



Nurturing Academic Excellence:
**A COMPREHENSIVE PERSPECTIVE ON MY
PHD JOURNEY AT THE
UNIVERSITY OF MORATUWA, SRI LANKA.**

I am an architect by profession and an academic involved in teaching at the University of Bahrain, a small island in the Arabian Gulf. Originally from Pakistan and living in Bahrain, flying over Sri Lanka for a decade has pushed me to land on Sri Lankan soil to pursue the most significant academic journey I have ever undertaken. This is even though I did my Masters in the UK and I have travelled to many places across the world.

Embarking on a PhD in Heritage and Architecture at the University of Moratuwa was not on my life's agenda until recently. However, it has so happened that I have made the right choice in arriving here. Dr. Ranjith Dayaratne's guidance, my mentor at the University of Bahrain, under whose supervision I also investigated various research methodologies, was perhaps instrumental in my decision to study at the University of Moratuwa and shaped my educational path.

Studying at the University of Moratuwa has been a unique, transformative, and diverse experience

hitherto unmatched. I cannot imagine how else it could have happened and where else I would have gone, except this very place where I am now studying to enjoy both great hospitality, natural beauty, architectural splendour and endless intellectual stimulations, seamlessly blending on-campus and online learning, the unique approach, the University of Moratuwa offers especially in response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, not only highlights the institution's adaptability but also underscores its commitment to providing quality education irrespective of geographical barriers. Needless to say, it is indeed a unique place.

The University's swift transition to virtual classrooms during the pandemic demonstrates resilience and dedication to maintaining an inclusive and accessible learning environment. The flexibility of its learning modalities has allowed for uninterrupted academic progress while embracing the global impact of the pandemic. Undeniably, this commitment is further exemplified by the innovative ap-

proach of Dr. D. P. Chandrasekara, my supervisor, an important figure in my academic journey, whose influential classes seamlessly combined online and on-campus learning opportunities. However, my impressions of the university does not end there.

Indeed, the collaborative nature of the University's research model groups showcases the institution's emphasis on meaningful interactions and collaborative efforts in academic pursuits. These groups broaden the perspectives and lay the groundwork for engaging conversations within the global academic community. The Research Methods class, conducted in an online teaching setting, emphasize practical learning and the university's dedication to applied knowledge. Including field experts and tutors adds significant value, enhancing the overall learning experience.

Without a doubt, my visit to the University of Moratuwa's campus a year into the PhD journey has provided a deeper appreciation for the institution's distinctive character. Situated near the serene shores of the Bolgoda Lake in Sri Lanka, the campus presents a unique blend of modern and traditional architectural elements. A tasteful fusion of design, it has been inspired by Sri Lankan vernacular architecture and global trends, demonstrating a commitment to minimal intervention, sustainability, and harmony with the natural surroundings. The campus, more than just a physical space, is an academic haven surrounded by breathtaking scenery. The welcome extended to visiting scholars like me, from a lecturer waiting at the airport to the presence of the Assistant Registrar, Ms. Yashodara Karunarathne to sort out the formalities promptly and efficiently, exemplified a kind and attentive reception that set the tone for a journey marked by intellectual discoveries and geographic transitions.

I think the architectural celebration of the union between human ingenuity and the natural world mirrors the institution's dedication to minimal intervention and environmental sustainability. The campus is not merely a school; it embodies academic excellence nestled within nature's beauty. This adventure into a world where learning thrives amidst enchanting landscapes has reshaped my perspective on higher education, aligning innovation and ac-

ademic excellence with the serenity of nature. Yet, beyond the physical infrastructure, the true essence of excellence is found only among the teaching faculty. The educators, admired from a distance, proved even more inspiring in person and continue to exemplify excellence in teaching, conveying complex concepts with clarity and enthusiasm. The vibrant exchange of ideas and the passion for their fields are exemplary, solidifying the impact on the academic journey.

Moreover, interactions with peers, such as Ms. Achini, a Landscape Architecture student who helped me assimilate to the university, echoed with camaraderie, further enhancing the learning environment. The collaborative spirit experienced online seamlessly translated into in-person interactions, fostering a vibrant and intellectually stimulating academic community. From the guards stationed around the campus to the teachers like Dr Samitha Manawadu, Dr Shaleeni Coorey, Dr Janaka Wijesundara, Dr Kanchana Perera and Dr Lanarolle, the hostel warden Ms Chamandika, every person helped me and catered to my needs wherever possible.

As I strolled through the campus, the captivating architecture continued to capture my attention. The structured layout and the design philosophy are aesthetically pleasing and designed to optimize the learning environment. The buildings, strategically oriented to capture the surrounding views and the topography, create a harmonious blend of form and function. The low- and medium-rise structures, seamlessly integrated with the natural landscape, promote a sense of tranquillity conducive to focused academic pursuits.

Its interiors are an equal match to its grand architectural outdoors. They were equally impressive, with ample natural lighting and ventilation enhancing the overall learning experience. The thoughtful incorporation of openings, courtyards, terraces, balconies, and verandas add to the architectural beauty and contribute to a sustainable and energy-efficient design. The University of Moratuwa prioritizes not only the intellectual development of its students but also their physical and emotional well-being through a conducive learning environment. The dedication of the campus to minimal intervention and

environmental sustainability extends beyond the architectural realm. The University's commitment to eco-friendly practices and conservation efforts is exemplary, further deepening my appreciation for the institution. From waste reduction initiatives to green spaces promoting biodiversity, the campus is a living testament to responsible stewardship of the environment.

The journey into the heart of Sri Lanka and the University of Moratuwa was more than a mere physical and academic exploration; it was an immersion into a vibrant cultural tapestry. Engaging with local communities and participating in cultural events allowed me to gain a profound understanding of the rich heritage that informs the architectural ethos of the region. This cultural exchange has added an invaluable layer to my academic journey, enriching my perspectives and influencing my research focus. Its commitment to providing a holistic educational experience has become even more apparent during cultural exchange programs and community engagement initiatives. These experiences complemented the academic curriculum and instilled a sense of social responsibility and global citizenship among the student body. It is heartening to witness the university's role in nurturing well-rounded individuals equipped with academic prowess, a deep appreciation for diverse cultures, and a commitment to positive social impact.

As I reflect on my academic journey thus far, it is evident that this institution goes beyond the conven-

tional norms of higher education. The campus is not merely a place of learning but a microcosm of intellectual vibrancy, cultural diversity, and environmental stewardship. My decision to pursue a Ph.D. has been validated by the outstanding academic opportunities and the immersive experiences that have broadened my horizons. The harmonious co-existence of heritage, architecture, and nature on this campus has shaped my research endeavours and influenced my worldview.

The visit to the University of Moratuwa has reaffirmed my decision to pursue a PhD here, as the excellence in teaching and collaborative ethos seamlessly complemented the architectural and physical environment, as well as the kindness extended to me by every person throughout my stay. I anticipate the continued enrichment of my academic journey in this exceptional learning environment. For me, the University of Moratuwa has set the stage for a holistic and transformative PhD experience, and I am excited to contribute to and benefit from the intellectual tapestry that defines this institution. As I delve deeper into my research and engage with the academic community, I am confident that the University of Moratuwa will continue to be a nurturing and inspiring academic home, fostering growth, innovation, and a profound sense of belonging.

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