

Deepak Dorje Tamang and Mahesh Raj Maharjan, eds. 2014. *Citizens, Society and State: Crafting an Inclusive Future for Nepal*. Kathmandu: Mandala Book Point.

In the midst of heated and polarized debates on state-building in the process of constitution writing, Social Inclusion Research Fund (SIRF) has produced an edited volume of six articles from among the 140 researches on inclusion it funded over nine years through the Harka Gurung Research Fellowship and Mathias Moyersoer Research Apprentices. Started in 2005 SIRF is a bilateral venture of the governments of Nepal and Norway that aims to influence government policies, and this book has been published by Mandala Book Point in association with SIRF and SEARCH-Nepal. The publication arrives late (in 2014) for influence on inclusion policy decisions since the political debate has already solidified along binary lines: pro and anti-identity and history based federalism. Nevertheless, the book is a useful resource. It sets a precedent for creative ways of institutionalizing inclusion, particularly by mentoring young researchers from excluded groups. The research articles provide an understanding of varied approaches to issues of inclusion, the

complicated structures of continued exclusion and a critical lens on activism and efforts of inclusion.

When maps dominate understandings of Nepal's territorial space in discussions about state restructuring in the new constitution, an examination of physical and environmental aspects for inclusion becomes imperative. Tunga Rai's chapter in the book contributes to this. She argues that exclusion takes place when peoples' relationships with the physical environment are not recognized. She shows this in her study of the Kghyemba system, and its relationship with practices of water management, cultural beliefs, and knowledge in LoManthang. Rai recounts that the timing of use of canal water is based on the belief that *Chyakhunghyau* (an imaginary eagle) arrives and purifies the canal water during a certain month. Rai's analysis bases much on the binary opposition between the traditional and the modern. If she had been able to go beyond this dichotomy, her research had the potential to explore in more detail the nuances of the Kghyemba system as practiced in LoManthang and as understood by the state. Further, Rai introduces ideas about ontological relations towards the end of the paper without fully explaining them. If she pursued her analysis along that line she would have contributed to a new line of argument in inclusion studies and debates in Nepal. Nevertheless, the article is significant. Rai shows how the social fabric is the weaving of traditional local institutions, peoples' beliefs and particular practices of engaging with the surrounding physical environment.

Shobha Kumari Mahato, in her chapter on the sociolinguistic situation of Santhali language, also could have better demonstrated the reasons behind positive attitudes towards Santhali language had she, like Rai, emphasized inter-relationships between culture, social practices and beliefs. For instance Rai shows that in the absence of recognition of traditional practices, and hence authority, not just the water management system, but the social fabric itself is under threat. Rai is able to bring into frame matters that are central to the lives of the people there in interaction with material environment, which a narrow, map-based understanding of territorial space, as in today's political discussions on federalism, cannot bring forward.

At a time when marginalized *Janaajāti* and Madhesi groups have formed alliances (albeit vacillating ones) and raised recognition as a prime agenda for state-building, it is imperative that present exclusion studies reflect an understanding of the history of inter and intra group relations in activism. Harsha Man Maharjan does this. He takes a critical look into the media

activism for linguistic and cultural rights by *Ināp*, a Newar weekly magazine in conjunction with its attempt for collaborative movement with two other *Jana jāti* groups – the Magars and the Tamangs. He argues, that the Newar media activists prioritized their issue – language. While *Ināp* challenged State policies, it only focused on the state as the oppressor, and hence missed an opportunity to generate discussions for reform within Newars and with other *Jana jāti* groups. Similarly, due to historic reasons and the position of Newars as rich merchants and Tamangs as laborers, he suggests that despite *Ināp*'s effort, the activists had a complicated relationship with Tamangs as opposed to the Magars. He critiques *Ināp* for portraying a united Newar nationalism, and Newars as a monolith. In addition to textual analysis, he could have also used people involved in *Ināp* into the frame of his analysis. Some of the questions he could have investigated to give a comprehensive understanding of his critique are: Whom among the Newars wrote, read, reported and participated in *Ināp*? What was the economic status, and internal caste hierarchical position of those involved in *Ināp*? Did this influence *Ināp*'s priorities of recognition versus reform, and inter group relations? However, Maharjan's contribution to the inclusion discussion is important. It is high time political activism, especially among marginalized groups such as members of the coalition between *Jana jāti* and Madhesi groups, became reflexive in their relations with other excluded groups, and paid more attention to issues being faced by Dalits and women while continuing their movement for recognition.

Numbers of different communities in government institutions give a preview of the problem of social exclusion, but remedies limited only to number may not be effective. How, then, can effective inclusion be brought about? Rajesh Chamling Rai brings an important insight on meaningful inclusion through his study of inclusion in the Nepal Army. Historically the Nepal Army has represented elite groups and served the monarch. This has continued despite the opening up of recruitment since 2016 v.s. For example, one of the glass ceilings he discusses is biased promotions. He gives the case of Chief of Army Staff: the *Jana jāti* Army officers eligible for candidacy to the post; Govinda Gurung, Om Bahadur Pun and Gajendra Limbu, were given early retirement and in their place, officers junior to them (and from historically privileged groups) were proposed as candidates. Even after the policy of inclusive recruitment in 2063 v.s., serious challenges remain. Rai argues that practices such as '*āphno mānche*,' and '*cākari*' persist and

continue to work in favor of the historically privileged groups. He points to lack of transparency and policies to ensure inclusive representation in higher rungs of Nepal Army. Recruitment does not necessarily ensure inclusion at all levels. In the absence of representation at the decision-making level, the policy and decisions do not reflect an inclusive voice. Therefore, he argues, inclusive recruitment alone is not enough. To only count the proportionate representation in the overall Army and be satisfied, defeats the purpose of inclusion. This issue of meaningful inclusion, looking at deeper structural issues, is a point relevant for discussion and practice beyond the Nepal Army.

What is the relationship between social exclusion and politics? The introduction by Deepak Dorje Tamang represents a stream of perspectives on inclusion that is reflected by few other articles in the book. Exclusion is treated as an apolitical matter. From this frame, economic progress and current political movements for identity are delinked and in opposition to each other. Development, Tamang argues, is the 'soft' approach and identity based political movements are 'radical.' Skeptical of the political movements, particularly identity politics, Tamang argues that these movements have overshadowed the issues of gender discrimination, empowerment, livelihood, and sustainable development, which in his opinion are the high moral ground through which inclusion for all can be ensured. This taking of an apolitical stand yet laying forward development as the solution is problematic. In the current Nepali context, inclusion efforts cannot continue to pretend to be delinked from politics. Even though there are nuances, the political deadlock in Constitution writing comes from polarisation for and against this recognition of identity demands. The problem of access to development is an argument laid in opposition to ethnic movements that demand recognition through identity and history based federal states. The faith in development as the problem of social exclusion continues to favor one political argument over another while under the illusion of being politically neutral. Inclusion, as a development issue, then, advances arguments against excluded groups, while undermining their agency to prioritize and voice their own concerns.

Articles in the book that advance the introduction's ideas of 'self-reliant development' as the solution to issues of inclusion would do better to re-examine their faith in the economy as empowerment. Control over property and Dalit women's decision-making and hence empowerment, Roshani Shrestha argues, are directly proportional. Either jobs or skills training, Tilak Biswakarma suggests, can be a better alternative to cash incentive

by government to promote inter-caste marriage. This is even as he argues prestige and power as reasons behind people of so called higher caste unwilling to forge relations with so called Dalit groups through marriage. Freedom from structural constraints, achieved through self reliance which in turn is attained through economy, either through jobs, property ownership or skills training, is a logic that operates within the current hegemonic idea of the market as the answer to all kinds of rights. This framework advances private property as primary rights and from which other rights, such as freedom of choice, speech and dignity derives. This is problematic because, as David Harvey (2007) argues, in such tendencies, as seen from the last three decades in the world, even though for a short time it may seem to work to the advantage of the poor and the marginalized, in the long term it only advances the structure that causes marginalization in the first place.

The inconsistent quality of papers in the book is an issue because if SIRF intends to build an academic resource and not just academic laborers, it needs to raise standards of production. For this, funding and general supervision of young researchers is not enough. The research questions that directed the research and analysis as reflected in the final write-up suggest missed opportunities both in terms of the issues studied and using the project to help sharpen research skills. The wide discrepancy in the quality of papers reflects the researchers' previous access or not to academic training and research experiences. Similarly, the final chapters vary in articulation, analysis and resources used. The training could increase its intensity and rigor from the start – the proposal, before starting research, and it could encourage new methods such as reading groups, peer-review, and writing support groups in due course of the research and writing process. The quality of production of researchers is an issue at the university level as well, where the professor-student ratio is highly disproportionate. A few academic organizations have guided young researchers through reading seminars, courses and conferences like Social Science Baha, Nepā School of Social Science and Humanities and Martin Chautari. Young researchers can benefit from more opportunities. This is not to say that the academic NGOs should or can resolve the failings of academic institutions in Nepal or structural problems in education. However, in the meantime, young researchers interested in doing research can benefit from initiatives like those provided by SIRF that connect young and senior researchers, encourage the former to do research and provide added opportunities for learning. Therefore, if SIRF or initiatives like SIRF

were to take place in the future, rigor in training and mentoring needs special attention to make it more effective.

## **Reference**

Harvey, David. 2007. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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