

BOOK REVIEW

Title: Kinship Studies in Nepali Anthropology.

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This edited volume consists of thirteen different articles on various aspects of kinship studies in Nepali society and an elaborative by Professor Ram B. Chhetri. It comes as a beginning in Nepali anthropological publications on a particular theme, also being the first effort on kinship studies by Nepali native anthropologists. It comprises of articles on different facets of cultural life of Bahun-Chhetri, Dhimal, Limbu, Loba, Gurung, Tamang, Musahar, Santhal, Magar, and Tharu, linked with kinship. The diversity extends also in terms of theoretical perspectives employed to analyze ethnographic data by respective authors, who are themselves from various caste/ethnic background.

The book commences with the sharp and comprehensive preface from Professor Ram B. Chhetri who highlights on the cultural nature of kinship with an illustrative story borrowed from International New York Times (2015). His article on Loba people from Mustang also asserts this cultural notion. Chhetri regards the then time joint operation of anthropology with sociology in a single Department, before having independent anthropology department in 2016, as responsible for hindering specialization in Anthropology at T. U. and the lack of exclusive publications on kinship (and other themes pertinent in anthropology) as part of that reality. He states that some emerging socio-cultural realities, such as widow marriage, declining endogamy, increasing divorce, and adoption of Nepali kids by foreigners and their return to bio-parents of Nepali society may motivate to have new directions in kinship studies in the days to come.

Professor Laya Uprety examines the history of kinship studies in Nepali Anthropology and presents overview of the studies from 1950s

onwards and critiques them in the global context of trends and suggests a few proposals for future. He portrays the analysis of contributions made mainly by *Videshi* (foreigner) anthropologists and few of their Nepali counterparts. He clearly points out that some of these scholars had explicitly dealt on kinship and many others had touched this issue as an indispensable part of their anthropological production. Professor Uprety himself led the initiation of crafting syllabus in Kinship studies in anthropology at T.U., and points that no Nepali anthropologists till now had made exclusive study on kinship *per se*. Overseeing the theories employed in kinship studies in Nepal, he finds the domination of structural-functional theory, and the absence of political economic perspectives. Considering alterations in Nepali society and culture and various other factors and forces affecting them along with the micro social institution of kinship, he has suggested some new areas for the future studies.

Professor Dilli Ram Dahal has come up with his own thesis about the potential causes behind why unilineal descent system particularly the patrilineal descent system has remained as a dominant feature of Nepali social structure despite its multicultural nature throughout the history (p.47). With ethnographic evidence from his own researches and that of other scholars, he comes up with the materialist explanations that inheritance of resources through the patrilineal line is the prime factor behind this. In their article, Professor Binod Pokharel and Ms. Uma Bhandari argue that territoriality of marriage in the *Kanth* has contributed for the consolidation of patrilineal principle and to strengthen the authority of the patrilineal system. *Kanth* differentiates itself from other spaces (rural and urban) mainly on the basis of dress, occupation, relation with agriculture, marriage practices, and customs. Therefore, for the natives, *Kanth* is not a geographical rather a social construct. The authors conclude that territoriality of marriage has contributed for the consolidation of patrilineal principle and to strengthen the authority of patrilineal system.

Dr. Janak Rai analyzes inter-ethnic relations and investigates how two hill origin Limbu and Rai ethnic groups attempt to portray their fraternal kinship ties, with another ethnic group-Dhimal, small in number from low land Terai. He has presented that the hill duo have taken the help of shared myth of origin of the same ancestry to claim their ethnic proximity and show equality and sameness through linking the referral made in *Mundhum*. His writing clearly shows that Dhimal do not accept these claims in the face value of Limbu portrayal and they critique, resist and redefine this idiom

of kinship. The role of *Mit* in establishing inter-ethnic relation has been analyzed by Dr. Suresh Dhakal and Mr. Nabin Rawal. This form of fictive kinship cross-cuts the traditional caste boundaries as it set in the sphere where consanguineous and affinal kinship cannot be established. Though *Miteri* is one of the most written areas in Nepali kinship studies, their writing deals on less touched area of Far West region. The authors show that *Miteri* is established through ritual performance and argue that it is maintained by reciprocity and regulated by rituals and social obligations.

Through the lens of structural-functional approach, some authors have dealt on how various forms of kinship contribute to different ethnic/caste groups to maintain caste/ethnic solidarity in their respective community and to adapt aptly. Dr. Tamang shows that Tamangs organize above the institution of family through various categories of groupings, which are also critical to understanding their construction of sense of identity and group belongingness (p.230). Some rituals, e.g. *Syaisyai* of Gurung, festivals of Tharu have been presented as site for kin interactions and presents functional role of kinship among the kin within and beyond the household. The authors have also pointed out the emerging trend of changing kinship relations, e. g. changes taking place in cross-cousin marriage practices among Magars.

Writings of Professor Timsina, Dr. Upadhyaya and Dr. Dhakal and Mr. Rawal portray that as a cultural construct kinship is maintained through generalized reciprocity. In contrast, Madhu Giri's article on kinship and marriage among Musahar community begins to fill the gap analyzing kinship from the political economic perspective. Mr. Giri critically portrays that kinship is the basis of unequal distribution of resources and exploitative relations of production among the family and kin members. What he claims as 'profit oriented family relation' treats elders as burdensome and gives importance to resource/money making youths. It is this thought pattern which compels youths to become *Haruwa-Charuwa* (a form of bonded labor), foundation for further exploitation. Showing the dynamics of intra-ethnic relations, Lagan Rai shows that conversion to Christianity ruptures traditional notion of kinship ties (e.g. in marriage and funeral rites) creating restrictions and unwillingness to participate in traditional rituals. His article also portrays about mere belonging in one's kin group is not sufficient to shape the nature of relationship among the kin members rather the sense of belongingness, and avenues and frequency of interactions crucially influences that.

These writings also imply crucial messages in the areas of theoretical and methodological contributions in anthropology. Professor Pokharel and Ms. Bhandari clearly put forth their departure with Marx that changes in infrastructural base of economy may not lead changes in the super-structural cultural level (here, territorial marital practices). In contrast to their claims, writings of Dr. Upadhyaya, Dr. Dhakal and Mr. Rawal and Dr. Thapa Magar have defended Marx not being wrong in his claims. From the writings of Professor Chhetri and Dr. Rai, it can be inferred that the positionality of the researcher is epistemologically crucial not only for the information generation but also for the development of write ups. Both of them were able to reflect upon a tiny part of ethnographic information acquainted in the field and to elevate and to expand that up to the level of engaged anthropological writing.

Hence kinship is social and cultural construction having obvious bases on some form of biological logic. Dahal, Pokharel and Bhandari, Dhakal and Rawal, Upadhyaya, and Thapa Magar have approached their analysis on kinship on the basis of materiality whereas symbolism is still crucial factor for Pokharel and Bhandari and Dhakal and Rawal. On top of this, their writing further implies that kinship study is an indispensable part of anthropological inquiry, which could be studied exclusively on its own or as an embedded form while inquiring about the other spheres of social and cultural life.

This volume itself is an historical on its own, as a contribution in this core area of anthropology and entirely by Nepali anthropologists in different stages of their career and with different analytical inclinations and capabilities to interpret. This book can contribute as a crucial academic resource for studies in Nepali kinship not only in Tribhuvan University and Nepal but also for others who have been involved in or interested in learning about Nepali society and culture. I am sure that some of the articles compiled in this volume will find their space more than in the footnotes, in any relevant publications, for scholars from around the globe.

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