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From the Editor

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FROM THE EDITOR

This issue of Himalaya focuses on Nepal's Tarai region, with articles from a range of disciplines exploring various aspects of its history, society and environment. Given the political and economic importance of the Tarai to Nepal, there are two major areas of concern with reference to research in the region; first, there isn't enough of it, and second, much of what there is, especially in western languages, focuses on the Tharu of the western half of the Tarai, about whom a fairly substantial literature has now developed. The lacuna in our knowledge is especially pronounced with reference to writings by non-Nepalis on those social groups that are collectively referred to as Madhesi, and who are playing a significant role today in the politics of republican Nepal. The Tarai deserves better; it is the most important part of Nepal outside the Kathmandu Valley, and the politics of modern Nepal cannot be understood without understanding the politics of this region and the complex cultural and social forms that shape that politics. It is in the Tarai that the shape of Nepal's future will be decided but the best account of the region's politics and society—by the late Frederick Gaige—is now over 35 years old.

This issue was originally conceived in 2008 as a venue for the papers presented at the Social Science Baha conference on *Nepal Tarai: Context and Possibilities*, in 2005. Details of that conference, including abstracts of the papers and summaries of the discussions that followed their presentation, may be found on the web at <http://www.himalassociation.org/baha/nepal-tarai.htm>. The Baha has done a service to Nepal Studies by focusing attention on the Tarai, first through the 2005 conference and subsequently by reprinting Frederick Gaige's *Regionalism and National Unity in Nepal*, first published in 1975—which is as relevant today as it was then. Many of the papers presented at the conference were published in Nepali by the Social Science Baha¹ but have not appeared in English. In addition to these efforts by the Baha, Martin Chautari brought out a useful bibliography on the Tarai in Nepali.²

The first three papers in this issue were originally presented at the 2005 Tarai conference. Bernardo Michael discusses the emergence of the Tarai as a region and the constitution of the Indo-Nepal border in the context of the frequently tense relations between the Gorkhali state and the East-India Company in the early nineteenth century. My own paper deals with the changing nature of Tharu-state relations in British India and modern India, and in Nepal, where the Tharu (especially their elites) went from being a necessary part of the state institutions created to administer and exploit the Tarai, to being irrelevant to those functions after the eradication of malaria in the 1950s made it possible for high caste hill people to settle in the region. Adhikari and Dhungana discuss the way Tarai forests were shaped by changing state policies from pre-unification times to the present as the state sought to cement its control over the region and its resources. Two other papers complete this collection: Giri's examination of the way children who work as domestic labor understand their situation and Allendorf, Gurung and Smith's discussion of an innovative program to recruit villagers to participate in a tiger conservation project in the Tarai.

This issue also introduces two new features to the journal. The first, which we have called "Perspectives", provides a forum for contributors to write opinion pieces on a topic relevant to Himalayan Studies. We inaugurate it with the keynote address by Professor Ramawatar Yadav to the Social Science Baha conference on the Tarai in 2005, in which he fleshes out from his own experiences the record of discrimination that *madhesis* have suffered at the hands both of the state and of some of Nepal's hill people. The second section is entitled "From the Archives"; it will provide space for the publication of interesting or noteworthy documents that readers might have come across in the course

1. Basant Thapa and Mohan Mainali, eds., 2006. *Mades: samasya ra sambhavna*. [Madesh [Tarai]: Problems and Prospects.]. Lalitpur, Nepal: Social Science Baha.

2. Tirtha Vishta and Ciran Manandhar, eds. 2009. *Tarai-Madhesa sandarbha grantha. Tarai-Madhes bibliography*. Kathmandu: Martin Chautari.

of their own research which are of general interest. Permission of course must be obtained from the relevant archive before such submissions can be published. The first contribution to this section is a letter preserved in the British Library (from the collection of the India Office Library and Records) from Margaret Oldfield, wife of the nineteenth century British Resident in Kathmandu, Dr. Henry Ambrose Oldfield, in which she describes the wedding of Jang Bahadur Rana's daughter to the Crown Prince of Nepal. She was, it seems, an honored guest with as much of a ringside seat as an outsider could hope to have. It is reproduced here with permission from the British Library and illustrated with two period photographs from the archives of the Royal Geographic Society in London, also reproduced with permission. I welcome your contributions to both these sections.

Finally, I want to draw your attention to the Himalayan Studies conference that the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies will be organizing at Macalester College from October 28th to 30th, 2011. The ANHS will meet in 2011 at Macalester rather than, as it usually does, at the South Asia conference in Madison, WI, and your active participation will make the event a success. The conference marks the Association's new role, achieved in 2010, as a Center in Developing Status of the Council of American Overseas Research Centers. A website for the conference is now online; it is linked to the ANHS website, as well as the websites of the departments of Asian Studies and of Anthropology at Macalester College. We will also publicize it through the ANHS list serve; if you aren't already on it, please consider joining; you will find more information on page 56. The conference is open to scholars and others from around the world, although, unfortunately, we have no funds for travel. The conference will be held in conjunction with the annual Midwest Conference on Asian Affairs, one of the largest of the regional conferences affiliated to the Association for Asian Studies in the U.S., and provides opportunities for synergies across the traditional boundaries of area studies. We plan to have a wide range of panel formats, ranging from the conventional three papers and a discussant, to round tables and workshops, where papers could be circulated in advance and the panel time devoted to discussing them. We are open to other formats; please write to me with your ideas. *Himalaya* will be a venue for publishing conference papers (which will go through the review process, like any other submission).

So prepare now to attend the conference in October next year. Conference attendees will provide food for thought and the two Nepali restaurants (and one Afghan restaurant) within a stone's throw of Macalester's campus will provide you with a more tangible taste of the Himalaya.

We hope to see you at Macalester next October.

Arjun Guneratne
St. Paul, MN, December 2010