

deserves admiration. The language is refreshingly free of the technical jargon that has been generated within the literature on sustainable development, and which is used by so many authors to make their writing appear more relevant. Quite the contrary, Aubriot's study of the tensions underlying the management of water resources, even in a relatively homogenous village, is a healthy antidote to the unmitigated user-group enthusiasm currently in vogue in the literature. That in explaining the causes of these tensions she attributes more weight to kinship affiliation than to socioeconomic parameters such as poverty, vulnerability etc., may diminish the value of her contribution in the eyes of some, and earn her the reproach of nurturing a genealogical bias. Her monograph is, however, a convincing and well-documented reminder not to lose sight of a determinant of human-environment relations, which does play an important role in many societies, and for the study of which anthropologists are particularly qualified.

***Social Demography of Nepal, Census 2001* by Harka Gurung. Lalitpur: Himal Books 2003. Pp. vi, 59; 15 tables, 11 figures, 6 annexes. ISBN 99933 43 55 2.**

Reviewed by David Seddon, Norwich

This little monograph sets out – in a number of short sections, backed up by tables and figures – selected data from the 2001 census, and makes some comparisons with the 1991 census in particular. These data relate largely to the numerical distribution and change over time of social categories in Nepal, defined variously by caste, ethnicity, religion and language. In addition, there is some discussion of literacy among the social categories identified. Migration is barely addressed, apart from some consideration of population change, by what is referred to as “native area”, between 1991 and 2001. Other possible topics – including those relating directly to demography (e.g. fertility and mortality rates, age and sex distribution) as well as school enrolment, higher education, health status and other indicators of well-being (e.g. income), political involvement, etc. – are not discussed.

It is an interesting and provocative compilation, as much for what it omits as for what it covers. The main text (pp. 1-34) consists of an Introduction, a section on Caste and Ethnic Groups (pp. 3-10), a section on Linguistic Groups (11-18), a section on Religious Groups (19-21), a section on

Caste/Ethnicity and Religion (22-25), a section on Literacy Level (26-27), a section on Janajati and Dalit Schedules (28-33) and a final Overview. It does not really live up to its title as *a Social Demography of Nepal*. It is not as broad in coverage as some of Dr. Gurung's previous works of this kind (*Ethnic Demography of Nepal*, 1996 and *Nepal: Social Demography and Expressions*, 1998). What it does essentially is to provide in an accessible form some statistical data on the caste, ethnic, religious and language groups into which the census divides the population of Nepal, and a commentary on the relationship between the "schedules" drawn up for the census and the reported data.

The central message conveyed in the Publisher's Note that precedes the main text – and arguably the intention of the author as well as the publisher – is that the 2001 census has "allowed" many caste and ethnic groups not previously enumerated "to claim their rightful place among the peoples of Nepal"; "near-extinct languages have been granted due recognition; and all religious groups have been properly documented" (p. vi). This kind of language – which implies that the census has "revealed new truths" about the nature of Nepali society, particularly as regards the numerical distribution of different caste, ethnic, religious and linguistic groups – pervades the monograph. Indeed, the Publisher's Note explicitly draws attention to the fact that "the two censuses held since the 1990 restoration of democracy in Nepal have revealed a very different social picture of the country than was expounded during the earlier period of cultural and social homogenisation actively pursued by the state" (p. vi).

The various tables and figures provide rich material for consideration, conjecture and consultation; the monograph should certainly be read and kept for reference by all those concerned with the social and political configuration of contemporary Nepal. But what is really interesting about the compilation is what it does and does not reveal about the contentious nature of the process of group classification and its relationship to the construction of identity – a matter of central importance, politically as well as socially and culturally in contemporary Nepal.

There is a passing reference in the Introduction to the preoccupations that underlay the 1911 census (the first census of Nepal) and how these affected the classification and publication of the data. One finds a more protracted consideration in section VIII on Janajati and Dalit Schedules of how the "schedules" were drawn up for the 2001 census in the light of the work of the Task Force on Janajati Utthan Pratishthan in 1996 and a similar body responsible for what have been referred to variously as Upechhit (excluded), Utpidit (suppressed) and Dalit (oppressed). This, the last substantive section of the main text, should properly have been the opening section. For it provides an interesting, but all too brief and not entirely epistemologically satisfactory, discussion of the ways in which the categories into which the census attempted to divide the population were constructed,

and of how discrepancies between the schedules (involving pre-determined classifications) and the reported data (including self-reported affiliations) arose.

The author is, of course, more aware than most, of the contentious nature of caste, ethnic, religious and linguistic classification, and refers explicitly to the pressure in contemporary Nepal for the proliferation of identities (p. 28). But some of the discussion reads as if the discrepancies between the schedules and the reported data can be resolved on the basis of what “is” or “is not” the “reality” in the field. The construction of identity is more complex and problematic than that. Behind the seemingly innocuous and “scientific” production and analysis of these statistics is a serious sociological issue of who is responsible for the construction of “reality” (for the suppression of certain versions and the creation of others) – as regards “identity” or anything else for that matter – and precisely how that takes place. The census is clearly one “arena” (and an important one as a reference point) among others.

If this monograph provokes debate along these lines with reference to the changes taking place as regards how and by whom caste, ethnic, religious and linguistic identity is defined/constructed, it will have served a valuable purpose. If it generates a more substantial attempt to examine and explore how caste, ethnicity, religion and language relate to other aspects of the contemporary social, economic and political structure of Nepal, that would also be excellent.

Information for authors

Proposals for articles should in the first instance be sent to the managing editor, Prof. William Sax. All articles submitted are subject to a process of peer review.

We would prefer that you send us both "hard" and electronic copy of your contribution, formatted in Microsoft Word. Please use author-year citations in parentheses within the text, footnotes where necessary, and include a full bibliography. This is often called the "Harvard" format.

In the body of your text:

It has been conclusively demonstrated (Sakya 1987) in spite of objections (Miller 1988: 132-9) that the ostrich is rare in Nepal.

In the bibliography:

Sakya, G.D. 1987. *Nepalese Ostriches: A trivial myth*. Kathmandu: Mani Pustak Bhandar.

Miller, M.L. 1988. A comprehensive rebuttal of G. Sakya. *Kailash* 6 (2): 121-83.

Smith, B.C. 1992. Looking for ostriches. In *Research Methodologies for the Himalayas*, edited by J. Pande, pp. 110-145. Shimla: Mountain Publishers.

Use of quotation marks:

Use **double quotation marks** (" ") for quotations of any kind, and for so-called "epistemological distancing".

Use **single quotation marks** (' ') for quotations within quotations and semantic glosses, including literal renderings of indigenous terms.

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