*Recent Reference Works on Women in Nepal and the Greater Himalayan Region

Sakala, Carol
1980 Women of South Asia: A Guide to Resources

Rana, Madhukar Shumshere J. B., Project Director
1979-81 The Status of Women in Nepal

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Two major new works are now available on the subject of women in South Asia and the Himalayas, including Nepal. They are the very large volume entitled Women of South Asia: A Guide to Resources, edited by Carol Sakala, and the three volume series entitled The Status of Women in Nepal, part of a project directed by Madhukar Shumshere J. B. Rana. As of this writing, the Sakala volume has been out for approximately one year, but the CEDA volumes from Nepal are still being published.

Carol Sakala's large and annotated bibliography on Women of South Asia is the most comprehensive guide to resources on women in India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Nepal. It was sponsored by the Committee on the Status of Women in Asian Studies of the Association for Asian Studies. The book covers a wide range of topics, and the full scope of time and includes both published sources as well as reference to related libraries, archives, and other local resources on women.

Part I, on published resources, begins with a long section on various perspectives on women unbounded by time and space. Sub-headings here include key reference works, bibliographies, biographies, historical interpretations of the position of women, major religious traditions about women, manifestations of the feminine in South Asian philosophy, theology and social structure, including the Goddess tradition and matrilineal systems, the women's life cycle, women's power and sexuality, spiritual life and religious observances, economic position, dress and adornment, and artistic traditions. Part II breaks down some of the same topics as above into discrete blocks of time, including the roots of Hindu tradition, Vedic and early Tamil tradition, bhakti and shakta traditions, and women in the modern period.

Regional specialists will be interested in that section of the book which covers topics of women in the Indic cultural region, South India, West India, Lowland East India, Bangladesh, and North/Central India--the area of Hindi-Urdu, Central Pahari and eastern Panjabi languages. This latter section includes a sub-section on "Nepal/high Himalayan cultural region: area of Nepali and northern Tibeto-Burman languages" (pp. 411-417, 4515-4583).
The Himalayan and Nepalese section breaks down into the following categories:

1. General statements: (a) Ethnographic contexts, (b) Collected papers and a photo essay.
2. The life cycle: (a) Rodi, Gurung youth associations, (b) Courtship and marriage, and (c) Fertility and motherhood.
3. Domestic sphere and family life: (a) Overviews, marriage stability, family relationships, and (b) Property rites.
4. Sexuality, witchcraft.
5. The spiritual life and religious observances: (a) Ascetic communities, (b) A women's festival, Tija/Rsi Pancami, (c) Kumari worship, deviki tradition, and (d) Goddesses, Newar tantrika traditions.
6. Education.
8. Political participation: Queens Ratna and Aishwarya
9. Arts: Children's drawings of man, woman and self
10. Western women in the Himalayas
11. Mountaineering: (a) Mrs. Bullock Workman, (b) others.

This section on the Himalayan woman is short, in part because of the dearth of materials available and in part, I suspect, because of the obscurity of many titles. It is encouraging, however, to note that since this bibliography was published, a number of other works focusing on women have appeared—from mountaineering exploits of women's expeditions, to a series of anthropological and sociological monographs on the Status of Women in Nepal.

The Status of Women in Nepal project was supported by the Nepal Government and the U.S. Agency for International Development, and is being published through CEDA, the Centre for Economic Development and Administration at Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu. As of this writing, only part of its volumes and numbers are available, but the others are in press. The work includes three major parts: Volume 1, entitled "Background Reports on the Status of Women in Nepal" has five parts, and is devoted to the collection and analysis of available secondary data on Nepalese women in such areas as statistical profile, institutions, legal status, development and planning, and an annotated bibliography. The bibliography (Volume 1, Number 4) includes sections on economy, education, anthropological studies, law, health and population, and general studies. Altogether this bibliography lists 223 entries dealing expressly with women in Nepal. (The Sakala volume, above, lists 63 entries on women throughout the Himalayan region.) It is unfortunate that the longer list of entries was not available for the Sakala volume where it would receive wider and more diversified readership.

The second volume of the Status of Women in Nepal project includes a series of eight ethnographies, based on village studies, in various parts of Nepal. These monographs reportedly will have both in-depth anthropological and quantitative survey data, dealing with women's economic roles and statuses both within the family unit and in the wider social context. In addition, an important part of the ethnographies is a Time Allocation Study, detailing the daily activities of all household members within each village sample. This alone should be of considerable interest and should generate new conceptions of women's activities in time and place in the daily routine. The ethnographies cover both ethnic and caste groups.
Volume 3 of the series will serve to synthesize the findings of volumes one and two into a draft for a "National Plan of Action for Women" in Nepal. This work marks the important transition between research and action, a major purpose for the overall project. It is the hope of the funding agencies, the editors, and the authors of the series that the national plan of action will serve to stimulate the formation of a coherent national policy on women and provide a basis for the eventual development of specific action programs for rural Nepalese women.

Both of these important compendiums regarding women are very welcome additions to the South Asian literature, and are essential resource materials for regional specialists and libraries.

*Nepali Grammar*

Verma, M. K. and T. N. Sharma
1979 Intermediate Nepali. Volume 1 - Structure, Volume 2 - Reader

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This two-volume set is a welcome addition to the growing literature on the Nepali language, and is especially useful as a teaching aid for learning the language beyond the first year. This set is designed for students who have already completed the equivalent of a first-year of introductory course, and who are proficient in reading Devanagari script. The two volumes are available with tapes and workbooks and designed to be used together so that students can attain fluency in reading and writing and at the same time be aware of the pertinent grammatical constructions underlying what they read. Each lesson in the Structure volume is accompanied by pattern drills and exercises for intensive practice and each lesson in the Reader volume has a glossary with structural and relevant cultural explanations. In addition, a comprehensive vocabulary list appears at the end of the Reader volume, arranged alphabetically (Devanagari standard) for easy access.

These books were funded by a grant from the U.S. Office of Education. As of this writing, sale arrangements were not complete with the Indian publisher, hence a price on the main volumes is unavailable. Interested persons should inquire at the University of Wisconsin's Department of South Asian Studies, 1242 Van Hise Hall, Madison, Wisconsin 53706. The tapes (approximately $7.50 per cassette) are available from the University of Wisconsin, Labs for Recorded Instruction, 279 Van Hise Hall, Madison, Wisconsin 53706. The workbooks, also available from the South Asian Studies Department, cost $3.50 each (there is one workbook for each volume).
The seventies saw an unprecedented growth in demography research in Nepal. Individuals and organizations, both Nepalese and foreign, have increasingly focused their attention on population issues and demographic aspects of development problems. The monograph under review, Population of Nepal, is an instance of this. It is a collection of articles, including some already published ones, by more than a dozen Nepalese policy-makers and/or researchers from various organizations. The content of the volume can be broadly divided into two categories: One set of articles reviews the levels and differentials of fertility and mortality, nuptiality patterns as well as the size and composition of the population; the second set of articles treats socio-cultural and economic aspects such as religion, ethnic composition, health, education, and employment. Attempts are made also to shed light on ecological and regional variations.

The data sources for most studies included are the recent censuses of the country. In the absence of a national vital registration system—it was only in 1977 that a vital registration system was introduced in some parts of the country—vital statistics are derived from the census data through the use of demographic indirect estimation techniques. Over forty percent of the Nepalese population is under age 15 while median age is just under 25 (pp. 29), and the birth rate remains high. The fertility and mortality estimates obtained through the application of different methods essentially tell the same story: The Nepalese demographic transition scenario is one in which fertility remains very high and mortality, though still high, gradually declines (Chapters V and VI). Several projections suggest that absolute size of the population will at least double—reaching over twenty million by the end of the century—under any plausible regimes of fertility and mortality (Chapter VIII).

A comprehensive survey of the existing laws relating to family formation, marriage, sexual conduct, inheritance, and succession is provided (Chapter XIII). This is helpful in understanding how certain laws may restrict or stimulate population growth under different conditions. In spite of a considerable increase in school enrollment, sex differentials in educational opportunities and in employment and occupational structures are high (Chapters X and XI). Despite the high priority attached to agricultural development in the various development plans, "food grain products increased only at about 1.0 percent, half the rate of increase in population" during the decade (pp. 7). The country experienced a decline in food supply per capita during the seventies. More than two-thirds of the population of children were found malnourished (pp. 107–8). Infective and parasitic diseases continue to be the most prevalent form of morbidity (pp. 106–7), while the country joined the rank of "small-pox free" nations in the late seventies.
It is disappointing, however, to note that none of the chapters in the volume deals specifically with the important phenomena of migration and urbanization, except for occasional reference to it. This omission is conspicuous particularly in view of its relevance to Nepal as evidenced by the fact that most of the policies envisaged to regulate population growth during the 1975-80 development plan period are directly related to migration and urbanization (cf. National Planning Commission, The Fifth Plan, 1975-80, Kathmandu: National Planning Secretariat, pp. 42-3. In Nepali). Apart from this there are few other printing problems and some tables with missing indicators. These deficiencies do not, however, undermine the usefulness of the present volume. Researchers interested in the population of Nepal will find the monograph a useful reference.