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IX. BOOK REVIEWS

*Barré, V., P. Berger, L. Feveile, G. Toffin

Review by: Andras Hoffer
Universitat Heidelberg

This is one of the most winning books ever published on Nepal. It presents the results of the teamwork of three architects and one ethnologist, and amply proves the fruitfulness of an interdisciplinary orientation. Since about 1970, a number of researchers have been devoting themselves to the phenomenon of urban space in Nepal. What makes this book new is not the topic itself, but the consequently integral approach. Panauti is not seen merely from the ritual, historical or artistic vantage; the authors do not focus on the main centres of worship or on traditional technology alone. Rather they analyze this small Newar town to the southeast of the Kathmandu Valley as the manifestation of what Marcel Mauss called a "fait social total." The summary of the contents may illustrate this:

1. The general setting: history, geography, economic infrastructure, population.
2. The real and the symbolic as structuring principles of urban space: the physical and conceptual (religious) boundaries of the town, the royal center, the town quarters, etc.
3. The taxonomy of the elements of urban space: street, public square, ghat, pati, etc.
4. The town as a space of everyday life. This part excels by a complete inventory of activities as "elements of circulation" (elements d'animation) and lists place, frequency and time of worship, toilet-making, leisure, etc. as well as the sex and caste of the actors. No attempt is made to formalize in a model the system of relationships between these coordinates.
5. The hypothetical evolution of urban space, starting from focal points such as the physical boundaries, the road-crossings and the royal centre, etc.
8. The house as a space of everyday life, with select examples.
9. The house as a space of religious life: family rituals, the opposition of pure/impure as well as the division of public and private spheres as manifest in the use and structure of the space.
10. The laws of formation of an urban fabric (tissu urbain): The traditional concentration of the houses of members of a lineage around a courtyard (cok) and the beginning disintegration of these cells of the urban fabric — a lucid demonstration of the congruence of material and ideal constraints.
11. The suburbs of recent origin outside the precincts of the old town; the effects of the emergence of a market for immovables.
12. Conclusion: A summary of the basic patterns of spatial organization followed by a rather wholesale tabulation of the correspondences between the social and the spatial orders, each seen as an inclusive set of elements: urban society/urban territory ... caste/town quarter ... clan/courtyard ... individual/house. They contend that planned "modernization" can and should be linked to the traditional structuring principles, instead of preserving only some of their products as monuments. The authors — too optimistic, alas! — stipulate that change be "an action wanted and understood by the population and the local authorities," and they conclude by urging the quest for an urban community characterized by common thought, speech and conduct.
(communaute de pensée, de parole, de gestes). The urban space in the past, they maintain, was a material expression of this community.

One wonders to what extent such a harmonious model will hold true in light of historical research not yet done. What we now tend to visualize as "unity," "organic" or "solidary" against our Western background, may turn out tomorrow to be a bit less self-evident, less stable and more individual, more the product of imposed and abrupt changes, more the outcome of crisis management and of half-resolved conflicts of interest. Has the organization and splendor of the ancient towns centered around the royal cult not resulted, partly at least, from a series of improvisations as hasty and as patchwork-like as were the coronation ceremonies at which many of us attended in 1975? The authors stress the "closed structure" rather than the "open process," and it is thanks to their vivid documentation of the former that the reader's attention is necessarily drawn upon the latter.

I personally wish Berger and his colleagues had been assisted by an indologist. With his help, the history and iconography could have been analyzed more in detail and the transliteration of indigenous terms would have become less chaotic. I also miss, here and there, some more facts on caste and kinship, especially on the guthi and fuki organizations, and the role of decision-makers in shaping the urban space.

One of the lessons the book teaches us is this: It is sufficient to see social structure as a network of relations merely between persons and institutions because space is as much part and parcel of this network as is time. The category of "residence" reaches beyond what ethnologists traditionally understand by it. And if, in the last two decades, the ecological approach has revealed the "social" in the "natural" environment extra muros, it now proves necessary to reconsider its reality intra muros as well. The social scientist, or the ethnologist at least, has a lot to learn from the architect (and the cultural geographer) in this respect.

One of the chief virtues of this book is its presentation: The well-balanced proportion of text and graphic illustration; the excellent plates and designs (together with numerous instructive children's drawings); the lucid and unpretentious style which never becomes enamoured of itself and never feigns a lofty level of abstraction; the patience for details the rich mine of which is not robbed rapaciously for dazzling theses and formulations.

Most of us have unlearnt the art of book reading. Rather we have got used to exploiting books by selecting just a few parts of immediate use for a forthcoming publication. This book does not deserve such a treatment. Read the whole, it's worth it!


Review by: Harvey S. Blustain  Cornell University
Social science in Nepal has been characterized by the 'staking out' of territorial and ethnic claims. One person would become an expert on the Gurung, another a specialist on the far-west Terai, and yet another an authority on the Limbu. The literature, accordingly, has presented a pastiche of information on various aspects of various peoples. In a welcome contrast to this perspective, Seddon, Blaikie and Cameron (along with their collaborators D. Fleming and A. Fournier) interpret Nepalese society through a political economy model which recognizes the historical continuities and structural system encompassing all of these diverse groups.

The authors begin their analysis by focusing on "the internal evolution of the Nepalese political economy, conceived essentially in terms of relations between classes and the dynamics of those relations" (p.3). Thus, "the category of class becomes the starting point in the analysis of social change in Nepal" (p.17). In particular, they are interested in examining the position and role of the lower classes in the national "crisis." It is to the authors' credit that they quickly acknowledge the complexity of the problem: "It is difficult to identify a distinct class of capitalist farmers" (p.39), "it is also difficult to distinguish members of this merchant class" (p.39), "the petty bourgeoisie (is) notoriously difficult to define" (p.41), and the "poor peasant is often virtually indistinguishable, except by the land he owns, from those almost totally dependent for their livelihood on working for others" (p.41). The lower classes are equally elusive.

One of the most problematic features of the analysis of Nepalese society is that a single individual can take a number of different class positions as he/she can be involved in a number of different production situations. Therefore, while class is an abstract analytical category, which at the same time identifies its contradictions and 'laws of motion' vis-a-vis its own development and relation to other classes, it requires additional but subordinate analytical categories to analyze the conjuncture of a number of class positions in an individual... Multiple class positions generally reduce the level, coherence and intensity of class struggle for a number of reasons. (pp.17,18)

These subordinate categories include sex, caste status, occupation, and kinship linkages. The bottom line, therefore, is that "all of these classes, though analytically distinct, in practice merge" (p.40).

1Numerous references are made to the Nepalese "crisis" and to the authors' previous book on the subject (see the review by Scholz), but there is no concise statement on the causes or dimensions of the crisis, and the reader must piece together clues strewn throughout the text.
Having outlined these analytical problems, the authors devote most of the book to exploring various sections of the lower classes — poor peasants, rural artisans, agricultural laborers, highway construction workers, porters, the urban labor force, and small businessmen and the petty bourgeoisie. In all seven of these chapters, the data are new and interesting. But having convinced us in the first two chapters that the analysis of class in Nepal is a complex affair, the authors provide no summary chapter which integrates the data into a coherent system. What we are left with are categories of people who, we are told in chapter one, would be united in a class struggle if there were not so many divisions between them. The effect is anticlimatic.

A second theme of the book is the underdevelopment of Nepal through the penetration of Indian capitalism. For this argument, the authors rely heavily on dependency theory. The theory, which was originally formulated to elucidate the Latin American experience, is based on the premises: (1) that the most meaningful unit of analysis is not the nation-state, but the 'world-system'; (2) that the world system is divided into 'cores' and 'peripheries,' the distinction being made on the basis of an area's role in the international capitalist division of labor; and (3) that the relationship between the core and the periphery is characterized by unequal exchange, with the core appropriating surplus from the periphery.

The authors argue that the history of Nepal can be placed in such a framework, with increasing entanglement with India resulting in greater economic and political dependence. Contrary to the general notion that Nepal was never a colonial state, they convincingly demonstrate that the treaty of Sugauli, which ended the war with Britain in 1816, ceded to the British a great deal of control over internal Nepalese affairs. Not only were the Nepalese rulers prevented from having any contact with other western powers, but in the best IMF fashion, Nepal was opened up to a nearly unrestricted flood of imports from India. By the beginning of this century, the construction of roads and railways as far as the Nepalese border, as well as the penetration of Indian industrial capitalism, had both increased Nepalese dependence on India and stifled the development of capitalism within Nepal. This trend continues to the present day, and the authors assert, is the main reason for the perpetuation of Nepal's underdevelopment (p.33).

All of this is straight dependency theory — so straight, in fact, that one wonders whether the theory is being used to enlighten us on historical processes in Nepal, or whether the Nepalese example is being offered in defense of a fundamentalist dependency doctrine. Either way, there are obvious incongruities between the facts and the theory that are not discussed. For example, there is the question of surplus appropriated by the center, one of the presumably essential components of a dependency relationship. Were the Nepalese state a true peripheral dependent of India, one would not expect Nepal to have maintained a balance of trade surplus from the early 19th century until World War II. Yet it did, a fact which is raised almost parenthetically (pp.25,31). Is Nepal a special case, with implications for dependency theory? Do the types of commodities exchanged matter? Does this tell us something about the historical processes involved in capitalist transformations? It is symptomatic of the book's unquestioning acceptance of theory (be it dependency, class analysis, or Lenin's concept of 'semi-colony') that none of these problems are raised, much less explored. Further, squeezed between the Himalayas and India, land-locked Nepal is forced to rely on India as its economic gateway to the world. Thus, is Nepal's dependent status a result of its
unfortunate location, or is it due to capitalist penetration? As the authors clearly state, both factors are important, but they could have done a more convincing job of sorting out the geographic, political, and economic factors; I am not persuaded that "porterage is merely a symptom of underdevelopment" (p.104).

A major problem with the book is that it was, literally, written by a committee. It lacks organization and coherence. The first two chapters jump around between various topics, and this makes it difficult for the reader to follow the argument. Each of the chapters on lower class occupational categories follows the same basic structure — history, present situation, prospects for the future — and this becomes repetitious. Closer coordination among the authors and some tightening up of the argument would have been of considerable help.

Academics (especially those operating within a Marxist or political economy tradition) have never been noted for their literary elegance, yet even by these modest standards the book is poorly written. Over the course of 214 pages, this writing style becomes a heavy burden. When combined with an abundance of rhetoric and jargon, it becomes an annoyance.

Added to these problems are the ones associated with poor editing — frequent typographical errors, cost figures in Nepalese rupees without any indication of exchange rates, references in the text which do not appear in the bibliography, poorly designed tables, and incorrect choice of words. With all this in mind, to charge twenty-four dollars is a bit much.

Having said all of this, it might be incongruous to recommend the book. Yet I do, especially for those who are still inclined to talk about what "their" people are doing in "their" village. For all of its problems, the book presents an alternative perspective on Nepalese society that has been sadly lacking. Besides offering good data on a number of sectors of the Nepalese economy, it promises to open up new avenues of analysis for other researchers.


Review by: Andras Hofer Universität Heidelberg

This remarkable publication has emerged from the author's well-known documentary film (world premiere at the American Museum of Natural History in 1980) on Northern (Kham) Magar shamanism. The order of pictures follows the sequence in the film, and each of them is accompanied on the opposite page by interpretation interspersed with quotations from the Magar shamans' recitations. An epilogue explains the origin and intention of the book, and describes the general cultural setting of the religious complex dealt with. Oppitz also provides us with a detailed, though technically deficient, bibliography of publications on shamanism and related phenomena in the central Himalayas.

-77-
Even though addressed to a wider public, the book is a useful source for the scientist, too. In contrast to many other ethnic groups in Nepal, the Kham Magar seem to have preserved their shamanism as an ethnoscopic tradition in the sense that its concepts have remained relatively free of outside influences, and that its ethical values have not been "relativized" by high religions such as Hinduism or Lamaism. What has already been shown by Watters (in Contributions to Nepalese Studies 2, 1975) is now fully confirmed by Oppitz: This extremely rich and vigorous tradition provides an invaluable material for comparative studies.

The author stresses that he has deliberately abstained from producing plates of high technical sophistication which would have amounted to "correcting" the reality to be documented. He rightly did so! The text is inspired with a humanistic commitment. Oppitz's literary skill and the aesthetic standards he sets for himself must be appreciated. His translations appear to be congenial, his comments convey much of the atmosphere and context of the rituals. Only his sporadic preference for a somewhat archaically sounding German is disputable because it exoticizes and shoves, involuntarily, the Magar into a hazy, distant past. And as if he tried to counterbalance this effect, or as if he did not trust the popularity of the teachings of Don Juan, he is sometimes a bit too anxious to defend his shamans against western prejudices.

The spelling of Nepali words is inconsequent, and an index would have facilitated the orientation to those readers who will not only enjoy, but also use, this admirable book. A second volume, Epische Nächte (Epic Nights), is in preparation.

* Prachanda P. Pradhan


Review by: Robert E. Mazur
University of Montana

Pradhan's monograph represents a thoughtful and rich account of the role of mobilizing local resources for public works activities in Nepal. As throughout the developing world, rural development has been acknowledged as the key to national social and economic development in this agriculturally-based country. Typically, a bureaucratic approach to rural development negates the role of people's participation in the determination and implementation of infrastructure and services; Nepal's recent past is generally no exception. However, Pradhan's examination of three types of public works activities strongly suggests the possibility for successful realignment of the government's efforts in favor of greater local people's participation. The observed patterns of rural development reflect local geographic and economic conditions, are popularly supported, and are achieved at a low cost which should command widespread interest.
The first example involves suspended bridge construction in the Banglung District. Local people were able to construct dozens of bridges at remarkably lower cost for two reasons. First, they deliberately avoided using exotic and costly materials (e.g., cement), except for basic materials like cable; instead, stone, iron fittings and other materials which were made or available in the district were used. Use of familiar materials and technology elicited large-scale participation of local people, the second essential feature. People's participation determined the siting of bridges, transporting construction materials and, finally, constructing bridges themselves.

Local participation reduced costs because most work was done on a voluntary basis. During the post-harvest periods, villagers brought materials to the sites and constructed the bridges. Only the skilled workers, masons, carpenters and blacksmiths were paid for their work. The usual substantial administrative overhead was avoided.

Having fewer financial transactions in local projects (with inputs from "outside" provided mostly in kind) made the villagers more confident that no corruption had taken place and increased their sense of responsibility toward the project. Not only were the bridges of greater utility, by being located where the local population needed them, but they were assessed as structurally safe. The expected life of these bridges is better than those usually constructed by a government, because they become community property and because local materials and technologies are used for their maintenance.

Pradhan's second example considers trunk road construction in the Illam District, stretching 78 kilometers and involving 13 Village Panchayats. The road brought the district's people into the mainstream of the national economy by linking into Nepal's major East-West highway; it permitted the export of their products like tea, cardamom, oranges and potatoes. Immediately after the political change in 1951, the Illam people organized themselves to construct motorable roads, even prior to the central government's forming road and highway plans. Again, voluntary labor contributions were the central components. However, the people did not have all the technical knowledge or equipment to produce a sound, durable road (taking into account landslide zones, contours, etc.); Nepal's Roads Department later assisted in completing the road. Without the people's participation, the costs would have been 50 percent higher and, more importantly, the road's construction might never have attracted government efforts.

The final example investigates the National Development Service as a means of mobilizing rural local resources (voluntary labor as well as materials) for the building of rural infrastructure like school buildings, small irrigation projects, trail improvements, etc. The NDS participants (students) generated enthusiasm for new projects through their efforts and, importantly, made local administration more responsive to the needs of the local people. Significant levels of resource mobilization occurred within the village community for village infrastructure development. Again, Pradhan presents a case for the village community as a whole being necessarily involved in the initiation, implementation and use of the infrastructure thus created.

Pradhan's monograph provides a number of valuable insights regarding different types of public works activities. In each case, there is ample evidence to suggest strongly that people's participation is responsible not only for lowering costs
through voluntary mobilization of labor and material resources, but for determining whether appropriate developments take place at all. Thirty years of limited success through top-down administration provided little useful rural development. The amount of rural infrastructure development needed in Nepal is immense. The central government will not be able to fulfill these requirements unless the local people participate in these efforts. This is true both from a financial and an institutional perspective. Further, expensive infrastructure projects started with foreign aid programs can reach only a small section of the population in rural Nepal. The examples cited here signify the importance of evolving organizational set-ups at the grass roots level which are capable of decision-making in response to the needs of the local people to implement their infrastructure projects. Such projects should not be taken merely as an end in themselves. Rather, rural infrastructure development at low cost with local technology, local materials and voluntary labor can become the main process for increasing social and economic facilities in Nepalese villages. The successes detailed here suggest the potential is tremendous.

The central weakness of Pradhan's monograph consists of the neglect of detailing the structures of rural village authority and decision-making. Certainly his task is ambitious in reporting on several types of public works activities. Further, despite its small size, Nepal has greater ethnic and cultural diversity than most countries. It would require a work of much greater length to describe the varied types of social organization and stratification, which he euphemistically refers to as "self-management," in each of the dozens of villages studied. Nevertheless, without some clear idea of how resources are mobilized prior to, during and after a particular project, the understanding generated is of limited value to those in another district, region or country. That is, the broader process of resource mobilization must become the object of future research and documentation efforts. It is the absence of this type of understanding which has principally accounted for the failure of imposed development projects, cooperatives, etc., throughout the developing world, as in Nepal.

Still, Pradhan's work has contributed significantly to clarification of the "solution" to development by giving substance to some important "problems."

* Banister, Judith and Shyam Thapa

Review by: Mohan N. Shrestha
Bowling Green State University

This is one of the best monographs published on Nepal's population. Instead of merely describing demographic characteristics of the population from the census data, the authors tried to be more analytical in their approach and also tried to present various findings and different points of view from those expressed in earlier reports. Specific discussions on the quality of census data, Nutrition Status Survey, Demographic Sample Survey of Nepal (1974-1978) and Nepal Fertility
Survey (1976) which was taken as a part of the World Fertility Survey, are presented toward the beginning of the study. Age reporting is a serious problem in any survey conducted in Nepal because of the lack of cultural importance attached to one's exact date of birth. As a result, age is reported as an estimate to the nearest digit ending in 5 or 0. The authors show how such age "heaping" has occurred in the Nepal Fertility Survey report and present a smoothing technique developed by Feney (1979) to correct such a problem.

Population is treated in a multi-dimensional framework. The relationship of population to the economy particularly agriculture, health, nutrition, family planning, migration, urbanization and environment is discussed in brief. Whenever one tries to extend the scope of a study within limited pages, the presentation becomes invariably brief and sometimes vague and shallow. In this case, however, the authors have been successful in keeping the discussions to the point. They are "short and sweet." Most of the earlier works on the respective topic are discussed, but the discussion is by no means exhaustive. For example, the study of "Effectiveness of Planned Resettlement Programme in Nepal" by V. B. S. Kansakar is one of the publications that was left out of the discussion.

The last section of the study is devoted to a discussion of the future population prospects in Nepal. The authors provide three different projections (pessimistic, optimistic and turning point projections) of age structures and total population with crude birth rate, crude death rate and natural increase rate per thousand for a period of 1976-2030. Judging from Nepal's recent census of population, the authors' assumption of rapid growth rate seems correct. Whether the country will take a turn in the near future and end up with a stable population of around 32 million in 2030 or will keep on increasing at the present rate of growth and reach a population of 52 million in 2030 depends on the decisions made today. Failure to act now only spells additional problems for the future. The authors in my opinion, have done an excellent job in highlighting the existing population problems and the future consequences for Nepal.

* Poffenberger, Mark

Review by: Dilli Dahal
University of Hawaii

In the last decade, there has been an increasing amount of demographic research on Nepal by scholars of various interests and disciplines. The main focus tends to be on problems of population and resources, and most authors have evaluated Nepal's population growth negatively. Such studies, with few exceptions, are based on macro-level data in spite of the fact that their reliability for Nepal is questionable. One could ask whether attention to this kind of data does not mislead as much as it informs. Except for Alan Macfarlane's study of a Gurung village, not a single work has gone into any detail on the interrelationship between population growth and resource deterioration in Nepal. But even he became something of a victim of a
western model of "poverty" and neglected to discuss Gurung adaptation over time in positive terms, despite his demonstration that the Gurungs of Thak are among the most prosperous in the region. Poffenberger's study, a version of his dissertation in Education, is similarly motivated by a sense of doom.

The book contains seven chapters beginning with a statement of the research problem: "I will be concerned with establishing how certain demographic, ecological, and social change processes are interacting throughout the hills of Nepal" (p.2). The author then moves through the usual description of Nepal's physical setting and then elaborates his research problem with a discussion of ecological, sociocultural, and demographic system theories. In the third chapter, he deals with historical demographic perspective. The fourth chapter shows how growing population pressure is disrupting the relationships between man and the hill environment. In the fifth chapter, he discusses how the hill people have coped with the pressure through various responses. Chapter six is concerned with the attitudes of people towards fertility rather than fertility change itself. The book concludes with a bleak picture of the future.

No one will deny the need for a synthesis of data and analyses relating to demographic, sociocultural, and resource utilization processes occurring in Nepal. Poffenberger's study is such an attempt, but has more weaknesses than strengths. One fundamental problem is the reliance, beyond what might be appropriate, on secondary data sources. On the first page, for instance, Poffenberger cites Caplan in reference to the eastern hill region of Nepal in advancing an argument that pressure on the land was a significant cause of out-migration. It must be pointed out, however, that Caplan's own source for this was an earlier writer who never visited the area, and in his whole book Caplan barely mentions any substantial emigration from Ilam or Indreni cluster. Reports based on recent visits to that area by Nepali anthropologists from the Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies indicate that pressure on land was not a significant factor for out-migration in the past. Socio-political factors were found to be more important factors.

Poffenberger's analysis of population processes over time in Nepal is also subject to debate. For instance, he relates the population growth pattern of Nepal with that of India, presumably on the assumptions of the proximity of the two nations. It should not be overlooked that Nepal is a much smaller country than India, with more diverse topography and ethnic groups and a distinct history. India was slowly being colonized after 1600 A.D. and even before that Greater India was ruled by Hindu as well as by Muslim rajas. Admittedly, the impact of British rule and reforms on Indian population patterns is not yet fully known. Nepal, on the other hand, has never fallen prey to the colonial experience and had only begun the process of growing into a nation in the latter 18th century with the conquests of Prithivi Narayan Shah and the House of Gorkha. These facts alone suggest that the population processes of the two countries are not strictly comparable.

The book includes extrapolation of demographic data from the works of historians. While at some point this must be done, it is arguable whether such scant data can justify lengthy discussions that are more than conjectures. When working from household lists and vamsavali (genealogies of particular groups) one would do well to remember that even today household lists are not strictly maintained and, perhaps more importantly, genealogies are maintained only by high caste Hindu groups or communities where a communal landholding system has been practiced. Poffenberger further argues that two hundred years ago the hills of Nepal were
already populated. By that does the author mean that no villages have been established in the hills for the last two hundred years? Or that the man to land ratios were already saturated?

Another problem I have with this book is the application of and presentation of apparently weak and ill-supported statements. For example, Poffenberger writes (p.18), "this and other evidence indicate clearly that throughout the hill regions of Nepal population exceeds the carrying capacity of the eco-system." The reader might first like to know what this "other evidence" could be. Beyond that, one immediately questions the use of empirically hard to assess concept of "carrying capacity." Two questions arise here: First, by carrying capacity, does Poffenberger mean the ability of local plots of land to support the local population? (One might ask if the carrying capacity of the New York City ecosystem has been exceeded.) Second, is he really serious when he refers to all of the hill regions of Nepal? It is probably apparent to anybody who has walked through the hills of Nepal that the eastern and western sections of hill region are quite different in terms of their resource base and population growth patterns.

There is no doubt that the population of Nepal has been steadily growing over the years, and it is also apparent that the present population growth rate of over 2.6 percent per annum is a matter of serious concern for the government. The gravity of the problem requires more innovative and comprehensive research to understand historical, ecological, demographic, and sociocultural factors behind the continued growth. Poffenberger's work, unfortunately, lacks an empirical basis and his overall analysis is shallow: Patterns of Change in the Nepal Himalayas adds nothing significant to furthering our knowledge of Nepal's population processes.


Review by: John Scholz
SUNY Stony Brook
(Reprinted from Pacific Affairs, Winter 198-82)

Nepal in Crisis analyzes the problems accompanying developments which "shift the demand and supply of services from the village into towns, and from a reciprocal relationship in which one aspect is payments in kind to a 'simpler' relationship expressed in cash as the medium of exchange" (p.265). Using extensive surveys from 1974-77 as well as other developmental and anthropological studies, the authors provide a carefully documented and much-needed account of the growth and functioning of a subnational economic system located in West-Central Nepal.

The authors boldly attempt to document the conditions and causes of continuing underdevelopment in Nepal. The first four chapters provide an adequate if somewhat sketchy overview of Nepal's political economy, stressing problems which the authors believe are bringing Nepal ever closer to acute crisis: overpopulation relative to employment opportunities, ecological collapse in the densely-populated
hills, depletion of forest resources, balance of payment problems, growing food shortages, widespread unrest, and the inability of the government to alter this chronic trend towards crisis (pp. 13, 14). Chapters five through eight stress the dynamic growth of the past two decades related to the expansion of the administration, the building of roads, and the resultant growth of commercial towns and expansion of commerce. The remaining four chapters analyze the failure of manufacturing and agricultural sectors to respond to these stimuli.

What, then, are the major causes of underdevelopment in Nepal? Although the authors borrow the "center-periphery" rhetoric of dependency theory (see esp. p. 185), they waste little time clarifying or documenting the doubtful claim that central exploitation is the major cause of underdevelopment. Instead, they expand several important and plausible themes. Entrepreneurial activities, they argue, have been channeled into speculative ventures dependent on privileged access to Indian markets or government permits and resources. These ventures depend on Indian or foreign manufactured products, thus creating little local employment for village artisans displaced by mass-produced consumer goods.

The authors also point to agrarian features which have aided rural tranquility, but also discouraged the emergence of production-oriented "capitalist farmers:" firm individual land holding rights, plentiful opportunities for farm laborers, the production of surpluses, the importance of larger employers as local patrons in village life, and the virtual disappearance of absentee landowners (p. 225). Since rural relationships discouraged class antagonisms and political movements, the government was able to ensure stability by enlarging the bureaucracy to employ potential dissidents and attract foreign aid. But development policies have been ineffective because "the ruling class in Nepal confronts a basic dilemma: that of promoting the economic and social changes without which the country as a whole will collapse ... while at the same time preserving the essentially non-progressive political structure in whose absence their own privileged position becomes rapidly threatened" (p. 45). In a nutshell, neither private efforts nor governmental policies will divert the slide towards the crisis of underdevelopment unless class relations of production and associated mechanisms of popular participation are developed which are more conducive to improved productivity.

The book is not without its problems. As with most developmental studies, an emphasis on production and employment diverts attention from the positive benefits of economic changes for rural consumers. Furthermore, if class antagonisms and impetus to change are so subdued in rural Nepal, is crisis as imminent as the authors suggest? More seriously, although the authors recognize that discrimination along caste or ethnic lines is politically more volatile than exploitation of economic classes (p. 89), they do not develop the implications of these socially-determined classes for the political economy of development. But the importance of this book lies in its careful description of the economic system, and the unanswered questions about broader issues at least can be placed in a carefully described concrete setting.
The basic argument that planning and project design require information is in itself incontestible. What generates controversy, however, are questions concerning the kinds of data needed, how data are to be collected, and who should collect the data. The current methodology most favored in development work is the sample survey, where a battery of enumerators is sent out to gather all sorts of data from presumably forthright, honest and cooperative peasants. Samples give numbers, and numbers give truth. The larger the sample, indeed, the truer the results, it is believed. All too often, however, such supposedly "scientific" means of getting information turn out to be time-consuming, costly and complicated. And, as the authors of this innovative book argue, inaccurate.

The authors, two American anthropologists with extensive experience in Nepal, and a Nepali linguist, set out to demonstrate what they -- and many others -- have long suspected, namely, that sample surveys alone can yield a distorted and untrue picture of what is really "out there" in the rural areas. They give evidence that "non-sampling" errors are much larger and more distorting than "sampling" errors when doing studies in developing countries. The implication is that effort now directed to getting large numbers would be better spent doing smaller, more carefully constructed studies -- culturally sensitive inquiries based on considerable prior knowledge of the locality and people.

What the authors did was take portions of survey questionnaires actually used by agencies in Nepal and administer them through trained Nepali assistants in villages in which they, the authors, had themselves done intensive research previously. In all four general areas studied -- census information, household economics, health, and family planning -- and in all dimensions of these areas -- knowledge, attitudes and practice -- significant differences were found between what had been recorded on the one-shot survey and what the anthropologists could establish was the true state of affairs after prolonged stays in the communities.

In the area of family planning, for example, 51 percent of the respondents to the survey in one village said they had heard of the condom. Yet from more detailed knowledge, it was established that 83 percent of the men know of condoms. When village respondents were asked a question from the 1971 World Fertility Survey -- "Where would you go for information on family planning?" -- only 20 percent gave a knowledgeable answer. When the question was asked slightly differently, with more cultural sensitivity, "Where would your neighbors go for information on family planning?" 80 percent knew the answer. Based on the first response, the Nepali government had been pushing information to the villages on where to go for family planning advice, when the large majority already knew; only their attitudes inhibited use of these services.
When it came to information on land-holding size, for example, or days of labor invested in crop production, the authors found discrepancies from 50 to 200 percent between what was reported in the survey and what was established to be correct. Regarding loans and yearly expenses, the authors found evidence which rendered "all of the data for all of the households highly suspect."

More than just present their data, the authors do a nice job of explaining some of the reasons why survey data are, by themselves, unreliable and should be complemented by other research methods. Among the problems discussed are the sensitivity of certain topics, the fear of negative consequences, the desire to project the right public image, interviewer error, and recall problems. In a separate chapter, Shrestha deals with a topic not often discussed: the linguistic and conceptual intelligibility of the survey questions. He found, for example, that "80 percent of sample respondents were unable to fully understand the complete questionnaire."

By supplying information, it could be said that people are contributing to project design and planning, a kind of "participation." Yet because of the inappropriateness of the surveys for collecting accurate data — and because of the culturally inappropriate ways those surveys are designed — people are deprived of meaningful participation at even this minimal level. This is one reason why the study is particularly important. In addition to documenting carefully the problems with surveys, the authors outline a methodology which could overcome many of the weaknesses inherent in the survey mechanism. Basically, the alternative involves more in-depth, relevant and culturally-attuned research strategies. These in turn, require the greater involvement of social scientists, especially anthropologists, in development work.

Yet in hoping to achieve a synthesis between good social science and successful development efforts, the authors have fallen short of the mark. Ostensibly intended for practitioners (to have written a book for anthropologists on the need for more use of anthropology would have been preaching to the faithful), the book is aimed primarily at an academic audience. Although practitioners and project designers should be familiar with research techniques (if only so they can evaluate the quality of data they receive from social scientists), it is unlikely that many will be interested in the details of pretesting questionnaires, developing a manual for anthropological data collection, or the training of interviewers. As a manual for field researchers, Use and Misuse, is first-rate. But chapter titles like "Epistemological Issues in Social Science Research Methods" are likely to turn off those people who might find the insights most applicable.

There remains another difficult problem not adequately resolved. Although long-term participant-observation is desirable, social scientists do have some other methodological options. "Quick and dirty" methods such as rapid reconnaissance or the use of proxies can yield timely and relevant data where time, money or an unsympathetic, impatient project programmer precludes intensive and long-term research. The concerns of the book are toward integrating social scientists into the development process, but the language and recommendations are more congenial to academics.

Also left out is a discussion of how secondary materials can be used to get relevant information. Ministries and agencies suffer from institutional amnesia, a condition characterized by the filing of reports, a turnover of staff which guarantees that
filed reports are forgotten, the commissioning of new surveys similar to those already filed and forgotten, and on and on. Research done in libraries and filing cabinets, while not in itself sufficient, could be valuable in enhancing the effectiveness of social science research.

It could be argued that the authors intended the book to be nothing more than a critique of the survey methodology and a guide for making surveys more accurate. In this they have some useful insights and suggestions. But surveys themselves are only one aspect of the problem. The integration of social science and development practice requires a mutual understanding, respect and sympathy between social scientists and practitioners. The book provides an excellent presentation on social science for persons carrying out development programs, yet its basic orientation is for researchers in the field. It would have been more useful to deal more with how to adapt social science methods to working within the bureaucratic, time, resource and other constraints impinging on practitioners.

For what it sets out to do, Use and Misuse is a well thought-out book with an important message. Everyone should be aware of the extent to which non-sampling errors in surveys are likely to surpass sampling errors. For those planners and designers who think there is safety in numbers, the conclusions will be rather disconcerting. Information is important and accurate information necessarily entails some costs. Researchers should regard the book as a field manual. Practitioners should read it for the lessons it teaches about the illusory nature of much "scientific" data. And peasants, if only they could read, would find the book amusing, getting some good chuckles out of how far from the mark unsophisticated survey results can be.