

# SOCIOLOGY IN NEPAL: UNDERDEVELOPMENT ADMIST GROWTH<sup>1</sup>

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## **Rise of Sociology**

The rise of the social sciences in post-16<sup>th</sup> century Western Europe has widely been attributed to the enormous political, economic and cultural contradictions—and struggles generated by the twin crises of feudalism and religious faith, the working out of reformation and renaissance, the rise of capitalism and, later, of the structure of democracy<sup>2</sup>. This large-scale and drawn-out dislocation and crises could find resolution only with a radical reorganization of life and society. This reorganization involved the creation, among others, of an expanded European and global market for wage labor, commodity production and reinvestment of profit; the class and state systems; a relatively centralized production regime which gradually reduced the role of the household as a site of production; spatially and socially distanced and “free”, often migrant and urbanized, labor; a culture of “faithless” reason, doubt, empiricism, “scientific temperament”; human and historically generated, rather than supernaturally delivered and preordained, progress; and norms of citizenship. It also involved the democratic and liberating influences of the American and French revolutions, the industrial revolution, the Soviet and other socialist revolutions as well as the much more drawn-out processes of decolonization, state formation, democratization, nationalism, modernity and developmentalism within the newly independent regions and countries.

The comprehension and explanation, control and reshaping, and prediction of this large-scale political, economic and cultural struggles and transformation, which generated a wide ranging and intense departure from the established order at multiple levels—ranging from

individual and group identity to the nature and relationships among individuals, households, states, classes and the multifarious constituents of the global system, were the planks on which the social sciences were founded. Intellectual frameworks aligned with feudalism and faith were rendered incommensurate for the comprehension, explanation, prediction of, and intervention into, the processes of struggle and transformation as also of the transformed social world. Further, the transformation, by its very nature, signified an end to the stability of the old world and generated successively new rounds of systemic as well as anti-systemic struggles and transitions at the local, intermediate and global levels and in the structure of relationship among them. The altered and ever-changing social world, in turn, necessarily demanded a mode of social enquiry that was based upon the assumptions that the social world was historically (rather than divinely) constructed, that it was eminently knowable (rather than mysterious and humanly unfathomable) and that it could, within the limits and facilities set by historical processes as well as conscious and organized human social action, be consciously reshaped and reorganized. The altered and ever-changing social world would also demand an empirical, as opposed to authoritatively received, mode of social inquiry. Not only was the larger structural and state level political authority consistently challenged, but the social world, which was diverse, unstable, complex and changing and, by most accounts becoming ever more so, demanded that even social scientific authority, including those which emanate from specific metatheories, established research practices and organizational structures, for example, the university system undergo a “reality check” on a continuing basis and revalidate itself in the process. The new social world both obliged and encouraged newer social visions, theories, sets of information, interpretations, critiques, modes of social control and platforms for action. The social sciences in Europe and later the USA were founded within the context of this large-scale transformation.

Specialized fields within the social sciences largely evolved during the 19<sup>th</sup> century in response to the expansion and intensification of the process of transformation itself, popular struggles that this transformation entailed, multifarious impacts on religious affairs, polity, administration (including colonial administration), law, economy, culture, etc., it generated, and the emergent structures the transformation created, for

example, state, market, urbanity, impoverishment, crime. The demands of the state structure for information, analysis and policy-making—and implementation thereof—in order to selectively contain, expedite and streamline the process of transformation and its effects, as well as the struggles of urban workers and their unions, activities of social reformers and charities as well as the social science academia played significant proximate roles in the evolution of the specialization in the social sciences. The social science academia was slowly gaining legitimacy as an interpreter of specific aspects of the new and evolving social world and as a potential “fixer” of the multifarious “social problems” generated by the transformation. The success gained by the already relatively specialized natural sciences contributed both to the legitimacy of the social sciences in general as also to the “promise” held out by specialization within the “science of society”. The part played by the social sciences, in particular, political science, public administration, economics, law and anthropology, during the colonial era further justified their utility.

It was within this space that sociology was gradually erected in Europe over the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The nature of the new, un-feudal, “faithless”, familiarly and spatially “unhinged” migrant-, urban-, industrial-, capitalist-, class-based and conflict-ridden society, with pockets of extreme poverty, exploitation and seeming hopelessness was not only relatively unfettered from a host of traditional anchors of order and control, but it also raised the specter of rootlessness and formlessness. Uncertainties loomed large. Further, the rapidity of the transformation, and the successive waves of transition in social lives, and the relative of unpredictability of the future course of transformation were being widely and intensely discussed and acted upon.

It was this a transformative cauldron which created the space for sociological thinking. Sketching and elaborating the features of the new society, as contrasted with the older forms, expectedly, was the first item in the agenda of such thinking. Comte’s “law of three stages” and Durkheim’s explorations of the bases of religion, education, anomie, individualism (egotism) and social integration in the new society were symptomatic of the thinking. Durkheim’s explorations also constituted a significant quest for the bases of order and stability in the new society.

Similarly, Weber's vast corpus sought to map this transformation in economic, political, administrative, social and psychological terms within a deeply historical and cross-societal comparative matrix. Marx's even vaster corpus, in turn, laid bare the history and functioning of the emerging mega structure of capitalism—the mother of all transformations, the contradictions that it produced and sharpened, and the impact it had on everyday social and personal lives. The Marxist corpus, in addition, also made the case for political action to challenge the capitalist transformation. All four sociologists, in addition, elaborated new epistemologies necessary in order to investigate the new society: empiricism; non-reductionism and “sociologization”; historical analysis, interpretation and disenchanting objectivity; and historical-dialectical materialism. For Comte, Durkheim and, to a certain extent, Weber, the new investigative perspectives would also legitimize sociology as an independent discipline in its own right. The institutional and financial bases of sociology, within the university system and with a certain level of public support, were rather painstakingly built upon during this period. It must be said, however, that the activities of many grassroots social reform associations lent legitimacy to sociology and to the strengthening of its institutional and financial base.

Following the relatively sterile interwar years, during which rural and urban sociology, symbolic interactionism, the “theory of action” and a couple of other broadly ahistorical perspectives (with the exception of critical theory, which emerged in Germany during the 1920s ) made their beginnings, the functionalist perspective gained a near-hegemonic metatheoretical status in sociology and anthropology, particularly in the US. The rise and high dominance of this conservative perspective, which lasted till the mid-60s has legitimately been attributed to the historically unprecedented economic growth and prosperity in the US during the aftermath of World War II, the masking of latent conflicts that such rise in prosperity afforded, the absence of major and overt conflicts, and to the elevation of the US to the preeminent position in the global hierarchy.

Two of the key features of the post-World War II scene, particularly with respect to the colonized and other third-world countries, were decolonization and modernization-led development. Decolonization and modernization were at once liberating and imperializing (excepting, to a

certain extent in the socialist countries): The “natives” were liberated from particular colonial countries while at the same time that capitalist imperialism was strongly revitalizing itself to incorporate the globe following a five-decade long hiatus characterized by two world wars, the rise of the soviet system and one great depression. The image that the modernization framework cast was one of unilinear growth and development within which the more modern and developed economies, cultures and peoples, including those within the modernized and developed states, in effect, constituted the future of the less modern and less developed. The states and peoples which were “traditional”, non-modern and less developed had only to traverse a path that had already been charted, including in relation to the generation and utilization of knowledge (including sociology) at the “local” level. It was merely a matter of filling in. This perspective was mirrored at the national level as well. Global, state and market—as well as most non-governmental—structures and institutions had just begun to engage in the search for “system-compatible and usable” information and interpretation. The search for such information and interpretation, which was large in scale, formed the bulk of social science work. The job market for sociologists was decidedly influenced by the search for such “usable” information and interpretation put at the service of modernization and development. These processes, which, among others, transformed the non-western settings and people into the “other” and coalesced within “orientalism”, were, in turn, laid bare and severely criticized, during the 70s, among others, by Edward Said, Talal Asad and others.

Within the Western countries themselves, the rise of the civil rights movement, anti-Vietnam war protests, and women's and student movements during the late 60s and the early 70s, however, led to a serious questioning of the functionalist position, as also of the empiricist and ahistorical stance. These movements and protests have also had the effect of substantially expanding the sub-fields of sociology as well as the job market for sociologists within the governments, semi-governmental institutions, the private sector, international institutions and the universities.

The post-70 sociological thinking, in turn, has remained “pluralist”: Even as the functionalist, empiricist and historical stances remain

widespread and legitimate, the last two decades have encouraged introspection (for example, Gouldner 1971, Clifford and Marcus 1986, among others); textual analyses, powerful interpretations of the inter-connection between power and knowledge and the interconnectedness of macro and the micro structures and processes. The world-systems perspective has been a singular contribution of the post-70 sociology, as is the feminist perspective. In addition, the post-70 period has seen the elaboration of a host of other frameworks, which seek to include the experience and struggle of a variety of excluded groups, for example, the races, ethnic groups, caste groups, migrants, senior citizens, disabled. History, holism, conflict and contradiction are in. Expansion of sub-fields and the job market, in the meanwhile, has continued, albeit at a slower pace, not the least due to the rightist neo-liberal and state minimalist position advocated and practiced since the 80s. Within the “developing” countries, the embracing of developmentalism and its corollaries—international financial assistance and “policy guidelines”, international non-governmental organizations, etc.—have further opened the job market for sociologists and social anthropologists. Ethnic, regional and other voices and struggles for inclusion and wider demands for democratization and public services have also opened up the professional space for sociologists and social anthropologists. The obverse has been the case as well: Some sociologists and social anthropologists, at times, have disagreed to honor the agenda and themes put forth by modernization, developmentalism and globalization, critiqued them and found and worked with other frames and themes.

Finally, during the 80s and the 90s, serious questions have been raised on the legitimacy of the existing disciplinary contours and boundaries in the social sciences as well as on the legitimacy of the accepted theory and practice of the social sciences including sociology and social anthropology. Calls have been made for tearing down the old but strong walls between the social sciences on account of the fact that they inhibit insightful inquiry of the new social conditions. Calls have also been made for modes of social inquiry, which are historically and politically self-conscious and are at the same time plural, local as well as universal (Said 1978, Clifford and Marcus 1986, Wallerstein et al. 1997, Wallerstein 1999, also see Amin 1997: 135-52, Sardar 2002). The widespread call for indigenization of sociology and anthropology raised

primarily although not exclusively by non-western academics, including those in Nepal (see below), are also at least in part based on the lack of fit between political, economic and cultural conditions within the global metropolis, on the one hand, and the peripheral regions, on the other. The academic work of the metropolis is seen to misrepresent the social work of the outlying regions, societies and peoples.

### Embedding

This rather long-winded introduction has been intended as a platform to enter into a discussion of the state of sociology in Nepal. It has argued among others that.

- The emergence as well as the specific nature of evolution of sociology (as well as other social sciences) is predicated on the scale and intensity of social struggle and social transformation. Large-scale and intense social struggle and transformation in Europe, particularly during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries led to a *zeitgeist*, which insisted on a historical and worldly rather than mythical and ecclesiastical nature of the social domain. This revolutionary *zeitgeist* systemically and gradually transformed all social practices, for example, forms of government, forms of economic transaction, structure of the household, identity of an individual, as well as all branches of social expression, for example, art and literature, physical and biological sciences and to the emergence and transformation of “sciences of society”, including sociology and anthropology. Even as the Nepali society is making a salient transition away from faith directed and feudal traditions and towards a more democratic political culture at various levels and sectors, and even as the sciences of society are seeking to learn from the Western academic tradition, the peripheral, dependent and unsustainable nature of the capitalist transition; the restricted nature of the urban and public domains; the miniscule, underdeveloped and non-polyvocal bourgeoisie; together with largely state dependent organization of higher education, relatively non-demanding and relatively unprofessionalized academic systems as well as functionalist and developmental emphases that the carriers of sciences of society have taken on has inhibited the development of social sciences in general

and sociology in particular. The hegemonic impact of the Western academia, on the other hand, has also led to an inordinate emphasis on receiving rather than generating knowledge.

- The specific nature of evolution of sociology is also predicated on the nature of the transition, that is, what and which political and economic structures and regions, ideologies, institutions, classes, groups are driving the transition; how the dominant structures are negotiating the transition with other less dominant structures; and the relative strength of the other less powerful, but nonetheless competing, structures. The more powerful generally usurp the right to characterize and speak for the less powerful. This essentially is the crux of the practice of “orientalism” (see Sardar 2002 for summary as well as critique). Speaking for others, however, is not a monopoly of the orientalist tradition, a point which is powerfully brought out in Clifford and Marcus (1987). Such “filtering frameworks” also operate at the national level in the developing countries and bear significant implication for the development of the social sciences (Guru 2002). Interconnectedness between power and knowledge implies that the powerful, unless systematically resisted and exposed, cannot but seek to usurp the authority of representing, often misrepresenting, the “other”. This strain is strong in Nepal and comes in the disguises of “salvage anthropology (and sociology)”, romanticism and a strong reformist, developmentalist and modernist sociology and social anthropology. There has been, since the last decade, some improvement on this front, however. Encompassing political debates and transitions (after the 1990 political transition and during the ongoing “Maoist struggle”) as well as ethnic, regions and to a certain extent, “gender”, perspectives and voices have been in ascendance during the last decade. While not all of these have yet been translated into the sociological and social anthropological proper, these cannot but leave marks within the discipline within the next decade—even as the urban, the upper class and upper caste, statist, modernist and developmentalist interests may very well continue to dominate the sociological enterprise. The ethnic and regional voices are already being translated into sociological and social anthropological agenda. Further democratization of the polity

in Nepal, which is inevitable in many ways, is likely to push these academic initiatives further.

- The specific nature of evolution of sociology and social anthropology in the West and the rest of the world are of an embedded nature. This embeddedness was principally founded upon the structure and processes of the colonial and capitalist transition that the non-Western polities, economies and cultures underwent beginning the 17<sup>th</sup> century (see Frank 1998 for the interface between Asia and the rest of the world). In addition, between the 1880s and the 1950s, many of these countries also underwent further capitalist and imperialist as well as anti-colonial, nationalist and democratic transitions and struggles. The social sciences—together with other forms of knowledge and expression—in these structures and countries developed both as constitutive components and critiques of these specific struggles and transitions. The social sciences there also developed both as constitutive components and critiques of the post World War II global and local structures and ideologies and practices related to developmentalism and modernization, capitalism and imperialism, formation of new state structures, nationalism and statism, as well as democratization, the enlargement of the public domain, expansion of public administration and the empowerment of the newly created citizens. The affirmation and remapping of the identities, political roles and life chances of the diverse class, caste, ethnic, religious, regional, linguistic, gender and other groups mandated by encompassing political, economic and cultural transitions also shaped and reshaped the social sciences and sociology and anthropology. The stamps of these structures and processes can be found in sociology and social anthropology in Nepal as well. Academic organizations at the higher level are largely financed by the state, although there is a growing private presence there. (Most private higher education structures, however, gain from indirect state support as well as more direct subsidy from state-financed academic organizations, principally in the form of teachers who agree to work on low part-time wages in private colleges because they continue to receive full-time wages and pensions from state financed colleges.) Developmentalism is a strong theme within the syllabi and it largely drives the research agenda. The state is

almost universally seen as playing the most significant role in relation to development and modernization. Nationalism remains a key and overarching reference point in syllabi, research outputs and discourses on development, modernization and even class, caste, ethnicity, gender and regionalism. The syllabi do emphasize critiques of these dominant preoccupations, but only a small number of academics view these transitions critically enough.

- Embedding has become much more intense during the post-World War II phase of globalization. The expansion and intensification of the global political, economic and cultural interface has had a pronounced implication for the shaping and reshaping of sociology and social anthropology in non-Western countries and, lately, within Western countries as well. The evolution of sociology and social anthropology in the non-Western world, in this specific sense, is an heir to sociology and social anthropology in the West and thus to a substantial extent inherits both the promise and the pitfalls held out by the discipline. In a rather curious but highly significant twist, this embeddedness, among others, is also beginning to reshape the discipline in the west (for example, Clifford and Marcus 1986). This embedding encompasses multiple dimensions, among which the economic interface and its political and military (for example, the “war on terrorism”) implications have been widely discussed. This embedding, however, also shapes what is defined as knowledge, the identification of valid modes of generating knowledge as well as the production and distribution of knowledge. The West remains highly privileged on all these accounts. As such, it is privileged in developing the frameworks of social science inquiry and defining the agenda of the social sciences (cf. Wallerstein et al.) 1997: 33-69, Wallerstein 1999: 169-184 in particular as well as in the production and distribution of texts and references, including specialized disciplinary journals. This privilege allows the Western academic establishments a much higher level of access to global information and literature, organizational competitiveness, resources and professionalization. The search for the nomothetic, the general, the grand theories and the metatheories, and universal laws, privilege the west. These, in turn, generously contribute to the powerful edge that Western sociology and social anthropology has over the practice of

the discipline in other areas of the world. The larger economic and political privilege necessarily rubs off on Western academia in as much as the West not only has “been there” already, but also gauged and weighed alternatives and possibilities and the rest is at the stage of “catching up”. Within the context of the embeddedness of the larger political and economic system and the hierarchy therein, the production of homologous and unequal intellectual and academic hierarchies are rendered inevitable.

- Nonetheless, and despite the growing salience of global structures and processes in the evolution of specific structures and processes that shape the polity, economy and culture in Nepal, sociologists and social anthropologists often continue to visualize societies in Nepal as uniquely local products. The significance of the macro and the long run in shaping the character of the micro and the present and the short run remain highly underemphasized both in the syllabi and the research agenda. The sociology of the interconnectedness of the global, the national and the local, the dynamics of this interconnection and the implications this interconnection have on the present and future lives of different social categories such as region, class, gender, ethnic group, caste group, the poor, etc., remains underemphasized. In addition, the significance of world-systemic processes on macroeconomic and sectoral public policies and their implications for processes such as centralization, democratization, etc., have largely been neglected in sociology and social anthropology in Nepal. Similarly, the developmentalist and functionalist perspective which remains dominant in Nepal, has inhibited teaching and research on frameworks and themes such as politics conflict, struggle, resistance, etc., despite, among others, the ongoing “Maoist” rebellion.
- The de-linking of the global, on the one hand, and the national and the local, on the other, becomes clear from a perusal of the “state of sociology” writings in Nepal. Most such writings fail to see the multiple levels of embeddedness involved in the evolution of sociology and social anthropology in Nepal: embeddedness of the polity and economy and the evolution of the discipline in the West itself, global and national embeddedness at the level of

encompassing political-economic frameworks—which contribute to disciplinary embeddedness and embeddedness of political economy and the evolution of sociology and social anthropology within Nepal. This is an area that needs to be urgently redressed.

### Sociology in Nepal: Institution and Growth

We can now discuss the overarching as well as much more proximate institutional bases for the emergence and growth of social accounts, the social sciences and “pre-sociology” in Nepal. It must be emphasized right away, however, that the roots of such sociological endeavors have to be sought not only in other disciplines such as literature and in economic, political and social history, but also in more lay accounts of emerging social reform associations, agrarian conditions, labor migration, structures of resistance, popular struggles, etc. Both “proper literature” and lay social accounts, however, remain extremely sparse right till the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It has to be recalled that the literacy rate in 1950 was approximately 5 percent, the first college was established in 1917 and the 1846-1951 Rana regime was politically highly controlled and autocratic. The tradition of oral and/or reconstructive history and sociology has been weak as well (See Burghart 1984, Oppitz 1971, Blaikie, Cameron and Seddon, 1980, Mikesell 1988, Ortner 1989, Shrestha 1971, among others, however.) This is an area where significant contributions can be made. Nepali sociologists and anthropologists who have remained almost exclusively preoccupied within the agenda of future, that is, modernization and development, have been particularly unproductive in reconstructing the past as also in analyzing a historically informed present. Such reconstructions would have to take on the task of describing and explaining emerging transitions in Nepal during the 1850-1950 period. We should also be reminded that in the past those who dared to word the contradictions and transitions during the period were often discouraged, incarcerated, exiled or killed altogether

Nonetheless, there is significant scope for sociological reconstruction based on historical accounts. Mahesh Chandra Regmi’s documentation-based historical accounts, particularly those related to the agrarian features of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Tarai, the conditions of life of the peasants and tenants there and their relationship with the state and its intermediaries as well as the social implications of the agrarian regime

(Regmi 1978, 1984), has proved an extremely fertile site for a variety of social science disciplines. There is no doubt either that Regmi’s corpus will continue to fuel much sociological reconstruction in the future. The pain and suffering of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century Hill peasants under conditions of the impending Nepal-East India Company war has been well sketched by Ludwig Stiller (1973, 1976) as well. Similarly, accounts provided by historians and others such as Prayag Raj Sharma, Kamal Prakash Malla, Harka Gurung, the Itihas Samsodhan Mandal, etc., have created a productive platform for sociological reconstruction. More recently Bhattarai’s (2003) Marxist account of Nepal’s political economy has provided a rich source for further reconstruction of socio-spatial relationships in Nepal. The old “colonial” account by William Kirkpatrick, (1811) Francis Hamilton (1819) and Brian Hodgson (1880) also constitute good source materials for a historical analysis.

If struggles and transitions make and reshape social experiences and, therefore, social accounts (including pre-sociological accounts), modern social accounts of Nepal would have to begin from the period of the rise of the world colonial capitalist bastion of the East India Company and the implications it had on the reorganization of states, markets and peoples in the north Indian region, including Nepal. The shaping and reshaping of Nepal and the peoples who inhabited it would have to be interpreted and explained within this specific global and regional context. The accounts of Mahesh Regmi and Ludwig Stiller (including *The Rise of House of Gorkhas*) constitute a “local”, “insider” and Nepali perspective on these events and processes, but it is obvious that the shaping and reshaping of Nepal and its peoples was far more than a domestic event. Regardless, this shaping and reshaping resulted, among others, in the “silent cry” among the peasants of the Hills (Stiller 1976), as also in the creation of semi-capitalist agrarian conditions in the Tarai (Mishra 1987). It is likely that the encompassing Civil Code of 1854 (Hofer 1979) prepared and implemented during the early phase of the centralized Rana regime constituted an attempt to come to terms with, and regulate and reshape, the political, economic, ideological and normative transitions during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century within a broadly autocratic, statist, Hindu, modernizing, rationalizing (in the Weberian sense), East India Company (and British Empire)- friendly, and dependent-capitalism promoting set up.

Some of the economic, agrarian, social and international implications of the set up have been described in considerable detail by Regmi (among others, in Regmi 1978, 1984; also see Mishra 1987). There were other implications as well, particularly in the overtly political and apparently, in the class, caste, ethnic and gender arenas. Several cases of resistance against the state have been recorded, for example, the revolt led by Sripati Gurung in Lamjung and Gorkha and the apparently larger revolt led by Lakhan Thapa, both of which took place in the 1870s, the longer running movement of Yogmaya, which ended in a mass suicide in 1942 and the furor caused by a book on social and economic reforms by Subba Krishna Lal Adhikari (see Karki and Seddon 2003: 3-5). In addition, relatively oblique satires, more forthright criticisms as well as agendas for political reform and change were making their way into the public domain. More importantly perhaps, there were transitions of a more directly "political" nature. The short lived Prachanda Gorkha rebellion and the more genuinely political Praja Parishad movement constituted a social account and a political agenda, which underlined the contradictions between the "old and defunct" autocratic regime which was losing its popular legitimacy and a new, yet to become democratic state of Nepal. Then, of course, there were the Nepali Congress Party and the Nepal Communist Party, together with a number of others, whose accounts and agendas had touched the lives and imaginations of a sizable number of independent peasants, skilled workers, urban dwellers, merchants and a section of the disgruntled but politically potent aristocracy. In addition, the global and, in particular, the Indian anti-colonial struggle, the struggle of various emerging political parties and their political actions as well as the emerging discourses on the new, post-World War II world order and modernization and development gradually delegitimized the authority of existing states, economic structures and values and norms, and generated new and alternative imaginations, visions and practices. The implications of some of the social, cultural, political and ethnic and value-related transitions and the local implications of global processes between 1921 and 1951—including the material and normative changes brought about by the demobilized Gurkhas forces—both at the "grassroots" and national levels are sketched in an engaging manner by Pande (1982).

The details of the emergence and practice of applied sociology as such immediately following the 1951 transition has been sketched (see Thapa 1973 in particular). The interconnection between the emergence and practice of sociology and the larger emerging, developmentalist, modernist, international financial and policy assistance driven, statist and liberal democratic national and international agenda, however, appears to have been given a short-shrift in the search for details. What is clear enough is that in keeping with these agendas, and in keeping with the emerging concepts and categories in sociology, particularly those in the US, this early period of the practice of sociology in Nepal, like in many other parts of the developing world, found itself implicated and applied in a newly instituted "Village Development Program". The program aimed at training development extension agents in the areas of rural family and society and in community development. The training package changed and expanded considerably with the advent of the monarchy-led and undemocratic Panchayat political system and the expansion of the state apparatus. The Panchayat Training Center was charged with training the Panchayat political cadres as well as the senior staff of the bureaucracy and conducted courses on rural society, group dynamics, communication, local leadership and social survey and planning, and sought to justify the notion that the Panchayat political system was inherently development friendly (cf Thapa 1973). In addition, a number of trained sociologists and anthropologists were hired by the state in elaborating the ideological framework of the political system and elaborating a national scale educational program. Anthropologists (apparently including at least one reputed international anthropologist) were also enrolled to conceptualize and administer a remote area development program within which the clergy (Buddhist in this case) would play a significant role. It was no mere coincidence that the program was framed and instituted along the northern reaches of the country (which lay contiguous to the Tibetan Chinese border), at a time when the Cultural Revolution was on the ascendant in the People's Republic of China. Similarly, the resettlement program, under which landless and marginal landowners in the hills, as well as ex-military personnel, were resettled in selected locations along the southern Tarai plains, also availed the services of several anthropologists. These "strategic alliances" during this period between the state, on the one



hand, and sociologists and anthropologists, on the other, however, must not be overemphasized. The state was the largest employer of trained specialists and there were only a few trained Nepali sociologists and anthropologists so employed. Nonetheless, it does appear that the early interface between the state, on the one hand, and sociologists, on the other, was aligned with statist interest.

The nature of this early interface, the state's "imperative" to introduce "Nepal" to the wider, principally Western and aid giving world, the rapidly increasing demand for sociologists made by international funding agencies in Nepal-- some of whose senior staff had been trained in the discipline itself, globally expanding developmentalism and the demand for sociologists therein—primarily for ascertaining the "specificities" of the local, "rural" and "project site" structures and processes, crystallized together into an agenda for instituting a formal academic and degree granting program in the discipline. Ernest Gellner's 1970 report on the desirability and feasibility of a Department of Sociology in Tribhuvan University, which emphasized that "social research should be closely tied both to social development and to the exploration of the national culture", and Alexander Macdonald's enrolment as the first professor of sociology (For both events see Macdonald 1973) as well as Dor Bahadur Bista's appointment as the first professor of anthropology were responses to these agenda. While this venture had its share of problems (Dahal 1984: 39-40), it did serve to augment the legitimacy of the discipline in the eyes of the state, several international development agencies and Tribhuvan University.

These processes and initiatives culminated in the formation of a Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Tribhuvan University in 1981. The department initiated a Master's level program and, in collaboration with the Sociology Subject Committee at the University, took steps to initiate bachelor's level programs in several campuses and colleges affiliated with the university. The initial course offerings, thematic emphases and the mode of expansion of the discipline have been described and critiqued by a number of participants (among others, Dahal 1984, Bhattachan 1987, 1996, Bhandari 1990, Gurung 1990 Gurung 1996, Bista 1987, 1996, 1997, Bhattachan and Fisher 1994; also

refer to Table 1). The next section elaborates these descriptions and critiques.

Organizationally, the academic program on sociology and anthropology has expanded rapidly within Tribhuvan University and is making a slow headway in other universities. Currently, a Master's program is being conducted in seven campuses, in Kirtipur, Patan, Trichandra, Biratanagar, Pokhara and Baglung. In addition, the Purbanchal University also conducts one Master's level program in the discipline. It should be emphasized that in part because most students enter the Master's level only after 10 years of high school and four years of college, the academic level of the majority of the students is internationally comparable to the Bachelor's level. Some of the students, on the other hand, compare well with graduate students of Western universities. The duration of schooling at the school level, however, is gradually shifting and the 12-year norm may be universalized in the next 5-10 years.

The Bachelors' level in the discipline is conducted in 17 campuses within Trihuvan University. In addition, Purbanchal University conducts two bachelor's level program. Further, courses on sociology and anthropology is also offered within various other disciplines, for example, development studies, rural development, forestry, agriculture and animal sciences, medicine, environment, and computer sciences. It is also offered in some higher secondary schools as an elective subject.

The discipline attracts a larger number of students: In terms of popularity among the Master's level students, it is likely that only economics rates higher. Part of the reason for this popularity is the fact that, unlike several other disciplines, entry to sociology and anthropology remains partially open to students from other disciplines, including physical sciences and technology. The root of this attraction, however, lies in the rather widely shared notion that graduates in the discipline enjoy an easier access to jobs in the development and "project" industry, for example, those implemented by international development and donor agencies, INGOs and some development agencies within the government.

In recent years, on average, the number of annual entrants to the master's level at all the participating campus has exceeded 1,200. However, one-half of the entrants drop during the second year. The proportion that graduates within a period of two years—the official duration of the course—is very small and possibly does not exceed 10 to 20 percent of those who attend the final examination. All in all, a rough estimate indicates that only about 1,500 students may have completed their Master's degree during the last 20 years.

There is a high level of variation in the quality of teaching at the Master's and, presumably, Bachelor's level in different campuses. In particular, the majority of the senior faculty teaches at the Kirtipur campus. The Dean's Office, the University's academic committee on sociology and anthropology and the Central Department of Sociology—the three principal agencies charged with promoting the discipline at Tribhuvan University—have accomplished precious little to bridge the wide gap in the quality of teaching across campuses in the University. Illustratively, during the last five years, the Dean's Office has organized only one experience-sharing event among teachers from various graduates and undergraduate departments. The Academic Committee has not met even once during the last four years. In addition, the Committee, though charged with the responsibility of overseeing the overall academic performance within the discipline, has historically interpreted its mandate extremely narrowly and focused only on the preparation of the courses of study. The *Central Department*, qualified as such because of the academically supervisory role it is expected to carry out in relation to other sister departments of sociology and anthropology within the University, has not pursued this mandate in a sustained manner.

The design of the syllabi at the Master's level remains uneven. Some of the courses are internationally competitive while a few others leave much to be desired. While the syllabi must remain sensitive to the job prospects of graduates, there are indications that job prospects are weighing much more heavily on the syllabi and the basics of the discipline are beginning to receive a short shrift. Bureaucratic bottlenecks, the centralized examination system, in particular, as well as the lack of initiative and unprofessional resistance among teachers often discourages attempts to revise the syllabi regularly.

Access to literature for both students and teachers remains extremely restricted. This, in part, is attributable to the facts that very few good texts have been prepared locally and international publications are generally highly expensive. Most of the departments do not have a library of their own. Even the Central Library of Tribhuvan University, which is located in Kathmandu, is perennially starved of funds and a large proportion of the meager collection of journals is availed through often irregular and short-term donations. Principally because of financial reasons, it cannot procure new high quality books, either. However, a couple of departments have initiated a system of generating funds from the students' body and utilizing the funds to procure texts and reference materials. The low level of competence of the majority of the students as well as many teachers in the English language also inhibits their access to high quality international publications in English.

The incentives given to university teachers, though broadly compatible with the incentives given to public officials, generally fails to attract new high quality teachers, particularly those with Ph.Ds and those who have graduated from reputed universities outside Nepal. Thus, many such graduates prefer to work for national and international non-governmental agencies and international development agencies which are much more paying. The criteria for the promotion of teachers through the academic hierarchy, while much more systemized within the last decade, nonetheless continue to prize seniority rather than research output and the quality of teaching. The centralized hiring and promotion mechanisms at Tribunal University often have foregrounded non-academic criteria and opted for semi-closed rather than open evaluations and contests. Such mechanisms, in addition, have encouraged the inclusion of non-professionals in organs charged with hiring and promotion.

The most significant and long-term problem that plagues teaching and learning at Tribhuvan University and the one that it shares with many other universities in the underdeveloped as well as some developed countries is the pervading climate of uncritical and unreflexive "intellectual" work. The severe lack of critical and reflexive outlooks bears serious negative consequences in the long run, among others, on the development of the social sciences and sociology and anthropology. The texts, generally, are both taught and learned not as platforms for

playful and creative thinking, as windows that facilitate a view of the wider world and as instruments that allow intimate dialogue with the self and society, but as something which constitutes the last word on the subject and as one which must be passively received. Many students and some teachers read but not engage with books. To a certain extent, this is understandable as well. The fact that many of texts and references they are required to read often do not address key attributes or problems of the society they live in does feed disengagement. In addition, many of the teachers fail to link, whether by way of illustration, comparison or critique, the text with the world the students inhabit. Such texts, in such a context, often acquire a fictive character. The apparently universal text, because it does not encompass the local or gives it a short shrift, fails to acquire local authenticity and, as a result, does not excite the imagination of the students. An unperceptive and uncritical mentor who fails to read the implicit meaning of the apparently universal text for local life and society, in turn, does not make the task of engagement any easier.

### Review of State of Sociology

For a discipline that has a relatively short history, the number of state-of-sociology-and-social-anthropology-in-Nepal reviews has been rather astounding. These writings, expectedly, vary widely in quality with respect to quality of insight offered on these questions. While some of these writings are responses to periodic review events organized by Tribhuvan University, many such writings do represent deep personal concerns with what sociology is and is not doing, where it is headed and what it can and should do. These reviews also touch upon some of the key debates surrounding social sciences in general and sociology and anthropology in particular (in Nepal). I shall utilize this section both to summarize the reviews and to explore some of the key epistemological and substantive debates on the sociology and anthropology of Nepal

A couple of caveats are in order to put this review of reviews in context. First, because these reviews have been prepared at different periods of the evolution of sociology in Nepal, the arguments raised have to be read with reference to the period of publication of the assessment. Some of the assessments prioritize teaching, some focus on research and many others cover both the domains. Some even implicate the university,

the government and so forth. While many of the reviewers are Nepali nationals, some are international academics. Further, while at least half of the reviewers were at relatively an early stage of their academic career at the time they prepared the review, the rest were in their mid-career or had had a long and rather distinguished career behind them. Finally, some of the reviewers have assessed the discipline more than once and at different stages of their career. This paper, however, collapses such reviews and does not attempt to investigate possible changes in such assessment.

**Table 1: Key Arguments in Reviews of the State of Sociology and Social Anthropology**

Author, Year	Key Arguments
Gellner 1970*	Romanticism (exploration) and midwifery (social development) complementary, particularly in Nepal where past is very much present
McDonald 1973	At this early stage, should focus on training of researchers, studies of change; utility of research an important consideration; high significance of national academic contexts for all, including international researchers; romantic midwifery possible; should shun building an intellectual enclave and should connect with the state as well as international organizations; multi-disciplinary studies required
Mishra 1980, 1984**	Should center on the linkage between concrete everyday experiences and structural, dialectical and critical approach; recognizing and transcending the politics of sponsored research; going beyond the empirical and linking it with theoretical categories; dismantling barriers among the social sciences; locating the micro within the macro context; connecting the syllabi to local experiences
Thapa 1973	Discipline should serve the needs of society and the social problems; should assess the impact or major national political initiatives on social organization

Dahal 1993	Inquiry into theoretically informed ethnography, national building, migration, poverty important; micro-level studies vital; infrastructural problems hinder pedagogy; reservations on a single department of sociology and anthropology; the anthropology of the Himalayan region characterized by undue emphasis on the micro; neglect of interaction with outside; undue emphasis on search for "natives" and romantic locale	Bista D. 1987, 1996***, 1997	Should attend to literature published in the Nepali language; should emphasize needs of the country, national identity, integrative processes and modernization rather than on nostalgia; bland ethnography not useful; dealing with real political, economic and social issues; short-staying international researchers cannot comprehend historical context; purposeful institutions key to disciplinary development; not all sponsored research sides with the "overdog"; important to link social/ideological features and development
Gurung, G. 1997	While relative lack of theory consciousness should concern us, we are in an early stage of disciplinary evolution, and some progress has been made in this direction; financial problems hurting quality of teaching	Bista .K. 1973	High significance of applied anthropology; "salvage anthropology" important but "costly"; accounts by transient international anthropologists sometimes divisive; efforts required to reduce barrier posed by the English language
Bhattachan 1987, 1997	Disciplinary progress much too slow; no original theoretical contribution even after five decades; preoccupied with "filling in" of details; should focus on local experiences, synthesizing Western and the indigenous; equality and social justice should become key themes; students should have ample opportunity for field research; many more electives required; departmental autonomy and higher financial incentives to teachers required; regular review of department and teachers necessary; split the department into two, i.e. sociology and anthropology	Berremman 1994	Should contribute to public education principally through comparative, holistic and contextual studies and by giving voice to the oppressed; approves Ivan Illich's call for "counter-research on alternatives to prepackaged solutions" as well as C. Wright Mills's call for social science to practice the politics of truth
Rai 1971, 1984	International researchers should not be required to respond to national imperatives, although they should be sensitive to them; "salvage anthropology" required; language barrier should and can be reduced; essence of anthropology must be honored by guarding against intrusion of other social sciences as well as "pseudo anthropology"	Fisher 1987	"Romanticism" and development "often vacuous"; extent of "reverse romanticism" high and problematic; priority to large-scale and long-range perspective and critical vision of the big picture much more important than myopic and small-scale field studies; priority to universal problems and timeless issues
Devkota 1984, 2001	Romanticism and "otherness", not action-orientedness, remain predominant and promote intellectual colonialism; coordination required between teaching departments and research centers; popular resistance to state and modernization and poverty and environmental deterioration should become key areas of investigation	Bhattachan and Fisher 1994	Theorizing remains weak; physical, financial and organizational hurdles hindering disciplinary growth; sponsored research inhibiting the emergence of focal themes within the discipline
		Mikesell 1993	Elaborating concrete conditions that shape life in Nepal and that are very different from those in the West; critiquing "development" that embodies imperialism and giving voice to the minorities important

Hachhethu 2002**	Lack of serious academic work by sociologists and anthropologists because of the lure of consultancy; financial incentives much higher in international agencies, INGOs, NGOs, private research centers and colleges; both students and teachers in the social sciences as a whole at Tribhuvan University (TU) regard their work in the institution as less than a full time job; erosion of personal honesty and integrity among both teachers and students; TU mismanaged and underfunded
Gurung, 1990	Inadequate physical infrastructure and educational materials constrain both teaching and research; discipline can serve the policy maker and the people as a social and cultural interpreter; this, in turn, requires political-economic and historical familiarity; need to develop local theory and methods
Bhandari 1990	Unattractive academic and financial incentives for teachers; texts not available in the Nepali language; Nepali language should become the medium of instruction in classrooms; expansion of career opportunities for students needs emphasis; emphasis required on policy component in teaching and research
Cameron 1994****	Shifting international fashions in development theory have rendered the image of Nepal fuzzy and shifting; this journey has been one of sound and fury as well as one in which the outsiders have been predominant; interdisciplinary efforts should be emphasized; priority to the inquiry of the global dimension that shows how interests of external agencies condition options available for internal choice; priority should be given to issues of power and accountability

\*In Macdonald, 1973; \*\* Reviews social sciences in general; \*\*\* In James Fisher 1996; \*\*\*\* Reviews the theory and practice of development in Nepal, not on sociology

A number of running themes emerge in these reviews of the state of sociology in Nepal. The theme of romanticism (which is often defined as

a preoccupation with and glamorization of the past as well as the currently existing) versus midwifery (often defined as a preoccupation with the future) is clearly implicated in these reviews. It has been alleged, mostly although not exclusively, by Nepali academics, that romanticism is strongly implicated in the very choice of Nepal—and some specific regions and locations within it, selection of themes as well as modes of thinking and writing of mostly, although not exclusively, by international academics. It has been argued by many that this romanticism detracts from the contribution the discipline could make to the “dispassionate” understanding, as also to public policy formulation and implementation and development. The scent of applied science and immediately socially useful work is strong here, as is the sense of actively and directly intervening, doing and participating. Contemplation, analysis and remaining at a distance from the center of activity, that is, activities which are elaborated through the power of the state, international agencies, international non-governmental organizations and, generically, by development, is not prized enough here. (It must be said that voluntary engagement by Nepali academics also remains high within the domain of the rather politically unglamorous and financially non-paying civil society initiatives.) This contrast between the Nepali and international academics, however, must not be overdrawn. Many academics—both Nepali and international—have drawn attention to the significance of the large-scale and long run perspective that are theoretically and historically informed. Fisher (1987) reminds us that “reverse romanticism” arising out of the faith bestowed on the state, the international financial institutions and on the agenda of modernization can become counterproductive as well.

As Fisher notes, it is difficult to define romanticism (within the context of sociological inquiry); the allegation of romanticism as applied to particular inquiry is often vacuous. Romanticism is certainly not a matter of the physical or cultural location of the “field” or of subject matter or theme of inquiry. Nor is it a matter of a particular technique of generating data and information. It may perhaps be defined as a feature of an entire mode of inquiry that contributes to mystification rather than to clarification. Romanticism and mystification is inherent in the modes of inquiry that are non-problematizing, ahistorical, and non-comparative. Such attributes are also inherent in the modes of inquiry that do not

explore the encompassing context within which the concrete is located and that do not seek to resolve the interface between the whole and the part as well as the reconfiguration of the interface. Within the academia, the invocation of “disciplinary boundaries” often serves to hide the connectedness and wholeness of social life, particularly in relation to the larger political and economic conditions and processes. Romanticism and mystification is inherent in modes of inquiry that do not allow full and authentic expression of the “local”. Romanticism and mystification is also implicated in attempts that unproblematically seek to slot the local into a predetermined substantive and theoretical conceptual framework.

The nationalist agenda is very strong in the writings of many Nepali academics. While this is evident from the preceding paragraph, the wide and frequent invocation of the nationalist—and sometimes ethnic, regional, etc., as also of the notion of “Nepal School of Anthropology”—is a telling expression of the sentiment. The call for indigeneity within the discipline and the emphasis on the investigation of the processes of national identity and integration also bear this out. On the other hand, John Cameron’s (1994) warnings against the ill-consequences of changing international academic fads on the image of Nepal and the practice of development there does underpin the problematic nature of the external and universalistic gaze. (This criticism would, of course, apply to other countries as well.)

The 1950-1980 period was one of nationalist renaissance in Nepal (also see Onta 1996). In particular, this was the period when Nepal was partially unshackled in a number of domains—not least within the domain of education and school curricula, from India. Illustratively, school texts on the history and geography of Nepal were prepared and used in the school curricula, for the first time, during the late 1950s. Beginning the early 70s, a new uniform and nationalistic school curriculum was introduced in the much-expanded school system. This was also a period when the non-South Asian and non-Chinese world started to intrude, and impact directly on, the lives of the majority of Nepalis. (This does not, however, imply that Nepal was “closed” prior to this period, unlike what many historians and politicians have asserted and as conventional wisdom incessantly repeats (cf Mishra 1987.) The current generation of sociologists was nurtured during this period. The

nationalist agenda within sociology and anthropology, however, should not be equated with the search for indigeneity within the discipline. This search, in part, goes beyond the notion of nationalism and constitutes a resistance against the universalistic claims of (primarily Western) social science and sociology and anthropology. It also constitutes a call for providing full and authentic respect to the local, for not the privileging current Western experiences and frames of thought and for an authentic interfacing between the particular and the general. It is a voice of protest against the political and economic hierarchization within the world system. Similar voices have been heard for nearly five decades from academics in the underdeveloped countries. More recent voices along this line have been summarized in Moore (1996; in particular see the introductory essay by Moore and by Norman Long on globalization and localization).

In consonance with the emphasis on nationalism, modernism and developmentalism and the resistance against romanticism, ethnography as the dominant mode of doing sociology and social anthropology has been strongly questioned both by Nepali and international sociologists. This mode of practice has been strongly questioned on the grounds of authenticity (cf. Furer-Haimendorf vs. Ortner in Ortner (1973), Manzano’s (1992) *mea culpa* on “impression management” among the Thaklis, Kawakita Jiro’s (1974) retraction of his initial characterization of Marphali women). It has also been questioned on the grounds of adequacy of explanation, for example, Ortner’s (1989) criticism of spatially and temporally shackled ethnography and Dahal’s (1983) criticism of Lionel Caplan in relation to Hindu dominance over ethnic groups (Caplan 1970). It need not be overemphasized that the dominant mode of doing ethnography was, and to a certain extent remains, “shackled”. One reason for such shackling is/was methodological: Participant observation, in practice, generally did not allow for historical and/or an explicitly cross-cultural vision. If historical vision remained consistently deemphasized in ethnography, cross-cultural perspective was generally defined as falling within the domain of the Ph. D. supervisors and other high ranking “theorists”, rather than “field level” and Ph. D.-seeking anthropologists. Such perspectives were often regarded as negating the definition of a culturally and/or physically defined field, regardless of the fact that the negation mortally violated

holism, the time honored principle of anthropological investigation. The dominant mode of doing ethnography not only encouraged discrete studies, but also legitimized the invalid notion that societies and cultures investigated were unconnected with wider expanses of time, space, cultures and politics and economies. For this artificial “whole” to stand on its own, it had to be set apart, often invidiously, from macro level and wider as well as immediately neighboring societies largely by means of “professional” fiat, rather than by means of historical criteria. It is for these reasons that ethnographers have been charged not only by the state, the nationalists and the culturally dominant, but also by trained sociologists and anthropologists with encouraging divisiveness. Thus also the emphasis in the preceding reviews that “integrative” structures, conditions and processes should legitimately be regarded as key themes of anthropological inquiry.

On the other hand, the nationalist and culturally dominant strain, as noted, remains strong among Nepali sociologists and anthropologists. One implication of this character is obvious from the preceding review. Few Nepali academics have acknowledged that resistance, conflict, struggle and emancipation—all somewhat divisive themes—ought to become a key site of sociological inquiry. Indeed, the emphasis on the developmentalist, nationalist, statist, and modernist agenda has been quite strong. The preceding review, in consequence, generally fails to acknowledge that social criticism has a legitimate place within the discipline. While many international academics have, somewhat understandably, shied away from these themes, except as applied to the local context, some others have insightfully explored them (for example, Caplan 1972, Gaige 1975, Blaikie, Cameron and Seddon 1980, Mikesell 1999). Though some Nepali academics have also highlighted such themes (for example, Mishra 1987, Bista 1992), most analyses by Nepali academics have either sought to downplay conflict and resistance or to find ways to “manage” it. Rather plentiful but discrete inquiries on “resource management”, for example those related to particular forest tracts, drinking water systems, are examples. No surprise then that a few sociologists and anthropologists have provided substantive accounts of either the 1990 transition or the Maoist insurgency (see Bhattachan 1993, Karki and Seddon 2003, however). This must be regarded as a serious failure. The use of arms in the “Maoist struggle” has certainly inhibited

field-based studies—the staple of many within the discipline. So has the government’s security perception, particularly during periodic bouts of “national emergency”, which views access to, storing and utilization of Maoist literature as an act of offense against the state. (Access to Maoist Party literature remains difficult in any case.) And, during this period of armed struggle between the Maoists and the state, academics as well as others, to a large extent justifiably, have remained worried and fearful on account of the “Marxist” and “Maoist” books on their shelves. Further, there is a pervading sense of insecurity among academics, journalists and many others that specific conclusions they reach and publish may invite reprisal from the government security forces or the Maoists. The ensuing sense of insecurity is a powerful inhibitor of academic engagement with the ongoing “Maoist” struggle. Nonetheless, these inhibitors cannot justify the paucity of inquiry into the struggle. Part of this failure, which is both personal and professional—at least as far as Nepali academics are concerned, must be attributed to old disciplinary emphases on ethnography, isolated ritual performances, “integrative” features, modernity and the newer disciplinary as well as local emphases on development, resource management, and the routine of project-level feasibility and evaluation studies.

Allied to this is paucity of inquiries on large-scale and long-range issues (cf. Fisher 1987) and the micro-macro interface. Despite the legitimate criticism of discrete micro studies by several academics cited in Table 1, few of the articles in *Contributions to Nepalese Studies* (henceforth *Contributions*), the premier sociological/anthropological journal published in Nepal and one that has been in operation for three decades, explore such themes. The political-economic perspective, which arguably lends itself much more readily to such themes, has remained relatively neglected. This neglect, among others, is tied to the academics and politics of the “field”, empiricism, anthropological holism, the agenda of spatially and sectorally delimited development, the nature of sponsored research and the nature of the “development project” within the ambit of which many micro-studies are carried out. I will come to the wider implications of sponsored research later.

One area, in which resistance, conflict and struggle have been rather widely studied, particularly in recent years, is the area of ethnicity. While

ethnicity was often implicated—to varying extents—in most ethnographic studies, the politics of ethnicity, ethnic conflict and the interface between ethnicity and nationalism has recently become a substantively salient area of inquiry. The 1990 restoration of democracy has furnished a potent site for organized political action on an ethnic basis and for inquiries into ethnic identity, discrimination and exclusion. The implications of emerging notions of ethnicity and ethnic political action on the nature of the Nepali state, Nepali nationalism and social justice and democracy are being widely discussed as well.

This ethnic debate has taken two principal forms. The first visualizes ethnicity as historically and socially constructed and contingent. Ethnicity, in this view, is constructed and sharpened and blunted within the context of specific political, economic and cultural structures and processes. The second form, which is essentialist in nature, in turn, posits that ethnicity is a primordial attribute of a group of people—an attribute (or set of attributes) that always was and, by extension, will always be, in existence.

The non-essentialist position has led to a rich debate on ethnicity, ethnic conflict and nationalism. While Ortner (1989), Holmberg (1989) and a few others laid the ground, the 1997 volume edited by Gellner, Pfaff-Czarnecka and Whelpton elaborates this position in great detail and with respect to the state and its evolution, various caste and ethnic groups and the emerging cultures and their career. The voices represented in the volume are diverse and amply demonstrate that ethnicity is historically constructed through specific political, economic and cultural structures and processes (see, in particular, the contribution by Pfaff-Czarnecka). The contributors to the volume also argue that because ethnicity is not an ahistorical construct, it is necessary to problematize and interrogate it.

As Gellner emphasizes in his introduction, the “true” essentialist position, which smacks of the days of “headhunters” and barbarians and races and tribes, has a few adherents now (For an overview and critique of the notion of tribe, see Dahal 1981, Caplan 1990). The legitimacy of the essentialist position has also been eroded by expanding intercultural interaction, movements of population and labor, the modernist, developmentalist and liberal democratic nature of many states, and the galloping commodity and labor exchange regime under capitalism and imperialism,

which is sometimes subsumed under the notion of globalization. Further, the essentialist position often defeats itself as many of those who take such a position in relation to the past and the present, nonetheless, argue that future ethnic political consciousness and practice (that is, ethnicity) will undergo a transition to the extent that certain specific contradictions find a resolution.

Regardless, “less pure” and softer versions of the essentialist position remain in vogue among ethnic political activists and politically committed academics (for example, National Ad hoc Committee for International Decade for the World’s Indigenous Peoples, Nepal, 1994, Bhattachan 1995). These visions freeze history, create unidimensional “ethnics”, eschew diversity and invidious political interests within and between ethnic groups, force a disconnect with encompassing political and economic issues and, in addition, seek to delink such issues from the question of ethnic identity. These visions, nonetheless, point out accumulating contradictions in a politically powerful manner and underscore the continuing significance of participatory and equity-based cultural and political negotiations.

Even as ethnography and ethnic studies have been in full bloom for several decades, the extreme lack of attention on the Dalits by sociologists remains both curious and sad (see Caplan 1972, however). This inattention must be regarded as a serious flaw within the sociology of Nepal. Indeed, the omnipresent and powerful caste system as a whole has received far less attention than ethnicity and several other themes. The Gellner, Pfaff-Czarnecka and Whelpton volume is no exception, except for a relatively peripheral treatment of the caste system among the Newars by Gellner. The politically and culturally excluded have also been left out of the intellectual discourse by Nepali academics. As far as international academics are concerned, could it be that those interested in the caste system and the Dalits find neighboring India more interesting instead?

The “reverse romanticism” with developmentalism and modernity—and with state and international development and donor agencies as well as INGOs and NGOs who remain at the forefront of these agendas—within sociology and anthropology in Nepal as noted by Fisher, remains pronounced. The preoccupation with feasibility and impact studies



resource (for example, forest, irrigation, drinking water) management, etc., remains notably intense. The participation of sociologists and anthropologists, both national and international, takes place within the frame of a project and by its very nature is generally limited to “field” level information generation, analysis of data and preparation of report. The reports generally do not contextualize the project and the field within a larger historical, spatial and theoretical-conceptual frame. Most such reports are not publicly and intellectually scrutinized and they thus do not contribute to public, intellectual and disciplinary debate. Project literature, not least because they are zealously guarded from public scrutiny, very often does not even contribute to the practice of national and international development debate and the larger agenda that cut across different sectors, different development agencies and different levels of government.

One key, although not the only, reason for the relatively high level of participation of sociologists in such “sponsored” research is the high level of distortion in the structure of wage incentives. The incentives to engage in sponsored research are several times more than the incentives to teach at the university (It is also the case, on the other hand, there is a sharp and just about impenetrable barrier in incentives for the national and international researchers). In addition, many international development agencies contract work out to individuals rather than institutions. Most academic institutions, on the other hand, are organizationally, although not academically, unequipped to organize research programs and to collaborate with the government and international development agencies to that end.

The engagement with sponsored research, however, has not all been negative for the evolution of the discipline. It has contributed to the interfacing of the disciplinary texts—which, to a substantial extent are repositories of specific Western experiences—with local structures and lives. This interfacing has helped national academics to engage in a comparative reading of the texts as against national and local structures and lives. It has made available a platform for the generation of comparative information and insight. This platform can serve as a creativity-promoting site, particularly within a setting within which the authority of the text has tended to remain unquestioned and sacrosanct.

In addition, to the extent that the line between applied and basic research is permeable, sponsored applied research can provide valuable input to more basic disciplinary research.

### Emphases in Sociology in Nepal

The evolution of the discipline in Nepal can also be characterized and assessed through a review of the outlets for sociological and anthropological writings. Such writings, however, remain scattered in several academic and semi-academic journals, magazines and newspapers. The significance of semi-academic writings by sociologists and anthropologists, while lying along the borders of the discipline, should not be underrated. It serves not only as an aid to public education but also to the training of aspiring and “junior” sociologists. These outlets, which are not the exclusive privilege of the trained academics, provide valuable space to those who wish to write in the Nepali or other vernacular languages and have helped several non-sociologists and non-anthropologists make valuable contributions to the discipline (See Rai 1984, however).

At present, several journals cater to the writings of sociologists and anthropologists *Contributions* (1973-), which is published by the Center for Nepal and Asian Studies, of course, has remained the principal outlet for the last three decades. *The Occasional Papers in Sociology and Anthropology* published by the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Tribhuvan University, Kirtipur Campus since 1987, is an additional outlet. By 2001, seven volumes of the journal have come out. *Studies in Nepali History and Society*, published by Center for Social Research and Development since 1996, *Kailash*, the publication of which has recently become irregular, and the journal of Nepal Research Center are other significant outlets. In addition, there are several other academic and semi-academic journals and magazines, published in the English and Nepali language, such as *Pragya*, *Mulyankan*, *Himal*, *Himal South Asia*, *Asmita*, *Rolamba*. In addition, during the last decade, several semi-academic and news magazine publications have focused on issues related to gender ethnicity and ethnic groups, Dalithood and Dalits as well as specific regions of the country. Such publications have started the polyvocal genre within social thinking and writing and are beginning to

make to make their presence felt within public policy institution. Further, several weeklies and dailies occasionally publish articles by sociologists and anthropologists.

This review will focus on the *Contributions* and provide quantitative information on some aspects of the nature and “productivity” of Nepali and international sociologists and anthropologists describe the theme of the articles and assess decadal trends with respect to productivity and themes. In addition, the articles will also be categorized in terms of their level of “theory consciousness”. Further, the themes covered in *Occasional Papers* will also be described. It must be emphasized that this description and assessment is of a preliminary and quantitative nature.

**Table 2. Themes Covered by Articles in *Contributions***

Theme/Period/Number of Articles	1973-1980	1981-1990	1991-2001	Total
Ethnography, ethnicity, nationalism, identity	17	13	7	37
Resource management, population, ecosystem	5	4	2	11
State, economy, market, livelihood	4	11	2	17
Politics, resistance, conflict, struggle, inequality	2	0	3	5
Gender, caste, kinship	3	7	2	12
Ideology, knowledge, sociology, anthropology	2	1	1	4
Health, education, environment, development	1	8	4	13
Social and cultural change	3	2	1	6
Religion, rituals, shamanism	11	0	6	17

Ethnography, livelihood, rituals and shamanism and faith healing are the most favored genre within *Contributions*. Many of the ethnographic articles are also based on very short-term and one-shot visits to particular “field” sites and, partly as a consequence, provide a simple descriptive account of a specific aspect of an ethnic group’s cultural life, for example, discrete ritual performance, shamanism, trans-humance, dimensions of livelihood, demographic attributes. Often the articles implicitly evoke a sense of material poverty, physical and social isolation and rather stark boundedness among the ethnic group described. The descriptive focus, generally, is on relatively unusual “ethnic

attributes” and the descriptive mood is often somber. In turn, there is little history, little “wholeness”, little explicit cross-cultural comparison and little emphasis on locating the subjects within larger, that is, regional, national, international or more encompassing political, economic and cultural patterns and processes. These features indicate that there is more than a whiff of anthropological romanticism here, even as such ethnographic efforts have opened our eyes to the diverse nature of social structure and culture, provided a base for deeper and wider investigations and furnished perspectives and information, which are potentially useful for preliminary ethnographic mappings.

On the other hand, sociological and anthropological writings, as reflected in *Contributions* have seriously deemphasized themes related to politics, ideology, resistance, inequality, contradiction and change—themes which have been starkly highlighted and acquired a particular urgency during the current era of “Maoist conflict”. Romanticism, “salvage anthropology” functionalism, developmentalism, scientificity, political neutrality, boundedness and the failure to look at the larger picture, despite their value, have performed a potent disservice to the sociological and anthropological enterprise. Studies of these genres, on the other hand, do serve to highlight the significance of sociological and anthropological studies which focus on the larger picture and which seek to interconnect different sections of the larger picture. They also highlight the significance of the historically informed studies that do not fetishize “culture”, but locate it alongside and within a specific and changing political economic structure and which give sufficient space to political processes and to the genesis and consequences of social contradiction.

Approximately 30 percent of the articles published in *Contributions* substantively locate themselves within, or seek to interrogate, relatively established conceptual-theoretical frameworks and contribute to the interpretation, buttressing or refutation, of the relatively established schools of thought or to the development of a more or less novel frame. The scope and significance of such articles is also broader than their immediate empirical engagement. One-half of the articles, even as they do locate themselves within a relatively established conceptual-theoretical framework, do so in a peripheral manner. Such articles do not

bring themselves to bear on such frameworks. About one-fifth of the articles remain at the level of “lay description”. The academic significance of the later two categories of articles, the last category in particular, necessarily remains low.

**Table 3: Level of Theoretical Consciousness” in Articles in *Contributions***

Period	Articles by sociologists and anthropologists	Articles that substantively implicate a theoretical framework	Articles that marginally implicate a theoretical framework	Articles that remain at the level of lay description
1973-1980	48	15	21	12
1981-1990	47	14	24	9
1991-2001	33	9	20	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>25</b>

Trends indicate that the proportion of articles, which substantively implicate specific conceptual-theoretical frameworks while setting up and/or “solving” a research problem, has remained nearly constant through three decades of publication of *Contributions*. On the other hand, there has been a discernible rise in the proportion of articles that peripherally invoke a conceptual- theoretical framework. Whether this represents a step toward a more intense and explicit recognition of the significance of conceptual-theoretical and comparative analysis in the future remains to be seen.

**Table 4. Productivity of Sociologists and Anthropologists in *Contributions***

Period	Issues published	Articles published	Articles by sociologists/ anthropologists	Articles by Nepali authors	Articles by international authors
1973-1980	14	96	48	7	41
1981-1990	22	133	47	15	32
1991-2001	23	180	32	11	21
<b>Total</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>409</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>94</b>

This decadal comparison of *Contributions* shows several notable features. First, sociologists and anthropologists contributed one-half of all the articles published during the 70s (columns 3 and 4). During the 80s, the number of articles authored by sociologists and anthropologists declined substantially in terms of proportion. Ditto in the 90s, both in terms of number and proportion. Sociologists and anthropologists contributed only about one-fifth of all articles published during the 90s. This quantitative reduction, however, also has to be viewed against the “expanding inclusiveness” of editorial policy as well as the overall growth of social science academic writing in Nepal. The initial domain of *Contributions* lay along the disciplines of history, linguistics and anthropology and sociology. The growth of academia and research outputs in other field of social sciences for example, economics, development, political science, human geography, etc., obliged the editors of *Contributions* to cater to articles in these fields as well. While the consequent “expanding inclusiveness” of *Contributions* does in part explain the proportional reduction in the number of articles authored by sociologists and anthropologist, it fails to explain the reduction in terms of absolute number evidenced during the 90s. This reduction is much more troubling than it appears to be in as much as the number of sociologists and anthropologists, including those employed at Tribhuvan—and to a much smaller extent other—universities grew rapidly during this very period. In addition, Tribhuvan University, which remains the principal institutional locus of academic sociology and anthropology, had increased the premium on the publication of articles as a basis for promotion within the academic hierarchy. While it is not possible here to exhaustively scan the reasons underlying the reduction in the number of articles published by sociologists and anthropologists in the journal, it can be safely said that the opening of other avenues of publication as mentioned earlier and engagement in the fast growing sponsored “project” research might have accounted for the reduction.

Second, during all the three periods, Nepali sociologists and anthropologists published fewer articles in the *Contributions* compared to international sociologists and anthropologists. Some progress, however, has been discernible on this front: While Nepali authors contributed only one-seventh of all articles—seven in all—published in the journal during the 70s, the proportion rose to one-third during the

latter two decades. Once again, however, the “expansion” of the disciplines of sociology in Nepal during the 80s and, particularly, the 90s is hardly substantiated by the record of publication in *Contributions*. The record, on the other hand, does show that the presence of international authors continued to remain strong within sociology and anthropology in Nepal.

**Table 5. Themes Covered by Articles in *Occasional Papers* (1987-2001)**

Theme	Number of Articles
Ethnography, ethnicity, nationalism, identity	5
Resource management, population, ecosystem	9
State, economy, market, livelihood	6
Politics, resistance, conflict, struggle, inequality	1
Gender, caste, kinship	5
Ideology, knowledge, sociology, anthropology	7
Health, education, environment, development	14
Social and cultural change	1
Religion, rituals, shamanism	2
Other	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>54</b>

As noted, one of the possible reasons for the low presence of Nepali authors in *Contributions* is the opening of alternative avenues of publication in sociology and anthropology. *Occasional Papers*, which was first published by the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Tribhuvan University, Kirtipur campus, in 1987, is one such avenue. Till 2001, seven issues of *Occasional Papers* have been published. Most of the articles have been in the Occasional Papers have been authored by members of the faculty in the Kirtipur campus.

The focus of *Occasional Papers* is much more explicitly “developmental” compared to *Contributions*. A large proportion of the articles on education, environment, resource management, population, ecosystem, livelihood, etc., in the journal falls within the “development” genre. On the other hand, and like *Contributions*, there are few writings

on politics, ideology, resistance, struggle, inequality. Unlike *Contributions*, on the other hand, it has fewer writings on ethnography, rituals, caste, kinship, gender, shamanism, etc., the traditional core of sociology and anthropology. During the early years, somewhat expectedly, and as evidenced by the information provided in Table 1, the journal was also preoccupied with “appropriate sociology and anthropology” and the preparation of a programmatic agenda for pushing the discipline towards greater “appropriateness”.

### Acknowledgements

I would like to express appreciation to the Institute for Social and Economic Transition, Kathmandu, for supporting me in the preparation of the article.

### ENDNOTES

1. This paper was originally published in CONTRIBUTIONS TO NEPALESE STUDIES Volume.32.No.1, January, 2005 and it has been reprinted here in this volume with the kind permission of Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, Nepal.
2. Whether sociology is distinct, relatively recent and modern European product or whether the discipline—or a recognizable precursor of it—can be traced to other specific spatial and historical setting(s) has, surprisingly, remained a nearly unexplored issue within sociology. To the extent that historical and social thinking and writing is rooted in social struggle and transformation, one could certainly have expected the sociological genre to have marked its presence during the formation and dismemberment of the Greco-Roman empires and civilizations, the opening of the Euro-American and Eurasian trade routes, the decimation of the American-Indian peoples and cultures and the rapid ascendance of the European civilization in the Americas during the 16th to 20th centuries, the slave trade in and across Africa, the formation of North Africa and Arabic urban regions, the ups and downs of the Sinic and Japanese civilizations, the initial institutionalization of the extremely oppressive and deeply divisive caste in India as well as the ferments created during the rise of all great religions and various larger scale and long-winded religious, sectarian, ethnic and national wars and their aftermath. The overall economic, political and cultural significance of these struggles and transition may very well have been relatively narrower, shallower and slower and, therefore, more contained than those produced by

capitalism and imperialism. Nonetheless, sociology has remained poorer because of the virtual absence of explorations, which seek to link these and other large-scale struggles and transitions on the one hand and modes and substances of social imagination and investigation on the other.

I am grateful to Suresh Dhakal for helping me with information provided in the tables in this section.

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