BOOK REVIEW


The present book under review is "the description of Nepal's growth and change during the last four decades in resource development, land use, deforestation, agriculture, population, cultural pattern, urbanization, industrial growth, transport systems, tourism and associated environmental management issues" (p.284). This is a book on "basic facts" of Nepal where the authors have integrated a massive amount of materials from different sources and presented a synthesis on Nepal's efforts to develop and change in the last four decades.

There are 11 chapters in the book, including 26 tables, 32 illustrations and 55 photographs. Chapters Five, Six and Seven are relatively longer, covering almost 36 per cent of the total text (pp. 101-204). A book of this size demands more careful evaluation than can be summarized and justified in a short review. First, let me briefly outline the contents of the book.

Chapter I introduces Nepal as a least developed country of the world. The second chapter, on "Environment and Natural Resource Base" gives a brief account of the geocological zones, climatic configurations, water resources, mineral resources, forest and scenic resources and natural resource management systems in Nepal. Chapter Three on "Land Use, Forest cover and Environmental Problems", has a short section on land use pattern (less than one page) but goes on to some details on topics such as forest cover, forest typology, deforestation and degradation, and principal factors leading to deforestation, forest management, forestry institutions and strategies for forest development in Nepal. One of the most important strategies of HMG to develop the forestry sector is the formation of "Forestry User Groups" throughout the kingdom beginning 1992 (Eighth Five Year Plan), is given minimal attention in the chapter. Chapter Four addresses the patterns and problems of agriculture, discussing the various aspects of agriculture such as cropping pattern, productivity and policies for reducing the incidence of landlessness in Nepal. The main problem of this chapter is the lack of analysis as to why agriculture still remains traditional and why conditions

of farmers have not improved over the years. Chapter Five, on "Human Resources", deals with mainly the demography of Nepal, covering topics such as the growth of population, distribution and density, and migration patterns (internal migration and circular migration). Then this chapter provides a case study of population mobility in a village (Taranagar) in the Middle Mountain Region in Gorkha district, followed by a section on fertility, mortality and demographic transition, population policies and family planning. Finally, there is a short section on health care, literacy and human development. The health care system and education are vital topics in relation to human resource development, which should have demanded a separate chapter. I don't know why the authors want to call this chapter as "Human Resources". Chapter VI, on "Cultural Patterns", deals with the various language groups of Nepal, the society, culture and economy of the various ethnic groups, environmental attitudes of cultural groups and historical context of ethnic interaction and change in Nepal. One of the nicely integrated sections in this chapter is the case study of a Newar village "Satungal" in the Kathmandu valley. Though the chapter as a whole provides an overview of culture in relation to environment, there is little here in the way of cultural accounts of people who have successfully adapted to the area over the years. Nowhere, have the authors attempted to isolate specific cultural factors (such as religion, village endogamy, kinship or the status of women) which are inimical to conventional developmental norms. Nor does the chapter provide information on the 60 different ethnic/caste groups enumerated in the 1991 census. The actual number of Magars, Gurungs, Rais, Limbus and other groups are, in fact, much higher than quoted in chapter on the basis of mother-tongue classification.

Chapter Seven, on "Settlement Patterns and Urbanization", briefly describes typical settlements and patterns of urbanization in Nepal. However, the focus is mostly on the three cities of the Kathmandu valley. The chapter describes environmental degradation in the Kathmandu valley caused by factories and large number of smoke spewing vehicles. The authors conclude that while urbanization, population pressure and poverty may be the proximate causes of environmental degradation, policy failures to formulate and implement appropriate enviromental regulations are frequently the underlying cause (p. 203). Chapter Eight, on "Industrial Development", highlights the patterns of industrial growth in Nepal before and after 1950, geographical distribution of industries, potential for industrial development, recent industrial policy and has a small section on cottage industry and handicrafts. Despite the information used, the authors are not willing to conclude that the picture of small-scale industrial development in Nepal was better before 1950 than after. Likewise, why
foreign donors and investors are more interested in infrastructures than in industries, is not given due attention in the chapter.

Chapter Nine, on, "Transport, Trade and Communication Patterns", is interesting as it provides a brief historical overview of trails and the role of porters, motorable roads, railways, air transport, trade and location of markets, foreign trade and transit routes, transport strategy for landlocked Nepal and communication patterns and much more briefly on postal communication, telecommunication, telex and telegraph, radio, television and press. Chapter Ten, on, "Development of Tourism", gives a glance of tourism in Nepal in general. It highlights touristic resources, natural and scenic landscapes, types of tourism, touristic frontiers and issues such as economic development potential of tourism and environmental impacts of tourism in Nepal. The last chapter "Development Challenges" emphasizes the population-resource balance equation, which according to the authors, is not given serious attention in planning the developmental efforts in Nepal.

No doubt, we need a systematic, historical and evaluative discourse on the issues of change and development in Nepal. My dissatisfaction about the book, however, rests on so many shortcomings encountered in the book. First, let me begin with the numerous unsupported statements made in almost all the chapter. These statements, I feel, misinform the general readers and thus demands a careful scrutiny.

In the first chapter itself the authors have shown soft corners towards India in substantiating their arguments. According to the authors, Nepal's introduction of the work permit system for Indians in Nepal violates the 1950 Peace and Friendship Treaty between Nepal and India(p.9). The authors obviously are not sensitive as to how this poorest country of the world would survive economically and politically if uncontrolled flow of Indians remains unregulated in Nepal? This argument is reemphasized in chapter V (p. 122). It is surprising to note that nowhere have the authors made an effort to comprehend the fact that the uncontrolled flow of Indians is creating unemployment for a large number of Nepali people. Furthermore, if Nepal does not strictly enforce the birth registration system, there is no way of identifying a local from a recently arrived Indian national. This has already created a chaos of the "citizenship issue" in the Nepal Tarai. On page 10, they note that "...... communist leaders were elected in 1994 on the basis of anti-India rhetoric". In fact, the anti-India sentiment in Nepal can be observed throughout history but became more pronounced when Nepal introduced the Panchayat system of Government in 1962. Many Nepalese painfully remember the extreme Indian highhandedness of 1989 when India blockaded Nepal for 15 months, destabilizing the country's economy and politics. So what makes authors blame the Communist
government is not clear given the fact that non-communist voting Nepalese are forced to make nationalist standings vis-a-vis the Indian government. The other statement, on p. 14 "Nepal's trade and transit impasse with India in 1989 contributed to a period of high inflation and slow economic growth". This statement could be true in certain contexts but, again, this was the first time in Nepal's history when Nepal attempted to come out from the Indian grip to prove itself as a sovereign nation state. While Nepal has already forgotten this kind of lessons by now by withdrawing the work permit system for Indians and it is also the case that Nepal must pursue an independent economic policy to survive and prosper.

In Chapter Two, p. 24 it is noted that "A 1993 field survey of several Nepali Pravasi Sanghs--organizations of Nepalese which provide assistance to new immigrants in north Indian cities--revealed that nearly 1.5 million Nepalese have left the middle Himalayan area for jobs in India". Similar statement reappears on p.117 of Chapter V as well. No authentic source is given in the text for this information. In fact, the Pravasi Nepali Sanghs are poorly organized institutions in India which hardly could count the flow of Nepali emigrants in India with little resources at their disposal.

On p. 106 of Chapter Five, it is written: "In an agricultural country like Nepal, a more meaningful measure of population pressure on the land is the ratio of people to the cultivated land. At the district level, the density per cultivated area ranges from almost 3,000 persons per square kilometer in Mugu to 191 in Mustang". This kind of statement is misleading as to how people are making their living in the Mountain region of Nepal. A Mountain inhabitant knows very well that his livelihood does not depend on agriculture alone and must simultaneously engage in at least three types of economic activities, e.g. agriculture, animal husbandry and trade to make a living. In recent years, a lot of Mountain people also seasonally engage in trekking and mountaineering activities. Elsewhere, I have written (1993) that the Byanshi people, who live in the High Mountain area of Darchula district (above 9,000 ft.), are the more prosperous group compared to other groups living in the lower elevations of the district. The statement such as "The Magars, Gurungs, Thakalis, Rais and Limbus have been Hinduised." (p. 143) is not fully true. In fact, except the Magars and, to some extent the Thakalis, other groups are least Hinduized in Nepal. In Eastern Nepal, the Limbus are the least Hinduized group though they have remained in close interaction with the Parvate Hindu groups over the last three centuries. Again the statement like "The Hindu of north Indian origin in the Tarai show a low degree of animal husbandry, as do the Newars (p. 151)" is not at all true so far as the Yadavs of the Hindu Tarai are concerned. Numerically, they are not only the largest single Hindu group of the Tarai
but also raise a large number of cattle and buffaloes. They are popularly known as Gwala or Ahir meaning "milkmen" in the Tarai.

The statement in Chapter Seven, "A little more than 99 per cent of these localities had populations less than 2,000..... Eighty-nine per cent of the total population lived in localities that had a population less than 2,000 (p. 177 ) confuses more to the readers. Similarly, in Chapter Eight also a statement reads "A field study in the Tarai revealed that workers who are moving to areas where industrial jobs are available are uneducated and untrained" (p. 217). Surprisingly, there is no authentic source for this statement as well.

Second, the authors rely too much on secondary sources in their treatment of the complex issues such as the change and development in Nepal. In fact, the whole analysis is based on census and survey data. Census data, particularly the demographic data of many developing countries of the world, are full of holes and often quite unreliable. So, any effort to understand Nepal better must not only include the macro-level data but also information from village studies (which are indeed available) to understand the concrete patterns of change and development over time.

Third, in every argument made by the authors, the population-resource balance model or the Malthusian theory is implicit (such as over population, deforestation, shrinking land base, declining agricultural yields and increasing poverty). There is clearly, a perceptional problem here. Nepal can as well be seen as being rich in terms of its natural and human resources. Some of the greatest resources of Nepal are its altitude, climate and topography where a variety of staple and cash crops can be grown throughout the year. Likewise, the multi-racial, multi-linguistic and multi-cultural characteristics of the nation could prove itself to be the best human resources if the leaders learn how to harness them properly. Moreover, the successful adaptive strategy of various groups of people in Nepal is little highlighted in the whole text.

Finally, while poverty and underdevelopment in Nepal are interpreted overwhelmingly in terms of what is physical, technical and observable in the statistical sense, I feel that the authors deliberately avoided to explore the root causes of the problems of underdevelopment in Nepal. Some such are as follows:

A. Nepal is not only landlocked but also India-locked. Nepal should learn from the achievements made by India in a number of sectors. But India's interests continue to dominate Nepal in major aspects of social, economic and political life. No doubt, thousands of Nepalese go to India for short term employment and likewise thousands of Indians also come to Nepal for work and business as well. Considering the size of the respective country, if
this kind of uncontrolled flow of Indians into Nepal continue, it will
definitely destabilize Nepalese economy and politics. Furthermore, Nepal's
policy of population control becomes meaningless until and unless this
uncontrolled flow from Indian is regulated. So, Nepal must regulate its
border if it has to develop and fulfil the interests of the people as a whole.

B. The other fundamental root of Nepal's underdevelopment is its
inappropriate politics and its less than committed leadership throughout
history. Whether it was the Rana regime or the partyless Panchayat regime
or the multi-party democratic form, the governments are not really serving
the common people: The increasing poverty of people over the years clearly
proves that the governments have not been effective. After the onset of
multiparty democracy, corruption has become more public and ministers and
members of parliament have become more concerned for their personal
gain rather than acting committedly for the Nepalese who are struggling for
their basic needs. Over politicization has become the main pastime and hobby
for the majority of Nepalese. Until and unless the government is sincere
and committed for development, Nepal will remain underdeveloped in the
next century as well even if we design the best plans to improve the
socioeconomic conditions of people.

C. Finally, though billions of dollars have already flown into this poor
country as grants and loans in the name of development, implementation of
concrete development programs to improve the economy of people seems
far away. In fact, if one compares Nepal's performances with those of the
South Asian countries over the last four decades, Nepal has become poorer
and more underdeveloped than before. It seems that aid and development
programs are initiated in Nepal primarily for political reasons and in order
to fulfill the interests mainly of the donor themselves rather than on
humanistic and nationalistic grounds.

Nevertheless, a patient student of interdisciplinary studies can extract a
good deal of valuable source materials from the book for further research and
analysis. It reads easily not only because of its detailed names, places, dates
and events but also because of its systematic and coherent picture of the
Nepalese society over the last four decades. The book can prove a good text
not only for foreign students, particularly undergraduates, but also for the
B.A. level Nepali students as well. In addition, the book should be of great
service to those interested in contemporary Nepal. Numerous statistical
tables and extended bibliography (230 titles of published materials) on
Nepal also increase its value. The only fear I have about the book is that its
price could go high which would not be affordable for the average Nepali
student.

– Dilli R. Dahal
Contributions to Nepalese Studies is a research oriented semi-annual journal of the Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies (CNAS). Started in 1973, the Journal has been able to establish record for its continued and uninterrupted publication for last 23 years—an unusual phenomenon for a professional journal in Nepal. With regular publication of Scholarly articles and book-reviews the Journal has been playing significant role in the enrichment of socio-anthropological literature of Nepal.

The Journal has succeeded in publishing 341 articles and 80 book-reviews in its 23 volumes of 47 issues. A systematic cumulative index to Vol. 1-12 (1973-1985) of the Journal was compiled and published in the Issue No.3 of Vol.12 of the Journal. The Cumulative Index has been brought up to date in the following pages by indexing Vol.13 to 23 (1986-1996) of the Journal, which contain 162 articles and 41 book-reviews. With a view to helping a user of the Journal quickly find information of his interest in the pages of the Journal, the Cumulative Index lists all the 162 articles in classified order, and the classified list is appended with alphabetical Author-Title and Subject indexes at the end. The Subject distribution of 167 articles is found to be as shown in the following chart:

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CONTRIBUTIONS TO NEPALESE STUDIES
CUMULATIVE INDEX: 1986-1996

CLASSIFIED LIST OF ARTICLES

010 BIBLIOGRAPHY


100 PHILOSOPHY & PSYCHOLOGY
121.6 BELIEF


150 PSYCHOLOGY
152.45 ATTITUDE


200 RELIGION


294.3 BUDDHISM


294.5 HINDUISM


304.2 ENVIRONMENT


304.6 POPULATION

20. Human development and the ethnic population sub-groups in the 75 Districts in Nepal. Thapa, Shyam. vol.22 (2) July '95, p.181-192.
304.8 MIGRATION


305.4 WOMEN-SOCIAL CONDITIONS


305.5 SOCIAL CLASSES


305.8 ETHNOLOGY

36. Is the name the game fame, shame or blame? Review of warrior gentlemen 'Gurkhas' in the Western imagination, by Lionel Caplan. Cross, J. P. vol.22 (2) July 1995, p.199-211.


42. The Sherpas transformed: Towards a power centred view of change in the Khumbu. Draper, John. vol.15 (2) July 1988, p.139-162.


306 CULTURE


306.8 MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE


312.23 INFANT-MORTALITY


320 POLITICS & POLITICAL SYSTEMS


325 REFUGEES


327 FOREIGN RELATIONS

64. Reconsidering Nepal-India bilateral relations. Dhruba Kumar. vol.21 (1) Jan 1994, p.73-89.

330 ECONOMICS & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

70. Growth through redistribution: An approach to fulfil basic needs and expedite progress in Nepal. Thapa, Y. B. vol.16 (2) July 1989, p.103-140.

330 ECONOMICS & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT


333 NATURAL RESOURCES


370 EDUCATION


390 FESTIVALS & RITUALS


86. The Moiety system of the Newars. Toffin, Gerard. vol.23 (1) Jan '96, p. 65-88.

400 LANGUAGE & LANGUAGES


89. Typological view of languages. Toba, Sueyoshi. vol.16 (2) July 1989

400K KIRATI


400M MAITHILI


400N NEPALI


400NE NEWARI


500 SCIENCE
580 BOTANY


600 APPLIED SCIENCE
610 MEDICINE & HEALTH


630 AGRICULTURE


700 FINE ARTS


720 ARCHITECTURE


730 SCULPTURE

120. Dry-lacquer or clay? Preliminary notes on a neglected Nepalese sculpture medium. Slusser, Mary S. vol.23 (1) Jan '96, p. 11-33.

737 NUMISMATICS


790 RECREATION


800 LITERATURE

900 HISTORY & GEOGRAPHY


AUTHOR-TITLE INDEX
OF
Articles and Book-Reviews

Adhikari, Ambika P.
Environmental problems in the Kathmandu Valley: Some issues in planning and management. vol.22 (1) Jan 1995, p.1-19. 17

Amatya, Purna P.


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Bajracharya, Ranjana

Ban, Indra, jt. auth. See
Kondos, Vivienne and Ban, Indra, Kondos, Alex, Kondos, Vivienne and Ban, Indra

Baral, Lok Raj

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Chhetri, Ram Bahdur

Cimino, Rosa Maria

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Fortier, John

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Gallagher, Kathleen M.
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Van den Hoek, Bert and Shrestha, Bal Gopal.

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Gulmez, Yeuer and Shrestha, Tej B.

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Shresthacharya, Iswarananda
Sinha, Dharni

Skar, Herald O.

Slusser, Mary S
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Subedi, Bhim Prasad

Subedi, Janardan, jt. auth. See
Tansig, Mark B. and Subedi, Janardan.

Tansig, Mark B and Subedi, Janardan
Social factors affecting patient utilization of high-technology medicine in Nepal. vol.22 (2) July 1995, p.131-139.
Thapa, Shyam
Human development and the ethnic popualtion sub-groups in the 75 districts in Nepal. vol.22 (2) July ’95, p.181-192.

Thapa, Y. B.

Growth through redistribution: An approach to fulfil basic needs and expedite progress in Nepal. vol.16 (2) July 1989, p.103-140.

Thompson, Julia J.

Toba, Sueyoshi
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Toffin, Gerard

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Tuladhar, Amrit Ratna
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Uprety, Prem Raman


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Van den Hoek, Bert and Shrestha, Bal Gopal

Van den Hoek, Bert, jt. auth. See
Shrestha, Bal Gopal and Van den Hoek, Bert

Van Driem, George

Vinding, Michael

Whelpton, John

Yadav, Ramawatar


Yadav, Yogendra P.
SUBJECT INDEX

Agricultural Growth 114
Ambivalence 45
Abglo-Nepal Relations 36
Antiquities 134
Athpahariya Community 41
Attitude 5
Badis 5
Baglung 27
Bajrayogini 7
Balance of Payments 74
Bandipur 678
Basic Needs 70
Beliefs 3, 4
Bhaktapur 14
Bibliography 1, 2
Bilateralism 61, 64
Birth Control 111
Buddhism 9-13
Buddhist Art 116
Buddhist Gift 10
Buddhist Monasteries 5, 119
CPN Unity Centry 57
Capital 67, 77
Cash Crops 22
Caste 27, 32
Chepangs 4
Child Bearing Experiences 31
Children 108
Chitwan 47
Civil Service 66
Classical Newari 101
Community Development 9
Contraceptives 111
Cultural Heritage 46
Currencies 121
Dairing 115
Dances 122
Dang Valley 16
Danuwars 38
Death Ceremonies 87
Development 5, 73
Diarrhoea 108
Divinity 54
Donations 129
Dumakhel 128
Ecological Damages 81
Education 83, 84
Egalitarian Judiciary 38
Energy Expenditures 80
English as Secondary Language
Environment 17, 18, 19, 51, 134
Epigraphy 130
Ethnic Groups 20, 31, 34-35
Ethnicity 33, 40
Ethnobotany 104-107
Ethnography 34, 40, 45
Ethnohistory 35
Ethnology 33-45
Excavations 128
Family life 47-51
Female Samyak 10
Festivals 10, 12, 85
Festivals, Buddhist 10, 12
Field Studies 80
Fine Arts 116-122
Folklore Remedies 105
Foreign Aid 65
Foreign Exchange 74
Geological Studies 134
Gods and Goddesses 6, 7
Gorakhati Yogis 16
Gorkha 79, 81, 82
Gorkhas 35, 36
Gurungs 35
Highland Languages 98
Highotechnology Medicine 113
Hinduism 14-16
Hindu Women 29
History & Geography 125-137
Household Cycles 50
Household Heads 47
Human Development 20
Human Resource 6
Hygiene & Sanitation 110
Indra-Jatra 85
Infant Mortality 52, 53
Inscriptions 130
Integrated Rural development
Projects 69
International Migration 23
Investment Policy 76
Janajati Movement 39
Jupiter 3
Kamala Valley 38
Kamees 31
Kathmandu 85
Kathmandu Valley 17, 26, 29, 104
Khumbu 19, 42
Kiranti Language 90
Labour Merchant Relations 67
Labour Relations 72
Lacquer 120
Lalitpur-History 13
Land Erosion 81
Land Pressure 22
Land Use 26, 79, 81
Langtang Tibetans 37
Leadership 41
Maithili Consonants 92
Maithili Grammar 91-95
Maithili Vowels 93, 94
Majani Systm 38
Malla Currencies 121
Mallas 129
Mammography Machine 113
Manang 43
Manufacturing Industries 75
Marriage 49-51
Mass Movement 131
Medical Plants 105
Medicine 108-113
Mental Illness 109
Mesocosm 14
Microeconomic Study 71
Migration 23-26
Milk Producers Association 115
Moity System 86
Monarchy 54
Monasteries 16, 119
Monetary Policy 71
Mortuary Rituals 87
Mother Tongue 83, 84
Mothers 108
Multi Party Democracy 57
Mustang 58
National Consensus 55
National Integration 33
Nationallism 39, 55
Natural Heritage Conservation 46
Natural Resources 79-82
Nepal-Bhutan Relations 61, 62
Nepal Himalaya 18
Nepal-Histpry 125-136
Nepal-India Relations 64
Nepal-Place Names 133
Nepal-Mahatmya 132
Nepali Art 117
Nepali Grammar 99
Nepali Languages 84, 98, 100
Nepali Paintings 117, 123
Nepali Poetry 123, 124
Nepali Politics 60
Nepali Readers 96
Nepali Verbs 97
Nepali Women 28
Nepali Word Order 99
Bewar Buddhism 11
Newar Town 67
Newari Grammar 103
Contributions to Nepalese Studies

Newari Language 83
Newari Verbals 101
Newari Verbs 102
Newars 86, 87, 127
Newars, Hindu 87
Nisyangte 43
Origin Myths 39
Panauti 46
Panchayat System 60
Perfect Buddhist Gift 10
Plant Foods 106, 107
Pokhara 24
Political Development 56, 59
Political System 58
Political Movement 60, 131
Political Parties 57
Polyandry 51
Population 20, 21, 22
Primary Education 84
Private Enterprises 75-77
Prostitution 27
Quality of Life 47
Rana Tharus 44
Ranas 126
Refugees 61, 62
Regional Cooperation 68
Regional Differentials 52
Regional Security 63
Religion 16
Religious Beliefs 3, 4, 112
Religious Dances 122
Rituals 29, 34, 54, 88, 129
Royal Goddess 15
Rural Debt 78
Rural Development 69
Rural Nepal 52, 78
Rural Population 21
Rural Poverty 78
Sacred Hillocks 8
Sacred Places 7, 8
Sagarmatha National Park 19, 118
Samyak Dan 90
Sankhu 112
Sanskritization Theory 37
Satars 33
Sculpture Medium 120
Settlement 26
Sherpas 42, 137
Simraongarh 136
Social Change 24, 42, 43, 56
Social Classes 32, 40
Social History 135
Solid Waste Pollution 19
South Asia 68
Squatting 26
Superstition, 3
Sustainable Development 19, 118
Taleju Bhavani 15
Tamangs 31, 50, 104
Tangin 51
Terai Village 44
Thakalis 24
Tharus 39
Tibetto Burman Languages 100
Tourists 137
Tribes 45
Tuladhars 11
Untouchables 27
Urban Rural Differentials 53
Vihara Culture 129
Warrior Gentlemen 36
Woman Healer 112
Women 27-31
Women Development 30
Women's Participation 115
Women's Status 28
Women's Work 31
लेखरुको वर्गीकृत सूची

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अतीशा १ अमिलेकहरू ७-१३ कचनुपुर २० करछखाङ २१ कृमाउं १९ कैलाशी २० क्षसेवक ७ गणेशमूर्ति १६ गुजारिका (खरीदार) २५ जना-जोलन ९९ होटी १०.२२ तासपत्र १० तिब्बत, यात्रा १ टोखा २३ दुईसा फू १३ दीपकर, श्रीजान ९ धर्म १,२,३ नेपाल इतिहास १९-२५ नेपाल बेस्लाई सम्बन्ध २४ नेपाल मूर्ति सम्बन्ध २४,५ नेपाली वजहात १४ नेपाली संस्कृति १५ नेपाली संगीत १८ प्रतिमा विज्ञान १६,१७ वजाचार्य, धनबाज ८ विपड़ ७ वर्षकृति १३ वासुदेव मूर्ति १७ भारतीय ९ मल्ल, जयप्रकाश ९ महिलाहरू उम्मेदवारी ६ महिलाहरू- सामाजिक स्थिति १४३