

Madhusudan Subedi and Devendra Uprety. 2014. *The State of Sociology and Anthropology: Teaching and Research in Nepal*. Kathmandu: Martin Chautari.

This is an informative handbook on the institutional practice of teaching and research on anthropology and sociology in Nepal. Both under- and post-graduate students can obtain a summarized history of the subjects spanning nearly six decades. The aspects covered are: the taught courses, the inherent gaps in their contents, scholarly outputs, and structural and conditional inconsistencies encountered by those engaged in these activities at the

Central Department of Sociology and Anthropology (CDSA) in Tribhuvan University (TU). The authors end their analysis by asking for reforms in these aspects in these disciplines.

The book contains eight sections. It begins by introducing some important individuals and their contributions in institutionalizing the disciplines in the country in the first section titled ‘Institutional History of Sociology and Anthropology’ in Nepal. The second section ‘Sociology and Anthropology Curriculum: Past and Present Status’ gives a snapshot of the courses designed and taught since the founding of the CDSA in the 1980s. It goes on to highlight briefly the semester set-up launched recently in the MPhil programme offered by the CDSA. In the third section, the authors evaluate the state of the sociological/anthropological scholarship, which mostly consists of works by the CDSA members. The authors stress that the most of these contributions are overlooked by non-Nepali reviewers. The fourth section ‘Sociological/Anthropological Research’ narrates the contributions made by Nepali and *bideśī* scholars on various themes produced over the different periods. The fifth section ‘Institutional Collaboration and Research Projects’ surveys the relationship between the department and institutions both inside and outside Nepal in view of the transfer of funds, projects collaboration, and various exchange programmes. The sixth section, ‘Professional Society and the Non-University Sector’ talks about the growth of knowledge producing institutions outside the university, such as non governmental organizations (NGOs). The seventh section ‘Quality issues in Sociology and Anthropology’ points to the causes and consequences of institutional problems and their impact on teaching and research in the colleges based in and outside Kathmandu. Finally, the authors conclude their essay by providing some constructive suggestions and recommendations for the betterment of the disciplines in the country.

Some issues are inadequately raised in the handbook and offer scope for further investigation. While the authors have partly succeeded in their stated aim, their description lacks originality and reiterates the thoughts already outlined by writers such as Krishna Bhattachan, Ram Bahadur Chhetri, Om Gurung, and Chaitanya Mishra. The book’s co-author Madhusudan Subedi himself had expressed his concerns over the aforementioned themes on numerous occasions. Except the issues related to the MPhil programme, the semester debate and other minor issues, the authors have not been able

to capture, contextualize and ignite any critical debate by providing new analysis.

It is rather surprising that the authors repeat their predecessors in evaluating the Village Development Program (VDP), established in 1953 as a non-academic institute (pp. 3–4). The VDP initiated a course on Rural Sociology after its commencement. Around the same time, ‘village study’ was becoming a major unit of anthropological/sociological analysis elsewhere in South Asia. In 1968, the VDP curriculum was revised to Panchayat Training Centre (PTC) resulting in several surveys as well as in planning and building local leadership. There are some works published about this. The authors could have searched some materials in the archive and could have provided some new thoughts instead of solely relying on a piece by T.S. Thapa (1974).

In narrating the institutional history and the early curricula, the handbook relies on materials written exclusively by those teaching in the CDSA (pp. 4–13). Little efforts to read others once affiliated to but no more active there would have been rewarding. Dor Bahadur Bista’s son Hikmat Bista took part in the curriculum design; Bed Prakash Uprety was asked by King Birendra to initiate building the anthropology department at TU; Soorya Lal Amatya was actively engaged in the subject committee from the start. Including the views of these individuals would have brought into light several disputes such as those related to the autonomy of the two disciplines, to incorporate Marxist agenda in the syllabus, and to make the thesis mandatory for the students. Furthermore, the authors of the handbook repeat the contents of various curricula from different periods (pp. 8–14) as previously published by Madhusudan Subedi, without any attempt to evaluate them. For instance, their comment that “[a]ll faculty members, including the chairman of the department, disliked this curriculum from the very day the department opened” (p. 9), surely anticipates further explanation.

The questions as to why new courses were not developed after 1990 and why the students were deprived of more pertinent courses such as Sociology of Urban Life, Sociology of Political Culture, Sociology of Social Problems, Economic Anthropology, and Medical Anthropology, among several others, also remain. The evident lack in the curricula revision might have triggered several explanations. It may be said, for instance, that the department *gurus* were responsible for restricting their disciplinary scope. While specialized courses were implemented in the 1990 curriculum, the department failed to bring forth a new syllabus till 1999. Alternately, it may be argued that

exclusion of the sociological/anthropological work by academicians or researchers from other disciplines or beyond TU also contributed to such a stale state. The authors could have anticipated these impressions on the curricula and provided plausible explanations.

In pp. 38–39, the authors tardily make a chart based on various anthropological theories on thematic issues such as caste, ethnicity, livelihood, and development/underdevelopment. In the accompanying chart, works by several imminent scholars are missing. For instance, Prayag Raj Sharma, whose invaluable contributions used to be mandatory readings till 2009; Purna Prakash Nepal ‘Yatri,’ whose ethnographic work on the Rautes are frequently cited, are not mentioned. Writers whose works related to family and caste genealogies are unacknowledged. Absence of any specialists of economic anthropology, medical anthropology, urban anthropology, and legal anthropology from beyond TU in the list is also striking. The authors in a way help perpetuate the dichotomy of insider-outsider in their survey of the disciplines. The initial story of the Institute of Nepal and Asian Studies (INAS) and the Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies (CNAS) with respect to the development of the field in the country is insufficiently dealt with in the handbook. It is disappointing as there is a dearth of literature related to the evolution of these institutes in TU.

Readers of a history of an academic discipline perhaps anticipate the starting points to be the following: the original locations of the discipline in question, systematic textualization of early written documents, and inclusive treatment of the disciplinary interfaces that give shape to the discipline, among others. Unprepared, the authors reiterate the textbook assertion that anthropology on Nepal began in the 1950s with Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf and John Hitchcock. That Nepal became ‘open’ only in the 1950s for foreign researchers and hence Nepali anthropology/sociology evolved is a question to be critically investigated, not to be passed on.

I hope that in their next work, the authors will tackle the questions related to the historiography of academic disciplines after evaluating the earlier surveys to identify the unexplored dimensions and unanswered questions. They will then examine the meaning of their own statement that most works by Nepalis are ‘theoretically weak.’ They will also think about how various characterization of the subject of these disciplines, i.e., the Nepali society and the Nepali people, have evolved both inside and outside Nepal. In searching the answers to these questions, perhaps we will have traced

a history in the making of what Dor Bahadur Bista had called the “Nepal School of Anthropology” (1987).

### References

- Thapa, T.S. 1974. The Development of Sociology in Nepal. In *Social Science in Nepal*. Prayag Raj Sharma, ed., pp. 49–59. Kathmandu: Institute of Nepal and Asian Studies.
- Bista, Dor Bahadur. 1987. Nepal School of Sociology/Anthropology. *Occasional Papers in Sociology and Anthropology* 1: 6–10.

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