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ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN GEOGRAPHERS ANNUAL MEETING

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Selected Abstracts

JOSHI, Tulasi R. (Fairmont State College)

A COMMENTARY ON THE URBAN EXPLOSION OF KATHMANDU, NEPAL

Kathmandu, the capital city of Nepal, is the largest city of Nepal. The population of the greater Kathmandu area including two other adjoining cities is over four times greater than the population of the next largest city in the country. The population growth of this Third World city over the last four decades has been phenomenal, each succeeding decade exceeding the growth rate of the preceding one. While the metropolitan area is sprawling in all directions, the task of achieving the urbane quality of life taken for granted in Western cities, seems to be getting nowhere here. Each day as the urban areas continue to grow, it only makes the work more difficult for its future planned growth, since the physical development plan for the metropolitan area seems put on hold.

In this context, this paper will examine the pattern of urbanization in Nepal with special reference to the greater Kathmandu area, summarize the consequences arising from the unplanned growth, review the effort of His Majesty's Government of Nepal for the physical development planning of the Kathmandu Valley, and provide effective concepts for formulating and implementing a master plan for the future growth in the very unique land tenure environment of Kathmandu.

SHRESTHA, Nanda R. (University of Wisconsin-Whitewater)

FRONTIER SQUATTER SETTLEMENT AND PRODUCTION RELATIONS: THE CASE OF NEPAL TARAI

In the past thirty years Nepal's Tarai frontier has experienced a growing influx of hill migrants searching mainly for land, probably the most important source of survival as well as social status and economic power in agrarian societies like Nepal. As such, land plays a central role in the ecodemographic as well as sociodemographic relations of production and hence people's class position or economic viability. While the ecodemographic relations concern the physical accessibility to land and production technology (i.e. human-nature relations), the sociodemographic relations define social land accessibility or control (i.e. human-human relations in the process of production). Since many migrants have failed to own land through formal channels or have access to it on a rental or sharecropping basis at the frontier, they have resorted to what is commonly known as "squatter or spontaneous settlement" as a mode of land acquisition. Its fundamental objective is to occupy a piece of land and turn it into a source of income (survival asset). Squatter settlement can thus be viewed as a form of social movement among landless hill migrants as it involves an unauthorized occupation of public land (e.g. forest fringes). While, as a social movement, squatter settlement has both ecological and political repercussions, the important question is: can it lead to improvements in migrants' socioeconomic viability? Based on survey data as well as personal observations, I will discuss the nature and process of squatter settlement and its role in ecodemographic and sociodemographic relations of production.