

1997

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### Recommended Citation

Fisher, James F. (1997) "An Interview with Dor Bahadur Bista," *Himalaya, the Journal of the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies*: Vol. 17: No. 1, Article 5.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/himalaya/vol17/iss1/5>

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## *An Interview with Dor Bahadur Bista*

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*Reprinted with permission from The Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research. This interview took place in Kathmandu, Nepal, May 22, 1991.*

JFF: Most foreign scholars in Nepal regard you as the father of Nepalese anthropology. Can you tell us how you came to be an anthropologist?

DBB: Professor [Christoph] von Furer-Haimendorf from London University was here to go to Solu-Khumbu for field research and was looking for an assistant/informant. I went and worked with him. That's how my interest in anthropology began. I happened to be the first Nepali student of anthropology. That's how I got the title.

JFF: What were you doing at the time he came?

DBB: I was the headmaster of a girls' high school that I had started in 1952. I resigned my position as headmaster to go with him.

JFF: How did you move from being a field assistant to being an anthropologist in your own right?

DBB: Well, from my own point of view I didn't enlist as an assistant to begin with. I was looking for a Nepali companion to travel with me. So when I found Haimendorf, I went to him and said, "I will be glad if you allow me to come with you; my advantage will be that I will be looking into my own country, my own society, and not just with one pair of eyes and one pair of ears but with the added pair of eyes and ears of a professor of London University of the reputation which you have. And in return, I'm willing to do anything, whatever you want me to do." That's how I offered my services. But from his point of view, he was looking for an assistant/informant, and I fit into that role. Frankly, I had not even heard the word "anthropology" in those days. I had to go and look in the dictionary to find out what the word meant.

JFF: What kind of research of your own did you do when you were with him in the field?

DBB: In the beginning, I maintained my own journal in Nepali and noted down everything—literally even trees and birds. All I was doing was opening my eyes and ears. I didn't know what I was doing. All I was doing was looking for everything. I didn't know what was important. So I recorded anything and everything—that's how I began. But soon after, as we moved along, increasingly I began to discipline myself, following and imitating his style. He was collecting certain types of information, which raised questions in my mind: "Why is he doing this? What is the point of raising certain questions and not other types of questions?"

JFF: Since you had come from a high-caste Hindu background yourself, what was your reaction to life among the Sherpas?

DBB: In the beginning, I must say I was shocked, because of the background I had, the way I was raised. But I already had some questions in my mind about the validity of the style of life, the attitude, and the world view which I had been given, both within the family and within the context of Hindu values. I was quite well educated in Sanskrit. I had studied Hindu mythology—Shrimad-Bhagavad, Mahabharata, Ramayana, Mitishash-tra and so on. Therefore I was quite well versed not only in the folk tradition of Hindu religion and high-caste values but also in the classical definition of what a Hindu society should be. So I had already begun to question the discrepancy between the way society and individuals behaved and the standard prescribed norms. Of course I didn't know anything outside of Hindu society, so my questions at that point were aimed at Hindu society itself. I was, in a way,

ready to absorb anything that I could see outside the social norms I was brought up with. I was quite willing to accept Sherpa norms as one of the variances because the level of society I was brought up in itself had so many unorthodox and unprescribed irregularities. That was the beginning of both my inquisitiveness and my openness to absorbing and accepting the variations. Accepting several norms was no problem for me at all. If I hadn't had the background of Sanskrit education and the norms and values which I was raised in, it would have been difficult for me to accept. But I was already beginning to look at differences with an open mind, at least theoretically. But actually living with European Christians among Buddhists was not easy in the beginning. That is why I was shocked at first.

JFF: How did you move from that period of fieldwork to other aspects of anthropology?

DBB: Increasingly I began to feel both inquisitive and interested in anthropology and at the same time suffocated. I did not see my own future limited to being just an informant and field assistant. I wanted to become an anthropologist like Haimendorf himself. And Haimendorf could in absolutely no way allow or visualize my being his student in anthropology. Later on, while still in the field, it became clearer that I wanted to be an anthropologist and have a career in anthropology, and Haimendorf did not want me to become one. Of course, in all fairness to him, later on, in 1960, with my persistence he agreed to become my supervisor and professor, and therefore I mustn't judge him only by the way he was in the beginning. He accepts me as a colleague now, but in the beginning I had to be persistent. Most of his European and American students find it difficult to understand this, because he has always been supportive of them in their field research in Nepal. But the crude reality was that his attitude towards me was very different in the beginning.

JFF: When was it that you went to London, and what were the circumstances of that visit?

DBB: I was with Haimendorf throughout 1957: seven months in Sherpa country and then another two months in the Eastern Hills, all the way to the border, into Darjeeling, and then two months in the Kaski-Lamjung area, among the Gurungs, and one month among the Chhetris of the southern part of Kathmandu Valley. By this time, I had been well trained—or maybe self-trained—I don't know whether he was trying to train me or whether I was, as far as he was concerned, still just an employee working for 100 rupees per month plus food. But I trained myself in the discipline of field anthropology. Then in 1960 I got the opportunity to go to London—nothing to do with anthropology, because it was in the Department of Linguistics. They needed a research assistant to help teach Nepali at the School of Oriental and African Studies. T. W. Clark was preparing his Nepali textbook with recorded oral texts on discs. He needed a middle-

class Kathmandu colloquial native speaker. He was having problems recording with two earlier non-Nepali-speaking assistants. Haimendorf recommended me because he needed me to further process his own field data. I could continue to work with him as his assistant and help him with discrepancies, fill in gaps, identify the masses of photographs he had taken—he couldn't possibly remember where they were all taken, who the people were, and so on. At the same time I could support myself working as a research assistant in the Linguistics Department with Clark. I tried to join the Department of Anthropology as an undergraduate. It was very difficult—Haimendorf didn't think I would make a good student of anthropology. But I insisted, and finally I was admitted as an undergraduate. And I did finish my undergraduate work.

JFF: That was your ethnography diploma?

DBB: Yes, a Certificate in Indian Ethnography. Then Haimendorf invited me to come to Nepal with him again as his field assistant, but by this time I was already registered as a graduate student at London University, so he said, "Well, I am going to be your supervisor, and, since I am going to be reading and helping you with your Master's thesis, why don't you come out with me and help me?" Clark wanted me to stay on in London and help him. Haimendorf and Clark had serious quarrels over this. But in the end I came back to Nepal. At the end of the fieldwork he managed to discourage me enough that I didn't go back to London to finish my degree. I stayed home.

JFF: Where did you go with Haimendorf on this second trip?

DBB: To the Kaligandaki Valley and Dolpa.

JFF: Since your career in London was terminated, what was the next step for you?

DBB: Well, for me there were serious problems. One was that I had my wife and four children. That was one concern. Second, I had opportunities here for a good job. Haimendorf didn't want me to finish my degree in anthropology and didn't want me to come back with him to London. I was already half-decided to stay home, because of my family and my job. And then my own professor, my supervisor, didn't want to review my thesis, and so the balance weighed heavily towards staying behind. I was unhappy that I couldn't finish my degree, and yet I couldn't walk away from anthropology. I was already deep inside it. So I had to make a choice. Either I had to take the risk of pushing my family into further hardship and problems, because my family, my wife particularly, would have a harder time, or I could continue my study of anthropology unofficially and continue my conflict with Haimendorf. You may wonder why I say "conflict with Haimendorf." He had specifically told me at one point that I would not be allowed to publish anything in English, although he would not mind my publishing in Nepali, because all the information I had collected was under his copyright.

That is why I had to revisit those areas to collect my own data later on. That was the reason he was shocked when I published my first ethnography, **People of Nepal** [1967]. He was even more shocked when Ernest Gellner helped me publish my Thakali article in **Man** [1971]. I think those years were very important, very crucial in my career in anthropology. That's why I had to be an unorthodox, formally speaking unqualified, and yet seriously involved and committed anthropologist, an anthropologist without a formal degree.

I continued my research throughout the country. I completed, by 1963, my extensive ethnographic survey of the country—all the ethnic communities, including the smaller minority ones, such as Danuwar and Bote, of only a couple hundred people, speaking their own language. I visited all of them. In a way, this pushed me much harder to become an anthropologist than the way most anthropologists go to a university and qualify for a degree.

JFF: And this resulted in . . .

DBB: The publication of **People of Nepal**, for which I was rewarded far more heavily than I had expected. I was rewarded financially, because many copies were sold, but more than that, people began to take an interest in me. I was invited repeatedly to lecture undergraduate students at several universities. Mostly it was American friends and universities who encouraged me, continually pushing me and propping me up so that I was accepted as an anthropologist, which benefited me a great deal. I was encouraged and accepted as a de facto field anthropologist of Nepal, and in those days there were no other Nepali students who had studied anthropology. This helped me not be disappointed and take a negative turn towards anthropology in general. Without this support I probably would have gradually turned in a different direction. But this continuous encouragement from America directly or indirectly helped me a great deal.

Therefore later on I decided to develop a specific field of Nepali anthropology. That's how I became the "father of Nepali anthropology." I thought the earlier level of anthropology which Haimendorf did was a product of colonial days, and he was a colonial professor. He maintained a native-versus-Western university-professor kind of attitude. He may have changed by now, but I could never forget those days. We Nepalis, if we had to develop a field of anthropology, or a department of anthropology at Tribhuvan University, or train a younger generation of Nepalis (which I did later on), had to develop a discipline of anthropology with a specific focus on Nepal and Nepal's future. And therefore it had to be applied—I couldn't continue on in theoretical anthropology. My own experience with a colonial anthropologist proved that there was no room for the discipline in Nepal if we were only going to mimic European schools of anthropology. There was

absolutely no point in Nepalis becoming the European type of anthropologist.

So, from that time on I began to think very seriously whether anthropology was a useful discipline for a country like ours. If it was, it had to be applied, related to development, and also closely connected with sociology, because we had no need to have sociology as a separate field as in the West and anthropology could not do all the work towards development alone. It had to be future-oriented. Just field ethnography would be of absolutely no use. What do Sanskrit texts like the Puranas do? Pandits can recite and collect *dachina*, but ethnographers cannot afford to recite texts and collect *dachina*—no Nepalis are going to pay you for that. It had to be useful.

JFF: Was your **People of Nepal** conceived in the older style?

DBB: In the older style, absolutely, because that was an imitation of what Haimendorf did to a certain extent.

JFF: When did you make this change to Nepalese anthropology?

DBB: In the late sixties, after I visited America. You invited me to the University of Missouri in Columbia in 1965, and then I visited the University of Chicago and met Sol Tax. After that I was at the University of Washington in Seattle, and then I visited Berkeley and met George Foster. In 1966 I visited the University of Hawaii and the University of Wisconsin. In the '70s I widened my anthropological horizons when I met [Robert] Murphy and Marvin Harris at Columbia. But by the end of '68 I was clear about what anthropology was needed for Nepal and what I was going to do. From the end of '68 through 1972 I worked with His Majesty's Government as an administrator for area development in the northern Himalayan regions. I applied my own anthropological knowledge of that region for economic development. By that time it had become clear that if I wrote another book I would write a very, very different kind of book from **People of Nepal**.

JFF: Most anthropologists don't realize that you also have a kind of secondary career as a creative writer—in Nepal you've published stories and novels. Can you comment on that, on how your anthropological training, or lack of it, affected your other writing?

DBB: I began oddly enough, many years before, as a creative writer, and I had already published a couple of short stories and a few poems, and I wrote essays which were not philosophic but almost, I would say now, ethnographic. So I already had an interest in writing. When I went into anthropology my interest in writing increased, and I found anthropology quite useful, and subsequently I wrote half a dozen short stories, anthropologically oriented, that is, based on ethnographic peculiarities.

JFF: Do you think you might not have gone in that direction if you had followed full-blown anthropological training?

DBB: If I hadn't gone into anthropology I would have continued in creative writing and I would have written very different kinds of things. But once I went into anthropology my creative writing interest was greatly hampered. I couldn't write anything without bringing in anthropological material. My novel **Shotala**, which is based on the adventures of a Nepali in Tibet, is an example. In a way it's a novel, but at the same time I put many ethnographic materials in it. And so if I had gone further into anthropology maybe I would have completely stopped my creative writing, and if I hadn't gone into anthropology at all I would have gone into creative writing alone. But I became a mishmash, half this, half that.

JFF: I think it was in 1972 that you left your job at the Remote Areas Development Committee and went as the consul general of Nepal to Lhasa. Can you comment on that experience—on how anthropology affected the way you saw things in Tibet and how you perceived the Tibetan situation and the Chinese there?

DBB: When I was assigned to Lhasa, the most important ideas His Majesty the King had in mind at the time—and he gave me personal instructions as to what my role was going to be—concerned political and commercial matters. Our trade relations with Tibet were at a very low level at the time, so we had to revive them for the sake of our northern-region people and Nepal as a whole. And there was naturally a political role. So in the beginning, although my knowledge about the northern high-altitude area was very useful, I didn't see myself operating as an anthropologist there. I was mostly representing my country, and therefore my interest was to see how best I could serve the interest of my country at the political and commercial levels. I think I managed to achieve most of what I started out to do and also most of what His Majesty the King at the time had mandated me to do. I didn't see my role in Tibet as that of an anthropologist, but nevertheless my anthropological eyes and ears were open—I couldn't close them. When I saw Tibet versus China, Tibetan versus Chinese, I wrote a report exactly as I saw it, without any interpretations, just the way I did in **People of Nepal**. My book **Report from Lhasa** [1979] is a travelogue. I described what I saw, without any value judgments one way or another because I thought it would be inappropriate for me as the representative of a friendly government and as a diplomat to make value judgments. Even though it's a consulate, our position in Lhasa is unique in the sense that it is not a consulate like those in many other commercial towns where consuls are sent purely for commercial trade purposes. For more than 300 years Nepal has had an official envoy in Lhasa. It is a very different role, far more important and unique in its historical context. For that reason I did not do any

formal anthropology while I was there. But I could see the situation there.

One other thing: was there towards the end of the Cultural Revolution, so things were not very smooth and normal. There were stiff, strict restrictions all over. I did make my travels but they were restricted, and I had to be escorted by host-government representatives. But my movements within Lhasa were not restricted. I had a lot of friends I could visit. On my recent visit to Lhasa it was very different, far more open, and there was not much restriction, a lot of tourists coming in. I hadn't been too far off the realities I had predicted. Unfortunately, the article I wrote about this disappeared in America with most of my color slides.

JFF: Did the fact that you had become very familiar with Tibetan culture through your residence with the Sherpas affect in any way your perception of Tibet?

DBB: Very much so. Because of my studies of the Sherpas I was quite familiar with Tibetan society and culture and religion. The Western concern was that the Chinese were destroying Tibetan culture, religion and civilization. I said that was not true, that they were not doing it deliberately. Of course, during the Cultural Revolution they did destroy much but the Chinese Red Guards were destroying everything religious and cultural throughout China. They were destroying temples, monasteries, burning books, and in the Western world sometimes there are slightly misguided reports that the Chinese were doing this in a colonial style to the Tibetans, which is a little bit distorted, because Chinese Red Guards at the time were destroying everything cultural and religious everywhere. So, when things in Lhasa were destroyed, it wasn't the Chinese destroying Tibetan things—Tibetan members of the Red Guard were doing it! There were former lamas, former monks, former disciples of these various monasteries themselves destroying this under the Red Guard. The Western world, with its own colonial history, had an obsession with it and guilt about it and tried to interpret things the way 19th-century colonials did throughout the world. It's not the same thing. The Chinese in Tibet are not colonial. It's a big political issue and controversial. I don't want to talk about that. The Chinese did not have a colonial attitude towards Tibet—this is what I had said in that article which wasn't published.

JFF: Well, let's pick up the story then, after your three years in Lhasa. What was the next stage in the development of your career?

DBB: I came back after three years in Lhasa. I worked briefly for the resettlement program along the southern border for two years and then I went to the university. My studies in anthropology and my experience in Lhasa led me more and more to the academic field, away from administration and development, where I had been working. Tribhuvan

University wanted to start a department of anthropology and created a chair in anthropology for me.

JFF: That was in Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies?

DBB: No, not to begin with. A chair was created in anthropology for a Department of Anthropology in 1977, but about that time I was offered a Fulbright senior fellowship to go to Columbia University. My friend Theodore Riccardi had recommended me for this. I was there for one academic year. Then the former vice-chancellor who had helped create this chair of anthropology retired, and his successor invited me to be the director of CNAS. This chair of anthropology stayed with CNAS for some years until I asked to have it transferred to the Department of Sociology/Anthropology, of which I was chairman.

JFF: What changes did you bring to CNAS?

DBB: Well, aside from administrative reforms, I was very adventurous in expanding anthropology and CNAS research activities. It had been a rather tame, small, and very disciplined institution until then. It was led by Prayog Raj Sharma, a scholar of good reputation. But when I came in, with my experience in wide-ranging activities both within the government and outside it, at home and around the world, I could not stay with what I found. I explained various fields of activities in many different disciplines; I invited young people to start research and senior people to write books. While I was there I started more than a dozen book-length projects on Nepalese history, economics, culture, religion, philosophy, anthropology and sociology. Quite a few books were published. I built a building and equipped it.

But aside from these logistical and administrative matters I did other very important things. I began a regular system of open seminars, weekly seminars like the brown-bag lunch seminars in American universities. This being a new concept, many Nepali academics found it difficult to accept, because for them a "seminar" included full paraphernalia: written papers, commentators, moderators, announcements, pay for paper presenters and so on. My brown-bag seminars were appreciated by most people, but a few continued to be uncomfortable with it. As soon as I retired from the directorship it unfortunately was discontinued. Anyway, I found it very helpful, and foreign scholars and ambassadors used to attend because there were also papers on politics, political development, international relations. This made some of my colleagues uncomfortable because CNAS's role until then had been mostly linguistic, historic and anthropological. But with the name "Nepal and Asian Studies" I saw no reason to restrict ourselves to history, linguistics, and anthropology. Some thought my activities were too ambitious, too unwieldy for that time. I didn't think so. Therefore CNAS did become different, in my period of three years, from what it had been. We became very active, with lots of young people coming in, not only

Nepalis but many American and West European, Japanese, and Russian people too.

JFF: And then, when you retired from the directorship, you actively started building a department of anthropology and sociology, now one of the biggest and most popular in the university. Can you tell us of those early days?

DBB: I belonged to a totally different generation. The younger generation had come, by this time, from various universities from around the world—from America, Europe, India, and so on. What I thought was that there was no need for our university to have separate departments of sociology and anthropology. This was hard to bring home to my junior colleagues with graduate degrees from universities with separate departments. They felt very uncomfortable with my idea of having a single department. They said, "Well, we can have a single department, but with two separate courses of teaching." I insisted on a single pedagogical track, because if you keep in mind what Nepal is and what Nepal's future needs are, then there is no point in having two departments. So that was hardest for me in the beginning, to keep both disciplines in some kind of hybrid system. But we compromised by giving two optional courses for the two disciplines and keeping the rest of the courses combined, so that students could choose to call their degrees sociology or anthropology.

The other difficult part, which I insisted on with my junior colleagues, was a dissertation based on compulsory fieldwork for the Master's degree. The university had an optional arrangement for any student who wanted to submit a fieldwork-based dissertation, but I said it had to be compulsory or no one would go to the field. And the way I visualized it, the department would not produce suitable graduates unless they were required to do fieldwork. Without it they would not be any different from graduates in other disciplines in the social sciences such as political science and economics. There was a great deal of pressure to keep it optional, and if the department had been organized without me or by somebody else at a different stage, we would have had two separate departments and fieldwork would not have been compulsory. To make sure it would work I found several kinds of financial support to pay students in the field and while they wrote their dissertations. I also asked you to come and help the department in this. My friend John Cool, then head of Winrock International in Kathmandu, helped by providing fellowships for study in Southeast Asian universities and giving some money for research and writing M.A. theses. Of course, you must also remember that my exposure to American universities and contact with anthropologists such as Sol Tax, George Foster, Marvin Harris, and you yourself had a lot to do with what I was doing.

JFF: Do you feel satisfied that the department now represents the kind of Nepalese orientation that you wanted all along for it to achieve?

DBB: You know, it is difficult to answer this question, because we have to talk about the whole political situation right now and therefore the condition of the university in general. If this university had been running at normal speed like any other university, then we could understand what the department is. But as it is, I don't know how much our difficulty is due to the intradepartmental situation and how much to the interdepartmental situation, the total context of the university and the political situation of the country. I have not visited the department for some time now but I understand that it has become totally unmanageable. I would not want to say that the department is not working properly but rather that the whole university system is not working properly.

JFF: To bring things up to date, your book on fatalism and development has just come out. Do you regard this as, in some sense, the culmination of your intellectual development, your orientation towards development and so forth?

DBB: Well, yes, what I have said in this latest book, **Fatalism and Development** [1991], is naturally the outcome of my experience altogether, not only in anthropology from the time I began as a field assistant and my later experience in many parts of the world but also since my early boyhood in a high-caste Hindu family, when I was being educated in Sanskrit texts. But I don't consider this the end. My next project as a development worker and applied anthropologist, and my next book which I hope to be able to finish within the next five to six years, will be the ultimate, final book of my experience, illustrating what I have presented in the form of a hypothesis in *Fatalism and Development*.

JFF: Can you just briefly state the main theme of **Fatalism and Development**?

DBB: Its main theme is that fatalism and development are opposite ends of the same spectrum. By fatalism I mean when people are continuously fed, bombarded, brainwashed with the idea that ultimately, what you are today is not a result of what you made yourself but was determined in your previous life or by some supernatural phenomenon or divine power, whatever you want to call it. Therefore, as long as we continue to preach the Sanskrit Puranic texts, Nepal will not develop, because such texts directly destroy any seed of personal initiative and therefore any entrepreneurial interest and future-oriented activity. Fatalism comes out of the Hindu Puranic texts. Even today we are being continuously bombarded through the national media, such as television and Radio Nepal, with this message. I consider this thoughtless and unimaginative.

I am very unhappy with this situation and unfortunately, I don't see many intellectuals in Nepal, at either the political or the academic level, interested in this. Until they see it I don't think the status quo is

going to change. Therefore, my purpose is not just to write and produce a book: I am almost starting a campaign with this book. If we want to develop this country, we have to do something about this whole idea of preaching the so-called Hindu classical texts, which continuously fertilize the vigorous growth of fatalistic tendencies and attitudes in this country. My suggestion is that we should encourage and promote the folk tradition and culture of various ethnic communities for development instead.

JFF: So it's really an attack on the fundamental Hindu brahmanical value system.

DBB: Exactly. Not Hinduism in general. What I am saying is that Hinduism doesn't have to be a reactionary, backward-oriented, static system. I use Hinduism as a generic term for any religion practiced in the land which is called "Hindustan" — present-day Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bangladesh, India are all "Hindustan" in the classical sense. The land was called "Indu," or "Hindu," and therefore "Hindustan" means "the land of the Hindus," so anyone who practiced any kind of religion, including shamanism and various forms of tribal religion, within this area was called a Hindu and this religion was called Hinduism. Today, Islam and Christianity are not considered Hinduism because these two religions arrived already developed from outside this geographic area, and also historically its practitioners came as invaders, hostile to the Hindu, local, native traditions, Islam even more so than Christianity. By this definition any form of religious practice, any deity, any ritual, any prayer spoken in any language could be accepted as Hinduism. That is how it was in the beginning.

Therefore, whatever religions are practiced by ethnic groups in Nepal can be labeled Hinduism. They should be accepted with full legitimacy, whatever the name of their deity, whatever their rituals, whatever kinds of priests, whatever they are doing—the Rais, Limbus, Tamangs, Tharus. Then Hinduism would be a perfectly normal, healthy and positive religion for Nepal. But if Hinduism is only the religion of certain caste people, providing a fatalistic theory, then it has no future. I am not anti-religion, and I am not anti-Hindu. All I am saying is that we have to clean up the reactionary, narrow-minded, prejudicial part of the belief system. There is a certain level of Hindu fundamentalism that we have to be careful of. These are people who interpret Hindu religion in a way which helps only a certain class of people, not other Hindus. If we continue like this Hinduism will have no future.

JFF: If the brahmanical values from India seem inappropriate for Nepal, does that mean that Nepal's value system should be more Chinese or Tibetan in orientation, or more European and American, or is there some indigenous Nepali value system that has yet to be fully realized?

DBB: I have to make clear that as far as I'm concerned I can talk only about Nepal, not other countries. Although I would say that this stratified, fatalistic model of caste was imported from India at a certain stage in our history I don't mean to say that India altogether is like that, but I do wish India would get rid of Hindu fundamentalists' saying they want to demolish a mosque which is more than 400 years old. But let's keep within the Nepalese context. For me, Nepal, like any country, has always learned, imitated, borrowed practices from the countries and societies around it. Even in the most isolated countries there is always borrowing—certainly in languages, and also in cultural practices, in artifacts, in architecture and so on. Until medieval times the countries of reference were only Nepal, India, Tibet, China; Nepal had no contact with other countries. Now, with the technological age, we come into contact with most of the countries of the world. Naturally, therefore, Nepalis today adopt certain things American, certain things Japanese, certain things Chinese, and as they always have, certain things Indian. What I am saying is that you cannot continually dismantle the basic social structure, the norms and values, and the nature of the composition of the society and reconstruct it. No society can afford to do that. We have seen that in some of the countries which tried Marxism/Leninism and found that it didn't work, the society has a certain degree of resilience and springs back to its native system.

So in Nepal, this Indian caste system was adopted only by a small number of people at the highest political level, which of course, happens to be the most visible. By no means it is the majority culture. It's a small minority but it is highly visible, so short-time visitors always notice it. Longtime residents see other levels too. We will continue to borrow lifestyles and languages and dress and music, but we cannot dismantle our basic social structure and borrow one from elsewhere. Therefore what I recommend to planners, administrators, and political leaders is that we go back to the basic native structure of the society, which today is strictly maintained without much disturbance among the ethnic communities. The so-called high-caste Hindus have tried to adopt many new things and have continued to change. Therefore this elite level of the society is no model for the rest of the country. You cannot impose it.

It's hopeless to try to. Even if you could, it would sap the vitality of the whole society by stratifying it hierarchically so that it would disintegrate as it did during the 17th and 18th centuries. That's my argument in the book. You are left with backbiting, character assassination and intolerance. The moment anyone tries to achieve something others attack and demolish him. This is the tendency within caste society, because everyone likes to be at the top, but that's not possible.

JFF: Given the increasing number of Nepali anthropologists trained in Nepal with advanced degrees

from Europe and the United States, how do you see the future of foreign anthropologists working in Nepal, and what should their relationship be with Nepalese anthropologists?

DBB: Anthropologists from abroad have done a remarkable and very valuable job in Nepal in the sense that without them we would not have the amount of publication that we do, on both the ethnic and caste communities, Hindu or otherwise, in this country. This is a valuable resource. So at that level, an absolutely valuable contribution has been made, beginning with, of course, Haimendorf, who has done more than anybody else so far, and we have to be grateful to him for that. But this kind of original, pioneering ethnography of any society that is not known to the rest of the world has a limit. Even my **People of Nepal** is a pioneering work in the sense that it introduces Nepali society to the world in a single book, although in a simplistic way. Up to a point such studies have value, but they tend to reach a point of diminishing returns because you cannot continue the ethnography of exploration forever.

Nepali society has gone way beyond what it was 40 years ago, after this country opened up in 1950. Now we are at a stage where we're dealing with real political, economic and social issues. Unless anthropology is prepared to address these problems it will lose its value. Now, this is a very crucial point: at this stage, most foreign anthropologists cannot do this, though there are a few exceptions like you, who have been a longtime resident and keep coming back and updating yourself on growth and development and change. Most of them are young people, graduate students, and here for the first time. We cannot expect them to understand the whole historic context of the past 40 years, what the country was like in 1950 when it opened up and what has happened since then. So, we can have a dialogue with you and a few others, but we cannot possibly do this with anthropologists who come into this country for the first time. They will continue their kind of exploratory anthropology.

When you view the discipline of anthropology from that perspective, what becomes clear is that it's the Nepalis who will have to play the important role. It's only the Nepalis who have lived their lives through these political, economic, social and administrative changes. These are the only people who can provide insight into the social dynamics and the direction of change. If you do not look at the source of the river, you do not know where the river is headed. But Nepalis by themselves will also have a problem in the sense that it is parochial to try to understand the whole process of change in isolation, because Nepal is not alone today. You have to be able to see things in a broader perspective, in the context of similar kinds of societies or societies slightly ahead of Nepal. This very important part can be played only by foreign anthropologists. Therefore I see increasingly exciting



possibilities for joint work between foreign and Nepali anthropologists.

Now, when I say this, there are two very important points to keep in mind. First, Nepali anthropologists have to be trained appropriately. I'm afraid I have to say that a Ph.D. from a foreign university does not necessarily prepare them for this kind of role unless they reorient themselves to the Nepali situation, because it tends to orient them towards the anthropological tradition of that particular university or department or school of thought, which will be unrelated to the Nepalese context. So these Nepalis, when they have been trained abroad and come back, have to reorient themselves to Nepal. They should not go directly to the Department of Anthropology at Tribhuvan University and start teaching anthropology. To me that is not acceptable. And second, foreign anthropologists, simply because they have been trained at a famous university to do their research and publish a book in the United States or Europe or Japan so that their own colleagues can read it, will establish their names, have jobs, get promotions, and everything, but that has nothing to do with the Nepalese context. Many anthropologists are going to remain like that, and I have nothing to say about them. But those who remain permanent friends of Nepal, who have developed an interest in helping Nepal, have to look at anthropology from the perspective of the Nepalese situation. That's why I call this a Nepali school of anthropology; unless you do that, the discipline, the tool, the method, and the whole theoretical background is there, but how do you apply it all? It must be culture-specific, country-specific. This is true of any country around the world. Anthropology cannot just continue to be guided by some American or European schools forever. If anthropologists want to be useful to Third World countries, whether in Latin America, Africa or other parts of Asia, they have to help train their counterparts who know their countries inside out. That's the kind of anthropology which has an absolutely unlimited scope and future, and unless you do that, anthropology is, to me, a dead end. That doesn't mean that anthropology departments will close down; of course they will continue, they will survive, but with not much fun and excitement and future orientation.

JFF: Tell us about the future of anthropology.

DBB: I think it's very important that we talk about the future of anthropology in Nepal. It's interesting, you know, that in Nepal most academics are high-caste Hindus. And therefore, it's inevitable that the style and nature of academia emanate from the interests these highcaste Hindu people have. By this I mean the department of whatever discipline you open up at the university usually becomes an end in itself. It's an "Every-country-has-a-university, why-don't-we?" kind of attitude. That's why we have a university. No one thought about what the university was really going to be. I'm afraid most Nepali academics tend to ignore that

question and think that simply because there are universities elsewhere we should have one too. If we thought more about these fundamental issues we would not allow Tribhuvan University to be dominated by political scandals all the time.

Therefore, when our department was organized, like any other department it could very easily have gone in the direction, "Well, let's have a department of sociology, or, anthropology" and then, "Well, what courses do we teach? All right, anything we can find, anything somebody happens to mention, or anything somebody happens to know." If you don't have a clear purpose in your mind of what you're going to do and why you're going to do it, of course you are going to end up with no positive results. That's what the difference was, I think, when I became instrumental in starting the department. I asked, "Do we need a department of anthropology? If we do, why, and what do our graduate students do?" That's why I think it's very important that we pay very close attention to what kind of courses we prescribe, what kind of professors from abroad we bring into the department. I would never have recommended starting a department of anthropology if I had not thought that anthropology had an important role to play in Nepal. I didn't recommend that the chair be created so that I could hold that chair. You have to give careful consideration to how we train and for what particular ends. This is what we did with the Department of Anthropology. It began with a very different emphasis, and all of these people who joined me, the younger generation, went along with me. We all agreed. It was an extremely close-knit, well-organized and motivated group of anthropologists and sociologists who founded the department. It won't necessarily remain like that unless we keep the same kind of people running the department, because there are people interested in becoming chairman just for its own sake. This is why I say that it's very important that we keep a clear perspective on the purpose of having a department of anthropology. I see a clear, very vital role for future graduates in anthropology in Nepal. When we say that they have an important role, then we have to think of how they are trained. That's why it's very important that anthropology be closely tied in with sociology. Anthropologists have to study the history of Nepal too. Otherwise anthropology will be just an imitation of other departments in other universities around the world and won't prepare students to play an important role in the future of Nepal.

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