagogy	202
The Aruni-Svetaketu Dialogue.....	204
Metalogue and Way Forward.....	207
CHAPTER VII.....	209
JOURNEY FOR NURTURING COLLABORATIVE LEARNING SPACE:	
TOGETHER WE CAN.....	209
Building the Culture of Collaboration.....	209
Communication for Building a Collaborative Culture.....	214
Building a Participatory Learning Space	217
Building Amicable Relationship	219
Nurturing a Spirit of Shared Vision	220
Metalogue and Way Forward.....	227
CHAPTER VIII	229
JOURNEY WITHIN THE UNCHARTED TERRITORY: CRITICAL SELF	
NAVIGATION FOR A POSSIBLE TRANSFORMATIVE TURN.....	229
Having Grace under Pressure.....	229
Am I a Reactive Jerk?	231
Making a Flashback: Exploring Ground Realities	234
Nurturing Relationship: Rethinking My Vulnerabilities.....	238
Being (Self) dialogical as/for Liberating/Transforming: Self-Other Dialectics.....	242
Never Give up: Stay Being a Squeezed Lemon	244
Leadership as Building Accountability and Integrity	249

Enduring Criticism for Wholehearted Leadership	252
Bouncing Back Big	253
Metalogue and Way Forward	256
PHASE III: CONJECTURE OR PROPOSITION PHASE	257
CHAPTER IX	258
ARRIVING AT A DESTINATION	258
Responding to My Inquiry Questions	259
Conclusions	260
Nurturing Proactive Mindset	263
Embracing Living Care and Connection	264
Fostering a Living Collaborative Space	264
Embracing Empathy as Key to Leadership	266
Humility for Nurturing Compassion.....	267
Empowering Teachers and Students.....	268
Nurturing Living Engagement.....	270
Spirituality to Nurture Leadership Values.....	271
Changing Landscape of Educational Leadership – Small 't' Theory	272
Myself as an Agent of Change and an Agency: New Found Sensibilities	276
Implications of the Inquiry	280
Implications for Myself	281
Contribution to Overall Educational Leadership Scholarship	282
Navigating the Memory Lane	287
Epilogue	291
REFERENCES	298
APPENDIX.....	328

ABBREVIATIONS

ECA: Extra Curricular Activities

ECD: Early Childhood Development

EdD: Doctor of Education

ELT: English Language Teaching

EWTs: Eastern Wisdom Traditions

MEd: Master of Education

MPhil: Master of Philosophy

NDA: Non-Dual Awareness

PhD: Doctor of Philosophy

PTA: Parent-Teacher Association

SLC: School Leaving Certificate

SMC: School Management Committee

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Taking a dive into the sea.....	2
Figure 2: Blooming rose	3
Figure 3: Germinating seeds	5
Figure 4: Crows in the fog	11
Figure 6: Framework of critical spirituality.....	50
Figure 7: Marin Rural Municipality, Sindhuli Sindhuli.....	55
Figure 8: A Mandala.....	64
Figure 9: Seven Ways of Knowing.....	69
Figure 10: Chakra epistemology.....	70
Figure 11: Ying Yang symbol.....	84
Figure 12: Ardhanarishvara	84
Figure 13: Meaning making process.....	99
Figure 14: Lord Krishna preaching Arjuna.....	108
Figure 15: Butterflies emerging from cocoon.....	116
Figure 16: An authoritarian teacher	118
Figure 17: A Meditative Moment	139
Figure 19: Phoenix bird associated with the Greek mythology.....	169
Figure 20: Our education system	199
Figure 21: A pensive mood.....	258
Figure 21: A monk taking view of natural beauty	271
Figure 22: Atlas of small 't' educational leadership theory	275
Figure 23: A more complex nature of small 't' theory (praxis-driven)	275

GLOSSARY OF SANSKRIT AND NEPALI TERMS

Ardhanarishvara: The mingled form of *Shiva* and *Shakti* as one. It also symbolizes the merger of feminine and masculine energy- *prakriti and purush* together or an *Aadiyogi-like* perspective that embraces an inclusive dimension

Choutari: A rest stop found along the foot trails in Nepal usually created by piling stones. It usually has Banyan or Peepal tree to provide shade.

Rajas: It is associated with energy, achievement and excitement. *Rajasic* mindset seeks success, power and prestige.

Sadhak: Someone who follows sadhana (spiritual practice and disciplines)

Satsang: It is a Sanskrit word that refers to the company of good people

Satva: In Vedic philosophy, *sattva* denotes purity, goodness, harmony, and creativity

Tamas: It is associated with inertia, darkness and stagnation. The *tamasic* tendency relates to the forces of darkness.

Tapas: It is a Sanskrit word meaning devotion, austerities, and penances

PHASE I: ICE-BREAKING PHASE

Phase I, as a preparatory phase, presents the commencement of my inquiry journey (chapters 1, 2, and 3). It incorporates agenda, purpose, emergent questions, and methods embraced to set the inquiry further.

CHAPTER I

JOURNEY TOWARDS INQUIRY: EXPLORING THE PEARLS

*To be a beautiful butterfly,
To collect precious pearls,
Maybe a goal of every life.*

*Think of the larva
Emerging from a cocoon,
Feel the charcoal,
Turning into a diamond.*

*Pains, sorrows, and struggles,
Are their truths.
Beauty and value of life,
Lie in them.*

*Living and enjoying them
Brings a moment of pride.
Sharing and caring for them
Broadens the vision of mind.*

*Figure 1: Taking a
dive into the sea*



Note: <http://surl.li/chcpl>

(Poem I, 2021)

The poem unfolds the trajectories of my leadership endeavours embodying ups and downs, setbacks, confusions, and vulnerabilities, that portray my attempt to navigate a canvas of living values (e.g., trust, care, collaboration, humility). Indeed, my school leadership journey has been a road with a constellation of challenges and uncertainties, a journey of frustration and disappointment, along with enthusiasm and unshakable optimism. Gradually a newfound sensibility seems to sprout afar. At this juncture of life, I stand, ponder, and embolden myself to navigate an uncharted territory, come what may. It appears that professional life is not only a bed of roses. Employing strategies to befriend thorns and continue my leadership journey to create an engaged and collaborative learning space at school might showcase my leadership performance as a blooming rose.

Figure 2: Blooming rose



Recalling my childhood days, my parents said that during my naming ceremony, the priest named me '*Chet Nath*,' consulting the time and position of stars and planets during my birth. According to the priest, "*Chet means consciousness, and Nath means Almighty, which means being conscious of Almighty*". Further, the priest told my parents, "Your son will be a good person in the future. He will remain mindful of his activities and have a tremendous faith in God." My parents were euphoric to know this about their son from the priest. Literally, pondering on my name '*Chet*,' which means awareness...consciousness...mindfulness, brings into light

*Chet ji, why don't you ponder upon your name to set the scene of your inquiry?
Critical friend, Krishna,
July, 2022)*

the meaning and the contradiction the very word holds along my school leadership journey, thereby triggering my soul-searching.

My leadership journey confronts several challenges and constraints. I have a tough time engaging some of the teachers meaningfully due to their status quo. I have come to realize that it is possible to upset the status quo by being context-sensitive, tolerant, and proactive to keep the momentum of the leadership journey. I find the remarks of Taffinder (2006) quite thought-provoking, who mentions that “as a leader, you must make risks and take risks by understanding what opportunities exist, or can be created, and then converting them into results” (p. 49). Likewise, I am committed to venturing into uncharted pathways of leadership endeavors with self-probing sensibilities.

As I embarked on my doctoral journey in educational leadership in a quest for creating an engaging and productive learning space at school, three propelling questions emerged: why am I pursuing my PhD embracing auto/ethnographic inquiry? How is it going to contribute to the self and leadership transformation? How will my doctoral inquiry contribute to the domain of school leadership scholarship? What does it mean

Chet ji, you did a great job. You navigated your deeper self, confused yourself, you made yourself vulnerable here and there. You took the risk that is visible in your inquiry. I like the research that has some risk taking in terms of doing something new.

One of the Research Committee Members

23 October 2022

to be or feel like being a headteacher who aspires to develop the school as a transformative learning space? Where does the exposure of my vulnerabilities take me? Pondering upon these emergent questions, I commenced my doctoral journey, a long-standing dream and risk-taking journey of my life to nurture the seeds of leadership. Akin to Walker (2020), who mentions that “to know me and my moral

purpose in education and life is to know my life story” (p. 183), this inquiry unpacks efforts and emergent understanding of ours (me and my participants) pertaining to school leadership experiences. Writing about life evocatively has been a milestone for me to probe my sensibilities.

The Inception of My School Leadership Journey

It was someday in 1998; my happiness knew no bounds when an English language teacher asked me to be a teacher at an institutional school he and his nephew founded in Sarlahi district. He was a renowned English language teacher in that area then. Many students took the English language class at his language institute, which was evidenced by a

Figure 3: Germinating seeds



Note: <https://rb.gy/zwbzah>

considerable flow of students from the early morning to evening. Then I was pursuing my grade twelve with an English major. I also joined the English language class at that institute. He supported us with the course in English literature as well. He was an outstanding English language teacher. His way of dealing with students was quite impressive. He was amicable and showed empathy to the students. A minor incident favoured me to be a teacher out of many students there. Our teacher used to take the English language test every month. I scored the highest on one of the language tests, so he was impressed by my performance. It was a coincidence that there was a vacancy at their school, and they were looking for a deserving candidate to be an English teacher at the primary level. He asked me if I would like to join the school as

an English teacher. Gladly, I accepted his proposal considering it to be a milestone in initiating my career.

The next day, I went to school with him. It took us fifteen minutes to get there by bus. I was a bit anxious and nervous. We got off the bus and headed toward the school. The school had a small beautiful garden in the front and a playground at the back of the building. He took me to the principal's office. He introduced me to the principal, his nephew who was there in the office. The principal was a smart-looking guy with a cheerful appearance. He told him about my excellent performance on the language test. The principal said that he was glad to see me. He asked me to wait until he managed a period for my demonstration class. He gave me an English book from grade five to prepare a lesson for the demonstration class. I was impressed by the way the principal spoke the English language, especially his fluency. "When would I be able to speak English like him?", I questioned myself. I started preparing a lesson for the demonstration class. As the bell rang after the long break, he took me to grade five and asked me to teach a lesson after introducing me to the students. A sigh of relief occurred to me that he did not stay inside the class. Otherwise, I was almost sure to get paralyzed. But he was roaming around outside the class, maybe observing how I was taking the class. I was pretty nervous in the class, but I managed to do it. After the class, I met the principal in his office. In a cheerful appearance, he said that he liked my teaching and asked me to continue from the next day. I was kind of surprised and excited to begin my teaching career. I extended my gratitude to the Almighty for the opportunity, as it was a sure indication of making me self-reliant and creating my identity as a formal school teacher. But I had a passion for being a fluent speaker of the English language, which accorded considerable prestige in society. Though it was a humble beginning of my career, it set a foundation for my teaching career, not

simply as a job or profession; it was more of a calling and a turning point in my life. During the break time at school, I made a phone call to my parents and shared the good news. They were excited to know it as I was away from home struggling to continue my study.

I returned home (my uncle's home) with a feeling of euphoria as I formally became a teacher from that day. It was probably a stepping stone in my teaching career. From the next day, I started going to school regularly with a new zeal and enthusiasm. After a week of teaching there, I was asked by the principal to take the lead in conducting the assembly. I heartily accepted his request. He might have given me that responsibility, having observed my performance as an English teacher. I started helping the school captain conduct the assembly effectively. Usually, fifteen minutes was allocated for the assembly. In addition to regular prayer, we divided the days for delivering a speech, reciting poems, physical training (PT), quizzes and so on. Occasionally, I had to speak in front of around 250 students and 15 teachers. Being an introvert, it was an ordeal for me in the beginning. I recall that I stammered and trembled while delivering a speech. Gradually, I got emboldened to speak in the mass. I was particularly appreciated for my proficiency in English and my modesty. After a few months, I was made in charge of the primary level, which was the foundation of my school leadership journey. I started leading the team of primary teachers, supporting them in the way I could. The English language probably supported me in creating my identity, possibly as a competent teacher among my fellow teachers at the school. It reflects the hegemony and power attached to the English language. Every year, there was a comparatively higher increment in my salary. The principal wanted me to continue at school longer. As an English teacher, I had to support them in the English language-related issues as well.

By then, I had completed grade twelve. I was the college topper. I was especially appreciated for my excellent academic result along with having a job. It was tough for me to avail time for my study. In a programme at college, I was felicitated with a cash prize and a letter of appreciation. During the speech, the campus chief said something like this, "*I believe in Chet. In the future, he will be a great scholar and raise the dignity of the college. I wish you all the best. But never get pampered with the achievement. You have a long way to go.*" The encouraging and cautionary remarks of the campus chief always alerted me to remain mindful of my dream to pursue.

I was all set to start my Bachelor level. I had a plan to go to Kathmandu to pursue my further studies and grab more opportunities there. But I could not make it happen due to the economic condition of my family, as I had to support myself and my family to some extent. Time elapsed so swiftly. Everything was fine at school. But I started planning to join another school nearby where I could get a higher salary. I was being a bit more ambitious. After a few days, I came to know about the vacancy announcement at another school where I had thought of joining. It was a reputed secondary level school with a dynamic principal known for his higher academic qualification and effective leadership strategies. Almost everyone in our area then used to talk about the personality and administrative capability of the principal of that reputed school. Many of them called him "*an amazing, smart, and caring principal, an apple of everybody's eyes- saharai majako principal, aankhama halepani nabijhaune jasto*". I had a big desire to be a teacher at that school not only for remuneration but to work under an impressive principal where I could unleash my potential under his tutelage, I mean his caring leadership. "Can I be a principal like him in future?" I asked myself. After some days, I went to that school to apply for the

post of a lower secondary level English teacher. I applied for it along with the necessary documents. After a few days, I was called to attend the written exam as a part of the selection process. I attended it, and later I came to know that I was shortlisted for the interview. On the interview day, I went there a bit early. I was growing anxious and restless as how to face the interview to be taken by such a renowned principal. Could I utter a word in front of him? How would he think of me if I went blank? These questions tested my level of confidence. There were many other candidates. I was confident that I would be selected. After half an hour, I was asked to go to the principal's office for the interview. I took permission to get into the office. I greeted the principal. He cheerfully asked me to take a seat and feel comfortable. I took my seat and tried to keep myself as comfortable as possible. But then my heartthrob was increasing. He asked me about my qualification, why I wanted to join that school, how I would discipline students, contribute to the school, and so on. I responded to his questions as confidently as possible. Finally, he wished me all the best and asked me to get in touch with the school administration for the final result, which would be published the following day. Then I returned home with the hope of being selected. I was impatiently waiting for the result. The next day, I went there. By the time I reached the school, the notice had already been put on the notice board. There were some other people to see the result. They told me that I was selected. I was glad to see my name on the noticeboard. Having seen the result, on the one hand, I was more than happy, but on the other hand, I was trapped in a dilemma as how to convey this message to the principal of the school where I was teaching. He might take my act as a betrayal of his trust in me. He gave me the first opportunity in my life to be a teacher. It was a quite painful moment for me. The next day, when I was about to tell him about my selection at another school, he told me that he had

already known it. Then he did not say anything. But I found him a bit disheartened; maybe he did not want to lose me. Later, other teachers told me that the principal wanted me to stay longer at school. I came to know that he also called me a selfish guy, an opportunist.

I decided to join another school, hoping to get more opportunities there for my personal and professional growth. I went there quite early to see the principal. I told the gatekeeper that I wanted to see the principal. Then immediately, he called the principal and told him about my arrival. Upon the principal's consent, I went to see him in the office. The principal gladly welcomed me and asked me to take a seat. Then he congratulated me and handed me the routine to follow from that very day. It was assembly time. The principal introduced me in front of teachers and students as a newly appointed English teacher. I liked the way the principal hoisted the national flag just before singing the national anthem. He also highlighted my performance in the selection process. There were around 700 students in school. Though I was selected as a lower secondary level teacher, I was given periods up to grade ten with an increment in my remuneration. To be a teacher teaching in grade ten was a matter of pride for me. By then, I had joined my Bachelor's level in a campus there with an English major. After one year of working there, I was asked to be the vice-principal of the same school. I gladly accepted the opportunity of leadership. Working there for a year as a teacher and vice principal for the following two years was a wonderful experience, which set the foundation of my school leadership journey. I was particularly impressed by the principal's leadership style and strategies. He was always cheerful and friendly. He always inspired the teachers and students to perform better. He was perhaps an apple of everybody's eye due to his encouraging and caring attitude. He was a role model for me. He was versatile and proactive. He always came

up with plans and policies for the betterment of school after having a broader consultation with the teachers. He had an incredible ability to convince people. He used to acknowledge teachers' ideas and suggestions. Some teachers and parents shared how comfortably, patiently, and cheerfully he convinced the disgruntled parents. The founder of the school was glad by his outstanding performance. He was provided with a vehicle, a high salary, and accommodation, along with other facilities. I found some teachers jealous of the facilities he was enjoying. It was an opportunity for me to work as the vice-principal under his guidance. I learned a lot as the vice-principal at that school for three years. Then, upon completing my Bachelor level, I decided to go to Kathmandu to pursue my Master's degree as I dreamed of meeting it and becoming a college-level teacher.

A Crow in the Fog

I came to Kathmandu from Sarlahi in 2003 AD to pursue my Master's Degree. When I was in Sarlahi, my uncle always urged me to go to Kathmandu to pursue my further studies. He said, *"You cannot demonstrate your true potential unless you go to Kathmandu. That is the capital city. You will find several ways out there. Do not get limited here. You are simply wasting your time here. Go there and explore better opportunities. You are like a frog of a well here (kuwako bhyaguta jasto)."*

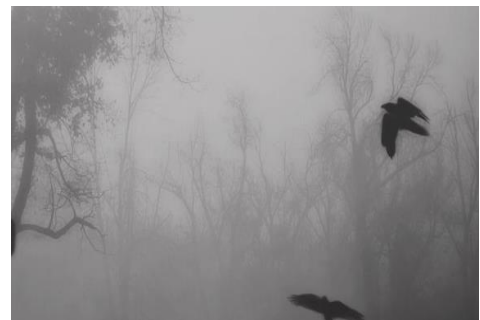


Figure 4: Crows in the fog

Then I was the vice principal of an institutional school in Sarlahi and was planning to invest in the same school. I had just completed my Bachelor's degree then. I was trapped in a dilemma. Some questions struck my mind: how will I survive in Kathmandu as there is no one to support me?, will I remain as a frog of a well as my

uncle said, staying here in Sarlahi?, how will I get a chance to teach at college without obtaining Master's degree? and so on. My urge to obtain a Master's degree and beyond to realize my academic potential to make a difference in life drove me to Kathmandu. As a catalyzer and a source of inspiration, my uncle kept persistently encouraging me to go to Kathmandu as soon as possible to continue my further studies and explore more horizons of opportunities there. It was the winter of 2003 AD; I came to Kathmandu to pursue my Master's Degree. I was like a crow lost in the thickest mist in the crowded city of Kathmandu. I had come to Kathmandu twice before. My wife, who had stayed in Kathmandu with her brothers, supported me in going to different parts of the city. Her unparalleled and unwavering support and sacrifice helped me to continue my studies there.

Amid uncertainties, I set out on the journey of higher education, cherishing a sweet dream of a bright future deep in my heart. I joined M Ed in ELT at Tribhuwan University with high aspirations and enthusiasm. I was glad to see the professors I had longed to see. It was like a dream for me. Meeting friends from different parts of the country was another wonderful experience. I was gradually getting out of my narrow well to explore a broader horizon of opportunities. After a few months in Kathmandu, I started teaching at an institutional school as a part-time teacher to manage my expenditures. After completing my Master's degree, I was selected as the principal at one of the institutional schools in Kathmandu, where I had worked as a part-time teacher for a year. I worked as the principal in that school for three years, which nurtured my leadership ability. Working as the principal at an institutional school has certain limitations. But over the course of time, I learned the value of teamwork and collaboration. I tried my level best to inspire and engage the teachers. But there were

moments when I felt frustrated, particularly while dealing with disciplinary issues of teachers and students.

It was in the year 2014, I was selected as a permanent teacher of secondary level under the provision of the Teacher Service Commission from Lalitpur district, Nepal, in my first attempt itself. Then I got the appointment letter from the then District Education Office, Lalitpur as a secondary level teacher at a School in Lalitpur. After a few months of being there, I was asked by the School Management Committee, the Parent Teacher Association and school teachers to be the headteacher due to a leadership crisis at school. Having observed the deteriorating condition of the school and pondering the high expectations of the stakeholders, I accepted their cordial request and assumed the position of headship amid chaos and uncertainty. My school leadership journey started amid a plethora of confusion, dilemmas, and uncertainties. Chopra (2010) points out that it is the leader who thrives in a chaotic environment exploring wisdom amid chaos. Similarly, Sokolow and Houston (2008) mention that the difficult period helps a leader to learn, grow, and stay stronger. So, I took this challenge as an opportunity to rise from the chaos and envision a living educational leadership theory- small 't' praxis to my context (but not limited) to transform this school into a progressive one. I sincerely took it as an obligation and a blessing to serve the community to create a collaborative vision with stakeholders to ensure quality education at school. But it was not easy to break the deep-rooted status quo at school, which I realized in due course of time. I had/have to confront numerous disempowering and demotivating forces. But deep in my heart, I believed that I could influence the team members by possibly being a role model. After all, it is a matter of teamwork. I prioritized relationship building with the stakeholders as I believe it is essential for a leader to be relationship responsible. I thought/think it was/is an acid

test of my life. People in the community might be watching whether I could/can deliver the responsibility as expected.

Despite my best efforts, unexpected circumstances leave me frustrated most of the time. At this point, there seems to be a greater need for me to follow the path of self-compassion to cope with difficult situations. It appears that self-acceptance is a wonderful healing strategy, though it might sound like being self-centric. I need to acknowledge the efforts of all the teachers even if somebody does not live up to my expectation. The request of one of my teachers to be a queen bee (*mahuri ko ranu*) was reasonably thought-provoking for me to rethink existing myths related to leadership and demystify them. Her remark portrays a leader as a central authoritative figure, which might indicate how a leader is perceived in our society. To this end, I have to change myself first to change others. This is what I might do without being desperate. There is a wise saying in Nepali - "*badala liyar hoina, badliyar duniyalai dekhaunu parchha- meaning that we have to show the world by transforming ourselves than being vengeful*". My moments of inner dilemma probably may find some ways out by questioning, challenging, critiquing myself and then surrendering to the higher self. Then my sole agenda of self- navigation might begin to unfold the journey of transformation. My spiritual practices, to some extent, provide solace and a beacon of inspiration to my leadership journey of self-knowing by self-probing my sensibilities. This is my attempt to develop a feeling of empathy aligning Germer's (2009) ideas that "if we can find ourselves in the midst of suffering and acknowledge the depth of our struggle, the heart begins to soften automatically" (p. 33). I began my soul searching and pondered upon being a role model as my teachers expected me to be. Sometimes, I question myself: Am I pursuing leadership only to meet the expectations of others? , should I put effort into making myself a leader by adhering

to the existing leadership myths?, is there anything beyond it? Or should I need to deconstruct my identity as a leader? I tried to manage frustrations and pressures to possibly blossom like a lotus in the pond befriending adversities, which might indicate the essence of being a leader. I fondly recall even now what my grandmother used to say, “*Nati, haresh nakhau, rap ra chap le nai hira banchha- meaning that grandson, don’t lose hope. It takes huge heat and pressure to make a diamond.*” What does it mean to be diamond? Why did she want me to be like a sparkling diamond? She is no more now. But her inspiring words always resound in my mind and heart and keep energizing me to move ahead, aligning with what occurs along the way being mindful and resilient as far as possible.

Articulating My Inquiry Agenda: Braving the Uncertainties

My interest in pursuing PhD was driven by my professional experience as a headteacher and my academic awareness. My inquiry journey began with navigating the narratives of my decade-long leadership experiences, unfolding my multiple selves (Qutoshi, 2016) and creating and recreating my multiple identities (Gautam, 2018). As the headteacher of a community school, I started pondering what leadership practice/style might be relevant to my context (but not limited to). I was guided mainly by conventional and stereotypical leadership approaches (e.g., being an authoritarian figure, and being confined to control and delivery), which were disempowering and disengaging for me. I came to realize that my leadership was not impactful. There was dissatisfaction at the receiving end. Exclusion, inequity and other forms of disparities



existed at school. There was a discrepancy between thoughts and actions, and I was caught in disorienting dilemmas. I had to rethink my leadership approaches to pursue my leadership journey. I started pondering how I could be a better school leader and lead school differently. What does it mean to be a head teacher in our context to live up to the expectations of stakeholders, referring to the remark of the chairperson of SMC of my school, who often urges me to *be like a head teacher*? The intent of his remark may be that the headteacher needs to be commanding, strict and authoritative. Then I questioned myself: what does it mean to be a headteacher who aspires to create a transformative learning space at school?

Going through available literature and research studies so far to my access to the issues of educational leadership in Nepal, I came to realize that there is a dearth of mainstream contextual educational leadership model(s). I embarked on this inquiry to envision a living educational leadership theory –small 't' grounded approach for my context (but not limited to), which might be a phenomenal lifetime experience for me to embody my life-enhancing values and be a catalyzer to accelerate the pace of transformation at school and beyond. As to reveal the problems of school, the reluctance and status quo of few teachers to change and update themselves, the apathy of the community towards school, and the lack of resources at school, among others, left me in the lurch. At this crossroads of confusion and dilemma, I committed to transforming my school from the quagmire of the status quo to a vibrant space of engaged, inclusive, equitable, and productive learning space, possibly being a change leader who, according to Fullan (2011) actively takes part as a lead learner for the betterment of the school, remains resolute, adheres to deliberate practice and encourages collaboration, and constructive engagement, thereby develops a collegial learning space developing a transformative leadership vision.

Reflecting on my leadership style, I remember that it was any day in April 2018, I sent a teacher back home for turning up late to school. I wanted to present myself as a stern headteacher. Even though I try to discharge my responsibility with the utmost sincerity as far as possible, I am also desperately failing in various ways due to being reactive and less organized. Arriving at this point in life, I feel a need to rethink different dimensions of leadership styles and strategies. I need to transform myself first to transform my teachers. Pertaining to my intent of self- transformation to transform others, my critical friend Pabitra shares, "*Isn't it a burden? Why does an HT need to transform teachers?*" I find her remarks quite thought-provoking.

Sometimes I suffer ego-cracking insults for being unexpectedly reactive. I want rapid progress and a paradigm shift in the system of school, which occasionally puts me at odds. When I cannot achieve as planned, it turns out to be a painful moment for me.

Khanal (2017) mentions that he came to know a loving and caring head teacher in his village school. Being impressed by the headteacher's qualities, he got enrolled there.

To me, it is indeed a key concern to be a headteacher with a caring heart who is capable of influencing others to foster team spirit for developing school as a transformative learning space that is featured by inclusion (are all included?), equity (are the vulnerable supported?) and participation (are all ensured of participation?).

Amid pressures and workload, it is quite challenging for me to balance an intuitive heart and a logical mind to create a harmonious learning space at school (Dhungana, 2022). Sometimes I question myself, "Am I good at delegating responsibility?" Pertaining to this, teacher Manita of our school says, "*Sir, one of your shortcomings I have noticed is that you always remain busy in work without properly mobilizing the team. It would be easier to work if you could delegate responsibilities to the teachers. It might create a feeling of ownership among team members*". Trying

to make sense of her remarks, it appears that without a huge amount of patience and self-transformation, there is a slim chance for me to sustain and thrive in the position of leadership being impactful. As the headteacher, I need to acknowledge the needs of the teachers and the students and move ahead with a shared vision. I dream of becoming a caring and inspirational headteacher by embracing the ethos of care, empathy, compassion, and inclusion. I feel the need to empower my teachers to embrace pedagogical change in their roles, creating a space for their autonomy and professional growth.

Being inspired by the ideas of Fullan (2014) that a headteacher has to maximize impact to promote student achievement to lead learning, become a system player, and be an agent of change, I reflect critically as how I have been developing a shared vision and values at school and inspiring the actions of the team members for pedagogical change, which is a critical aspect to bring reforms at school. In so doing, I reckon myself as a humble caretaker of school, possibly dropping the ego and inspiring the team members to make a difference, and at the same time, nurturing embodied values and practices.

Purpose of Inquiry

The purpose of this inquiry was to envision a living educational leadership theory that aims at transforming school from an entity of stagnation to a vibrant space of engaged, inclusive, equitable and productive learning space unfolding experiences, understanding and practices of my participants and me through auto/ethnographic navigation.



Overarching Inquiry Question

To delve into the inquiry, I came up with an emergent overarching inquiry question -*How have I/we (me and participating head teachers) been developing a living educational leadership theory that aims at transforming our school from an entity of stagnation to a vibrant space of engaged, inclusive, equitable, and productive learning space?*

Dear readers, I would like to reveal that my inquiry questions did not appear at once. They have a history of their emergence, which I have indicated in different chapters. I commenced my inquiry journey by unearthing my school leadership vignettes which led to the emergence of the overarching research question. As I further navigated my participants' narratives and interacted with the relevant literature (possibly auto/ethnographic literature review) and methodology, other subsidiary inquiry questions unfolded diachronically. So emergence has led me to epistemic orientation.

Rationale of the Study

“How do I improve what I am doing?” is a crucial question posed by Whitehead (2009) pertaining to living educational research as a living practice with relational intent (Carson & Sumara, 1997). I want to improve my school leadership practices and envision a transformative educational leadership theory- small 't' praxis to my context (but not limited to). I have embarked on this auto/ethnographic exploration to delve deeper into my culturally embedded self with a post-modern sensibility. Qutoshi (2019) mentions that the notion of cultural self-knowing is embedded within the philosophy of living educational perspective and is essential for a leader to create conditions conducive to transformative learning of self and beyond. As an effective learning strategy, cultural- self-knowing creates conditions to be

critical towards self and others with an emancipatory intent (Singh & Devine, 2013; Qutoshi, 2019).

Another reason that inspired me to undertake this inquiry is a dearth of research studies covering the issues of transformative dimensions of educational leadership in the context of Nepal. I also explored the issues of transformative educational leadership from the cultural-eco-spiritual perspective, as there is an intimate connection between spirituality and cultural cosmology (Charaniya, 2012), thereby creating a spiritual ecology with teachers embracing transformative intent.

This inquiry is the navigation of personal and professional lifeworlds of my participants and me. Right now, this phase of my life as a headteacher has been a phenomenal experience for me, unfolding leadership trajectories of being and becoming. Pertaining to it, a question occurred to me: what does it feel like being the headteacher of a community school who aspires to develop the school as a transformative learning space? I associated my lived experiences with my living relationship with the world (my school, but not limited to) (Whitehead, 2018). I have to overcome numerous challenges and reshape my identity, possibly an organic or *sattvic-like* identity. This study might illuminate school leaders to seek their self-transformation before embarking on a journey to transform others, thereby adding meaning and value to their school leadership journey through the active transformation of their own leadership praxis informed by context-sensitive and experience-based leadership strategies (Dhakal, 2022)

Research Methodology: A Bird's Eye View

This qualitative inquiry embraces a post-formal and/or maverick approach informed by post-humanist thinking. I agree with the notion of questioning and challenging grand theories and prioritizing micro or little narratives to create a new

history, as history is always in the making. In this globalized context, postmodernism guides us to make adjustments seeking numerous alternatives and possibilities. It underpins the notion of critical spirituality (spirituality-grace, care, empathy, compassion, and criticality- critical self-reflection, challenging status quo, embracing materiality) as an underlying theoretical lens making a fusion of the Eastern Wisdom Traditions (EWTs) and Western-induced critical perspectives which create a space for epistemic openness. To this end, I have explored seven interconnected ways of knowing, being, and valuing informed by the *chakra model of epistemology*.

I have used multiple genres (the narrative genre to incorporate the narratives of my participants and me, poetic genre, dialogues, metaphors, local proverbs, images) to maintain epistemic humility. I have used images in different chapters of my inquiry to represent my thoughts visually and clarify my positionalities. As the saying goes- a picture is worth a thousand words; I have used images to crystalize (to make better sense) the themes of my inquiry. I have used italics to represent the participants' remarks and for the keywords of other languages (mainly Nepali and Sanskrit) to create an emphasis and draw the readers' attention to the texts. I have maintained a 'journal' that incorporates the record of everyday happenings, whereas a 'dream diary' contains specific vignettes depicting my future plans and vision.

Metologue³ and Way Forward

The first chapter situates my research agenda as a progeny of my decade-long trajectories of school leadership experiences leading to the emergence of the overarching inquiry question. An effort has been made to articulate the niche of this inquiry. This inquiry as a multi-epistemic auto/ethnographic exploration envisions a living educational leadership theory- small 't' praxis. It is a value-driven, soulful and

³ Instead of summarizing everything, I would like to communicate with my readers about the issues in-between acts or scenes.

contemplative inquiry. This introductory chapter deals with the inception of my leadership journey leading to the emergence of my research agenda. Likewise, some anecdotes pertaining to my school leadership journey of alignments, contradictions, tensions and paradoxes further illuminate the intent of this inquiry. Pondering on what leadership practice/style might work in my context (but not limited to) has inspired me to embark on this doctoral journey. I have tried redefining educational leadership perspectives by demystifying existing leadership myths and exploring the alignments and tensions of my school leadership practices and values, thereby developing a living educational leadership theory for my context (but not limited to).

From the initial phase of my teaching career, I got an opportunity to take the lead at school under different leadership portfolios such as the lead person to conduct the assembly, primary in charge, vice-principal, principal, department head of a college, the headteacher of a community school and so on. Slowly and gradually, my passion for school leadership increased not as a seeker of power and authority but as an opportunity to serve others, embracing the spirit of collaborative leadership and a serving leader with self-probing sensibilities. I am not sure of the leadership qualities a leader should have. Still, my colleagues say that my soft nature, amicability, attitude of valuing and respecting others, etc., have become stepping stones to sustain and possibly thrive in the leadership position. But an indication that depicts me as a leader with transformative intent might be my constant engagement in my personal and professional growth and my keen desire to empower my colleagues as far as possible. It is the beginning of the journey as I am in the process of becoming a leader with a transformative sensibility. To crystalize the journey of being and becoming a transformative school leader. I pursued my PhD in educational leadership, a long-standing dream of my life to critique the disempowering conventional and

stereotypical leadership approaches and adapt practices of professional development strategies to transform my (but not limited to) leadership practices. The next chapter deals with theoretical and conceptual referents employed in this study to flesh out other inquiry questions.

PHASE II: ENGAGEMENT PHASE

Phase II incorporates chapters 4,5, 6, 7, and 8. These five chapters evolved during the field engagement process. Here, I navigate how we (community school headteachers/teachers) enhanced our living leadership values and educational influences by envisioning living educational leadership theory- small 't' praxis to our context and endeavoring to put it into practice and see the response of the people around. Basically, in chapter 8, I critically navigate my school leadership practices, possibly informed by transformative thinking and sensibility.

CHAPTER II
 JOURNEY TOWARDS THE FIELD OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP:
 FLESHING OUT INQUIRY QUESTIONS

This chapter illustrates the conceptual and theoretical referents of my inquiry. This is not a systematic review per se because it does not embody a conventional sense of literature review but embraces a post-formal approach. It is more of dialoguing with literature. With this intent, I used Western-induced critical theories such as transformative learning theory, knowledge constitutive interests, and living educational theory as well as Eastern Wisdom Traditions based more devotional concepts such *tamas –like, rajas-like, sattva-like* gunas, humility (*binayashilata*), compassion (*karuna*), and empathy (*paranubhuti*) to have inclusive views of contextual leadership model being mindful of local cosmology to reveal my journey of being and becoming a transformative school leader. Critiquing the limitations of the established capital ‘T’ theories, I envision small ‘t’ praxis-driven theory of educational leadership through metaphors, dialectics, narratives, local proverbs, and critical self-reflection employing the lens of critical spirituality.

Getting Started: Embracing Auto/ethnographic Review

I pursued my PhD journey in Educational Leadership in 2020 at Kathmandu University, School of Education. Then I started exploring literature on educational leadership. I consulted publications by renowned authors; Busher (2006), Fullan (2001, 2011, 2014, 2018), Robinson and Aronoca (2014), to name a few. Busher's (2006) concepts helped me understand the nuances of educational leadership. Similarly, Fullan's publications enabled me to understand the meaning of educational

change, systemic thinking, how one can become a change leader and strategies for maximizing the impact as a headteacher.

I was impressed by the TED Talk of Robinson (2007), which critically highlights how schools kill learners' creativity. It helped me to deconstruct my deep-seated leadership myths and practices through critical self-reflection. It planted a seed in my critical understanding of leadership. I also went through the recent articles of internationally renowned journals such as *Leadership Quarterly*, *Educational Management, and Leadership*, *School Leadership* (to name just a few). Khanal and Ghimire's (2022) study pointed out role conflict and role ambiguity of headteachers in the context of public schools in Nepal such as power-sharing, lack of adequate autonomy, limited professional development opportunity, and dearth of leadership knowledge and understanding.

Going through the literature on educational leadership provided me with a robust lens for looking into my reflective and critically reflexive experiences, as a result of which I was able to critically and creatively recreate autoethnographic narratives in the quest for exploring leadership practices and envisioning pragmatic living educational theory- small 't' in the context of Nepal. Dhakal's (2022) study inspired me to explore reimagining and restructuring school leadership philosophies in Nepal. His findings reveal the intent of creating a more equitable and just learning space at school, challenging existing leadership theories. To this end, I ventured into exploring an emergent question: *How do I envision and enhance a living educational leadership theory- small t in the context of Nepal crystallizing the Eastern Wisdom Traditions and Western-induced perspectives?*

Reaching this stage, I must confess that I navigated the process of envisioning a living educational leadership theory- small 't' praxis-driven orientation in the context

of Nepal diachronically. The concepts and ideas on educational leadership issues kept emerging as I started navigating recent national and international publications related to the agenda of my study from the beginning of 2020. I do remember going through the book of Ladkin (2010) entitled "*Rethinking Leadership: A New Look at Old Leadership Questions*" in February 2021. It took me a few days to make my journey through the book. Having read the book, I came to realize the need of critically rethinking, deconstructing, and reconstructing leadership practices and/or myths, braving to make a journey to the unknown so as to explore the possibilities of empowering and emancipating leadership endeavors. The concepts, ideas and philosophies on educational leadership got enhanced and crystalized with critical awareness as I started developing my thematic qualifying paper entitled "Critical Theory and Spirituality in Educational Leadership" with my supervisor. The paper focuses on the intersection of spirituality and criticality as two guiding forces to enhance meaningful leadership with transformative sensibilities. The article got published in the Journal of Education Inquiry in 2022.

(Re)conceptualizing Leadership

I completed my MPhil in English Language Education in 2017. By then, it had been three years, I continued working as the headteacher at a community school in Lalitpur. I got a month-long training on school leadership in 2015 conducted by Education Training Centre Kathmandu. The training sessions catalyzed my passion for bringing some positive changes at school. I realized my inadequacy in terms of understanding core issues of leadership. I found myself as an authoritarian and reactive headteacher. My critical reflexivity urged me to be a better school leader. To materialize my quest, I made up my mind to switch to the domain of educational leadership. As a result, I was able to pursue my PhD in educational leadership. I find

leadership as an incredibly contested and fascinating term. I encountered Ladkin (2010) in 2021, who argues that leadership is a socially constituted phenomenon that emerges from social and historical contexts. Pondering the nature of leadership from the philosophical vantage point, Ladkin (2010) further mentions that “leadership occurs when people construct it to be occurring” (p. 101). Pertaining to becoming a leader as the most crucial choice, Chopra (2010) mentions that leadership keeps evolving amid chaos and uncertainties.

Considering leadership as a highly sought-after and highly valued phenomenon, Northouse (2016) argues that “leadership involves influence. It is concerned with how the leader affects followers. Influence is the sine qua non of leadership. Without influence, leadership does not exist” (p. 6). So it appears that leadership is an act of making a purposeful impact. Dhiman (2019) argues that leadership as an art of self-expression demonstrates who you are. Bennis (2009) mentions that integrity, authenticity and vision are the fundamental tenets of leadership. Integrity appears to be a valuable leadership trait, a moral compass that a leader must constantly demonstrate. In a similar vein, Northouse (2016) argues that adherence to the philosophy of integrity is vital for a leader to be trustworthy. Focusing on leadership as performance, English (2008) posits that “the art of leadership is anchored to the central moral questions of life around which your being is enveloped” (p. 1). His remarks reveal that a leader needs to be ethically mindful to anchor the boat of leadership.

As of my understanding, leadership as an influencing process, is a journey along a road with many thorns, puddles, and bumps, and yet the silver lining needs to be discerned around the dark clouds. I am pursuing my school leadership journey embracing several moments of failing and faltering. In disguise, this journey would

offer the gamut of opportunities to a leader to probe leadership competence which requires possibly a transformative sensibility. The beauty of leadership is that it keeps posing newer challenges as testimonies to test a leader's competence. With my shifting perspective, I have started acknowledging my school leadership journey as a challenge to deep-seated conventional leadership approaches.

Conceiving leadership as a moral craft, Sergiovanni (2007) argues that "school needs special leadership because schools are special places" (p. 1). Wright (2000) mentions that "the notions that schools should be responsible for transmitting cultural and spiritual norms reflect a deeply rooted historical understanding of the proper function of education" (p. 113). I find the questions posed by Raj, a member of my reference group, quite relevant and challenging to this end:

- a. *What is the purpose of education and school-based education?*
- b. *Is school-based education different from other approaches to education? (like informal, alternative, national, community based) ?*
- c. *Who gets to set the purpose of school-based education?*
- d. *Finally, how would/should a school leader communicate these ideas and expectations to the students, parents and teachers?*

I want to ask these questions because these are the questions that I have been struggling to find answers.

(January 28, 2022)

I find his questions entirely meaningful and thought-provoking. The intent of these questions lies in creating a collegial and engaging learning space at school. So, recognizing academic or instructional functions appears to be a primary function of a head teacher. We need to go deeper into discourse and dialogue to this end. Emphasizing the need for the Buddhist way of

leading an organization, Acharya (2021) purports that “the *maitri* (friendship), *karuna* (compassion), and *muditya* (sympathetic joy)... are the foundations of effective and efficient leadership” (para. 8). So, it appears that the Buddhist philosophy envisions creating a harmonious space in an organization. Drawing the insights on leadership from *the Bhagvad Gita*, Dhiman (2019) highlights that “real fulfilment is about transforming our search for success into a discovery of profound meaning and significance for life and leadership” (p. 13). So, it appears that a leader needs to embrace spiritual values (e.g., care, compassion, humility) to navigate the meaning and purpose of leadership.

(Re)conceiving Educational Leadership

It was October 2021; I hosted a panel discussion entitled "Trends and Issues of Educational Leadership in Nepal" organized by Leadership Learning Community Nepal, a community of practice of leadership scholars. Two prominent educationists in Nepal were invited to share their thoughts. During the discussion, I asked them how they perceived the changing notions of educational leadership and what might be the ways out. Here I would like to present the thoughts of one of the panelists, Dev;

I think most of us work in a transactional setting, which focuses more on control and delivery. It follows a rigid structure. An underlying philosophy is that as you are delivering services, you have to reach the destination at any cost. Transaction leadership does not seem to focus on collaborative engagement and participatory processes. Transformational leadership is mild. A leader becomes consultative and tries to create a harmonious space. But transformative leadership intends to deconstruct hierarchy and looks for dialectical and dialogical engagement, thereby ensuring structural deconstruction. The transformative process marks a departure from the point

of view of engagement. You look for dramatic changes and challenge hegemonic forces. To this end, transformative leadership challenges inequity, injustice, discrimination and exclusion.

After the panel discussion, I pondered what Dev shared. His remarks made me assess my own engagement as a leader. Where do I stand now? Am I at the level of a transactional, transformational, or transformative school leader? Am I trying to move toward a transformative process of an engagement or confined to service, delivery and results? These questions triggered my soul searching and I further attempted to explore the depth of educational leadership.

Of contemporary trends and issues in educational leadership, West- Burnham (2013) argues that “after more than a generation of scholarly, intellectual, and academic activity, educational leadership remains a problem child. Its parentage remains problematic, its genealogy uncertain, and its relationship vis-a`-vis other disciplines is contested” (p.10). English (2008) points out that "educational leadership as a performing arts draws its inspiration from the humanities, not the sciences, especially drama, literature, history, and philosophy "(p. 173). Duignan (2006) mentions that a successful educational leader provides a vision for the future and inspires hope in the team members. Similarly, highlighting the role of visions and values in managing a change in an organization, Coleman and Glover (2010) mention that “leaders in education and elsewhere have power and influence to change the culture of the organization and to overcome cognitive and structural barriers faced by individuals and groups to work towards valuing diversity”(p.14). Taking the entire educational leadership scenario in the context of Nepal, I unpacked some critical views and perspectives on the following issues to envision transformative agency-

driven contextual and organic educational leadership philosophy through the lens of critical spirituality (Panta & Luitel, 2022b) for meaningful educational leadership in the context of Nepal.

Educational Leadership as Merely an External Phenomenon

How long shall we rely on and celebrate imported ideologies? This question strikes my mind now and then. Mediating the external policy contexts of school and leadership, Busher (2006) mentions that there is a hegemony of influential people and structure to establish the core values for education. Regarding educational leadership issues; there is no substantial evidence of mainstreaming the vision and philosophy of living educational leadership in the context of Nepal. There is an influence of several global leadership practices imposed by supra-agencies that are being followed as taken-for-granted approaches/assumptions that may not be/ have not been compatible with our context. The Western notion of servant leadership (Blanchard & Broadwell, 2018) and the Eastern notion of ‘*Dasya Bhav*’ may have differing philosophical underpinnings. *Dasya bhav* might create a deeper bonding between leaders and followers akin to a mentor-mentee relationship or maybe like a dialogical relationship between *Krishna* and *Arjuna* as in *the Bhagavad Gita*. So, it seems pertinent to explore/ construct contextual educational leadership philosophy that fits our soil. Aligning with the views of Panta (2018), any notion of leadership that is incompatible with the context may not be impactful, maybe akin to the process of transplanting tissues, which runs the risk of failure and frustrations. At this trajectory, imposed leadership phenomenon can be counter-productive, which might demean local cosmology (e.g., local values and culture). This study explores and critiques educational leadership practices in the context of Nepal to envision a living philosophy of educational leadership – small 't' praxis-driven approach that aims to

create a transformative space at school through the whole-school concept, living leadership and living pedagogy.

Educational Leadership as Limited to Technical Performance

I present two short anecdotes to illustrate this sub-theme. A few months ago, while conversing with Dipak, a teacher at Janata School about the condition of school and headteacher's leadership style, he said, "*Everyday activities of school are normally going (chaliraheko chha)*. But we want our head teacher to do more than being limited to school premises, and instructing the teachers". The remarks of teachers meant a lot to me as a researcher because it was clear from the sharing of the teacher that the head teachers are expected to create a vibrant space at school, put extra effort for change, and explore more opportunities for school improvement than being confined to routinized activities guided by technical interest (Habermas, 1972).

During an inaugural address at basic ICT online training, Jay, a leader of the Teachers' Union said, "*Don't run your organization only technically. You have to run it strategically, paying heed to other dimensions of leadership as well*" (May 20, 2020). Considering school leaders as agents of change, Busher (2006) mentions that "decisions making in schools, then, including the processes of teaching and learning, can be perceived as political and negotiative interactions "(p.50). Pertaining to developing a political and ecological understanding of schools, Busher further opines that the political model of leadership gives due focus on the dynamic rather than the structural dimension of an organization with an argument that an agile and visionary leadership constructs the possibly non-hierarchical structures to drive the changes of an organization. I think the teacher leader was trying to make a point that being able to operate organizations in a routinized manner might be one aspect of leadership. Still, at the same time, a leader has to go beyond it and be mindful of several

pertaining issues for the greater good of the school, akin to the ideas of Duignan (2006), who mentions that “drawing people beyond their daily tasks and routines and engaging them in helping to shape a desired future facilitates the creation of a more meaningful and inspiring workplace” (p. 21). In a similar vein, Fullan (2011) mentions that “educational change is technically simple and socially complex” (p. 45). He further elaborates that educational change is more a question of difficulties in planning and coordinating with the stakeholders in a complex social setting. It also highlights the need to develop strategies for educational change following local cosmology and sentiments or culturally informed and empowering pedagogy (e.g., living pedagogy). Educational leadership is more concerned with control and delivery phenomena, as argued by Habermas (1972). So, educational leadership seems to be more confined to technical performance or technical interest than demonstrating a dynamic visible presence in the context of Nepal to nurture value and change-driven educational leadership philosophy.

Educational Leadership Philosophy as Grand Theories

It was in the year 2015 while pursuing my MPhil; I got orientation on grand theories such as constructivism, phenomenology, criticalism, postmodernism (to name just a few). Our professor encouraged us to be mindful of Western-induced theories and explore our culturally embedded local perspectives; otherwise, there would be a celebration of imported perspectives, thereby paralyzing our indigenous epistemology and values. Generally, there is a tendency to adhere to grand leadership narratives and master theories and ideologies and look into the issues in our organization, which might lead to disengagement and frustration. So, it seems pertinent to consider local cosmology and micro/mini-narratives of stakeholders to run an organization sustainably, developing a feeling of ownership. As a school leader, I frequently

manage time to listen to the stories of struggles of the stakeholders regarding the establishment and operation of the school in the locality and the challenges they have faced so far. It provides insights and builds a rapport and connection with the people of the community.

Grand theories and philosophies may provide a higher level of insight. Still, at the same time, we need to consider mini-narratives/theories/ sagas and/or grounded knowledge which might hold a greater significance in local contexts as they incorporate local and indigenous epistemologies. But there is a trend of relying on imported grand theories of educational leadership philosophies which might lead to epistemic injustice in society. Aligning with the ideas of Busher (2006), as schools are situated in socio-political contexts, the impact of national and local policy contexts on the internal processes of school, including leadership, need to be assessed rather than importing the grand theories on educational leadership in a bid to have a big influence undermining the available mini-narratives of local cosmology. So, it appears pertinent to create space for little narratives and let the seeds of culturally embedded knowledge and educational leadership experiences germinate and blossom like the lotus embracing the local issues and realities.

Educational Leadership Research Lacking Agency-Driven Leadership for Change

I believe that it is impossible to empower an individual without nurturing his/her agency. Highlighting the importance of quality people/agencies for sustained improvement in the educational sector, Fullan (2011) mentions that “educational change depends on what teachers do and think” (p. 77). Evidence shows that a blanket approach to leadership is dominant in our country's context, which has become disempowering and disengaging, putting aside the local knowledge and

realities as they do not appear to be contextual and organic. The visions and values of educational leadership are not clearly defined. Structure or hierarchy-driven leadership focuses on the structure and ignores a person's abilities and possibilities. Such a system may not be able to empower an individual and ensure autonomy.

This inquiry primarily focuses on the agency's roles and efforts to make a difference in an organization. A structure-driven system may not pay sufficient heed to empower the individual but somewhat remains entangled in the mission of serving the interest of others. When I joined a community school, the school was gradually losing its credibility in society as the number of students was declining, and student achievement was not satisfactory. There was a growing dissatisfaction at the receiving end. Upon the sharing, people blamed the head teacher's negligence and irresponsibility for the gradual downfall of the school. My intention here is not to pinpoint the shortcoming of the former headteacher. Still, my take is that a headteacher as a catalyzer might inspire the team to get engaged meaningfully for a better result of the school, as Fullan (2014) rightly mentions that as a lead learner, system player, and a change agent, the headteacher needs to constantly focus on maximizing impact on student achievement. And on top of that, leadership needs to focus on the holistic development of a leader. Aligning with the views of Fullan, it can be argued that by articulating the values and vision of the school, the headteacher can create an environment of collaboration and trust. English (2008) posits that "effective leading is about drama and performance- artistry! Artistry involves the whole human, not simply the head, but the heart. Human action contains vision, emotion, and belief embodied in artful performance" (p. xi). At this backdrop, having pondered upon the dearth of adequate studies on the mainstream of agency-driven educational leadership philosophy and the significance of leadership capacity

development in the realm of educational leadership, this inquiry focuses on envisioning agency-driven educational leadership philosophy in the context of Nepal embracing the intent of living leadership and living pedagogy. I am eager to demystify the existing leadership myths. Delving through the current literature on contemporary leadership theories and philosophies/perspectives, I realized that there is a need to take a transformative turn to explore the departure of narratives on leadership engagement. To this end, navigating transformative leadership unfolds possibilities of thinking beyond the box and transcends the compartmentalized notions of leadership, possibly with critical sensibility.

Transformative Leadership

For the first time, I came to know about transformative learning in *Advance Qualitative Research* class while pursuing my MPhil in 2014. Our professor introduced the intent of transformative learning by displaying a picture of a larva turning into a butterfly. He elaborated on the views of Habermas and Mezirow on it. I was quite fascinated by the idea and had a keen desire to explore it in depth. Pondering upon this issue, I questioned myself: can I become a transformative school leader?; are my efforts and commitments directed towards transforming the school?; am I bold enough to break the status quo akin to how a larva breaks the cocoon?; and so on. While pursuing a leadership journey, I frequently find myself trapped in dilemmas, confusions, and uncertainties. It is a challenging undertaking. The metamorphosis of a larva into a colourful butterfly is a metaphorically empowering image for a leader who aspires to create a transformative learning space at school, possibly with a transformative sensibility.

Making a synopsis of leadership theories, it appears that transactional leadership entails a mechanical type of leadership functioning that primarily focuses

on service delivery, control and result. In contrast, transformational leadership focuses more on collaborative effort in a coordinated manner to maintain a mild working relationship in a given context. It appears to be a subset of transformative leadership. As of the intent of transformative leadership, it seems to demand structural deconstruction or re-architecting of the existing system. It intends to make a total departure of the leadership perspectives challenging the status quo and maintaining dialectical relations. So, it appears quite pertinent to assess our leadership engagement to explore our situatedness as a school leader, that is- are we moving toward a transformative engagement?

To me, a transformative leader is a proactive and agile leader who greatly prepares himself or herself for unpredictable daring (Brown, 2012). Burns mentions that “transformative leadership is the ability to perceive opportunities, to engage emotionally with individuals in pursuit of higher goals, to inspire groups of followers, and to develop and articulate a vision that has been associated with the ability to enact organizational change” (as cited in Gabriel, 2008, p. 1). The transformative leaders are proactive, trustworthy, charismatic, and influential leaders (Hurduzeu, 2015). Shields (2020) argues that “transformative leadership is a critical leadership theory that emphasizes inclusion, equity, excellence, and social justice” (p. 3). So, the intent of this leadership theory underpins that a safe, welcoming, and engaging learning space at school is a must for ensuring democracy, equity, inclusion and emancipation. I have composed the following poem envisioning some dimensions of transformative educational leadership philosophy connecting to my everyday headship experience.

Be proactive

Lead the team;

Acknowledge everyone

Maintain self-esteem.

Pursue leadership journey

Be trustworthy;

Try to be an agent of change

With transformative sensibility

And daring to expose vulnerability

(Poem II, May 2021)

Highlighting the essence of transformative sensibility, Taylor and Synder (2012) argue that transformative research incorporates a way of critically examining our personal and professional values and beliefs to explore how our lifeworld has been governed by in/visible sources/forces of society. In this way, transformative learning theory supports me in critiquing and examining my leadership practices to unfold the transformation process, as transformative sensibility might be the essence of leadership philosophy. In a similar vein, Taylor (2013) mentions that “researchers as transformative learners draw on constructivist, critical, social and art-based epistemologies to examine reflectively, critically and imaginatively their lived experiences” (p.2). I have a passion for transforming my struggles and failures into signature strengths, critically examining my leadership practices to have meaningful engagements and connections with the stakeholders. Aligning with their views, I have also put my best possible efforts (which may not be sufficient) to inspire and unleash team spirit to achieve the goals of school. To this end, I have employed epistemic humility through the lens of critical spirituality to have a holistic view of knowledge generation about envisioning a transformative leadership model. “The critical spirit of leadership leads naturally to the notion of transformation” (Foster, 1989, p.35).

Aligning with the intent of transformative leadership to offer the hope, commitment and promise of creating “equitable, inclusive, democratic, and socially just schools” (Shields, 2020, p. 10), I explore leadership issues from a contextual vantage point.

Understanding Contexts in Educational Leadership

Understanding leadership from a contextual perspective is significant for a school leader like me to make an impact at school by being context-sensitive, context-responsive, relation-responsible and possibly being compatible with the expectations of the stakeholders to adjust to the local cosmology. Sergiovanni (2007) argues that "context plays a key role in deciding whether certain approaches to the leadership will be effective or not" (p.1). Regarding the significance of context for leadership effectiveness, Moir (2017) argues that “a contextual model of leadership embraces the role of leadership as a framing force of our individual and collective perceptions concerning the broader influential situational setting” (p. 2). White (2016) argues that contextual leadership skill is essential for context adjustment as a leader has to engage various people in volatile and complex contexts. English (2008) points out that the leadership phenomenon is universal, but leaders as contextual actors need to act mindfully (e.g., think globally and act locally), paying heed to culture and context. In a similar vein, Tian (2020) argues that a leader is anticipated to perceive and balance glocal mindsets and contexts, embracing the spirit of glocalization and a hybrid leadership model. Sergiovanni (2005) emphasizes navigating contextual issues and constraints that the headteachers face on a daily basis. Highlighting socially just leadership, Richard et al. (2020) argue that various political contexts at local and national levels catalyze and motivate school leaders' community activism to promote student equity in schools. Leadership as critical practice critiques and challenges deep-seated constructions of reality (Foster, 1989). They further highlight the

ecological model of leadership that reflects the interconnection and reciprocal relationship between the community and schools. The field of educational leadership and management appears to have local as well as global expressions. Similarly, national values and goals significantly impact leadership policies and practices. Similarly, Clark and O' Donoghue (2016) argue that understanding context is crucial to adopting the strategies relevant to the context.

Aligning with my purpose, ambience, and mission of life, being calm enough, I need to create my transformative professional space. For this, I need to act strategically and contextually to create a harmonious relationship at school and empower teachers to create a vibrant learning space (e.g., living practice and collaboration) at school. I need to pay heed to the contexts and local circumstances to thrive as a leader. I question myself as an educational leader: am I leading up to the expectations of the stakeholders?; am I able to lead thinking differently?; is it the purpose of leading merely to fulfill others' expectations?; am I spending this precious phase of life meaningfully?; am I able to make a difference?; am I a visionary school leader with contextual (e.g., eco-spiritual) sensibility? These questions make me mindful of my leadership practices and strategies. Qutoshi (2016), in his study, concludes that transformation demands a holistic and inclusive view of knowing, believing and doing things creatively. Such a view of knowing, and doing appears to be a more powerful way of envisioning horizons of knowledge through critical-creative ways. It would be instrumental in improving his teaching, learning and research practices and being aware of context-specific challenges, possibilities and opportunities in his socio-contextual and pedagogical settings in Pakistan. In a study to uncover contextual issues of school leaders of Nepal, Khanal and Ghimire (2022) mention that role conflict and role ambiguity result from issues of power-sharing, lack

of adequate autonomy, limited professional development opportunities, and a dearth of leadership knowledge and understanding.

Research as/for Transformative Professional Development

Being the headteacher at a community school has been a moral dilemma for me in terms of creating a transformative space at school challenging the existing status quo and disempowering forces in different forms, as viewed by Bonner (2008). Through this research, I attempted to present an epistemic introspection (Gautam, 2018) of my professional journey as a school leader through a critical autoethnographic lens. Ettling (2012) mentions that "in reality, the professional journey of the transformative learning educator is a spiritual journey" (pp. 544-545). I unpack the trajectories of my experiences through critical reflexivity that shapes/is shaping and reshapes/ is reshaping my identity as a headteacher through several topsy-turvy situations, paradoxes, and contradictions akin to the idea of Whitehead (2008) that I am a living a contradiction. I reveal my struggles of being and becoming unmasking the microcosm of school leadership experiences.

I am embarking on my journey of PhD through auto/ethnographic lens, which has allowed me to unfold my (but not limited to) struggles and process of metamorphosis, critiquing conventional and stereotypical deep-seated beliefs and taken and granted assumptions. There is a dearth of research of this kind in educational leadership in the context of Nepal. This is the saga of a collaborative transformative journey unpacked further through the lens of critical spirituality, making a fusion of Eastern Wisdom Traditions and Western-induced critical perspectives. In this process, the first supportive inquiry question emerged- *How have our emergent understanding and practices of educational processes supported (and*

otherwise) us to becoming a school leader who embraces compassion and care, social justice and inclusion?

Conceptual and Theoretical Reorientation

During my inquiry *directed to praxis* (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), I adhered to the critical theories such as transformative learning theory, knowledge constitutive interests, and living educational theory to look into my auto/ethnographic journey, thereby envisioning a living educational leadership theory- small 't' for my context (but not limited to).

Transformative Learning Theory

Transformative learning theory, as a new andragogy, is one of the noteworthy theories in the domain of adult development and learning. Mezirow (1991) is the initial founder of the transformative learning theory based on the term perspective transformation. As a cardinal dimension of adult learning, perspective transformation incorporates a structural change in observing ourselves and our relationships. Mezirow (1991) points out that “transformation theory does not derive from a systematic extension of an existing intellectual theory or tradition such as behaviourism, neo-Marxism, positivism or psychological humanism” (p.

*What does the term 'transformative' carry? Is it simply the derivative of 'transform'-change? Or, are you connecting it to transformative theory/education? Sometimes using an already theoretically rich concept as a common place word gives an impression of incumbency and generates continuous misreading. I love to see how theories work with/in your inquiry.
One of the Supervisors
January 20, 2022*

11). Concerning the practice of fostering transformative learning despite a host of challenges, Gunnlaugson (2008) presents a meta-analysis of a complex mosaic of two waves of contributions to the field of transformative learning to integrate the

dominant perspectives. The first-wave contributions critique Mezirow's take on transformative learning, while the second-wave contributions prioritize holistic practices and lead to integrative and holistic theoretical underpinnings, thereby developing meta-theoretical discourse on transformative learning. Cranton and Taylor (2012) mention that "transformative learning theory is based on constructivist assumptions, and the roots of the theory lie in humanism and critical theory" (p. 5). Pertaining to the scope of transformative learning theory, Cranton and Taylor (2012) argue that it deals with personal and social change as an essential leg of an elephant metaphorically. To crystallize the concept, Cranton and Taylor (2012) further mention that the dominant perspective of transformative learning theory incorporates cognitive and rational, imaginative, intuitive, spiritual, individuation and relational perspectives, which contribute to social change

Highlighting the sociolinguistic context of transformative learning, Mezirow further mentions that the work of Habermas, particularly the theory of communicative action, offers "the sociological theoretical context for transformation theory" (p. 47). Mezirow (2012) further explains that "transformative learning is based on the notion that we interpret our experiences in our way, and that how we see the world is a result of our experiences" (p. 5). Transformative learning seems to contribute to progressive education. According to Taylor (2013), "Transformative learning involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and permanently alters our way of being in the world" (p. 12). Drawing on the core concepts of transformative learning, Mezirow (2012) mentions that it challenges "our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mindsets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective" (p.76).

Considering transformative learning theory from a contextual perspective, Merriam and Kim (2012) argue that personal transformation is at the heart of transformative learning theory, which gradually leads to social transformation. Taylor (2007) critiques Mezirow's transformative learning on the ground of heavily focusing on individual transformation than power relation or social transformation, thereby leading to emancipatory discourses. Further, Sandlin and Bey (2006) view transformative learning critically for lacking attention to power relations. Revealing the cardinal point of research studies pertaining to transformational learning as a multidimensional approach, Taylor and Synder (2012) mention that most of the studies on transformative learning focus on the practice of promoting transformative learning and provide support for key assumptions associated with Mezirow's perspective of practice such as creating a safe and inclusive learning environment, focusing on individuals learner's needs, and building on life experiences. So, pondering upon the integral view of transformative learning theory, I explored the connection between the basic tenets of transformative learning theory and me and my participants' school leadership journey.

Knowledge Constitutive Interests

A path-breaking monograph of Habermas '*Knowledge and Human Interest* (1972)' contains a contested concept of emancipatory interest. Habermas (1972) mentions that "interest, in general, is the pleasure that we connect with the idea of the existence of an object and action. Interest aims at existence because it expresses a relation of the object of interest to our faculty of desire" (p. 178). In the process of envisioning my contextual leadership philosophy- small 't' praxis, I take support of three domains of knowledge of Habermas, i.e., *knowledge constitutive interest*, which includes world knowledge, practical knowledge, and emancipatory knowledge. I

mainly focus on emancipatory interest. To me, emancipation means being able to liberate my embodied values of leadership. I frequently get in a dilemma, trying to figure out the sense of it.

With the intent of forging a link between knowledge and human interest through the practice of self-reflection, Habermas (1972) argues that “in the power of self-reflection, knowledge and interest are one” (p. 313). In other words, self-reflection as a powerful tool connects knowledge and interest as well as autonomy and responsibility. He talks about the possibility of emancipation from ideologies and structures.

It appears that the philosophical underpinning of the emancipatory interest of Habermas establishes a connection with the concept of the perspective transformation of Mezirow. Knowledge is obtained by self-emancipation through the process of self-reflection, which results in transformed consciousness. To crystalize the idea further, Ottmann (1982) mentions that Habermas takes the emancipatory interest as liberty and the possibility of an epistemology of history and nature. Pondering upon the idea that self-reflection is at the heart of emancipation, I would establish a link between my leadership responsibility and emancipation through self-reflection. I am also concerned with the social emancipatory approach as viewed by Tisdell and Tolliver (2001), which focuses on interaction and companionship to have liberating effects on the cultural self to be an agent of change.

I envision living educational leadership theory- small ‘t’ embedded to the ground of my being through the lens of critical spirituality. In other words, this inquiry generates my own living educational leadership theory embracing my embodied values of humility, care, compassion, inclusion, and justice to living as fully as I could, navigating and valuing my school leadership experiences. I prioritize

the issues and trajectories of democracy, multicultural polity, and communicative personality. I am also committed to formulating a coherent critical theory of modern social formations. Pertaining to my inquiry undertaking, let me raise a few questions. How do I create an engaging environment at school? How do I help the teachers to be an agent of change? How do I facilitate the teachers to promote a culture of collaboration and their agency? I kept pondering upon these questions to liberate my vision of leadership. I theorized emancipatory interest in my context. But the idea of emancipation sounds relatively superficial to me. I am in a substantial inner dilemma of envisioning a living educational leadership theory- small 't' orientation in the context of Nepal.

I tried to contextualize co-constructed ideas of living educational leadership. I always love critiquing and challenging the status quo. I tried to do justice to the philosophical underpinning of emancipatory interest and draw its relevance to my context (but not limited to). In the meantime, I need to consider the tools for theorizing, such as metaphors, dilemmas, narratives, proverbs, and critical and adhere to the metaphor of knowing by critical self-reflection, which might lead to my transformed consciousness.

Living Educational Theory

Jack Whitehead is the principal architect of the living educational theory. As an innovative approach to creating personal living theories, Whitehead (2008) defines living educational theory as “an explanation by an individual for their educational influence in their learning, in the learning of others, and in the learning of social formation in which they live and work” (p. 104). Having presented “How do I improve what I am doing?” as the cardinal question of the living theory, Whitehead

(2008) further explains that living theories incorporate embodied values, understanding and contextual influences in the life and research of an individual.

Many educational leadership theories and philosophical underpinnings are being practised globally. As we need to work in educational institutions having different socio-cultural contexts, values, and expectations, it is pertinent to think globally and act locally, linking to grounded realities. So, being inspired by the notion of living educational theory, I tried to generate a living educational transformative leadership theory to my context (but not limited to) grounded in eco-spirituality and transformative paradigms to improve my school leadership practices critiquing educational research studies conducted in Nepal for not giving space for educational research as/for transformative professional development. As an educational leader, I need to focus on my professional endeavour, praxis, and values to transform my leadership roles. Effective leadership helps to bring desired changes in an organization. A leader undergoes numerous unexpected circumstances. So, it appears that a leader needs to be bold enough to confront any challenge and pursue the vision of the organization with unwavering determination. I see and experience myself as a living contradiction (Whitehead, 2018) as I observe what I am doing in my school as a leader amid chaos and uncertainty, which might embrace transformative intent and awareness of relational dynamics.

In a study on developing living leadership, Malic (2017) explores alignments and tensions between the practices and values adhered by the principals and those of their schools. Using various rhetorical strategies, the principals depicted complexities and paradoxes attached to their roles. It also interprets the connections, disconnections, and tensions between principals' leadership values, practices, and school values. This study is more relevant to my context (but not limited to) to

understand and articulate more about the contexts in which leadership is practised and to explore the connections between what I do as a school leader and my emerging beliefs and values. I am also pursuing the journey of becoming a transformative school leader, thereby developing a living educational leadership theory for my context (but not limited to) through auto/ethnographic exploration.

Critical Spirituality

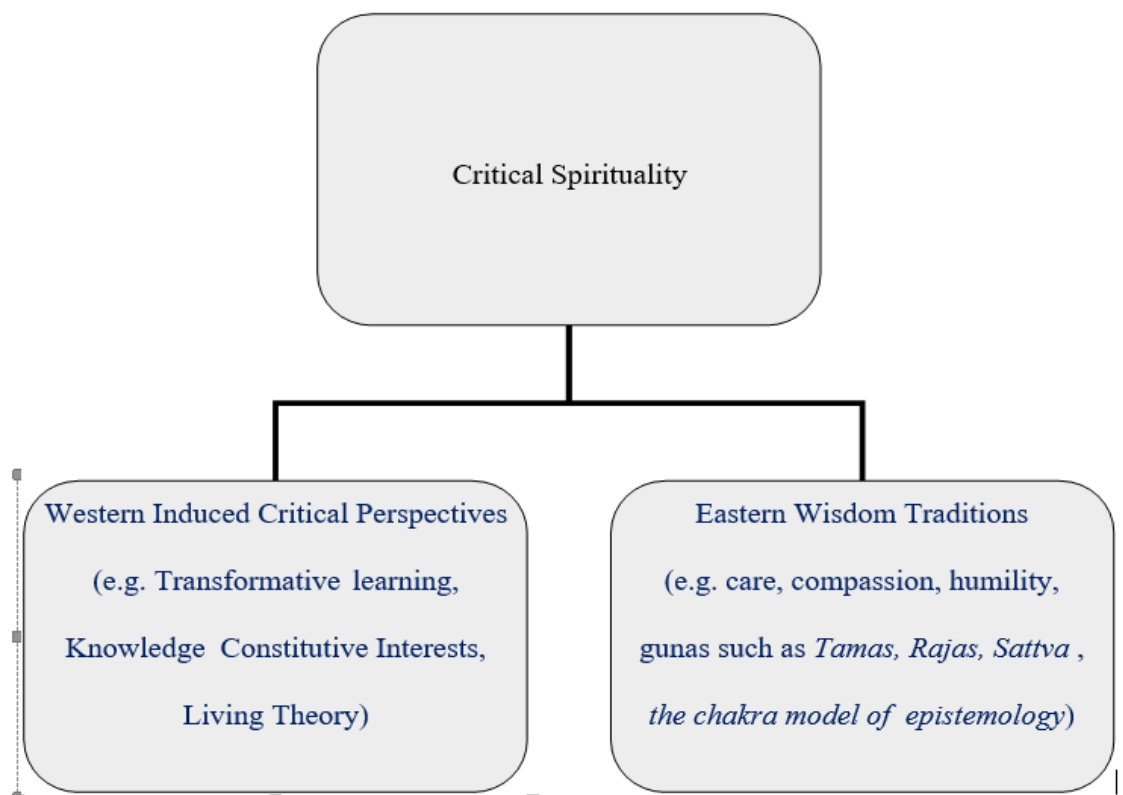
Dear readers, arriving at this stage, I do not claim that school leaders (headteachers, educational officers, and other school leaders) cannot perform well without entering into the practice of spirituality. I feel that a spiritual quest might be quite helpful for the personal and professional growth of school/educational leaders. I am not sure of the contribution of critical spirituality to school/educational leadership. However, the insights of criticality and spirituality might nurture effective and meaningful leadership, maintaining the harmony of heart and mind, and finding paths to mutual trust, collegiality, and collaborative space.

Bussey (2006b) points out that critical spirituality "integrates the concerns of critical theory for social justice, gender equity, and process of legitimation" (p. 42). Stressing the need for valuing diversity with a critical perspective, Gardner (2011) asserts critical spirituality as "seeing people and communities holistically; seeking to understand where they are coming from and what matters to them at a fundamental level" (p.77). Similarly, Boyd (2012) argues that critical spirituality includes insights into critical theories and critical pedagogy. More so, the reconciliation of spirituality and criticality supports nurturing spiritual values and challenges the deep-seated beliefs, paradoxes, and contradictions, thereby "theorizing critical spirituality as an ontological and epistemic praxis to connect the inner world to the outer social reality and materiality" (Panta & Luitel, 2022b, p.1). Thus, criticality and spirituality as

guiding forces provide a meaningful space for school/educational leaders to bring about school reforms (Dantley, 2005; Panta & Luitel, 2022b).

The Western-induced critical theories such as transformative learning theory, Knowledge Constitutive Interests, and Living Theory, among others, deal with external realities informed by technical rationality, whereas the perspectives from the Eastern Wisdom Traditions deal with an inward process (e.g., self-reflection, self-inquiry, self-transformation). To this end, this inquiry makes a fusion of EWTs and WIPs via the lens of critical spirituality (*spirituality* includes grace, humility, care, empathy, and compassion, whereas *criticality* embraces critical self-reflection, challenging the status quo, embracing materiality).

Figure 6: Framework of critical spirituality



The figure 6 illustrates that spirituality can be critical as it embraces critical consciousness (e.g., being aware of the status quo, challenging

disparities) (Panta & Luitel, 2022b). The Western-induced knowledge traditions offer a space for criticality, whereas the Eastern Wisdom Traditions appear to be more devotional as they embrace care, humility, and empathy, among others. So, it seems that critical spirituality intends to create a harmonious space by embracing spirituality and criticality.

Western culture mainly refers to the Occidental or European culture primarily guided by technical rationality. Rational enlightenment is seemingly more logical, so it cannot contribute to post-rational and post-formal thinking. Western philosophy deals more with the material world, which should not be completely forgotten. The European enlightenment may be necessary but insufficient. The Western-induced knowledge traditions (e.g., Transformative learning, Knowledge Constitutive Interests, Living Theory) offer a space for criticality, whereas the Eastern Wisdom Traditions appear to be more devotional as they embrace care, humility, and empathy, among others. So, it seems that critical spirituality intends to create a harmonious space by embracing spirituality and criticality by connecting the internal and external world.

To this end, the second supportive emergent inquiry question is- *How have we⁴ been conceiving our role as a school leader working toward developing the school as a transformative space?*

Three Gunas (*Sattva*, *Rajas*, and *Tamas*) as Spiritual Compass

Dissolve rajasic pride with sattvic humility,

Dissolve rajasic greed with sattvic generosity,

Dissolve rajasic arrogance with sattvic gratitude,

⁴ Here we refers to myself and my participants—headteachers, teachers and critical friends

Dissolve tamasic anger with sattvic kindness,

Dissolve tamasic ignorance with sattvic awareness.

Kumar (2010, p. 93)

According to the *Bhagavad Gita*, *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* are the three governing qualities of life. Pertaining to *sattvic*, *rajasic*, and *tamasic* qualities (*gunas*) of life, Kumar (2010) mentions, "When we see ourselves and understand our condition using the three qualities as a compass, they can tell us who we are and where we are " (p. 20).

The quality of *sattva* is related to creativity and nourishment. "Sattva seeks synthesis, integrity and diversity. It is about being rather than having" (Kumar, 2010, p. 23). As a headteacher in difficult circumstances, I also seek a location for healing (hooks, 1994), which is possible by enhancing *sattvic* leadership qualities. *Rajas* is associated with energy, achievement and excitement. *Rajasic* mindset seeks success, power and prestige. "Rajasic is concerned with achieving the ends" (Kumar, 2010, p. 21). *Tamas* is associated with inertia, darkness and stagnation. "The tamasic tendency relates to the forces of darkness. It is dictatorial, cunning, fearful and secretive. It produces depression, dullness, apathy, and inertia" (Kumar, 2010, p. 24). I am trying to explore the heart of darkness in my inquiry rather than only celebrating good aspects.

Some propelling questions I ask myself are: why am I studying the *Bhagavad Gita*?; what does *the Bhagavad Gita* mean to me as a headteacher? I always take school as *Dharmashala* and prepare myself to face everyday reality at school with

greater awareness, possibly through *Arjuna Drishti* (focused vision of Arjuna⁵-) to get through a do-or-die situation. Obviously, I am reading *the Bhagavad Gita* for my inner transformation. It is a treasure trove of divine knowledge and wisdom. As I go through the verses of the *Bhagavad Gita*, I feel empowered to cope with the stark challenges of life.

Metilogue and Way Forward

This chapter sheds light on definitional and conceptual aspects of educational leadership. Engaging with the concepts and ideas of educational leadership led to the emergence of three subsidiary inquiry questions. It also elaborates on some of the key established theories of educational leadership and a gradual shift to transformative leadership, contextual leadership and beyond. It further explores research as/for transformative professional development. Similarly, the insights from Western-induced critical theories such as transformative learning theory, knowledge constitutive interests, living educational theory and devotional concepts of transformation from the Eastern Wisdom Traditions (hybrid design space) are employed as major theoretical referents, thereby creating a space for critical spirituality (Panta & Luitel, 2022b), which has supported me to explore the heart of darkness.

There is a paucity of the kind of inquiry I am undertaking in the context of Nepal. This inquiry primarily focuses on enhancing individual agency for transformation to happen. I would like to unpack the debates and discourses on it. The following chapter illustrates the methodological orientation that governs my entire inquiry process portraying critical spirituality as an overall framework.

⁵ The main protagonist of the Indian epic, the *Mahabharat*, an ardent devotee of Lord Krishna. He is trapped in an ethical dilemma and decides not to fight.

CHAPTER III

JOURNEY TOWARD RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter of my possibly soulful inquiry begins with a discussion on multi-paradigmatic research design space and emergent philosophical underpinnings embracing multiple ways of knowing, being and valuing, integrating the features of Western-induced critical perspectives and Eastern Wisdom Traditions (EWTs), particularly the *chakra model of epistemology* as a map to navigate through life experiences as well as to envision a living educational leadership epistemology in my inquiry. I have constructed arguments and discourses pertaining to the multiple ways of being, knowing, valuing and based on my participants' experiences, time, and space and possibly in a dialogical and dialectical manner. Moreover, this section sheds light on auto/ethnography⁶ as an empowering, humanizing, and soulful method of inquiry. Having discussed research as/for transformative leadership praxis, there is an explanation of the meaning-making and theorizing process through multiple logics and genres. The chapter concludes with a description of the research space and the participants, the quality standards which I have employed to maintain the quality rigor of the inquiry, as well as the ethical issues.

I took a collaborative auto/biographical turn embracing the paradigm of post-modernism, which supports me in going beyond established grand ideas and ideologies. I have also tried to embrace possibly post-qualitative thoughts (e.g., the notion of a rhizome), as argued by Deleuze and Guattari (1987).

I took the support of the paradigm of integral perspective with an inclusive and holistic view of knowing. I have embraced the notion of "empowering epistemic

⁶ Auto/ethnography shows the dialectical nature of the narratives embracing both ethnographic and autoethnographic components.

metaphor of knowing as holistic meaning-making" (Luitel, 2009, p. 32), looking for possibilities of a better school adhering to the paradigm of integralism.

Eastern Wisdom Traditions

As I am oriented by spirituality, conceiving it as a phenomenal source of empowerment, the feelings of compassion, gratitude and humility are my embodied values that might support my self-transformation. Dear readers, now let me present how the seed of spirituality got nurtured during my upbringing and how the historicity influenced my growth.

My Spiritual Upbringing: An Epistemological Evolution

I was born in a beautiful village in Sindhuli district in a middle-class Hindu Brahmin family. Sindhuli is a historically significant and naturally beautiful district. It lies in the inner terai of Nepal. The historical monument/fort known as Sindhuli Gadhi, situated at the peak of the Mahabharat range, reflects the identity of the district. It is famous for the battle between the then Gorkha Army and the British troop. The British soldiers were defeated by the gallant Gorkha force in 1767 AD. The lush green forest, beautiful settlements and a large open paddy field resonate with the beauty of the village. The holy stream of Marin Khola, the lifeline of the

Figure 7: Marin Rural Municipality, Sindhuli Sindhuli



village, flows by the side. To recall from my memory lane, my parents used to go to that river to take a holy bath and bring water in a mug to offer to God. My mother used to go to the nearby temple of Lord Mahadev to worship every Saturday. I also used to go there with her. She used to sprinkle water at Peepal tree, and does it even now. Upon my curiosity, she said that offering water and worshipping Peepal tree every Saturday could prevent any untoward event. She said, "*We are always under*

the influence of bad stars. We need to pray to God to avert the bad influence". I wondered about my mother's remarks and ritualistic acts. How can sprinkling water on the roots of Peepal tree and the head of the statue of God prevent inauspicious happening? It was my innocent childhood curiosity. Now I relate her practice to the notion of eco-spirituality, which sees the image and presence of God in all of creation. Eco-spiritual awareness is pertinent to saving the earth's resources (Cummings, 1991).

As a child, I used to go to the temple with my mother and other relatives. I loved going with them. I noticed different rituals at home, such as *Satyanarayan puja* (religious worship of Hindu Lord Vishnu), *Ekadashi Vrata* (11th day fasting every fortnight in the Hindu Lunar Calendar), and rituals performed at different big festivals like Dashain and Tihar. I used to keenly observe those happenings and ritualistic performances. In the month of Magh, my mother used to take a month-long rigorous *Swasthani Mata Vrata* (strict fasting and ritual observed in the month of Magh dedicated to Goddess Shree Swasthani). In the morning, my mother used to take a bath tolerating severe cold. I wondered why my mother was performing such hard rituals. Upon my curiosity, she said that she was doing it for the good health, well-being and happiness of the family members. In the evening, other neighbours also came to our home to listen to *Swasthani vrata katha* (a series of stories narrated by Lord Kumar, elder son of Lord Shiva, to *Agastya Muni*, a saint). There used to be a recitation of a chapter every evening. After the recitation of the particular chapter, my mother used to distribute *prasad* (offered items to God such as sugarcane, fruit pies, sweets, etc.). My mother asked me to recite the tales for a month from the holy book of *Swasthani Mata vrat- katha*. Goddess Swasthani is the Hindu Goddess who is believed to fulfill the wishes of the devotees who worship her with a pure heart and ardent devotion. The story of the marriage of old Shiv Sharma and very young Goma,

and how an elephant selected Navaraj to be the king of Lawanya nation due to the grace of *Goddess Swasthani* as a result of his mother's rigorous fasting and absolute devotion. The stories were quite weird for me as a child then; now I am trying to make sense of the metaphorical connections of those stories to my life. Because of ritual practices at home, and my father's nature of serving the community selflessly left a kind of deep impression in my mind to grow spiritually and get involved in social work. Then I also read a page from *Shrimad Bhagavad Gita* (The song of Lord- a 700 verse canonical scriptures of Hindu thinking) daily. My mother encouraged me to do so. Though I was a bit introverted in my childhood, gradually, I was building up my confidence.

The trivial activities of neighbours like quarrelling, backbiting and showing ego hurt me a lot. I used to feel disheartened having seen young friends of mine wandering here and there. I did not find elders encouraging the youth to take the right path and engage meaningfully in work. The then socio-political situation of the late 90s in Nepal was quite traumatic due to the Maoist insurgency, and Sindhuli was one of the most affected districts. Many of my school friends joined the People's Liberation Army (*jana mukti sena*), quitting their studies. Some of them were killed in confrontations with the security forces. Fortunately, I was able to overcome distractions and continue my studies. Recalling those heartrending moments of conflicts and war leaves me shattered even now. I do not know how I was able to survive those adverse circumstances. Unlike others, my parents were role models for many in society. They put efforts into inculcating moral and ethical values in children. I started developing a feeling of compassion toward animals. I asked my parents not to sacrifice animals for God and Goddesses. I was shocked to see my relatives slaughtering animals and offering blood to Goddess Durga during the Dashain

festival. Upon curiosity, I asked my father, “*Do you think that God and Goddess enjoy the blood of these innocent animals?*” My father tried to convince me that those were the practices carried out for long. Sometimes I saw my neighbours sacrificing pigeons and he-goats as *bhagal* (commitment to offering animals and birds for grace) to God and Goddess. I disliked those practices. As a child, I could not do anything. I was disheartened having observed those ill-practices prevalent in society. There was uproar inside me toward such inhumane activities of people in the name of religion and ritual. I started being a vegetarian when I developed a feeling of compassion toward animals which provided me with inner peace and tranquillity.

After the completion of my schooling in the village, I went to Sarlahi district for my higher secondary education. I stayed with my uncle's family. Sometimes I used to attend ritualistic celebrations with my aunt. I used to recite the names of God when I got in trouble. I remember I attended ‘*Saptahas*- a weeklong narration and explanation of the contents of the *Shrimad Bhagavad* by a learned scholar). I keenly listened to the stories/ narratives shared by the Pandits/spiritual gurus. Those stories were narrated in the praise and glory of God’s deeds and miracles. I was amazed to see people blissfully chanting a divine Mantra of ‘*Hare Ram, Hare Ram, Ram, Ram, Hare, Hare- Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna, Krishna, Hare, Hare*’. I saw people full of tears while chanting the holy names of Lord. I asked some of them why they were reduced to tears. I was told that it was spiritual tears, tears of spiritual ecstasy. As people kept chanting, they blissfully produced tears due to positive vibrations and feelings of absolute delight out of hectic affairs. Those tears symbolized the release of their traumatic psychic impressions.

Gradually, I developed faith in God. My relatives said that I was doing better in my studies. I was also proud of my performance, always holding the first position.

It was possible through my concentration and dedication to my work. I saw the young people of my age being involved in smoking, playing cards, and strolling here and there without any definite purpose. "*Why don't people value/prioritize what needs to be valued or prioritized?*" I questioned myself. My relative wholeheartedly praised my effort and said, "*You're a role model in our clan. You need to raise our dignity as well. Keep working hard to accomplish your mission in life*". Being inspired, I used to confine myself in a room surrounded by books. I had put the images of God and Goddess on the wall. Whenever I was in any gloom and despair, I looked at the images of God and prayed to bestow me strength to cope with the adverse circumstances. Since my childhood, I was a bit introverted and soft-spoken. My parents, siblings, and relatives appreciated my attitude and behaviour. Though the world was clapping for my progress, I was not complacent at heart with the achievement. I longed for something more. I deeply longed for my higher studies and wanted to spend more time in meditation and chanting the names of the Lord, which provided solace to my heart. I still remember remarkable sermons and the narratives of the *Bhagavad Gita* delivered by Pandit Narayan Prasad Pokhrel in a melodious and soothing manner. Almost everyone used to go to listen to his religious speech when he was around at religious functions. Once I had an opportunity to listen to stories shared in the glory of God. I sincerely appreciated his way of narrating stories making everyone spellbound. I was overwhelmed, having seen the devotion and faith of devotees present there. I wished I could be a person like him who could share ideas in front of a big mass in such an outstanding manner. He had extraordinary oratorical skills.

After completing the Bachelor's level from a campus of Sarlahi, I came to Kathmandu, a city of temples and faith, a dreamland of opportunities to pursue my

Master's degree. I was gaining maturity over time. Academically, I was doing well. I started teaching at colleges as well. The income was also good. In the meantime, my heart was longing for inner engagement. But I could not find a place for spiritual engagement. Once, one of my relatives shared how the *Vipassana* meditation of ten days changed his life. Once I went to his room with my spouse. We found him meditating there. He said that it had changed his lifestyle and thinking patterns, and his level of concentration had increased. I found him as a calm man of positive vibration. He was entirely focused on his study as well. I was impressed by his ideas of *Vipassana*⁷ meditation. I have heard about different clusters of *Satsang* like *Radhe Radhe* (*Satsang* dedicated to Lord Krishna), Osho meditation, Manokranti centre founded by Yogi Dr. Vikashananda, and many others. I was not able to have any connection with any one of them. At home, in my way, I started doing spiritual practices of connecting soul to super-soul. I bought a book of *the Bhagavad Gita* by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Srila Parbhupada. Then I started reading a few *shlokas*⁸ every day. It was wonderful chanting divine verses soulfully. The book contained the Sanskrit verses with their meaning and interpretation in the English language so that it was easier for me to understand them.

The spiritual turning point of my life occurred when a college coordinator showed me an image of Abdhoot Baba Shivananda Ji, a saint of the *Shiviyog* lineage of Goraksha Nath and Machchhindra Nath. The divine smile of Babaji was spiritually awakening. Being curious, I asked the coordinator to elaborate a bit about Babaji. He asked me to follow Babaji on Youtube. He also shared his experience of getting connected to the *Shiviyog*. I often found the coordinator listening to a bhajan (a

⁷ Insight meditation- one of the oldest forms of Buddhist meditation which focuses on awareness.

⁸ Sanskrit word which means verse or stanza

devotional song), ‘*Om rhom jum sha*⁹. It was a bit different than usual bhajan, full of positive vibration. I asked him what kind of bhajan it was. Upon my curiosity, he said it was the bhajan by Abdhoot Baba Shivanandaji. I was even more excited to get it. He gave me the bhajans in the pen drive and also provided a CD of Babaji. It was a spiritually eye-opening CD. Due to spiritual connection, my relationship with the coordinator was more cordial. One day he said that there is a *Satsang*¹⁰ Centre at Bageshwori run by Babaji' grace. The *Satsang* was conducted every Saturday, and *hawan* (making offerings into a consecrated fire) was performed every Purnima. He asked me to join there if I liked it. I was more than happy to know it, for I longed to connect to spiritual engagement. It was Saturday. I went there with him. He introduced me to Guru there. I found him as a man full of spiritual vibration and positivity. He also treated me like an acquainted person. I found people there spiritually devoted. I was impressed by their way of dealing and engagement. We had a two-hour meditation session guided by Abdhoot Baba Shivananda ji. I felt blessed after meditation, though it was challenging for me to concentrate in the beginning. Connection to divinity filled me with joy and a wonderful lifetime experience. In this way, my journey of self-navigation was gaining momentum. I was passionately waiting for this moment in my life. For this, I extended my gratitude to the Almighty as I came to the right place for spiritual engagements.

I started going there every Saturday, possibly on the day of Purnima. My life took a turn of spiritual navigation. I found Babaji's idea of taking spirituality to the workplace profoundly impressive. He highlighted the practice of unconditional love, gratitude, and forgiveness to bring transformation in life. Babaji reveals that *Shivयोग* is a science beyond science. It teaches us the art of dying, making life meaningful,

⁹ Mahamirtunjaya beej mantra

¹⁰ It is Sanskrit word which refers to being in the company of good people

having burnt the *Karmic* layers, and solving the unresolved issues of life. I found Babaji's thoughts pragmatic and life-changing. As I start practising as per Babaji's ideas, I feel change happening in my life which might be an antidote to my transformation. I gradually start becoming more confident and tolerant. My life takes a different turn in terms of engagement and practices. Even my family members take Babaji as a reverent Guru. We have developed tremendous faith in *Shiviyog* practices.

Babaji instructs every *Sadhak*¹¹ to pursue the path of non-duality, which helps to release all the negative psychic impressions and traumas of life. As I flashback, I think I have taken the right course in my life. Though I am a naïve spiritual practitioner, I am happy. I take things easy, even during difficult times.

These days, I practise spirituality every moment. I try to remain connected to divinity even in the workplace. I have developed a feeling of care, compassion, and humility. I want to explore more about my true self and get rid of my false self. Whenever I find time, I get involved in meditation, following the ideas of Babaji that, we need to try to remain in a meditative mood round the clock and keep striving to make a difference in life through spiritual engagement. Even at school, I encourage teachers to meditate and find inner peace, which is the essence of life. I engage students in a brief meditation to realize their true self and potential. I follow the insights and ideas of spiritual teachers. There is nothing like a perfect job; as Brown (2012) mentions, the feeling of perfectionism is a hindrance to progress. I enjoy what I am doing, considering it an opportunity to serve God. I try my best to discharge my assigned responsibility. The questions: who am I? and why am I here? and so on always trigger my soul-searching. Jaggi Bashudev (Sadhguru), an Indian Yogi and mystic, Radhanath Swami (spiritual leader with a soothing voice and miraculous way

¹¹ Someone who follows sadhana (spiritual practice and disciplines)

of expressing ideas), Swami Mukundanath (renowned spiritual leader and authority on mind management), Maharaji (a peace campaigner), Shri Shri Shri Ravi Shankar (widely respected humanitarian and a spiritual leader), Mahatriya (founder of Infinitheism), Satyanarayan Goenka (founder of *Vipsaasana* meditation), Dhandapani (a former Hindu monk and entrepreneur), Sarvapriyananda (a monk of Swami Ramkrishna order), Dr. Yogi Vikashananda, a Nepali spiritual guru and philosopher to mention but a few are amazingly inspirational spiritual mentors.

My perspectival understanding is that spirituality is essential to understand the essence of being human. Our life might become meaningless if we do not harness our ability to explore the spiritual self. Engagement in spiritual practices has been a turning point for nurturing my self-probing sensibilities. I can sustain and work under pressure and stress due to the spark of spirituality. It seems to be a must for every school leader to leverage leadership capacity to engage in and solve the problems of the school for a meaningful outcome, as viewed by Lambert et al. (2016).

I further explore the dimensions of spiritual ecology to create a positive school culture to unfold my school leadership praxis. Sometimes I get upset and frustrated, having felt that I am entangled in the veil of chaos and uncertainty. Despite efforts, things do not go well as anticipated. It becomes quite tough to meet the expectations of the stakeholders. Some of the team members remain engaged in the trivial matter and even seem eager to pinpoint my shortcomings with the intention of discouraging and disempowering me. At times, out of disappointment, I tend to get lost and go blank. I get caught in a dilemma of how to cope with disempowering forces. It always becomes an issue of identity for me. I feel that a storm is brewing despite making efforts for the greater good of the school. Conflict management appears to be another challenge for me. To convince me, I close my eyes, take a deep breath and ponder the

consequence of every happening. At this juncture, I come across a glimmer of hope and optimism to pursue school leadership journey with greater patience and determination to overcome possible clashes and confrontations in a leaderful manner. At times, I think my anticipative nature has been a source of stress and disappointment when my team members do not perform as expected. On the other hand, my ability to have tolerance and inclusive vision has been possible through my engagement in spiritual practices. The root of spirituality embedded in me from my childhood is shaping my journey of being, becoming and valuing.

Spiritual Epistemology in Leadership

A universal peace prayer and divine mantra mentioned below from the *Vedas* reveals the essence of spirituality.

Om, Sarve Bhavantu Sukhina

Sarve Santa Niraamayaah

Sarve Bhadrani Pashyant

Maa Kashcid- Dhukha- Bhaag Bhavet

Om Shantih Shantih Shantih !

Meaning

Om, May all be happy

May all be free from illness,

May all see auspicious things

everywhere,

May none suffer

Om Peace Peace Peace!

To me, as a spiritual seeker,
spirituality is approaching oneself. It is

Figure 8: A Mandala



a journey of self-navigation. It nurtures the moral craft of leadership. Piercy (2013) defines spirituality” as the quest for life meaning and self-awareness for a higher purpose demonstrated through efforts to the common good for all” (p.30). Swami Mukundananda (2019) mentions that “all the Vedic scriptures teach us that spirituality is a journey within ourselves. It entails the unfoldment of the inherent divinity inside us, which requires purification of the mind” (p. 4). Similarly, Muller (2005) views spirituality as defining aspect of holistic education that incorporates a sense of connection to the cosmos. I perceive that the root cause of all types of pollution is the pollution in our hearts. Spirituality cleans the pollution in our hearts and rejuvenates us to dive into the deeper- self. So, I take spirituality as a prominent agenda for my self-transformation. Incorporating spirituality is an essential component of being a transformative school leader (Piercy,2013). In a similar vein, Houston (2008) mentions that spirituality allows leadership to blossom fully and helps to step towards an uncertain future with a stronger sense of connectedness to one another.

In my journey of soulful inquiry, I take spirituality as solace in my struggling life with a profound sense of liberating effect. Spirituality creates meaning out of life experiences (Bean, 2000). Tisdell describes spirituality as part of the life journey that leads an individual toward wholeness (as cited in Piercy, 2013). Spirituality liberates us from the narrow mindset and ego, thereby opening the doors of an all-embracing mind and heart, where sharing and nurturing becomes a lifestyle (Kumar, 2010).

Highlighting spirituality as a crucial and underlying element of leadership, Sokolow and Houston (2008) mention that spirituality connects us to our deepest selves and helps us to be an effective leader as it acts as a signpost to pursuing the spiritual dimension of leadership. Dhiman (2019) mentions that " modern leadership concepts such as vision, motivation, and empowerment, self-awareness, self-mastery,

excellence in work, importance of ethical means in achieving righteous ends, meaning and fulfillment at work are all lucidly discussed in the Bhagvad Gita" (p. 3). *The Bhagavad Gita* offers timeless leadership lessons to the leaders of organizations. It depicts how leaders can have lasting influence by performing one's innate duty (*swadharma*), developing fine emotions such as self-knowledge, care, love, and compassion with a deeper level of awareness. Dhiman (2019) further mentions that *the Bhagavad Gita* focuses on the ethical and spiritual dimensions of leadership, knowing, doing, and being. Spirituality as a divine spark is the foundation of inner peace and compassion. It helps me as a leader to create a cohesive and harmonious team at school. I believe that spiritual engagement is a must for a school leader to organize, collaborate and mobilize the team to achieve the goals of an organization. Perceiving spirituality as a vital component of leadership, I attempt spiritually driven leadership practices. I have to uplift myself with transformative sensibility through spiritual unfoldment. Having a focused mind and clarity of the purpose of my responsibility, I need to engage in daily activities meaningfully. Sometimes I find myself desperate amid chaos at school and hopefully, build up courage through spiritual awareness to pursue my school leadership journey.

Spiritual Awakening

Black clouds are overcasting

Chaos, failures and frustration,

Like a crow lost in the fog

Trapped in the web of obligation.

No one to unpack my woes,

No one to soothe my burning heart,

*My only ultimate solace
Has been a spiritual spark.*

*Devoid of spiritual nourishment
Would have deterred me from my life mission,
Would have lost the joy of living
Without learning an awesome lesson.*

(Poem 2, June 2021)

Pertaining to how the spiritual dimensions of leadership might be fostered to ensure personal growth in the workplace, Metzger (2008) expresses that it is essential to cultivate inner dimensions to cope with stresses and crises at the workplace paying attention to physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being. Aligning with the ideas mentioned, I am keen to grow as a person and a leader in all dimensions of my being and becoming, focusing on my inner self having a connection to my everyday affairs. The life of a headteacher is a perpetual dilemma. It requires an intellectual and moral commitment to overcome frustrations and discern the silver lining around dark clouds. In connection to the issue of maintaining a harmonious blend of spirituality in leadership to ensure and/or create an engaging and transformative learning space at school, Bonner (2008) mentions that “spiritually oriented leadership embraces the whole student and sees the grave danger of overemphasizing cost-efficient thinking in education” (p. 132). He further mentions that it is hard to gain the trust of people and bring expected reform without cultivating spiritually oriented leadership. So, I need to adhere to spiritually oriented leadership to foster the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well- beings of teachers and students, challenging the status quo. Further, I attempt to expand the horizons of perceptions to work towards greater possibility.

Palmer (1999) argues that being spiritual does not mean forsaking the material world but engaging profoundly through life-enhancing action. His argument embraces the idea of reconciling spirituality and materiality, i.e. critical spirituality. Considering spiritual capital as wealth, a vision and a model we live by, Zohar and Marshall (2004) mention that "it reflects our shared values, shared visions, and fundamental purposes in life. Spiritual capital is reflected in what an organization believes, what it exists for, what it inspires to, and what it takes responsibility for" (p. 3). It helps us ponder deeper dimensions, values and meaning of our life. It instills in us the feelings of care, compassion, truth, goodness, and beauty, embracing integral perspective, thereby contributing to holistic education by embracing the intent of critical spirituality.

Seven Interconnected Ways of Knowing, Being, and Valuing

My intent to go beyond the positivist research paradigm inspired me "to look at the bigger picture of the nature of knowing in my inquiry" (Luitel, 2009, p. 24), thereby exploring the possibilities of thinking, expressing, and knowing via integral ways (Taylor & Synder, 2012). I love to interact and negotiate the interest, hopes and challenges of my participants to embrace living values and beliefs as well as promote living collaboration (Dhungana, 2022), albeit I sometimes assume myself as a living contradiction (Whitehead, 2008) being entangled in the dialectics of performance and commitment. However, I am endeavoring to create a *satva-like* collegial learning space at school.

My auto/ethnographic navigation seeks an emergent, multi-perspectival, holistic and integral nature of inquiry (Luitel, 2009). Considering contemporary qualitative research as a complex, chaotic and contested field, Taylor and Medina (2013) proposes that interacting research paradigms provide insights to understand

possibly soulful inquiry?; how does it govern my entire inquiry process? and so on.

These questions enable me to create a space for an integral epistemology (Wilber, 1998; 2006) to incorporate me and my participants' leadership understanding,

perspectives and practices. The *chakra model of epistemology*

and integral understanding of the genesis of the school leadership paradigm unfolding multi-layered consciousness.

I sought the alignment of the *chakra model of epistemology* to the different ways of knowing and beyond. The

word *chakra* is derived from

Sanskrit as mentioned in the *pre-vedic philosophy*, meaning a disc,

wheel or any arrangement in a

circular shape. Paulson (2002)

mentions that “*chakras* are

vortices through which energy

flows both in and out of the body”

(p. 59). *Chakras* are considered

energy vortices or stations for transmitting and receiving energy. They always meet in

the form of triangles. Johari (2010) mentions that “*chakras* are psychic centres of transformation that enable one to move toward an enlightened state of being” (p. 1).

He further mentions that “knowledge about the *chakras* as psychic centres can be a

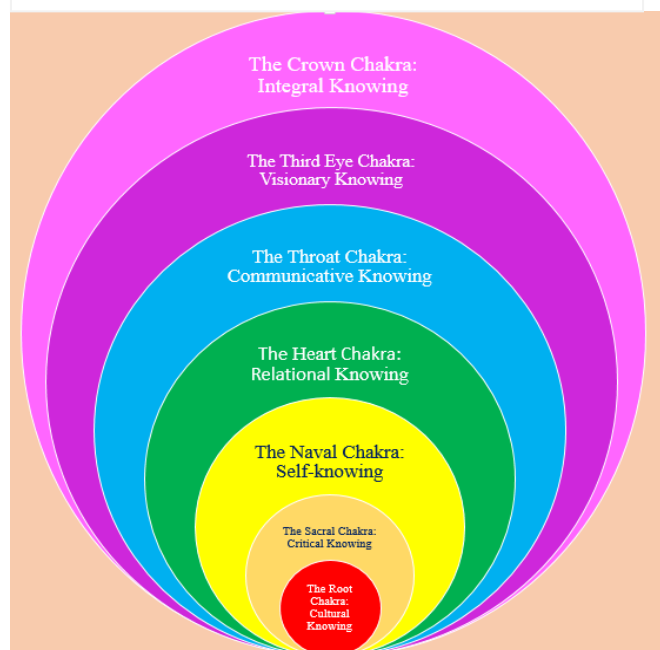
valuable key to introspection” (p. 3). “When a *chakra* and its petals flow correctly, a

certain frequency is set up, opening a person to psychic abilities or higher spiritual

values” (Paulson, 2002, p. 67). So when psychic abilities are nurtured, people will

have an expanded level of awareness and understanding of cosmic energy. Wauters

Figure 10: Chakra epistemology



(1997) argues that “it is our thoughts and attitudes, more than anything else, which block or release the flow of energy through chakras” (p. 21). As a master map, *the chakra* system connects us to the outside world (Judith & Goodman, 2012). There is a different level of intensity at different *chakras*, which guides “our levels of vitality, responsibility and empowerment” (Wauters, 1997, p. 21). These multiple wheels of life-force energy unfold multiple ways of being, knowing, and valuing.

The *chakra* system, as *elan vital* (Bergson, 2004), offers a space to craft an integral inquiry space through multi-layered consciousness. It might embody the understanding of human existence to unfold the pathway to holistic engagement with an expanded level of consciousness. Upon my query on the epistemological contribution of seven ways of knowing, my supervisor unfolds as:

Where is the gap in the existing literature on qualitative research? Where is the major crisis? We have different ways of understanding and perceiving knowledge. Why are seven ways of knowing required in the secular context? How have different ways of knowing developed? Spirituality is one way of knowing. Spirituality means connecting to something beyond humanity, which is required now. Humanity promotes anthropocentric thinking, but we need to go beyond it to post-anthropocentric thinking or post-humanist thinking. Equanimical relationships, fraternity, and global awareness are pertinent.

Basically, we may say that Western Modern Worldview or Western-induced paradigms generate mechanical or anthropocentric knowledge. So, it is pertinent to justify how seven ways of knowing might contribute to post-anthropocentric thinking. Your inquiry aims to celebrate seven ways of knowing, being, and valuing, drawing insights from the chakra system.

(Communication with Supervisor, March 2, 2022)

The epistemological underpinning of my inquiry embraces different ways of being, knowing and valuing. I also look for epistemic possibilities in my inquiry through performative imagination and semi-factual writing. I also adhere to the notion of epistemic skepticism. I unpack the phenomenology of learning and experiences of me and my participants as struggling school leaders. I construct knowledge incorporating experiences, and stories of struggles and resilience of me and my participants, thereby developing a living transformative educational leadership theory – small 't' praxis to my context (but not limited to).

Each level of *chakra* might promote different levels of knowing, which might also depend on an individual's awareness, thereby leading to integral knowing. Through lots of reflection and contemplation, the inner navigation of holistic knowing and unfolding possibilities through life might be pursued with transformative sensibilities. I seek an alignment on how the *chakras* system might render epistemic space to the spectrum of knowing with transformative possibilities embracing care, compassion, and humility.

The blend of epistemologies from Western-induced paradigms and Eastern Wisdom Traditions (critical spirituality) has become instrumental for me "to bring the nuances of the evolving nature of being and becoming" (Gautam, 2018, p. 45) as a headteacher and to represent voices of others to have a deeper engagement pertaining to envisioning a living educational leadership theory for creating a better school.

Cultural Knowing

'*Be like a headteacher*' as sometimes remarked by some of my teachers and the SMC chairperson, maybe pointing to my shortcoming for not being able to lead the way they anticipated might resonate and anticipate my cultural or contextual knowing as the headteacher to act aligning with the expectations of the people and the

contexts I live by. Cultural knowing relates to our social and ecological worldview (Taylor, 2015). Cultural knowing embodies contextual understanding and culturally situated realities. Wildman and Inayatullah (1996) argue that culture embraces multiple ways of knowing. Cultural knowing helps to generate context-based subjective meanings (Qutoshi, 2016). In other words, it appears pertinent to understand people's values, beliefs, assumptions and attitudes to make sense of why they do what they do. I came to realize that the metaphor of knowing as interpreting and constructing (Taylor et al., 2012) provided me space to construct contextual meaning of our leadership narratives (me and my participants) to have a glocal perspective (e.g., think globally and act locally) to connect world views at local and global levels. In a similar vein, Clark and O' Donoghue (2016) contend that understanding context is pertinent to understanding the realities of school leadership as leadership may not be enhanced when a leader cannot adopt the strategies relevant to the context. As human beings are cultural beings, the ego might play a part in cultural knowing, i.e. ego to self and ego to others. I am in the process of deconstructing my ego. As I gradually start dropping my ego, the situation turns out to be positive. I have come across many ego-cracking moments; such incidents have provided a huge lesson for the process of my transformation in disguise.

As of Eastern Wisdom Traditions, *the Muladhar chakra* might relate to cultural knowing and beyond. *Muladhar* means foundation. The symbol of the *Muladhar chakra* is a lotus with four petals. It is located at the base of the spine. It is associated with the earth element, so it links us with earth, which is our standing or ground reality. Wauters (1997) mentions that the *Muladhar chakra* “filters energy up from the earth and connects our higher energies to the basic reality of life” (p.22). If energies are dominant in this chakra, food and sleep become the most critical factors

for a person. It is the *chakra* for survival, stability, building trust, among others. It might promote self-centric knowing and bodily being. Considering the root chakra as the *chakra* to manifest our relationship to the material world, Hoopen and Trompenaars (2009) mention that “root chakra is the spiritual hub of everything material” (p.67). Jung (1996) argues that the *Muladhara chakra*, being the root *chakra* relates to our conscious world.

Further, Taylor (2015) mentions that constructivist epistemology incorporates emergent analysis via grounded theorizing and thick description. It enables me to construct insightful understandings of the meaning- perspectives underpinning my and my participants' (but not limited to) school leadership strategies and dynamics.

Critical Knowing

The intent of one of the inquiry questions is to create a transformative space at school, upsetting the stagnation that demands critical knowing of my participants and me. In this connection, Taylor (2016) views that "critical knowing involves coming to understand how and why (political, institutional, economic) power has structured our social realities" (p. 1080). Uncritical reproduction of normative social values and practices does not contribute to deconstructing disempowering and deep-seated beliefs and ideologies (Taylor et al., 2012). Cranton and Taylor (2012) mention that “the goal of critical social theory is to critique and change society as a whole and rather than explain or describe it” (p.7). Critical knowing also embodies ideology critique, which "describes the process by which people learn to recognize how uncritically accepted and unjust ideologies are embedded in everyday situations and practices" (Brookfield, 2009, p. 293), akin to Friere's (1972) revolutionary notion of critical consciousness to envision a democratic and just society.

To me, critical perspective has been a basis to pursue the process of transformation to critique my views, assumptions, and beliefs being critically reflective on self and others' practices (Brookfield, 2009) and seeking alternatives with an open mind challenging the existing truths. Using a self-reflective approach helps me to deal with life experiences and narratives in a critical and dialectical manner. Critical knowing allows me to be critical of others and myself in different circumstances of socio-cultural settings through the metaphor of *finger-pointing*, as viewed by Luitel (2009; Luitel & Taylor, 2019). Making use of the metaphor of finger pointing, I reflect critically on my school leadership roles and that of my participants to revitalize the school leadership journey stretching the envelope as far as possible, agreeing with the views my critical friend Pabitra mentions, "*As a researcher, we are not trying to create a new envelope, rather we are trying to stretch it as far as possible*".

(Personal Communication, 2 February 2022).

I remain aware of my shortcomings and vulnerabilities, considering my vulnerabilities as the seeds of my possibly transformative school leadership journey. I embrace the intent of emancipatory interest of Habermas (1972) through the process of informing, reforming, and transforming, not as a hierarchical process, but as a continuous process of being and becoming as a part of inter-being as argued by Hanh (2014), who questioned the existence of the lotus without the mud. Then as a leader, shall we get scared of the ground of circumstances?

Giving critical focus pertaining to the role of education, Robinson and Aronica (2015) argue that education needs to promote active citizenry. To this end, a school leader needs to be critically mindful of students' hopes, aspirations, and passion and engage them meaningfully in classroom/school activities. Being critically aware of

my belief system and practices and that of others in a given cultural context enabled me to challenge my own "false consciousness" (Qutoshi, 2016) and empowered me as a leader to look at my endeavors of being and becoming from the vantage point of catalyzing the process of transformation.

The Eastern perspective gives due focus on self-knowing and self-transformation. The Eastern perspective of the all-encompassing Self contradicts the Western perspective of the individual self as a source of knowledge. The Eastern aphorisms such as *appo deepo bhava (be light unto yourself)*, *I am Satchidanand (I am eternal, enlightened, and pure self)*, *'Aham brahmashami (I am the universe)*, *I am 'Shiva (shivoham)* and so on highlight the significance of the Self. The Eastern perspective appears to embrace a higher self-that is universal Self, akin to the philosophy of non-duality.

I would like to relate the notion of swadharma to critical knowing.

Swadharma literally means "one's duty (*swa* meaning self and *dharma* meaning duty)" (Bhawuk, 2011, p. 93). The verse 2.31 of the *Bhagvad Gita* introduces the concept of *swadharma* "to motivate *Arjuna* to fight by stating that even in view of his duties (*swadharma*), he should not hesitate to engage in battle" (Bhawuk, 2011, p. 94).

स्वधर्ममपि चावेक्ष्य न विकम्पितुमर्हसि ।

धर्म्याद्धि युद्धाच्छ्रेयोऽन्यत्क्षत्रियस्य न विद्यते ॥ 31॥

swa-dharmam api chāvekṣhya na vikampitum arhasi

dharmyāddhi yuddhāch chhreyo 'nyat kṣhatriyasya na vidyate.

(Besides, considering your duty as a warrior, you should not waver. Indeed, for a warrior, there is no better engagement than fighting for upholding of righteousness.)

The *Vedic* philosophy considers *swadharma* as one's prescribed duties; *para dharma* (spiritual duties) and *apara dharma* (material duties). *Swadharma* always places duty first. We have to be duty-bound. I ask myself: If I am a head teacher, what is my *swadharma*? Am I performing my *swadharma* with honesty and integrity? I need to be committed to my responsibility. The verse 18.7 of the *Bhagavad Gita* highlights the significance of performing our *swadharma*.

नियतस्य तु सन्न्यासः कर्मणो नोपपद्यते ।

मोहात्तस्य परित्यागस्तामसः परिकीर्तितः ॥ 7॥

niyatasya tu sannyāsaḥ karmaṇo nopapadyate

mohāt tasya parityāgas tāmasaḥ parikīrtitaḥ

The verse states that the prescribed duties should never be abandoned.

Performance of the prescribed duties elevates us from *tamas*-like *guna* to *rajas*-like *guna* to *sattva*-like *guna*. Renunciation of obligatory duties leads us to the mode of ignorance and degradation of the soul.

As a school leader committed to creating a transformative space at school, I am guided by the metaphor of knowing as critical self-reflection or knowing through critical conversation (Brookfield, 2009), cultural and ideological critique (Mclaren & Kincheloe, 2007) and performance praxis (Denzin, 2003b).

As to Eastern Wisdom Traditions, the *Svadhistan chakra* (the sacral *chakra*) might promote critical knowing and beyond. It is the *chakra* for movement, fluidity, pleasure and so on. The emotional issues relating to this *chakra* include “self-worth, self-esteem, self-confidence, and personal power” (Wauters, 1997, p. 22). It is the *chakra* of emotionality, connectedness, identity and creation (Hoopen & Trompenaars, 2009). Considering the critical aspect of *the Svadhistan chakra*, Jung (1996)

mentions that "*Svadhasthan chakra* must be unconscious, symbolized by the sea, and in the sea is a huge leviathan which threatens one with annihilation" (p. 15). So, it appears pertinent for anyone to rescue oneself mindfully from the *vabasagar*¹² of life. If this chakra is in a state of balance, it helps in decision-making and the process of empowerment.

Cranton and Taylor (2012) mention that "the goal of critical social theory is to critique and change society as a whole and rather than explain or describe it" (p.7). To me, critical perspective has been a basis for transformation to critique on me and my participants' views, assumptions, and beliefs with critical reflections on self and others' practices (Brookfield, 2009). It allows me to be critical of others and myself in different circumstances of socio-cultural settings through the metaphor of *finger-pointing*, as viewed by Luitel (2009). In line with the views of Taylor (2013), critical epistemology enables me to sustain a transformative intent and develop transformative leadership philosophy for my leadership praxis. Turning a critical eye inward and taking an activist turn, I critique and challenge my belief systems via critical-self- reflection, as mentioned by Brookfield (2009).

Existential Knowing

The local metaphor "*chattan chheder umranchha Peepal*" meaning that Peepal tree grows penetrating rocks, embodies the fact that we need to cope with adverse circumstances and stay strong, aligning with our vision and mission with unwavering determination and commitment. Arguing against the notion of Descartes "*I think, therefore I am*", which appears to be an overly self-referential or solipsistic idea (Panta & Luitel, 2022a), Kumar (2010) mentions that "only in relationships with others will you blossom. You are because others are, and others are because you are.

¹² Ocean of worldly existence

We all exist, flourish, blossom and mature in this mutuality, this reciprocity, and the web of relationships" (p. 58). His arguments capture the essence of inter-being and co-existence to sustain in this arena of mutuality and collaboration.

As of the *Manipur Chakra* (the Navel Chakra), it is associated with the fire element. The fire might burn the ego and take us along the path of transformation. One seeks to do a lot of things if this *chakra* is activated. It is the chakra for spontaneity, self-esteem, vitality, willpower, resilience and autonomy (Hoopen & Trompenaars, 2009). This chakra might promote self-knowing and beyond as well as support to critique and challenge deep-seated beliefs and taken-for-granted assumptions and ponder on our existence as a culturally embedded being with transformative sensibility.

Relational Knowing

As a headteacher, I consider relation (*sambandha*) as a crucial component of leading. Oliver (2015) mentions that building an environment of trust is crucial for a school leader to experience long-term achievement while maintaining harmonious relationships with the stakeholders. Taylor (2016) mentions that "relational knowing involves learning to connect empathetically and compassionately with our true (nonegoic) selves, our local community, the culturally different other, and the natural world" (p.1080). I find the statement I came across elsewhere that is "either co-existence or no existence" quite meaningful to my ebb and flow of school leadership. A leader is not alone in performing a task as it is a collaborative venture. Rapport building with stakeholders appears to be a crucial aspect of leadership. Vaai (2017) mentions that relational understanding is a crucial component of being a human, so it seems pertinent to decolonize self by deconstructing the non-relational understanding of self. In a similar vein, Gergen (2009) mentions that as a relational being, an

individual needs to be mindful of relational responsibility to foster the spirit of co-existence and community collaboration. With the unfoldment of critical awareness, I am mindful of my relational and embodied self as I am connected to the socio-cultural landscape of my context. Aligning with the views of Kumar (2010), I need to "take time to do and to be" (p. 59). Hersted and Gergen (2013) argue that relational leadership enhances the spirit of collaboration in an organization.

Considering relation and connection like the roots of a tree, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) argue that "a rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles" (p. 7). To crystalize the notion of a rhizome, Adkins (2015) mentions that it has neither a beginning nor an end. It constantly creates something new without following a linear pattern of connection and growth. A rhizomatic interaction and connection incorporate six principles: connectivity, heterogeneity, multiplicity, signifying rupture, cartography, and decalomania. The principle of connection embodies that "any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 7). It is non-hierarchical and creates something new (Adkins, 2015). The principle of heterogeneity embraces diversity, whereas the principle of multiplicity embodies that a rhizome has various dimensions or possibilities of deterritorialization and is considered a zone of indiscernibility (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Likewise, the principle of asignifying the rupture reflects that " a rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again, on one of its own lines or on new lines" (Adkins, 2015, p. 9). Finally, the principles of cartography and decalomania affirm that a rhizome is not confined to any structural or generative framework. It is considered a map, but not a tracing.

As of the Eastern Wisdom Traditions, the *Anaahat chakra* might embrace the relational aspect and beyond. It is considered to be the centre of creativity and connection. Balancing this chakra might ensure all-embracing love, connection, empathy, compassion, and a good relationship. The heart also might be the repository of delusions and dualities, likes and dislikes. I have attempted to unpack the *bhavas* to align with leadership practices. *Bhavas* refer to a "wide range of psychological states or emotions" (Haberman, 2007, p. 11). The *sthayi-bhavas* (foundational emotions) incorporate five *bhavas*, namely *shanta* (peace/neutrality), *dasya* (servitorship), *sakhya* (friendship), *madhurya* (sweetness) and *vatsalya* (parental affection). I also explore *samabhava* (equanimity) and the philosophy of *sambandha* (relation).

Communicative/Practical Knowing

My upheavals of school leadership experiences have nurtured me to take communication as a core leadership performance. When I tend to impose my ideas and plans without having broader consultation with my team members, I come across dissenting voices, grievances, and sometimes even apathy and rejections from them. As I communicate any issue with team members, I can have their thoughts, solidarity, and meaningful engagements while implementing those plans. So, frequent communication and dialogue with stakeholders help to build trust and maintain cordial relationships (Fiarman, 2015).

Communicative or practical knowing is related to practical interest, which relates to exploring possibilities of consensus and mutuality through hermeneutic understanding (Habermas, 1971). Regarding the role of communication in leadership, Baldoni (2010) argues that communication skill is a powerful strategy for effective leadership. So, there is a paramount role of communication in maintaining cordial relationships and making action happen, Fullan (2010) argues that "communication in

the abstract, in the absence of action, means almost nothing” (p. 26). Hersted and Gergen (2013) highlight the need for dialogic collaboration to enhance the vitality of an organization.

The Vishuddha chakra located at the throat is associated with communicative knowing and beyond. “The throat chakra is the connection between our inner being and the outside world” (Hoopen & Trompenaars, 2009, p. 158). This chakra is associated with communicating truth and exploring the path of integrity and creativity. Hence, the throat chakra might help catalyze the dialogue and discussion, opening the avenues of sharing, interacting, and thriving together.

Visionary Knowing

To me, vision (*durdristi*) includes being conscious of my dream (*sapana*), imagination (*kalpana*), and intuition (*brahma*). I believe in collaborative vision and remain engaged with the team members to envision possibilities for a better school of tomorrow. Taylor (2016) mentions that "visionary and ethical knowing involves us in creative, inspirational and discursive processes of idealising, imagining, poeticising, romanticising, meditating on and negotiating a collective vision" (p. 1080). Pertaining to visionary knowing, Cornish (2004) argues that it enables us to anticipate many of the challenges and opportunities that lie in store in the future. His Holiness Sadhguru (2012) mentions that “imagination is firmly rooted in your mind. You must understand this. It does not matter how fanciful or how wild your imagination is” (p.155). So, it appears that the power to imagine or visualize is the signature strength of being human. "Our vision of the universe is driven by the unity of feeling and reason, imagination and reflection" (Wright, 2000, p. 110). In a similar vein, Luitel (2009) considers imagination as an epistemic technique to explore the possibilities of a phenomenon to enrich an inquiry.

The Ajna chakra, as the point of intellectual realization and intuition, is the centre of seeing, dreaming and creating a vision. Wauters (1997, p. 23) mentions that the brow chakra “governs our ability to think and discern, use our intuition and imagination, and gather wisdom from our life experiences”. People start seeing things as they are when this *chakra* is in a state of balance. It helps to explore the purpose of our life and visualize our destiny. Considering the crucial role of the third eye chakra (*Ajna chakra*), Judith and Goodman (2012) mention that the process of envisioning shapes and vitalizes our conception. The active use of our imagination adds colour and shapes to our idea leading us to our pathway to fulfilment. So, this *chakra* might relate to visionary knowing and beyond as it might help to see a big picture. This *chakra* might help an individual to be a progressive being. My vision might offer me space to envision living educational leadership theory- small 't' orientation for my context (but not limited to) being mindful of the glocal educational leadership perspectives and landscapes to explore newer possibilities.

Integral Knowing

I embrace the "empowering epistemic metaphor of knowing as holistic meaning-making" (Luitel, 2009, p. 32), looking for possibilities of a better school adhering to the possibility of integral knowing. On becoming a holistic leader, Dhiman (2017) argues that "we need holistic leaders and holistic systems that are able to integrate the spiritual and the material perspectives in a dialectical manner" (p. 1). "The yogic view of consciousness is the exact opposite of the common sense view. The world you perceive directly in your consciousness is the outermost part of the inside of your consciousness" (DeGracia, 2015, p. 24). So, it appears that the yogic or monkish view of consciousness does not reject the external material world, looks for how we are embedded in it and encourages us to think like a monk transcending

trivialities. The *yogic* perspective as a meditative dimension is an all-embracing perspective that links to eco-spiritual cosmology.

Integral knowing helps me "to envision holistically at the crafted stories" (Qutoshi, 2019, p. 62) of my school leadership venture and that of my participants interpreted subjectively. The process of holistic meaning-making, theorizing, and envisioning in my research incorporates "inclusive logics and expression, various forms of imagination and perspectival language" (Luitel, 2009, p. 33). Having felt that multiplicities, plurivocality, differences, irony, and playfulness (Luitel, 2009; Polinkhorne, 1992) could not be taken into account by the critical knowing, I incorporate integral knowing in my inquiry which offers new ways and alternatives of seeing the world. I embrace post-modernist views of multiple horizons of possibilities using multiple logics, such as metaphorical logics, poetic logics, dialectical, and dialogical logics (Dyson, 2007). Unfolding me and my participants' actions, perceptions and experiences as school leaders, I construct narratives that incorporate auto/ethnographic waves in a dialogical manner to explore, re-imagine, and reconstruct our culturally storied and situated identity as viewed by Ellis (2004).

Figure 12: Ardhanarishvara



universalism and cosmic consciousness. Its realm is our sense of connectedness with

Figure 11:Ying Yang symbol



Sahasrara is a Sanskrit word that means infinite. This *chakra* is associated with the space element. It is connected to empathy, pure consciousness, and aesthetics. "This is the chakra of

something greater than ourselves " (Hoopen & Trompenaars, 2009, p.196). It is in a dormant state for most of the people. "It is the state when energy (*Sakti*) and intelligence (*Siva*) get merged, which is portrayed by the iconography of *ardhanarishvara* signifying "the half-male and half-female aspect of Siva and Sakti" (Yadav, 2001, p. 1). So, *shiva-like* image (merger of feminine and masculine energy together) or *Aadiyogi-like* perspective seems to embrace an inclusive dimension, a state of unison and harmony. The Chinese philosophy of *Ying-Yang* that incorporates dynamic tensions of opposites as a healing strategy might also reflect the possibility of integral knowing (Palmer, 1998). Similarly, Kim et al. (2010) argue that the *Ying* and *Yang* of life, an interplay of opposing life force energies, maintains a balance of life, thereby creating a harmonious and conscious living. As the gateway to universal consciousness, the *crown chakra* keeps us connected to our quest to create a new belief system, even amid chaos and complexity that unfold around us with an expanded level of awareness (Judith & Goodman, 2012), transformative sensibility and contemplation in action. So, this chakra might be related to transcendental knowing or integral knowing and beyond, portraying an individual as a universal being seeking alignment to higher values with the possibility of having mystical experiences and harmonious living.

The following poem further unpacks my confusion and inner dilemmas amid chaos and, at the same time, newfound confidence and enthusiasm to embrace possibility-driven leadership:

At a Crossroads

At this trajectory of life

Everything seems blurred,

Like a crow lost in the dense fog

New confusion looms over.

Echo of my soul

Inspires me for inner navigation,

Deeper, deeper, and further deeper

Towards uncharted destination.

(Poem III, January 2021)

An East-West Auto/ethnography as Transformative Research Methodology

Auto/ethnography as life writing being with others has been a passion for me to navigate my deeper self. Embracing auto/ethnography as my method of inquiry, I have composed the following poem incorporating moments of struggles as a headteacher:

My Saga (Mero Ram Kahani)

Helpless like maniac

Trapped in the mire,

No support from anyone

Instead, add fuel to the fire

Unpacking my woes

Anticipating empathy,

Ointment to my burning heart

Has been auto/ethnography.

(Poem V, August 2021)

Looking at the compound nature of the term, auto/ethnography is literally a product of three spaces/ *Auto* means ‘ personal experience- the self; *Ethno* means socio-cultural, and/ or ‘ cultural experience’ and *Graphy* means a method of writing as a genre or a craft of representation (Ellis, 2004). I believe auto/ethnography is a process of probing the self. Autoethnography, as an autobiographical genre of collaborative creation (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Bochner, 2002), has been a profound tool for self-exploration. “Autoethnography is a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context. It is both a method and a text” (Reed- Danahay, 1997, p. 6). Autoethnography has gained popularity in academia for its contribution to understanding firsthand human experience (Chang, 2016). "Doing autoethnography offers a space wherein individuals can critically and reflexively reflect on their experiences" (Sikes, 2022, p. 25). Autoethnography cares for self and others" by embodying the change we seek in the world" (Adams, et al., 2022, p. 8) via empathy, connection and understanding.

I added East-West here because the Western-induced critical theories such as transformative learning theory, knowledge constitutive interests, and living educational theory, among others, help me navigate external realities and challenge disparities (Luitel, 2019), whereas the Eastern Wisdom Traditions inspire me to navigate inward (e.g., embracing grace, humility, compassion, self-reflection, self-inquiry). To this end, this inquiry makes a fusion of EWTs and WIPs through the lens of critical spirituality for the reconciliation and holistic understanding of educational leadership phenomena exploring the heart of darkness.

Auto/ethnography connects life and art to create auto/ethnographic texts to change the world (Jones, 2002). Wall (2006) mentions that culturally relevant personal experience consolidates auto/ethnography, and I am keen to explore my layers of struggles that display my efforts of being and becoming in my professional voyage of self-exploration, embracing this empowering, humanizing as well as the challenging genre of research and writing. Ellis mentions that autobiographical researchers work to connect the autobiographical and social “by privileging concrete action, emotion, embodiment, self-consciousness, and introspection” (2016, p.85). Personal experiences are the cornerstones of autoethnography, in which the researchers mindfully examine socio-cultural contexts and how they lived their experiences (Chang, 2016). As a headteacher, possibly in difficult circumstances, I have been “confronted, challenged, moved and changed” (Wall, 2006) by my everyday practice, experience and learning. Life writing has been my source of healing and navigation through multi-layered selves. Considering writing as a method of inquiry, Richardson (2000) argues that "writing is also a way of knowing- a method of discovery and analysis. By writing in different ways, we discover new aspects of our topic and our relation to it" (p. 923). So, writing about my moments of struggles, thoughts and feelings as a headteacher and a PhD scholar seems akin to braving the wilderness (Brown, 2012). Further, Bochner and Ellis (2016) contend that auto/ethnography looks at human suffering, subjectivity, injustice, feeling and loss and encourages reflexive and creative methodologies to explore the landscapes of lived experiences in performative ways through multiple logics and genres embracing transformative sensibilities.

I am possibly aware of my journey of being and becoming a leader with a growth mindset (Dweck, 2006). As a practitioner of autoethnographic inquiry, I need

to keep my agency intact. I experience persistent anxiety about how I represent myself in auto/ethnographic texts incorporating my identity as a headteacher and my self-understanding as an agent of change (Wall, 2008). Chang (2008) articulates that in auto/ethnography, "the life of self is the primary focus of inquiry, and others are explored in auxiliary relationship with self" (p. 65). I craft my narratives and unfold my embodied experiences in pursuing self-discovery.

Critiquing my professional practices as a headteacher, I am having a shifting perspective to embrace the landscape of transformation (Dyson, 2007). I employ auto/ethnography with "a critical bent" as my choice of writing style (Chang, 2016) to explore and reflect critically on the sensitivity of my professional practice envisioning my own (but not limited to) liberation as a headteacher as Afonso and Taylor (2009) opine.

Critical autoethnography allows me to be critical of the self and others as it generates critical reflexivity. It supports me in concentrating on producing meaningful, accessible, and evocative research grounded in personal experiences (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Critical and visionary auto/ethnography supports me in envisioning my leadership philosophy as compatible with my context (but not limited to).

Auto/ethnographic writing supports me in envisioning my living educational leadership theory- small 't' approach (but not limited to). My performative auto/ethnographic journey empowers me "to challenge and change" (Spry, 2008. p. 500), critically reflecting on my leadership performance. Performative auto/ethnography critically unfolds the researcher's engagement with others in given sociocultural landscapes (Spry, 2011). So it appears that performative

auto/ethnography critically explores and challenges the personal, political, and social issues at the praxis level.

Narrative Portrayal

My multilayered stories of struggles make a huge sense in my life. As a practitioner of auto/ethnographic inquiry with possibly transformative sensibility, I find it to be a legitimate tool for unfolding one's embedded self and charting the journey of personal transformation (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013). Markova (2008) views that “stories fuel the engine of our desire and generate our actions” (p. 42). Similarly, Kroth and Cranton (2014) argue that “storytelling is one way in which educators and learners can understand the process of transformative learning through first-hand accounts of others’ transformative experiences” (p. xiv). Huang and Carspecken (2013) argue that self-narratives integrate the ongoing life experiences of an individual to constitute and claim human identity. It is also my process of soul searching and identity claiming. As a spiritual seeker, I try to explore the purpose of my living. Learning from vulnerabilities, I want to make my life meaningful and worthwhile. Narrating my stories of struggles, I want to release my resentment, pain and frustration (my negative psychic impressions) and embody my living values (e.g., care, empathy, connection) by concentrating on my self-transformation.

I try to open up myself to multiple dimensions of possibilities with regard to envisioning better schools. In line with the view of Anderson and Glass-Coffin (2013), who mention, “It is the ‘I’ of emergence, the ‘I’ of dialogue, the ‘I’ of being changed by inquiry” (p.71), I portray the visibility of mine in the research.

Autoethnographic inquiry is perceived as a “self-narrative that places the self within a social context. It is understood both as a method and a text” (Reed- Danahay as cited in Anderson & Glass- Coffin 2013, p. 72). I adopt this method to unpack my

participants' narratives of being and becoming. It is “active, reflexive, and reflective,... decentered deconstructed and self-aware” (Kong, et al. as cited in Anderson & Glass- Coffin 2013, p. 72) to explore painful memories and insights. I have used a narrative approach to record my present actions or describe my current circumstances by using self-observation, as viewed by Chang (2016). I have used my old diaries, maintained a daily journal and (re) crafted my narratives through memory reconstruction. I have represented the participants' voices by crafting narratives based on interviews and observations.

***Currere* as Transformative Narrative Portrayal**

I have used *currere* as a method to reveal a tension between the allegorical values of life and the realities I am trying to represent. *Currere* is a method for autobiographical reflection proposed by Pinar (2004), who argues that “this autobiographical method asks us to slow down, to remember even to re-enter the past, and to meditatively imagine the future” (p. 4) to make sense of the present. It is a method concerned with self-understanding. Pinar (2004) further mentions that “there are four steps or moments in the method of *currere*: the regressive, the progressive, the analytical and the synthetical” (p.35). This process incorporates retelling the story of one’s ontology of existential educational experiences, imagining possible futures for self-understanding, examination of past, present and future life history and practice, and ways of thinking about engaged pedagogical action and these steps also known as ‘moments’ may happen concurrently (Pinar, 2004).

The first step is a regressive step or moment which encourages the learners to recall a particular educational experience. Thus this step is a phase of creating ‘a data resource’ to delve deeper into the layers one lives (Pinar, 2004). In highlighting Pinar's idea, Kissel (2008) mentions that this step renders the foundational material

for self-reflection. Given the regressive phase of *currere* is about uncovering the self, Pinar (2004) mentions that “the regressive phase of *currere* is a discursive practice of truth telling...to oneself” (p. 55). Taking this stage of *currere* in due consideration, I unfold my personal and professional past experiences and, at the same time and encourage my participants to do so.

The progressive stage, the second stage, offers numerous possibilities for the future. This phase includes two modes of explanation, namely stylistic experimentation and thematic way. Through ‘stylistic experimentation’, one writes to become other as one imagines possibilities for the future. ‘Thematic mode’ unpacks what is imagined as futural by imagining the future, the future turns into the present (Pinar, 2004). This phase invokes me to the possibilities of future to embolden myself to be ready to face the obstacles of the future for my personal and professional transformation (but not limited to).

The third stage is the analytical stage which creates a “subjective space of freedom in the present” (Pinar, 2004, p. 36). Critical self-examination of the past and the present seeks an understanding of myriad aspects of an educational experience. Using this critical approach, I make a self-examination of the past and present to seek an understanding of multiple facets of my school leadership experiences and practices.

The final stage, known as ‘synthetical stage’ or ‘moment of synthesis, deals with re-entering the lived present in the light of the knowledge obtained in the earlier steps (Pinar, 2004). The key question of concern is: ‘What is the meaning of the present?’, which provides an opportunity to revitalize my leadership and pedagogical practice by employing insights from the past, present, and future to create a transformative space at school (Kissel, 2008).

My navigation of knowing the self is guided by Pinar's (2004) idea that autobiographical writing empowers me as a school leader to pursue uncharted territory of leadership journey, possibly being an agent of change. I jumped from the past and to the future and then got back to the present to make sense of the past and the future, making a synthesis of the moments. *Currere* method has also addressed the issue of historicity to some extent in my inquiry.

***Lila* as Multiperspectival Method of Writing: A Cosmic Playfulness**

The notion of *lila* writing incorporates relative experience. Nothing is certain. Nothing is static. Uncertainty is the law of life. For instance, we commence a journey, but it is not sure whether we will reach the destination or not. But then the journey continues. It appears that we need to show the world as an agent of change rather than acting on vengeful feelings. *Lila* writing is a multi-perspectival genre of writing. It encompasses the notion of dramatic dimensions, playfulness and a mythopoetic¹³ mode of inquiry. It helps to unpack my trajectories of leadership identity through dialectical thinking to envision contextual leadership philosophy- small 't' praxis. *Lila* writing helps me to get in touch with the wonders of life and leadership, embracing the dramatic orientation of life as expressed by Shakespeare, who considers the world as a stage and we all human beings are merely actors of the cosmic drama. He focuses on our performance and reminds us of our entry into this world and our exit from being merged into the vast cosmos. Pertaining to the connection of *lila* writing to postmodernism (Butler, 2003), Bhattarai (2020) mentions, “*Lila* writing is the Nepali version of postmodernism. The concept of *Lila* writing was advocated by Indra Bahadur Rai in the Nepali literature, who mentions that words never tell the truth. One short story may have many forms.

¹³ Relating to the making of myth (s)

I have used these constructs of *Vedic* tradition to see the chaotic and orderly nature of leadership. To this end, I am trying to make a shift in my leadership performance from a *rita-like* ordered sort of strategy to a vibrant *lila-like* nature of leadership. I consider the school leadership journey as my life's transient dance of being and becoming.

Life Journey

Amid traumas and dramas

Myriad of choices and dilemmas,

Life has been a game of mirage

Unfathomable and incomprehensible phenomena

Life is daunting and heart-wrenching

Full of blood-curdling saga,

There is incredible joy otherwise,

Journeying through molten lava.

(Poem V, June 2021)

Meaning Making through Multiple Logics and Genres

I listened to the narratives of my participants (*shrawan*), and reflected critically upon my as well their stories (*manana*), and commenced the process of meaning-making and theorizing (*nididhaysana*). As I have recrafted the narratives of the participants based on their sharing (not exactly), I have used the phrases like ' my participant said something like this'; ' I heard my participant saying something like this' to maintain epistemic humility (flexibility in meaning-making process embracing the post-modern sensibility (method of doubt, raising questions, viewing from multiple perspectives). Pertaining to meaning aspects and perspectives, Mezirow (1991) argues that meaning-making is the process of interpreting experience to give it

coherence both pre-linguistically and through language. "Performative autoethnography is forged in the ontological tension between its epistemological potential and its aesthetic imperative. It is through language, after all, that we give an account of ourselves" (Spry, 2011, p. 508). Considering meaning as interpretation, he further mentions that "our need to understand our experience is perhaps our most distinctly human attribute. We have to understand them in order to know how to act effectively" (p.21). So, to render coherence to my experiences, I used multiple logics and genres for multi-layered meaning, embracing epistemic pluralism. The logics and genres illuminated me to have conceptual clarity to reckon with the complex phenomena and nuances of transformative school leadership journey through the moments of to be or not to be, akin to the notion of the Hamletian dilemma (Panta, 2018).

First, the dialectical logics supported me in understanding and embracing several contradictory realities that co-exist together, promoting the notion of the interdependence of opposites, i.e. self and others, as viewed by Wong (2006). Amid contradictions and chaos, I looked for meaning, coherence and harmony. I expected my team members to support me, albeit being anticipative has been quite painful for me. I reached the crossroads of ontological (reality) and axiological (moral) standing. Gradually, I think and admit I am not always right, so I need to be humble and receptive. I need to acknowledge and incorporate the ideas of others. My paradigm shift may occur from 'this is what should be done' to 'I need to be open to several contradictions, alternatives, and possibilities. I have created dialogues to foster meaningful interaction and discussion, adhering to the notion of dialogical logics for multi-schema analysis (Luitel, 2019), employing different images and metaphors to make meaning and theorize my transformative school leadership praxis.

For the conceptual clarity of metaphor, Lakoff and Johnson (2003) mention that “metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature” (p.4). Claiming the connection between metaphor and emotion, Kovecses (2000) argues that human emotions are constructed mainly from an individual’s embodied experiences in different cultural settings. Further, highlighting the role of metaphors in making sense of our experiences, Kovecses (2015) argues that “metaphorical meaning does not simply arise from conceptual metaphors, their mappings, and their potential entailments. An enriched view of conceptual metaphor theory must pay serious attention to the role of context in metaphorical meaning construction” (p.14). He further illustrates that metaphors can emerge from bodily, situational, discourse, and conceptual-cognitive contexts. So, metaphorical logics oriented me to express meanings, thoughts, and feelings. For this, I used images and contextual and cultural terms and maxims pertaining to school leadership issues, and my journey of becoming and being a transformative school leader, envisioning and/or theorizing living transformative educational leadership theory – small 't' grounded theorizing of educational leadership connected to lived experiences to my context (but not limited to).

The narrative logics reveals multiple realities which facilitate me “to maintain the crisis of representation forming embodied, soulful, contextual, and reflective narratives for representing self and others” (Rai, 2017, p. 91). It promoted my storied and performative thinking embracing space, people, action, and time.

Highlighting the craft, practice, and possibility of poetry in research, Cahnmann (2003) argues that having developed a poetic voice, a scholar may express their ideas in multidimensional, penetrating, and accessible ways incorporating

rhythm, form, metaphor, and other poetic techniques. Sullivan (2020) argues that "we recognize the occasion for poetry as easily as we recognize a familiar road" (p. 111). Similarly, Apol (2021) posits that inquiry poems should be defensible poetically as a poetic craft is a crucial step in an inquiry. I used poetic genres to represent my multiple perspectives, vibrant voices and embodied interpretation, otherwise, they might not have been expressed concisely to convey multi-layered meanings of expression about aesthetic, spiritual, and emotional attachments, as viewed by Qutoshi (2016). I present a short poem to express how I maintain a balance and seek harmony in my everyday activities. Overall, multiple logics and genres helped me to create "multiple layers of learning, leading to a paradigm shift in thinking, viewing, and believing" (Luitel, 2009, p. 62).

Revitalizing the Self

I come home in the evening

Like a shaken murky water in a bottle,

Blurred, dimmed and suffocated,

Despite my efforts to keep calm during the day.

Peacefully, I enter my study room

With closed eyes and mindful breathing,

I reflect/savour upon my whole day's activities

And then, slowly the sand of stress gets settled.

I feel renewed and revitalized,

Keep conversing with my true self,

I accept myself as I am,

And then extend gratitude to the divinity.

Humility is my mantra,

Gratitude is my ambrosia

Forgiveness is my resilience,

And compassion is my solace.

(Poem VI, July 2021)

When required, I have used non-linguistic genres such as photographs, pictures, and drawings to depict multiple issues pertaining to school leadership.

As a practitioner of transformative research, I attempt to render coherence to my experiences and promote epistemic pluralism while unpacking multi-layered meanings of the complex phenomena and nuances of the transformative research paradigm. In the course of unpacking lived experiences and meaning-making through multiple logics and genres, I navigate the stories of struggles, roles of structure and agency while undergoing the three stages such as informing, reforming, and ultimately transforming adhering to the notion of transformative learning, Habermasian emancipatory interest, living educational theory, thereby developing living t educational leadership theory to my context (but not limited to) through the lens of critical spirituality.

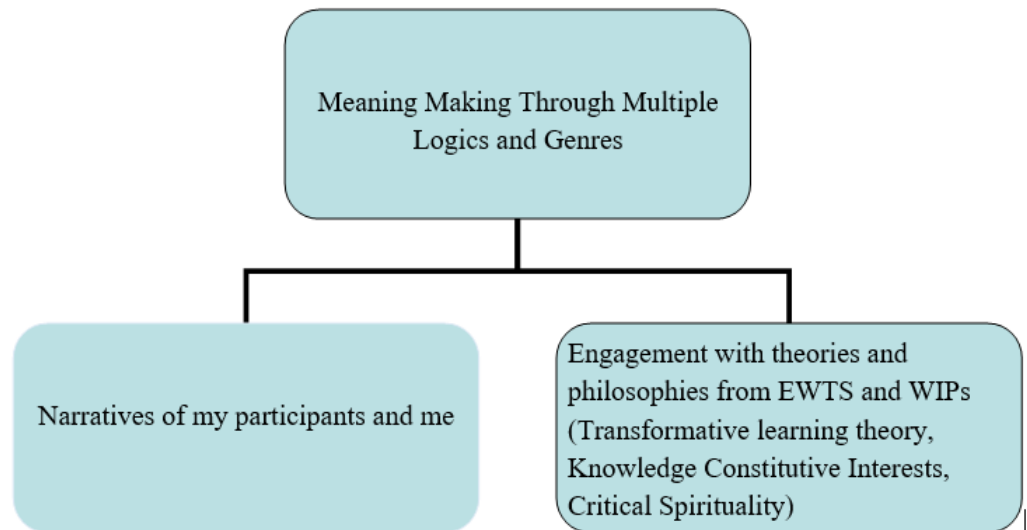


Figure 13: Meaning making process

My Inquiry Space and Participants

The agenda of my inquiry emerged from my engagement as a headteacher under challenging circumstances and my aspiration to create a transformative learning space at school. I have revisited my school leadership journey in different capacities and also keenly observed the leadership styles of school leaders about "knowing, being, and believing" (Thakur, 2017, p. 80) in my community and school contexts. I have unfolded my school leadership experiences of more than a decade. My community of practice and participating headteachers, including mine, constitute my research space (See Appendix I for the details of the participants). I have used my memory to talk about people and places. There are my memory participants and the participants I have inducted in this inquiry process. My day-to-day dialogue and interaction happened with school leaders, teachers, educational officers, students, parents/guardians and SMC and PTA members. I have presented their narratives of school leadership issues and concerns in my inquiry.

I chose two headteachers as my key research participants for in-depth exploration to envision a contextual living educational leadership theory- small 't'

praxis to my context (but not limited to) as I came to know that they have been putting lots of efforts into transforming their schools from scratch dealing with turbulence and adverse circumstances (e.g., lack of community support and trust, financial crisis, low motivation of teachers, status quo and so on). They have become the leading examples of headteachers in the context of Nepal, who are able to develop a *sanskar*¹⁴ of school leadership. I have chosen them purposively through a snowball process. They are found dedicated to bringing about transformation at their schools. They seem mindful of their leadership practices, considering the responsibility of headship as their *dharma*¹⁵. My first meeting with them left a beautiful impression on me. I was particularly fascinated by their strong willpower and optimism to make substantial changes happen at school. I took their narratives to enrich my discussion and discourse and crystallize my endeavors to co-create a transformative vision of school leadership. I do not serve as their mentor, but I want to collaboratively engage with them to develop an atlas of small 't' educational leadership theory

I have taken the support of the reference groups (in my inquiry, the reference group comprised teachers, educators, headteachers, educational officials, friends, students and relatives, who contributed to my inquiry and appeared in different chapters. They have provided their thoughts and observations upon my request on various educational leadership issues and concerns) and critical friends. I have four critical friends; Pabitra, Bijay, Krishna, and Shiva (See the Appendix for detail). They read my thesis chapters and provided me with their critical observations. Their critical input has been instrumental in enriching discussions about different nuances of school leadership. The following table 1 represents the mapping of research questions, data sources, theories, and participants and the meaning-making process.

¹⁴ Moral values, ethics, and culture

¹⁵ Religious principle or moral law/ an individual's responsibility

Table 1

Mapping of Research Questions, Data Sources, Theories, and Participants and Meaning-making Process

Inquiry Questions	Data Sources	Timeline	Theory Used	Participants/ Characters	Meaning Making Process
<i>1. How have we¹⁶ been conceiving our role as a school leader working toward developing the school as a transformative space?</i>	Narratives, observation, semi-factual genre, memory reconstruction, dialogues, reflective journal, poems, dream diary	2020 Feb to 2022 April	Transformative Learning Theory, Living Educational Theory, the <i>chakra</i> model of epistemology	teachers, critical friends, memory participants, semi-fictional participants	<i>Key strategy: shrawan, manana, nididhaysana</i> Poetic logics, logistics genres, imagination
<i>2. How have our emergent understanding and practices of educational</i>	Narratives, observation, reflective journal, dream diary, videos,	2020 June to 2020 February	Living Educational Theory, Theory of Care, Critical spirituality, critical consciousness, co-	Headteachers, teachers, critical friends, Students,	Narrative logics, dialogical engagement, dialectics,

¹⁶ Here we refers to myself and my participants—headteachers, teachers and critical friends

<i>processes supported (and otherwise) us to becoming a school leader who embraces compassion, care and inclusion?</i>	interactive meetings with stakeholders, poem (published)		inception leadership, positive psychology, knowledge Constitutive Interests	teacher educators, members of the reference group	critical self-reflection, theorizing
--	--	--	--	---	--------------------------------------

<i>3. How have we been enabling (and otherwise) our colleagues to embrace pedagogical change in their roles as teachers to create an engaging learning</i>	Narratives, observation, reflective journal, dream diary, pictures	2021 October to 2022 February	Living Educational Theory, pedagogical thoughtfulness, critical spirituality	Critical friends, teachers, members of the reference group, dream students,	Narrative logics, dialectics, crystalization, pedagogy of hope, lead by example, theorization,
--	--	--	--	---	--

<i>space?</i>					
<i>4. How have our (my participants and I) roles been in promoting (and otherwise) collaborative learning space at schools?</i>	Narratives, observation, diaries, reflective journals, interactive meetings/FGDs, myths	2021 May to 2021 November	relational leadership, living educational theory, theory of communicative action, <i>Gunas and chakras</i> (EWTs)	Headteachers, teachers, critical friends, Experts (educationists and social activists),	Narrative logics, pictures, dialogical and dialectical logics
<i>5. How have I been evolving as a school leader along the inquiry process?</i>	Vignettes, poems (composed and referenced) memory reconstruction reflective journal, diary	2020 February to 2022 July	, Knowledge Constitutive Interests, Living Educational Theory, critical spirituality, self-other dialectics	Myself, Family, Critical friends, members of the reference group, teachers and staff	Narrative logics, poetic logics, photos, Vulnerability, Critical self-reflexivity

Quality Standards

I focused on quality standards as mentioned by Luitel (2009) “...incisiveness as focus on a significant issue, illuminating as cultivating subtleties, verisimilitude as

likeliness, transferability as viability, pedagogical thoughtfulness as evoking readers and critical reflexivity as transformative process” (pp. 107-109). As a practitioner of autoethnographic inquiry, I am aware of my '*dharma*', i.e. procedural ethics and obligations, as well as my '*karma*', i.e. situational ethics, my action and multi-layered consciousness while undertaking my inquiry.

Trustworthiness

Maintaining trustworthiness in my inquiry has been a profound challenge. However, I have been able to manage it following its basic nuances. Pertaining to the basic issue concerning trustworthiness, Lincoln and Guba (1985) pose questions as: "How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences (including self) that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of ?" (p. 290). The authors argue for the need to come up with convincing and applicable findings that embrace truth value and neutrality. Trustworthiness embraces credibility. I have maintained the credibility of the inquiry through prolonged engagement with the participants, triangulation of information, constant observation, and member checking. Similarly, conformability is ensured by having an audit with members of the reference group and maintaining a reflective journal.

Highlighting the applicability concern of transferability, Tobin and Begley (2004) define it as the generalizability of inquiry. Transferability as a criterion of trustworthiness is about the viability or achievability of the research in another context. To maintain transferability, I tried to be honest and as revealing as possible while presenting my stories of personal and professional engagement to envision a living educational leadership theory- small 't' praxis-

**“Brahma
Satya,
Jagat
Mithya”**

driven orientation approach to my context (but not limited to).

Verisimilitude

Of autoethnographic work, Ellis (2004) mentions that “to me, validity means that our work seeks verisimilitude; it evokes a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable, and possible” (p. 23). Aligning with this view, Taylor (2014) contends that auto/ethnographic inquiry tends to achieve verisimilitude to broaden the perspectives of researchers and readers to understand different others empathically. Plummer (2001) opines, "What matters is how the story enables the reader to enter the subjective world of the teller- to see the world from her or his point of view, even if this world does not match reality" (p. 40). Pertaining to it, Bochner (2002) poses two questions: how useful is the story, and to what uses might the story be put.

I tried to connect the notion of verisimilitude to the idea from the Eastern Wisdom Traditions – *Brahma satya, jagat mithya* meaning that the Brahman is the ultimate reality, whereas the universe is illusory. *Mithya* does not mean wrong or futile, but it embraces the notion of epistemic humility (epistemic openness or flexibility). There is no single fixed reality. Realities keep changing. It might appear like a mirage in the desert. So, I focused on verisimilitude and developed my stories which might create a feeling of sameness or likeliness in readers and create a feeling in them as their own embodied narratives.

Pedagogical Thoughtfulness

A question that always strikes me is: how does a pedagogically thoughtful headteacher act for the betterment of children at school? The sense of pedagogical thoughtfulness helped me to place a high priority on children and pay heed to their educational concerns, as viewed by van Manen (1991), who further mentions that " to

see a child is to see possibility, someone in the process of becoming" (p. 1), and "facts and values are important for knowing how to act pedagogically" (p. 42).

van Manen (1991) further argues that pedagogical thoughtfulness is a multifaceted and complex notion that embodies critical reflection and possibilities in life. It is conditioned by a child's love, care, responsibility, and hope. I employ the standard of pedagogical thoughtfulness as I am also a teacher/pedagogue. Moreover, pertaining to my role as an instructional and pedagogic headteacher, there is a greater need for me to be reflective of my everyday pedagogical practice.

The six questions (*prashna*) inquired by six Rishis to Sage Pappalada constitute the mode of inquiry in the *Prashna Upanishad* (Khullar, 2020). "The questions discuss knowledge about Brahman, the relation of the individual (Purusha) with the universal (Atman), meditation, immortality and various other spiritual topics (Sastri, 1928, para. 1). It appears clear that the insights from the *Prashna Upanishad* emphasize that dialogue and collective participation play an important role in teaching and learning. It seems essential to encourage the learners to raise new questions, reflecting their curiosity to learn new things. So, the notion of pedagogical thoughtfulness supported me to reflect upon my pedagogical practices being sensitive to context. I encourage students to become independent and take their directions to make a difference in life.

Critical Self-Reflexivity

To me, critical self-reflection is a path to transformative leadership endeavour. "Close attention to personal feelings, thoughts and emotions open up autoethnography to a deep well of self-reflexivity" (Chang, 2016, p. 110). Kroth and Cranton (2014) mention that telling stories and reading others' stories support a process that is at the heart of critical reflection, and it is a key to the transformative learning process.

Taylor (2017) proposes that "critical reflection as a theoretical construct and reflective practice is seen as central to the theory of transformative learning since its inception" (p.77). Wall (2006) argues that "autoethnography is linked to post-modern philosophy and incorporates reflexivity and voice in social research" (p. 1)". Critical reflection offers an explicit focus on unfolding and critiquing "the power dynamics that frame practice and uncovering challenging hegemonic assumptions" (Brookfield, 2009, p. 293).

I delved deeper into my personal experiences of sharing my professional identity. I reflected on my experiences of transformative learning through critical self-reflection with embodied values in the mission of being and becoming, as viewed by Qutoshi (2016). Chang (2016) contends that self-reflection helps to capture the present perspective on an issue related to the topic of exploration. I maintained critical- reflexivity by accepting and confessing how I presented my situations.

There appears to be a call for a school leader to be critically reflective (Brookfield, 1995) to have a deeper and more critical understanding of the leadership venture. Fook and Askeland (2007) emphasize "the need for emotional preparation for the critical reflection process" (p. 520). Critical self-reflection as an ideology critique (Brookfield, 2009) helped me to be aware of my deep-seated beliefs and assumptions. Pertaining to my emotional upheavals, let me present a journal entry here.

Whenever I encounter any problem, I tend to be reactive and a bit nervous. I make some decisions in haste and regret them later. Making some decisions without consulting key people has often put me in a problem. Sometimes I become overexcited as well. There are some events of losing temper and feeling miserable. It appears pertinent for me to show my emotional maturity at school and present myself as a thoughtful leader. Can't I

deal with teachers convincingly and ensure their meaningful engagement? Do I need to rethink my leadership strategy and endeavours?

(Sept 22, 2021)

Embracing the notion of reflexivity in Buddhist epistemology, Dunne (2018) mentions that "reflexive action is crucial for action in the world" (p. 90). Referring to the idea of Sri Raman Maharshi on self-inquiry through contemplation, Shankarananda (2007) purports that "self-inquiry is the mother of all spiritual methods and all forms of meditation. It is direct, sleek, and effective. It requires no religious belief, nor any dogma to practice" (p. 1). His remarks underpin the role of self-awareness in critical self-reflexivity.

Vulnerability

Brown (2012) defines vulnerability as "uncertainty, risk and emotional exposure. Our willingness to own and engage with vulnerability determines the depth of our courage and clarity of our purpose" (p.2). She further argues that leading a meaningful and harmonious life is the path of vulnerability. Based on her arguments, it appears pertinent to deconstruct the notion of vulnerability and embrace it exposing our imperfect self, which might change our life in disguise.

Figure 14: Lord Krishna preaching Arjuna



Note : <http://surl.li/clibr>

Dear readers, it appears essential for us to unpack the conversation between Krishna and Arjuna. The *Bhagavad Gita* depicts how Arjuna became vulnerable and was caught in the ethical dilemmas of war, which might indicate our everyday challenges. "Arjuna, the protagonist of *the Bhagavad Gita*, demonstrates that no matter what your status in society and stature in life, we all live with blind spots. We

all carry the burden of faults and weaknesses (Shah, 2016, para. 5). So, it appears quite evident that we need to dare to become vulnerable. By embracing our imperfect selves (Brown, 2012), we might open the doors of possibilities acknowledging our blind spots and converting them into a point of self-transformation.

What follows is a poem that I happened to compose in a reflective mood, thinking about my vulnerabilities. Sometimes, I get even a bit anxious, assuming that my team members are talking about my vulnerabilities and making fun of me. Amid this, I heard my inner voice solacing me this way:

Vulnerability at Disposal

Why do people want to make you naked?

Do you know it?

It's because you are a leader.

*Why do you fear assuming that
your team members are celebrating your weakness?*

Let them expose your vulnerability,

As much as they can

Instead, you have to thank them,

For being kind to you in disguise.

You'd better not make an attempt

To hide your vulnerability,

It may grow like a cancer

You'd better expose it and tolerate

Stay bold and keep thriving out of your vulnerability.

(Poem VII, January 2, 2022)

For me, vulnerability is to take up a school leadership position amid uncertainty and chaos as a naïve person and to start a mission of creating a transformative space at school, where status quo is so deep-rooted, where people are keen to make a mountain out of a molehill and pursue blame game and where your commitment for transformation is always at risk. A school leader is often disappointed and desperate with a sense of being on the anvil in pursuit of bringing positive changes at school. Similarly, venturing into PhD in Educational Leadership when I was already in headlong debt and had a serious issue with time management was a vulnerability for me. I had shamelessly asked for money from friends and relatives and requested my father to sell a piece of land. Rejection from my sister to offer me a loan after the agreement was a hugely painful moment for me. I also requested the Education officer to grant me a leave, but my request was rejected, citing some legal hurdles to give me a study leave. Then I pleaded SMC chair to grant me occasional leave and requested the Assistant Headteacher to look after school affairs in my absence and other teachers to cover my classes. For me, vulnerability is also tolerating when my plan is rejected by higher authorities (SMC chair, Education officer) and sometimes even by my team members and start acting as per their will, compromising my plan strategically not to hurt them but to keep convincing them about my mission in a humble manner.

Svatah-pramanya-vada

To explore internal legitimacy in auto/ethnographic inquiry, I came across the concept of *Svatah-pramanya- vada* from Eastern Wisdom Traditions (*the Nyaya/ Mimamsa*¹⁷ philosophy/argument), which relates to the notion of intrinsic or internal legitimacy of knowledge (more of an inward process) and embraces the process of

¹⁷ A tradition of contemplation or critical investigation in Indian philosophy which offers rules for the interpretation of the vedic texts

sustaining the belief in the process of generating knowledge. The concept appears quite close to trustworthiness. In this regard, Chatterjee and Datta (2007) argue that “the validity of knowledge arises from the very conditions that give rise to that knowledge, and not from extra conditions” (p. 238). Although the authors have translated it to be validity (more of an outward process), I think it to be more of legitimacy. So, it appears that the generated knowledge might not depend on extra conditions. It is self-evident or self-generated conditions of me and my participants that illustrate the navigation of knowledge generation beyond traditional ritualistic practices of performing leadership. As knowledge generation basically depends on the contextual realities of the participants, my thorough engagement with the narratives of my participants maintained internal legitimacy with transformative sensibility.

Ethical Issues

Research is itself value-laden. Bochner and Ellis (2016) mention that "ethical issues in autoethnography can have greater consequences for our personal lives and other individuals in our stories too" (p.141). Pointing to the issue of using self as the primary source of research which might pose ethical dilemmas, Tullis (2013) argues that "autoethnographers, therefore, consider the personal, social, political, and ethical consequences of using their experiences as the primary source of research data" (p.246). These remarks highlight the need for a practitioner of autoethnographic inquiry to be mindful of how they represent themselves, others and the happenings of a group (Jago, 2002; Adams, 2008).

A transformative research practitioner is anticipated to be a change agent, whose inquiry journey is considered to be the journey of soul searching. Still, sometimes it might end up with a breakdown (Brown, 2012). Oliver (2015) mentions that a researcher must abide by the ethics of doing good and avoiding harm as much

as possible. At this crossroads of navigating uncertainties and dilemmas, I, as a transformative research practitioner, walked an ethical path keeping abreast of research values, vision, and integrity. I abided by the ethical guidelines to maintain confidentiality, anonymity, informed consent, freedom, respect, democracy, care, compassion, and humility. Being mindful of my values, vision, and integrity, I remained conscious and committed to adhering to personal, academic and social norms and values.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

Privacy in research is an essential ethical standard. Regarding anonymity, I have not disclosed the names of the informants or any other personal means of identification. I made use of aliases and codes for identifying people.

Ethics of Care

Considering care as an ethical task and a fundamental way of life, Vanlaere and Gatsmans (2011) argue that “care as a value normally refers to a positive qualification: attentiveness to the needs and wants of others” (p.16). I take care of my vulnerabilities along with those involved in the narratives of this research. The ethics of care seems to be highly embedded within the notions of truth and commitment to one’s responsibility, mutuality concerning self and others’ care and pedagogical relationship (Deniz & Gardina as cited in Qutoshi, 2016). Similarly, Lantieri (2003) mentions that understanding, empathy, and respect maintain a cooperative and caring spirit.

Ethics of Compassion

Germer (2009) mentions that “being compassionate means that we recognize when someone is in pain, we abandon our fear of or resistance to it, and a natural feeling of love and kindness flows towards the suffering individual” (p.33). Pertaining

to self-compassion as the ground of all emotional healing, Germer further mentions that self-compassion as a form of self-acceptance develops our mindfulness to help and care for ourselves. Highlighting the importance of the inherent value of forgiveness, Metzger (2008) reiterates the need to accept the inherent value of forgiveness. Metzger (2008) reaffirms the need to accept unexpected outcomes and realities of our deeds. It becomes evident that based on my own experience, I also feel rewarded by employing the principle of forgiveness as my possibly resilient strategy to sustain my optimism of life for transformation (*rupantaran garne jijiwisha*).

The sole aim of this inquiry was to explore my efforts of self-transformation (but not limited to). So, I always tried to be compassionate toward my teachers and empathize with their difficulties. An ethic of compassion has been a lifeline of leadership endeavour for me. Compassion helps me have an inclusive and equitable vision of all the school teachers giving priority to living collaboration and relationships (*jivanta sahakraya tatha sambandha*). It harmonizes relationships and builds up the team spirit at school. In my experience, even if I reach school calmly sometimes, due to the nature of some friends, I get upset and feel disheartened. What should I do then? So, at this moment, I always go for self-compassion, reflecting upon the criticism despite my efforts for the betterment of the school, adhering to the encouraging remarks of Mother Teresa.

She mentions that some people come into our life as blessings and some as lessons.

Ethics of Humility

Humility does not demean oneself and make anyone feel worthless



or inferior. It is also not about self-deprecation rather, it helps to drop our ego and mirrors our true nature (Dhiman et al., 2018). Highlighting the incredible power and joy of humility, von Hildebrand (1997) mentions that humility helps us respect everyone and see their dignity driving our ego from our soul. Metzger (2008) contends that “ know that if you make a mistake with the intent of doing good- if you engage with this task in a spirit of humility, and in touch with your higher purpose- all will be well” (p. 129). I perceive that my transformation is only possible through humility. If we are not humble, we stumble many times. I want to drop my ego and practice leadership without any egoistic feelings as far as possible to ensure inner peace, tranquillity, and harmony.

As humility practices vulnerability, it helped me to have a humble heart to respect the experience and perspectives of others. Considering humility as a critical leadership virtue, Dhiman et al. (2018) argue that “intellectual humility is a virtue that allows reason and understanding of one’s knowledge and one’s fallibility” (p. 581). Humility keeps a person open-minded and becomes ready to accept their shortcoming. I embrace the ethic of humility to build trust in my leadership practices. I need to liberate myself first to liberate others; for this, I find humility at the heart of leadership philosophy. While maintaining this ethical concern, I acknowledge and expose my vulnerabilities to develop my school leadership capability to a more prominent possibility. I take humility as the parachute of my leadership flight or might be the *mantra* of my leadership. It enables me to see good and positivity in others. Thus, to me, cultivating the virtue of humility seems essential to thrive as a transformative school leader in the making, adhering to my living philosophy that *I am a humble caretaker of this school*. Embracing the idea of humility-oriented

leadership has been a phenomenal experience for me to grow possibly as a full-fledged leader, who aspires to create a transformative space at school.

Metalogue and Way Forward

This chapter incorporated a multi-epistemic research design space making a fusion of Western-induced critical perspectives and seven interconnected ways of being, knowing and valuing from Eastern Wisdom Traditions (EWTs), through the lens of critical spirituality based on *the chakra model of epistemology*. I have used the constructs from the Eastern Wisdom Traditions to decolonize and recontextualize my inquiry.

It further unfolded spiritual epistemology in leadership as the basis of humility-oriented leadership with a deeper awareness, possibly guided by visionary knowing, which led to the emergence of two more subsidiary inquiry questions My effort to maintain humility helped me have a humble heart to respect the experiences and perspectives of others. I have used auto/ethnography as a living methodology in my inquiry. My inquiry space and participants (e, g., myself, headteachers, teachers, critical friends, and members of the reference group to offer space for dialectical and dialogical engagements) showcased my deeper engagement to envision living educational leadership theory- small 't' praxis. As leadership is an evolving process, ethical sensibility and eco-spirituality perspective appear to be driving forces for meaningful leadership. I have used multiple logics and genres to uncover multi-layered meanings embracing collaborative epistemic space.

CHAPTER IV
 JOURNEYING INTO CONCEIVING LEADERSHIP ROLES: BREAKING THE
 COCOON

This chapter focuses on the first emergent research question of my inquiry: *How have we (my participants and I) been conceiving our role as a headteacher working toward developing the school as a transformative learning space?* With this research question at my disposal, I navigate through major themes- *retrospection for setting the stage, no more a queen bee: demystifying the myth, trajectory of the leadership journey, unlearning and relearning leadership approaches, taking a proactive turn, reconstructing the identity, and envisioning possibly a transformative space.* This chapter explores key features pertaining to creating school as a transformative learning space from the quagmire of stagnation and disempowering forces embracing possible leadership epistemic standpoints. It incorporates the narratives with a critical observation to nurture the process of envisioning a living educational leadership theory- small ‘t’ by identifying the existing leadership issues and portraying the conventional leadership approaches and practices that disempowered my participants and me and posed a challenge to shift further.

Figure 15: Butterflies emerging from cocoon



Note: <http://surl.li/chcmj>

Venturing into Uncharted Territory

Having conceived my role as a headteacher, possibly with a transformative sensibility, I unpack my efforts to create an equitable and engaging learning space at school. I also unpack some disempowering forces and status quo as bottlenecks and

my efforts to acknowledge team members as empowering and resilient forces to create a collegial learning space where they get an opportunity to be the agents of change. I have also employed imagination as a semi-factual genre of writing as an epistemic technique in my inquiry. The characters embedded in and emerging from my experiences of professional life as a student, teacher, in-charge, vice-principal, and principal, including their roles and attributes, facilitate the performers to have an understanding of their potential roles in this “plurivocal performatively imagined space” (Luitel, 2009, p. 65). The following semi-factual account demonstrates my dilemmas as a headteacher and my awareness that guides me to pursue the school leadership journey with optimism and lead by example (Baldoni, 2008), conceiving my transformative role.

It was someday in May 2020. I was sitting on a chair on the roof of my house in Kathmandu. I am writing to disorient my leadership dilemmas with the flight of imagination. I happen to be in the middle of a dense forest in a strange land, like a confused crow lost in the mist. It is morning time. The whole forest is enveloped in dense fog. The wilderness appears very scary. Anything unexpected might happen in this solitary place. Then I start breathing rapidly, a bit confused about the further journey, my destination. Gradually, the weather becomes clear as the rays of the sun dispel the blanket of fog. The forest starts shining upon the touch of the sunlight. "It's miraculous", I shouted in joy. The serene and breathtaking beauty of the surrounding hypnotizes me. A bit further on the top of the hill, a small cottage-like structure is seen. Maybe a saint is meditating there and reaching the moment of Samadhi. A flash of new hope emerges in me. It is said that hope sustains life. Based on this optimism, I embolden myself to pursue my journey.

I ponder upon the fleeting moments of life and upheavals I have been encountering so far as to reach my destiny. The overall scenario is painting the collage of my life as if new avenues of opportunities are there for me to explore in the depth of the forest. I feel like staying there longer, keeping fear aside. I am not sure of my destination, but my inner voice urges me to pursue my journey without any further ado, maybe miles to go ahead before I sleep. I look for a way to get out of the forest. But there is no visible way to get out of it. A considerable confusion looms over which route to take further and where the way will lead me. My vision gets blurred amid uncertainties. I get caught in an inner dilemma. I get a bit scared when I hear the sounds of animals in the wilderness. As I contemplate my further journey, a flash of inspiration occurs to me. I have my mission to achieve. Being committed and emboldened, my life journey to the land of uncertainty continues, maybe a journey of my soul searching and emancipation, a journey of honesty and integrity. It does not matter where I reach, but I need to keep moving. Perhaps to move ahead is the law of life. The journey continues...

(Journal # 1, November 2021)

Retrospection for Setting the Stage

Dear readers, first of all, I present an episode pertaining to the leadership style of the headteacher of the school where I was a student and the impression imprinted in my mind about the headteacher as an authoritarian figure (Wang & Liu, 2019).

Figure 16: An authoritarian teacher



Note: shorturl.at/ckos1

All of a sudden, Mr. Shridhar, the headteacher of my school, enters the classroom. All of us stand up to greet him, a bit bowing our heads. We do this when the headteacher/teacher comes to the class. Moreover, the headteacher is a scary figure for us. Then he allows us to take our seats. It is the Science period. But the Science teacher is late due to some tasks. The headteacher moves around the class quietly, making his appearance look fully imposing. Who is he staring at? Is he staring at me? I quiver a bit due to fear of punishment. I have seen him punishing students by making them do sit-ups by holding their hands many times, and sometimes even using a stick and slapping. This is a frequent scene at school.

Dear readers, do you know why I was fearful of the headteacher? It was because we did not get any love, care, and compassion from him. In the meantime, he shouts, "Get out of the room!" We get fearful and start trembling at the shouting of the headteacher. Thank God! I am not the one who he is shouting at. Immediately, he sends two students out of the class. We do not know why he is sending them out. Maybe they are making noise, ignoring the presence of the headteacher. Blushing and feeling a bit ashamed of their classmates, the students get out of the classroom quietly. They are asked to kneel down outside the class. The headteacher threatens all the students to be mindful of the disciplinary codes of conduct. By then, the Science teacher had arrived. He becomes slightly hesitant as he sees the headteacher in the class. The headteacher asks the Science teacher to be strict and not to spare anyone. Then he goes out of the

class. A sigh of relief for all of us after his departure.

(Journal # 3, December 2021)

The narrative mentioned above depicts the headteacher as an authoritarian figure, possibly a disempowering image of a leader, thereby demonstrating the dictatorial leadership of a headteacher that negatively impacts the performance of teachers weakening their authority and snatches the autonomy of the learners. Now I present another episode about the leadership style of the principal of the school where I worked as a teacher and vice-principal.

Principal Mahesh enters the staffroom with a cheerful appearance. He greets all the teachers there. The teachers hurriedly respond to his greeting. He asks us if we have any problems. He requests all the teachers to take care of students and take a few minutes to motivate them. He further says, "*If we deal with students positively, they will learn better*". His smiling appearance and motivational attitude make everyone feel good. A sort of positive vibe is created among the team members. We, as teachers, feel glad to have a caring and amicable principal like him. Sometimes I ponder upon his way of dealing with people. What is the magic behind his leadership strategy? The students are also pleased to talk with him. He is never found boasting that he is the principal. He is close to anyone. I have found guardians/parents praising our principal wholeheartedly as a faithful guardian of the school. What a charming personality! They are proud of sending their children to school under the principalship of such a caring person. He is a role model for all of us. I guess this is the beauty of being a school leader. I happen to compose a poem acknowledging his soothing and inspirational leadership strategy.

You are there, so we are

You are there at school,

So, we are there
Your cheerful appearance
Makes everything clear.

Your arrival at school
Brings a wave of joy,
Your amicable dealing,
Soothes our woe.

(Poem VIII, January 2021)

In the poem above, I might seem to be glorifying his charisma as a school leader, considering him a lovable star. In fact, I find it a joy in meeting and talking to him. His welcoming attitude means a lot to me. He is a reservoir of knowledge and wisdom. He is a dynamic person. He is good at sports, music and other activities. He is ready to support anyone in whatever way possible. But he never makes any compromise in terms of responsibility. He seems to be putting a lot of effort into creating a collegial space at school. On the contrary, my school headteacher seems to appear as a disempowering image to me. His stern nature had some sort of paralyzing effect on me. Why did he behave and present himself that way? It could be due to cultural and societal beliefs that a headteacher has to be different from other teachers, and every student has to get scared of them. We have our conventional myth that “*vidhyarthi bhaerpani u ta head sir sangh pani daraundaina* meaning being students, they do not take any fear of the headteacher”. What a mindset! It appears they are guided by *the Manipur Chakra*, i.e. existential knowing (See Chapter III). Our school headteacher might have presented himself that way to maintain this legacy. This deep-seated belief has alienated the headteacher from the team members, which hinders

group engagement. Keeping distance from the team members might not help a leader to perform effectively. He is missing the opportunity to get close to teachers and get to know about their problems. He also might have been guided by the ego (guided by *the Svadhithan chakra*) that I am the headteacher, and I need to be different from other teachers, keep a distance and be authoritative. As a student, I never got a chance to talk with him. I got fearful even to greet him.

At the beginning of my school leadership, I probably adopted the authoritarian style of leadership as an influence of my school headteacher. Gradually, I follow the strategy of Mahesh, my school principal. These days at school, I meet the teachers and greet them. I do not wait for them to greet me. I ask them if everything is fine with them. I try to get close to them as their friend. I am keen to find some points to inspire my team members. I talk to students of pre-primary to secondary levels, and ask them if they have any problems or if they would like to share anything with me, such as the update on their studies, how they support parents at home, and the way their parents treat them. I have come to know many issues that students are facing, which might help me collaborate with parents to solve those issues and increase parental engagement. I encourage teachers to take a few minutes of class every day to motivate the students as motivation directs human behaviour in a meaningful manner (Dhiman, 2019). With a shifting perspective, I am keen to envision a living educational leadership theory- small 't' praxis for my context (but not limited to) based on my past, present and future roles as a headteacher to make meaning of my contribution to school by embracing the ethos of living practice and living leadership (Whitehead, 1989).

No More a Queen Bee: Demystifying the Myth

Teacher Manisha of headteacher Shrijana's School (Shreejanshil Secondary School) shares, *"In whatever condition the school has reached today, it has all been possible through hard work and dedication of headteacher Shrijana. If she were not here, I would doubt the existence of the school. It might have been merged with another school nearby"*. The teacher wholeheartedly praises the efforts of headteacher Shrijana. Perhaps she might have been guided by *the Manipur Chakra*, *i.e.* existential knowing that gave her confidence and courage. As she shares, a question strikes my mind: does a person alone take an organization to the apex of success?; why do we run after the vision of a person?; why do we simply glorify a person?; can we not create a resilient system?; what about the future of that organization when that charismatic person leaves the organization?

Like the sharing of teacher Manisha about her headteacher, I would like to present a quite soothing sharing of teacher Namrata of my school. One day at school, after four years of headship, I was in a dilemma whether to quit or continue it. I was stuck in the quicksand of gloom and uncertainty, otherwise in a sink or swim situation. I was slightly frustrated and discouraged observing a myriad of disappointing situations at school, such as teachers' reluctance to change, status quo, the apathy of the community toward school, a leg-pulling attitude, a lack of resources and so on. Noticing a gloom of despair on my face, one day, she came to me and said convincingly;

Sir, I guess you are not feeling well today. You may have been shocked by the hurtful remarks of some teachers. We understand that you are putting your best efforts into transforming the school. But see, all five fingers of your hand are not equal. We have colleagues of diverse nature and attitude. After

all, you are a queen bee. We have a huge hope from you. Don't think of quitting the headship. It would not do any good to you as well. Remember, you got full support from the teachers while being the headteacher. No one opposed you. But after being the headteacher, some of them may have grievances. It's hard to make everyone happy. I feel the support you got from all the teachers is an achievement for you. I do not know how you have taken it. Everyone noticed a spark of leadership in you, and they agreed to make you the headteacher. (March 2020)

I pondered on the gravity of the teacher's words as she said that five fingers of a hand are not equal. I find her remark entirely meaningful. It also reflects the diversity of an organization. Even if I want everybody to be of similar attitude and behaviour, it is not possible. I came across a quote to ease my dilemma, "Not all the fingers are of the same length, but when they are bent, all stand in equal length. Life becomes easy when we bend and adjust to certain situations". Bending and adjusting to a situation is a quite challenging job for me, maybe because of my ego factor (guided by *the Svadhistan chakra*). But as the headteacher, I think that I have to make a lot of compromises to create a high-performing team to enhance quality education at school, in line with the thought of Lantieri (2003), who mentions that "teamwork becomes the modus operandi for getting things done" (p. 190). But I find the metaphorical intent of the queen bee, *rajas-like* quality quite disempowering. I want to demystify this notion of holding the key authority. I need to critically see this point of being a queen bee and put efforts to sustain the trust the team members offered me.

During my school days, I struggled with disempowering culture and the status quo of school, where students were not allowed to have their say. It was a sort of

imposing culture promoted by an authoritarian headteacher. My retrospective travel to the initial days of my leadership and critical reflections on those moments support me in improving my leadership practices to envision a living educational leadership theory- small 't' approach in the context of Nepal.

To probe more on the issue of being a queen, I consulted Bijay, one of the critical friends of my inquiry, to share his critical observation on this theme so that I could rethink the narratives of being a queen bee. In what follows is the conversation between me and my critical friend Bijay.

Researcher: Namaskar sir! How are you doing?

Bijay: Namaskar sir! I am good. And how are you?

Researcher: I am well. First of all, I would like to thank you for accepting my request to go through my thesis chapters as a critical friend. I want to deconstruct the notion of being a queen bee, as said by a teacher. What's your take on it?

Bijay: Regarding this, the point to ponder is how our society keeps individuals at the centre. Our community generally projects and glorifies an individual as an agent of change. I think we need to be critical of this social mindset as well. If somebody calls you a queen bee, it's ok. But the point is how you perceive this archetype for your leadership journey. If you become jovial that you are a queen bee, then you tend to be a narcissist. You need to ask: why have people called me a queen bee? , what special features do I have to be a queen bee? Why do people want to glorify me?,

Researcher: Yeah! I wonder why people appreciate much in front of me. What should I do in this context?

Bijay: I think you need to be mindful of the other side of the narratives. I mean the narratives that might demean your efforts as the headteacher.

Researcher: Yeah. It's thought-provoking. Thank you sir for your critical observation on my narratives.

Bijay: Welcome sir.

Dear readers, akin to the sharing of my critical friend Bijay, I would like to deconstruct my school leadership identity as a queen bee, rather, I prefer the metaphor of an unfolding lotus to portray the evolving process of leadership. Considering oneself a queen bee might lead to narcissism (Brown, 2012). To this end, I need to be critically reflective and keep unfolding my identity, being mindful of the other side of the narratives.

Trajectories of Leadership Journey

It was someday in 2014. I was with some teachers in the staff room. The teachers having leisure periods were there. Some of them were going through the students' assignments, while others were busy in a friendly chat. As I was also having my leisure period, I turned on my laptop to check my emails. In the meantime, teacher Dev said,



Note: <http://surl.li/chcqq>

Sir, upon your arrival last month, many of us thought that a new teacher who could take the responsibility of headteacher has arrived. There is a growing dissatisfaction with the current headteacher. We hope very soon you will be requested to take up the responsibility of headship. All of us are ready to support you. We want the betterment of school. We want a visionary leader to lead us. The school is about to collapse. The number of students is declining. Please don't say 'no' when you are requested to be the headteacher. Take this as an opportunity to enhance your leadership competence.

The teacher appeared quite serious while sharing it. I was deeply reading his face. Other teachers who were there agreed upon what he said. The bell rang, and then I went to the class. In the evening at home, I deeply thought about what the teacher said and the way other teachers agreed upon what he said. I was not willing to be the headteacher immediately. Then I was pursuing my MPhil degree. I was also thinking of a University career. Once, Netra, one of my Master's level professors said, "*Being a bright scholar, why are you confined to a school? Why don't you pursue a university career? It is also not easy to be the head teacher of a community school. There are issues of seniority and hierarchy. But when the team wants, it's possible*". Having listened to the teacher, I questioned myself, why do they want to offer me a leadership position where there are already some teachers?; am I competent enough to meet their expectations?" Maybe they want a completely devoted leader to bring about some changes at school, possibly creating a cohesive team. The teacher said something like this;

The school is going to collapse. It's not time to talk about the seniority issue. It's time to sustain the school. Let's support our new teacher to be the headteacher. As an English teacher, he may take the lead and enhance the quality of education at school. The school is facing a difficult situation. We need to go for some kind of sustainable resolution. How can we save our face if school collapses and merges with another school? It is our prestige issue well.

When I met the SMC chairperson for the first time, he shared about the overall problems of the school. He indirectly wanted me to take the lead. I came to know the intent of SMC and teachers and some community members whom I met. They anticipated a dynamic headteacher to address the need of the hour brought forth by the

leadership crisis at school. Irrespective of ideologies, everyone was ready to support me. "*Should I remain a teacher seeking my comfort zone or take the responsibility of leading a school?*" I asked myself. There was no prompt answer in my mind. I had the experience of working as a principal of an institutional school. Then I was pursuing my MPhil. So, they wanted me to take the lead. It is not that easy to be the head of a community school. There are issues and concerns of stakeholders in terms of shouldering the responsibility to a person. I recall one of the persons saying something like "*vidhyalayako sancho launu bhaneko sanu kura hoina* meaning that *handing over the keys (entire responsibility) of school is not a small thing.*" Upon sharing of some school leaders and stakeholders, it seems clear that there are several bottlenecks at community schools. It is challenging to take a decision and make the team work as expected. Leg pulling attitude and the tendency to make a mountain out of a molehill are high. Headteachers and teachers have more engagements and practices elsewhere than their assigned responsibilities at school, akin to a Nepali proverb '*kam kuoro ekatir kumlo boki Thimi tir-* meaning running for minor leaving major at the table. I have closely observed such problems in community schools. Amid this, I did not want to put myself in the inferno. I was engaged in writing/compiling books for school and college levels. Apart from school time, I could invest my remaining time in my academic growth. "*How would you respond to the SMC members if they requested you*"? This question struck my mind. Therefore, I was caught in a dilemma.

I also had a meeting with some long-serving teachers at my school. There was no alternative to venture into the leadership journey. Several waves of thoughts whirled in my mind. I also thought that some teachers might want to see how I would

lead. I tried to reckon with the gravity of the situation. To convince me, teacher Namrata said;

Generally, there occurs a tug of war to be the headteacher at a school. Even the aspiring candidates for the position of headship file the case in court if they are not appointed. But in your case, even if you are junior to some of the teachers, everyone is ready to support you with the hope that you might make some collaborative efforts to bring about positive changes at school. Why do you hesitate to take up the role? Take it as a symbol of respect from our side. After all, you don't have to carry school on your shoulders. It's teamwork. I cannot be a headteacher even if I want because I do not deserve it. But you deserve it by your level, qualification and performance.

These all questions, queries, and anticipations gradually inspired me to take up the responsibility of the headship.

I started questioning myself, "So should I reject the offer of headship like a coward? How would community people take me if they came to know I didn't want to be the headteacher? Where would I get transferred if the school collapsed? What would be my identity at another school?" My identity issue was also associated with it. I thought the community would recognise my efforts if I could give some momentum to school. So what should I do? Should I continue my professional life being the headteacher right after two months of taking a permanent appointment as a secondary level teacher? "*Sometimes one needs to take a bold decision in life*", I auto-suggested myself. The inner core of my heart was urging me to be the headteacher. It might be a test of my life. Let me see what happens and how the pages of my life keep turning.

In a meeting, teacher Nisha said, " *We are impressed by your qualification, position, attitude and behaviour. One stark reality is: if we cannot give a message to the community that there is an immediate transition in the leadership at school, it might turn out to be costly. There is a tussle between SMC and the school administration. A message of conflict and underperformance has spread in the community. So, at this critical time, you have to take the lead.*" Similarly, teacher Dinesh said, " *We have complete trust in you. We are ready to work under your leadership. We will fully support you. At any cost, we need to save the school from any untoward happening*". In a similar tone, teacher Manita added, " *Sir, your income may decline. But if you could take the lead to keep the image of the school, it would be well appreciated by the community. It would be a great achievement even for you*". Yet teacher Mamata said, " *At this moment, there is an anticipation of the community, SMC, teachers and even senior students that you will take the lead. You need to take the lead without any second thought on the foundation of this trust and confidence.*"

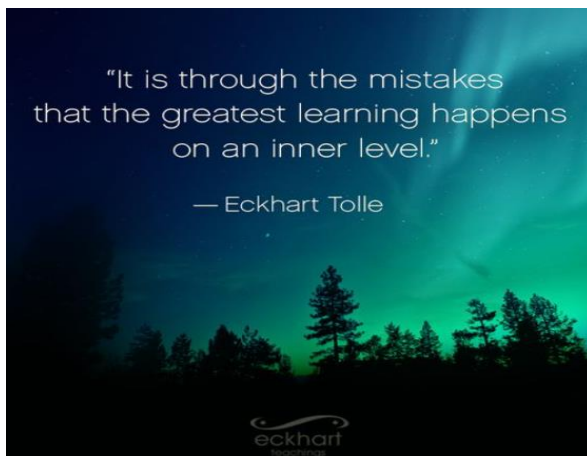
Having listened to the teachers who participated in the meeting, I asked myself, " *What would be the pros and cons of accepting and/or rejecting the offer of taking the lead in difficult circumstances at school*"? I thought even if I rejected, someone would have to take the lead and get ahead with a new perspective and dynamism. I thought most of the teachers wanted to break the status quo and give momentum to the school. I spent a few days pondering upon these waves of feelings and thoughts. I was mentally prepared to take the lead when the SMC formally requested me to do so, and the then headteacher was amicably willing to go for a smooth leadership transition.

It appears quite hard to sustain the leadership image after assuming leadership responsibility. A pertinent challenge might be to align with the expectations of the

people around, akin to my inquiry participant headteacher Shrijana who shares, “As the headteacher, I have to make a lot of sacrifices and compromises, even though it hurts me sometimes.” I also ask myself, “Am I prepared to pursue the leadership position? Can it be an opportunity for me to be possibly a game changer? Sometimes I think, “I am supposed to be the headteacher amid uncertainties. Mobilizing the team might be a stark challenge for me. But I might be able to do it through my experience and expertise. It might be an opportunity to serve and enhance my leadership capability. Opportunity does not always knock at your door.” Having thought so, I became ready to take the responsibility of the headship and started making a deeper analysis of the overall affairs of the school.

Unlearning and Relearning Leadership Approaches

To lead a school in a calibrated manner by creating an engaging learning



Note : <http://surl.li/chdfe>

space, I need to remain tolerant, empathetic, compassionate, and humble (Brown, 2012) to encourage team members to convert their apathy into empathy, status quo into dynamism, and reluctance into willingness. I remain committed to maintaining a balance between my life and school leadership, ensuring peace, joy and happiness at the workplace.

I have started communicating more with people, even if I do not feel like communicating with them. I do realize that if I did/do not communicate, it would/will be costly for me. Though it sometimes hurts my ego and leaves me

on the verge of despair, I do it as I lead a team. A leader has to tolerate the intolerable. (Journal, August 2020)

Being a leader appears to be one of the most challenging choices one makes in life. Leadership demands a paradigm shift in thought and action. Actionable strategies might support leaders to increase influence to run an organization smoothly and jovially, mustering the courage to deal with difficult circumstances (Brown, 2017). With my shifting perspective, contemplation and soul-searching pertaining to my living leadership theory, I have come to realize that it is an opportunity for me to maintain a cordial relationship with the team members to create a collegial environment at school. To this end, I need to make my team feel worthwhile acknowledging and recognizing their efforts. I have to preserve their pride and self-esteem. I have to begin my day with the praise and appreciation of my team members. Many times at school, in a reactive mood, I asked teachers to do some tasks without any consultation, demonstrating my authority as the headteacher. Now I have come to realize how much detrimental it had/has been to my team members. My emerging insight is that I will never say ‘you’re wrong’, but instead deal indirectly to make them realize their fault as I have to let my team members save their face. There are some pertinent questions that I guess every leader has to ponder: Do our leaders begin with praise and appreciation? Do our leaders point to the shortcomings of followers indirectly with the intent to support their growth without making a mountain out of a molehill? Do our leaders talk about their vulnerability first? Do our leaders avoid arguments and remain tolerant? Are our leaders good listeners?, and so on. My emerging understanding is that a leader may earn the trust of the team members. But a key challenge for a leader is to sustain the conviction. Once leaders become

distrustful, they get into the realm of doubts that might be costly for a leader. Then there occur issues of transparency, integrity, and accountability.

I am in the process of learning, unlearning and relearning leadership. This process incorporates my endeavours to reconstruct and/or unfold my identity. The following poem depicts my identity dilemmas.

Vicissitudes (Lila) of Life

Broke, desperate and disappointed,

Fragmented, shattered and scattered.

Lonely, underestimated, and ignored,

Blurred, suffocated and confused.

Compromise, optimism and patience,

Faith, trust and tolerance.

Compassion, gratitude and humility,

Passion, courage and integrity.

(Poem VIII, May 2022)

The poem illustrates my unfolding identity as a school leader. I am possibly in the process of constructing, deconstructing as well as reconstructing my identity as a school leader. It might be my lifetime opportunity to leave perhaps a positive impression on the community. I need to do something that matters for school. To be more committed and attentive to my responsibility, I have to co-create my professional identity by working collaboratively with teachers and stakeholders. When I became the headteacher, I had a bigger ambition to bring drastic changes at

school. I was fast and furious at making plans and taking decisions. I gradually started facing setbacks at every stage. Needless to say, I thought I would be able to change the mindset of the entire community, and make teachers exceptionally dedicated and supportive. There would be a flow of students within a few years. At this race, I gradually started fumbling and faltering. I became desperately helpless. I wanted to resign from the position of headship. Later, I come to realize that I need to change myself to change others. Then I begin soul searching, gather confidence, analyze the pros and cons of the situations and take steps strategically, though it appears to be a *rajas-like* quality. I had a tough time when I became reactive. So, with my emerging insight, I take every challenge as an opportunity to unfold myself. I experience a sort of personal paradigm shift in me. I have come to realize my number of shortcomings in being critically self-reflective, pondering upon the gravity of the situation and acting mindfully, not as a transactional leader but possibly as a leader with a transformative sensibility.

Taking a Proactive Turn

I present here how my nature of being reactive has put me in unexpected problems despite my efforts to bring changes at school. Whenever teachers come late to school, I get reactive. If I find teachers engaged in some informal talks, I get reactive. If I do not find teachers with lesson plans, I get reactive. I get reactive to disciplinary issues of students. There are hundreds of reasons for me in a day to be reactive. I find problems everywhere at school. A series of reactive episodes of the day leaves me miserable and frustrated at the end of the day. Sometimes I even become reactive with non-teaching staff owing to their under-performance of their assigned duties. Sometimes, a day, a week or a month passes this way. Some teachers come to me and ask me not to be reactive. Getting quickly reactive to the

shortcomings of teachers aggravates the situation beyond my expectation. My nascent view is that as I get reactive, the teachers will be alert and sincerely carry out their assigned responsibilities. It is my illusion, I guess. It may be my leadership mirage. On the contrary, they start making a mountain out of a molehill. I gradually realised that I needed to change this pattern of behaviour. I present a short narrative pertaining to my reactive behaviour and its consequence.

It was someday in August 2019; I found the classrooms not cleaned. Immediately I called sister Rita and asked her reactively what the reason behind not cleaning the classrooms was. She did not say anything then and started cleaning the classrooms. But she came to the office later and expressed her grievances about my reactive nature. She said, "Head sir! I am also working hard. As I had to look after small kids of ECD (Early Childhood Development) upon a teacher's request, I could not manage time to clean these rooms. I do realize that this is my weakness. But I am disappointed by how you rebuked me in front of teachers and students. You may think about how I felt then. I do know that I am a low-paying staff at school. But I am also a human being. I also have my self-esteem. Please don't be reactive that way.

Then she went out of the office. I started pondering upon what she said about my reactive nature. She was right. As a team leader, I had to unlearn my ways of dealing with staff, even when they are at fault. I realized my weakness. I need to treat every staff equally. When I do not deal with staff proactively, I face problems every day. My reactive nature has become the root cause of my stress. Teachers create problems, staff members do not perform well, and so on. But my reactive nature makes the situation even worse and makes me feel vulnerable. A headteacher is expected to be versatile. It is said that a headteacher has to be dynamic, and flexible.

They have to share hope and optimism, but I am spoiling the situation. What to do now? I got caught in an inner dilemma. Suddenly, I happened to write as;

Everything may not always go as per my expectation. I cannot have a hundred percent of what happens. I need to strategically and proactively pinpoint their weakness without making them feel humiliated or demoralized. My team needs my support, care, encouragement, and empathy. I am their guardian. I must be a humble caretaker of school. I need to be strict, but there is a way to be so. Keeping in mind that there is no friend in an organization. I have to create a cohesive team amid contradictions. It appears essential to set a boundary (Lakshaman rekha) for myself. I have to learn the art of leading, then it might make me happy.

There are many issues at school. Grievances of students, teachers, staff members and guardians, lack of resources, politics and many other issues at hand. I also feel overwhelmed. But as a leader, I need to cope with these problems. Every obstacle needs to be handled with utmost care and thought. My experience says that being reactive won't help, instead makes the situation worse.

(Dream Diary, October 26, 2021)

Then I recalled how teacher Manita shared her impression of my leadership style, even pointing out my shortcomings,

We are glad that the entire context/milieu of school has changed after you arrived at school. Sometimes you got disappointed and tendered your resignation; then we were reduced to tears as well. Under your leadership, many significant changes are happening at school. If I have to point out your shortcomings, there are some points I feel like sharing with you. Even now,

you are not able to understand the sentiments of all the teachers. You occasionally become reactive without understanding the root causes of the problem. I think you cannot manage time effectively and understand the true nature of team members. Sometimes we find you desperate to complete the tasks near deadlines. You remain busy, but without delegating the responsibilities. If you delegate the responsibilities, your burden reduces. You can make teachers more responsible by assigning them specific tasks. It might develop a feeling of ownership in teachers as well. Be like a leader, sir. We are eager to do our assigned responsibilities as per your expectation.

(18 December 2020)

I was moved by the sharing of Manita. She highlighted some key issues such as time management, delegation of authority, and acting like a leader. I have some reservations about what she shared. Honestly speaking, I am a bit critical of what she said, though she revealed my efforts at school. I am inspired by the views of Fiarman (2015), who mentions that the task of leadership is arduous, but a leader is not alone in doing it with quest and integrity. So, I feel that I do not have to shoulder the entire burden of school. To this end, the art of delegating responsibility appears to be pertinent. I think that I can gain the trust of team members. But a pertinent challenge for me is to capitalize on the trust of team members and stakeholders. It appears that I need to be more humble and acknowledge their efforts wholeheartedly. The following journal entry depicts some proactive changes happening in me:

As a headteacher, I need to try my best to be proactive and tolerant as much as possible. I must have the courage to lead and make a difference with a transformative sensibility. I need to acknowledge more dynamism, strength and performance of the team members than looking for their fragilities. No

fragility, but agility has to be my priority if I genuinely aspire for transformation to happen. I have started delegating roles to the team members with autonomy. I pay heed to the ideas and suggestions of the team members. My emerging strategy is – rather than presenting myself in a commanding and reactive manner, I follow the other way around so that people do the work without getting hurt, akin to a Nepali adage ‘sarpani maros lathi pani nabhachiyos- let snake be killed without breaking the lathi (stout stick)’. I need to deal strategically being mindful of the overall affairs of school. Only motivated team members might contribute to creating an engaging learning space at school.

(Dream Diary, Nov. 13, 2021)

I am possibly mindful that my every thought, emotion, and action generates an impact on team members. Then I start asking teachers if they have any problems, support them in their pedagogical issues as an instructional leader of the school, and put an effort to manage resources as demanded by teachers. I also encourage them to make maximum use of the available resources. Most importantly, I ask them how any problem can be solved. They come up with several ideas to solve the problems. I find some hard-working teachers working enthusiastically and wholeheartedly, and they are found inspiring other team members as well. It is said that a problem shared is a problem halved. We collectively think of better alternatives to solve a problem. I hold a staff meeting for sharing and consultation regarding any pertinent issue. I ask myself- how can I develop a feeling of leadership in all teachers? It would be nice to inculcate the feeling that ‘I am also a leader of this organization. To this end, the responsibilities are delegated to the deputy headteacher, academic in charge, and level in charges. They take care of respective levels and support the teachers if they come

across any issues. They submit a progress report monthly. They see me in between if they need my support to sort out any problems, otherwise, they take the initiatives to solve problems themselves. Everyone feels respected and empowered. I feel glad to see teachers busy planning their lessons, developing materials, and engaging students in different curricular and extracurricular activities. Everything seems to be going well. I am trying to be a catalyzer for my team. A positive vibe seems to be created among team members. Aligning with the ideas of Jelfs (2011), it appears to me that connection and coherence, a sense of empathy, compassion, respect and trust, and showing concern for the teachers and students may develop school as a wonderful haven of living pedagogy; thereby enhancing a transformative learning space.

Quest for Unfolding *Sattvic-like* Identity

Headteacher Shrijana has been serving in the capacity of the headteacher at Shreejanshil School for more than two decades. According to her teachers, she is a dedicated school leader who remains at school from dusk to dawn, taking care of overall school affairs. She has made a considerable contribution to bringing school to its present condition. While having a conversation with her, she shared something like this:

Figure 17: A Meditative Moment



Don't compare me and my schools with already established schools. I mean, those schools were already renowned schools. Ours is a different one. It was on the verge of collapse two decades ago. Now we have around one thousand students, and they are performing well in their studies as well as extra-curricular activities. We have been confronting many difficult

circumstances. I was the one to implement the social audit process and orient the other headteachers of nearby schools on this matter and other documentation processes. I sometimes lose my temper when I don't find teachers performing up to my expectation. I consider it a wave of genuine anger.

(4 April 2022)

When she took the responsibility of headship, there were around one hundred students at school. The entire school team seems to focus on enhancing the quality of education, creating a collegial learning environment. Her sharing clearly shows that she sometimes loses her temper to alert the teachers of their performance. I became a bit curious and asked her *“You lose your temper to alert the teachers. Does it go well every time?; does it give you peace?; and how do you manage it?”* Feeling a bit uneasy (as I observed her), she said, *“It does not give me peace at all. Then after some time, I try to convince them being cool”*. She seemed to be guided by the motive of success and achievement akin to the intent of *the Muladhar chakra*, which is the chakra for existential knowing (See Chapter III). She seemed to focus on control and delivery to have a better outcome embracing the intent of transactional leadership (Arenas, 2019). Unlike her, I intended to transcend the transactional approach to leadership and advocate structural deconstruction of educational leadership, which might be the point of departure of my leadership understanding, thereby envisioning an equitable and inclusive learning space at school.

As I listened to headteacher Shrijana, I recalled some moments of mine being reactive with teachers, particularly with less punctual and underperforming teachers. I often appear to be a *rajas-like* leader, possibly guided by *the Manipur chakra*, who seeks achievement, success, position and prestige. As I reflect upon my engagements,

I feel a sort of paucity in my leadership effort. I think I am trying to move beyond *tamas-like* state of stagnation and status quo, possibly guided by *the Muladhara chakra*. However, I am not able to work joyfully and have patience. Like headteacher Shrijana, I concentrate more on the teachers' performance and the overall outcome. There seems to be a lack of peace and tranquillity in my professional engagement. My reactive nature and the hustle and bustle (possibly *rajas-like* nature) often tend to demonstrate my identity as a result-oriented leader who seems to compromise his and others' well-being. Is it the intent of being a leader?; does it add any value to leadership?; can I not transcend this limitation?; and will I not be able to dispel an elusive leadership veil and nurture transformative sensibility? These questions make me ponder upon my leadership endeavours.

It appears that our identity is always in a state of flux and is evolving. Huang and Carspechen (2013) mention that human identity is multiple and fractured, which is understood in terms of inconsistent patterns of claiming. Given the natural movement of life, Chordon (2009) mentions that "we are all a mixture of aggression and loving-kindness, hard-heartedness and tender open-heartedness, small-mindedness and forgiving open mind" (p.25). Kumar (2010) rightly mentions that "when the mind is embedded in sattvic motivation, only then is a physical action truly transformed into a sattvic action; the inner and the outer need to cohere for the sattvic to emerge" (p. 74, embracing compassion, care, and inclusion. This notion of *gunas* (*satva, rajas, and tamas*) from the Eastern Wisdom Traditions are the indicative of spiritual compass of life, the understanding of which leads to our fulfilling experience (Kumar, 2010). As a school leader, our orientation needs to be directed towards enhancing *sattvic-like* leadership qualities.

With a shifting perspective, I have come to realize that I have to “embrace the state of being and becoming” (Dyson, 2007, p.45). Despite my repeated request, when I find a few teachers not following the regulations of the school, I get disappointed. I am caught in a dilemma as how to deal with those teachers who appear *tamas-like*. Out of frustration, I lose my temper quite often. Consequently, my reactive nature, which I would like to represent metaphorically as a boomerang attitude, hits me back and alienates me from the team. Then I feel vulnerable and miserable as a leader of school. When I ask the teachers who turned up late to be on time a bit aggressively, they take it negatively and start making a mountain out of a molehill. I intend to make them punctual and dutiful, but my reactive nature puts my headship on the anvil. It appears as if there is a problem in my way of dealing. It seems essential for me to be context-sensitive. At school, I am in a situation of huge dilemmas and challenges. It is a moment for me either to (re) create and/or unfold my identity. For this, I need to make an inclusive effort to maintain a connection with the stakeholders. Moreover, I must learn to lead effectively, inspire team members and have patience in dealing with the disgruntled ones at school. Being mindful of the friends who magnify trivial issues into grave ones, I might need to even more tolerate and collaborate.

During one of the meetings, some teachers complained that I hurt their self-esteem, leaving them to feel humiliated and demotivated. My way of dealing with them was thought to be ineffective. According to them, I underestimated their contribution and treated them in a biased manner. It was unbearable for me. I was almost broken as I did not want to hurt their feelings deliberately. I wanted them to be the change-makers. But I could not present myself the way they expected. Teacher Namrata of my school said, “*I know you are working hard. But your reactive nature*

has overshadowed your contribution. Be mindful of your plan and have patience”.

The remarks of the teacher triggered some soul-searching. I start pondering upon my vulnerabilities. I need to respect teachers' self-esteem as "it is a fundamental human need"(Branden, 1994, p. 3). How can I make them work meaningfully if they feel hurt? Am I presenting myself as an arrogant headteacher? Do I not understand that self-esteem is dear to everyone? If I can make teachers feel that their self-esteem is acknowledged, they may become more motivated to work. But it seems as if I am disempowering teachers at some points without looking for possibilities of encouraging them. In an encouraging tone, Branden (1994) mentions that "your life is important. Honour it. Fight for your highest possibilities"(p.xii). He further mentions the practice of living consciously, self-acceptance, self-responsibility, self-assertiveness, living purposefully and personal integrity as the six pillars of self-esteem. Highlighting the behaviours a leader must avoid, Dhiman et al. (2018) mention that leaders need to listen to the ideas of the team members to make an informed decision. I keep imposing orders and directives as an authoritarian leader. My reactive nature has put me in stress and deplorable conditions many times. As a leader, I tend to dominate any discussion during meetings and in other informal sharing, which might have demonstrated my ego. Considering ego at the root of almost every problem and obstacle, Holiday (2018) further mentions that ego results in eliminating positive initiatives and virtues.

Rather than acknowledging others' ideas, I kept imposing my ideas which were not well received by teachers. As a result, I faced problems such as a lack of support from the team members during the implementation phase. Even I came to know about the noncooperation of some teachers on the ground that they were not consulted while making decisions. This also shows the need for democratic,

participatory, and consultative leadership in the organization. As I gradually developed my patience to listen to the ideas of my team members, it fostered feelings of ownership for any decision taken, and I guess they might have felt a bit empowered. For instance, I put the agenda in the staff meeting while selecting the teacher representative last year. I asked everyone to share their views and show their interest if they wanted to be the teacher representative. Out of twenty-five teachers, four of them showed their interest in being the teacher representative. Then I had a separate meeting with those four teachers. Finally, a consensus was forged to nominate teacher Rajesh as the teacher representative. A challenging question for a leader might be whether they are able to keep the team members cheerful or not. A leader is expected to be committed to creating a collegial space at school.

My learning as a school leader is that it is hard for any intolerant leader to sustain in an organization. I have often been intolerant and haste at making decisions without broader consultations. I am putting effort into being open and inclusive, possibly embracing the intent of *sattvic-like* leadership, perhaps guided by *the Anahatha and Vishudha chakras*. Along my leadership journey, the only option left for me was to transform myself and reconstruct and/or unfold my identity as a caring and progressive head teacher. I realize the cause of my stress and worry at the cost of changing others' attitude rather than changing myself first. "The road to self-transformation is long and hard and beset with challenges at every step. It has been compared with walking on a razor's edge" (Dhiman, 2019, p. 61). To this, my critical friend Pabitra shares her thought "*perhaps you need to develop razor-like sharp objective observation of your inner self, neither logical mind dominant nor intuitive heart dominant.*" Her remarks might anticipate me to be critically self-reflective. More so, if we want to change others, it becomes a source of worry and unhappiness.

It appears essential for a school leader to remain mindful and context-sensitive. A leader is expected to be involved in the (re)construction and/or unfoldment of meaning and values in the social worlds. It appears essential to follow the strategy of care and connection to foster team spirit and synchronization to create a dynamic and motivated team at school. As for me, I am at a moment of a career turning point, wrestling to (re) create and/or unfold my identity, perhaps a *sattva-like* identity. Regarding identity, I find the sharing of my critical friend Pabitra immensely thought-provoking. She mentions that “*the word ‘identity’ reminds me of a metaphor of clothes. Identity is like clothes we wear, which we change on different occasions for different purposes. Why do you put on that particular clothes?*”

I want to grow more courageous, critical, enthusiastic and determined at the face of chaos and uncertainties embracing integrity, accountability and ethics of care and connection. Aligning with the ideas of Metzger (2008) pertaining to personal growth in the workplace, I involve my inner life, heart and soul to (re) create and/or unfold my professional identity as a leader. Headteacher Shrijana seems to follow the intent of transactional leadership to give the team members a feeling of leadership (*netritwako avash ta hunu paryoni*). I seem to have a disharmony with my critical mind and caring heart. Apart from being a strategic headteacher to sustain my leadership journey, is there any possibility of transcending the current state of leadership by living the value of care?

Envisioning Possibly a Transformative Space

It was someday in January 2021. I was on the roof of my home feeling thrilled, looking at the golden rising sun, blooming flowers in the vases, and sparkling peaks of the mountain at a distance. What a breathtaking scene! Extending gratitude to Supreme Consciousness, I played a soothing bhajan

and start meditation. It took a while to have concentration. Immediately my attention was drawn to the activities of school, the nature and attitude of the teachers and other issues of school. Then again, I put effort into concentrating on my breathing: breathing in and breathing out, feeling relaxed. My heart rejoices. The bhajan continued...

*Mere aapake kripase sab kam ho raha he,
karte ho tum kanaihya mera nam ho raha he.*

(Oh, Almighty! I am undertaking my responsibility smoothly by your divine grace,

Kanaihya, you are doing it for my fame!)

Upon listening to the bhajan and observing my breathing, the cells of my body started vibrating. I concentrated on the image of God. Everything felt wonderful. After fifteen minutes of meditation, I opened my eyes and looked around. I gazed at the unfathomable blue sky. All of a sudden, my eyes got filled with tears. It occurred to me that these drops of tears released my pain and traumatic feelings. Feeling blessed, I visualized myself leading school, maintaining peace and harmony, thereby fostering team spirit and exploring new horizons of opportunities at school. My dharma is to reach the verge of the stakeholders' trust and expectations. Gradual improvement at school and collaboration culture always inspire me to break the deep-rooted status quo and create a transformative learning space at school. It's my dream as a headteacher.

(Journal, November 2, 2020)

I remained committed to creating a transformative learning space at school through meaningful dialogue and collaboration to promote deep learning (Fullan,

2018). I present a scenario of a staff meeting that embraces the ethos of democratic practice.

I consulted AHT, Academic In-charge and teacher representative to set the agenda of the school meeting. The critical agenda was regarding the commencement of alternative modes of facilitating students' learning. Due to COVID Pandemic, the government announced to halt the physical classes for a month to break its chain. Adhering to the decree of the government, the staff meeting was called on April 22, 2021. The meeting was due to start. Almost all the teachers joined the online meeting. Only a few teachers were absent, citing their inability to attend the meeting due to their illness. There were times when I was reactive with the teachers during the meeting and felt too miserable after it. So, I patiently listened to the teachers' ideas, plans, comments and suggestions.

When I took more time to elaborate on the issues, it turned out to be counter-productive. Many times, I confronted unexpected circumstances. Being mindful and with the hope of turning the meeting into a success. First of all, I had a brief informal sharing with them. Then I formally began the meeting and briefly highlighted the agenda of the day. The agenda included alternative modes of learning facilitation, ICT training, and other miscellaneous issues of school. Then I requested all the teachers to put their ideas focusing on the agenda and thoughts regarding the overall affairs of school. To encourage teachers, I said, "*There might be many issues and problems at school. I do know all the teachers are discharging their responsibility with utmost sincerity. We are the problem-solvers as well. Please feel free to share your thoughts with an open mind. We are the change makers at school. Collectively, we can make some positive changes and work towards this end.*" After my short encouraging remarks, the teachers started sharing their views. First of all, teacher Dev shared:

I am glad that school is gradually making progress. It has been possible through our teamwork approach. My concern is about the distribution of ICT gadgets, mainly laptops. How many teachers are provided laptops by school? How is their condition? What is the plan of school to avail ICT resources to other teachers? I have taken a week of ICT training before. I am eager to learn more. I wish every one of us would grab an opportunity to be ICT literate. If we don't update and become techno-savvy, we will be outdated. Take the request of the headteacher to involve in ICT training as an important opportunity to update ourselves. The headteacher has to monitor teachers' involvement and progress and create a learning environment managing necessary resources.

Then teacher Ram, who is the ICT department coordinator, shared as:

Our headteacher is eager to launch any new program at school. We also feel encouraged by his initiative. He proposed to form an ICT Unit at school to make teachers ICT literate, which is a praiseworthy initiation. I see the need for review meetings time and again to discuss the progress and challenges to plan further. Time management has been an issue. Many teachers are eager to update themselves. They are learning and utilizing their knowledge and skill. They have started taking online classes. But what to do for those who are not interested in updating themselves? What is your plan for those teachers? I am ready to support them via ICT training. I only require permission and the direction of the school administration. I have to manage time. It's my obligation to work as asked by the school administration, but my concern is that it has to bear fruit; I mean, it has to support teachers to be ICT friendly. It depends upon the passion of teachers as well. Please, head sir,

think of teachers' involvement and the progress they are making. Sometimes I feel I may be wrong as well. Why don't our headteacher become a bit strict toward those teachers who try to take undue advantage of his flexibility? Don't make any plan in haste. Think, consult, make a decision, and implement it. Identify the real issues and try to address them. Finally, it is important to broadly discuss the effectiveness of any program and plan further through collective understanding. I have asked you many times to get the computers repaired, but they are not maintained yet. New gadgets are purchased; let's think of repairing the things we already have. I believe in action, not in gossip and futile talk. Thank you!

Then teacher Dinesh shared as:

Let's think of the effectiveness of any plan and programme before implementing it. A good plan is pertinent to reap a better result. We need to get to the root of any problem. Deeper discussion and engagement is important while taking any decision. Think twice and take any decision. At a specific interval, we have to carry out an impact analysis. Continuous follow-up is required to explore the root cause of any issue. No doubt, everyone has to update themselves. Everyone has to make a strong commitment to exploring a solution to any problem. But I see less encouragement in teachers and students. Let's make an effort toward this end. Connecting to parents is essential. Some efforts are being made to communicate with parents, and some more steps are required to strengthen the school-parent relationship. Our plans are awesome, but the implementation aspect has to be effective. For this, let's not only raise our fingers at the school administration. It's our joint responsibility. But in the meantime, timely communication and encouragement

from the school administration is a must. Our nice plans need to bring some tangible results. Student achievement has to be our key focus which determines the actual performance of school, though we need to take care of other aspects. Where are the loopholes? Let's spot them and work together to patch them up. Fair treatment and evaluation of teachers by school administration matter a lot to keep the morale of the teachers high. Sometimes I feel quite discouraged and demotivated. I don't know why. Maybe my efforts are not well recognized by school. Thank you for giving me a chance to share my thoughts!

Similarly, teacher Mamata shared as:

The school has to give priority to the capacity building of teachers. Only updated teachers can deliver as per the expectation of students. My request to school administration is to create an environment for learning. Our headteacher is proactive. I appreciate his efforts. But the teachers need to show their willingness to learn and update themselves. I am also putting efforts as far as possible to be ICT literate. Our ICT coordinator is supporting a lot to this end. We are very thankful to him. Please make efforts to encourage him further. The COVID- 19 pandemic has given us an opportunity in disguise to update ourselves. It's hard to be a teacher without knowledge of ICT. Knowledge sharing culture of our school is a good practice.

After that, the Academic In-charge Samir said something like this:

Due to adverse situations, we must continue teaching and learning in whatever way possible. This is not a normal situation. We need to come up with some strategic planning at this critical time. There are many issues and problems at school. We need to minimize them gradually through

collaborative efforts. We can't solve all the issues at once. It is essential to categorize the problems and address them gradually. Let's take full responsibility for our respective classes and work in a planned way. Let's make an effort. Where there is a will, there is a way. Our online classes are going well comparatively. Let's see the bright sides of the actions as well. Some teachers discourage other colleagues by simply highlighting ineffective aspects of online classes. Let's wholeheartedly encourage teachers to work towards this end with commitment and dedication. Coordination with parents and stakeholders is a must. Let's not wait for the headteacher to do everything. We must take the initiative ourselves and request the school administration for support if necessary. I also believe in teacher leadership. We have to take the lead in the learning of students. We need to apply our knowledge and expertise for the betterment of students. If students do not perform well, then our sincerity and performance will be questioned. Action speaks louder than words. Passion, willpower, and commitment to change are crucial to success. The school has to create a learning environment even better than this. Thank you!

After the sharing of the teachers, I said something like this, possibly to address the concerns of the teachers;

Thank you, all the teachers, for your remarkable suggestions and feedback. This is the beauty of sharing ideas with the team. I believe in the strength and dynamism of the team. Despite numerous problems, we are committed to bringing changes to school. It has been possible through our collective efforts. As you know, the headteacher is only a representative character. You are the real actors of school. The strong commitment of

teachers determines the performance of school. I believe in collaboration and communication. I always encourage teacher leadership. Being more optimistic, discharge your responsibility so that no one will question your performance. Don't feel discouraged and disempowered. Let me know if there is anything that has to be done from the side of the school administration. Sometimes I may not have been able to notice the problem. Please share any issues feeling free. You are all leaders and agents of change. But I am critical of the disempowering attitude of some of the teachers. Let's support and learn from each other. Let's think of what we can do rather than what we cannot do. We need to bring change in our mindset. We can make a difference together, and our collective performance and gradual improvement in student performance and achievement have shown it. Even the Municipality has praised the efforts of our teachers. I am proud of you, all dynamic teachers. Considering your suggestions, school administration commits to moving further. We have to create our identity and let it sustain itself. Please do not always wait for the headteacher to solve your problem. Let's take a proactive initiation. Thank you everyone!

After the meeting, I thought it is always good to take team members' ideas and work accordingly. In doing so, an environment of trust can be built. As the headteacher, I have a crucial role at school, but I am not the whole and sole person to make a miracle happen at school. So, I need to think about my responsibility prudently and remain tolerant and optimistic. The remarks of mine mentioned above might show my humility as I try to be more open and incorporate colleagues' ideas. Oliver (2015) mentions that a leader is not expected to come under the dereliction of duty. Keeping an open mind, I need to deal with any issue. I recall one of my teachers

saying, "*Netritwama basepachhi, hujurele sankrisna bichar tyagi chhati farakilo banaunu parchha* meaning as a person in a leadership position, you need to keep an open mind and heart." Nobody is immune to all the shortcomings, but as we share our problems and concerns, we may get new ideas and insights from others, which might be instrumental in seeking a solution to existing issues. It also might generate a feeling that I am not working alone as a leader. Oliver (2015) mentions that decision-making is an indispensable aspect of the headteacher's daily life adhering to the common good approach. I ask Uma, a member of my reference group, to critically share her thoughts pertaining to creating a transformative space at school as a practitioner of progressive education philosophy. Then she shares:

These days, people talk a lot about transformative learning. It has been a buzzword. For me, transformation means a progressive change. The transformation has to be seen in the classroom, on the walls of the classroom, in the teaching styles of teachers, as well as in the behaviour of the students. The path of transformation is not easy. It is easier said than done. Are students engaged in PBL (Project Based Learning), ABL (Activity Based Learning), group work and pair work? Do students get a chance to share their ideas and thoughts freely? The voice and choice of the students should be given due priority. Give opportunities to learners to explore a lot of things. Ensure their creative engagement to nurture their creative and critical thinking so that they can face the challenges that come their way. Create an autonomy-supportive environment at school, so the learners become autonomous and independent. And gradually, they start taking charge of their learning. Similarly, the teachers and the students need to be engaged in reflective practice. There has to be a constant dialogue among school administration, teachers, students and

parents. The agency of students, teachers and even other stakeholders needs to be valued. My point is that transformation has to be seen in the field, in practice and in action.

(Usha, a member of Reference Group, 7 November 2021)

Highlighting the role of a headteacher to create a transformative learning space at school, Carpenter (2018) believes that the learning journey is connected to positive learning habits. Shields (2020) argues that “transforming an organization to be equitable, inclusive and socially just presents considerable challenges” (p. 164). So, to transform our school, a due focus needs to be given to the quality of leadership and pedagogical accountability to ensure equitable, inclusive and engaging whole-school practices demonstrating courage and ethical responsibility.

To probe more on the issue of creating a transformative space at school, my efforts, strategies, and actions, I consulted my critical friend Bijay to share his critical observation pertaining to this chapter so that I could recraft my narratives. What follows is the conversation between me and my critical friend Bijay.

Researcher: Namaskar sir! How are you doing?

Bijay: Namaskar sir! I am good. And how are you?

Researcher: I am well. First of all, I would like to thank you for accepting my request to go through my thesis chapters as a critical friend. I anticipate your critical comments and observation to explore more on the issue of creating a transformative learning space at school. I am putting effort as a practitioner of transformative learning philosophy. I am trying to act proactively and support teachers and students as far as possible. Do you think my actions are guided by transformative sensibility? Please share your thoughts and observations based on my narratives you have read.

Bijay: It's my pleasure to go through your thesis chapters. I enjoyed reading this section and would like to reflect on it based on my knowledge and understanding. There are different schools of thought on transformation. Your line of transformation appears like self-transformation and then systemic transformation to influence the team. It is akin to the view of Mezirow on the psychological notion of transformation. Your narratives seem to have been guided by this notion. Sometimes what I feel when we write our narratives incorporating the vignettes of our transformation, we need to be aware of our limitations as well. It is quite challenging for a practitioner of autoethnography, isn't it?

Researcher: Yeah! It's challenging, I guess. I also feel that as we craft our stories, there is a chance of being overly self-referential or self-indulgent. It's an issue to be mindful of. What's your take on it?

Bijay: When somebody calls you a friendly and tolerant headteacher, you might think why they are saying so. They have praised you; maybe you deserve it, or maybe due to your leadership position. There is a general trend that people give a lot of praise in front of you to take some benefits from you and talk ill of you in your absence. You need to be critical of this aspect. Your team members are praising you; maybe the previous headteacher was strict or did not act as per their will, or did not listen to the ideas and opinions of the team members. Some teachers were interested in making you the headteacher to fulfill their vested interest or maybe thinking of getting more opportunities when you become the headteacher. My point is that as you craft your narratives, it is better to think of the other side of the stories as well. You might think of possibilities and craft your vignettes, being critical of these facets in a parallel manner. Rather than putting a tag or being judgemental, you might be more open and descriptive. Rather than projecting a disempowering image directly in the

beginning, explain what has made that person a disempowering image. Maybe the headteacher is not proactive, does not encourage teachers who want to initiate innovative projects and programs at school, is unsupportive and so on. Let narratives articulate it. I appreciate the way you are being more dialogical in your writing. Despite your effort with transformative intent, there might be public narratives beyond what you have thought. For example, people might say that he is pursuing a PhD, he is seen in the public forum, he is creating a team of his favour, he might have taken commission while constructing the school buildings, and so on. There might be narratives of appreciation as well. These public narratives indicate our social structure and mindset. I am not trying to discourage you, but I think public narratives are critical aspects to be considered.

Researcher: Yeah, exactly. Thank you for reminding me of the public narratives. Sometimes I have heard a public narrative as “Dherai aasha thiyo tar yo head sarle pani khasai socheko jasto garna sakenan- we had a big hope on this headteacher but he is not able to perform as expected”. The next narrative I have come across is “rajnitile garda headsirlai ramrai kam garna sakenan- the headteacher could not perform well despite his effort due to politics.” Similarly, another narrative I have come across is “Vidhyalaya collapse hun lageko thiyo- kahanbat yo head sir vidhyalaya bachaunalai aaipuge- the school was about to collapse, from where did this headteacher come to save this school from collapse?” As a headteacher, I think it’s better to explore or be mindful of both facets of the narratives and archetypes.

Bijay: I think these narratives are powerful for theorizing and meaning-making. The insights of these narratives might help you craft a living educational leadership theory (small 't' praxis-driven model) that you are thinking of. Have you

ever thought you are genuinely creating a cohesive team or doing groupism? Aren't you favouring the people who praise or support you? Are you aware that some people simply tend to push you? I think these questions are pertinent as you pursue a journey of creating a transformative learning space at school.

Researcher: You're right. Sometimes I also feel that some of my activities are directed toward showing the public that I am putting efforts for the betterment of school as a dynamic headteacher than for the transformation of the institution. I seem to be guided by the Manipura chakra, i.e. existential knowing. For example, keeping (library, computer lab, book corners, neatness of classrooms and surrounding and so on) everything up to date when there is an inspection visit from higher authority, and back to usual business (yastai chalihalchhani) on other days. This is quite disappointing. I am critical of my practices just to throw the dust in people's eyes. Sometimes, even my teachers said, "Dekhaune kam ali badhi bhayo- it seems as if you're keen to show off the stakeholders than actual change to happen at school". I think I am also influenced by the social mindset of showing off- bahir euta kura, bhitra arko kura- there is a discrepancy between what you show and what you perform daily. Once in a staff meeting, teacher Lok said, "Your planning is not effective. I don't think you are that visionary. You don't consult broadly while finalizing SIP (School Improvement Plan). Preparing documents of this kind has been a ritualistic act. You simply get it approved from the SMC meeting. Have you conducted any review meetings? What about achievements? How is the implementation process? Have you ever done a SWOT analysis? Please take my words positively. Thank you!" I listened to the remarks of the teachers with due attention. I thanked him for his comments. Based on his suggestion, the SMC formed a SIP drafting committee. We rethought the vision, mission, and goals of the school. We

started conducting review meetings. Our staff meeting also formed SLAST (School Leadership and Administration Support Team) and delegated the responsibilities to the teachers. Gradually, the performance scenario of school started changing. I also started taking my role seriously, not as an authoritative figure but as a catalyst of the team. I want to inspire the team members' performance, portraying myself as a guide by the side than a sage on the stage.

Researcher: How do you think about my way or efforts of transformation?

Bijay: I think you're along the right path. Make sure you are clear with your line of thought. Mezirow talks about transformation, and Habermas also talks about transformation through the notion of emancipation. But Mezirow deals more with individual transformation. The critical theory of Freire and Gramsci's concept of encountering hegemony, embrace transformative intent.

Researcher: Yeah. It's insightful. I will try to be clear pertaining to the nuances of transformative possibilities in my inquiry. I opt for self-transformation first and then the transformation of others. I am guided by the chakra model of epistemology, seven interconnected ways of knowing, being and valuing, which guides me to be mindful of self-transformation as my primary agenda. I think only a leader with a heightened level of awareness might support others to transform. As you have read my stories of struggles and difficult journey as the headteacher and a PhD scholar, how do you see my efforts to be an agent of change as a school leader through my narratives?

Bijay: I think as you keep unfolding yourself, the idea of writing as a method of inquiry might help you explore the efforts of transformation. Whatever circumstances you may go through, keep your agency intact. You have elsewhere used 'queen bee' to depict how our organization and society take the leader as a central

figure. The trend of keeping a leader at the centre might be another perspective of leadership.

Researcher: Thank you sir, for your critical observation on my narratives.

Bijay: Welcome sir.

After having a conversation with him, I thought it is essential for a leader to be aware of the other side of the stories and public narratives. In this connection, Smith et al. (2018) argue that dualities, dialectics, and paradoxes support the transformation process. I also asked myself: Is there any point in being reactive and hurting others? Am I thinking of my well-being and the well-being of others? Can I move ahead without the support and collaboration of others? When the team members are motivated, they perform more than I expect by being proactive. As a headteacher, it is my responsibility to sustain the team members' enthusiasm. Am I working to this end?

Metilogue and Way Forward

The anecdotes illuminate my efforts of unlearning and relearning leadership approaches with transformative intent and working toward building a resilient system at school so that it operates smoothly even in the absence of a leader. I (re)crafted some narratives being mindful of stream of consciousness, a narrative mode of writing to observe my thought process meditatively.

The first retrospective episode reveals an authoritarian and disempowering headteacher, whereas the second anecdote depicts a kind and caring headteacher who constantly puts efforts into motivating team members and portrays himself as an inspirational leader with a quest for unfolding *sattvic-like* identity, possibly guided by relational and visionary knowing (guided by the *Anahatha and the Ajna Chakras*). As leadership is always an evolving and/or unfolding process, a leader needs to have a

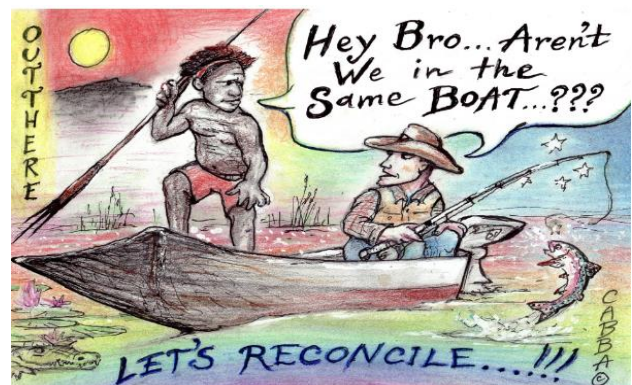
deeper awareness to continue doing, knowing, and reflecting, considering communication, relation and trust building as crucial aspects of leadership.

My retrospection embodies my episodes of growing as a leader in different capacities revealing my authoritarian being in the initial days of my leadership and a gradual shift to democratic and participatory becoming. This chapter incorporates narratives pertaining to taking a leadership role amid dilemmas and confusion. And then, it further illustrates my emerging confidence to take up challenges in order to bring about some changes at school. This period is mainly guided by cultural knowing (*the Muladhar chakra*) and beyond. I also make retrospection of school leadership responsibility and ups and downs faced along the way, which would be unfolding me as a transformative school leader in the making, aligning with the idea of Kincheloe and Steinberg (1995), who argue that the education system and/or leadership needs to be “just, optimistic, empathetic and democratic” (p.2). The chapter incorporated the narratives intending to create a transformative learning space at school. The chapter also highlights my attempt to demystify a leadership myth of being a queen bee so as to portray myself as a proactive leader. It appears equally crucial for a leader to be mindful of the other side of the narratives. Akin to me, mainly head teacher Shrijana seems to be guided by *the Manipur chakra*, i.e. *existential knowing* (See Chapter 3), which is related to success, willpower, and resilience. At the same time, she is also keen to maintain a cordial relationship with the team members. Like headteacher Shrijana, there seems to be a shift in consciousness from the *Manipur* to the *Anahatha chakra* as I appear more relationship conscious, unlike in the past. The next chapter deals with the issues of caring leadership embracing compassion, care, and inclusion to create a *sattva-like* learning space at school.

CHAPTER V

JOURNEYING FOR CARING LEADERSHIP: BEING IN THE SAME BOAT

The purpose of this chapter is to showcase how my participants and I nurtured caring leadership as a vital aspect of the leadership process and how it critiqued the conventional, somewhat authoritarian leadership practices, thereby contributing to the process of envisioning living leadership theory-small 't'. This chapter is prominently guided by relational and communicative knowings.



Note: <http://surl.li/ckboy>

The chapter focuses on the second emergent research question: *How have our (my research participants and I) emergent understanding and practices of educational processes supported (and otherwise) us to becoming a school leader?* Delving into the research question gave rise to the major themes of the inquiry: *a. Setting the scene: exploring possibilities; b. Getting into the shoes; c. Respecting feelings and thinking of team members?; d. Humility as care, compassion, and inclusion, and e. Leadership as the epitome of empathy and gratitude.*

Setting the Scene: Exploring Possibilities

Rama, a student of grade IX comes to my office and says, "Excuse me, sir! We are almost ready to start the programme. So, I request you to be at the school hall as soon as possible. You will have to chair the programme". Being glad, I reply, "Sure. I will be there in a while. Please invite all the teachers". Thanking me, she leaves the office. Then I come out of the office. I feel glad to see the active engagement of

students in organizing the programme. “How can I create a caring environment at school?; am I being a catalyzer or imposing my plan?; am I able to meet the expectations of the students and teachers?, and can I raise the self-esteem of teachers and students?” These questions strike my mind as I am on the way to the hall,. I get into the hall and greet all the teachers and students there. I take my seat on the chair in front of the students there. The deputy headteacher, in-charges and other teachers are seated on the chairs in the same row as summoned. The hall is crowded with the hustle and bustle of the students. Some teachers are seen instructing the students to make sure they are all set to start the program. The program organized to mark Children’s Day is due to start. Then a girl from grade nine emerges at the podium to conduct the program as the master of the ceremony and begins highlighting the importance of the program confidently. She gives a formal turn to the programme. Then the students of different classes take part in the elocution competition entitled ‘Exploring Possibilities of Empowering Children’. I am amazed by the performance of the students. They highlight children’s rights, problems, opportunities, care, inclusion, and compassion for the children's better future. The students appreciate the efforts taken by school, though they are not sufficient to empower them. In the meantime, my eyes get filled with tears. I do not know why. The tears might indicate my desire to see proactive teachers and articulate students. I start thinking about how I/we can create more opportunities for our students to unleash their potential.

(Journal 4, 2020)

Dear readers, while delivering my remarks, I appreciate teachers' efforts and students' active engagement in making such a wonderful program happen at school. The journal entry mentioned above depicts the proactive engagement of teachers and

students. Creating a culture of shared leadership empowers learners (Pretz, 2017) in their learning and unfolding their leadership capability.

Now I would like to share briefly about a prominent educator to set the scene for the need to create a caring environment at school. A monumental TED Talk entitled *Do schools kill creativity?* by Sir Ken Robinson is reasonably thought-provoking. Robinson (January 7, 2007) remarks that “if you are not prepared to be wrong, you will never come up with anything original” (5:51-5:56). He makes a point that an original idea has an embodied value. He further mentions that intelligence is dynamic and wonderfully interactive. But we have a trend of stigmatizing the mistakes of our children, which paralyzes their learning, and then the school no more becomes a haven of learning for the children. As a result, they feel demoralized and uncared for at school. Pondering upon his sharing, some questions strike my mind. As a school leader, do I care for the creativity of our learners?; am I mindful of nurturing their creativity by creating a collegial learning space at school?; are we able to create an emotionally engaged and accountable environment at school?; do students enjoy being at school? and so on. Perhaps these questions trigger my soul-searching about how much we are committed to creating a caring learning space at school. To build a caring culture at school, it appears necessary to regard every individual in the organization as a valued human being (Hess & Cameron, 2006) and create a collegial environment where everyone gets an opportunity to engage wholeheartedly.

The sharing of students unveils their desire for having an engaging learning space at school, where they could explore more opportunities to shape their future. They seem quite hopeful about the future. I try to relate it to Paulo Freire’s idea of a pedagogy of hope. Considering hope as an ontological need, Freire (2014) argues that pedagogy of hope encourages a sense of optimism for transformation, blending hope

with struggle and enthusiasm. Pedagogy of hope is “grounded in real-life issues and challenges” (Bourn, 2021, p.65). It might promote the critical engagement of teachers and learners in the process of learning, thereby unfolding several avenues of opportunities.

Getting into the Shoes

I present an incident shared by Pujana, a member of my Reference Group, during a conversation. A parent went to the school and meets her daughter's dance teacher. Upon meeting, she said, *“My daughter does not like to dance at home even if I ask her to practice many times. Could you convince her?”* Upon hearing this, the teacher replied in a quite reactive manner, *“She performs well at school. I don’t know how you deal with her at home.”* The remarks of the teachers made the parent feel a bit uneasy there. She seemed to expect some support from teachers, but the teacher became quite reactive without understanding the parent's problem. The parent returned when the conversation ended abruptly there and perhaps feeling a bit humiliated.

The anecdote depicts the way the teacher dealt with the parent that does not seem convincing and caring. She did not show any concern or care about the parent’s sharing. Is this the way a teacher is expected to deal with parents? What might be the consequence of such a shallow and reactive form of dealing with parents? Such an incident might sour the relationship of school with the community, thereby creating a rift between school and community. Highlighting how parent-teacher communication affects family involvement in the learning of students, the American Federation of Teachers (2007) mentions that “schools that communicate bad news about student performance more often than recognizing students’ excellence will discourage parents’ involvement by making parents feel they cannot effectively help their

children” (para.1). So, it appears that effective parent-teacher communication builds a positive relationship with parents, thereby encouraging greater parental support in the learning of the students.

Regarding the ways of dealing with children's issues, headteacher Shrijana shared, *“I always ask my teachers to show concern about the issues of parents and children. We need to try to understand their problems. Sometimes, the students come to school without wearing proper uniforms, without doing a home assignment, and so on. We need to know their problems and treat them accordingly”*. Headteacher Shrijana appeared keen on the issues and concerns of parents. Like headteacher Shrijana, I also pay heed to the concerns of parents, teachers, and students. When they share any concerns, I take them seriously. I also request them to look for some alternatives to address the problem. Once a parent called me and said, *“Sir, teacher Ramesh reprimanded my son using harsh words. He is feeling sad and says that he does not like to go to school”*. Then I requested him to come to the school when he was free. The next day, he came to school and shared his problem. First of all, I amicably talked to him. I had already spoken to teacher Ramesh before the arrival of the parent. I got to know the heart of the matter. Eventually, having a conversation with the parent in the presence of teacher Ramesh turned out to be quite cordial. Teacher Ramesh tried to clarify his intent and said sorry for being rude to the child. He committed not to repeat it. The issue was addressed amicably. Pertaining to it, my critical friend Pabitra argued, *“A teacher saying sorry in front of the headteacher, student and parent seems a positive change in the outside world. But it might deepen negative change in the inner world. Have you explored that the teacher did not feel humiliated, low, inferior, or disrespected when he had to say sorry in front of all?”* I find her remarks thought-provoking. Am I mindful of this aspect of dealing?

It appears that taking the lead in school is a critical responsibility. Being a bit critically self-reflective, I question myself: *will I be able to lead the change?* To be a change leader, I need to treat people around me as my most important colleagues and collaborators (Bennis, 2009). Following the idea of Bennis, I would not overpraise or underestimate my team members. I would try to balance by adhering to the Nepali maxim: *dudhko dudh paniko pani chhutayaune prayas* - meaning be fair while treating the team members' efforts and contributions. A note of encouragement might mean a lot to a team member. I recalled what teacher Dipendra said in a personal meeting with me "*Head sir, kasailai kakha kasailai pakha nagarnus hai, meaning head sir, be fair and supportive to all without doing any undue favour.*" Following the principle of proportionate attention and praise, I put an effort into cultivating a culture of candor and collegiality (Bennis, 2009) at school. I try to keep an open mind embracing the ethics of caring, sharing, and compassion, as viewed by Kumar (2010). I am keen to strengthen the relationship with the stakeholders as "existence is an intricately interconnected web of relationships where we all share the same breath of life" (p. 56). In other words, relational knowing appears to be quite pertinent to this end.

Upon soul searching, I happened to write, "*A leader needs to have the courage to see their self-esteem being crushed down in front of their eyes. And being resilient, one needs to pursue the journey embracing the storms*". (*Dream Diary, Feb 2022*)

The circumstances I go through always put me in a huge dilemma. I always encounter an inner dilemma concerning paradoxes and contradictions between leadership rhetoric and realities. Maybe I lack the competency to act as per the demand of the situation or context. I sense that I am getting energy from *the Manipura Chakra, i.e. existential knowing* (See chapter 3). Am I lacking a contextual

understanding of the phenomenon? Am I acting like an alien in my organization being disconnected from the team members? Perhaps being a leader requires a strong desire, dedication, determination, and patience. More so, an attempt to get into the shoes of the team members and stakeholders might encourage a leader to take the right action, being resilient and thoughtful.

Respecting Feelings and Thinking of Team Members

Dear readers, now I would like to share an anecdote of mine as an eye-opening event in my professional life. An unexpected incident occurs during a school meeting that displays my immaturity and vulnerability (*ma dherai chukeko awastha*), leaving me totally shattered. There is an agenda regarding the appointment of the deputy headteacher. To my dismay, most of the teachers utterly reject the agenda and request me to postpone it to have an adequate discussion and reach a decision.



Note: shorturl.at/korsR

Despite my effort, I cannot garner consensus as most of the teachers believe that shouldering the responsibility to anyone in a key position without a broader consensus can be detrimental to school. In this regard, Teacher Devendra said,

All the teachers cordially supported you to be the headteacher because there was no better alternative and you were more qualified, worked as the principal before, and we supported you. But now you see some aspiring senior

teachers for the post of the deputy headteacher. You need to select the best one. But you are trying to pick up a teacher of your choice that depicts as if you are under pressure to do so. Take time, think, and go for a broader consultation. What's the use of providing responsibility to someone forcefully? All of us need to work in a team. Does such an act promote a collegial environment at school? I think it will simply create misunderstanding and conflict. Appointing the deputy headteacher is not like appointing an ECA In charge. The assistant headship is a sensitive position. The person has to run the school in the absence of the headteacher being fully accountable for the overall affairs of school. Once you appoint somebody in this position, you cannot immediately ask them to step down. So, I request you to rethink it seriously.

I listened to him with due attention, but his words did not touch me as I remained stubborn to pick that particular teacher for the position of the deputy headship. I was not under the pressure of anyone to do so, as some of the teachers thought. I wanted somebody who could whole-heartedly support me, but the procedures I adopted and the way I presented the issue in the meeting did not impress the teachers, rather, there was a space for doubt upon my insistence. It turned out like *binaskale biparit buddi* (blurred intelligence at the time of adversity) as if guided by *the Muladhar chakra, a tamas-like state*. It seems as if I do not have the guts to listen to, face challenges, critical comments, and contradictory ideas (Brown, 2012). My flaw might be that I constantly demonstrate my insistence on the agenda without being adequately consultative. Finally, most of the teachers and the teacher representative hand me the staff meeting register and then the teacher representative said, *“Sir, I will be compelled to write a note of dissent if you further insist on this*

agenda. Let's drop this agenda for now. It might be detrimental for school as well as for you in the long run. Take this register and do as you like, sir." I was slightly shocked by what he said. Then I reacted, *"I may quit the position of headship if you don't agree upon this agenda"*. Then teacher Jay immediately said, *"kehi chhaina sir, kalo gaya goro aaunchha- No, problem sir. If you quit, many others more eligible will turn up"*. I was shocked by the remarks of teacher Jay. Amid shock, confusion, and dilemma, the meeting ends inconclusively. It turned out to be one of the saddest moments in my life and simultaneously a noteworthy moment to rethink my leadership practices having exposed my vulnerabilities.

I have come to realize the lack of collaboration and a setting the agenda for the meeting. I break down, become tearful and even think of quitting the leadership responsibility immediately. But there was no other way out than accepting the bitter reality of the moment and moving ahead. A gloom of despair looms over. I appear to be too vulnerable to continue the leadership journey. My headship seems to be on the anvil. I feel helpless and desperate due to my insistence. I never thought that such a thing would ever happen. I think everyone would accept the proposal. How would anyone reject my proposal?, it occurred to my mind. As it goes beyond my anticipation, I come to realize my vulnerability. It appeared to be an ego-cracking insult for me. As the days pass, I realize it might lead me to my professional impasse. The only option at my disposal is to turn my vulnerability into my strength and rise

Figure 19: Phoenix bird associated with the Greek mythology



Note: shorturl.at/STUW

from the chaos, being possibly resilient or rising from the ashes like the phoenix bird¹⁸.

An ever-unexpected event smashes my ego and teaches me a life lesson that it is better to take any decision through collective consensus, not out of the fury of the moment. An interesting aspect of this event is that as a leader, you need to confront many unexpected events and any immature decisions made. One could be strategic, a *rajas-like state* but it does not mean that one has to impose the thing and compel others to support it. At home, I question myself, "*Dekhis, khubai ma nabhaya skulnai chaldaina jasto garthis ni ? meaning - did you see? You thought that the school would not run in your absence*". Then I contemplate over it. The school runs or has to run, whether I am there or not. But my leadership needs to leave a progressive impact when I am there. Considering school as my *Dharmashala*, I need to put my effort collaboratively for the greater good of school akin to *-ramro garna nasakepani naramro ta garnu bhayanani* meaning that put every possible effort into the interest of the school

I value and respect all the team members and listen to them as patiently as possible rather than interrupting and interrogating them. I pay attention to them and value their opinion and suggestion. My life-thriving mantra is that the people in front of me are the most important, and the task at hand is the most important task for me in the world as I am engaged with them at the moment.

Humility for Care, Compassion and Inclusion

As I try to stay humble, I find myself at peace, possibly guided by *satva-like* quality. Regarding how much humility is put in place and practice, headteacher Shrijana said,

¹⁸ An immortal bird associated with the Greek mythology. It symbolizes renewal, i.e. rising from the chaos and adversities.

I respect all the team members. I am keen to talk to parents, teachers, students, and other stakeholders and take their ideas and suggestions for the betterment of school. When some parents express their grievances, I try to convince them proactively by being as humble as possible. I never boast that I am the headteacher and I should not be imposing my ideas upon anyone. I try to deal with them wholeheartedly. I remain careful not to hurt their feelings. When I feel that a teacher is having some problems, I approach them and ask them. I try to get close to them. But the circumstances do not always remain the same. Sometimes I am bound to lose my temper, having noticed some issues in teachers' performance. But after some time, I approach them and request them not to take it otherwise. I try to clarify my intention of coming up with possibly bitter remarks. Then I feel they get convinced. But I am not sure to what extent. My conviction is that I lose my temper for genuine causes.

Quite akin to headteacher Shrijana, I try to remain as humble as possible. But there are some instances of being reactive as well. I often stand by the school gate and greet students, parents and teachers. I ask parents about their children's studies and ask them to provide suggestions for the betterment of school. I approach the teachers and ask them if everything is well. I find time to ask them how they consider my leadership styles. When there is any debate and discussion, I try to put my view being humble. I try to narrow down the distance between the stakeholders and me. Sometimes, I get reactive to alert teachers, but the situation takes some untoward turn. As some teachers point out my shortcomings, I deeply listen to them and make a commitment to amend them. Even if I feel hurt by the teachers' remarks, I accept them rather than argue with them. Sometimes, some teachers ask me to be a bit status-conscious while dealing with parents. I understand their intent. But as the

headteacher, I should not make anyone feel discriminated. My experience reveals that tolerating bitter remarks has emboldened me to cope with unpleasant situations.

Dear readers, now I present a snippet of the motivational speech shared by Prakash, a motivational speaker on ‘Spirituality and Leadership’. He shared, “*Learn to bend. An act of bending does not make you small. Only the dead body does not bend. You are alive, so you need to bend as per the gravity of the circumstances.*” (June 10, 2020)

The thought of the motivational speaker moves me. He highlights the need to have a positive outlook on life. Being humble might be a vital leadership quality to unfold the possibilities like a lotus. The following verses from the poem “*Naitik Drishtanta*” by Lekh Nath Poudel, the crown poet of Nepal, highlight the essence of being humble:

Upakari guni wyakti nihuranchha nirantar,

Faleko brikshako hango najhukeko kahan chha ra ? /69/

A well-behaved person remains humble,

The trees with fruits tend to bend low.

Humility is a significant virtue for a leader to cultivate leadership by embracing integrity (Gist, 2020). Dhiman et al. (2018) mention humility as the touchstone of great leadership helps minimize ego. A lack of humility might lead to the derailment of the leadership journey. Hence, humility-oriented leadership seems to embrace feelings of care, compassion, gratitude, and other virtues. Taking humility as a key mantra of leadership, I am discharging my responsibilities, possibly making my team vibrant and functional as far as possible. In what follows is a journal entry to crystallize my efforts pertaining to my realization of why humility matters in leadership:

A bitter and heart-rending moment. As I recall, I feel like crying. It happened in March 2020. I had called a joint meeting of teachers, School Management Committee (SMC), and the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) to share plans and initiatives taken by school with the hope of getting constructive input and suggestions. It was a review meeting of the activities performed by school as well. There was a meaningful discussion going on in the meeting in an amicable manner. Taking a turn, the participants shared their views on enhancing quality education at school. Some of them were quite vocal and critical as well.

As the discussion progressed, some members made comparatively caustic remarks about my performance without any evidence. It could be guessed that they apparently wanted to hurt me. I tried my best to convince them, but they were not in a position to be convinced. There could be other reasons behind their remarks, akin to a Nepali proverb hawa nachali pat hallidaina meaning that there is no smoke without fire. They particularly pointed out our shortcomings, undermining our efforts to bring about positive change at school. But unfortunately, the situation took an unexpected turn when I came out of the hall, leaving the meeting being intolerant. It was quite unbearable to me. I was almost blank and got in a sort of shock. The SMC chairperson and ward chairperson tried to pacify me, but I left the meeting and went home, defying their request feeling profoundly hurt. The meeting ended inconclusively. I reached home with a burning heart and feeling miserable and helpless. I was restless, not knowing what to do. I could not concentrate on anything. In the evening, upon reflection, I asked myself: Why did I present myself as a reactive jerk?, why couldn't I tolerate the caustic

remarks of some members?, why couldn't I demonstrate humility as a responsible school leader?, How can I rise above bitterness and negativity?, and so on. After all, it's going to be costly for me. I called a member and apologized for what I said and did, which definitely exposed my vulnerability. The next day at school, even my teachers pointed out my immaturity and inability to tolerate it, even though I tried to justify my behaviour. I was already at the vulnerable edge Teacher Nisha said, "Being the headteacher, you should not have left the meeting in the middle. You should have tolerated what they said. You missed a chance to demonstrate your maturity. In your absence, the meeting was disrupted. It was indeed a frustrating experience for your well-wishers as well. I don't know how you have taken it, but you didn't do well, sir." Her remarks made me speechless. You may think about how I felt after listening to the teacher's words. In disguise, that event taught me a huge life lesson, pointing to the need to be a humble leader to cope with adverse circumstances.

(Dream Diary, December. 20, 2021)

Humility as the foundation of a relationship, helps to balance ego and maintain integrity and humanizes leadership (Gist, 2020). So, it appears to be an important quality to nurture leadership efforts. I have realized that the practice of humility seems to minimize my ego (Gist, 2020). So, having dropped the ego as far as possible and making a possible compromise, I go for broader consultations before taking any decisions on several issues of school following the intent of co-inception leadership (Antoine, 2018), thereby thriving together fostering co-existence

As a headteacher, I am caught in the constant dialectics of being and becoming (Dhiman, 2019). Pertaining to planning, doing, and coping with change, Fullan (2001)

mentions that “promoters of change need to be committed and skilled in the change process as we are in the change itself” (p. 64). Self-transformation appears to be a prerequisite to social and spiritual transformation (Kumar, 2010). I keep pondering on changing dynamics of school leadership to make a difference at school, such as the commitment and passion of teachers for bringing about changes, increased community involvement, active participation of students, and so on

Is there anyone who has become successful without any struggle and sacrifice?; and can I become a caring leader? I questioned myself. I try to acknowledge my vulnerability, retrace my steps of correction and make a commitment to add value to my leadership journey. I value and nurture my everyday experience. I am on the mission of creating a collegial learning space at school, upsetting the state of status quo and stagnation. My efforts are channelized for this mission, which has become an irresistible calling of my heart. My engagement in spiritual practices has supported me in carrying out my leadership role effectively as “a deep internal spiritual transformation is required to transform the world around us” (Dhiman, 2019, p. 205). Learning to bend could be a strategy for me to create a win-win situation aligning with the views of Germer (2009), who mentions that “life is tough. Despite our best intentions, things go wrong, sometimes very wrong (p.1)”. Making mistakes and compromises might help us to grow in a humble manner. In this connection, Fiarman (2015) reveals that "embracing mistake is my new mantra. Learn from them. They're a natural part of being a novice and a stepping stone to improvement" (p.37). She further argues that learning is a crucial aspect of leadership that helps develop a new understanding and transform leadership engagement.

Leadership as Epitome of Empathy and Gratitude

The meeting of parents-teachers began at school. The teachers and parents started interacting about the study and behaviour of students. I found some of our teachers highlighting the weaker points of children. Generally, the parents of poor-performing students did not feel good, and started arguing with teachers. The next day, during the teachers' meeting, I proposed a plan regarding how to deal with parents and students. The teachers expressed their thoughts. One of the teachers also shared the idea of giving sandwich feedback, which most teachers appreciated. Some of the teachers liked to follow the stick-and-carrot approach. After a rigorous discussion, it was decided to begin dealing with parents highlighting the positive aspects of students and sharing the problematic aspects of children without blaming the parents with due care. I appreciated the idea of giving sandwich feedback as it balances the way of dealing with parents.

Rina, a teacher of Headteacher Shrijana's school shared, *“Our head teacher sometimes displays her grievances at our performance and becomes reactive. But she always takes care of students and shows affection. When the students see her, they surround her. It's nice to see. She is like a mother to them”*.

Like headteacher Shrijana, I also try to extend gratitude and compassion toward everyone as far as possible. I try to show an empathetic attitude. Considering empathy as feel-good emotion, Krznaric (2015) mentions that "many people equate it with everyday kindness and emotional sensitivity and being tender and caring towards others" (p. 1). So, a school leader is expected to have a deeper awareness and transformative sensibility to get into the stakeholders' shoes.

Sokolow and Houston (2008) suggest that “gratitude is not just a feeling; it is a form of energy. Gratitude begets gratitude. The energy of gratitude has the power to

attract and empower” (p. 23). Dhiman et al. (2018) mention that gratitude as a master key of all virtues helps to live a fulfilling life. Kumar (2010) points out that "in order to grow spiritually, we need to develop the sattvic faculty of appreciation and gratitude" (p. 610). So, it appears that a leader needs to have an attitude of gratitude. It seems important to acknowledge the support of team members and stakeholders with a grateful heart. I admit that everyone is unique. I acknowledge the contribution teachers made in many ways to enhance quality education at school as they are the agents of change and the real actors of school.

Finding some points to encourage and empower them could be a great strategy. I do not intend to pinpoint the weaknesses of teachers, instead I put efforts into nurturing and capitalizing on their positive emotions, signature strengths and virtues to enable them to thrive or feel worthwhile, following the notion and essence of positive psychology, which incorporates happiness and well-being as desired outcomes by promoting positive emotions, relationship, engagement, meaning and accomplishment (Seligman, 2002). Swami Mukundananda (2019) mentions that “positive thinking is the mental state of harbouring happy thoughts and an optimistic attitude. Positive thinkers are always cheerful and confident about life. They prefer to see the same glass as half-full, which the pessimists find half-empty” (p. 14). I am committed to bringing about change in school, and nurturing caring leadership. The following journal depicts my realization of embedding empathetic feelings as a headteacher being guided by *the heart chakra, i.e. relational knowing*:

Being reactive and not getting into people's shoes, I have come across many pathetic situations, leaving me helpless and miserable. I am responsible for those unpleasant situations. Gradually, I have come to realize that only by being empathetic and compassionate I might repair the relationship with the

stakeholders, revitalize their enthusiasm, and solve the pressing problems of school. Being mindful of adverse circumstances that might be inconsiderate to others, I have started practising impressive empathy, which “includes understanding others who disagree with us” (Fullan, 2011, p. 4).

Teacher Lok criticizes me almost in every meeting, even with colleagues. I come to know about it through other team members. Initially, I start behaving to correct him for being a bit reactive. Actually, it’s a tough job to deal with difficult people and anticipate an amicable attitude from them. My strategy fails because of his stubborn nature. Maybe I could not deal with him as per his expectation, though I think I am doing well. I become a bit restless and impatient. Once a teacher comes to me and says “Sir, teacher Lok is a difficult person to deal with. He undermines your efforts and demeans your plans. He also questions your leadership competency targeting your fragility with a remark as “how can he lead a school effectively?” and so on. Rather than proactively supporting, he enjoys making a mountain out of a molehill. I don’t understand why he is doing so. Even though he is vocal about your performance, I request you to deal with him amicably. After all, you are the headteacher, and it depends on you how you deal with your team members. My worry is that he does not seem to make any compromises, so you need to have a bit more patience. He has a communication breakdown with some other friends as well. He seems to be egoistic.

Having said this, the teacher went out of my office. I take teachers’ ideas seriously and make up my mind to change my strategy of dealing with them. As the headteacher, I have to handle the situation strategically- sarpa pani maros lathi pani nabhanchiyos, meaning let the task be performed

without aggravating the situation. I am mindful of not turning vengeful toward him, rather I start showing care and concern to him. I question myself, “Why don’t I look for positivity even into negativity?” It is said that even poison might contain some elements of nectar. As I start getting closer to him, and asking about his health, study, family, and so on, gradually, he starts behaving positively. He responds well to my request, before he had many other excuses. No doubt he is a duty-bound teacher. I start highlighting his strength. He starts sharing issues about the classroom and school with me. Keeping distance from him did not help me. Through my humble efforts, I can maintain cordial relations with him; otherwise, it was on the verge of deterioration.

(Dream Diary, December 24, 2021)

I think I am possibly able to repair and revitalize the relationship with him through empathetic feelings. Had I tried to overpower teacher Lok using my authority, it might not have led to a pleasant situation. With a possibly deep awareness, I dealt with him through my heart, which might have encouraged him to bring positive changes in his behaviour. Why should I show apathy toward him? Isn’t he worthy of my appreciation, even though he criticizes me? He is also a member of our team. His performance might have supported enhancing the quality of school. I need to acknowledge the efforts of each team member. This emerging insight urges me to rethink my leadership practices and try to get into the shoes of my team members. I often try to see the difference between making a team member happy and making another disgruntled. It is said that it takes a spark to blaze the whole forest. I try my best to discharge my *swadharma*, possibly without any vested interest, which supports galvanising the cracks of our institution, akin to the notion of connecting dots.

Metalogue and Way Forward

This chapter illustrates the themes pertaining to care, compassion, empathy, and inclusion, primarily musing on caring leadership. Having grace under pressure appears to be a vital quality of a leader. Like headteacher Shrijana, I am also committed to developing a culture of shared leadership and team spirit, thereby creating a collegial and caring learning space at school to nurture the creativity of the teachers being guided by *the Anahat Chakra (the heart chakra- See Chapter III)*. There might be several issues, and addressing those challenges in an amicable manner, might demand caring and proactive leadership engagement. Getting reactive to alert teachers sounds quite paradoxical. Pertaining to it, my critical friend Pabitra said;

We are living in a paradox. And my argument was to live harmoniously in paradox, not by disregarding reactivity but by embracing, like the way a mother embraces. Here, my definition of a mother is one who embraces all children, normal and abnormal. Yeslaai mutu chahincha mutu meaning it requires a sense of compassion and humility. It engages open heart, mind, and hands. All common mothers cannot do. So these days, I see mothers who do not have motherhood, aama ho mamata chaina !”

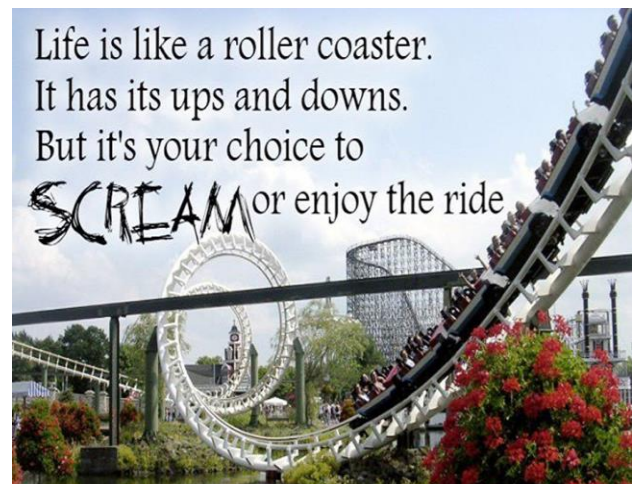
The remarks of my critical friend urge me to be a grounded school leader who embraces the ground realities with an inclusive vision. Perhaps a leader needs to nurture and critically reflect on leadership endeavours and look for alternative ways of dealing with the team members. Instead, an attempt to get into the stakeholders' shoes by paying heed to the contextual realities might be an effective strategy to be pursued. As every leader seems to be entangled in the dialectics of being and becoming, humility-oriented leadership might promote a feeling of inter-being, thereby offering

a space for collegiality and relational knowing to create a cohesive team at school. To this end, humility and empathy might unfold possibilities of creating a harmonious space at school being guided by *the heart chakra, i.e. relational knowing* (see Chapter III). The next chapter deals with unpacking efforts to enable our colleagues to embrace pedagogical changes.

CHAPTER VI

JOURNEY WITH COLLEAGUES TO EMBRACE PEDAGOGICAL CHANGE:
RIDING THE ROLLERCOASTER

The purpose of this chapter is to explore how headteachers play a catalyzing role in supporting continuing professional development of teachers based on the third emergent inquiry question- *How have we been enabling (and otherwise) our colleagues to embrace pedagogical change in their roles as teachers to create an engaging learning space?* It also unpacks the value of systemic thinking and meaningful engagement to create a positive climate at school



Note: <https://tinyurl.com/ce8wmrks>

where teachers and students remain wholeheartedly engaged. This chapter contributes to the process of envisioning a living educational leadership theory- small 't' by developing a creative space to nurture the agency of teachers and students. Existential, critical and communicative knowings basically guide this chapter.

The following emergent themes are explored in depth: *a. Catalyzing role of a headteacher: Keep the ball rolling, b. System thinking and reform, c. Turning apathy into calling, d. Teacher engagement as empowering teacher agency., e. Student engagement: unveiling colourful butterfly.*

Catalyzing Role of a Headteacher: Keep the Ball Rolling

Upon my query on making teachers accountable, the former headteacher Sushil of Jana Jagriti secondary school shared how to encourage teachers to take pedagogical accountability:

As the headteacher, I tried my best not to discourage teachers. I made efforts to support them. Only updated teachers perform well in the classroom. I did not think of relieving underperforming teachers of their responsibility. We arranged the sharing of teachers every Friday. They stayed in their respective subject groups and discussed the issues and problems of different subjects and classes. The teachers of all levels openly shared their practices and problems in classrooms. In doing so, we came to know several issues in the classroom. Every teacher was keen to learn new things. It promoted a learning culture at our school. Sharing teachers' experiences has been instrumental in promoting the quality of teaching and learning at our school.

(17 October 2020)

Teacher Nirmala of headteacher Shrijana's school said;

Our headteacher is able to create a cohesive and vibrant team at school. Smilingly she delegates the responsibilities to everyone. She encourages the teachers based on their performance. The teachers are awarded on different occasions, so they are even more encouraged to perform better. One of the key reasons behind the success of our school is teamwork. Motivated teachers are a strength of our school."

Akin to the former headteacher Sushil and headteacher Shrijana, I am also keen to motivate my teachers. Due to unexpected hassles, I feel that I am not able to motivate the teachers as expected. I question myself: Am I not discouraging the

teachers instead? I ask my teachers to share their plans and any support they anticipate from the school administration. Based on performance, we also appreciate the efforts of our teachers. For example, our Science teacher, Ram came up with a plan to introduce Science Innovative Project. We discussed this in the meeting, and finally, it was approved by SMC; we included this plan in the SIP. We formed a team led by the science teacher. Now, this project has been a brand of school.

Freire (2014) mentions that a culture of respect, tolerance, and generosity needs to be established in order to create a climate of meaningful dialogue pertaining to teaching and learning acts. So, it appears that a teacher needs to be ethically sensitive and critical of the social-political phenomena of society to educate and empower the learners to be the agents of change. Similarly, Sergiovanni (2007) mentions that learners struggle to achieve the necessary developmental growth and nurture the essential intellectual knowledge and practical skills. Similarly, hooks (1994) mentions that learning space becomes a wonderful location of possibility, where learners exercise freedom to explore the avenues of larger possibilities. So, it appears pertinent to create an engaging space at school to explore the possibilities of the learners, which in fact, is our *dharmā*¹⁹ for the collective good. As a humble caretaker of school, I am aware of my role as a catalyzer.

I try to deal strategically with my team members, not as a micromanager but possibly as a catalyzer. I mean, I make efforts to acknowledge and address the disgruntled voices. I value and respect all the team members and listen to them patiently than interrupting and interrogating them. I pay attention to them. I am trying to be grateful for what they have done as a part of their responsibility. My mantra is that the people who are in front of me are the most important people for me in the

¹⁹ A moral principle that governs individual conduct

world as they are with me, and I am working with them at the moment. I make an effort to go for broader consultations before taking any decisions pertaining to several issues of school at hand.

Conceiving the catalytic role of a leader, Baldoni (2008) mentions that leaders need to give their team members a reason to follow them and work collaboratively to build trust and be effective. The team members will not follow you until they trust you. To this end, understanding needs and delivering value is pertinent. It takes a considerable effort to put it into practice and set the right example, akin to the maxim that Rome was not built in a day.

Systemic Thinking and Reform

As a headteacher, I have experienced several systemic problems such as (ineffective plans and policies, a lack of effective monitoring mechanisms, decontextualized curriculum). To illustrate further, I would like to share an anecdote:

In the SMC meeting, we had an agenda for reviewing and updating SIP (School Improvement Plan). During the discussion, Dipak, one of the members, said, "Most of the documents we prepare at schools are prepared for formality and to submit them to the concerned authority than with the intent of change. We are just being ritualistic (in Nepali: tulasima hom hale jasto). How can we bring change through such practices?"

(December 5, 20021)

His remarks perhaps portray the trend of maintaining documents for formality. If such practices happen, how can we expect positive organisational changes? Teacher Puja of headteacher Shrijana's school shares;

The key strength of our school is teamwork. We have established a system at school. I mean, we have well-defined job descriptions and terms of

reference. All the teachers know their duties and responsibilities. Different extracurricular and co-curricular activities are conducted as set in the annual plan. There is an excellent coordination among teachers. We easily manage the classes in the absence of teachers. Sometimes, I don't see the headteacher for some days, but everything goes well at school in a systematic manner. The absence of the headteacher doesn't make that difference.

Dear readers, here I confess that despite my efforts, I am not able to build a system as expected. According to my teachers and students, there are several issues and chaotic situations in my absence, such as classroom management issues, engagement of teachers, and so on. A question strikes my mind “*How can we make all members feel that I am a part of this system, and I need to play my part honestly to build a system?*” Now I would like to mention an anecdote that incorporates a collaborative effort to maintain resources at school to give a feel of reform.

A teacher of the Early Childhood Development (ECD) level of our school comes to my office. She greets me and asks for permission to get inside the office. I cheerfully welcome her and ask her to take a seat on the sofa. I ask her about the activities taking place in the ECD section. She says that everything is going well. She shares her plans and efforts, including integrated lesson plans to improve pedagogical practices to engage small children meaningfully and requests me to manage some essential educational and play materials for the ECD section at the earliest. She hands me a list of items, thanks me, and leaves the office anticipating to get things as soon as possible. Then I call the accountant to the office and ask him to go through the list of items and their tentative price. He goes through it, calculates the tentative price and says that it might cost more than thirty thousand. For an under-

resourced community school, it is a big amount. I ask him about the possibility of buying these items. He says that it is impossible to buy these items immediately as there is an insufficient amount in the school bank account. I get trapped in a dilemma. As the headteacher, it is my responsibility to look for an alternative way. Then I request some organizations to support in this regard. I even request the Mayor of the municipality to support me. Where there is a will, there is a way. One organization helps to buy items as mentioned in the list, and the Mayor of the municipality releases some fifty thousand to buy a smart Television for the kids. After a few days of the request of the ECD in charge, the materials are brought to school. The teachers of the ECD section and other teachers become glad to have the required things. The ECD in charge coordinates with other teachers of the ECD level and gladly remains engaged in teaching-learning activities. I am glad to see the students playing on the seesaw, watching rhymes on the smart TV, and teachers happily guiding the students to perform the activities.

(Journal 5, 2020)

It is perhaps quite hard to manage resources at a community school. The government provides a limited budget for the operation of school. We request donor agencies, organizations, and people to support the school financially and provide ICT resources like laptops, computers, etc. At this backdrop, I take the issue of reform in two ways: one is availing necessary resources, and the next is updating teachers to be competent with the latest trends and issues of teaching and learning and having knowledge of the basics of ICT to meet the needs of the techno-savvy generation. The teachers need to put an effort into developing and managing resources. Everything and every space might be used as a resource. In this connection, I find the sharing of

Suresh, an MED scholar of Educational Leadership and Management from Nepal University, about school improvement plans quite thought-provoking. He mentions:

I am dismayed having seen the deplorable condition of most of the community schools across the country. The government has made a considerable investment to enhance the quality of education in these schools. It appears like pouring water into the sand. It requires the art of leading and the commitment of the teachers. The public schools should have made significant progress and should do as well. These schools have a national obligation and responsibility to ensure quality education to all the citizenry as provisioned in the Constitution of the country. There are qualified teachers and resources as well as support from different organizations. So, what's wrong? Where is the gap? What is school leadership doing? Who is responsible for this pitiable situation? From where do we start? It is pertinent to ponder upon these issues of common concern. Unless there is reform in the public education system, the entire education system of the country can't yield any expected result.

(September 26, 2021)

I am moved by his remarks, which might trigger the soul-searching of every educational leader. It appears to be our collective responsibility to identify the gap and make necessary efforts to solve the problem. Reform might require unwavering commitment. In this connection, Fullan (2010b) argues that resolute leadership is crucial to ensure “whole-system-reform possibilities” (p. 4). So, systemic reform appears to be pertinent.

Coming to realize my practices of past and present leadership and my intent of empowering teachers enables me to envision a living educational leadership theory in

my context (but not limited to). It is rather a calling of my heart embedded into my deep desire to create an engaging learning pace at school. To have more ideas on systemic thinking, I consulted my critical friend Chiran. Upon my curiosity, he shares:

We are all a part of a system. Indeed, we are the system ourselves. So it is our prime responsibility to consolidate the system. Rather than blaming others, a leader needs to work wholeheartedly for transformation. If we do not fit in the system, we will have to get out of the system. I mean, there is no point in being in the system if our performance is below expectations. I always advise school leaders to work for transformation, and it is possible. Willpower is required for it. Leadership responsibility is not a pastime job. It is an opportunity to make a difference. There are expectations from the stakeholders. If you do not meet the expectations, can you remain a leader there? No, you can't. People will look for alternatives. If a screw does not fit, I mean, if it doesn't tighten or keep spinning despite efforts, shall we keep it still there or remove it? Our system is trying to change us, so we need to align ourselves with the spirit of the system and be mindful of our performance. Lead joyfully, inspire the team members, and create opportunities for them to remain engaged. Follow the system approach, prioritize the system, and don't be the one to be rejected by the system. Present yourself as a vibrant member of the system through your performance. Whether you have created a good system at school or not is judged by how a school runs in your absence. Do not make any pretext. Who do you blame when you are a system yourself? Make your leadership tenure a historical one. Let me give an example of a headteacher of our Municipality who has brought considerable change at

school within a few years. Whenever I call him, he is at school. He remains engaged in school activities. His school is going to be a model school in our area. Do you think he is not having any challenges? I know he has been facing many challenges. But when people see him committed, they are bound to support him. So, it shows that action-oriented and committed leaders gain support from different quarters.

(Chiran, a member of the reference group, 6 November 2021)

I am moved by his thoughts regarding the possibility of transformation at school and the possibilities of systemic reforms. He has a long experience of working in the education sector. He seems quite critical of the performance of the majority of school leaders and appreciates those school leaders striving to make a difference despite several hurdles.

Turning Apathy to Calling

I was on leave for a week in February 2021 due to some domestic urgency. I formally entrusted the responsibility to the Assistant Headteacher to look after the school affairs and requested Academic In-charge and other level-wise In- charges to support him. After a week, I went back to school and asked the AHT about school activities. He said that everything went well. After he reported about the activities, I went to take my period in grade ten. I asked students to update me about the activities of a class during the week. Upon sharing Dipa, a grade ten student said, "*Sir, in your absence, there was a pathetic situation at school. The teachers did not follow the timing strictly to come to the class. We felt a lack of care and support from the teachers.*" Then another student, Resham added, "*Most of the teachers were busy talking in a group than taking care of students. The AHT was seen moving around, but he was also in a rush to go home right after school than looking after us during*

extra classes like you". Then another student said, "Our Academic In-charge is more proactive. He also took online classes apart from physical classes to engage us".

After the class, I went to the office. I called both sisters to the office and asked them about the overall activities of school. Sister Rita said, "*Sir, in your absence, we don't know what happens at school. We get shocked having observed the activities of some of the teachers. Some of them do not come to school in time, do not stay in class full time, remain busy talking in groups and leave school as early as possible".*

The students also praised the efforts of some teachers who worked hard to engage the students. The sharing of students reflects the diversity of priorities of teachers. But what is essential is to create an engaging environment where you get a chance to learn collaboratively. Having listened to students and sisters, I took a long breath and calmly pondered upon my responsibility at school. "*Am I failing to create a system at school, unlike headteacher Shrijana?"*, I asked myself. I also try to look for my shortcomings (e.g., lack of effective responsibility delegation, not being able to create a cohesive team despite effort and so on) behind such happenings at school in my absence. Whether the headteacher is there or not at school, should it make any difference to teachers in discharging their assigned responsibilities? Why are some of the teachers not performing well in my absence? These questions struck my mind. I recall the book I read a few years back entitled '*Passion for Teaching*' by Christopher Day. This is a great book for teachers. How can teachers engage students productively if they are not passionate about teaching? If student engagement does not become teachers' priority, how can such teachers perform well in the class? I further question myself, "*As the headteacher, why am I not able to create an engaging environment at school? Why are most teachers demotivated by their profession? Whose fault is it?*

A few months back, I reached school quite late. I had to attend a meeting. I had informed AHT about it. As the meeting concluded early, I headed toward the school. I parked my bike, went to the office, and immediately went to the staffroom to see the teachers. Let me portray the scene in the staffroom. The teachers in leisure periods were there. Two of them were correcting assignments of the students, a few teachers were having a talk on the political issues of the country, and some others were yawning.

Upon seeing me, teacher Reena came to me, and we had a brief conversation. Teacher Reema said something like this:

Sir, it's quite challenging to be the headteacher, isn't it? When you are a bit flexible, many teachers want to take undue advantage. They also take leave without any valid reason. Sir, once a teacher took a leave saying that she was not well and had to go to hospital for treatment. But sir, I saw her in the field working the whole day. Why did she tell a lie? And sir, when you are strict, some teachers bitterly criticize you. I also get shocked having observed the nature and attitude of some of our teachers. But sir, you must remain strict and boldly deal with such teachers who do not perform well and make excuses.

I patiently listened to her without any reaction and then went back to the office and pondered upon my role and desire to create a collegial and engaging learning space at school. I am strategically dealing with disempowering team members, making them more engaged in their tasks. I delegate authority and responsibility to the team members and see how they perform.

I am keen to support them in whatever way possible. I also expect everyone to be fully engaged in their assigned roles. Sometimes, I feel dismayed having observed

the performance of some teachers. But I try to remain tolerant. At times, I console myself that all the fingers of my palm are not equal, and so is the performance of some of the team members. It might be my soothing strategy to convince myself. But it is not always easy. It requires considerable patience. I need to support and encourage teachers to enhance their performance as their *dharma*. My experience underpins that teachers work whole-heartedly only when they are motivated. I find the following divine verse of the *Bhagavad Gita* quite solacing to me:

उद्धरेदात्मनात्मानं नात्मानमवसादयेत् ।

आत्मैव ह्यात्मनो बन्धुरात्मैव रिपुरात्मनः ॥ ५॥

uddhared ātmanātmānam nātmānam avasādayet

ātmaiva hyātmāno bandhur ātmaiva ripur ātmanah

(One must deliver himself with the help of his mind, and degrade himself.

The mind is the friend of the conditioned, and his enemy as well)

Dear readers, let me share a happening with you that occurred at school. There are some colleagues who always try to make a mountain out of a molehill (*tillai pahad banaune prawriti*). They also look for my shortcomings. I take it easy, considering that life is not only a bed of roses. Several thorny issues must be overcome along the difficult journey of life. They might be doing so to upset me so that I would get reactive, and they would get a chance to take advantage of my vulnerability. I call it *tamas-like* attitude of my colleagues. Later, I came to realize that I had to take it easy and as a normal phenomenon. These days, I positively take friends' complaints and grievances as an opportunity to rectify my leadership practices. I pay attention to their sharing. I try to be empathetic. On top of that, I put every effort into minimizing my feelings of *kam*, *krodh*, *lobha* and *moha* (lust, anger, greed, and fascination) as they are the key hurdles in life. I try to shift from *Tamas*,

Rajas to Sattva- like qualities as a spiritual compass of my life. I try to see divinity in everybody, I mean, I extend respect to everyone. This possibly personal paradigm shift has been instrumental in sustaining my leadership and creating an engaging learning space at school. I have got an opportunity to nurture a transformative leadership sensibility which might be observed in my dealing with teachers being proactive.

Teacher Engagement as Empowering Teacher Agency

Once while having a conversation, head teacher Rita of Lokpriya school said, *"I used to feel in the beginning as if I had to carry the whole burden of school on my shoulder. But it is not so; these days, I go for shared leadership practice and delegate responsibilities to my colleagues."* I find her idea quite impressive. Ups and downs, dilemmas and confusions of my leadership journey might become milestones for my transformative possibilities.

While making a strategic plan for the new academic session, I requested all the teachers to provide their suggestions for the effective planning of academic activities at school. Upon request, they offered their ideas and suggestions. The key suggestions included giving equal priority to all the teachers, maintaining a cordial connection with guardians, making financial aspects more transparent, delegating responsibilities among teachers, disseminating information in time, availing necessary educational materials, and taking effective measures to discipline the students, and so on. As I went through the suggestions, I came to realize that the suggestions of teachers demanded me to be more proactive and dynamic. My key strategy was to delegate the responsibilities and inspire the teachers to get things done. I also followed other strategies, such as engaging team members, interacting more with them and being

more visible and accessible. I started observing the implementation of the strategic academic plan. The following journal entry shows the changes happening at school.

At school, everything is going well. The in- charges are making efforts for positive changes at school. They gladly carry out their responsibilities as they feel they are acknowledged and recognized by school. I need to encourage and support them. It's an opportunity for me to be a leader of an educational organization, despite several hurdles and challenges at my disposal. I need to acknowledge their diverse thoughts and ideas. It was 1 pm, I saw the academic in charge having a meeting with other level in charges. The sharing culture has gained momentum, which is, in fact, quite encouraging. It was delightful to see the team working wholeheartedly. Teachers and students are engaged in different teaching-learning activities.

(Journal 6, April 25, 2020)

Sometimes it appears like chewing iron to meaningfully engage the teachers. It is quite hard to bring changes at school as expected. Sometimes, I feel disappointed having observed the teachers' activities. They have enough time for futile talk and gossip, but if I ask them to give extra time to develop and manage resources and make effective lesson plans, many of them only fulfill the formality. They come up with lots of grievances than ways to solve any issue. I present an instance as to why an in charge of our school started underperforming. A hard-working teacher Lalit started gradually underperforming. I was a bit shocked to see it. Later, I came to know that he started sharing grievances with other teachers that his efforts were not recognized by school administration as he expected. Then I indirectly started motivating him. It took quite long to bring his enthusiasm back, but I could do it through my constant efforts. Sometimes, the headteacher may not be aware of many things happening at school.

So, it is essential for them to avail time to listen to the teachers and engage them to keep their morale high.

There might be several reasons behind the pathetic situation of community schools in Nepal. Stagnation and status quo, lack of resources and competent teachers, and poor utilization of available resources could be some of the reasons as why community schools are not able to perform as expected except few better-performing schools. “*Rajako kam kahile jala gham, meaning let the day pass and be free from work*” maybe a deep-seated belief in the mindset of the government employees in our context, which reflects the dearth of a growth mindset. To get the teachers rid of this mindset, I guess there is a need to create school as a transformative learning space maintaining accountability and integrity. Pertaining to the vitality of teacher engagement, Fiarman (2015) points out that it is important to create and nurture amicable conditions and a living collaborative culture for improvement to take place. To boost student achievement and holistic development, teachers need to establish a culture of constant learning and updating to change the deep-rooted disempowering practices and perspectives. Teachers play a vital role in realizing positive changes in education to ensure educational outcomes. The key characteristics of teachers as change agents include a passion for lifelong learning, entrepreneurship, and collaboration, among others. To realize this, teachers need to find a passion and work on it with avid zeal and dedication. In this connection, I strongly believe that a headteacher has an important role to play. Creating an environment to engage teachers wholeheartedly might be important to nurture and empower them as agents of change as “professional accountability is about far more than satisfying externally imposed bureaucratic demands” (Day, 2005 p. 19). Teachers anticipate an engaging environment at school, where they can plan and pursue their teaching-learning

activities autonomously. They want space to learn together and thrive together. My inner voice always urges me, "*Chet, please never come across a situation that dismantles the trust you have gained from the team members. Once the situation of mistrust looms over, then your entire mission of creating your school a transformative learning space remains a distant dream-a far cry*". I am aware that I need to inspire the actions of the teachers. Encouraging teachers in every possible way may enhance teacher engagement. I mention in my dream diary, "*I have to listen to teachers' ideas keenly and carefully. I must make my efforts to meet their expectations as far as possible. How can I make teachers and staff members work when they are demotivated? As a headteacher, it comes to be my responsibility to make them happy as far as possible so create a happy school*".

(Dream Diary, October 2021)

Regarding the role of teachers, Fiarman (2015) asserts that "a teacher guides kids to resist and reject prejudice, to value their identities, and to excel academically" (p. 20). In a similar vein, van der Heijden et al. (2018) mention that "personality and contextual factors are related to teachers' perceptions of being a change agent" (p.347). Calling every teacher an extraordinary teacher, Collins (1992) mentions that as a teacher, one has to always renew their spirit and love every child like a mother to promote love of learning and sharing. The struggles of Marva Collins, a Chicago school teacher, portray that a teacher needs to break the boundaries and instil in children '*you can do it*' attitude to unleash their potential. Actually, it is the essence of Marva Collins's way of engaging children.

Student Engagement: Unveiling the Colourful Butterfly

It was an incident in 2020. The class teacher of grade VIII shared that a student had been irregular for a few days without information. Even her call was not

received. Then I went to the class and asked students if there was any issue and if they knew anything about their friend who had stayed absent. One of the students said that she did not know the reason for her absence, but she might have been upset. Upset? I asked her. "Did anything happen in the classroom?" There was no reply from the students. I came out of the class and went to the office. First of all, I called the parents to know the reality. They received my phone and said their daughter did not feel like going to school. She was hurt by the dealing of a teacher. I felt shocked to hear this. I requested them to send their daughter to school the next day. Upon my request, they agreed to send their daughter to school. When she came to school the next day, I called her to my office and asked her to share the problem. She revealed the fact being a bit hesitant. She said:

Sir, Ramesh sir insulted me in the class. He said I was not making any progress and would not be able to do anything significant in my life. I am a dull and useless student. You can guess how I felt in the classroom. As I reached home, I cried, recollecting what the teacher said. Actually, I thought I was worthless. I was humiliated in the class. So, I didn't feel like coming to school thinking my friends would laugh at me."

She reduced to tears as she revealed her anguish. I was moved by what she said. A month before a student had shared a similar problem. Even in the staff meeting, I requested teachers to respect the feelings of students and try to understand their problems by getting a bit closer to them. Why don't some teachers take the sentiments of students into account? I start pondering this grave issue. In the meantime, a dream student appears and says, "*I feel happy to go to school. My teachers are caring and friendly. They respect my feelings and ask me if I have any problems. My school is like a family. I feel home at school. We get engaged in*

creative activities at school. My friends are cooperative. Moreover, I love going to school as I feel valued there". (Dream Diary, October 2021)

Then I question myself, "*How can we create a welcoming environment and collegial learning space at school?*" Challenging the taken-for-granted assumptions pertaining to education and the school system, Robinson and Robinson (2022) argue that it is significant to nurture the imagination and creativity of the learners to tap their extraordinary possibilities.

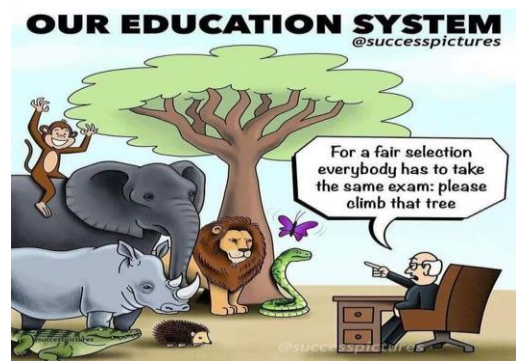
Anush, one of the broad toppers in the SLC Examination shared;

I secured 99 out of 100 in Mathematics and 97 out of 100 in Science. People consider me one of the brightest students. I was good at memorizing the mathematical formulas and definitions of

Science. But I am not able to connect my learning to life. My learning process was quite disengaging. I didn't enjoy it at all. I was simply committed to securing good marks. And my teachers and parents were happy about it. Nobody cared about my learning process. I got a bit frustrated as well. These days, I am involved in a project that supports schools in developing plans to teach Mathematics and Science in fun and playful ways connecting to nature and life. We encourage and support schools to form a Fun Club, a STEAM club as well as and make a cohort of senior students to support junior ones, which promotes collaborating learning.

It was someday in September 2021. The science teacher of grade VI was absent. So, I went to the class to engage the students as other teachers were busy. As I

Figure 20: Our education system



entered the class, the students greeted me. I asked them to take their seat. Then I inquired which lesson was going on. The students told me that the chapter '*Work, Energy, and Power*' was in progress. I asked them if they understood the lesson. Immediately most of the students said that they understood the lessons the science teacher taught and the science class was very interesting. They were more curious as I wanted to know more. One of the students said, "Our science teacher engages us in different creative activities. He has started an *Innovative Science Project*. Last week, we made pen holders, flowers and flower vases from waste papers and other materials." Then to my surprise, another student added "*If every teacher teaches like our science teacher, we will be really smart students who can perform like our science teachers and be creative*". Yet another student added, "*Head sir, our science teacher should be awarded The Best Teacher Award.*"

Being glad of their positive remarks about the teaching style of the science teacher, I thanked them and asked them to actively participate in the different activities of school. Then I came back to the office from the classroom. In a pensive mood, I contemplate how the students appreciate a sincere and dedicated teacher with reverence. It might be possible when we take our profession as a calling with enhanced awareness. The science teacher appears to be guided by the *throat chakra*, *i.e. communicative knowing*. He involves students in different activities and creates an environment for their ideas. I would like to present an anecdote from our school:

It was someday in September 2020, I had a staff meeting with teachers. The key agenda of the meeting was how to engage students in creative activities at school. I encouraged teachers to develop creative plans and ideas for the meaningful engagement of students. The teachers came up with different creative ideas. Our science teacher proposed to begin the 'Innovative

Science Project'. I appreciated his ideas and requested him to prepare a proposal, including a tentative budget for the project. After a few days, he submitted a proposal with a budget of Rs. 30,000. I got it approved in the meeting of the SMC and released the budget. Then he and his team members purchased the necessary items for the project. A team of four members were/are engaged in the project. The team started engaging students in practical activities such as drawing session using drafter tools, creating 3D alphabets and tangram using hard paper board, constructing geometric shapes using rubber mat, clinometer using ply and so on.

The students were/are found keenly engaged in the activities. The parents are glad to know about students' engagement in creative and practical activities. As the headteacher, I am glad I am able to inspire the team of teachers. This is an example of a project quite successfully launched at school. The students are found working even after school and at home as well.

It appears essential for a teacher to engage oneself from the heart, not for the sake of engagement or formality. Our science teacher is a great lesson to the teachers who do not meaningfully engage the students in the classroom. Student engagement promotes students' self-awareness and supports them as self-regulated learners (Nilson & Zimmerman, 2013). Highlighting the role of teacher agency in ensuring student engagement, Stein et al. (2016) mention that student engagement includes "a meta construct of behavior, emotion, and cognition" (p.11). So, it is necessary to create an environment at school that challenges and celebrates learning (Fullan, 2018), thereby promoting a holistic learner engagement.

Insights from the Gurukula Models

One of my external examiners remarked, "Are students taught or do they learn something on their own? This is one of the core issues of education philosophies and this would be really contextual to incorporate some of the *Gurukula Models* from the *Upanishads*". His remarks inspired me to engage in ancient *Gurukula models, which are indeed great examples of learner autonomy and inquiry-based learning*

The Bhrigu-Varuna Model of Inquiry/ Pedagogy

Dear readers, I would like to present an episode taken from the *Taittiriya Upanishad* (chapter 3) to depict an inquiry-based learning model from the ancient *Gurukul* contemplative traditions through the conversation between *Bhrigu* (Son of *Varuna*) and *Varuna* (the water God).

Bhrigu, *Varuna*'s son and disciple, approaches his father cum *Guru* and asks him to kindle the light of his knowledge. Then *Varuna* transforming himself in a position of a *Guru* asks him "*Bhrigu*, tell me what you want." *Bhrigu* says, "Teach me *Brahman*". *Varuna* becomes happy because his son is eager to know the higher realities of life. "Listen to me attentively", *Varuna* asks. *Bhrigu* does so. *Varuna* did not give any sermon or lectures. He just told him, "Now go and seek the *Brahman* by yourself through *tapas* or inquiry". *Bhrigu*, being a competent and well-informed student, he went away for the inquiry. He sits for the inquiry. He realizes that the whole world is created through *pancha-bhutas* (five basic elements). He starts pondering and realizes that *annamaya kosha* meaning the external world is there because of matter (food). And thinks that he got to know the *Brahman*, i.e. materially constituted. But while analyzing, he got into doubt. "Is this *Brahman*? Is this the root cause for the whole world?", he thinks.

When *Bhrigu* has a doubt, he does not keep quiet but he approaches his *Guru*. He asks, "Father, I have understood what *Brahman* is. But I do not know whether it is

right or not. “Tell me what you have understood”, *Varuna* asked. Then *Bhrigu* shared his realization as “Matter as the principle from which the whole world is originated, sustained, and resolved. Is this correct? Have I understood *Brahman*?” *Varuna* smiled and told him, “You are in the right direction.” Being curious, *Bhrigu* asks “I am in the right direction. I have not reached the end. Then what is the end?” *Bhrigu* asks “I have nothing more to say. Go and contemplate *Brahman*”. Then he realizes one more subtle aspect, i.e. *prana*. The whole cause of matter is because of energy behind it. The whole matter has transformed itself into energy. It means he understood *prana*-energy. With this understanding, he thinks again, analyzes and has a doubt. Is this a root cause? He went back to his *Guru* and says, “I have understood *Brahman*. Tell me whether I am right or wrong”. “What is it?”, *Varuna* asks. *Bhrigu* says “Energy pervades all forms of matter. The whole universe is constituted of energy.” Hearing it, *Varuna* says, “You are on the right path. Go and enquire further.”

Bhrigu goes back and again introspects and does a deeper analysis of the whole creation and then comes and shares “I have understood about *manamaya kosh*-mind (thinking or mental process). *Varuna* again says “Go and contemplate further”. He goes back and continues his inquiry. He comes with a logical understanding that the whole world is because of the *vijnanamaya kosh* (intellect, logic or reasoning). He asks, “Is my understanding right?” *Varuna* says “You’re almost there. Go and enquire further”. He again goes back and starts his inquiry, but does not come back. As *Bhrigu* does not come back for a long time, he goes in search of him and finds him in a state of bliss. Then he asks, “Did you understand what you wanted to know?” *Bhrigu* replies, “Yes. I have understood it. It is *ananda*- infinite-existence-bliss. This bliss is *Brahman*. This is what I have understood. I did not get any doubt. So, I did not

come to you.” Varuna gladly says, “What you have understood is very correct. Now I don’t have to teach you any more about *Brahman*”.

The sharing of *Bhrigu* and *Varuna* reveals a *pancha-kosha viveka* (uncovering the wisdom of fivefold sheaths). So, it appears pertinent to know the student before pursuing the process of teaching and learning. We also come to know about inquiry-based learning methodology through the more profound analysis of oneself and the cosmos. Introspection, contemplation, and meditation appear to be key techniques of learning. It reveals that a great teacher allows students to question and always encourages students to explore further appreciating their efforts and ideas and supporting them in the process so that the students will unravel realities themselves through self-inquiry. This *Bhrigu-Varuna* model of inquiry/pedagogy holds relevance to ensuring the meaningful engagement of the learners for creating a productive learning space. In this connection, Swami Krishnanda (1994) purports that “wonderful was the teacher; he would not utter a word of teaching, really. Know it by yourself; go deep into yourself; work for yourself; and toil for yourself; know it for yourself” (p. 214).

The Aruni-Svetaketu Dialogue

This episode is taken from the *Chandogya Upanishad*. Svetaketu requested his father to give him knowledge. Aruni explains several things to him. During that discussion, while explaining the original form of a being, Aruni tells Svetaketu- *Tat Tvam Asi* (Thou Art That- that is you). Aruni explains this with five examples such as *madhu dristanta*, *briksha dristanta*, *lawana dristanta*. Aruni elaborates that when the honey bees prepare honey, they collect the juice of different trees and flowers and bring it together and make honey out of it. Though this juice is from different trees, it is the same when honey is prepared. We cannot segregate the component juices.

Similarly, *Atman tatwa* in all living-beings is the same. And Svetaketu, you are that ultimate reality.

Svetaketu is not satisfied with this explanation, so he requests his father to explain in even greater detail again. The second example that Aruni gives of the river and the sea. He says, “East going river flows to the East and the West going river flows to the West. This means both of these types are opposite in flow. But ultimately, all rivers merge with the ocean. From the sea, they again in the form of the vapour reach the river and again unite in the sea. Once they mix with the sea, water cannot be separated. No distinction is possible there. *Atman tatwa* is the same. Everything originates from there and merges with it. And you are that *Atman tatwa- tat tvam asi*. This example too did not satiate Svetaketu’s doubt. Then he requests his father to explain again. Aruni then used an example of a tree. While explaining this concept, he explained the relation between *Atman* body, mirtyu or death and explained what is eternal or what is transient. So, Aruni tells Svetaketu if one strikes on any part of a tree, upper, lower or middle, *rasa* (sap) oozes out. Wherever you strike, the *rasa* or sap that comes out is the same. Because that tree is full of sap of liveliness which is the *Atman*. But its branches and gradually the whole tree starts revealing away. A blow can generate no sap because it lacks its *Atman tatwa*. Similarly, death or mirtyu kills a person’s body. The body becomes lifeless, but life does not die. *Atman* never dies. Like the tree, the body dies, but the *Atman tatwa* within remains eternally alive. *Atman* is immortal and that immortal element is you- *tat tvam asi*.

On hearing this, Svetaketu expresses his wish to learn even more. That time, Aruni gave the example of a banyan tree and asks him to get a fruit. When Svetaketu does so, Aruni tells him that there are several seeds in the banyan fruit. They are like atoms. Aruni further says that the seeds are so small. If they are broken, nothing can

be seen inside. When the same seed is sown, it gives birth to a huge tree that has branches, leaves, fruits, and flowers. The *atman tatwa* is exactly like a seed. Nothing is seen within it, but it has the potential to create this entire universe. The atom-like atman that encompasses everything is nothing but it's you, Svetaketu. *Atman tatwa* is everywhere and all-encompassing. To explain it further, Aruni asks Svetaketu to get some salt. He gets the salt as directed by Aruni. He instructs Svetaketu to put that salt in a glass of water in the night and get the glass to him the next morning. Another point to be noted is that in order to secure knowledge, one needs to have patience and readiness for waiting. Aruni could have immediately explained through the example of salt and water. But Aruni asks Svetaketu to show the salt overnight and get it to him the next day.

Through this, he wants to check Svetaketu's eagerness to gain knowledge. We get a message here that when one has to understand something, patience is very important. So, Svetaketu has a great longing for knowledge, and therefore, he obeys the orders meticulously and gets the glass to his father the next morning. Aruni then asks him, "*Can you see the salt that you put in it yesterday?*" It won't be seen. But if you want to experience it, you'll have to drink the water. Aruni adds that Svetaketu should drink the water from the top part of the glass and he asks, "*How is the taste?*" Svetaketu says actually it tastes salty. Then Aruni asks him to taste the water from the centre of the glass and asks, "*Does it taste salty?*" "Of course, yes", Svetaketu says. Then Aruni asks him to bring the water from the bottom part of the bottle. And he again asks him, "Is it salty?" Of course, it is salty. The salt has been completely dissolved in the glass. Every part or every drop of water will have the taste of salt. Aruni tells Svetaketu, thereafter, the salt in this water cannot be seen but it is continuously present. The principle of 'salt' is similar. Like salt, the eternally

omnipresent element is *satya* and it is the *atman*. And that is you, Svetaketu. The atom like element present everywhere that is true is nothing but you, Svetaketu.

The Chandogya Upanishad with the primary doctrine *ta tvam asi* and all the five examples almost summarizes the entire knowledgeable discussion. It highlights the need for humility and patience to acquire knowledge. The style of explanation is beautiful. The entire discussion unfolds through dialogue and different topics are made simple. The discussion thus becomes interesting. Timalisina (2020) mentions that “it is dialogue that allows open space and it is through dialogue that boundaries are constantly negotiated” (p. 677). The dialogue between Yajnavalkya and his wife Maitriyi in Brihadaranykyia looks for a negotiated ground to address the anxieties. Similarly, the dialogue between Raikava and Janasruti in the *Chandogya Upanishad* deconstructs power (Timalisina, 2020).

Metialogue and Way Forward

Perceiving the role of a headteacher as a catalyzer to empower teachers to take pedagogical accountability appears to be a crucial aspect. Like headteacher Shrijana creating a vibrant team and amicably delegating responsibilities inspires teachers to perform better. In doing so, an environment to have a meaningful dialogue regarding the pedagogical issues might help to explore the possibilities to engage the learners.

Collective decision-making, forging consensus and developing a feeling of ownership to build systemic thinking lie at the heart of pedagogical change. The *heart chakra* and the *throat chakra, relational and communicative knowing* play a role to this end. So, a headteacher must rethink and transcend the role of a transactional leader, possibly with enhanced awareness to empower teacher agency, thereby creating a challenging and promising learning environment for the learners'

meaningful engagement in the learning process. The next chapter incorporates narratives to create a collaborative space at school.

CHAPTER VII
 JOURNEY FOR NURTURING COLLABORATIVE LEARNING SPACE:
 TOGETHER WE CAN

This chapter, being prominently guided by existential, relational and communicative, and visionary knowings portray vignettes and arguments to nurture a collaborative learning space at school. The discourses of the chapter contribute to embarking on a collaborative epistemic endeavor (Dhungana, 2022), thereby envisioning an engaging learning space with cooperative intent.



This chapter focuses on the fourth emergent inquiry question: *How have our (my participants and I) roles been in promoting (and otherwise) collaborative learning space at schools?* The major themes upon navigation include: *a. Establishing the culture of interaction and collaboration, b. Communication for building a collaborative culture, c. Building participatory learning space, d. Building an amicable relationship, and e. Nurturing a spirit of a shared vision.* These themes unpack the efforts for fostering learner engagement that requires a collective commitment and effort akin to a saying that it takes a village to raise a child.

Building the Culture of Collaboration

Considering collaboration at the heart of school improvement, Namuna school along with the School Alumni Society, organized a joint interaction programme on the theme "Effectiveness in Learning" in May 2020, inviting education experts, organizational leaders and other stakeholders. The programme started after the arrival

of the key speakers, SMC members, advisors, PTA members, teachers and former students of Namuna school. The chair of Shirjana school Alumni Society Dipesh welcomed the speakers, guests, and participants and highlighted the essence of organizing this interaction programme. Then, turn-wise speakers were asked to present their views and provide suggestions for the school improvement. The first speaker was Dev, a renowned educationist of Nepal who shared his views as:

First of all, I would like to thank the entire school team of Namuna school and School Alumni Society for organizing this interaction programme to explore the horizons of possibilities for school improvement. We need to think of skill-oriented, entrepreneurship-driven, and engaging education. There has to be a blend of ancient and modern knowledge. Teachers need to update themselves. Otherwise, they will be outdated. They need to engage in research as well. They have to try to be techno-savvy to meet the expectations of a new generation of students. Being positive thinkers, they need to develop and encourage the questioning mind of students. School leaders need to plan for the ways to engage the opposing and disempowering forces at school, considering that diversity of views and opinions will offer more opportunities. Efforts should be made in order to develop the critical thinking of students. Thank you!

After the sharing of the first speaker, another speaker, Bibesh, the principal of an institutional school shared his views:

It is indeed a matter of huge pleasure for me to share my thoughts in this interaction programme today. Empowering young minds should be the priority of school. The students should be oriented about twenty-first-century skills such as critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, communication,

teamwork, and so on. Priority also has to be given to leadership capacity development, value addition, and confidence building. If the students are nurtured this way, they may contribute to nation-building. They learn how to communicate in diverse situation. All these efforts support their holistic development. Thank you!

After that, the speaker Chandra, a teacher leader shared his views as:

We have to understand the meaning of education through multiple perspectives. Critical faculty of students needs to be developed so that they can question and challenge the deep-rooted beliefs and unjust practices of society. Creating a learner autonomy-supportive environment at school is a must to facilitate students' learning. The teachers need to transform themselves first to transform the students. The transformative process in education is not a 100 m race. It's a marathon. It takes time and requires huge patience. The issue of teacher management has to be taken seriously by the school administration and school management committee. A team of qualified, trained, dedicated, and motivated teachers should be at school. There should not be any space for politics at school. The entire effort has to be concentrated on student achievement. There must be no compromise to make a vibrant team of committed teachers. There should be provisions for reward and punishment at school. Budget planning, talent management and teacher encouragement should be the priority of school. It appears to be a crucial role of a headteacher to create an engaging learning environment at school as an instructional leader. I emphasize creating a safe learning environment. It comes to be the duty of teachers to support students to be globally competent citizens who are also aware of local cultural values and beliefs along with

global awareness. The school administration needs to establish a culture of connection, collaboration, and interaction to be more transparent and accountable about the overall affairs of school so that as a leader, you can build an environment of trust at school. Thank you!

The sharing of the speakers underscores the need to create active and critical citizenry who are able to deal with real-life problems in a thoughtful manner by seeking alternatives. They highlight that learning needs to be connected to entrepreneurial activities as well. They urge teachers to remain up to date to meet the learning expectations of 21st-century learners. Rather than prioritizing rote memorization and mechanistic learning, the teachers need to kindle the learners' curiosity so that they gradually become empowered through the development of critical thinking. They also point out the changing roles of the teacher “from sage on the stage to guide on the side” (King, 2010), thereby enhancing the active agency of the learners.

All speakers highlight the importance of building a network with the stakeholders and establishing a culture of cooperation and collaboration by fostering the spirit of shared leadership and consensus-based decision-making. They stress being transparent and accountable and creating a vibrant team of teachers who are updated and techno-savvy. They emphasize maintaining integrity as a crucial aspect pointing to the need to build a collaborative school culture that requires the critical involvement of the team members Krznaric (2015) So, it appears that interaction offers an opportunity to explore possibilities for the common good. In what follows is the sharing of Chief Educational Officer Chiran upon inspection of Namuna Pragati school:

Chet ji, the construction of a new building seems to be taking place rapidly. I am impressed by what I saw at school today. Everything seems to be well-managed. The students are well-cultured. Your documentation part is outstanding. The poem recited by a student of your school in Inter- School Poem competition yesterday was outstanding. I vividly recall what you said two years before when I put my query about less number of students at your school. You said, "Sir, I am planting bamboo, so it might take a few years for the bamboo shoots to sprout." Accordingly, some visible changes are seen at school. Even the headteachers of other schools have started appreciating your efforts. You are going to be a role model headteacher and a resource person for school leadership of our Municipality. You are about to complete your PhD in educational leadership, which is going to be a great achievement. I am ready to support you in whatever manner possible. All the best!

(Personal communication, November 1, 2021)

The sharing of the Education Officer inspires me to take some bold steps to create a collegial and transcended learning space at school. The enrolment rate of students has increased. The students are performing well in the inter-school competition as well. Akin to planting a bamboo shoot, the transformation seems to happen at school through collective effort and living collaboration.

Being amid frustrations, dilemmas, contradictions, paradoxes, and confusion, I pursue my efforts to create my school as a transformative learning space. It is a collaborative venture full of challenges and opportunities. Highlighting the notion of inter-being, Hanh (2014) mentions that "a flower can only inter-be with everything else. You can't remove the sunlight, the soil or the cloud from the flower" (p.3). The remarks of Hanh highlight the essence of co-existence and collaboration as living

values to create a harmonious space at school, which I consider being the heart of leadership. There are many hands behind the scene working and collaborating with me. As a leader, it comes to be my responsibility to engage the stakeholders towards attaining the vision and mission of school. The teaching and non-teaching staff members who work day and night deserve a huge credit and salute. As of now, I feel more connected to school and community and extend gratitude to the stakeholders for everything they have done for the betterment of school, albeit there might be some grievances, criticism, and resentment

Communication for Building a Collaborative Culture

Dear readers, now I would like to present an anecdote that depicts the crucial role of communication in building a collaborative culture at school.

Today, during the staff meeting, I proposed a joint meeting with SMC, PTA, and the School Alumni the following week. Upon my request to share their viewpoints, Teacher Lok said, "We need to take time to communicate with our stakeholders about the meeting and agenda as well. Let's prepare a report and presentation slides. We have to make it impactful, which shows our efficiency." Some teachers suggested preparing well for the joint meeting, including the depiction of the overall activities of school. Upon the next agenda on purchasing ICT materials under President Educational Improvement Programme, the teachers shared their views on bringing extremely required items. Then we finalized the specification list. The ICT coordinator Ram, appointed at our school last year took responsibility for finalizing it. He once said in the meeting, "Sir, you kept me in the ICT Materials Purchasing Committee. I agree to be on the committee. But in many

schools, headteachers and SMC members ask teachers to be on the committee to sign only without any consultation.

I find the remarks of teacher Ram quite thoughtful. Then I assured him that it would not happen. Dear readers, now I would like to present my reflective note to portray how I have started being consultative with the team members.

When I tend to impose plans without a broader consultation, I come across grievances, complaints, and rejections. Smilingly, when I keep an open mind to listen to team members, many wonderful ideas come along. My tendency to make a quick decision and being upset immediately often leaves me in a miserable condition. As I start believing in the power of collective decision-making, it brings a wave of enthusiasm among team members. Acknowledging the ideas of colleagues may support a leader in building a cohesive team. As it is elsewhere said, leadership is not management, it's all about taking the initiative. I find this statement quite meaningful. Many programmes happen at school, team members work hard day and night to make them a success.

A leader is supposed to stay by the side of the team members and play a facilitative role as a catalyzer. It appears that only encouragement needs to be considered a powerful strategy and be available when team members need them. As of me, I try to deconstruct my leadership strategy and make an effort to present myself as a caring and supportive figure. I don't much bother what others say of me. I ask myself about my efforts to maintain integrity. I need to keep my agency intact. As I communicate about any issue of school in time and work with collaborative intent encouraging the involvement of team

members, I am able to cope with the situation meaningfully without feeling miserable. (Dream Diary, May 21, 2021)

It appears that frequent communication and interaction with stakeholders help build a trusting relationship, promoting participation and support of the community in school affairs (Fiarman, 2015), thereby leading to the emergence of the *sattva-like collegial learning space*. Regarding the role of communication in leadership, Baldoni (2010) argues that communication skill is a powerful strategy for effective leadership. Similarly, Fullan (2010) highlights the paramount role of communication in making a meaningful action happen. Now, I would like to present a vignette to underscore the significance of communication for a leader as:

Every day at school, my first duty is to visit every class and ask students if they have any problems. I also inquire about the absent students. Then I call the parents to know the reason for the absence of their wards. Once during the phone call, one of the guardians expressed her positive note that she was glad that I was showing concern for her child and trying to know if she had any problem. Some days later, she came to school and told me about her family problem bursting into tears. She was deserted by her husband a few years back. He married another lady and lived separately, neglecting her and her daughter. These days, she is struggling hard to manage the family expenditures. Because of difficult family circumstances, her daughter could not make her regular presence at school. I was moved by her poignant sharing, and I promised to support her daughter to continue her study at school.

(Journal 7, March 10, 2021)

I came to know about the family circumstances of the parent interacting with her. Like me, headteacher Shrijana also appears to be a consultative leader. She calls frequent grade-wise parents' meetings and encourages them to share their concerns and problems. In doing so, she is able to reduce the rift between school and community and solve the issues of her students as early as possible. It appears that a leader needs to be mindful of the power of communication as it is critical to building hope and courage for "inspiring people to perform at their very best" (Grue, 2015, para.20). So, reflecting on the several complex circumstances so far I have encountered at school (e.g., grievances of parents, diverse expectations of teachers and students, issues of financial and resource management), I feel that there is a need to explore possibilities of meaningful dialogue to build a relational leadership (Reitz, 2017), to cope with the emerging issues by embracing the intent of the *heart chakra* and the *throat chakra*, i.e. *relational and communicative knowing*.

Building a Participatory Learning Space

This section incorporates anecdotes pertaining to fostering a collegial learning environment at school, building trust and amicable relationships with the stakeholders encouraging their active participation in the overall affairs of school, i.e. *sattva-like* participatory learning space..

Headteacher Shrijana shared that "*when I took the responsibility of headship, the situation of school was not so good. The school was gradually losing its once-fine image. The trust of the community toward school was gradually declining. There was not such an amicable relationship between staff members and the school administration.*" As of my first strategy, I started having regular interactive meetings with parents and stakeholders and received their ideas. On behalf school, I made a commitment to improving the situation of school. I had frequent meetings with

teachers. We made strategic planning to bring some substantive changes at school. The teachers offered lots of remarkable ideas. Gradually, the environment of school started becoming collegial. Like headteacher Shrijana's efforts, I also made an effort to ameliorate the relationship among team members, parents, SMC, and other stakeholders, which was at the souring stage then. My unfolding awareness and relational knowing, guided by the *Anahatha chakra*, support me to this end.

It seems quite hard to please all the team members, akin to a saying – if you think of making all happy, sell ice cream. It is indeed a challenge for a leader. When one is convinced, then another gets disgruntled. It might make the life of a leader miserable. A leader is expected to be even more thoughtful and patient at this moment. If they become reactive, the situation gets even worse and sometimes gets out of the grip of a leader, inviting unexpected consequences. I have come across many such difficult situations or moments of dilemma, such as painful moments while convincing SMC members to make some decisions, teachers' apathy to break the status quo, and so on. I put effort into convincing my team members, though many often remain unconvinced. When there is no broader consensus for an agenda, I opt for a broader consultation than deciding in haste. In the initial days, my immaturity got reflected on many occasions. These days, I am trying to put my efforts into showcasing my maturity as a tolerant school leader. I sometimes exert some pressure to support me and my agenda, which has turned out to be counter-productive. I feel desperate and miserable time and again and feel like quitting the position. I am frequently charged with making immature decisions. My ego, i.e. *tamas-like* quality, seems to stand as a challenge for me. I acknowledge the efforts of all the team members, for I cannot make a difference at school alone. It might be possible through participatory leadership. The headteachers of the inquiry as gardeners are putting

efforts into taking care of students (flowers), and other lives (staff) to make school a collage of different stakeholders. I am mindful of my role in creating a cohesive and intact team at school, possibly akin to a colourful and harmonious rainbow, a *sattva-like* space guided by visionary knowing (*the Ajna chakra*).

Building Amicable Relationship

Dear readers, now I would like to present a quite thought-provoking sharing of Teacher Sujata after a staff meeting during which I tried to impose pressure on teachers, possibly demonstrating my imposing attitude regarding the overall performance of teachers in a quite reactive manner. Teacher Sujata shares:

Sir, your remarks and presentation styles today appear to be indicative of the fact that there are changes happening at school only because of you. It seems as though other team members are reluctant to bring positive changes at school and are creating obstacles to achieving the mission of school. As a teacher representative, I feel a bit disappointed by your remarks. I do not know how others have felt. But I think most of the teachers are unhappy with your reactive remarks. Can you transform school alone?"

(May 22, 2022)

The sharing of Teacher Sujata makes me think hard about how I present myself in front of the team members. Her question- "*Can you transform school alone?*" depicts my *rajas-like* attitude (ego) guided by the *Svadhishthan chakra*. Unlike headteacher Shrijana, I confess that I am not able to maintain a cordial relationship with all the team members. The relationship appears to be like brittle glass. It may break at any time. As the headteacher, I need to be strategic but not reactive. Proactive efforts can make a difference. To this end, I need to go the extra mile. It is the nature of people (may not be everyone) to pinpoint the shortcomings of others. So I need to

put every effort into creating a cohesive team at school. Reason (1998) argues that "to teach is to create a space in which the community of truth is practiced" (p. xi). The relationship and participation of teachers and students should be enhanced to create a dialogical, deeply enriching, and encouraging learning space at school (Jelfs, 2011). In a similar vein, Sergiovanni (2007) mentions "schools also need special leadership because they are staffed by professionals who do not warmly welcome to the kind of hierarchically based command leadership or hero leadership that characterizes so many other kinds of organizations" (p.1). Freire (1972; 1974) argues for the need to humanize education. Efforts need to be made to empower the children to make them critical citizenry. It appears that developing a positive relationship in school is key to creating an engaging learning environment (Roffey, 2012). Carr (2013) mentions that "positive emotions facilitate creative, tolerant thinking and productivity" (p. 6). Schools are expected to nurture a cordial relationship and close connections with local communities and stakeholders to create a climate of trust (Deal & Peterson, 2016). To put in other words, it is essential to engage children in deep learning in an amicable manner so that they get an opportunity to explore their potential and become critical thinkers.

Nurturing a Spirit of Shared Vision

Dear readers, now I would like to present vignettes that showcase a shared vision to envision a living educational leadership- small 't' praxis.

Shall I just keep grumbling at team members and stay restless that the school is not able to achieve substantive progress due to uncooperative teachers, parents, and other stakeholders? Who is to blame? Paani mathiko obhano bhaer basna milchhara- meaning that can I stay away from blaming others for the underperformance? I have to rethink my leadership styles. I

might inspire teachers and other stakeholders by proactively delegating responsibilities. Timely support and constant encouragement appear to be pertinent to keeping teachers' enthusiasm. If I miss acknowledging the efforts of the stakeholders and team members, it might be costly for me. I need to understand the ground realities and act accordingly with a deeper awareness to create a collegial learning space at school.

(Dream Diary, December 26, 2021)

In the process of writing the chapters of the inquiry, I unfold my school leadership narratives of practice, strategies, and achievements. Then I further explore the other school leaders' stories of struggles to make a difference at school. Highlighting the need for praxis leadership, Fullan (2011) argues that “the source of creating breakthroughs, then is learning about and from practice, not theory “(p. 12). I further look for larger possibilities through *strategic intuition* (Duggan, 2007) to have clarity of my thoughts and vision to adjust to new circumstances and put an effort into creating *a new theory of action* (Fullan, 2011) to turn my school into a success story. The dramatic difference does not occur at an organization overnight. It requires a considerable amount of patience, commitment and perseverance. In connection to it, let me present the sharing of Sushil Sharma, the former headteacher of Jana Jagriti Secondary School pertaining to a vision set by his team to lead a school to a newer height of success

We gave due priority to enhancing the quality of the pre-primary section, which is the foundation of school. When our school produced 95% result in the School Leaving Certificate (SLC) examination in 2052 BS, many people thought that we did a miracle. In fact, there was no such miracle as public thought. It was the outcome of our decade-long effort and investment

done at pre-primary and primary levels. We trained the teachers, made necessary arrangements in the classrooms, and conducted regular meetings and consultations with parents. As we earned the trust of our parents, it was a milestone for us to move ahead in a planned way.

(17 October 2020)

It is remarkable to note how former headteacher Sushil made a long-term shared vision and started investing in pre-primary and primary levels to strengthen the foundation. The efforts of the school were paid off after a decade with the SLC result. It also shows that a leader has to work whole-heartedly on a priority basis, inspiring the team members. Unless the team members are updated and empowered, the school cannot make any significant progress.

I believe in the power of visualization, fiction and imagination. Reflecting on my school leadership practices, I have created some semi-factual texts in the process of envisioning aligning with extraordinary enthusiasm and enriching experiences of school leaders for transformation. Albert Einstein mentions elsewhere that imagination is more important than knowledge. His Holiness Sadhguru (2012) mentions that “imagination is firmly rooted in your mind. You must understand this. It does not matter how fanciful or how wild your imagination is” (p. 155). “Our vision of the universe is driven by the unity of feeling and reason, imagination and reflection” (Wright, 2000, p. 110). So, it appears that the power to imagine or visualize is the signature strength of being human. My vision offers me space to envision a living educational leadership theory for my context (but not limited to), being mindful of the glocal educational perspectives and landscape to explore newer possibilities.

I am feeling good as the headteacher. It is all about the art of leading. I am trying to be a whole-hearted leader embracing the spirit of inter-being. I am getting a chance to serve as the head of an organization. Isn't it a chance for me to leverage my leadership capability? I have to make the most of it. It is an opportunity for me to create my history. My efforts, words, and actions matter a lot, I guess. I need to be mindful of these aspects and pursue my leadership journey.

(Dream Diary, 10 November 2021)

Highlighting the extraordinary role of school leaders in rising successfully above challenges and being emotionally resilient, Grant (2014) argues that a school leader needs to demonstrate an ability to lead and inspire members by maintaining a moral compass and staying connected to their vision. Metaphorically, a leader is anticipated to bloom like a lotus.

I have employed the notion of "empowering epistemic metaphor of knowing as envisioning" (Luitel, 2009, p. 33), looking for possibilities of a better school adhering to integral knowing. The key facets of envisioning in my research incorporate "inclusive logics and expression, various forms of imagination and perspectival language" (Luitel, 2009, p. 33). In a similar vein, Sergiovanni and Green (2015) argue that leadership is a moral craft of stimulating imagination and creativity while maintaining ethical integrity. I envision creating a transformative learning space at school developing a transformative vision to streamline the expectations of students, parents and teachers and other stakeholders. In envisioning a dream school, I asked teachers and stakeholders to share their thoughts and visions pertaining to their dream school and the leadership required to lead such school. Their views are presented as follows:

Owing to his dream school, teacher Raj shared;

I want a school with well-equipped physical infrastructure, a spacious playground and a garden. It has well-managed classrooms, availability of instructional materials and a conference hall. A school with a state-of-the-art ICT/ computer lab, science lab, and provision of capacity-building training for teachers to equip them with modern trends and issues of teaching and ICT skills. There is a culture of cooperation and collaboration, a conducive learning environment, no leg-pulling attitude among team members and where there is a fair provision of reward and punishment to teachers.

Teacher Raj dreams of a school with a better physical infrastructure with all the required facilities so that the teaching and learning process can run smoothly. A school where there is a culture of collaboration and fair treatment of the team members. In this connection, Collins (2001) highlights the need to combine “a culture of discipline with an ethic of entrepreneurship” (p. 13) so that an organization can make a leap through outstanding performance. Teacher Raj anticipates some newness and innovative undertakings happening at school to empower teachers and students.

Similarly, teacher Nisha shared about her dream school as :

A school that does not prioritize only English as the medium of instruction. I believe English has to be an optional subject, but not a compulsory one. It helps to bridge the rift between the community and institutional school. It also helps to promote the feeling of nationality and patriotism. My dream school has a provision of all the required facilities to facilitate the teaching and learning process. There is a nice working culture without any prejudice and discrimination. That school becomes a learning

centre in a true sense. The basis of management is through collective consensus and shared decision-making.

The remarks of teacher Nisha envision a school that can meet the aspirations of learners from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Diversity management is a challenging issue for a school. Undue focus on the English language might paralyze the students' learning. She highlights the role of education in promoting intercultural understanding. She aligns with the view of teacher Raj in terms of ensuring fair treatment to all the team members and creating an autonomy-supportive learning environment at school. He reiterates the need to forge consensus while making any decision at school. Collective decision-making fosters connection and community spirit (Brown, 2021), and it becomes easier for a leader to keep the team engaged and get things done at school. Teacher Dipesh shared his views on his dream school as:

My dream school is a school that is able to win the trust of parents /guardians and the wider community. There are facilities of well-managed classrooms, labs, pure drinking water, a meeting hall and a hygienic environment. A school that organizes meetings with stakeholders time and again to consolidate the relationship with parents and involve them in different activities of school. Priority is also given to extra-curricular activities in addition to the regular teaching and learning process. A place where teachers remain fully engaged in order to improve student achievement as well as their moral behaviour and there is occasional monitoring and supervision from stakeholders and the concerned authorities about the overall affairs of school. On top of that, a school where the actual performance of teachers is evaluated without any discrimination and favouritism.

Teacher Dipesh highlights trust building as a critical component for a thriving school. So, a leader is expected to be relation-responsible to this end. He reiterates the need to create an engaging environment at school. On top of that, no team member has to be discriminated against and demeaned; otherwise, it might be costly for the organization. There has to be a crystal clear evaluation of the performance of the team members.

The SMC chairperson Mahesh, shared his views in connection to his dream school as:

My dream school is a model school of society where people of the local community happily and confidently send their kids for education. Everyone trusts the quality of school, and there is a flow of students for the enrollment. The infrastructure of school is also excellent. A school where there is a cordial relationship among school administration, teachers and students, and other local stakeholders. A school which produces an excellent result and competent students.

The chairperson envisions a school where there is a flow of students from the local community, and the people of the community take ownership of school with greater involvement. He emphasizes a cordial relationship among stakeholders so that the school thrives, aligning with the vision and commitment to confronting chaos and the status quo. He mentions that if students can influence the people of the society through their knowledge and skill, then the people of the community will have a more profound attachment to school. Leadership needs to focus on connectedness, collaboration and communication to positively influence others through a shared vision (Purkey & Siegel, 2002). Considering leadership as the collective capacity of humanity to create a better world, Senge (2006) argues that building a shared vision

and anchoring it by embracing system thinking helps to breathe life into the vision of an organization and step across the threshold.

Metalogue and Way Forward

Fostering learner engagement requires a collective commitment and effort. As the saying goes, it takes a village to raise a child; it underscores the need for a collective effort to nurture a child. It appears pertinent to go for “deeper forms of collaborative cultures” (Azorin & Fullan, 2022, p. 131) to cope up with the emerging issues and concerns of education and build a possibly resilient school system. Similarly, maintaining a positive relationship appears to be at the heart of creating a collaborative learning space at school. The question posed by Teacher Sujata of my school if I could transform school alone might underpin the need to create a learning space at school where a child gets an opportunity to engage collaboratively to nurture their creativity unfolding their active agency. Creating a harmonious space through critical awareness might dispel misunderstanding and conflict.

As school is a miniature society, there is a diversity of thoughts, opinions, vested interests, tensions, dilemmas, contradictions, and many more. It is rather challenging to lead a school by imposing plans and policies. Being optimistic, a headteacher is expected to discharge responsibility, embracing integrity, transparency, and accountability. Highlighting the intent of meaningful collaboration at school, Sutton and Shouse (2016) contend that “collaboration builds teacher trust and expertise and enables schools to implement changes in instruction with greater ease and comfort” (p.69). In a similar vein, Kohm and Nance (2013) mention that collaborative culture builds teachers' confidence and helps them embrace creative leadership, thereby creating an environment for effective learner engagement. So, it

appears crucial to embrace the intent of collaboration as a living value to promote learner engagement.

CHAPTER VIII
 JOURNEY WITHIN THE UNCHARTED TERRITORY: CRITICAL SELF
 NAVIGATION FOR A POSSIBLE TRANSFORMATIVE TURN

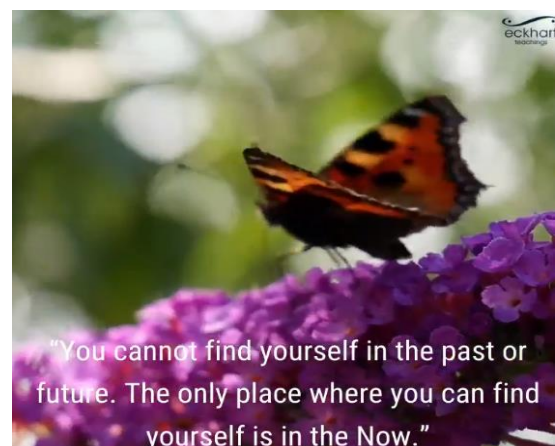
Dear readers, in this chapter, I bring forth the anecdotes of my self-navigation of being and becoming a headteacher with transformative sensibility based on the fifth emergent research question: *How have I been evolving as a school leader along the process of inquiry?* The first anecdote depicts how I am trying to get through difficult circumstances. The other narratives portray my shift from a reactive jerk to a possibly humble headteacher who appears keen to nurture relationships and trust building to create a collegial and transcended learning space at school. Overall, I attempt to theorize my autoethnographic narratives (Ellis et al., 2010; Pandey, 2021), thereby unfolding creative spaces for my transformative learning journey as a headteacher. Existential, critical and relational epistemologies mainly guide this chapter.

Having Grace under Pressure

I get up a bit earlier in the morning than on other days. A new positive vibe gets circulated in me. Then I begin my meditation. In a meditative mood, first of all, with a humble heart, I extend my deepest



Note: <http://surl.li/chdeo>



Source: <http://surl.li/chdfe>

gratitude to God Almighty for bestowing this beautiful life. I also thank my Gurus, parents, well-wishers, and everyone for being with me in one way or other to make many great things happen in my life. After a brief meditation, I go to the roof of my house and savour some noteworthy moments of life (for example, appreciation of guardians for being a kind and caring headteacher, the encouraging remarks of my PhD supervisor about my thesis chapters, to name but just a few). The golden sun rays are about to spring up from the eastern horizon with a beacon of hope and possibility. I look at the sky. The depth of the blue sky is unfathomable and limitless, and so might be the destiny of life. I start questioning myself: what is my identity in this vast cosmos? What is the purpose of my birth? What is the limit of my growth? These questions possibly trigger my soul searching. Suddenly I reduce to tears. I experience solace as the drops of tears flow down my cheeks. I think of my everyday activities, and mingle of pain and hope. There are some people who encourage me to keep moving ahead, and at the same time, there are people who add fuel to the fire and are keen to make a mountain out of a molehill aggravating the situations. Sometimes, out of disappointment, I feel like giving up leadership responsibility. My inner voice alerts me, "Chet, tolerate, tolerate, and tolerate. If you don't tolerate it, it brings you to the end of your mission. You need to change your perspective." After all, everyone is supporting and alerting me to pursue my responsibility with utmost sincerity and integrity. I need to have grace under pressure critically observing my shortcomings and rectifying them as I am constantly trying to edit my life to harness its better version.

(Journal 6, June 2020)

Houston (2008) argues that “leadership in today’s context seems Sisyphean- you just have to keep rolling that rock up the hill, knowing all the time that someone will come along and try to roll it back down” (p. 14). So, the remarks of Houston depict a challenging context that a leader needs to cope with and brave the uncertainties (Brown, 2012). The only option at my disposal is to gather courage, have patience and get ahead, as it is said that champions are a few steps ahead of others confronting the storms of life. John F. Kennedy, young and vital, witty and articulate president of the USA, constantly mentioned the leadership quality as “having grace under pressure” (Houston, 2008, p. 10). His inspirational remark expects a leader to have a sense of smoothness and decency in difficult and challenging circumstances to make a difference in an organization.

The adverse situations in disguise might provide me with an opportunity to grow as an efficient and effective leader. These problematic situations might be testing my leadership ability as *agni pariksha* (acid test) of my leadership journey. There is no other viable alternative for me at my disposal now than standing the test of time. This might be the law of life. Deep in my heart, an incredible vibe of confidence seems to emerge and embolden me to confront the plethora of challenges of life with greater optimism.

Am I a Reactive Jerk?

Sometimes, I consider myself a less strategic headteacher. I decide in haste and regret it later. I am not able to seize the moment. I find myself chasing many rabbits. Occasionally, I get into a dilemma and appear to be less consultative. I feel like I am reaching the edge of vulnerability. Even if some of my colleagues might want to play upon my vulnerability, I am committed to transforming vulnerability into strength and courage.

(Journal 8, February 9, 2021)

What does it mean to be a strategic headteacher? Am I leading with the mind only? How much have I allocated to my heart? Am I leading the school aligning with the expectations of the stakeholders? These questions always strike me and they seem to be guided by *rajas-like* quality. Navigating deeper into self, I critically reflect on unfolding my everyday school leadership experiences along with my efforts of being and becoming. Critical self-reflection further emboldens me to cope with disempowering beliefs, forces, mindset and taken-for-granted assumptions as a transformative school leader in the making. I question, challenge and critique myself to break the status quo and ponder upon my shortcomings. Upon my request to share pertaining to my leadership styles, strengths, and shortcomings, teacher Samir shared as follows:

Sir, when you appear to be reactive, you seem to be having a confrontation with team members. As the headteacher, you must tolerate all these happenings and appear in front of your colleagues as if nothing has happened. Even if you want to shout at, argue and pinpoint the weakness, you must speak politely and keep the teachers motivated and meaningfully engaged. Your amicable dealing means a lot to the teachers. When you lose your temper or be reactive, the situation further aggravates and gets out of your grip, and you will have to lament and regret not taking the situation under control in time. As the headteacher, you need to have patience. Similarly, having gone through my narrative, my critical friend Pabitra said, "I sense that you are experiencing the conflict between your strategic or logical mind and caring or intuitive heart.

Pondering upon the overall circumstances, it appears to me that being the headteacher of a community school demands patience, an incredible ability of

tolerance and indomitable courage to turn challenges into opportunities. Is being tolerant a need to become a loving and caring headteacher? I am not sure. So, there is a need for me to have a deeper awareness. There are several instances of conflict and confrontation at school. I need to take them normally and deal strategically. I get trapped in dilemmas frequently. Sometimes, I get upset seeing the activities of some teachers who do not seem devoted to their responsibility. The responsibility hardly comes into their priority like coordinating with parents, updating the record of the students, and adopting some remedial measures to scaffold the student's learning. They are keen to pinpoint the shortcomings of others than taking self-initiated efforts. I realize that I need to be more strategic while dealing with teachers not to hurt their sentiments. In the meantime, am I aware of when to be strategic and when to be caring? After all, the progress of school is almost impossible unless the entire team gets committed to achieving the desired goals set by school. I need to find some points to inspire teachers to be more dynamic and committed. I should not be reactive with teachers at any cost. The situation might get out of my control, leading to untoward consequences and it will make a mockery of my lifeline statement, "*I am a humble caretaker of school*". So, I have started changing my strategies, being possibly empathetically reactive, and trying to get into the team members' shoes. I know that I need to change my attitude first to change others. Sometimes when I get in a dilemma, I ask this question to teachers seeking ideas and opinions to get through the situation. "What would you do if you were in a moment of dilemma? Or what is your suggestion pertaining to this issue? The following poem underpins the anguish of a headteacher:

Agony of a Leader

Only the wearer knows

*where a shoe pinches,
Only the mother knows
unenduring labour pain,
only a leader knows
Tolerating the intolerable,
rejoice and be resilient,
Be optimistic with a humble heart.*

(Poem IX, February 2021)

Making a Flashback: Exploring Ground Realities

Dear readers, now I unveil a brief history of Namuna Pragati Secondary School and its present context to give a picture of how the school is operating

A few decades back, there were many students at school, more than eight hundred. Then there were no institutional schools in the area. After institutional schools started mushrooming, parents from so-called well-to-do and status-conscious families started getting their children admitted to institutional schools. The people of the community started questioning the poor performance of the students, especially in the SLC examination, irregularity of students, and punctuality of teachers. Some people in the community shared that the headteacher did not pay any attention to establishing a connection with the community. In 2010, after the retirement of the long-serving headteacher for three decades, a new headteacher was appointed. He was an active and dynamic person. He made efforts to bring about changes at school. He prioritized relationships with the community as his key strategy to enhance the quality of teaching and learning at school. For this, he started supporting and motivating teachers. He started sending teachers for different capacity-building trainings. Recalling how he learnt typing and other basic computer skills, teacher Bhim

said, *“The headteacher asked me to learn computer at any cost. He reduced my one period and asked me to master basic computer skills. I became computer literate because of him; otherwise, I would have never learnt it.”*

Working constantly with commitment and taking the school team in confidence, he created a positive vibe at school and in the community. The people of the community started coming to school. Some brought their children from institutional schools to get them admitted there. Everything was going well. Suddenly there was an unpleasant dramatic turn at school. Due to politicization and other internal feuds at school, he could not continue long as the headteacher. He was bound to step down. When the people of the community came to know that he was resigning, they came to school to protest, demanding his continuation. Many students protested it. But there was no way out. He quit the headship and got transferred to another school from there. There was a blame game happening among teachers, SMC, and community members. Who was at fault? It was difficult to identify, but the situation in school was getting deplorable for sure. After his departure, another headteacher was appointed. He tried his best to bring the situation back to normalcy, but he could not do so due to internal conflict. Within a year, many students left school, which gave a wrong impression to the people of the community. Hard earned the trust of the community was again on the anvil. It was hard to gain the trust of the community back. Unfortunately, a conflict occurred between the school administration, teachers, and SMC. A cordial relationship with the people of the community with a feeling of ownership could not be re-established. The number of students declined gradually, and the school was on the brink of collapse. There was a rumour in the community that the school would soon be turned into a hotel or a poultry farm. The well-wishers of the school were shocked to hear such heart-rending remarks as the school is the

epitome of the blood and sweat of community members, especially those who contributed to its establishment. There was a competition with a nearby community school, where there were more young and dynamic teachers. So, the people of the community started sending their children there. The attempts made by school so far were not sufficient to reach the verge of expectations and regain the trust of the people of the community, such as English as a medium of instruction, computer education, updated teachers and so on.

It is in January 2014, I get an appointment as a permanent teacher at secondary level and get posted at Namuna Pragati secondary school. I had come to this school once before as one of my friends used to teach there. I knew where the school was. I happen to meet the chairperson of school. He takes me to school and introduces me to other teachers. The headteacher is on leave, so the acting headteacher introduces me to the assembly. I see very few students on the school ground, probably below a hundred. He allocates me some periods. Later, I come to know that there were some reasons behind the gradual decline in the number of students, which included politicization at school, headteachers' inability to build a cordial relationship with teachers, students, and the community, and not being able to compete with another nearby community school and other institutional schools in the vicinity. After a few days, the headteacher arrives at school. He allocates my periods to different classes. I have already started taking my classes. I go to grade ten. There are only nine students. I get surprised when students share that the English class remained vacant for four months. It is the fourth month of the academic session, even the first lesson has not been started. When I talk to the headteacher, he says that he made several attempts to bring the teachers, but due to many factors, he was not able to do so. After a few months, I am appointed the headteacher of the school, possibly through collective

consensus. Even the head teacher Shiv is willing to hand over the responsibility to me. In this connection, he shared, *“I want to hand over headship to you. It’s time for the new generation to take the lead. I am ready to support you.”*

From the very beginning, I start having a consultation with the stakeholders and getting to know the issues of school. Owing to my efforts, I heard some people making some remarks as *“naya jogile badhi kharani dhashna khojachha*, meaning *a new monk tries to smear with more ashes, metaphorically a newly appointed authorized person puts more efforts to make change happen.”* I make several efforts such as holding meetings with teachers and identifying immediate needs, orientation on lesson planning, forming different committees and delegating responsibilities, conducting parents and stakeholders’ meetings and so on to bring changes in the pedagogy of teachers and establish a cordial connection with the people of the community. I hold frequent meetings with SMC and make a collective decision for the effective implementation of school programmes. The Alumni was formed before, but it was passive. I put effort to revitalize it. And it has also worked like a bridge to connect to the community now. I become quite stern to break the status quo, which does not happen as I think. The reluctance of teachers to update, deep-rooted stagnation, the apathy of community toward school, and the lack of resources are the bottlenecks in moving ahead. Gradually a climate of trust seems to be created in the community. The number of students gradually increases and reaches 200 plus. Some people in the community are in ‘wait and see’ condition. Expectations of stakeholders, students, teachers, SMC, Alumni and people of the community keep rising. The school team is quite able to give a message that the school is putting efforts to reach the verge of the expectation of the community. It is perhaps a significant achievement. It has regained its momentum to some extent. A new hope seems to be springing

among the stakeholders. The aloof community has been turned into an involved community through frequent interaction and involving them into different committees such as parent-teacher associations, and so on. Junior Red Cross Circle, child club, and other clubs are functional at school. The master plan has been made to construct state-of-the-art buildings at school. In this connection, Rajesh, a community member said, "*You gave a new life to school which was otherwise about to collapse*". Such remarks from community members keep encouraging our team to get even more committed to the betterment of school. In the meantime, some issues of mine (my fragilities) must be thought about to amend my leadership style. The leadership journey appears "to be a carefully orchestrated critical engagement" (Wright, 2000, p. 80) in that it demands the critical sensibility of a leader to remain mindful of one's leadership delivery and its impact on the welfare of an organization.

Effective family and community engagement and collaboration in school activities appear to be quite challenging. Still, to this end, a headteacher, as well as school team, needs to nurture a genuine relationship with families and the community (Grant & Ray, 2019). School community partnership supports student learning and strengthens the school-community bond, promoting parental engagement in school affairs (Valli et al., 2015).

Nurturing Relationship: Rethinking My Vulnerabilities

In my experience, repairing and nurturing a relationship appears to be a mammoth task. It demands a lot of compromises and patience; encouraging the team members' collaborative spirit might help to strengthen the relationship. To crystalize it, I recall a moment from my memory lane.

The particular day in October 2017 was deeply painful. The lack of punctuality of the teachers had been an issue. My attention was drawn to this problem

by the SMC and community people. We had a teachers' meeting pertaining to this issue. I was asked to be stern to latecomers. I made up my mind to do so, but there was no broader consultation on it. I was keen to take action against teachers who turned up late. I started closely inspecting the punctuality of my teachers. One day, a teacher turned up late without information. I was in a kind of shock. Then I asked her not to repeat it in a quite reactive manner. She did not speak a word, but as I read her face, I felt that she was shocked. She seemed sad the whole day and went home without any reaction.

After her departure, I thought I should not have behaved that way. I should have talked to her calmly to explore why she was late. My problem was being reactive at first, souring the relationship and then regretting later and making efforts to repair the relationship, which has become quite costly for me. This might reflect my immaturity and faulty way of dealing with people. So, how to get rid of this vicious circle has been a life-threatening challenge for me. I should not add fuel to the fire by being reactive and taking a decision in haste. I have to cope and adapt to any adverse circumstance thoughtfully.

I feel that some teachers get disappointed when I tend to be reactive and get into a vulnerable condition in the decision-making process. Having observed such a scenario, Teacher Lok said, *“Sir, you are working hard, we know, but you are suffering only due to your reactive manner. You need to maintain a relationship with the teachers in a way the strings of the well-tuned guitar are maintained. It has to be neither too loose nor too tight.”* Pertaining to maintaining the punctuality of teachers, former headteacher Sushil of Jana Jagriti Model school shared:

There is a way to deal with the issue of punctuality. A headteacher has to be strategic in this regard. No action has to be taken without proper

thought, consideration, and consultation. Regarding any issue and problem, hold a staff meeting. This is the forum to solve any issue in school. Present the agenda of the meeting. Have adequate discussion upon every item of the agenda and get it decided collectively. Do not impose anything from your side. Ask your teachers: what to do for those who turn up late?, what to do for those who stay absent without any information?, and what to do for those who do not stay in the class the whole time? Have enough discussion and interaction about the agenda in the meeting. Get them decided from the staff meeting and plan for its implementation accordingly. When any decision is taken collectively, then everyone takes or has to take ownership. But most often, headteachers try to impose their authority and issue directives and notices. Generally, people do not like directives. So, a headteacher has to make a decision collectively through adequate discourse and discussion on the issues. Take time. Don't worry. Let everyone feel that they are a part of any decision made. The unilateral decision always puts the headteacher under problem. Some teachers are found not abiding by the collectively made decision. In this case, they feel that they are at fault. It would be easier for you to correct them.

A headteacher has to be neither too strict nor too liberal. If you're too liberal, gradually, your teachers start disobeying you. It's up to the headteacher how to balance the strings of leadership so that it can function meaningfully. If you are too liberal, people might start saying that "yo head teacherle gari khadaina (this head teacher will not sustain)". You should not let this benefit people as well. The heart of the matter is that a headteacher must be liberal for the right thing, but stern for the wrong. So, a head teacher has to be a role model first. If the headteacher doesn't work hard, comes to

school late, disappears from school frequently citing several reasons such as meetings and other official works. At this point, the teachers start gradually disobeying the headteacher and the climate of distrust is created. So, a headteacher has to work hard. People see when you work hard. People also start evaluating if you do not work hard. Being the chief of school, a headteacher has to feel that there are eyes looking at him from every direction. Never try to throw the dust into the eyes of teachers and stakeholders, mentioning several pretexts and excuses. An honest and dedicated head teacher can involve other teachers in different activities. There are teachers with positive as well as negative mindsets at school. The teachers with negative attitude also start gradually supporting you if you are doing well selflessly. And the rest will be compelled to support you.

If you start taking action against teachers taking support from the management committee, it does not help you to make negative teachers positive. It instead makes them more negative. Rather than realizing their shortcomings, such teachers get united and become vindictive toward you. Let them constructively realize their flaws. (August 10, 2021)

I was impressed by his remarkable sharing. He emphasizes the need to forge consensus and collective decision-making. According to him, maintaining equilibrium and creating a climate of trust are crucial aspects of leadership. In a similar vein, Deal (2008) mentions that “leadership on a see-saw is a balancing act. Some leaders seek to tighten up things, while others strive to set the spirit free. Too much influence in either direction means trouble” (p.172). Highlighting the significance of nurturing relationships in the process of transformation, Taylor (2007) argues that “ it happens through trustful relationships that allow individuals to have questioning discussions,

share information openly and achieve mutual and consensual understanding” (p. 179). So, there seems to be an urgent need to amend my way of behaving to maintain an amicable and cordial relationship with teachers and stakeholders. I have to put effort into turning a shocking moment into a rocking moment through sincere efforts, patience, persistence and perseverance without losing zeal and enthusiasm. I do not believe in the idea of delivery and control, thereby transcending the intent of transactional leadership so as to create a collaborative learning space at school. I try to create a climate of trust as it may help to create a collegial environment at school, and several possibilities might be explored for school improvement. In this connection, Oliver (2015) mentions that building an environment of trust is crucial for a school leader to experience long-term achievement. So, being mindful that a leader is not supposed to let the trust be eroded, considering integrity, fairness and trust as the key tenets of leadership, Oliver (2015) mentions that "failure to lead with integrity is deplorable. It is virtually unpardonable" (p. 2). Integrity reflects our action based on our awareness (Barrett, 1998), possibly guided by the *crown chakra*, i.e. *integral knowing*, which is associated with consciousness and harmony to co-create a harmonious space at school.

Being (Self) dialogical as/for Liberating/Transforming: Self-Other Dialectics

As the world has multiple realities, I think they are socially constructed and multi-layered. Thus, my ontology for the research is relative and subjective. I navigate my inner self to explore multiple realities. I am mindful of the point that the self



is non-dualistic and interconnected and seek dialectical situatedness of it guided by non-dual awareness²⁰(Josipovic, 2012)

Critical self-reflection might be a powerful tool for my self-navigation.

Having a constant dialogue between my fractured identity as a school leader and my inner self, I begin to reflect upon my efforts of self-liberation or *moksha*. Whatever I am now, it is all interconnected as “our life is the sum of all that has touched us, all and everyone who has made a difference in our lives” (Dhiman, 2019, p.v).

Extending my deep gratitude to one and all, I begin to reflect upon the purpose of my life. For me, as a headteacher, liberation means building a cordial and harmonious relationship with team members, working together jovially to share ideas and discuss things that can develop the confidence of my colleagues and make them feel empowered as agents of change (Qutoshi, 2016). I am searching for purpose and meaning of life and leadership as a God-bestowed responsibility at this precious moment of life through this spiritual inquiry. The Habermasian view of emancipation enables leaders to become free of all restrictions of the outer world as well as deep-seated assumptions through which a leader makes better sense of being and becoming (Qutoshi, 2016). As a leader, this sensibility enables me to develop contextual and transformative leadership visions.

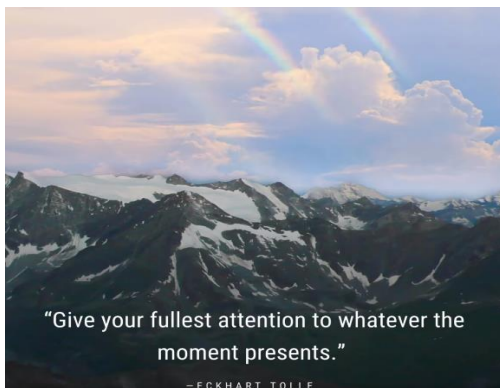
I want to redefine my role as a leader. But I do not want to be the queen bee, holding the centre position. I just want to collaborate with colleagues being with them by their side, not simply as a sage on the stage. I want to deconstruct the leadership myths of being at the centre. Sometimes, I question myself, "Should I put efforts to make myself a leader by adhering to the existing leadership myths? Or should I deconstruct my identity as a leader? Deconstructive interpretation places the

²⁰ NDA is state of all conscious experiencing. A pure experience or an experience of oneness.

authentic self and poses tough questions (Dantley, 2010). As it is the process of making a person mindful of their positioning, educational leaders might begin “to deconstruct established attitudes, values, and actions that foster inequity” (Beachum et al., 2007, p. 51). This process helps to unmask the root cause of any issue or problem in an organization by deconstructing leadership myths and stereotypes. Aligning with the philosophy of deconstruction as decentering, critical spirituality intends to get to the root of issues and problems and rebuild a better organizational structure and culture (McCray, 2012). Nietzsche (2014) mentions that “deconstruction works in identifying the contradictions of logic within a text, exploring those assumptions that are often taken for granted, or go unnoticed in more traditional readings” (p. 17). In other words, Derrida's philosophy of deconstruction tries to upset the hierarchies of binaries and challenges the taken-for-granted assumptions in educational leadership discourses.

Never Give up: Stay Being a Squeezed Lemon

It might be someday in June 2019; out of frustration, I shared my deep woes with Resource Person Raj, who came to our school for supervision. On a quite



Note: <http://surl.li/chdfe>

disheartening note, I said, “*Sir, I think I cannot continue any longer as the headteacher at this school. It’s hard to please everyone. I am under huge pressure. I have to tolerate unnecessary and unexpected interventions. Almost nobody acknowledges my effort. In fact, I am disappointed by the*

overall scenario at school. There are hardly a few members who want change and are keen to work to this end.” After I revealed my woes, maybe my vulnerability, he said soothingly:

Chet ji, take it easy. Never try to give up. What will you do when you quit? You will be immediately replaced. People are keenly looking for the opportunity. So, do not take any decision in haste. You will have to regret it in the future. I know you are putting a lot of efforts to improve school. Keep your enthusiasm up. Stay here being a squeezed lemon. You are a young headteacher. You have many days ahead to work and demonstrate your ability. The community will gradually evaluate your effort. It takes time. You cannot garner a hundred percent support and solidarity in your mission from the teachers and other stakeholders. Nabiraunu nadaraunu (don't be at fault, don't get scared). Why do you worry much? There is no question about your honesty and integrity. People gradually come to know about it. After all, you are the headteacher of school. Being the headteacher, you need to display your maturity and stay connected with your team members.

"When you quit the headship, you either have to get transferred from this school or quit the job. How can you stay here being a toothless tiger? As your well-wisher, I advise you to display your maturity and encourage you to muster up the courage to continue your leadership responsibility. It's up to you to make the decision.” I listened to him with due attention, but I did not say anything. I simply nodded my head. After half an hour of conversation, he left school. After his departure, I went to the office and thought for a while over what he said in a reflective mood. At home in the evening, recalling his metaphorical expression of '*stay here being a squeezed lemon*' made me contemplate my leadership strategy and my future course of action. I came out of the room and went to the roof. I looked at the sky. It

was a full moon night. I gazed at it for a while. I looked around; the whole city was looking bright. Sometimes the moon got invisible when enveloped in the dark cloud. It does not mean the moon has stopped shining. So, it depicts that the situation does not always remain the same. I need to learn a life lesson from it. We have to look for positivity, even in the negativity, or explore the heart of darkness.

I try to convince myself that life is full of tests and trials, and I need to possibly bloom where I am planted as I feel I am interconnected like a lotus. I need to perform my *swadharma* come what may. Once when I made up my mind to get transferred to another school, I came across some questions and reactions from my colleagues: a. why does he want to leave the school?, b. isn't he getting support from the school management committee?, c. is he getting better opportunities at another school?, and so on. The teachers of the school where I wanted to get transferred asked me: a. why do you want to come to this school, quitting headship there?, b. are you having problems there at that school?, and so on.

Further, teacher Rajesh said, "*As you planned to come to this school, our headteacher may have thought that you are making a plan to replace him from the position of headship shortly as you are more qualified and dynamic than him*". The questions and queries of teachers put me in a huge dilemma. Then I asked myself: "Why do I want to get transferred? Is that the only solution? Am I seeking temporary solace in the long journey of my career? and so on.

I recall a moment when one of my friends Raj said, "*Chet, be mindful. There is no friend in an organization. People are ready to stab you with a sharp knife when you are at fault.*" His remarks hold truth to some extent. There are many bitter moments I have faced as a leader. As the headteacher, I need to work strategically though it sounds *rajas-like*, to overcome the challenges. It takes time to reach the

goal. Even in a family, there might be conflict among family members. Conflict seems to be inevitable everywhere. It depends on how we settle it mindfully through collaborative effort and create a win-win situation. It is hard to make everyone happy as people have different expectations and aspirations. As the saying goes, *“If you want to please everyone, you cannot please anyone. If you want to make everyone happy, then do not be a leader and start selling ice- cream.”* These remarks are indicative of ground realities that a leader faces every day. Aligning with these remarks, I think there is no other way for me other than to transform myself and be a catalyst for others’ transformation. I should not decline my momentum as some people have started questioning my dynamism. I need to be aware of the other sides of narratives as well. I am also gradually receiving the support and solidarity of the community in our collective mission of transforming school. It is evident that challenges occur while overcoming the deeply rooted status quo, which I am facing every day at school. I think getting lost at this crossroads of my professional journey may not rejoice my heart; otherwise, my dream remains an unfinished project.

Sokolow and Houston (2008) argue that life constantly offers a new life lesson to test our strength and learn and thrive from experience. My school leadership journey over the years has led me “to some new insights and new questions” (Dyson, 2007, p.36) for my mammoth task of self-transformation, overcoming setbacks, frustrations, obstacles and barriers possibly by the support of cultural knowing. My inner dilemma and life challenges are whether I would be able to penetrate the rock of the circumstances and sprout like a People tree or be hopelessly defeated, akin to the Hamletian dilemma- the moment of to be or not to be (Panta, 2018). I need to go the extra mile to make a difference. I conceive pain and problems as indispensable aspects of my life. I should not withdraw from my responsibility being upset by the

adverse circumstances. The following poem further illustrates my ambitions, dilemmas and endeavors of self-transformation:

Metamorphosis

Desperate larva in the cocoon

Struggling to come out;

Dream of being a colourful butterfly

Amid a mountain of doubt.

Have a freewill to choose an attitude

It determines our altitude;

Need to be spiritually aware

To set forth uncharted journey ahead.

Do you want to break yourself?

Or be broken?

Choice is ours whether to be an omelet

Or a chicken.

(Poem X, May 2021)

I get restless and impatient when I encounter any problem, maybe about organizing a meeting, programme, or other issues. As I contemplate the problems and their ways out, a new wave of enthusiasm appears in me. Maybe I need to learn to go beyond problems and treat them as a part of my life and smile at them gracefully. Getting upset at the face of the issues seems disempowering and paralyzing. A few years back, I read a captivating book entitled '*Tough Times Never Last, But Tough People Do*' by Schuller (1998), where he mentions that "when you've exhausted all

possibilities, remember this: you haven't "(p.5). He encourages readers to look for newer avenues of possibilities to overcome the problems amid chaos. Tough people gather the courage to win over tough times and survive and thrive through difficulties. I think tough times teach us valuable life lessons and support us in being resilient.

Problems may appear as opportunities in disguise. When problems are taken as a part of life, it helps me to relieve my stress and develops the confidence to cope with them. Sometimes, I find myself in such a vulnerable moment that I feel depressed and think I cannot get ahead anymore. I feel like getting stuck in the quicksand of the circumstances. I have to turn all the gloom, challenges, and dilemmas into a new perspective, as viewed by Zohar and Marshall (2004). My introverted nature appears as a barrier, and I feel that I am stuck. I think it all depends on attitude and mindset. I might have to dare to thrive out of my vulnerability.

Leadership as Building Accountability and Integrity

Every day when I reach school, the security guard standing at the school gate greets me. Then I look around. A feeling of tremendous joy fills my heart and mind. Then I enter the headteacher's office and look at the headteacher's chair with reverence. Having felt a huge sense of responsibility, I extend my gratitude to the Almighty for the opportunity. I lower my head to touch the chair with respect, close my eyes, and make a vow to discharge my responsibility with utmost sincerity adhering to the ethos of accountability and integrity as far as possible as the lifeblood of my school leadership journey and make an effort to be a whole-hearted headteacher.

(January 15, 2022)

Leaders are anticipated to be mindful of a situation or context that causes a lack of trust, so they need to remain engaged in trust-advancing conversations to build

trust with the team members (Evans, 2015). Taking trust building as a crucial and critical aspect of leading the change, Lestari et al. (2021) argue that a leader has a crucial role to play during the periods of change to build trust and enhance the dynamic managerial capability, which consequently affects organizational performance. “Change savvy leaders always know that you can’t directly make people change. You create a system where positive change is virtually inevitable” (Fullan, 2010, p. 62). To deal with complexity, Fullan (2010) comes up with the term ‘skinny’ “which is about the naked unadorned facts- the essence of the fact” (p.3). The skinny approach incorporates the idea of making change less complex through the combination of mindset and action set. In other words, an apt combination of the right attitude and grounded actions catalyze the transformation process. In this connection, former headteacher Sushil Sharma shared:

I conducted a timely social audit and auditing of the financial transactions. I disseminated the information about the overall activities of school to the teachers, parents, and other key stakeholders. People are keen to know about the budget allocation and financial transactions of the school as well as how the resources are used. When the headteacher openly shares and is ready to answer the stakeholders' queries, he or she can maintain accountability and transparency. When people doubt your transparency, I guess there is no point in continuing leadership. If a leader is accountable, he or she can make others accountable. So, what I think is that accountability has to begin with oneself.

(October 17, 2020)

The remarks of headteacher Sushil indicate that a school leader needs to be accountable for the queries and concerns of the stakeholders. To this end, maintaining

accountability and integrity appears to be a critical aspect of leadership in the absence of which there is no point in holding a leadership position. Owing to maintaining accountability and integrity, another participant, headteacher Shrijana shared:

As the headteacher, I am mindful of building an environment of trust at school. When people start questioning and have a doubt about the activities of the headteacher, there occurs a crisis of trust. A headteacher needs to maintain honesty. It helps to create a belief system and values the relationship. To keep integrity, I try to be transparent about the overall affairs of school. I always ask myself: how long does a dishonest headteacher continue his or her leadership journey? Why should others trust me? There must be a reason to trust me, mustn't there?

(18 October 2020)

Her remarks underpin the need for trust-building as a critical component of leadership. She mentions that transparency as the heart of leadership has to be maintained at any cost. Another thought-provoking idea is that nobody trusts a leader without any reason. For this, proactive efforts are required to gain the trust of the stakeholders.

The remarks of both participants underscore the need to maintain accountability and integrity to portray oneself as an honest and ethical leader. Considering accountability as a vital component of leadership, Dive (2009) mentions that “an accountable person is expected to exercise the relevant and appropriate authority for their role” (p.15). Highlighting the point that accountability requires self-commitment, Jackson (2021) argues that “you will never get accountability by chasing, checking, and correcting people” (p. 73). So, it appears that exercising authority by being relevant and answerable is a critical element of leadership.

Enduring Criticism for Wholehearted Leadership

I came to know that teacher Lok kept criticizing me despite my efforts to lead the school differently. I kept pondering why he was acting that way. I put every possible effort into convincing him and exploring the underlying cause of our misunderstanding. I thought it might be due to an ego problem, or he wanted me to consult him for every affair of school. Sometimes, I almost lost my temper having observed his activities and leg-pulling attitude.

Further, I consulted a few other teachers, and they also mentioned a similar point that he is keen to highlight my shortcomings. I thought hard as how to deal with him. I almost went blank. I did not react to him immediately. A few days passed. I was looking for an effective way to approach him and ask him not to be my critic without concrete evidence.

Dealing strategically with insults and unfair criticism might be a “life-sustaining and life-enhancing” (Sokolow & Houston, p.13) experience for me. I need to accept any adverse circumstances as an opportunity for my enhancement. I have a quest for inner peace and empowerment that will resonate with my teachers, students and me. I have to reconstruct my identity to sustain myself in the changing situation of multiple challenges and opportunities. Nowadays, I take those teachers as critical friends. As I started getting closer to teacher Lok, I came to know about some positive changes in his remarks about me and my leadership styles. In the course of my school leadership journey, I have come to realize that I have to listen to others’ points of view and acknowledge their contribution with a grateful heart to be a whole-hearted leader, as viewed by Brown (2012). This might be a wonderful leadership strategy. I am aware of creating win-win situations to accommodate the viewpoints of a dissenter, as viewed by Everard et al. (as cited in Coleman & Glover, 2010). This

strategy might help to create a cohesive team at school, incorporating the diverse views and opinions of the team members. In what follows is a journal entry that reflects my emerging thought:

I have come to realize that I can't stop others from criticizing me. It's hard to meet the expectations of everyone. So, there might be dissatisfaction and grievances. Keeping an open mind and heart, I must welcome the team members' opinions. I come to know my shortcomings from those teachers who criticize my efforts. Taking criticism, dissatisfaction, and grievances of team members, into account, I might get a chance to fix many issues at school. Discouraging criticism might be counter-productive, but I put effort into exploring its positive aspect.

(Dream Diary, October 1, 2021)

Bouncing Back Big

*The woods are lovely,
Dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
Miles to go before I sleep
Miles to go before I sleep*

Robert Frost

The new school headteacher strives for changes at school. The school team makes an impressive academic plan to improve student achievement and ensure the holistic development of children, following the ideas of a whole-hearted approach to manage children's behaviour (Rogers, 2000). They collectively work for the betterment of school. The school alumni also comes up with support for school in many ways. The donor agencies are showing

their interest in supporting school to develop physical infrastructure and enhance quality education. According to the master plan, a four-storeyed building gets a top priority which is almost finalized. An international donor agency agrees to construct it. Now the construction of a mega building is in progress. The culture of collaboration takes a new turn at school which is expected to boost the performance culture of school. An amicable relationship between the community, students, teachers, SMC and PTA, achieves a new height and collegiality is fostered among the team members. There is a new enthusiasm in the local community to contribute to the progress of the school. In a few years, the infrastructure of school gets completely changed. When people of the community look at school, they get amazed by seeing magnificent school buildings. When people visit school, they get impressed by the state-of-the-art library, well-equipped science and computer lab, drinking water and sanitary provisions at school.

All the team members are dedicated to engaging students in teaching-learning activities. An outstanding performance of school amazes everyone. The school gains the trust and confidence of the community. The Mayor gets impressed by the performance of school and appreciates the efforts of the school team. Student enrollment has drastically increased. The number reaches near a thousand. During assembly, the school ground is full of students. It looks like a dream while having a flashback of the situations of school a few years back. The headteacher meets senior citizens of the community. One of them says, "Who will continue the legacy of school? The skin of my both shoulders got peeled off while carrying the timber during the construction of the school buildings. We raised the fund from every household

in the community to provide salaries to some teachers. After your arrival, there is a glimmer of hope for school improvement. We are quite hopeful that the school will not collapse. Yo purkhale banaeko Saraswotiko mandirlai jasaribhaepani jogaunus head sir, tapainko kalyan hunchha meaning let this school, the temple of Goddess Saraswati, the goddess of learning and wisdom, not collapse as it is the glory of the community established by the predecessors' blood and sweat. Head sir, take the lead as you are doing it. Your contribution shall be remembered.” He gets in a pensive mood at the remarks of that senior citizen who was a former member of the school management committee as well. Most of the people in the community gradually start sending their children to this school. People start requesting the head teacher to get their children admitted to school at any cost. It has been a huge challenge to manage the flow of students. When the people of the community gather at chowk, they say, “Barha varsa pachhi khola farkanchha bhanthe ahile hamro school pani dherai ramro bhayako chha, meaning as it is said that a stream swells/floods over the periods of twelve years, similarly our school is also flourishing after a long stagnation. The school is awarded the “Best School Award” by the Municipality. The confidence and morale of the teachers get enhanced. They enjoy high prestige in the community. There is continuous support and enthusiastic participation of the people of the community in different activities at school. Community participation and feeling of ownership is visible. It is heartening to see that the school is bouncing back big.

The narrative reflects the constant struggle of the headteacher (me) and the school team for the flourishing of school. I have started taking joy in the magic of

honest self-reflection and rejoicing in things as they are (Chordon, 2009; Chordon, 2010). It takes courage to be a transformative school leader. Sometimes I face grudges from my teachers and try my best to encourage them and settle the issue with a close attention. I reflect and calculate the risk factors before making any decision. I believe that a collective decision-making strategy is a crucial component of leadership. I agree with the ideas of Chordon (2009) that “deep down in the human spirit there is a reservoir of courage. It is always available, always waiting to be discovered” (p. 59). Delightfully, I pursue my school leadership journey abiding by the ethos of courage, compassion, care and connection (Brown, 2012).

Metalogue and Way Forward

Recalling the remarks of the sweeper of my school, even though I wanted to be a lovable star, she took me as an incompetent jerk (Casciaro & Lobo, 2005). Sustaining leadership responsibility and having grace under pressure appears to be a quite daunting task for me. Am I leading the organization, or am I being led?, and why should others be led by me? These questions sound quite paradoxical to me as I consider myself as a living contradiction, but I endeavor to create a harmonious and collegial learning space at school. Even though I try to be as humble as possible, some team members take me as a reactive jerk. With shifting perspective and self-probing my sensibilities, I am quite aware of deconstructing deep-seated leadership myths with possibly enhanced awareness of “reconciling spirituality with critical perspective” (Panta & Luitel, 2022b, p. 1), thereby considering materiality and criticality as two guiding forces of leadership. Despite unprecedented challenges and setbacks, I am committed to possibly being a whole-hearted headteacher with relational sensibility and transformative intent. The next chapter reveals the climax or a tentative destination of my PhD inquiry.

PHASE III: CONJECTURE OR PROPOSITION PHASE

This phase presents the allegorical values of my inquiry. It is not about concluding my inquiry as such. I try to render a *currere-like* meaning to see our (me and my participants) future school leadership engagements. This section reveals the conjecture or proposition of my inquiry.

CHAPTER IX

ARRIVING AT A DESTINATION

Arriving at this stage, I think there is no destination as such. And I have also not come to any destination for sure. This is a tentative destination or, metaphorically, a traveller's rest or *choutari* along the journey. In other words, this inquiry journey now takes me to this conjecture. I do not want to close the debate here. In fact, it cannot be closed. It keeps evolving, informed by a maverick approach to inquiry.

Figure 21: A pensive mood



Note: <https://rb.gy/2s1yyq>

This chapter incorporates the overall epistemic contribution (outcomes) of my entire inquiry journey. I have made a nascent attempt to connect *bindu* and

Chetji, why did you write the conclusion? It is my concern. It is not about concluding your life or concluding your journey. Life is an evolving reality with a huge aspect of the future. In my understanding, infinity is what you are trying to allegorize. Allegorical value is well-crafted in your inquiry. It is neither a thesis nor a hypothesis. You are composing certain things for your readers allegorically. Your post-formal, maverick, or multi-layered propositions would best suit these ideas. We have many more hypotheses for our researchers to take up and work further.

(One of my supervisors, 7 November, 2022)

brhamanda (dots and cosmos). The ability of a leader to focus on essential constructs/ideas not being distracted by trivial issues to achieve the goals of an organization appears crucial. If the focus is diverted, a leader gets derailed from their mission. With a note of encouragement to embrace the

present moment awareness, Tolle (2010) purports that it is not possible to experience,

think or feel anything outside the now. His argument underpins the need to have an awareness of the moment by a leader aspiring for positive changes to happen in an organization. I endeavor to unfold how my leadership approaches build a collective sense of responsibility and ownership to create a better school (Fiarman, 2015). As far as possible, I am putting my efforts to build a cohesive team and nurture collegiality at school. I am trying to rise above my vested self-interest and serve the institution selflessly, acknowledging vulnerability as my growth point. In the meantime, I question myself: am I putting efforts to be a successful school leader (*a rajas-like*) or am I trying to go beyond it and pursue the journey of leadership contributing to social transformation (*a satva-like*) with critical sensibility and mindful activism (Tillmann, Norsworthy, & Schoen, 2022, p. xi)? More so, I need to lead school by being a catalyzer embracing the ethos of *swadharma*.

Responding to My Inquiry Questions

This inquiry began with an emergent overarching question: *How have we (me and participating headteachers) been developing a living educational leadership theory- small 't' praxis that aims at transforming our school from an entity of stagnation to a vibrant space of engaged, inclusive, equitable, and productive learning space? The following inquiry questions emerged diachronically to meet the intent of the key inquiry questions. 1. How have we been conceiving our role as a school leader working toward developing the school as a transformative space? 2.*

Triubte to Inquiry Questions

Oh dear, emergent inquiry questions,
 You were the signpost of my inquiry.
 But why did you sometimes lead me to the
 blind alleys?
 Maybe you wanted me to venture into a new
 territory.
 Receive my kudos for making me ever
 vulnerable nurturing my sensibility.

How have our emergent understanding and practices of educational processes supported (and otherwise) us to becoming a school leader who embraces compassion, care and inclusion?, 3. In what ways have we been enabling (and otherwise) our colleagues to embrace pedagogical change in their roles as teachers to create an engaging learning space?' 4. How have our roles been promoting (and otherwise) collaborative learning space at schools? In the process of self-probing my sensibilities, one more inquiry question emerged: 5. How have I been evolving as a school leader with critical and creative sensibilities along the inquiry process?

Arriving at this stage, I must confess that my emergent inquiry questions supported me in re/crafting inquiry chapters. But they were not immune to limitations. At times, I moved beyond the inquiry questions embracing the notion of epistemic openness (e.g., providing space to emerging thoughts and ideas). In doing so, I realize that research questions are not ends in themselves; instead, they are a means to an end. I am developing a small-'t' theory, small 'p' philosophy, and a small 'm' model of praxis-driven living educational leadership in the context of Nepal. In so doing, I have embraced the notion of critical spirituality (making a fusion of spirituality and criticality) to transcend technical interest. As a spiritual seeker with critical awareness, I cannot take things for granted, staying away from social justice, care, inclusion, equity, and empowerment. As a headteacher, I must advocate these critical aspects for social transformation.

Conclusions

I would like to point out why I am writing plural 'conclusions'. In doing so, I intend to embrace pluralism and multiplicity. I am referring to some authors in some places in the very last of a paragraph because of inter-textuality to create a dialogic space in my inquiry. My whole inquiry is guided by the orientation of critical

spirituality, in which criticality refers to finger-pointing, critiquing and challenging the status quo and spirituality embraces grace, care, empathy, and humility, among others. I have often used 'dear readers'²¹ to give my inquiry a dialogic turn and make the texts reader-friendly.

Dear readers, arriving at this stage, I dare to say that my inquiry may not

testify to the grand narratives of a great leader, but self-probing of my sensibilities (but not limited to) might offer insights to school leaders who are struggling to establish themselves as champions of change. This multi-epistemic inquiry embracing seven interconnected ways of being, knowing, and valuing from the Eastern Wisdom Traditions (EWTs) as well as the Western-induced perspectives

What's New to My Inquiry?

*The worn-out pathways-questioned,
The possible arrays-envisioned.
Living care and connection as a gaze,
A saga of proactive leaders' voyage.*

*Self-navigating a critical path,
Deriving values in vulnerable math.
Fathoming in dark, pondering the depth,
With a high sensibility of the curious self.*

*Fostering collegiality in a collaborative space,
Probing leadership praxis on a spiritual base.
Humility and empathy for nurturing compassion,
Envisioning 'a living model' of the transformation.*

enabled us (me and my participants) to envision a living educational leadership theory – small 't' exploring the possibilities and promises of a better school embracing humility, care, and empathy for nurturing compassion adapting to meet the needs of 21st-century schools.

The overall structure of the inquiry is based on a post-formal structure, which is "ecologically organic and multi-layered" (Wagle, 2021, p.21). It appears to be

²¹ The readers here refer to all the potential readers/intended audiences (research scholars, education policy makers, school leaders and teachers) who will read my inquiry.

rhizomatic and fuzzy (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). I am using the maverick approach in my inquiry, challenging the funnelling modes of research conventions. The sine qua non ²²of my leadership philosophy is to have a holistic and integral view of nurturing critical and creative sensibilities. This inquiry has been “a collaborative epistemic journey” (Dhungana, 2022, p. 361) nurturing my life-affirming school leadership values and deconstructing the deep-seated leadership myths. Senge (2006) defines leadership as "the capacity to hold a shared picture of the future we seek to create" (p. 11).

I explored the Western-induced critical perspectives and the Eastern Wisdom Traditions based on seven interconnected ways of being, knowing, and valuing to unpack the glocal contexts and understandings of leadership attributes. Akin to an autobiography of a Yogi, this spiritual inquiry has been a constellation of my and my participants' lived experience (s) as H/teachers. This incredible soulful journey has pushed me along transformative pathways explaining my culturally embodied self, embracing evolving consciousness. It has been a journey from reactive to proactive to reconciliation. This inquiry is also like *the Bhrigu-Varuna model of inquiry* (self-inquiry through *tapas*) or *the Aruni- Svetaketu model of inquiry* (*Tat Tvam Asi -Thou Art That-* that is you). A leader with a transformative sensibility integrates and engages the body, mind, heart, soul, and spirit (Dhiman, 2019). Arriving at this stage, I feel that there is a need to explore possibilities of meaningful conversations with the stakeholders to develop a sense of relational leadership (Reitz, 2017) to cope with emerging issues at school. What is claimed to be theorizing actually goes well with what I am doing. Me and my participants' narratives supported the theory-building

²² an essential condition

process- small 't' praxis. I have tried to reflect and theorize the outcomes of my inquiry under the following sub-headings.

Nurturing Proactive Mindset

The reactive nature of a leader might add fuel to the fire. I used to convince myself and my team members regarding any issue. When there was no broader consensus for an agenda, I used to exert pressure on them to align with my agenda, which turned out to be counter-productive many times, leaving me desperate and miserable. I was charged with making immature decisions in haste. I know I made some compromises. But it did not reach the verge of the expectations of the team members. My ego stood as a challenge for me. As I gradually started being humble and proactive, the situation turned out to be more collegial. I have come across many ego-cracking moments (such as being reactive with teachers on several issues, e.g., punctuality, performance, and so on, and then feeling miserable when team members point to my inability to handle the issues thoughtfully (see Chapter VIII). In fact, such incidents have provided a huge lesson for my leadership transformation in disguise as I started self-probing my sensibilities along with probing the narratives of the participants of the inquiry. Now I acknowledge the efforts of all the team members, for I cannot make a difference at school alone. It is a collaborative venture, not a walking-alone journey.

Proactive headteachers can create conditions for learning opportunities to bring about changes at school and embrace the intent of socially just leadership (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018) despite challenges and

Leadership is not about being in charge. Leadership is about taking care of those in your charge.

SIMON SINEK

disparities. The narratives presented and discussed in the inquiry depict that the team members get motivated if they are put in a position, possibly a challenging one. So, the headteachers, rather than ritualistically motivating the team members, need to create positions (perhaps a collaborative space) for them. My narratives also reveal my gradual shift from a reactive jerk to a proactive headteacher. So, it appears that a proactive and visionary leader might consider exposing vulnerabilities as a process of their growth, questioning the conventional route (e.g., worn-out pathways) of leadership.

Embracing Living Care and Connection

Arriving at his stage, I have come to realize what we say, how we say, and how we behave matter a lot in leadership. There is a local adage "*bolna payo bhaner pwakka nabolnu, boli ra goli firta hundaina* meaning that *think well before you speak anything as you do not get back bullet and words once fired.*" As the headteacher, I must pay attention to integrity, accountability, transparency, and empathetic feelings toward my school members. Noddings (2013) argues that as a human being, we all aspire to care and to be cared for. So, as a head/teacher, it appears essential to maintain a caring relationship with learners with an enhanced sensitivity so that no child feels left out. Perhaps, I will be able to make a difference in terms of creating a collegial learning space at school by embracing the intent of living care and connection (see Chapter Five), possibly guided by relational and communicative knowing.

Fostering a Living Collaborative Space

I find the statement I came across elsewhere, "either co-existence or no existence," quite meaningful to my ebb and flow of leadership. A leader is not alone in performing a task, as leadership is a collaborative venture. So, rapport building

with stakeholders appears to be a crucial aspect of leadership. In this connection, Vaai (2017) mentions that relational understanding is a crucial component of being human, so it appears pertinent to decolonize the self by deconstructing the non-relational understanding. In a similar vein, Gergen (2009) mentions that as a relational being, an individual needs to be mindful of relational responsibility to foster the spirit of co-existence and collaboration. Highlighting the role of the leader as a team player, Maxwell (2003) contends that “teamwork is at the heart of all great achievement” (p. 6). A team offers multiple ideas and perspectives on developing and implementing effective programmes and projects at school.

With the unfoldment of critical sensibility, I am mindful of my relational and embodied self as I am deeply connected to the socio-cultural landscape of my context. Aligning with the views of Kumar (2010), I need to "take time to do and to be. It is in the participation in this dance of doing and being that spirituality is to be found" (p. 59). A leader's identity appears to be an embedded and unfolding identity (Huang & Carspecken, 2003), unlike the identity of a lone wolf. To this end, a leader is expected to be humble and tolerant and bloom like a lotus in the pond.

Leadership is the journey of connection to heart and mind. Sergiovanni and Green (2015) assert that leadership embraces change through the equilibrium of one's heart, mind, and hand, strengthening leadership's heartbeat. Leadership networking underpins the ideas of connecting, collaborating and creating. Brown (2012) argues that connection renders purpose and meaning to our life.

It appears pertinent to develop collective capacity (Fullan, 2010) to take any organization along a progressive path, upsetting stagnation. I appreciate Barrett's idea that "everybody has a responsibility for leadership" (Barrett 1998, p. xviii) which he considers to be the essence of total leadership or co-leadership. In a similar vein,

highlighting the issues of initiating bravely, building collective venture, co-accountability, and self-healing, Antoine (2018) mentions the intent of co-inception leadership is to promote the spirit of “working collaboratively to develop new beginnings and create together” (p. 3). Co-inception leadership also embraces the need to be a micro changer and develop competence to have grace under pressure to maintain the momentum of leadership endeavour as leaders are often put to the test, and they are anticipated to stand the test of the time, braving the wilderness (Brown, 2017) pursuing the spirit of walking together with the transformative intent. The notion of inter-being embraces how headteachers need to establish a network and connect with stakeholders for the common good, possibly creating a *satva-like* leadership space informed by the *chakra model of epistemology*.

Embracing Empathy as Key to Leadership

With my shifting perspective, I came to realize that I need to get close to teachers and students to explore the classroom situations and overall affairs of school. I go around, visit classes, and ask teachers and students how they have been feeling, thinking, and valuing. I start interacting with them so that I come to know more about their problems and concerns. I ask students about their performance in different subjects, whether they are engaged in classroom activities, etc. I ask teachers if they have any problems and if they are encouraging participatory pedagogy place and practice (in the classroom and beyond) to create an engaging and collegial learning space. I started having quite prolonged engagement with teachers and students. Now I am able to have a reflective understanding of teachers and students. I describe and interpret their worldviews. "We must learn to see passionate involvement rather than objective detachment as the foundation of insight and understanding" (Wright, 2000,

p. 110), pouring the heart onto a task as an engaged leader. I find headteacher Shrijana, headteacher Suman, and headteacher Sushil as involved gardeners.

As a leader, it appears pertinent to make an effort to understand the feelings and situations of others. Empathy entails putting yourself in other people's shoes and showing compassion to them. Krznaric (2014) purports that empathy embraces kindness and emotional sensitivity, being caring toward others. So, a school leader is expected to demonstrate empathy to get into the team members' shoes.

Humility for Nurturing Compassion

Taking humility as a key mantra of leadership, I am discharging my responsibilities by taking into account the feelings and emotions of my teachers and students as far as possible, getting into their shoes." Humility-oriented dialectic logic" (Luitel, 2009, p. 33) helps me to envision a living educational leadership model.

I have employed the multiparadigmatic research design space – seven interconnected ways of being, knowing and valuing, incorporating the ideas from the Eastern Wisdom Traditions (EWT) and the Western-induced paradigms (See Chapter III) to have a holistic perspective on leadership moving beyond the technical rationality, possibly with a transformative sensibility. In particular, embracing the paradigm of integralism in my research enables me "to demonstrate the idea of humility and care for others" (Qutoshi, 2009, p. 62) with ecological consciousness endeavoring to co-create with teachers 'a spiritual ecology', thereby enacting practically an emergent transformative leadership praxis. Wearing different hats of leadership has been my everyday reality. I consider myself a humble caretaker of school. I think I am aware of my role as a catalyzer. This might be the beauty and joy of humility-oriented leadership (Gist, 2020; von Hildebrand, 1997).). I pursue the leadership journey with a growth mindset. Being humble and tolerant, I listen to ideas,

observe the activities of the team members, and encourage them to make the best of what they have. I am mindful that I am in the right place to make a difference and metaphorically bloom like a lotus with a deeper awareness. To make the most of this lifetime opportunity, I need to have the courage to lead proactively without losing patience and enthusiasm. So, I am open to my limitations as I am on the mission of transcending my limitations as far as possible by embracing humility.

Empowering Teachers and Students

As the headteacher, my efforts are directed toward developing a collegial learning space at school. Students, as the flowers of the school, are engaged in creative activities to explore their potential. We take care of the feelings and emotions of the students (Vanlaere, & Gatsmans, 2011). I am able to maintain an empathetic relationship with teachers, students, and guardians/ parents. How can I be a caring headteacher? How can I help my students to be better in their studies? How do I improve what I am doing?, (Whitehead, 2009), etc., are the questions I pose to myself. Teachers are advised to make every possible effort to make students creative and imaginative to solve everyday problems. The teacher and students are asked to come up with multiple perspectives to address any issue related to pedagogy and school administration, like headteachers Shrijana and Suman (See Chapter VI). The following poem showcases how I encourage teachers to enhance their performance to make a difference.

Let's Perform

Dear teachers,

Considering profession as dharma,

Being engaged in karma,

It's the right time to make a difference,

Give your responsibility a due preference.

We are here for a society to transform,

It might depend on how we perform,

Let's revitalize our zeal and passion,

Being optimistic, march toward the mission.

(Poem 11, June 2021)

No action is genuine unless it is performed in the full wakefulness of self-knowledge. Self-knowledge transforms our motivation and liberates us from the narrow confines of self-centered action to freedom of serving others" (Dhiman, 2017, p. 51). The *Bhagavad Gita* highlights the need to perform genuine action by being mindful of contexts and circumstances. Performativity is considered to be "the stylization of the body...understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of self " (Butler, 2003, p. 12). "Performatives are the citations of social practice" (Niesche & Gowlett, 2019, p. 69). Baldoni (2008) asks leaders to insist on action, not words. As the adage goes, action speaks louder than words. Clarity and coherence in the action of leaders inspire the team members to remain engaged in pursuing organizational goals. To this end, leadership is critical to leading and managing schools effectively (Busher, 2006). Effective leadership appears to be vital to maximize performance and enhance the effectiveness of the school system (Forster, 2005; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

As the headteacher, my role is also to create an environment to empower teachers and students to raise their voices against the injustice and unfairness prevalent at school for the common good. To this end, a child club is formed to empower students. The students start raising their voices against punishment,

bullying, and abuses made to them by the teachers and students. There is a complaint box fixed on the wall near the notice board. The students who are having an issue can directly complain to the headteacher. They can drop a written complaint in the box if they find it uncomfortable. Fortnightly, we open the box, enlist the cases, and make efforts for case management. We have a team led by the headteacher to deal with the cases. We come across some critical issues, such as different forms of abuse, use of sexist language, bullying, discrimination, etc. and deal accordingly as per the gravity of the cases. As I start paying attention to the problem of the students and teachers, they become more open to sharing their problems. These efforts have empowered junior students, female students and other sufferers to lodge the complaint and seek justice. I also encourage students to raise their voices in the family and the community against any discriminatory behaviour they face. They are asked to break the silence and fight disempowering forces. I think such orientation promotes critical thinking and encourages them to question and challenge deep-seated beliefs and unjust practices (Foster, 1989).

Nurturing Living Engagement

I am not sure of my qualities as a leader should have, but most of my colleagues say that I appear to be dedicated to the betterment of school. Regarding the significance of engagement, Kumar (2010) mentions that "the act of personal engagement, in turn, brings us a greater sense of fulfilment in a wonderful dovetailing of the personal, the social and the political" (p. 57). Baldoni (2010) mentions that "if you want people to grow and develop, you give them tough assignments" (p. 5). I always keep myself busy with certain tasks, maybe it is about reading books, conducting training for the capacity building of teachers, conducting different strategic planning meetings with stakeholders, and so on.

As a leader, I am putting efforts for the living engagement of learners creating an environment of justice, democracy, inclusion, and empowerment, possibly being guided by critical, relational and integral knowings. The participating headteachers of the inquiry are found putting efforts to create an environment for the holistic engagement of teachers and students in the process of learning.

Highlighting the various facets of holistic leadership, Dhiman (2019) mentions that “holistic leadership is a voyage of inner discovery which begins with self-knowledge that serves as a prelude to leading from within” (p.6). Self-awareness and self-mastery are considered to be the key tenets of holistic leadership. A holistic leader inspires the team members, making them feel they are worthwhile people of the organization to make a difference. It promotes a living engagement of the team members.

Spirituality to Nurture Leadership Values

Pertaining to becoming a holistic leader with deeper awareness, Dhiman (2017) argues that "we need holistic leaders and holistic systems that are able to integrate the spiritual and the

Figure 21: A monk taking view of natural beauty

material perspectives in a dialectical manner" (p. 1).

"The yogic view of consciousness is the exact opposite of the common sense view. The world you



perceive directly in your consciousness is th

Note: <http://surl.li/chgro>

consciousness" (DeGracia, 2015, p. 24). So, it appears that the yogic or monkish view of the consciousness does not reject the external material world, but looks at how we

are embedded in it and encourages us to think like a monk embracing the intent of critical spirituality (Panta & Luitel, 2022b). I acknowledge my vulnerability and retrace my steps of correction for the enhancement of active transformation, thereby creating a space or leadership praxis nurtured by critical spirituality.

My engagement in spiritual practices has supported me in carrying out my leadership role, possibly in a mindful manner as “a deep internal spiritual transformation is required to transform the world around us” (Dhiman, 2019, p. 205). Taking an integral standpoint on spirituality, Wilber (2006) argues that as we advance spiritually, we try to be as comprehensive and inclusive as possible, shifting our identity from egocentric to ethnocentric to world-centric, thereby exploring the pathways for a spiritual journey. A leader as a conscious being is expected to perform meaningfully with enhanced awareness. I consider my school as a *dharmashala*, a place of my contemplation and professional growth. I am mindful of spiritually oriented leadership as it embraces the feelings of care, compassion, gratitude, humility, and among others. "When we integrate spirituality into everyday life, it is transformed into *sattvic* life" (Kumar, 2010, p. 68), and it is the quest of my leadership journey. With a shifting perspective, it appears that embracing love, care, empathy and compassion imbued with an air of spirituality offers a transformative experience to me as the key intent of my whole inquiry leading to the emergence and enhancement of a living educational leadership theory- small 't' praxis in the context of Nepal.

Changing Landscape of Educational Leadership – Small 't' Theory

This inquiry enables me to bring a shift from (often disempowering) leadership approaches and practices nurturing transformative sensibility through self-probing. Reading the book of Goffee and Jones entitled “*Why Should Anyone be Led*

by *You? What it Takes to be an Authentic Leader*” inspired me to go for soul-searching. This is a powerful question that might compel a leader to ponder on their leadership styles and strategies. The authors highlight the critical roles of self-discipline, optimism, communication with care, and so on for making leadership happen. The essence of their argument revolves around knowing and showing ourselves as resilient leaders. They argue that a leader who is able to capture the hearts, minds, and souls of others can lead effectively. Some questions strike my mind in an effort to make sense of myself: What unique qualities do I have to be a leader?, what differences can I make in the lives of people whom I lead?, why should my colleagues consider me as a leader?, and so on.

As a leader, I am putting my efforts to create meaningful learning opportunities for students. I also endeavor to reciprocate the stakeholders' expectations as far as possible. I take dialogue as the heart of my leadership journey, possibly guided by communicative knowing. "In dialogue, unexpected insights emerge, things unfold, relationships deepen, ideas multiply, imagination is enhanced, and everyone is engaged in the process of discovery. Everyone participates, all sides are active" (Kumar, 2010, p. 28). Referring to the traditions of the Advaita Vedanta, Sharma (2007) mentions that "all opposites are like being and non-being, life and death, good and evil, light and darkness, gods and men, soul and nature are viewed as manifestations of the Absolute" (p. 1). The intent of generating small 't' – living educational leadership theory is inspired by the non-dual school of thought of the Advaita Vedanta.²³ Pertaining to the landscape of leadership, Fiarman (2015) poses some questions such as: " How does it feel to be a principal?; what keeps us awake at night?; what motivates us to engage in work that never ends?" (p. 18). These

²³ A non-dualistic school of thought of Indian philosophy that embraces the concept that the *Brahman* is the ultimate truth.

questions urge leaders to rethink their leadership mindset and strategies. I consider my leadership responsibility as a God-bestowed responsibility. Leadership is a relationship-building and walking-together journey. Being optimistic, I pursue my efforts to create a transformative learning space at school, which is a daunting task, but I try to see the silver lining around the dark clouds to overcome barriers (professional, cultural) by using practical transformative leadership strategies such as dialogue, workshops and seminars, critical self-reflection and curriculum design and implementation. So, it appears pertinent to adhere to the intent of participatory generative leadership for making a difference as leadership is an evolving process. The following figure reveals tentative aspects of living educational leadership – small 't' theory.

Figure 22: Atlas of small 't' educational leadership theory

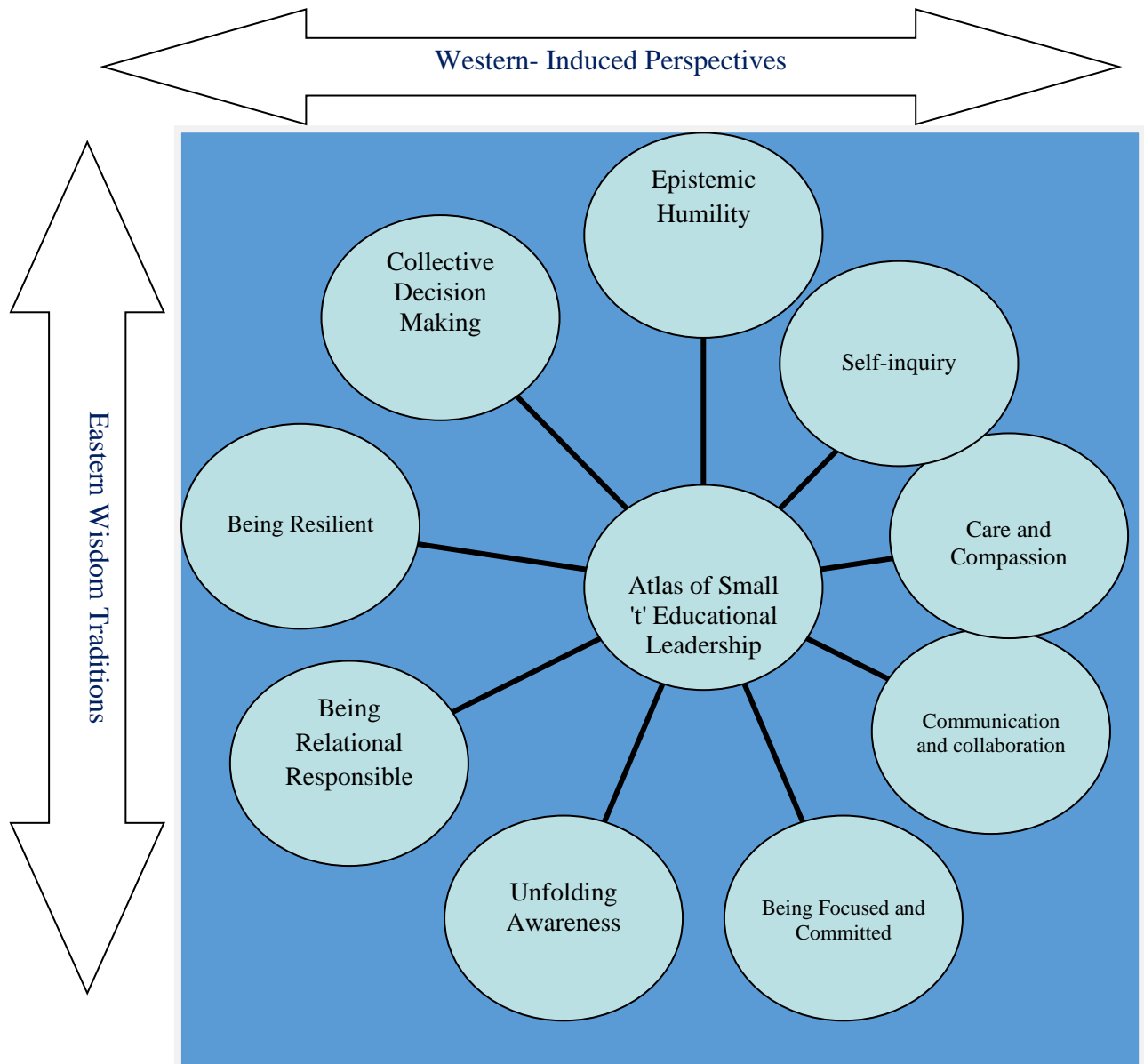


Figure 23: A more complex nature of small 't' theory (praxis-driven)

I have attempted to envision small 't' praxis. It does not mean demeaning or ignoring capital 'T'. Small 't' is an orientation and approach. It is connected to our (me and



my participants) lived experiences. I have tried to embrace capital 'T' while envisioning small 't' praxis.

The atlas reveals an envisioning of a living educational leadership theory-small 't', thereby transforming a school into a productive and transcended learning space. The core issues in this process of envisioning small 't' praxis-driven educational leadership theory incorporate maintaining humility for epistemic openness, leading by encouragement, and maintaining accountability and integrity. As leadership emerges from the context, it is pertinent to lead contextually, being committed to developing transformative praxis by exploring dialectical relations between small 't' and capital "T" educational leadership theories. With evolving awareness, a leader is expected to be relational-responsible and resilient to cope up with adverse circumstances. A leader informed by sattva-like quality makes a collective decision for the common good by creating a harmonious learning space at school. Having done so, a vibrant space of engaged, inclusive, equitable, and productive learning space can be created at school through the lens of critical spirituality, crystalizing the bend of the Eastern and the Western Wisdom Traditions to embrace materiality and criticality for developing holistic leadership praxis with transformative sensibilities.

Myself as an Agent of Change and an Agency: New Found Sensibilities

Dear readers, let me set the scene for this sub-heading with the sharing of a former headteacher Shushil, who said;

As the headteacher, I tried my best not to hide my weakness. I took support from the team members. I considered it an opportunity to learn. In the beginning, it was difficult for me. I had a fear that my team members would come to know my weaknesses and they might demean me. But by exposing my

flaws, I got a chance to be strong, though sometimes I had a feeling of being criticized.

Sushil dared to expose his shortcomings and took them as an opportunity to learn and thrive. He encouraged other team members to keep an open mind and heart to learn from each other. Aligning with his views, I also think that exposing vulnerability is not a comfortable undertaking for everyone. Exposing oneself like an open book requires courage and tolerance as there is a chance of being criticized or demeaned. Highlighting the empowering aspect of vulnerability, Brown (2012) mentions it as “the catalyst for courage, compassion, and connection” (p. 11). Taking the path of vulnerability seems to develop the courage in me to utter, *“I don’t know, and I am learning from my team members”*. Though there is a risk of being exposed, embracing vulnerability might support a leader to thrive out of dilemmas, paradoxes, and controversies. So, I pose a challenging question: “How can I be creatively vulnerable?”

When I look at the limitless sky, my whole body starts vibrating with a feeling of bliss, being a part of this cosmos. A paradigm shift seems to have occurred to me and my leadership style. I do not mean I have become like a sage, but I am in the process of unfolding my identity. Adhering to the ideas of Mother Teresa, I take some people as blessings and some as lessons in my life. As every moment is a learning moment, I seem to have a transformative experience every day. I am on the mission of creating my school as an engaging learning space from the state of the status quo. My efforts are channelized to achieve this mission. Given that we are always at the crossroads of choosing which way to go, Chordon (2009) mentions that it is up to us to choose whether to take the path of pain or happiness. We have the strength to cope with difficulties that come along the way, disentangle ourselves from old habits, and

live consciously (Chordon, 2009), possibly informed by *the chakra model of epistemology*.

I am amid frustrations, dilemmas, contradictions, paradoxes, and confusion. Rising above chaos has always been a profound challenge for me as a headteacher amid difficult circumstances. Metaphorically, it is akin to the fate of the mythical phoenix bird rising renewed from the ashes. My leadership journey has been a dance between deep-rooted stagnation and a quest for transformation, swinging to and fro amid uncertainties. Sometimes, I think I am getting lost in the whirlwind of circumstances. I am facing everyday acid tests along my leadership journey. How can I make my leadership impactful? Navigating the *Bhagavad Gita* has been a life-transforming experiences for me. The sparks of wisdom I have attained from the *Bhagavad Gita* always urge me to be a humble leader and to see greatness in others. Embracing humility has been a mantra of my leadership journey. In a similar vein, Bennis (2019) mentions that “whatever is thrown at leaders, they emerge from their crucibles stronger and unbroken. No matter how cruel the testing, they become more optimistic and more open to experience” (p. xxiv). Similarly, I am also trying to be an unshakable optimist with a humble heart.

It appears quite hard to please all the members of the team. A headteacher gets into a pathetic situation as if he/she endeavours to make everyone happy. When one is convinced, then another gets disgruntled. It makes the life of a leader painful. Regarding decision dilemmas, Barrett (1998) asserts that a leader is likely to be paralyzed by indecision. At this moment, a leader is expected to be even more thoughtful and mindful. The following poem, to some extent, depicts a sort of living educational leadership model I have envisioned so far.

Art of Leading

Leading is an art,

Learn to lead by heart.

Compassion, care and humility,

Pertinent to maintain integrity.

Constructing a transformative vision,

Pursue an emancipatory mission.

Knowing, believing, and valuing,

Bring a shift in pattern of thinking.

Building networking and collaboration,

Embrace the power of communication.

Delegate the roles and share the power,

Being pragmatic is the need of the hour.

(Poem XI, February 2022)

To create an engaging learning space at school, I need to remain tolerant, empathetic, compassionate, and humble to convert the apathy of my team members into empathy, the status quo into dynamism, and reluctance into a willingness by embracing the philosophy of holistic leadership. Serigiovanni (2007) argues that the four pillars of leadership, such as leaders, followers, ideas and action, are essential for effective leadership. If leadership does not result in action, it turns out futile. It is said that action speaks louder than words. I have started communicating more with people even if I do not feel like communicating, perhaps due to unpleasant remarks they make. I realize that if I do not communicate, it will be costly for me. Though it hurts

my feelings sometimes and leaves me on the verge of despair, I do it as I am leading a team. I am inspired by the theory of communicative action by Habermas (1987), which is taken as social action directed toward forging mutual understanding between social actors through cognition, interaction, and expression. Without effective communication, it appears quite challenging to pursue a leadership journey.

One of my leadership crucibles as my unfolding strategy has been my adaptive strategy which “allows leaders to respond quickly and intelligently to relentless change” (Bennis, 2009, p. xxvi). This strategy has fostered my contextual understanding and enabled me to explore more opportunities to manage disorientation, dilemmas and disequilibrium. Sergiovanni (2005) focuses on school culture and building community and moral leadership for school effectiveness. Keeping collective well-being in focus, I need to act proactively to capitalize on my signature strengths: humility, perseverance, compassion, and creativity.

Implications of the Inquiry

Dear readers, arriving at this stage, my emergent understanding is that the implications of my inquiry stated so far are the progressions of my life. I am composing certain things for my readers allegorically using *currere* approach.

The implications of living educational leadership theory- small ‘t’ are at multi-levels (self and beyond). Transformative sensibilities

Implications of My Inquiry

*Exploring narratives of professional departure,
To self-probe my sensibilities,
Portraying the glocal picture of headship,
To nurture my creativities.

Navigating educational leadership praxis,
To contribute to leadership epistemology.

Embracing auto/ethnography,
As a living methodology.

Envisioning a living model,
To unfold pedagogic transformation.
Exploring larger possibilities,
Supporting policy formulation.*

I have nurtured so far in my engagement in the doctoral inquiry have implications for my workplace, my society, my family and the future state of affairs where I am both an agent and an agency. The following sub-headings illustrate the implications of my inquiry.

Implications for Myself

Dear readers, the primary goal of my research is my personal, educational and professional transformation. The narratives of my professional departure unfold pathways for my transformative professional development. Having said so, I dare to mention that as I transform, my transformation will have manifold impacts on other threads such as my school (my teachers and students, overall performance of schools, policy-making), my friends, my family and so on. There is a dialectical relationship between my transformation and the structural transformation, which depicts why I am critiquing the policy formulation.

Moreover, my school leadership experience uncovers the fact that I am a living contradiction (Whitehead, 2009) and endeavouring to create a harmonious learning space at school. A leader is expected to navigate contradictions with self-awareness embracing a collaborative mindset (Hull et al. 2020) to create a space for diverse stakeholders. There are contradictions, and they are part of our life. How we address the contradictions and reflect on them mindfully appears to be important. I have faced many contradictions and paradoxes (contradictions in educational policy, mismatch between school expectations and community expectations, lack of community ownership and agency building). I am in the constant process of being and becoming relocating myself at the crossroads of transformative leadership endeavours, possibly nurturing critical and creative sensibilities.

Contribution to Overall Educational Leadership Scholarship

This multifaceted soulful inquiry has been an illuminating venture of my life in many ways (e.g. challenging normative conventional leadership approaches), which empowers me and helps me understand the nuances of leadership as inter-being and envisioning transformative leadership praxis- small 't', a living theory. In so doing, I unpacked the constructive dimensions of living leadership theory "such as pluralism, differences and visionary space" (Thakur, 2017, p. 94). As we talk about reforming and transforming an educational organization, it requires a commitment and understanding of systemic thinking. It is indeed a Herculean task. Jackson (2021) argues that a leader needs to focus on leveraging the team members and creating an environment for meaningful engagement. With possibly deeper awareness and a feeling of humility, a leader is expected to create a collegial environment at school that promotes risk-taking so that every team member gets connected with purpose and gets an opportunity to explore and thrive (Fullan, 2010). The arguments of Fullan underpin the process of transformation through collective effort, trust building, transparency and on top of that, developing a feeling of each member that *I am also a leader of this organization and I am also contributing to the positive change of the organization*. As leadership is an ever-evolving and unfolding process, I keep unfolding and recrafting my layered identities as a headteacher embracing the intent of accountability, integrity, networking and living collaboration.

The inquiry unpacks the sharing of the participants and post narratives and meaning-making to envision a living educational leadership theory- small't' praxis. The participants' remarks, in general, highlight the issue of accountability, integrity, collective decision- making, unwavering commitment to transformation, creating an autonomy-supportive learning environment at school, building rapport with the

stakeholders and, on top of that leading to mindful understanding of the contexts. It appears pertinent to rethink different nuances of leadership to envision a living educational leadership model – small ‘t’ to our context. The inquiry further explores the issues of collective consensus to take the team members along the path of change, breaking the status quo. Knowing where we are heading is pertinent, though the uncharted territory might be profoundly challenging. Then only the leadership journey might turn out to be a pleasant and daring experience akin to a Nepali proverb- *bhujnelai shreekhanda nabhujnelai khurpako bid* meaning that learn the art and essence of the thing at hand, but do not demean its value. Proactive leadership appears to be a must to this end to lead an organization having patience and tolerance. A leader needs to stay away from the blame game and comfort zone. Nothing penetrates like a Peepal tree, and so is the case of a passionate leader who endeavours to take the lead with a deeper awareness.

Contribution to Methodology (Auto/ethnography)

Auto/ethnography as a philosophy and method of inquiry triggers our soul-searching (me and my participants) and meaningfully engages our emotions (Adams & Hermann, 2020). In the navigation of writing about trajectories of our (me and my participants) personal and professional life experiences, auto/ethnographic inquiry, which is also considered as "collaborative, consciousness-raising, and empowering inquiry" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 681), opens up avenues to explore our existential crisis or crisis of representation to deeply think upon lived experiences as viewed by Zaner (2004).

This inquiry incorporates emerging dimensions of leadership, having pondered on the auto/ethnographic narratives. Constant ponderings on the narratives of mine and my participants reveal some emerging dimensions of leadership in a

dialectical manner. I have pursued this auto/ethnographic inquiry making a fusion of the Eastern Wisdom Traditions and the Western-induced critical perspectives introducing seven interconnected ways of being, knowing, and valuing based on the *chakra model of epistemology* through the lens of critical spirituality. This is a unique inquiry from this vantage point connecting East and West, unlike prevailing researches on auto/ethnography.

Contribution to Pedagogy

This inquiry envisions a living educational leadership theory to my context (but not limited to). It is embedded into a quest to create an engaged and productive learning space at school. In so doing, this inquiry might be helpful for school leaders/teachers who aspire to transform their leadership/pedagogical approaches and practices to create inclusive, socially just and productive learning spaces at school. This inquiry further envisions a living pedagogy (engaging, nurturing values connected to local cosmology, a shift in approaches and conventions of teaching and learning) that addresses the contexts of my participants and me. Our (me and my participants) narratives of personal and professional engagements might illuminate school leaders/ teachers to have a broader vision to explore challenges and opportunities at school with expanded awareness and creative sensibilities. I explored some key ancient *Gurukula models*, such as *The Bhrigu- Varuna model of inquiry* in *the Taittiriya Upanishad*, which primarily focuses on introspection, contemplation, and meditation (*tapas*) as key techniques of learning and *the Aruni-Svetaketu dialogue* in *Chandogya Upanishad* focuses on humility and patience to acquire knowledge- *tat tvam asi- thou art that- that is you*. A pertinent question is – are students taught, or do they do something independently?

Contribution to Educational Leadership Praxis (Small ‘t’ – Living Theory)

As leadership does not occur in a vacuum, there are vital influences (e.g., family, friends, relatives, teachers, civil society) to re/construct it. More so, our personal, professional, and educational transformation will contribute to cultural reorientation as we are deeply connected to the socio-cultural milieu. This inquiry navigates creative subjectivities in the context of educational leadership studies (Gates, 2016).

I am in a constant quest to explore the meaning of school leadership amid chaos and uncertainty (Zohar & Marshall, 2004) to find passion, joy and fulfillment in the responsibility I am pursuing. Wauters (1997) mentions that “the process of stepping forward in life is necessary to the continual journey which opens up our awareness and sense of discovery, giving us new truths and deeper insights” (p. 10). This auto/ethnographic inquiry showcases our (my participants and me) embodied living educational leadership values (e.g., care, compassion, empathy, humility) as the head teachers of schools. I have taken life writing to explore and understand the multiple selves. I have used “imagination as a key epistemic technique” (Luitel, 2009, p. 9), aligning with the epistemic metaphor of knowing as semi-factual imagining. I have tried to theorize our experiences to have a deeper understanding of them and unfold multilayered meanings. Thriving amid chaos might be part and parcel of leadership. The notion is reflected through *lila-rita like*²⁴ dialectics of leadership. A leader is required to perform multi-faceted roles to lead the change. I am putting my efforts to transcend rhetoric and ritual of leadership endeavours paying heed to contextual issues and concerns.

²⁴ Lila refers to cosmic playfulness, whereas rita refers to order or truth

Contribution to Policy Formulations

There is a gap between policy provision and practice in recruiting headteachers in the community schools of Nepal. There is a lack of clearly defined roles for headteachers. Despite political shifts, Nepal's public education system has not significantly improved. It may be due to imported normative policies via supra-agencies, which are incompatible with the context of the country (Panta, 2018). The headteachers are recruited as managers; however, transformative leaders' roles are expected. So, there is a need for socially just leadership. To bridge this rift to some extent, school leadership policy developers and practitioners might get insights from this inquiry to develop leadership capacity-building programmes employing “context-responsive and transformative strategies” (Dhungana, 2022, p. 367), nurturing embodied life-affirming values such as care, empathy, and humility adapting to the needs of 21st-century schools. Thus, the study underpins redefining and deconstructing leadership approaches and perspectives, embracing the intent of inter-being with an expanded awareness of being self-critical and critical of others.

I have read elsewhere that being a leader is one of the most challenging choices one makes in life. Leadership appears to demand a paradigm shift in thought and action. Every leader's thought, emotion, and action play a crucial role in an organization. Actionable strategies might support leaders to increase influence and run an organization efficiently and effectively. Ball (1987) argues that headteachers are expected to be aware of the dynamics of leadership to make many positive things happen at school. With my shifting perspective, contemplation and soul-searching pertaining to my living educational leadership theory, I have come to realize that it is an opportunity for me to create goodwill and maintain a cordial relationship with the team members. I need to make my team members feel worthwhile acknowledging

their efforts. As I begin my day with praise and appreciation for my team members, it might inspire them to perform better.

My participants and I are “co-evolving and co-transforming” (Hanson, & Cherkowski, 2015, p. 15). The non-critical self-reflective school leaders (Dhungana, 2022) might find it of less significance. However, this inquiry might inspire the school leaders to rethink their leadership approaches and deconstruct the existing myths to explore larger possibilities amid challenges and embrace the intent of transformative school culture.

Navigating the Memory Lane

Dear readers, now I tell you a story of a person who later becomes a headteacher and a PhD scholar whose personal and professional experiences empower him to pursue his school leadership journey, possibly with deeper awareness.

He was born in a lower-middle-class family in a village in Sindhuli district, Nepal. His parents work hard to earn bread and butter for the family. After his birth, his father has a tough time arranging money for the care of his mother and newly born son. He does some labour work to manage money as there is no way out to immediately get money to support the family. He looks at his son and feels glad. He says, “Yasko mukh herepachhi ma mero sabai pida birsanchhu meaning I forget all my woes as I look at his face”. They do not get any help from their relatives, except his old mother-in-law, who supports them. Then his father and mother keep working hard on the farm. They always have a tough time managing the basic needs of the family. His father is known to be hard-working and honest in the village. When he obtains a loan, he pays it back in time. He supports the villagers in their work and urgency. Even the chairperson of the village praises his honesty and boldness.

Sometimes he sends him to the district headquarters for some work like delivering letters, bringing some goods, and so on. He hardly says no when he is asked to do something by the seniors. He even crosses the swelling streams of the rainy season and does the assigned task with sincerity, as asked by the chairperson of the village. He gets paid for that. He sends his son to a community school nearby home. As morning shows the day, his son is interested in the study. He holds the first position from grade five. His parents are proud of his performance. He is always encouraged to be better at studies. His parents start working hard to support their son's study. His basic requirements are almost fulfilled. He continuously holds the first position in other classes as well.

In grade eight, he falls in bad company with his friends. He starts smoking, playing cards, and stealing money from his mother's thailee (small wallet/purse). Later, his father comes to know this and thrashes him badly. His mother convinces him not to get involved in such activities being influenced by friends. Embracing him, she says "Timile yasto kam garyaubhane hamro sara sapana chakanchur hunchha. Aaj buwalai dherai naramolager timilai kutnu bhaeko- meaning that our dream collapses if you get involved in such wrong activities. Your father punished you today, feeling utterly disheartened by your unexpected activities." Then he gets convinced. He makes up his mind to leave the bad company. He fully concentrates on his study. He completes the SLC examination securing the first division. It becomes a turning point in his life. He writes in his diary, "I will be a doctor in my future". But due to the financial issue of the family, he cannot join a good college with a science major. It is the first hard blow to his dream of being a doctor. He leaves the

village for higher studies. He stays at his uncle's home in Sarlahi and joins a college there with an English major. He teaches school students to manage his study expenses. He completes his 10+ 2 being the topper and then starts teaching at an institutional school. He joins his Bachelor's level study there in Sarlahi campus. After one year, he joins another bigger school in that area and becomes the vice-principal there. He completes his Bachelor's level and gets married. He comes to Kathmandu to pursue his Master's degree with his wife. His wife supports him in continuing his further education.

After a few months, he runs out of money. It becomes tough for him to stay in Kathmandu. Then he starts taking home tuition and begins teaching at an institutional school. After completing his Master's degree, he becomes the principal of an institutional school. After two years of principalship, he quits it and starts teaching at several colleges in the Kathmandu valley. Then he pursues his MPhil in English Language Education. Working day and night, he avails time for teaching and his study. It is one of the most challenging moments of his life. He is inspired to make a difference in life as "tough times never last, but the tough people do". Then he is selected as a permanent secondary level teacher, and after a few months, he becomes the headteacher of a community school in Lalitpur. He confronts numerous problems and topsy-turvy situations as the headteacher. In disguise, it becomes a treasure trove of experiences for him to pursue his PhD in Educational Leadership, incorporating his struggles in life and leadership. His auto/ethnographic PhD proposal gets accepted at the university, and being motivated and committed, he pursues his doctoral journey. He gears up his PhD journey with continued support and mentoring from his supervisors. A long-standing dream of his life

is nearly achieved. It has been a lifetime opportunity for him to leverage and document his and his participants' narratives of struggles in being and becoming a transformative school leader.

Though he cannot be a medical doctor as he aimed to be right after completing the SLC examination, overcoming several upheavals in life, he is achieving his highest academic dream materializing his enduring passion of being a doctor of philosophy. He fails and falters many times, but he never gives up. He firmly believes that hope sustains life and adheres to the idea shared by a motivational speaker, probably Jack ma that "today is tough, and tomorrow is going to be tougher, and the day after tomorrow is beautiful." He recalls many heart-wrenching moments of life in the Kathmandu valley due to financial constraints. He makes no compromise to further his studies come what may. The struggles and setbacks of life deform him, reform him, and finally lead him to the transformation process to create possibly the best version of him. He envisions a collaborative living educational leadership model (small 't' praxis-driven approach) to improve his practice (but not limited to). He realizes that nothing is easy in the world. To achieve something in life, one needs to pay the price. As a spiritual seeker, his inner calling or passion for transformation keeps him going along his professional journey with rejuvenated zeal and enthusiasm. He is learning and unlearning to transcend his limitations. It appears to him that there is no substitute to love and care. He seeks a living joy in the performance of leadership responsibility abiding by the ethos of integrity and accountability with critical sensibility.

(Journal, March 2020)

Dear readers, my autobiographical excavation explores “the universe of possibility” (Poulous, 2013, p. 466) to find my renewed hope, enthusiasm, and identity by self-probing my sensibilities. This mode of inquiry has been “genre-bending forms of expression” (Bochner, 2014, p. 7) to materialize my dream of writing a probing and evocative PhD thesis to portray myself (but not limited to) as a headteacher, possibly informed by transformative sensibility.

Epilogue

Pursuing a PhD has been an incredible learning journey of my life imbued with challenging and heart-wrenching moments. I become tearful, recalling the moments of breaking the cocoon. I held/have been holding different leadership portfolios from the beginning of my teaching career, inspiring me to pursue the journey of possibly



becoming a transformative headteacher. Bennis (2009) mentions that “whatever your leadership experience, it’s a good place to start” (p.xxxii). In a similar vein, Brown (2012) says that a leader needs to dare to be exposed and seen. I recall the remarks of teacher Lok of my school " *As the head teacher, you need to take a strong stand (head sirle ali daro khutta teknu parchha).*” His remarks point to my flexibility as a shortcoming. But I guess the essence of his remarks is that as a leader, I need to be fully committed to bringing substantive changes at school, being persistent and rigid to some extent. I agree with Fiarman (2015), who mentions that people get a chance to learn when they are caught in dilemmas and a state of disequilibrium, even if they

might get upset and scream. I have been reduced to tears feeling, often upset and miserable, along my leadership journey. I have a vision of a school promoting deep and meaningful learning (Fiarman, 2015) and where teachers and students feel motivated and empowered. My responsibility as a leader is to create a collegial environment to promote student engagement and meaningful learning. Overall, my contemplative doctoral journey has probably been a testimony of my transformative life journey.

Pursuing a doctoral journey in envisioning a living educational leadership theory in the context of Nepal has been both a daunting and illuminating venture for me in many ways. My constant engagement in bringing about changes at school has been a rewarding and enriching experience. In this transformative quest, I have employed auto/ethnography as a methodological approach to unfold the collective narratives. This multifaceted critical inquiry inspired me to theorize our (me and my participants') experiences to understand the nuances of leadership and explore the complex nature of the culturally situated self. This soulful inquiry seems to expand school leaders' understandings of leadership through contextual navigation of Nepal's school leadership practices and attributes, thereby envisioning a living educational leadership model- small 't'. I have unpacked the narratives showcasing how conventional leadership approaches/practices and hegemonic forces disempowered us (me and my participants) and maintained the status quo.

This contemplative PhD journey portrays my living embodied values (e.g., humility, empathy, care, compassion) as the headteacher of a school and a spiritual aspirant. "How do I improve what I am doing" has been an underpinning philosophy in my effort to possibly becoming a headteacher with a transformative sensibility. Life is a continuous unfoldment of newer and bigger horizons of possibilities. My

leadership journey has been a continuous unfoldment of my life, embracing the ethos of inter-being, becoming, and valuing. The following stanza by Robert Frost illustrates the essence of taking a different path in life.

*Somewhere ages and ages hence,
Two roads diverged in a wood, and,

I took the one less travelled by,

And that has all made the difference*

(Robert Frost, "The Road not Taken")

Going through the manuscripts of my inquiry, my supervisor remarked;

Make your PhD thesis like an epic journey, Chet. We have higher expectations from our graduates. As you are spiritually oriented, try to come up with an evocative agenda with your transformative experience. Don't get swept away by frustration and disappointment. Embolden yourself to navigate through difficult and uncertain times.

(Personal Communication with Supervisor, January 2021)

I was spellbound by these great words of encouragement from my principal supervisor. I remained committed and emboldened to write an epic-like soulful PhD thesis that might leave a footprint behind. The struggle has been worthwhile, incredible and fulfilling, giving meaning to my school leadership journey and life itself. A new enthusiasm emerges to go the extra mile to make a difference. Even if I might not make a substantive difference, I might at least keep the ball rolling. A new dimension has been added to my inquiry as I reworked my methodological section incorporating the *chakra model of epistemology* (seven interconnected ways of being,

knowing, and valuing) and submitted it to my principal supervisor. His comments triggered soul-searching and researching. He further mentioned;

Chet ji, people might comment on your write-ups as the mere reproduction of earlier researchers. What originality would you add here? You might 'reconcile' Western-induced paradigms with paradigms arising from your culture- Eastern Wisdom Traditions. This is to start thinking in terms of Upanishads/puranas/lores/, etc.

(November 10, 2021)

I have tried my best to intrinsically connect to the process of grounded theorizing by embracing the intent of *currere* method of exploration. My colleague Pradip asked me “ *Why are you pursuing a PhD as a school's headteacher? Your MPhil qualification is more than sufficient for your level.*” Pondering upon his remarks, I sensed a touch of sarcasm in his tone. So I replied, “ *I want to explore the school leadership trends and issues locally and globally, questioning conventional leadership approaches (e.g., leader as an authoritarian, probably a scary figure, leaders as the queen bee), and envision a living educational leadership theory- small 't' orientation. As a school leadership practitioner, I think I am making the right choice.*” The following poem possibly captures the essence of my inquiry journey:

Edited Life

Every day with new horizons of possibilities,

I keep editing my anguish and agonies,

I keep striving for a better version of me

Amidst uncertainties, chaos, and dilemmas.

As I commence editing myself

*A new vibe and enthusiasm appears,
 A newer and larger possibility emerges,
 I keep envisioning myself as a dream builder
 A long-standing dream is almost achieved,
 An epic-like journey is nearly reached,
 Opening the door of my transformation and emancipation.*

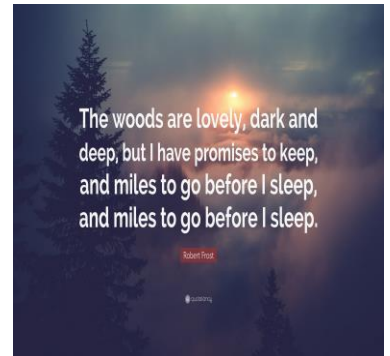
(Poem XII, May 2021)

I want to "create a new version of the past, a new history " (Denzin, 2008, p. 18) of my school leadership journey through the unfoldment of my experiences. Every day, I keep editing my life and leadership practice in a quest to find a better version of myself and envision a greater possibility, though it seems like a wild-goose chase or riding a wild horse. To face challenges and the expectations of stakeholders, a headteacher requires "enormous passion, commitment, and endurance" (Fiarman, 2015, p. 18). In this connection, I gratefully recall the remarks of the Chief Education Officer Chiran, who frequently mentions in the meetings of headteachers that "*as headteachers, you need to put every effort to meet the expectations of the stakeholders. It shows your efficiency. Your commitment to change is crucial in this regard. You may not get a second chance to be the headteacher. Now is the time for you all to make a difference*" (June, 2021). Aligning with his remarks, I feel I need to conceive the "magnitude of responsibility" (Fiarman, 2015, p. 17) and pursue a leadership journey possibly leaving no stone unturned to meet the expectations of the stakeholders embracing the spirit of collaboration. I have almost reached the end of my contemplative PhD journey, which I would like to mention as a Himalayan task "is only the starting point, the contested future" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 681) of my life. As a headteacher, I need to be resilient to cope with the status quo,

frustration, humiliation, and many other adverse circumstances. I need to pursue my school leadership journey joyfully, considering it as a remarkable responsibility bestowed by God with a deep awareness for my academic thriving and professional transformation.

The indomitable journey continues...

*Amidst the narratives of becoming and being,
A fractured identity is in the making.
A puff of dare to care and share a collage,
Fathoming the pieces of life for a montage.*



Note: shorturl.at/hosRW

Stumbles, anguish, and resentment

Success, joy and amusement.

Accepting life as a mirage,

Navigating the self in every gauge.

Wrestling like a warrior,

Pouncing like a tiger.

Pondering like a sage,

Brooding in a cage.

I am bestowed with this doctoral grace,

Envisioning a new paradigm of this race.

As Bochner (2014) rightly mentions, “in the academic world, we refer to graduation as a commencement; an ending that is a beginning replete with

*How do you know whether the changes in your practice are having an educational and values-laden influence on the learning of others you want to have?
(Marie, November 5, 2022, Webinar Discussion)*

promises, possibilities, risks, and uncertainty” (p. 304); I will further navigate the unfinished aspects of this daunting and promising academic journey with my newfound transformative sensibilities. I intend to focus on nurturing/empowering teachers' agency by establishing a culture of sharing their perspectives and motivating them to come out of the box (comfort zone) to be agents of change, as teachers are the real actors in the classroom.

A transformative path of professional development demands critiquing deep-seated beliefs and disempowering practices. To this end, an evolving awareness embracing care, compassion, and humility might help me to create a transformative vision, thereby creating a collaborative learning space (co-creating spiritual ecology) at school and beyond. On top of that, I encourage teachers to be possibly critically self-reflective of their professional practices to challenge systemic problems and hegemonic forces. Finally, regarding my post-thesis engagement, I will endeavor to ensure empowerment, equity, inclusion, and justice aspects at my school and beyond, embracing the intent of critical spirituality. More so, I will act possibly afresh and anew with unfolding awareness to engage with my practitioners' community (transformative research, autoethnography, educational/school leadership), and professional community for the implementation of practical transformative leadership strategies (e.g, workshops, seminars, conferences, curriculum design and implementation, critical self-reflection practices among many).

REFERENCES

- Acharya, D.P. (2021). *Buddhist leadership: The path leading to the better society*.
<https://lbu.edu.np/research/buddhist-leadership-the-path-leading-to-the-better-society/>
- Adams, T.E. (2008). A review of narrative ethics. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 14(2), 175-194.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800407304417>
- Adams, T. E., & Hermann, A.F. (2020). Expanding our autoethnographic future.
Journal of Autoethnography, 1(1), 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.1525/joae.2020.1.1.1>
- Adams, T.E., Holman Jones, S., & Ellis, C. (2022). *Handbook of autoethnography*
 (2nd Ed.). Taylor & Francis.
- Adkins, B. (2015). *Deleuz and Guattari's a thousand plateaus: A critical introduction and guide*. Edinburgh University Press Ltd.
- American Federation of Teachers (2007). *Building Parent-Teacher Relationships*.
 Author.
- Anderson, L., & Glass – Coffin, B. (2013). I learn by going. Autoethnographic modes
 of inquiry. In S. H. Jones, T. E. Adams, & C. Ellis (Eds.), *A handbook of autoethnography* (pp. 57-83). Routledge.
- Antoine, E. (2018). *Thriving with co-inception leadership: Dare to create extraordinary enterprise*. Creative Collaborative Coaching Zone LLC.
- Apol, L. (2021) Attending to Aesthetics: The Art of Revision: In Poetry, Poetic
 Inquiry and Rwanda: Engaging in the lives of others. *Studies in Arts-Based Educational Research*, 3, 33-48. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-56562-6_3

- Azorín, C., & Fullan, M. (2022). Leading new, deeper forms of collaborative cultures: Questions and pathways. *Journal of Educational Change*, 23, 131–143.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-021-09448-w>
- Baldoni, J. (2008). *Lead by example: 50 ways great leaders inspire*. AMACON.
- Ball, S.J. (1987). *The micro-politics of school. Toward a theory of school organization*. Methuen.
- Barrett, J. (1998). *Total leadership: How to inspire and motivate for personal and team effectiveness*. Kogan Page Limited.
- Beachum, F.D., Obiakor, F. E., & McCray, C.R. (2007). Community uplift theory for positive change of African Africans in urban schools. In M.C. Brown & R. D. Bartee (Eds.), *Still not equal: Expanding educational opportunities in society* (pp. 269-278). Peter Lang Publishing.
- Bean, W. E. (2000). Community development and adult education: Locating practices in its roots. *New Direction for Adults & Continuing Education*, (85), 67-76.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/ace.8507>
- Bennis, W. (2009). *On becoming a leader*. Basic Books.
- Bergson, H. (2004). *Matter and memory*. Dover Publication, Inc.
- Bhawuk, D. P.S. (2011). *Spirituality and Indian psychology. Lessons from the Bhagavad Gita*. Springer.
- Blanchard, K., & Broadwell, R. (2018). *Servant leadership in action: How you can achieve great relationships and results*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.
- Bochner, A. P., & Ellis, C. (2016). *Evocative autoethnography: Writing lives and telling stories*. Routledge.

- Bochner, A.P. (2002). Perspectives on inquiry III: The moral of stories. In M.L. Knapp & J.A. Daly (Eds.), *Handbook of interpersonal communication* (3rd ed., pp. 73-100). Sage.
- Bochner, A. P. (2014). *Coming to narrative: A personal history of paradigm change in the human Sciences*. Walnut Creek.
- Bonner, C. (2008). Spiritually oriented leadership in a secular age. In P.D. Houston, A. M. Blankstein, & R. W. Cole (Eds.), *Spirituality in educational leadership* (pp. 111-129). Corwin Press.
- Bourn, D. (2021). Pedagogy of hope: global learning and the future of education. *International Journal of Development Education and Global Learning*, 13 (2), 65–78: <https://doi.org/10.14324/IJDEGL.13.2.01>.
- Boyd, D. (2012). The critical spirituality of Paulo Freire. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 31, 759 - 778.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2012.723051>
- Branden, N. (1994). *The six pillars of self-esteem*. Bantam books.
- Brookfield, S. (1995). *Becoming a critically reflective teacher*. Jossey-Bass.
- Brookfield, S. (2006). Tales from the dark side. A phenomenology of adult critical reflection. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 12(3), 203-216.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0260137940130303>
- Brookfield, S. (2009). The concept of critical reflection: promises and contradictions. *European Journal of Social Work*, 13(3), 293-204
[.https://doi.org/10.1080/13691450902945215](https://doi.org/10.1080/13691450902945215)
- Brown, B. (2012). *Daring greatly: How the courage to be vulnerable transforms the way we live, love, parent, and lead*. Gotham Books.

- Brown, B. (2017). *Braving the wilderness. The quest for true belonging and the courage to stand alone*. Ebury Publishing.
- Brown, B. (2021). *Atlas of the heart: Mapping meaningful connection and the language of human experience*. Random House.
- Bryant, A. (2017). *Grounded theory and grounded theorizing: Pragmatism in Research Practice*. Oxford University Press.
- Burns, J. M. (2010). *Leadership*. Harper Perennial Modern Classics
- Busher, H. (2006). *Understanding educational leadership: People, power, and culture*. Open University Press.
- Bussey, M. (2006b). Neohumanism: Critical Spirituality, Tantra and Education. In S. Inayatullah, Bussey, M., & Milojevic, I (Ed.), *Neohumanist Educational Futures: Liberating the Pedagogical Intellect* (pp.80-95). Tamkang University Press.
- Butler, C. (2003). *Postmodernism: A very short introduction*. Oxford University Press.
- Butler, J. (2003). *Bodies that matter. On the discursive limits of sex*. Routledge.
- Cahnmann, M. (2003). The craft, practice, and possibility of poetry in educational research. *Educational Researcher*, 32(3), 29-36.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3699832>
- Carpenter, R. (2018). *A manifesto for excellence in schools*. Bloomsbury Education.
- Carr, A. (2013). *Positive psychology: The science of happiness and human strengths*. Burnner- Routledge.
- Carson, T.R., & Sumara, D.J. (1997). *Action research as a living practice*. Peter Lang.

- Casciaro, T., & Lobo, M.S. (June 2005). Competent jerks, lovable fools, and the formation of social networks, *Harvard Business Review*.
<https://hbr.org/2005/06/competent-jerks-lovable-fools-and-the-formation-of-social-networks>
- Chang, H. (2016). Individual and collaborative autoethnography as method: A social scientist's perspective. In S. H. Jones, T. E. Adams, & C. Ellis (Eds.), *A handbook of autoethnography* (pp. 57-83). Routledge.
- Charaniya, N. K. (2012). Cultural- spiritual perspective of transformative learning. In E.W. Taylor, & P. Cranton (Eds.), *The handbook of transformative learning* (pp. 231-244). Jossey- Bass Publishers.
- Chatterjee, S., & Datta, D. (2007). *An Introduction to the Indian Philosophy*. Rupa Publications.
- Chopra, D. (2010). *The soul of leadership: Unlocking you potential for greatness*. Harmony Books.
- Chordon, P. (2009). *Taking the leap: Free ourselves from the old habits and fears*. Shambala Publications, Inc.
- Chordon, P. (2010). *When things fall apart: Heart advice for difficult times*. Shambala.
- Clark, S., & O'Donoghue, T. (2016). *School leadership in diverse contexts*. Routledge.
- Clough, P. (2002). *Narratives and fictions in educational research*. Open University Press.
- Coleman, M., & Glover, D. (2010). *Educational leadership and management: developing insights and skills*. Open University Press.

- Collins, J. (2001). *God to great. Why some companies make the leap and others don't*. Penguin Random House.
- Collins, M. (1992). *Ordinary children, extraordinary teachers*. Hampton Roads Publishing.
- Cornish, E. (2004). *Futuring: The exploration of the future*. World Future Society.
- Cranton, P., & Taylor, E.W. (2012). Transformative learning: Seeking a more unified theory. In E.W. Taylor, & P. Cranton (Eds.). *The handbook of transformative learning* (pp.3-20). Jossey- Bass Publishers.
- Cummings, C. (1991). *Eco-spirituality: Toward reverent life*. Paulist Pr.
- Dantley, M. E. (2005). The Power of Critical Spirituality to Act and to Reform. *Journal of School Leadership*, 15(5), 500–518. <https://doi.org/10.1177/105268460501500502>
- Deal, T. E. (2008). Leadership on a teeter-totter: Balancing rationality and spirituality. In P.D. Houston, A. M. Blankstein, & R. W. Cole (Eds.), *Spirituality in educational leadership* (pp. 171-182). Corwin Press.
- Dantley, M. E. (June 2010). Successful leadership in urban schools: principals and critical spirituality, a new approach to reform. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 79(3), 214-219. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/20798344>
- Day, C. (2005). *A passion for teaching*. RoutledgeFalmer.
- Deal, T.E., & Peterson, K.D. (2016). *Shaping school culture*. Jossey-Bass.
- DeGracia, D. J. (2015). *The yogic view of consciousness*. HQ
- Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1987). *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2011). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (4th ed.). Sage.

- Denzin, N. K. (2003). *Performance ethnography: Critical pedagogy and the politics of culture*. Sage.
- Denzin, N. K. (2008). *Searching for Yellowstone. Race, gender, family, and memory in the post-modern West*. Left Coast Press.
- Dhakal, S. (2022). *Reimagining, restructuring, and revitalising school leadership philosophy in Nepal: A critical auto/ethnographic case study*. <https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses/2560>
- Dhiman, S. (2017). *Holistic leadership: A new paradigm for today's leaders*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Dhiman, S. (2019). *Bhagavad Gita and leadership: A catalyst for organizational transformation*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Dhiman, S., Mardirossian, K, & Quiroa, M. (2018). Personal fulfillment and workplace flourishing: Finding mutual and personal alignment. In .D. Satinder, G. E. Roberts, & E. C. Joanna (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of workplace spirituality and fulfillment* (pp. 578- 601). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Dhungana, P. (2022). *Developing a living model of professional development of school teachers in Nepal: A collaborative epistemic journey* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Kathmandu University.
- Dive, B. (2009). *The accountable leader: Developing effective leadership through meaningful accountability*. Kogan Page.
- Douglas, K, & Carless, D. (2016). My eyes got a bit watery there: Using stories to explore emotions in coaching research and practice at a golf programme for injured, sick and wounded military personnel. *Sports Coaching Review*, 2000(85), 67-76. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21640629.2016.1163314>

- Duggan, W. (2007). *Strategic intuition: The creative spark in human achievement*. Columbia Business School Press.
- Duignan, P. (2006). *Educational Leadership: Key challenges and ethical tensions*. Cambridge University Press.
- Dunne, J.D. (2018). Reflexivity in Buddhist epistemology. Implications for cooperative cognition. In W. Smith, M. Farjoun, & H. Tsoukas(Eds.), *Dualities, dialectics, and paradoxes in organizational life* (pp. 82-105). Oxford University Press.
- Dweck, C. S. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. Random House.
- Dyson, M. (2007). My story in a profession of stories. Auto ethnography- An empowering methodology for educators. *An Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 32 (1), 36-49. <http://dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2007v32n1.3>
- Ellis, C. (2004). *The ethnographic I: A methodological novel about autoethnography*. Altamira Press.
- Ellis, C. (2017a). Compassionate research: Interviewing and storytelling from a relational ethics of care. In I. Goodson, M. Andrews, & A. Antikainen (Eds.), *The Routledge international handbook on narrative and life history* (pp. 431–445). Routledge
- Ellis, C. (2020). *Revision: Autoethnographic reflections on life and work*. Routledge.
- Ellis, C., Adams, T. E., & Bochner, A. ,P. (2010). Autoethnography: An Overview [40 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 12(1), Art. 10. <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs1101108>.

- Ellis, C., & Bochner, A.P. (2006). Autoethnography, personal narrative, reflexivity: Research as subject. In N. Denzin , &Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed. pp. 733-768). Sage Publications.
- English, W. F. (2008). *The art of educational leadership: Balancing performance and accountability*: Sage Publications.
- Ettling, D. (2012). Educator as change agent. Ethics of transformative learning. In E.W. Taylor, & P. Cranton (Eds.), *The handbook of transformative learning* (pp. 536-551). Jossey- Bass Publishers.
- Evans, C. (2015). *Leadership trust. Build it, keep it*. Centre for Creative Leadership.
- Fiarman, S. E. (2015). *Becoming a principal: learning to lead, learning to learn*: Harvard Education Press.
- Government of Nepal. (2016). *The education act (8th amendment)*. Nepal Law Commission.
- Freire, P. (1972). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Penguin Books.
- Freire, P. (1974). *Education for critical consciousness*. Bloomsbury.
- Freire, P. (2014). *Pedagogy of hope: Reliving pedagogy of the oppressed*. A & C Black.
- Froster, N. (2005). *Maximum performance: A practical guide to leading and managing people at work*: Edward Elgar.
- Foster, W. (1989). *Towards a critical practice of leadership*. In J. Smyth (Ed.), *Critical perspectives on educational leadership* (pp. 8-27). RoutledgeFalmer.
- Fullan, M. (2001). *The new meaning of educational change*. RoutledgeFalmer.
- Fullan, M. (2010). *Motion leadership: The skinny on becoming change savvy*. Corwin Press.
- Fullan, M. (2010). *All systems go: The change imperative for whole system reform*.

Corwin Press.

Fullan, M. (2011). *Change leader: Learning to do what matters most*. Jossey- Bass.

Fullan, M. (2014). *The Principal. Three keys to maximizing impact*: Jossey- Bass.

Fullan, M. (2018). *Deep learning. Engage the world change the world*. Corwin Press.

Gabriel, P. (2008). *Personal transformation: The relationship of transformative learning experiences and transformational leadership* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation] George Washington University, Washington DC, USA.

Gardner, F. (2011). *Critical spirituality: A holistic approach to contemporary practice*. Routledge.

Gates, R. M. (2016). *A passion for leadership. Lessons on change and reform from fifty years of public service*. Alfred A. Knopf.

Gautam, G. R. (2018). *Becoming and being an English education professional: An autoethnographic inquiry from Gurukul Sanskrit education to English language teacher education* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Kathmandu University.

Gergen, K.J. (2017). *Relational being: Beyond self and community*. Oxford University Press.

Germer, C. K. (2009). *The mindful path to self-compassion: Freeing yourself from destructive thoughts and emotions*. The Guilford Press.

Gist, M. (2020). *The extraordinary power of leader humility*. Berrett-Koehner Publishers.

Gladwell, M. (2008). *Outliers: The story of success*. Little, Brown Young Publishers.

Goffee, R. &, Jones, G. (2006). *Why should anyone be led by you? What it takes to be an authentic leader*. Harvard Business School Press.

Grant, K.B. &, Ray, J. A. (2019). *Home, family, and community*. Sage.

- Grange, L. (2011). A pedagogy of hope after Paulo Friere. *South Asian Journal of Higher Education*. 25 (11), 183-189.
<https://www.ajol.info/index.php/sajhe/article/view/72538>
- Gregen, K.J. (2017). *Relational being: Beyond self and community*. Oxford University Press & The Crossing Press.
- Grue, C. (2015). The art of communicative leadership. <https://www.communication-director.com/issues/direct-empower-inspire/art-communicative-leadership/#.YpIrQChByUk>
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 191-215). Sage.
- Gunlaugson, O. (2008). Metatheoretical prospects for the field of transformative learning. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 6(2), 124-135.
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1541344608323387>
- Guthries, K.L., & Jenkins, D.M. (2018). *The role of leadership educators: Transforming learning*. Information Age Publishing, Inc.
- Haberman, D. L. (2007). A Selection from the Bhaktirasamritasindhu of Rupa Gosvamin: The Foundational Emotions (Sthayi-bhavas). In E. F. Bryant (Ed.), *Krishna: A Sourcebook* (pp. 409-440): OUP.
- Habermas, J. (1972). *Knowledge and human interests*. Beacon Press.
- Habermas, J. (1987). *The theory of communicative action: Reason and rationalization of society 1*. Beacon Press.
- Hanson, K., & Cherkowski, S. (2015). Deepening connectivity: Learning about ourselves through others as a way to experience integrity as an inquiry

educator, *Educational Journal of Living Theories*, 8(2), 1-18.

<https://ejolts.net/node/259>

- Hanh, T. N. (2014). *No mud, no lotus. The art of transforming suffering*. Parallax Press.
- Hersted, L., & Gergen, K.L. (2013). *Relational Leading: Practices for dialogically based collaboration*. A Taos Institute Publication.
- Hess, E.D., & Cameron, K.S. (2006). *Leading with values: positivity, virtue, and high performance*. Cambridge University Press.
- Holiday, R. (2018). *Ego is the enemy*. Penguin Random House.
- Holman Jones, S. (2005). Autoethnography: Making the personal political. In N. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 763- 797) Sage.
- hooks, B. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. Routledge.
- Hoopen, P. T. & Trompenaars, F. (2009). *The enlightened leader: An introduction to the chakras of leadership*. Jossey-Bass.
- Houston, P. D. (2008). What's spirituality got to do with it? In P.D. Houston, A. M. Blankstein, & R. W. Cole (Eds., pp. 7-12), *Spirituality in educational leadership*. Corwin Press.
- Howie, P., & Bagnall, R. (2013). A beautiful metaphor: transformative learning theory. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 32(6), 816-836.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2013.817486>
- Huang, Y., & Carspecken, P. (2003). Human identity, self-narrative, and negation. In L. Carspecken, B. Dennis, & P. F. Carspecken (Eds.), *Qualitative research: A*

reader in philosophy, core concepts, and practice (pp. 263-303). Peter Lang
AG

Hull, R.B., Robertson, D.P., & Mortimer, M. (2020). Leadership for sustainability.

Strategies for tackling wicked problems. Oisland Press.

Hurduzeu, R. E. (2015). The impact of leadership on organizational performance.

SEA- Practical Application of Science, 3(7), 289-293.

<https://ideas.repec.org/a/cmj/seapas/y2015i7p289-294.html>

Jackson, R. R. (2021). *Stop leading, start building: Turn your school into a success story with people and resources you already have*. ASCD.

Jago, B. J. (2002). Chronicling an academic depression. *Journal of Contemporary*

Ethnography, 31(6), 753. <https://doi.org/10.1177/089124102237823>

Jelfs, H. (2011). Through the U: A transformational journey retold. *Reflective*

Practice, 12(3), 401-413. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623943.2011.571870>

Johari, H. (2010). *Chakras: Energy centres of transformation*. Destiny Books.

Jonas, W. B. (2011). Towards a Neuroscience of Spirituality.

Journal of Qualitative Methods, 7(1), 38-53. [10.1007/978-94-007-2079-4_15](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-2079-4_15)

Jones, J. L. (2002). Performance ethnography: The role of embodiment in cultural

authenticity. *Theatre topics*, 12(1), 1-15. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ659035>

Josipovic, Z., Dinstein, I., Weber, J., & Heeger, D. J. (2012). Influence of meditation

on anti-correlated networks in the brain, *Frontiers of Human Neuroscience*, 5,
1-11. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnhum.2011.00183>

Judith, A, & Goodman, L. (2012). *Creating on purpose: The spiritual technology of manifesting through chakra*. Jaico Publishing House.

Judith, A, & Goodman, L. (2014). *Chakras: The pathways to success*. Jaico

Publishing House.

- Judith, A. (2009). *Wheels of life: A user's guide to the chakra system*. Llewellyn.
- Jung, C. G. (1996). *The psychology of Kundalini yoga*. Princeton University Press.
- Kazan, A., & Byrant, A. (2013). *Self-leadership: How to become a more successful, efficient, and effective leader from the inside out*. McGraw-Hill.
- Khanal, J., & Ghimire, S. (2022). Understanding role conflict and role ambiguity of school principals in Nepal. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17411432211073410>
- Khanal, T. N. (2017). *Instructional leadership: An ethnographic inquiry into perceptions and practices of teachers and head teachers*. [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Kathmandu University, Nepal.
- Khullar, P. (2020). *Prashna Upanishad: Six questions of creation*. <https://www.speakingtree.in/article/prashna-upanishad-six-questions-of-creation>.
- Kim, J.K., Lee, D.S., Richman, N.G., Schiesser, R., Kim, S.A., & Silberstein, S. (2010). *Ying and yang of life: Understanding the universal nature of change*. Head and Soul, LLC.
- Kissel, L. (2008). The Terrain of the Long Take. *Journal of Visual Culture*, 7(3), 349–361. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470412908096341>
- Kincheloe, J.L., & Steinberg, S.R. (1995). Introduction: The more questions we ask, the more questions we ask. In J. L. Kincheloe, & S.R. Steinberg (Eds), *Thirteen questions*. Peter Lang.
- King, A. (2010). From sage on the stage to guide on the side. *College Teaching*, 41(1), 30–35. <https://doi.org/10.1080/87567555.1993.9926781>

- Kohm, B. & Nance, B. (2013). Creating collaborative cultures. https://pdo.ascd.org/LMSCourses/PD13OC010M/media/Leading_Prof_Learning_M4_Reading301.pdf
- Kovecses, Z. (2000). *Metaphor and emotion: Language, culture, and body in human feeling*. Oxford University Press.
- Kovecses, Z. (2015). *Where metaphors come from: Reconsider context in metaphor*: Oxford University Press.
- Kroth, M., & Cranton, P. (2014). *Stories of transformative learning*. Sense Publishers.
- Krznaric, R. (2015). *Empathy. Why it matters and how to get it*. TracherPerigee Book.
- Kumar, S. (2010). *Spiritual compass. The three qualities of life*. Green Books.
- Ladkin, D. (2010). *Rethinking leadership: A new look at old leadership questions*. Edward Elgar Publishing Limited.
- Lakoff, G., & Johnsen, M. (2003). *Metaphors we live by*. The University of Chicago Press.
- Lambert, L., Zimmerman, D. P., & Gardner, M. E. (2016). *Liberating leadership capacity: pathways to educational wisdom*. Teachers College Press.
- Lantieri, L. (2003). A vision of school with heart and spirit. In M. J. Elias, H. Arnold, & C. T. Hussey (Eds). *EQ +IQ= Best leadership practices for caring and successful schools*. Corwin Press.Lestari,
- Y. D., Nadia, F. N. D., Sukoco, B. M., Ahlstrom, D., Widiyanto, S., Susanto, E., Nasution, R. A. & Fauzi, A. M. (2021). Dynamic managerial capability, trust in leadership and performance: the role of cynicism toward change, *International Journal of Leadership in Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2021.1974096>

- Lewis, C., Watson, M. & Schaps, E. (2003). Building community in school. In M. J. Elias, H. Arnold, & C. T. Hussey (Eds). *EQ +IQ= Best leadership practices for caring and successful schools*. Corwin Press.
- Lincoln, Y.S., & Guba, E.G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E.G. (2005). Paradigmatic controversies, contraindications, and emerging confluences. In N.K. Denzin and Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The sage of handbook of qualitative research* (3rd, pp. 191-215). Sage.
- Luitel, B. C. (2009). *Culture, worldview, and transformative philosophy of mathematics education in Nepal. A cultural-philosophical inquiry* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Curtin University, Perth, Australia.
- Luitel, B. C., & Taylor, P. C. (2013). Fractals of ‘old’ and ‘new’ logics: A post/modern proposal for transformative mathematics pedagogy. *Philosophy of Mathematics Education Journal*, 7.
<http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11937/19854>
- Luitel, B.C. (2019). Journeying towards a multi-paradigmatic transformative research program: An East-West symbiosis. In P.C. Taylor & B.C. Luitel, (Eds.), *Research as transformative learning for sustainable futures: Glocal Voices and Visions* (pp.19-37). Brill sense.
- Luitel, B.C., & Taylor, P. C. (2019). Introduction: Research as transformative learning for sustainable futures. In P.C. Taylor, & B.C. Luitel (Eds.), *Research as transformative learning for sustainable futures: Glocal Voices and Visions* (pp.1-16). Brill- sense.
- Malic, J. R. (2017). *Living leadership: Exploring the leadership values and practices of independent school principals in Ontario*. [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Toronto.

- Markova, D. (2008). Spiritual courage: Lead from the inside out. In P.D. Houston, A. M. Blankstein, & R. W. Cole (Eds.). *Spirituality in educational leadership* (pp. 37-48). Corwin Press.
- Matthews, D. (2006). Epistemic Humility. In van Gigch, J.P. (eds), *Wisdom, Knowledge, and Management. C.West Churchman and Related Works Series*, (vol. 2, pp. 105-137). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-387-36506-0_7
- Maxwell, J.C. (1999). *The 21 irrefutable laws of leadership: Follow them and people will follow you*. Nelson, Thomas @ Publishing Co.
- Maxwell, J.C. (2003). *The 17 indisputable laws of teamwork: Embrace them and empower your team*: Nelson Impact.
- McIlveen, P. (2008). Autoethnography as a method for reflexive research and practice in vocational psychology. *Australian Journal of Career Development*, 17(2), 13 - 20. <https://doi.org/10.1177/103841620801700204>
- McLaren, P, & Kincheloe, J.L. (2007). *Critical pedagogy: Where are we now?* Peter Lang.
- McLaughlin, M. (2012). *Crossing cultural borders- A journey towards understanding and celebration in aboriginal Australian and non-aboriginal Australian contexts*. [An unpublished doctoral dissertation] Curtin University, Perth, Australia.
- Melling, A., & Pilkington, R. (2018). *Paulo Freire and transformative education: Changing lives and transforming communities*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Merriam, S. B., & Kim, S. (2012). Studying transformative learning: What methodology? In E.W. Taylor, & P. Cranton (Eds.). *The handbook of transformative learning* (pp. 56-72). Jossey- Bass Publishers.

- Metzger, C. (2008). Persona growth in the workplace: Spiritual practices you can use. In P.D. Houston, A. M. Blankstein, & R. W. Cole (Eds.), *Spirituality in educational leadership* (pp. 111-129). Corwin Press.
- Mezirow, J. (1978). Perspective Transformation. *Adult Education*, 28(2), 100–110. <https://doi.org/10.1177/074171367802800202>
- Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative dimensions of adult learning*. Jossey- Bass Publishers.
- Mezirow, J. (1997). Transformative learning: Theory to practice. *New Directions for Adult & Continuing Education*, 74, 5-12. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ace.7401>
- Mezirow, J. (2012). Learning to think like an adult: Core concepts of transformation theory. In E.W. Taylor, & P. Cranton (Eds.). *The handbook of transformative learning* (pp. 73-96) Jossey- Bass Publishers.
- Ministry of Education. (2016). *School sector development plan, 2016-2023*. Author
- Moir, M.J. (2017). Contextual leadership: Context as a mediator of leader effectiveness. *Psychol Behav Sci Int*, 3(4): [10.19080/PBSIJ.2017.03.555617](https://doi.org/10.19080/PBSIJ.2017.03.555617)
- Muller, J. P. (2005). Holistic learning. In J.P. Muller, S. Karsten,, D. Denton, , D. Orr, , I.C. Kates (Eds.), *Holistic learning and spirituality in education: Breaking new ground* (pp. 106). State University of New York Press.
- Neal, J. (2018). Overview of workplace spirituality research. In .D. Satinder, G. E. Roberts, & E. C. Joanna (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of workplace spirituality and fulfillment* (pp. 3-58). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Nilson, L., & Zimmerman, B.J. (2013). *Creating self-regulated learners: Strategies to strengthen students' self-awareness and learning skills*. Stylus Publishing.
- Niesche, R. (2014). *Deconstructing educational leadership*. Routledge.

- Niesche, R., & Gowlett, C. (2019). *Social, critical, and political theories of educational leadership*. Springer.
- Noddings, N. (2013). Why care about caring? In *caring: A relational approach to ethics and moral education* (2nd ed., pp. 7–29). University of California Press.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt7zw1nb.7>
- Northouse, P. G. (2016). *Leadership. Theory and practice*. Sage Publications.
- Oliver, C. G. (2015). *Leadership with integrity: Reflections on legal, moral, and ethical issues in school administration*. AuthorHouse.
- Ottmann, H. (1982) Cognitive Interests and Self-Reflection. In Thompson J.B., Held D. (Eds.), *Habermas. Contemporary Social Theory* (pp.79-97). Palgrave, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-16763-0_5
- Palmer, M. (1998). *Ying & Yang: Understanding the Chinese philosophy of opposites and how to apply it to everyday life*. Paitkus Books.
- Palmer, P. J. (1998). *The courage to teach: Exploring the inner landscape of a teacher's life*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Palmer, P.J. (1999). *The active life: A spirituality of work, creativity, and caring*. Willey.
- Pandey, K.R. (2021). *Theorising transformative learning: The power of autoethnographic narratives in education*. Brill | Sense.
- Panta, C. N. (2018). *Exploring learner autonomy through English language teachers' perspectives: A hamletian dilemma*. [Unpublished MPhil dissertation] Kathmandu University, Nepal.
- Panta, C. N., & Luitel, B. C. (2022a). Solipsism as a challenge of doing autoethnographic inquiry. *The Qualitative Report*, 27(4), 1058-1067. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2022.5365>

- Panta, C. N., & Luitel, B. C. (2022b). Reconciling critical theory and spirituality in educational leadership. *i.e.: Inquiry in Education*, 14 (1), Article 7.
<https://digitalcommons.nl.edu/ie/vol14/iss1/7>
- Paulson, G.L. (2002). *Kundalini & the chakras. Evolution in this lifetime*. Llewellyn.
- Pereira, L. J. (2005). *Between the real and the imagined: An inquiry into the act of transformative leadership*. [Unpublished doctoral dissertation] Curtin University of Technology, Australia.
- Perera, G. (2015). *The future of leadership. Nine things successful leaders do now*. Kindle Edition.
- Piercy, G. (2013). Transformative learning theory and spirituality: A whole- person approach. *Journal of Instructional Research*, 2, 30-42.
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1127651.pdf>
- Pinar, W. F. (2004). *What is curriculum theory?* Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (1992). Postmodern epistemology of practice. In S. Kvale (Ed.), *Psychology and postmodernism* (pp.146-165). Sage.
- Poudel, L. N. (2017). *Kabishiromani rachanawali, part-2*. Nepalaya.
- Poulos, C.N. (2013). Writing my way through: Memory, auto-ethnography, identity, and hope. In S. H. Jones, T. E. Adams, & C. Ellis (Eds.), *A handbook of autoethnography* (pp. 57-83). Routledge.
- Poulos, C.N. (2021). *Essentials of autoethnography*. American Psychological Association.
- Pretz, B. (2017). The Impact of a Positive Environment and Shared Leadership to Empower Collegial School Culture. Graduate Theses and Dissertations.
<https://scholarworks.uark.edu/etd/2546>

- Purkey, W. W., & Siegel, B. L. (2002). *Becoming an invitational leader. A new approach to professional and personal success*. Humanix Books.
- Qutoshi, S. B. (2016). *Creating Lived Educational Theory: A Journey Towards Transformative Teacher Education in Pakistan*. [An Unpublished PhD Dissertation] Kathmandu University, Nepal.
- Qutoshi, S. B. (2019). Cultural –self knowing: Transforming self and others. In P.C. Taylor, & B.C. Luitel (Eds.), *Research as transformative learning for sustainable futures: Glocal voices and visions* (Vol. 64, pp. 147-159). Brill & Sense. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004393349_009
- Rai, I. M. (2017). *Identity paradoxes of Kiran Migrants in Urban context: An autoethnographic inquiry*. [Unpublished doctoral dissertation] Kathmandu University, Nepal.
- Reitz, M. (2017). *Dialogue in organizations: Developing relational leadership*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Reason, P. (1998). A participatory worldview. *Resurgence*, 168, 42-44.
https://www.embracingcomplexity.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/participatory_worldview.pdf
- Reed-Danahay, D. E. (1997). *Auto/ethnography: Rewriting the self and the social*. Oxford University Press.
- Richard, S.M., Salisbury, J., & Cosner, J. (2020). The school-community connection: Social justice leaders ' community activism to promote justice for students. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*,
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2020.1842506>

- Richardson, L. (2000). Writing: a method of inquiry. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 959-578). Sage Publications.
- Robinson, K. [TED Talks]. (2007, January). Do schools kill creativity. [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iG9CE55wbtY&t=362s>
- Robinson, K., & Aronoca, L. (2015). *Creative schools: The grassroots revolution that is transforming education*. Viking.
- Robinson, K., & Robinson, K. (2022). *Imagine if... creating a better future for all*. Penguin Books.
- Roffey, S. (2012). Developing positive relationship in schools. In Roffey, S. (Ed.) *Positive relationships: Evidence based practice across the world* (pp. 128-145).
- Rogers, B. (2000). *Behaviour management. A whole-school approach*. Paul Chapman Publishing Ltd.
- Sadhguru (2012). *Of mystics & mistakes: The journey from confusion to clarity, from error to enlightenment, from self-deception to self-discovery*. Jaico Publishing House.
- Saldana, J. (2011). *Fundamentals of qualitative research*. Oxford University Press.
- Sandlin, J. A., & Bey, G. J. (2006). Trowels, trenches and transformation: A case study of archaeologists learning a more critical practice of archaeology. *Journal of Social Archaeology*, 6, 225-276.
<https://www.deepdyve.com/lp/sage/trowels-trenches-and-transformation-xjPbZ6wBIk?key=sage>
- Shankarananda, S. (2007). *Self-inquiry: Using awareness to unblock your life*. Shaktipat Press.

Sharma, C. (2007). *The Advaita tradition in Indian philosophy*. Shree ainendra Press.

Sastri, S. S. (1928). *Prashna Upanishad with Shankara's commentary*.

<https://www.wisdomlib.org/hinduism/book/prashna-upanishad-shankara-bhashya>

Sergiovanni, T.J., & Green L. R. (2015). *The Principals' Perspective: A reflective practice perspective*. Pearson.

Schuller, R.M. (1988). *Tough times never last, but tough people do*. Orient paperbacks.

Seligman, M. E. P., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2014). Positive psychology: An introduction. In M. Csikszentmihalyi (Ed.), *Flow and foundations of positive psychology*, (pp. 279-298). Springer.

Seligman, M. E. P. (2002). *Authentic happiness: Using the new positive psychology to realize your potential for lasting fulfillment*. Free Press.

Senge, P. M. (2006). *The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization*. Doubleday.

Serdyukov, P. (2017). Innovation in education: what works, what doesn't and what to do about it? *Journal of Research in Innovative Teaching & Learning*, 10(1).
<https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/JRIT-10-2016-0007/full/html>

Sergiovanni, T. J (2005). *The values of leadership*. *The Educational Forum*, 69 (2), 112-123.

Sergiovanni, T.J. (2007). *Rethinking leadership: A Collection of Articles* (2nd Ed.). Sage Publications.

Shah, P. (April 13, 2016). Being vulnerable and managing blind spots. Lessons from Arjuna. <https://dharma.today.com/2016/04/13/being-vulnerable-and-managing-blindspots/>

- Shields, C.M. (2020). *Becoming a transformative leader. A guide to creating equitable schools*. Routledge.
- Sikes, P. (2022). Doing autoethnography. In T. E. Adams, S. Holman Jones, & C. Ellis, handbook of autoethnography (2nd Ed.), (pp. 23-28). Taylor & Francis Group.
- Singh, A. , & Devine, M. (2013). *Rural transformation and newfoundland and Labrador diaspora. Grandparents, grandparenting, community and school relations*. Sense Publishers.
- Smith, W., Farjoun, M., & Tsoukas, H. (Eds.) (2018). *Dualities, dialectics, and paradoxes in organizational life*. Oxford University Press.
- Sokolow, S. L., & Houston, P. D. (2008). The spiritual dimensions of leadership. In P.D. Houston, A. M. Blankstein, & R. W. Cole (Eds.), *Spirituality in educational leadership* (pp. 13036). Corwin Press.
- Spry, T. (2008). Systems of silence: Word/less fragments of race in autoethnography. *International Review of Qualitative Research*, 1(1), 75-80.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/irqr.2008.1.1.75>
- Sri Aurobindo (1997). *Essays on the Gita*. Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust.
- Stamp, K. (1991). Spirituality and environmental education, *Australian Journal of Environmental education*, 7(1), 79-86.
- Cooper Stein, K., Kintz, T.M., & Miness, A. (2016). Reflectiveness, Adaptivity, and Support: How Teacher Agency Promotes Student Engagement. *American Journal of Education*, 123, 109 -136.
<https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/10.1086/688168>

- Sullivan, A. M. (2020). On poetic occasion in inquiry: Concreteness, voice, ambiguity and associative logic. *In Poetic Inquiry*, 111-126.
https://doi.org/10.1163/9789087909512_011
- Sutton, P. S., & Shouse, A. W. (2016). Building a culture of collaboration in schools. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 97(7), 69–73. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0031721716641653>
- Swami Krishnananda (1994). *Living a spiritual life*. The Divine Life Society.
<https://www.swami-krishnananda.org/spiritual.life/Living.a.Spiritual.Life.pdf>
- Swami Mukundanada (2019). *7 mindsets for success, happiness and fulfillment*. Westland Publications.
- Swami Prabhupada (1986). *Bhagvad Gita as it is*. The Bhaktivednata Book Trust.
- Taffinder, P. (2006). *The leadership crash course: How to create personal leadership value*. Kogan Page.
- Taylor, E. W. (2007). An update of transformative learning: A critical review of the empirical research (1999- 2005). *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 26 (2), 173-191. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370701219475>
- Taylor, E. W. (2017). Critical reflection and transformative learning: A critical review. *PAACE Journal of Lifelong Learning*, 26, 77-95.
https://www.iup.edu/pse/files/programs/graduate_programs_r/instructional_design_and_technology_ma/paace_journal_of_lifelong_learning/volume_26,_2017/taylor.pdf
- Taylor, E. W., & Synder, M.J. (2012). A critical review of research on transformative learning theory. In E.W. Taylor, & P. Cranton (Eds.). *The handbook of transformative learning* (pp. 22-37). Jossey- Bass Publishers.
- Taylor, P. C (2016). Transformative science education. In S. Gunstone (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of science education*, (pp.1079-1082). Springer.

- Taylor, P. C. (2013). Research as transformative learning for meaning-centered professional development. In O. Kovbasyuk, & P. Blessinger (Eds.), *Meaning-centered education: International perspectives and explorations in higher education* (pp. 168-185). Routledge.
- Taylor, P.C. & Medina, M.N.D (2013). Educational research paradigms: From positivism to multiparadigmatic. *Journal of Meaning Centered Education*, 1. <http://www.meaningcentered.org/journal/volume-01/educational-research-paradigms-from-positivism-to-multiparadigmatic/>
- Taylor, P.C. (2013). Research as transformative learning for meaning-centered professional development. In O. Kovbasuk, & P. Blessinger (Eds.), *Meaning centered education: International perspectives and explorations in higher education* (pp.168-185). Routledge.
- Taylor, P.C. (2015). Transformative Science education. In R. Gunstone, (Ed.). *Encyclopedia of Science education*, (pp.1079-1082). Springer.
- Taylor, P.C., & Wallace, J. (2001). *Contemporary qualitative research for Science and Mathematics educator*. Philadelphia
- Taylor, P.C., Settlemaier, E., & Luitel, B.C. (2012). Transformative educational research: Professional development for cultural sustainability. In K. Tobins & B. J. Fraser (Eds.), *International handbook of science education* (2nd ed.). Netherlands: Springer.
- Taylor, P.C., Taylor, E.L., & Luitel, B.C. (2012). Multi-paradigmatic transformative research as/for teacher education: An integral perspective. In B.J. Fraser, K.G. Tobin, & C.J. McRobbie (Eds.), *Second international handbook of science education* (pp. 373-387). Springer.

- Thakur, R. S. (2017). *A journey towards peaceful living: An educational practitioner's meta/physical reflection*. [Unpublished doctoral dissertation] Kathmandu University, Nepal.
- Tian, Q. (2020). *Glocalization and the development of a hybrid leadership model: A study of Chinese university Presidents' experiences*. Routledge.
- Tillman, L.M., Norsworthy, K., & Sochen, S. (2022). *Mindful activism: Autoethnographies of social justice communication for campus and community transformation*. Routledge.
- Timalsina, S. (2020). Dialogue and culture: Reflections on the parameters of cultural dialogue. In L., Dan, & D.P. S., Bhawuk (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of intercultural training*. Cambridge University Press.
- Tisdell, E. J., & Tolliver, D. E. (2001). The Role of Spirituality in Culturally Relevant and Transformative Adult Education. *Adult Learning, 12*(3), 13-14. <https://doi.org/10.1177/104515950101200305>
- Tobin, G. A., & Begley, C. M. (2004). Methodological rigour within a qualitative framework. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 48*, 388–396. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.2004.03207.x>
- Tolle, E. (2010). *The power of now: A guide to spiritual enlightenment*. Namaste Publishing.
- Tullis, J. A. (2013). Self and others: Ethics in autoethnographic research. In S. H. Jones, T. E. Adams, & C. Ellis (Eds.), *A handbook of autoethnography* (pp. 244-261). Routledge.
- Ubben, G.C. & Hughe, L.W. (1992). *The principal: Creative leadership for effective schools*. Allyn and Bacon.

- Vaai , U. L. (2017). *The relational self: Decolonising personhood in the Pacific*. University of the South Pacific Press.
- Valli, L., Stefanski, A., & Jacobson, R. (2018). School-community partnership models: implications for leadership, *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 21:1, 31-49. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2015.1124925>
- van der Heijden, H. R. M. A., Beijaard, D., Geldens, J. J. M., & Popeijus, H. L. (2018). Understanding teachers as change agents: An investigation of primary school teachers' self-perception. *Journal of Educational Change*, 19(3), 347-373. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-018-9320-9>
- van Manen, M. (1991). *The tact of teaching: The making of pedagogical thoughtfulness*. State University of New York Press.
- Vanlaere, L., & Gatsmans, C. (2011). To be is to care: A philosophical ethical analysis of care. In C. Leget, C. Gatsmans, & M. Verkerk. (Eds.), *Care, compassion and recognition: An ethical discussion*. (pp. 15-32). Peters.
- von Hildebrand (1997). *Humility: A wellspring of virtue*. Sophia Institute Press.
- Wagle, S.K. (2021). *Place pedagogies, eco-spiritual cosmologies, and cultural stories: Wisdom from Dharmashala*. [Unpublished doctoral dissertation] Kathmandu University, Nepal.
- Walach, H. (2015). *Secular spirituality: The next step towards enlightenment*. Springer.
- Walker, A. M. (2020). A voice from the field. In C. M. Shields , *Becoming a transformative leader. A guide to creating equitable schools*,(pp. 183- 194). Routledge.

- Wall, S. (2006). An autoethnography on learning about autoethnography. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 5(2). https://www.ualberta.ca/-iiqm/backissues/5_2/pdf/wall.pdf.
- Wall, S. (2008). *Easier said than done: Writing an autoethnography*. Sage Publication.
- Wang, Z., Liu, Y. & Liu, S. (2019). Authoritarian leadership and task performance: The effects of leader-member exchange and dependence on leader. *Frontiers of Business Research in China*, 13- 19. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s11782-019-0066-x>
- Wauters, A. (1987). *Chakras and their archetypes: Uniting energy, awareness, and spiritual growth*. The Crossing Press.
- Wauters, A. (1987). *Chakras and their archetypes: Uniting energy, awareness, and spirituality*. Crossing Press.
- West-Burnham (2013). Contemporary issues in educational leadership. In M. Brundrett, *Principles of school leadership*. Sage Publications
- White, S.L. (2016). Contextual leadership: A new perspective and set of skills. *Law Journal Newsletters*. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/296331309>.
- Whitehead, J. (2008). Using a living theory methodology in improving practice and generating educational knowledge in living theories. *Educational Journal of Living Theories*. 1(1), 103-126. <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/jack/jwejolts2019.pdf>
- Whitehead, J. (2009). Using a living theory methodology in improving practice and generating educational knowledge in living theories. *Studying Teacher Education*. 5(2), 107-111. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17425960903306476>
- Whitehead, J. (2018). *Living theory research as a way of life*. Brown Dog Books.

- Wilber, K. (1998). *The essential Ken Wilber: An introductory reader*. Shambhala.
- Wilber, K. (2006). *Integral spirituality: A startling new role for religion in the modern and post-modern world*. Integral Books.
- Wildman, P., & Inayatullah, S. (1996). Ways of knowing, culture, communication and the pedagogies of the future, *Futures*, 28 (8), 723-740.
[https://doi.org/10.1016/0016-3287\(96\)00031-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/0016-3287(96)00031-6).
- Wong, W. -C., (2006). Understanding dialectical thinking from a cultural-historical perspective. *Philosophical Psychology*, 19(2), 239-260.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09515080500462420>
- Wright, A. (2000). *Spirituality and education*. RoutledgeFalmer.
- Yadav, N. (2001). *Ardhanarisvara in art and literature*. D.K. Printworld Ltd.
- Zaner, R. M. (2004). *Conversations on the edge: Narratives of ethics and illness*. Georgetown University Press.
- Zohar, D., & Marshall, I. (2004). *Spiritual capital: Wealth we live by*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

APPENDIX

Brief Notes on Research Participants (Purposive Selection)

Key Research Participants

1. **Myself:** I have been serving in the capacity of the headteacher at Namuna School, a community school, for nine years. During my leadership journey, I have come to realize that leadership is not a position, rather, it is an opportunity to influence the team members by demonstrating a catalyzing role. I find myself as a living contradiction, thereby endeavoring to create a *satva-like* harmonious and transcended learning space at school. I am keen to nurture caring leadership at school by developing a transformative leadership vision.
2. **Sushil:** He served in the capacity of headteacher at Janajagriti School, a community school, for twenty years. During his leadership period, many positive changes occurred at school. The school was able to garner a national reputation from scratch. He is the epitome of courage and dedication.
3. **Shrijana:** She has been serving as the headteacher for fifteen years. She is a PhD holder as well. Her leadership tenure has been considered a golden era. Many significant changes (e.g., increment in the number of students, student achievement, community involvement and ownership, teamwork) are happening at school; otherwise, before she embarked on the leadership responsibility, the school was on the verge of collapse. She is an author as well. Her leadership engagement is outstanding.

Members of the Reference Group

1. **Chiran:** An education officer with a long experience of twenty-five years in educational administration. I find him as an inspirational figure. His expert input has been instrumental to my inquiry.
 2. **Manita:** She is a teacher at Namuna School. She is hard-working. She frequently comes to me and offers her ideas for the betterment of school. As the wife of the former chairperson of school management committee, she closely observes my leadership styles. She sometimes criticizes me for not being able to delegate responsibilities to other team members.
 3. **Dinesh:** He is a teacher at Namuna School. I find him quite open and frank. He is punctual and responsibility-conscious.
 4. **Mamata:** She is a teacher at Namuna School. She is good at engaging students in and outside the classroom. She embraces the ethos of progressive pedagogy.
 5. **Samir:** He is the Academic-in charge at Namuna School. He avails enough time to support me in different tasks at school. He keeps suggesting to me to make a difference at school.
 6. **Uma:** She is a teacher at Joyful Progressive School in Kathmandu. She is also a scholar of Post Graduate Diploma in Educational Management. She is a practitioner of progressive education.
- Dipesh:** He is the chairperson of School Alumni Society. He supports the school in many ways (e.g., collecting funds for the renovation of the school buildings, introducing Scout at school, and supporting in capacity building of teachers). His engagements in national and international organizations are outstanding.

7. **Dev:** He is one of the renowned educationists of Nepal. He is quite critical of the education system of the country. His expert view has been instrumental to my inquiry. He advocates the need for transformative leadership to overcome the disempowering forces deep-rooted in society.
8. **Sujata:** She is a teacher at Namuna School. She keeps alerting me about my leadership performance. She openly points out my vulnerabilities.
9. **Raj:** He teaches at a college in Kathmandu. He is an educator with critical sensibilities.

Critical Friends

1. **Pabitra:** She is my critical friend. She is a PhD in education. She has provided critical observations going through my narratives. Her thought-provoking remarks make me rethink my leadership understanding and performance.
2. **Bijay:** He is my critical friend. He is a PhD scholar. He has offered critical comments to improve my thesis. He alerts me to be mindful of the narratives of the other side to minimize solipsism and narcissism.

Participant Consent Form for Research Project

Title: Envisioning a Living Educational Leadership Theory in the Context of

Nepal: An auto/ethnographic inquiry

My name is Chet Nath Panta. I am a PhD candidate at Kathmandu University School of Education, Nepal. I have received UGC fellowship ((PhD-77/78-Edu-07) to carry out my study. I have been working as a headteacher at a community school in Lalitpur, Nepal for a decade. This study intends to envision a living educational leadership theory – small 't' praxis that aims at transforming school from an entity of stagnation to a vibrant space of engaged, inclusive, equitable and productive learning space unfolding experiences, understanding and practices of my participants and me through auto/ethnographic navigation.

If you agree to participate in this study, I will arrange convenient times to conduct interviews and observe the activities at your school during my visits from 2020 to 2022. All the information collected during the inquiry process will be treated confidentially. So I request you to participate in the study as a research participant. You are free to withdraw at any time without comment or penalty if you decide not to participate in the study.

If you have any queries or questions regarding my study, you may contact:

PhD Candidate: Chet Nath Panta

Telephone Number: 9841649858

Email: chetnath@kusoed.edu.np

Principal Supervisor: Prof. Bal Chandra Luitel, PhD

Email: bcluitel@kusoed.edu.np

Please provide your consent if you agree to participate in the study:

Yes:

No:

Participant's Name:

Designation:

Email:

Signature:

Date:
