

IN MEMORY OF DR. HARKA GURUNG (1939-2006)

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Dr. Harka Bahadur Gurung (1939-2006), well known for his wide-ranging scholarship, died in a helicopter crash on September 23, 2006 in Taplejung District, Eastern Nepal. This small note on Dr. Harka Gurung basically focuses on two things: a) Background information on his family, education and services, and b) His scholarship and contributions to social sciences in Nepal.

Family Background and Academic Career

Dr. Harka Gurung was born in Taranche, a small village in Lamjung in Central Nepal on February 5, 1939 in a soldier-cum priestly Gurung family. His grandfather used to work as *Pachu* priest. The snow peaks of Manasulu and Himalchuli loom large just 24 kilometres north of the village Taranche, and this village was situated on the left bank of the Marshyandi river. This natural landscape of birthplace not only developed in him a sense of "belongingness" to the location throughout his life but also opened up the path to becoming a good geographer in the future.

He was the fourth son of the family. He was popularly known as "Thula" (big) by his peers in Taranche as he was the first youngest son (*Thula kancha*) in the family. His father was a *subedar* (non-commissioned first class officer) in the British army in India. His two elder brothers also worked in the British army in India. So it was natural that he spent his childhood with his parents in Dehardun, India, with the children of army families.

He started learning the basic Buddhist Lamaistic education from his grandfather at home. He learnt *Tamukui* or Gurung *kura* at home and learnt Nepali from his friends as the village was dominated by the Chhetri community. His formal schooling began in the Children School, Deharadun, at the age of nine and he finished high school from King George Military School, Jalandhar, in 1955. This military school provided him with the foundation of a good education including discipline, games and sports. It is interesting to note here that despite his education in the military school and the background of army families, he did not join in the Indian army. There could be two reasons for this: i) His short physical stature did not motivate him to join the army, and ii) His keen interest in pursuing higher studies.

From Deharadun, he came to Kathmandu and finished his Intermediate of Arts from Trichandra College in 1957. He went to Patna College, Patna (Bihar, India) to continue further education. A large number of Nepali students would go to Patna for a degree in higher education in those days as it

was closer to Nepal and there was some level of understanding of higher education between the Government of Nepal and Patna University, Bihar, India. Gurung not only earned a first class first B.A (Hons.) degree from Patna College in 1959, but he was also popular in other extra curricular activities. He was the captain of football and hockey team and the General Secretary of the Nepali Students' Union. He also developed good skills in painting. While studying for his M.A. degree in geography from Patna University, he received a scholarship to study geography at the University of Edinburgh where he finished his Post graduate Diploma in 1961 and a Ph.D. degree in geography in 1965. His Ph.D. dissertation entitled, "The Valley of Pokhara: Prolegomena to a Regional Study" (Department of Geography, University of Edinburgh, July 1965) is to this day widely cited as a source to understanding the Pokhara valley.

He began his academic assignments as a Demonstrator at the University of Edinburgh (1963-64) and continued as a Research Fellow, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London (1964-66). He served as a Lecturer in the Department of Geography, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu (1966-68) and Visiting Fellow, Population Institute, East West Center, Honolulu, Hawaii (1984-85). He served as a Member and the Vice Chairman in the National Planning Commission (1968-75); Minister of State for Education, Industry and Commerce (1975-77) and Minister of State for Tourism, and Public Works and Transport (1977-78). His last assignment was the Director of Asia and Pacific Development Centre, an intergovernmental organization based in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (1993-98). He joined New ERA, a non-governmental organization based in Kathmandu, in 1980, and continued his association with this institution till his death in September 2006.

Scholarly Contributions

Dr. Harka Gurung has published several books and articles and given hundreds of interviews to many renowned newspapers in Nepal. Before his death in September 2006, there are a total of 697 publications to his credit: 15 books, 7 small monographs and 675 articles and reports. This long list of his publications will appear in some other volume in the future. Tables 1, 2 and 3 below provide a summary of his writings according to thematic contributions and chronological order, including the most important books with major themes.

Table 1: Harka Gurung: Thematic Bibliography

	Subject	Items and %
A	Agriculture/Forestry/Wildlife	23 (3.3)
B	Arts/Literate/Sports	19 (2.7)
C	Language/Religion	58 (8.3)
D	Development/Economic	169 (24.2)

E	Education/HRD	22 (3.2)
F	Environment/Conservation	29 (4.2)
G	Ethnography/Sociology	23 (3.3)
H	Geography/Geology	50 (7.2)
I	Maps/Cartography	17 (2.4)
J	Mountaineering	35 (5.0)
K	Politics	81 (11.6)
L	Population	43 (6.2)
M	Science/Research	8 (1.1)
N	Travel/Tourism	68 (9.8)
O	Miscellany	52 (7.5)
Total		697 (100.0)

Source: New ERA, September 2007

Table 2: Harka Gurung: Chronological Bibliography

Year	Items	Year	Items
1957	3	1981	15
1958	6	1982	18
1959	8	1983	24
1960	7	1984	12
		1985	11
1961	3	1986	14
1962	4	1987	17
1963	3	1988	17
1964	3	1989	28
1965	4	1990	32
1966	4	1991	18
1967	11	1992	28
1968	17	1993	10
1969	10	1994	8
1970	11	1995	10
1971	5	1996	20
1972	7	1997	8
1973	9	1998	10
1974	4	1999	31
1975	8	2000	42
1976	5	2001	31
1977	3	2002	25
1978	5	2003	40
1979	8	2004	40

1980	16	2005	25
		2006	18
		2007	21
Total	164		533

Source: New ERA, September, 2007

His important books organised by theme are given in Table 3 below.

Table 3: HARKA GURUNG: Books with major themes

Theme	Name of the book
Mountaineering	1968. <i>Annapurna to Dhaulagiri: A Decade of Mountaineering in Nepal Himalaya, 1950-60</i> . Kathmandu: Department of Information
Development Planning	1. 1968. <i>Regional Development Planning for Nepal</i> . Kathmandu: National Planning Commission 2. <i>1972 Graduates in Nepal: A Diagnostic Study</i> : Kathmandu: NPC 3. 1984. <i>Nepal: Dimensions of Development</i> . Kathmandu: Sahayogi Press 4. 2005. <i>Nepal Regional Strategy for Development</i> . Kathmandu: Asian Development Bank
Travelogue	1980. <i>Vignettes of Nepal</i> . Kathmandu: Sajha Prakashan
Cartography	1983. <i>Maps of Nepal: Inventory and Evaluation</i> . Bangkok: White Orchid Books
Political Economy/Nature/Culture	1. 1986. <i>Kehi Abhibyakti (Some Expressions)</i> (in Nepali) Bensisahar, Lamjung 2. 1989. <i>Nature and Culture</i> . Kathmandu: Ms. Saroj Gurung
Demography	1. 1989 <i>Regional Patterns of Migration in Nepal</i> . Honolulu: East west Population Institute 2. 1998. <i>Nepal: Social Demography and Expressions</i> . Kathmandu: New ERA
Adibasi/Janajati	1. 2004 <i>Janajitiko Sero-phero (In the World of Nationalities)</i> . (in Nepali): Kathmandu: Nepal Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities (NFDIN) 2. 2006 <i>Nepal Bibliography of Indigenous Peoples (Janajati)</i> (with K. Bhattachan). NEFDIN
Ethnicity	1999. <i>Faces of Nepal</i> (with Jan Salter). Kathmandu: Himal Books
Inclusion/Exclusion	2006. <i>From Inclusion to Exclusion</i> . Kathmandu: Social Inclusion Research Fund

Though Dr. Gurung had a Ph.D. degree in geography, his writings crossed disciplinary boundaries, including contributions to sociology, anthropology, population, economics, history, political science, development studies and so on. Table 1 shows that his writings spread over 15 thematic areas. He has written more on development/economic fields (24.3%), followed by politics (11.0%) and travel/tourism (9.8%). If themes like language/religion and sociology/ethnography are combined, these are the second most frequent, (11.0 %) like politics. This clearly demonstrates that he was a prolific writer and spent his whole life writing on various themes in social science.

He began writing from during his student days in Patna University and published two articles in local journals there. The first article relates to his impression of Patna, while the second is a poem related to the Ganges River. Since then he hardly ever wrote poetry. Since 1957, he had some publications every year till his death, and in some years he had up to 42 publications in a year to his credit. In the later stage of his career, he started writing books and articles on caste, ethnicity and social movements, giving due emphasis to the rights of the Adivasi/Janajati groups of Nepal. This also reflects his inner feelings and closeness being from an Adivasi/Janajati group and his growing distaste of the ruling elite, particularly the Brahmins and Chhetris of Nepal.

I worked together with Dr. Harka Gurung on several projects, mostly associated with New Era. Once I also accompanied him on a field visit in the Upper Arun valley for about a week. I observed him closely during this field trip and I found him to be not only a voracious reader of books (he used to read one book the whole night and the next morning he would pass me the same book to read), but also an excellent field worker. He always listened to people carefully, even though his dialogues with people were brief. Like a field anthropologist, he would make notes in his diary about what he had seen and observed in the field every day. His daily diary describing his daily work routine and impressions of what he had seen and observed will be an important source of information for those researchers who want to know more about him.

Dr. Gurung's scholarship was always based on facts. Though he frequently criticized the quality of the statistical data available in Nepal (particularly the Central Bureau of Statistics), he used these statistical data extensively in almost all of his articles, reports and books. In fact, his writings always included tables or statistics.

Though he was trained in the British model of functional geography, he gradually shifted his position from static, synchronic analyses to diachronic, processual ones. His writings paid great attention to the historical processes and internal dynamics of society over time. In the past his approach was oriented more towards a survey type of research where he made extensive use of statistical analyses (*Internal migration in Nepal*, 1989, and *Internal and international migration in Nepal*, 1983, co-author). On the other hand, he

was a good observer and traveller. As a geographer and mountain chronicler, he travelled different parts of Nepal, and he recollected many of his memories in his book, *Vignettes of Nepal* (1980).

Considering his vast number of books, monographs and articles, if I were to compile a list of the most important and significant books and articles by Dr. Gurung, the job would be immensely difficult. This is because when I start reading them, I find that each of his publications was based on data (both primary and secondary) with sound logic, reasoning and methodology. Below, I briefly highlight some of his important writings (books and reports) and how he presented his ideas as a great scholar in various social sciences.

The book *Vignettes of Nepal* (Sajha Prakashan 1980) is divided into 20 chapters with a bibliography, a glossary and an index. The book has 19 maps, 44 colour plates and 58 black and white photographs. The book is essentially a travelogue and introduces the readers to his journey across different parts of Nepal: the snowy mountains, the hilly regions, criss-crossed by a maze of streams and rivers and adorned with beautiful lakes and delightful valleys. In addition to the description of varying landscape, there are rich anecdotes on local history and lore, the economy and cultures of diverse ethnic groups. There are vivid descriptions of geology, flora, fauna, festivals and subtle observations on the changes that are taking place in rural Nepal. However, he is also clever to note his biases towards his discipline and use of such words throughout the text. He writes, "the profusion of words like ridge, valley, ascend, descend, climb, steep and traverse are a reflection both of my geographical bias and the rugged terrain of the country" (p. vii). This book was written during a difficult time in his life when he was implicated in a court case of a political nature (Carpet scandal).

The Monograph/Report *Internal and International Migration in Nepal* (Main Report, National Commission on Population, Singh Durbar, Kathmandu, 1983) was jointly prepared by the 9- member of the study team (four geographers, two sociologists and three economists) and Dr. Gurung coordinated the overall study and the writing. The study focused on the Kathmandu valley (Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur districts) and the Tarai districts (Jhapa, Morang, Siraha, Parsa, Dahnusa, Mahottari, Nawalparasi, Rupendehi, Banke and Kanchanpur). The field study was completed in about three months. The main topics included not only basic data on national and international migration but also a study of the international border, internal migration, labour and citizenship. The interesting findings of this study are:

1. According to interviews with the heads of households conducted in the Tarai districts, 6.9 per cent were immigrants. In this calculation it was observed that over the last 25 years (between 1958-1983), the annual growth rate of immigrants in Nepal was 4.2 per cent.

2. Interviews conducted with the heads of households in the Kathmandu valley showed that 2.9 per cent were immigrants.

Of the many recommendations made in the report, two recommendations were most important.

1. Border regulation between Nepal and India; and
2. Foreign workers working in Nepal should obtain a "work permit" to work in Nepal

Because of this report, many "Madhesi people" of the Tarai were not happy with Dr. Harka Gurung and some even proposed to hang him when the report was publicly released. Today, everybody realizes that he was a "true nationalist" as he was very careful to note the illegal entry of Indian nationals into Nepal under the guise of local Madhesi people of the Tarai.

The book, *Nepal: Dimensions of Development* (Kathmandu, 1984 & 1989, pp 322 pages with 20 figures and 58 tables), has 22 chapters, and is a collection of writings spread over the last 15 years published in various journals such as *Vasudha*, *Industrial Digest*, *Population and Development*, and so on. In totality, the volume deals with various aspects of development in Nepal. The articles include journalistic forays, conference papers and inaugural addresses and many seminar presentations and articles focused on population, spatial planning and the ecological problems of Nepal.

In the book, *Nature and Culture, Random Reflections* (Kathmandu, 1989) the author wants to bridge the gap between the social sciences and natural sciences from the perspective of a "holistic view of things". The book is a collection of 25 articles published in various journals over the last three decades as a student (1960-64), teacher (1964-65), planner (1968-78), politician (1975-78) and the freelance consultant (1980-1989). The book is divided into four major themes: Himalaya (6 articles), Landscape (7 articles), Society (8 articles) and Political Culture (4 articles). The book is indeed a great contribution to those who are interested in understanding the different social and natural dimensions of Nepal and their interrelationships.

The book, *Nepal: Social Demography and Expressions*, published by NEW ERA (1998) is a pioneering book about the sociology and demography of Nepal. As the title of the book suggests, there are two major parts: Social Demography and Expressions. Part I - Demography has five chapters that deal with population, migration, ethnicity, language and religion based on the 1991 census data. In Part II- Expressions, another five chapters deal with topics such as education and elitism, ethnicity/caste and politics, regionalism and elections, and development and ideology based on the data of the 1991 census and various other sources such as the Election Commission, the World Bank. Chapter Ten of this section "State and Society" is a reprint of his previous article published in *Nationalism and Ethnicity in the Hindu Kingdom: The Politics of Culture in Contemporary Nepal* (1997) edited by David Gellner et.al. This book is very useful for students of sociology,

anthropology, population and political science as it furnishes good comparative data on the situation of various ethnic/caste groups in Nepal, a demographic account of growth and the redistribution of population and the political representation of various ethnic/caste groups in relation to other groups and their level of development in Nepal. Numerous tables and appendices provide the reader with a good source of material. Throughout the book, Dr. Gurung attempts to show that Adivasi/Janajati groups in Nepal are socially, economically and politically backward compared to groups like the Brahmin, Chhetri and Newar. He thus feels that the demands of Adivasi/Janajati for equal participation and representation in various socio-economic and political sectors of Nepal is well justified. In his preface, he aptly remarks that "Ethnic politics in today's Nepal is both an expression of primordial aspiration and a process of people's transition from subjects to citizens. What is now being contested in the socio-political arena will determine the formation of the nation." In other words, inclusion of various groups (such as the Adivasi/Janajati and Dalit) is a must for the overall development processes of Nepal. In the latter stage of his life, he expressed these ideas in several forums and published a couple of articles on these themes.

The book, *Janajati Serophero (In the world of Nationalities)* (Kathmandu: Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities, 2004), is restricted to issues dealing with the indigenous nationalities of Nepal. There are 21 provocative articles in the Nepali language on different themes. Most of the articles published in the book relate to Nepal's post-1990 democratic revolutions. Though the book claims to deal with the world of Adivasi/Janajati, there are at least four articles which exclusively focus on Gurungs only such as "Gurung Jati Bare" (About the Gurungs), "Tamujati: Auta Manthan" (Tamu Jati: Some Discussions), "Tamu Sankritiko Jagerna" (Protection of Tamu Culture) and "Gurung Bare Auta Thakali Katha" (A Thakali story about the Gurung). Other articles include "Gorkhali-ko Chinari" (Introduction to the Gorkhali people), "Kuro Sanskrit Karkapko" (Sanskrit talk used under pressure), and so on. One of the major arguments raised by Gurung in this book is about the origin of the Gurung themselves. He feels that there is a lack of scientific evidence about how the Gurungs were divided into the "Char Jate" (four groups) and "Sora Jate" (sixteen groups) Gurungs. He neither believes in the Brahmanical model which relates to the origin of Gurung as having Hindu blood nor the Western version which suggests that the community have Tibetan blood. He feels that more in-depth research is required to understand the origin of the Gurungs in the context of Nepal. This clearly suggests that the history and origin of many Adivasi/Janajati groups of Nepal is blurred.

The booklet, *Trident and Thunderbolt: Cultural Dynamics in Nepalese Politics* is based on a lecture delivered by Dr. Gurung, which was an

inaugural lecture is the Mahesh Chandra Regmi lecture organised by Social Science Baha, 24 April 2003 on "The Agenda of Transformation: Inclusion in Nepali Democracy". He argues that the monopolistic policies of the Hindu state over the last 235 years have marginalized various groups in different ways. The three major groups of contenders who are marginalized by the state are : (i) Janajati (ethnic peoples) on the basis of culture, (ii) Dalit (untouchables) on the basis of caste and (iii) Madhesis (Tarai) on the basis of geography. He offers ethnic/cultural events from 1770 to 1964 from various Janajati groups who contested for space within the state. Finally, Gurung suggests some areas for intervention for the upliftment of groups such as the Janajati, Madhesi and Dalit.

The last book before his death was *From Exclusion to Inclusion: Socio-Political Agenda for Nepal* (Kathmandu: Social Inclusion Research Fund, 2006, pp. 50). In this book he considers social inclusion/exclusion as the socio-political agenda of various groups of people in Nepal. He argues that there is educational and political inequality and economic deprivation among various groups and that there thus needs to be an agenda of social inclusion for these communities. He notes that Nepal, with its high-caste patrimony, has always remained averse to progressive measures on equality (p. 47). That is why the social inclusion of groups like the Adibasi/Janajati is mandatory for any kind of development model in Nepal.

Discussion and Conclusion

Dr. Harka Gurung was a true family man who loved and deeply respected every member of his family. As he was more interested in natural landscape than giving Hindu or Buddhist names to his children, he named his two daughters Himalchuli and Manasulu, and one son Sagarmatha. He dedicated his book, *Vignettes of Nepal* (1980) to his two daughters (Himalchuli and Manasulu) and two sons (Bikas and Sagarmatha). The book, *Nepal: Dimensions of Development* (1984) was dedicated to his father (Subedar Parsai Gurung) and the other book, *Nature and Culture* (1989), to his mother (Mayishebo Gurung). The publisher of most of his books was his wife Ms. Saroj Gurung. He acknowledged his wife in most of his writings and admitted that she accompanied him through even the most difficult parts of his life with courage and fortitude.

Dr. Gurung is no doubt one of the most accomplished Nepali scholars to date in the history of Nepal. His breadth of interest was unusual and his productivity at this stage of his career stage was virtually unparalleled among any Nepali scholars to date. He has conducted research and published on a range of issues encompassing some of the earliest and best travelogues, best ethnographic descriptions of various Nepali ethnic groups, assessments of the politics of ethnic identity in Nepal, and population-related themes ranging from fertility to migration. Beyond geography, his writings vary enormously

in contents. Some writings are closer to history, some to sociology and anthropology, political science, economics or development studies. Some of his writings are purely descriptive while others are highly analytical. This diversity is both a strength and a weakness. It is strength because so many sources of knowledge come together in the field that it continually sparkles with new ideas and thoughts. There is also a weakness in such writings, as diverse efforts make a subject weaker in its own areas.

While Dr. Gurung was in fact not particularly interested in developing theories of social sciences in general, at the same time he was quite good at developing models. His models of “regional development” based on five development regions, and a proposal to divide Nepal into 25 districts are very well taken by Nepali scholars and planners even today. He was a true nationalist. As a team leader of the project on migration, he proposed two things if Nepal hoped to develop in the future: the border between Nepal and India must be regulated and a system of work permits should be introduced to foreign workers in Nepal. The latter stages of his writing can be counted on understanding, and often representing, the indigenous or “native” point of view. In other words, he played the role of a “cultural broker,” in mediating between the government and the Adivasi/Janajati groups of Nepal for their upliftment and development. He noted that the underdevelopment of many Adivasi/Janajati groups was closely related to the social and political constraints of the wider Nepali Hindu social structure. Unlike many Nepali scholars, he always read and cited books which focussed on Nepal; in fact, his study room at home can aptly be described as a ‘Nepal Collection’.

Dr. Gurung had a lifelong passion for travel, an inner desire for adventure and facts which ultimately led to his tragic death in the soil of a remote region of Nepal Himalayas. He will be remembered in the history of Nepal as a planner, teacher and renowned academic.

Reference

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