

INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>*James F. Fisher*

The papers collected in this volume are the fruits of faculty labors in a new institution in Nepal: the Central Department of Sociology and Anthropology of Tribhuvan University. Though the institution is new to Nepal, the disciplines are not; for close to three decades Nepal was a happy hunting ground for scores of foreign anthropologists and the occasional sociologist. Their numbers and activities have continued to increase at an exponential rate. Every now and then a Nepalese field assistant would be trained abroad, but there was no sustained, systematic instruction in anthropology or sociology available anywhere in the country<sup>2</sup>.

This imbalance began to be corrected in late 1981, when classes were initiated for the first 'batch' of M.A. students of the recently established Department of Sociology and Anthropology on the Kirtipur Campus of Tribhuvan University. It was my privilege to be invited to serve as Visiting Fulbright Professor from 1984 till 1986 in the Department (then known awkwardly, but officially, as the Instruction Committee), where I arrived just before the first M.A. theses were being presented in 1985.<sup>3</sup> Present at the creation, more or less, and as a teaching member of the faculty, I experienced the ferment and enthusiasm of the nascent Department as an ingredient in its mix. One of my assignments was to serve as editor of our first volume of *Occasional Papers*.

Despite the lack of a perduring institutional base, there has been considerable discussion in recent years both of what sociology and anthropology might become, and what they should do in Nepal. Programmatic statements on these issues were issued in published proceedings of two national conferences on social science held in 1973 and 1983.<sup>4</sup> Whether or not it is faithful to the original blueprints, the Department is now a going concern, and it seemed to me it was time for a stocktaking. After the clarion calls and exhortatory rhetoric have faded, what kind of

research and teaching were we in fact doing? That is the question each of the following essays, in its own way, answers.

The 'theme' of this volume, then, is its intention: to illustrate the breadth and depth of our intellectual interests, both pedagogical and research, as they have developed in these first few years. Some of the essays describe the vision we have of our mission. Bista draws on a lifetime of anthropological experience and distinguished scholarship to stake out the distinctive kind of anthropology and sociology that Nepal needs to nurture. His view of a pragmatic, developmental discipline is echoed in Bhattachan's careful assessment of the curricular possibilities and constraints. My own view endorses these positions and buttresses them with some theoretical caveats. I further argue that development problems demand a range of research border than that which is conventionally considered under this rubric.

Chhetri's essay exemplifies the possibilities inherent in investigating such an ostensibly "non-development" topic as cultural identity. Yet inter-ethnic dynamics clearly must be sensitively attended to in policy planning, especially in Nepal, where migration (Chhetri's main focus) has become the key political and social issue of the 1980's. The articles by Gurung, Pandey, and Upadhyay also take ethnicity and stratification into account, but their major focus is on the use of resources. Gurung examines not only the problems of forest management, but also the generally unheralded measures hill villagers have devised as solutions to them. Pandey shows how poverty in a Tarai village results from a lack of fundamental resources, primarily land, exacerbated by population shifts. Upadhyay addresses resources of a different kind, specifically people, and reminds us that no material improvement can be made without adequate education and training of young people. Most of the youth of Nepal, like the rest of its population, lives in rural areas, making the solution to the problem Upadhyay has identified difficult. None of the essays here offers panaceas, but pinpointing crucial problems is always the first step towards their solution.

Similarly, Mishra makes no pretense of providing a set of easy answers to the fundamental problems he raises, but his incisive and devastating analysis of "development" exposes

conundrums that are otherwise all too easily ignored by the burgeoning development industry. He makes it clear that the mindless pursuit of empirical studies, no matter how "applied" the orientation, is not enough. Rather, a clear sense of history and theory must inform our research efforts, and these must in turn be imparted to the next generation as they pass through the educational system.

That is exactly where the efficacy of the ideas in this volume will be put to the test -- in the students who emerge by confronting them. We have not attempted to draw up a final timetable for the development of either sociology and anthropology in Nepal, or of its society, but we have tried to make a beginning. These essays constitute a benchmark against which we may test the future progress and relevance of the Department, the disciplines, the faculty, and students.

## NOTES

1. I am grateful to Navin K. Rai for his careful reading of and helpful suggestions on the entire manuscript.
2. See Bhattachan's essay for a summary of sporadic, though abortive, attempts prior to the 1980's to introduce sociology/anthropology into the university system.
3. The roster of M.A. Theses illustrates the range of interests of the first group of students:

Pandey, Tulsi, *Poverty and State Policy*

Upreti, Laya Prasad, *The Role of Forests in the Village Economy*

Chaulagai, Tilak Prasad, *The Guthi System among the Newars of Kirtipur*

Bhattarai, Tika Prasad, *Briddhasramka Briddhaharu*

Rajbhandari, Bhupadas, *Patterns of Forest Use in Aiselukharka Village*

Ojha, Hari Kumar, *Women's Participation in the Handloom Industry*

Pokharel, Chintamani, *The Community Fish Farming System*

Prasai, Jivanath, *An Anthropological Study of the Satars*

Chhetri (Bista), Gyanu, *A Socio-economic Study of the Gaine of Pokhara*

Pandey, Chandrakant, *The Role of Emigration in the Life of the Magars*

Sharma, Shrikrishna, *An Anthropological Study of Festivals*

Basnyat, Sandhya, *Farming, Carpet Weaving, and Women*

Khatri, Naniram, *A Study on the Supply of Firewood by Women*

Sharma, Reshraj, *Attitudes of Graduate Students Towards Abortion*

Olee, Seeta, *A Socio-economic Profile of the Danuwars of Jhapa*

Laudari, Rajendra Prasad, *A Study of the Chepang Community of Shaktikhor*

Manandhar, Bimala, *Fertility History of Working Women*

Pokharel, Bindu, *Breast-Feeding Behaviour of Working Mothers*  
Koirala, Prayagraj, *The Role of Domestic Animals in Peasant Economy*

4. *Social Science in Nepal*, Institute for Nepal and Asian Studies, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, 1974; *Social Sciences in Nepal: Infrastructure and Programme Development*, Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, 1984.