

REVIEW ARTICLE

MAKING NO HEADS OR TAILS OF THE ETHNIC "CONUNDRUM" BY SCHOLARS WITH EUROPEAN HEAD AND NEPALESE TAIL

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Nationalism and Ethnicity in a Hindu Kingdom. The politics of Culture in Contemporary Nepal. Edited by David N. Gellner, Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka, & John Whelpton. Published in Amsterdam, The Netherlands by Harwood Academic Publishers. 1997. Pp.xxii+623, include List of Figures, List of Tables, Glossary, References and Index. Cloth. ISBN 90-5702-089-0. Price US\$ 75.00/£ 49.00/EUR 63.00.

“... बाहूनहरूले यस मूलुकका स्थायी बासिन्दाहरूलाई चूसन सम्म चूसेका, दबाउनसम्म दबाएका र हेप्नसम्म हेपेका छन्, होइन र...?”
(किच्चक हिच्चक (तारानाथ शर्माको पाताल प्रवासमा उद्यत)

"... The Bahuns have spared nothing to exploit, suppress and despise the original inhabitants of this land, or have they?"
-- "Kichhak"¹ Hitchcock (quoted by Sharma 2054:15)

Introduction

The book contains not just the original articles but also contrasting reviews of the main text by two Nepalese scholars, which are regarded as "conclusions" by the editors and "epilogue"/"reactions" by the Nepalese contributors. It, therefore, deserves an extended critical review in terms of its contribution to theory, concept, fact, methodology, epistemology and substance of nationalism, ethnicity and politics of culture in Nepal. I will critically assess the book by looking at what the editors of the book claim it to be and asking whether the contributors live up to such claims. I will review the book's strength and weakness, the substantive issues it raises and suppresses, and how the book could have been improved.

I have divided this review into three parts: (1) organization of the book: was it well thought out?, (2) themes of the book, and (3) audience of the book and the second part in six sub-parts: (i) theoretical positions:

primordialist and/or essentialist v instrumentalist and/or modernist, (ii) nationalism: "patriotism" v ethnonationalism, (iii) ethnicity/ethnic identity: caste v nationalities, (iv) resistance for: equality v displacement, (v) social change: "Hinduization" or "Internal Colonization" v Liberation and (vi) perspectives: "top-down" and "bottom-up" v "inside-out" and "outside-in."

I myself being a Thakali², a member of the National Committee for Development of Nationalities representing the Nepal Federation of Nationalities (NEFEN) and a faculty member of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology from its inception in 1981, who was trained in sociology in a Western school, I must frankly say that my reactions and analyses about the book under review would be multiple--partly from an academic perspective, partly from an advocacy perspective and partly from an ethnic activist perspective. In other words, I will primarily rely on reason, logic and rationality, but also emotion. Also, I mostly agree with the positions taken and analysis done by Harka Gurung; my analysis is supplementary and complementary to what he has already written in the book. I shall touch on and dwell on the articles and issues that I think are most significant for our understanding of politics of culture related to nationalism and ethnicity in Nepal.

Organization Of The Book: Was It Well Thought Out?

If any reader carefully looks at the contents of the book it instantly reveals that the book suffers from a number of conceptual problems. These are as follows:

- The book basically provides European, particularly British, scholars' perspectives on caste and ethnic issues in Nepal. Both eminent and upcoming scholars--13 European (10 British, 2 Germans, and 1 Swiss) and 2 Nepalese scholars--contributed articles on the theme. No American or Japanese scholars, who have done significant research on ethnic issues in Nepal, got his/her place in the book. Most of the contributors appear to belong to the "Oxford Club."
- Two Nepalese scholars, cultural historian Prayag R. Sharma and geographer Harka Gurung, contributed in the epilogue. Sharma provides a typical Bahun's perspective and Gurung provides a typical ethnic perspective on a wide range of issues. Unfortunately, *Madhesi*, *Dalit*, Muslim and Christian perspectives are conspicuously missing in the book. This review article also would not help to fill in the gap.
- Most of the authors are social anthropologists and the remaining authors are geographers, Indologists and literateur. The editors claim that the book is about the politics of culture but the perspectives of political sociologists, political economists and political scientists are conspicuously lacking. Instead of three articles on the Rais and other

ethnic groups with similar historical experiences vis-a-vis the Bahun-Chetri rulers, the editors could have put some efforts into getting multiple but related disciplinary perspectives that would have helped readers to better understand the main themes and issues raised in the book.

- Seven articles, including the introduction, part one, and conclusions are general. The remaining nine articles are about specific ethnic groups (the Newars, Gurungs, Tamangs, Tharus, Rais and Yakkhas) and primarily Hindu caste-based linguistic groups (Maithil), Bhotiya and emigrant Nepalis. In the absence of convincing reasons for the selection of specific ethnic, caste or linguistic groups, the groups included do not adequately represent the diverse features and aspirations of Nepalese society. For example, one wonders why the Rautes, who still live a nomadic life in the jungles of far- and mid-western Nepal, and other "poor" indigenous ethnic groups such as the Chepangs and Rajis were excluded? Why were three articles on the Rais included but none on the many other ethnic groups that are relatively lagging behind them? Why was there not even a single article about the Bahuns and Chetris--the master manipulators of nationalism and politics of culture? Why was there no articles about the *Dalits* and the Muslims? Why was the Christian issue not included? If the editorial policy was to focus on indigenous ethnic groups with Bahun-Chetris in the background, then why were the Maithils included? Why did Maithils get priority over Bhojpuris and Abadhis? The book leaves all these questions hanging. In brief, the book gives a very partial and unbalanced picture of the politics of culture in Nepal.
- The book's 15 articles are grouped in six parts: dominant and diaspora identities, central Nepal, the Tarai, east Nepal, the northern fringe, and conclusions. Clearly, five parts are conceptualized spatially but introduction and part six, that is, conclusions, are issue based. Spatial logic is not convincing for three reasons. First, the hills have been broken down into east and central regions but the west, mid-west and far-west get no coverage. Second, the same logic has not been applied with regards to the Tarai. Finally, in the mountain, hill and Tarai regions, indigenous peoples have many issues in common, but on regional issues, mountain-hill and the Tarai are distinctly divided. The Bahun-Chetris are the common "predators" as perceived by indigenous peoples, *Dalits* and the *Madhesis*. If the book was intended to raise issues specific to certain caste/ethnic groups, chapter divisions based on the caste/ethnic groupings would have made better sense, otherwise, issue based chapter divisions would have been more representative, succinct, and useful. These problems might have surfaced because the editors customized chapter divisions based on the

articles already available. Apparently, articles were not solicited based on the conceptual clarity of both the organizers of the seminars and/or the editors of the book.

In brief, the book is based on a one-day conference and series of seminars that were organized in the autumn of 1992 at the University of Oxford. Obviously, the strength and weakness of the design of the conference and seminars have had effects on the book.

Themes Of The Book

The seminar series was on "culture, politics, and identity in the Himalayan region" (p.xvii). These four themes have been re-focused on, as stated by Gellner in the introduction (p.3), four other themes, "nationalism, ethnicity, resistance, and change in Nepal," "from both top-down and bottom-up perspectives." These ultimately boil down to nationalism and ethnicity as the central focus and the politics of culture with sub-focus, as the title and sub-title of the book suggest. The chapter divisions, however, impose a spatial logic as mentioned earlier. Sharma groups European writers' contribution on the themes of state formation and nation-building, the upsurge in ethnicity and ethnic identity, socio-cultural change, and Hinduization (p.471). John Whelpton, Alan Macfarlane, Claire Burkert, Andrew Russel, and Martin Gaenszle deal with the issue of ethnic identity; Axel Michaels and N. J. Allen with the process of Hinduization; David N. Gellner, Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka, Prayag Raj Sharma and Harka Gurung with nation-building and state formation; and Christian McDonough with land and change. Among these contributors, David Gellner and Harka Gurung explicitly deal with both spatial and substantive issues, such as resistance in Gellner's case.

Theoretical Positions: Primordialist and/or Essentialist v Instrumentalist and/or Modernist³

Identification of the features, nature, and degree of primordialist and/or essentialist and instrumentalist and/or modernist in Nepal is exciting but the book faintly takes up the case and deals with it very casually. What is more disappointing is that it does not even try to get into the depth. The notion of "instrumentalism" is used by Gellner (p.7), Whelpton (p.65), Hutt (p.125), Gaenszle (pp.352-353), Pfaffa-Czarnecka (pp.453-456), and Sharma (pp.483, 486). Among them Gellner and Pfaffa-Czarnecka use "instrumentalism" cautiously, whereas Sharma uses the notion in its vulgar form.

Gellner dichotomizes primordialism and/or essentialism and instrumentalism and/or modernism and defined them accordingly. He writes, "according to the primordialist position, ethnic (and potentially national) identity has always been an aspect of social identity . . . Consequently the primordialist view is also often characterized as essentialist" (p.7). He further writes, "Opponents of primordialism are

known by the two different labels ... namely instrumentalism and modernism. In fact these two terms are used in different contexts and have different implications. In discussions of ethnicity it is instrumentalism that is opposed to primordialism, the idea being that the point of emphasizing ethnic distinctiveness is to gain some political or economic advantage" (p.7). He believes that "Instrumentalism raises the issue of motivation; or at least asserts that considerations of political and economic advantage offer the best grounding for explaining the success or failure of different ethnic movements" (p.7).

Gellner has aptly noted, "No extreme instrumentalist position will be defended here: it is unlikely that ethnic activists are motivated solely by the pursuit of economic or political advantage either for themselves or for the group (they often view themselves as devoted to the selfless pursuit of larger goals, to the detriment of their own, and their household's, economic advantage; at the same time, ... they often have a crude instrumentalist view of their *opponents'* motivations). And yet, the competition of different elites, which sometimes takes ethnic forms, does usually have political and/or economic consequences. Indeed political and economic benefits are specifically targeted when there are campaigns for job quotas or autonomous regions... For present purposes, the more modest (though still far from uncontroversial) modernist claim is upheld, that both nationalism and ethnicity--but not ethnic identity, which is ancient, as explained below--are relatively new phenomena on the world scene, and even more recent arrivals in Nepal" (pp.7-8).

Pfaffa-Czarnecka is of the view that "A third factor leading to an increased interest in cultural matters can be located among the entrepreneurial group. Here, primordial and instrumental considerations mingle most visibly" (p.455). She further writes, "... the entry of the minorities into the public arena results in a 'tragic' instrumentalization of primordial feelings, reinforcing internal cleavages, and politicizing every single aspect of culture. Whether it is really so is for the 'represented' minorities to judge" (p.462).

The ruling Bahun-Chetri scholars' voice is best represented by Sharma who accuses people like me and Om Gurung for being instrumentalists. He labors hard not only to denounce our ethnic activism but also to dump it by charging us, citing the English proverb " 'hunting with the hounds and running with the hare' " (p.486). Sharma, going beyond Gellner, writes, "The ethnic politics of Nepal in the 1990s seems to have elements conforming with both the primordialists' and the instrumentalists' models. In a democratic set-up the ethnic groups of Nepal feel an urge to discover pride in their ethnic identity. At the same time, however, they are also conscious that they can take advantage of the democratic situation and bargain for a good share in the political and economic pie, which fits the instrumentalist model. Such an urge on the part of the various ethnic groups need not be in conflict with the idea of a nation and nationalism.

Still, much unnecessary heat and passion gets generated over the many issues relating to ethnic demands (O. Gurung, n.d.; Bhattachan, n.d.)" (p.483).

The question is not really about ethnic activists being "primordialist" and/or "instrumentalists" as suggested by Sharma, because these concepts are the creation of social scientists, particularly social anthropologists and have been imposed from the top by foreign academicians and the ruling Bahun-Chetris. In practice, ethnic activists, including their organization, the Nepal Federation of Nationalities (NEFEN), have pursued the principles of equality and non-discrimination guaranteed by the Constitution of 1990. NEFEN's approach so far is as good for the ruling Bahuns and Chetris as it is for the ethnic groups. Ethnic demands are not for the displacement or replacement or expulsion of the ruling Bahuns and Chetris. Indigenous peoples are not demanding that the "imigrant" Hindu Indo-Aryans should go back to their "ancestral homeland," that is northern India, that Nepali should be boycotted as the language of officialdom, education and media. On the contrary, what the indigenous ethnic groups have been demanding so far is that the state, including the executive, legislature, judiciary and political parties, should treat equally of all Nepal's languages, religions, cultures and caste and ethnic groups.

Also, our ethnic demands are not just about economic and political gains. Our demands are also for the recognition of our very existence, our histories, cultures, and religions. It is ridiculous on the part of Bahun-Chetri scholars who maliciously feel that ethnic activists play their ethnic card to get more political and economic gains. Interestingly and surprisingly, when Bahun-Chetris' lineage organizations demand more political and economic gains for their respective lineages they are seen as neither instrumentalist nor communal. When they are in the driving seats in the branches of the government as well as the media and political parties, they are not seen as instrumentalist or communal. When the Supreme Court issues an interim order not to use "national languages" or mother tongues in the local bodies, the Court is not seen as instrumentalist or communal. When the House of Representatives makes *Daura-Suruwal* the mandatory outfit for legislators, the House is not seen as instrumentalist or communal. And when a so-called revolutionary party, the Nepal Communist Party (Unified Marxists Leninist), elected at least 24 Bahuns out of 28 elected central committee members in its sixth convention the party was not accused of being instrumentalist or communal. Other ethnic activists and I always wonder why is it a sin when we aspire for equality in all public spheres, including linguistic, cultural, religious and political fields?

The Newars' achievements, an issue raised and (mis)used by Sharma, are prime evidence of Bahun-Chetris' instrumentalism. Whatever the gains of the Newars of the Kathmandu Valley in Nepal's politics, bureaucracy and education these were due to their strategic position of being the only

indigenous ethnic group of the capital city. If other ethnic or religious groups such as the Rauts, Chepangs, Limbus, or Muslims had predominated in the Kathmandu Valley, they would have benefited like the Newars. Therefore, the Shah rulers, Rana rulers, Pancha rulers, and now the democratic leaders also need their help and support of the Newars to maintain law and order in the Kathmandu Valley. Helping the Bahun-Chetris has cost the Newars the rapid destruction of their communitarian life, language and culture. Therefore, socio-culturally and politically conscious Newars are now struggling, along with other indigenous ethnic groups, to restore their rapidly disappearing language and culture, and not just for political and material gains as suggested.

Any reasonably sensible or normal person would instantly understand who has been the most instrumentalist caste and/or indigenous ethnic groups in Nepal since 1768 A.D.. There is no doubt whatsoever that Bahun-Chetris have been great and smart instrumentalists. They have internally "colonized" the indigenous peoples of Nepal, and want to continue to do so in the future. Bahuns and Chetris have used the instruments of "unification," the 104-year old autocratic Rana regime, the 30-year autocratic partyless Panchayat political system and the multi-party democracy of the present to monopolize political, economic, cultural, linguistic and religious power and resources.

Bahun-Chetris have never conceded an inch of their monopoly of political, economic, cultural, linguistic, and religious power and resources and they are not mentally prepared to do so now or in future. Even after the reinstatement of democracy in Nepal, they will not loosen their grips on power considering the fact that the democratic constitution of 1990 prohibits ethnic, language, and religion-based political parties, considering that two centuries of Bahun-Chetri domination has left its mark on consciousness of the oppressed, and considering, finally, that we are striving to claim our due equal rights as Nepalese citizens why should we be charged and denounced by any scholar as taking "primordial" or "instrumental" positions? Why any one of us, who live in a multi-caste/ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-religious and multi-cultural society, cannot take it as our legitimate democratic aspirations that have been denied by the predator state run by the Bahun-Chetris? It is good for the Bahuns and Chetris that most of the indigenous ethnic groups so far have not demanded for their "replacement" or "displacement" or "expulsion." If the Bahuns and Chetris remain adamant, then the paradigm of current struggle may change. The suppressed and oppressed groups may revolt against the Bahuns and Chetris, by using violence, if necessary.

My sense is that ethnic activists will be patient enough to use non-violent options for some time. Unfortunately, such generous peaceful approaches have been labeled as either primordialist or instrumentalist or a mixture of the two. If ethnic groups "gain nothing," following their words, or do not get equal rights in public sphere, and if the ruling

Bahun and Chetris are not willing to concede to get down to what they deserve, then the current paradigm of equality may change to displacement or replacement or expulsion of the Bahuns and Chetris, which would necessarily be more violent. They may discover that Franz Fanon (1982) was right when he strongly argued that violence is the only means left for the natives to drive away the "settlers." No one in Nepal actually wish to see violence of any kind. It will be difficult for the indigenous ethnic groups to undo in a few years or even decades what has been done by the Bahuns and Chetris over the last two centuries. However, in the last eight years many things have already been accomplished, and real momentum for change is gaining rapidly.

Although the theoretical debate on instrumentalism versus primordialism appears to be one of the core issues dealt with by some contributors, none of the articles actually analyzes in-depth the theoretical frames of primordialism and instrumentalism in Nepal. Gellner, Pfaff-Czarnecka and Sharma engage in very superficial discussions about them. If these two theories are so important for the editors, I wonder, why the contributors did not elaborate on the contexts, assumptions, variants, implications and critiques of both theories.

Nationalism: "Patriotism" v Ethnonationalism

In Nepal, all political leaders and their followers, on the one hand, and indigenous peoples, on the other, often talk about "nationalism," but the languages of their discourse are primarily antagonistic. The ruling Bahun-Chetris and the "national political parties" that are under their command⁴ define nationalism ("*Rāstrabad*") in terms of one nation, one King, one religion (Hindu), one language (Nepali)⁵ and one dress (*daura suruwal* and *Nepali topi* for men and *saari* for women). There are some "progressive" or leftist groups who equate "nationalism" with anti-Indianism, "anti-imperialism" and "anti-expansionism" only. All of them often use the terms "nationalism" and "patriotism" synonymously. They completely overlook the existence of nationalities and their definition of (ethno)nationalism in terms of their distinct languages, religions, cultures and we-feeling.

Sharma represents the first or the worst variety and completely undermines the existence of nationalities by writing: "remove monarchy and there is no state, and minus the state, there is no nationalism. The only form of nationalism the ethnic groups have known about or been familiar with is in the framework of the Nepali state" (p.482). In contrast to Sharma, Gellner, Whelpton, and Pfaff-Czarnecka try to engage the readers on the debates centered on the latter variety of nationalism, that is ethnonationalism. However, a lack of a conceptual and theoretical framework about nationalism makes these discussions more fuzzy and superficial with least relevance for the ethnic activists and advocacy groups. It does not surprise me at all because such controversy exists in

the Western debates that revolve around its definition, cognate subjects, forms, disciplinary perspectives and interrelationship with other concepts (Hutchinson and Smith 1994:3). For example, with regard to debates on the definition of nationalism, some focus on national sentiment, some on nationalist ideology and language and others on nationalist movements; and debates on the forms of nationalism include religious, conservative, liberal, fascist, communist, cultural, political, protectionist, integrationist, separatist, irredentist, diaspora, pan and so on (Hutchinson and Smith 1994:3-4). Whelpton senses "Being Nepali, then, means different things to different Nepalis and we need to be constantly aware of the gap that may exist between official aspirations and the actual feelings of a population divided along ethnic, caste, and class lines" (p.39).

Most of the left-leaning political parties, their leaders and followers, define "nationalism" in terms of anti-India sentiments. Such sentiments are real and have merit of their own, but using it as proxy for nationalism sidelines its important components, such as nationalities, language, religion and culture. The Bahun-Chetri rulers define nationalism in terms of "common" history, "common" national icons, "common" language, "common" religion, "common" dress and "common" sentiments. All these presumed commonalities are Bahun-Chetri-centered. They thus undermine socio-cultural, linguistic, religious and caste/ethnic diversities. One such common national icon imposed on all the Nepalese people is the cow, a theme of the article by Michaels. Cow became the national animal because the Hindu Bahun Chetri rulers decided to make it so in order to undermine indigenous peoples and their cultural practices. The constitution makers should have avoided declaring the cow as the national animal because there are many indigenous ethnic and religious groups whose cultural practice is to eat beef. We ethnic activists have therefore suggested to declare animals such as Rhinos as the national animals, which would affect no one's sentiments.

Ethnicity/Ethnic Identity: Caste v Nationalities

Gellner, in the introduction, discusses a controversy surrounding the term "ethnicity." There is also controversy about terms such as "indigenous people" and "*Janajati*." Such controversies are not unusual in Nepal for two reasons: one, these terms are well contested in the Western societies as well, and two, the term "ethnicity" is a Western concept superimposed onto Nepalese society, which obviously does not have a fit. In Nepal, it was Sharma (1992) who mentioned Bahun and Chetri ethnicity, followed by Dor Bahadur Bista (1995) who argued that the Khas of mid-western Nepal are the *Janajatis*. Similarly, the Bahun Chetri policy makers, planners and politicians use the term *Janajati* to refer to themselves and the *Dalits* as well. Some *Dalits* also call themselves *Janajatis*. Thus, the term *Janajati* has been misused as a synonym of all the Nepalese. Furthermore, Rajendra Pradhan (1994) misled many people when he

argued that either everyone or no one is indigenous here in Nepal. Thus, in the 30 dark years of the partyless Panchayat political system, we were told that "all Panchas are Nepalese and all Nepalese people are Panchas," and now in democracy we hear that "all indigenous peoples are Nepalese and all Nepalese are indigenous peoples." The draft concept paper of the ninth development plan used 24 different words to refer to the *Janajatis* and includes economically backward Bahun-Chetris and *Dalits* such as Damai, Kami and Sarki in the hills and Musahar, Dom and Dusadh in the Tarai. Similarly, the *Rastriya Janajati Bikas Samiti* formed in 1997 defined *Janajati* as those Nepalese people who are economically backward. This definition fails to recognize rich but genuine *Janajatis* as *Janajatis*, and wrongly recognizes non-*Janajatis*, such as poor Bahuns/Brahmans, Chetris/Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras as *Janajatis*. Gellner's full citation of the definition offered by the ethnic activists (p. 20-21; see also NAC/IDWIP-N 1994) and a careful study of the history of various caste and ethnic groups (cf. Hodgson 1991), draw a *Laxman Rekha* ("a clear cut demarcation") between caste and non-caste groups. As long as His Majesty's Government of Nepal does not provide legal definition of the terms, particularly of "indigenous people" and "*Janajati*," the controversy will continue. If the government recognizes the definitions of these terms in the way indigenous ethnic activists have defined them, the controversy would cease and if the legal definition goes against their aspiration one may expect a series of violent confrontations in the future to decide the definitions politically⁶.

Any one who has some knowledge about Nepalese social structure knows that Nepalese society comprises caste and non-caste groups even though the New National Code of Nepal abolished untouchability since 1963. In practice, caste is bifurcated into so-called "high" and "low" caste groups. Among "higher" caste groups of the hills, Bahuns and Chetris have been in the driving seat of the political economic vehicle of the country for the last two hundred and twenty five years. A Task Force on the Establishment of a Foundation for Upliftment of the Nationalities, in a report submitted to His Majesty's Government of Nepal in 1996, defined *Janajatis* as "those people who have their own mother tongue and traditional customs but do not fall within the four fold *Varnasram* system of the Hindus" (Task Force on An Foundation for Upliftment of the Nationalities 1996:13). The ruling Bahuns and Chetris are very resistant to such concrete demarcation between caste and ethnic groups because they love to fish in muddy waters. During the autocratic Rana regime, Bahuns and Chetris brought the nationalities within the legal fold of the caste system by putting them in the second place (as the *Matawalis* or "liquor drinking" castes) in the fourfold caste hierarchy. Bahun-Chetris thus reaped the harvest of the state and society. Now the Bahuns and Chetris wish to reap the current harvest by identifying themselves as the "genuine"

indigenous ethnic group of Nepal! The book under review makes no attempt to clear the waters made muddy by the Bahuns and Chetris.

Resistance For: Equality v Displacement?

Some contributors engage in debates on whether there is a continuing tradition of caste-ethnic harmony in Nepal. Different scholars have taken different positions. Some contributors say no, some say yes, and some say maybe. Gellner writes: "For the last forty years it has been a cliché of Nepalese politics and tourist brochures that the many different castes, religions, languages, and 'races' of Nepal live together in tolerant harmony, without the violent conflict which has blighted the other countries of South Asia. The harmony may have been exaggerated. Bhattachan (1995:125) condemns it as a 'blatantly manufactured myth' of the Panchayat period — but it is equally true that ethnic violence has so far been avoided" (emphasis mine). Even after reading these lines Sharma (p.472) "concludes": "Most people in Nepal have liked to believe that, despite its cultural diversity, its history has been marked by an ethnic harmony in a multi-ethnic society, free of all kinds of ethnic tension. Its transition to democracy could be expected to produce other kinds of problems, but no serious stirrings" (p.6) (emphasis mine). Gurung, on the contrary concludes: "Political expressions, ethnic or otherwise, become especially salient during periods of power transition. This is what Nepal is experiencing presently under a democratic environment. However, Gellner (Introduction, p.6) seems nearer the truth when he argues that ethnic harmony may previously have been exaggerated. There were ethnic conflicts in the past of which recent apparitions include the Hindu furor over Padma Ratna Tuladhar's comments on beef eating and the Hindu-Muslim clashes in Nepalganj in October 1995" (p.530) (emphasis mine). The problem with differential perspectives lies in what "harmony" or "conflict"/"tension" mean. If conflict means something that is equivalent to the conflicts in Sri Lanka and Yugoslavia, then yes it did not happen after the so-called project of "unification." If harmony means peace and tranquillity or no attempted or failed ethnic insurgency or conflict, then the answer is no.

Sharma, a Bahun scholar who often expresses typical Bahuns' views, is unhappy with us for dichotomizing the Nepalese people into "us" and "them" but in the next sentence he himself loves to refer to "us" as "them." In his own word (p.489), "The leaders of ethnic organizations in Nepal have shown a preference for presenting their case in terms of two sets of opposing ideas, cultures, values, or situations, or even, unfortunately, in racial terms. This can be seen in the use of contrasts such as Hindu versus *Janajati*, indigenous versus non-indigenous, *Pahari* (the hill people) versus *Madhesi* (people of the plains), Mongol versus Aryan, or the pointed noses versus the flat nose. There seems to be a

constant implication of 'them' versus 'us' (Bhattachan, 1995). These are examples either of political naiveté or of deliberate ethnic brinkmanship. Whether they like it or not, only the state such as we have it today is able to provide all of us with an overarching sense of national identity. Sequestered ethnic groups, either singly or collectively, have nothing similar to parallel it. If they try to invent something artificially so late in the day, they cannot do it without first destroying the idea of the state" [emphasis mine]. The dichotomy of "us" and "them" was manufactured by the ruling Bahuns and Chetris themselves in the last two hundred thirty years and now indigenous ethnic groups are forced to use the dichotomy to turn it around. Sharma makes a baseless claim, like in the famous story of the emperor's new clothes, about the Nepali state's proven capability of providing "an overarching sense of national identity."

So far, ethnic activists have been busy getting organized, as demanded by the Western model of the multi-party political system, by not losing their roots of indigenous organizations/institutions. As the paradigm pursued is for equality, not displacement or replacement of Bahuns and Chetris, ethnic activists have been using non-violent means to achieve their goals. Nationalities, *Dalits*, *Madhesis*, and other religious groups have been using some weapons of the weak. The Nationalities, *Madhesis*, *Dalits*, Muslims, and Christians, generally, have never resorted to communal riot or violence against their oppression by the ruling groups. Although the economic and sociocultural inequality between the ruling high caste groups and the remaining groups has been rising and the awareness and organization capacity of the latter groups is also on the rise, it would not be surprising if such events come up here too. So far we all have resorted to the peaceful means to press our demands with the ruling "high"- caste groups. These means include seminars on burning issues, interaction program with the national political parties, press release, street demonstrations, boycott campaigns, counter-threat to defend our cause, and networking with international sister organizations (Bhattachan 1997a:6).

Resistance against the ruling Bahuns and Chetris may tactically take different alliances. For example, recently the Pashupati Area Development Committee controlled by the Bahun-Chetris was forced to formally apologize for dismantling Kiranti's graveyards in Bankali forest near the Pashupatinath temple in Kathmandu as demanded by a joint struggle committee of the Rais, Limbus, Sunuwars and Yakkhas. Also, recently "*Bhasik Adhikar Samyukta Sangharsha Samiti, Nepal*" ("A Joint Struggle Committee for Language Rights, Nepal"), a network of various mother tongue speaking people's groups was formed to fight against the recent interim order issued by the Supreme Court of Nepal not to use national languages or mother tongues in the local bodies. In the case of language issue, all Tibeto-Burman, Urdu and Indo-Aryan language speakers, except

Nepali and Sanskrit, have already united to fight against the hegemony of the Nepali language. Similarly, indigenous peoples, *Dalits*, Muslims, Christians, and Women may form a network to advocate for positive discrimination or affirmative action or reservation of seats in politics, bureaucracy, education, police, and military. On the issue of secularism, all-non Hindus may form a network to fight against the domination of Hindu religion. Certain issues are exclusive to particular groups. For example, indigenous ethnic groups have to fight against all the Hindus, *Dalits* have to fight against the practice of untouchability by high caste groups, and *Madhesis* have to fight against hill domination. Most of the human rights organizations, which have networks with international human rights organizations, often support these groups.

Dahal (1993:1) has noted that the Bahun-Chetris are in conflict with *Madhesis*, the Newars and other *Janajatis* and the *Dalits*. Given these conflicts, the authors would have done justice to the issue of resistance if its context, nature, variants and implications were discussed and analyzed in detail.

Social Change: "Hinduization" or "Internal Colonization" v Liberation

Hinduization or sanskritization has been the darling to many Nepalese and non-Nepalese anthropologists and other social scientists since the fifties. Much has already been written about it. The book does not add anything to what has already been said and written. Anthropological analyses of Hinduization or Sanskritization by social scientists such as Shigeru Iijima and Prayag Raj Sharma were and still are Bahun-centered. They believe that ethnic groups like the Thakalis, Magars, Gurungs, Rais and Limbus have gone through such processes in order to elevate their social status. What is missing in such texts is the context of Bahun-Chetri monopoly on power, privilege, and authority in the last two centuries. There is no denying the fact that some members of various ethnic groups were under tremendous pressure to claim they belonged to "high" caste groups to get more privileges from the rulers, otherwise they would have faced continued persecution and poverty. From the *Janajati* perspectives, however, it was a process of internal colonization, not Hinduization or Sanskritization as claimed by the authors. Sharma writes, ". . . the process of Hinduization in Nepal should not come as too much of a surprise. Hinduization happened neither in the same degree nor in a uniform manner amongst all groups and individuals. Nor did the state proselytize or force people to accept Hinduism, although in some cases tax exemptions were available to ethnic groups as an incentive to conform to some cherished Hindu cultural values . . . more properly, it was left to the individuals or groups themselves to decide to what extent and in what form to take it or leave it. In general the Hinduization process never cut

deeper than the imitation of the Hindus high castes' mannerisms by the others (see Pfaff-Czarnecka, Chapter 13). Nor was Nepal's acculturation process one-way traffic. The Hindus themselves have been no less influenced in their many beliefs and practices by the religion of the smaller traditions" (pp.481-2) [emphasis mine].

Gurung has correctly noted, "The spread of Hinduism as a religious ideology also meant social ordering according to the Hindu framework based on a hierarchical caste system . . . The Code [National Legal Code] was promulgated in 1854 to impose Hindu caste rules on various ethnic groups" (p.501). He further notes, "The main significance of the Muluki Ain was in its scope, the fact that it encompassed all people under the Gorkhals' rule" (p.501) and "Hinduization was accompanied by the colonization of tribal areas" (p.502) (emphasis mine).

All indigenous ethnic groups want liberation from the traps of Bahunism (*Bahunbad*), Hinduization, Sanskritization and Nepalization. It is obviously not an easy job for ethnic groups and *Dalits*, even in the recently reinstated multi-party democracy, to undo in a few years or decades what has been done over the last 230 years, because the Bahun-Chetri power structure is still very well fortified in the "national" political parties, including the Nepali Congress dominated by the Purbiya Bahuns, the Rastriya Prajatantra Party dominated by the Kumain Bahuns and the Nepal Communist Party (Unified Marxist and Leninist) dominated by the Jaisi Bahuns. Among the Bahun and Chetri political leaders, Dr. Baburam Bhattarai⁷ and Puspha Kamal Dahal ("Prachanda"), the leaders of the "People's War," are the only leaders who have accepted the historical fact that the nationalities, *Dalits* and other minority groups have been suppressed, oppressed and exploited by the ruling Bahuns and Chetris. Bhattarai and Dahal have promised to give the right to self determination to nationalities, including the right to secede, which they believe is the only way for liberation. Therefore, the Khambuan Mukti Morcha led by Gopal Khambu has gone underground supporting the "People's War" led by Dr. Baburam Bhattarai.

Perspectives: "Top-down" and "Bottom-up" v "Inside-out" and "Outside-in"

All fourteen articles, including the introduction, by the European authors have neither top-down nor bottom-up, and neither etic nor emic perspectives as claimed. Their perspectives are more outside-in-out than outside-in. Most of the European authors are very sympathetic to the plight of the suppressed, oppressed and depressed caste and ethnic groups but the reasons are not because they, as suggested by Sharma, studied them but because logic, reason and rationality dictate them to do so. If we look at their works from a dialogic of theory, fact, observer and participant, clearly their writings are mediated by themselves as

"observers" than by theory or fact or participant. In contrast, the articles by Sharma and Gurung have, to some extent, bottom-up or inside-out perspectives but Sharma gives a typical Bahun perspective and Gurung a typical *Janajati* perspective. Sharma's arguments remind me of a Nepali proverb "*Khayepani nakhayepani Baghko mukh raato*," meaning "Will it leave out any grass for lambs, if all tigers turn graminivorous? My personal predilection is that all theory, fact should come from the participant and observer should reflect them because they cannot represent them.

If social scientists, including social anthropologists, sociologists, and historians, claim to give "bottom-up" perspectives and are committed to contribute positively to make a difference in the lives of the people, then it is essential that they should analyze indepth the issues debated extensively by the people themselves. Such issues include devolution of power and authority or local self-rule or local level autonomy or right to self-determination, positive discrimination or affirmative action or reservation of seats in education, bureaucracy, politics, military and police. The editors claim that the book represents bottom-up perspectives but none of the contributors has discussed and analyzed some burning issues such as the right to self-determination (Gurung 1995; Magar 1995; NCP (Masal) 1995a and 1995b; NEFEN 2054; Tamang 1995; and Thapa 1995a and 1995b), local-level autonomy, and marginalization of indigenous self-help organizations (Bhattachan 1997b).

Audience Of The Book

The price of the book, both the original and Nepal editions, is out of reach even to most of the university faculty members, scholars, researchers, students and ethnic activists. Only a handful of them and donor agencies may purchase and read the book. Also, the book is available only in English; those interested Nepalese who cannot read English will not get an opportunity to benefit from it. Also, the book is about the people--the diverse ethnic groups with their own mother tongues and inability to speak either English or Nepali--will not even know of its existence. Gellner claims in the introduction that the contributors have used both "top-down" and "bottom-up" perspectives. If siphoning of information from the "bottom-up" is possible then disseminating those collected and synthesized information from the "top-down" is ethically equally important. Therefore, the editors and publisher of the book should find ways to translate the book or a summarized version of it, at least into the Nepali language for the benefit of the various ethnic groups covered in the book. I, however, strongly believe that such books should be translated into most of the "national languages" or mother tongues spoken in the country. As the price and language of the book make it accessible to only a handful of Nepalese scholars, ethnic

activists and the general public, it has neither any "use value" nor any "exchange value" for the Nepalese people at large.

The book may be useful to "foreigners" like Gellner, Whelpton, Macfarlane, and Hutt or those expatriates associated with donor agencies in Nepal, who know something more about Nepalese society, culture, economy and politics. Especially expatriate staff of donor agencies must read the book, understand the complexities of ethnic problems and streamline their development strategies, programs and projects by putting caste and ethnicity at the center. But other "foreigners," who have either very elementary ideas or some general ideas about Nepal, may get a very partial picture of the text without a context in spite of the introduction. I felt that the book was more about "inside-out" of Nepal than "outside-in" Nepal. Generally, the foreigners may find it very informative and helpful to get some glimpse of the political aspects of the complexities of Nepalese society and culture.

The *Dalits*, Muslims and the *Madhesis* will likely find little of interest in the book.

Bahun-Chetri readers may feel uncomfortable with many issues raised and analyzed by the Western contributors. They, however, may find Sharma's "concluding" article as their Vedas for their community members. Also, they may find it as cultural "Tomahawk" missiles/nerve gases targeted to the indigenous ethnic groups. The indigenous ethnic readers, including myself, definitely find that he unnecessarily labors hard to defend all the wrongdoing of the Bahun-Chetri rulers in the last 230 years by manufacturing de-contextualized, ahistoric, narcissist, illogical, sometimes senseless and baseless, arguments. He leaves no stone unturned to discredit and disgrace the positive efforts made by the *Janajatis* in order to project an image of the Bahun-Chetris as the only dignified, generous, caring, gracious, and pro-welfare group in Nepal! The politics of culture in contemporary Nepal is making clear the historic fact that the Bahuns and Chetris are the villains of the *Janajatis*, *Dalits*, *Madhesis* and other minority groups. History is always cruel to the wrongdoers. The wrongdoers in Nepalese society and culture have to pay cumulative socio-cultural interest if they are not willing to accept their past wrongdoing and give an equal space in the public sphere to the *Janajatis*, *Dalits*, *Madhesis* and other minority groups. The message is in the book but it is not loud and clear as it should be.

To conclude, given the fact that Europeans are the major contributors, and the Nepalese contributors are confined to the end, this volume is basically about the European head with the Nepalese tail. As a logical conclusion, it appears that a second volume about the Nepalese Head with the European tail should be in waiting.

Notes

1. Kicchak, in the famous Hindu epic Mahabarata, is a brother-in-law of the commander of King Birat who was killed by Bhim. Bhim was one of the five brothers called Pancha Pandav. Kicchak had sexually harassed Draupadi, wife of the Pancha Pandav. Tara Nath Sharma, in the first chapter of his book *Pattal Prabash*, recalls his encounters with John T. Hitchcock and Joe Elder in the process of getting admission to a U.S. school. He characterizes Hitchcock as Kicchak, as Prof. Hitchcock not only discouraged but refused to help him because he belonged to a Bahun caste.
2. The Thakalis, whose traditional homeland is in the Mustang district, are one of the 61 plus ethnic groups in Nepal. Their total population is less than nine thousand.
3. For detail understanding of the concepts of essentialism and instrumentalism in the philosophy of science see Popper (1968:97-119). Karl R. Popper discusses conjectures, truth, and reality as the third view concerning human knowledge.
4. For example, the Nepali Congress is controlled by the Purbia Bahuns, the Rastriya Prajatantra Party by the Kumain Bahuns, and the Nepal Communist Party (Unified Marxist Leninist) by the Bahuns whose spouses are from ethnic groups.
5. Gorkha bhasa, now called Nepali, is the language of the Bahun Chetri rulers. Communities belonging to "national languages," that is, mother tongues other than Nepali, have criticized the constitution for its discrimination against their languages. In a multilingual country like Nepal Nepali language cannot be and should not be the only national and official language. Instead, all languages should have equal status.
6. See Bhattachan (1993; and 1996) for the politics of definitions of indigenous peoples.
7. Dr. Baburam Bhattarai (1997) has appealed the Newars to join in the people's war.

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