

# **RICH POSSIBILITIES: NOTES ON SOCIAL HISTORY IN NEPAL**

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A two-day seminar entitled "International Seminar on the State of Nepali Historiography: Problems and Prospects" was organized by the Central Department of History of Tribhuvan University on October 12 - 13, 1993 in Kirtipur.<sup>1</sup> Three papers were presented: one on the historiography of ancient and medieval Nepal (Vaidya 1993), another devoted to an overview of Nepali historiography between 1769 and 1950 (Adhikari 1993) and a final one that highlighted selected trends and problems in post-1950 Nepali historiography (Upreti 1993). I feel that far too much time during the seminar was spent on reviewing the rather well-known history of history writing of Nepal and too little time was spent on identifying the weaknesses in our practice in substantive terms.<sup>2</sup> If significant progress is to be made in our historiography, then we must give detailed recognition to the gaps in the literature on ancient, medieval and modern Nepali history and carry out research projects that begin to address these lacunas.

Although I cannot claim such expertise for myself, I make here a modest attempt to do two things. I first look at how the 'social' is conceived from within the discipline. Using a somewhat dated classification of social history proposed by Eric Hobsbawm in 1971 – but still fulfilling the requirements of this preliminary discussion – I comment upon a few of the historical works written in the recent past to highlight the absence of a broad-based social history in our literature of the modern period.<sup>3</sup> Second, I address one particular gap, the general absence of oral history as method. I discuss some common attitudes toward oral history and suggest some possibilities for its use in social historical research. My conclusion calls for a greater pluralism in history writing practices in Nepal.<sup>4</sup>

## **Looking For Social History**

As already pointed out by many analysts, Nepali historians, with few exceptions, have for long been obsessed with the political history of the ruling elites.<sup>5</sup> This reveals an attitude which assumes that only those

"perched at the very apex of the polity" (Kumar 1989:247) mattered in the past, and therefore studies focussed on them adequately describe the historical process of our society.<sup>6</sup> The history of the ruling elites is more often than not passed off as the history of Nepal. The need to engage in a broadly conceived social history of the 'people of Nepal' from an interdisciplinary perspective has been reiterated on many occasions (e.g. Stiller 1974; Sharma 1974; Adhikari 1980), but there are few examples of such work.<sup>7</sup> Judging by what was said as comments during the history seminar, it seems that some senior historians still consider 'a history of the people' to be outside their research and teaching agendas.<sup>8</sup> One historian suggested that the political history of the elites can also illuminate the 'socio-economic' aspects of their times. Apart from the vagueness of the term 'socio-economic', what is noteworthy is the assumption that it is more legitimate to enter this turf via the lives of great personalities, a sure symptom of a trickle-down theory of history and society.

In an earlier article, I argued that disciplinary history's growth in Nepal was inextricably linked with the agenda of progress adopted by the Nepali state under Panchayati nationalism (Onta 1993b). Working under this nationalistic framework the Nepali historians chose the nation-state with all its claims to unity, freedom and progress and the class in power as the subject of all history. Focussing on future research agendas that are inclusive of themes and concerns that have been systematically omitted by previous historians, I argued that we should stop paying exclusive attention to elites and begin focussing on the life-experiences of the many subaltern classes of Nepalis.<sup>9</sup> Given the polemical tone of the earlier article, I seemed to be suggesting "a needlessly polarised view of the approaches available to the historian" (Whelpton 1993b:2). As should be clear from this paper, it was not my intention to suggest that approaches and topics other than those of the 'history from below' variety have been exhausted in Nepal. Nor was it my view that elite and subaltern histories are somehow hermetically sealed separate entities. Nor did I intend to identify the history of subaltern classes as 'social' and that of elites as 'political' (cf. Sarkar 1985:1082). My point then was that the 'history from below' approach was conspicuous by its absence in our historical literature, and it was therefore important for us to begin to pay attention to it.

This said, let us review what kind of social history we might have in our midst. In a 1971 essay entitled "From social history to the history of society," Eric Hobsbawm tried to discover where social history (mainly in Europe) then stood after what he described as "two decades of unsystematic if copious development" (1971:20). According to him, it has always been difficult to define social history, but broadly speaking, it had been used in

three sometimes overlapping senses. The first sense referred to "the history of the poor or lower classes, and more specifically to the history of the movements of the poor" under the rubric of "social movements" (1971:21). The second sense is in reference to "works on a variety of human activities difficult to classify except in such terms as 'manners, customs, everyday life.'" Hobsbawm added that this variety of social history was "not particularly oriented toward the lower classes – indeed rather the opposite – though the more politically radical practitioners tended to pay attention to them." He called this the "residual view of social history," equivalent to British historian George Macaulay Trevelyan's definition of social history as "the history of a people with the politics left out" (Trevelyan 1978[1942]:1), and dismissed it summarily as something that "requires no comment" (1971:21).<sup>10</sup>

The third sense in which the term 'social history' had been used was in combination with 'economic history,' although the former more often than not played second fiddle to the latter. Hobsbawm explained this predominance of the economic over the social by referring partly to the headstart that economics had had over the other social sciences and partly to a view of the economy in the Marxian and the German historical school which "refused to isolate the economic from social, institutional, and other elements."<sup>11</sup> Historians of this kind were interested in the "evolution of the economy, and this in turn interested them because of the light it threw on the structure and changes in society" (1971:22).<sup>12</sup>

Turning to our literature, let us first look at studies of the history of the poor and lower classes and their social movements. As Krishna Ghimere says in his recent book, social movements in Nepal are poorly documented (1992:138-46).<sup>13</sup> Scattered references to individual and collective acts of open resistance during Rana and Shah rule are found, but no substantive effort has been made to examine these.<sup>14</sup> However, even from these few references, some observations can be made. For instance, in the rebellion led by Lakhan Thapa the Second in Gorkha near the end of Jung Bahadur's rule, it is said that he declared himself as a king, and "pretended that he was specially commissioned by the Goddess *Manokamna* to overthrow Jung Bahadur" (Rana 1980[1909]:302). Previously he had claimed the status of a "saint" (idem: 303). Immediately after Jung's death in late February 1877, more than one Gurung in Gorkha declared himself a Buddhist emperor and engaged in revolts (Manandhar 2048 v.s.: 143-47). In 1840, a man by the name of Tule Rohani claimed to be an avatar of Lord Krishna and declared himself the king in the region of Parbat in west Nepal. His revolt is said to have lasted for almost a month (Nepal 2050 v.s.: 144 - 155). Shakti Yogamaya's dissent in east Nepal in the late 1930s is said to have been preceded by a period of

reclusive penance after which she acquired the power to engage in political activism (Aziz 1993: 19 - 29).

Manandhar, Nepal and Aziz have noted that those engaged in rebellion have claimed religious or kingly authority or both. At a general level, it is no exaggeration to suggest that the notion of power that inspired these rebellions was "made up of such ideas and expressed in such words and acts as were explicitly religious in character" (Guha 1983:34). As Guha has suggested, power and religion, were "inseparably collapsed" in the language of this violence. Given the explicitly religious ideologies of domination in general and that of political legitimacy in particular, such a language of protest is not unexpected. We see this, for instance, in Tule Rohani's claim to being a king and an avatar of Lord Krishna. Moreover the absence of attribution of his rising to any particular grievance suggests that protest can occur when an erosion in patterns of legitimate authority is felt (cf. Ramchandra Guha 1989:3). This is important to remember as we read historian Gyanmani Nepal's attempt to understand Tule Rohani's rebellion within the context of the political chaos then prevalent in Kathmandu amongst the *bharadari*. To always seek political chaos (or alternatively economic exploitation) as the reason for all acts of protest is to show trust in a notion of instrumentality that is hard to support in the face of what we know about cases of protest such as those by Rohani. This kind of secular historiography fails to come to terms with the contents of rebel consciousness. It fails to acknowledge that such acts of insurgency were not necessarily mindless and spontaneous response to a particular suffering or a passive reaction to some superordinate or elite initiative (cf. Guha 1983). Nepal's approach can also be compared with Aziz's initial search for "some higher authority" in trying to understand the "political positions and philosophies" of Yogamaya. She says that the bias she had inherited in her training as a social scientist prevented her from initially realizing that Yogamaya, a woman and a hill farmer, could "have arrived at her position based on her own intelligence and resources" (1993: 23).<sup>15</sup> Our historiography needs to recognize the rebel's agency as the motivating force of rebellions.<sup>16</sup>

Ghimere also draws our attention to acts of what we might call, following James Scott (1985), 'everyday forms of resistance' by sukumbasis in central terai in the recent past, but a historical examination of this phenomenon remains to be done. In Regmi (1978) we get a description and explanation of how and why peasant families from Nepal chose to migrate elsewhere during the second half of the nineteenth century. This could be seen as exercising the "exit" (Hirschman 1970) form of non-violent resistance even as the debate about whether or not "exit" counts as resistance remains open. Furthermore

we need to engage in substantial historical research on gender relations.<sup>17</sup> As some scholars have pointed out in recent years, studying resistance by the subaltern classes, of the violent and everyday kind, can be of great diagnostic value with regards to our study of power and social relations.<sup>18</sup> In our case, studying individual and collective acts of resistance – both everyday and violent ones – to Rana and Shah rule will better our understanding of how power was perceived and deployed under those regimes. While the administrative structure of power in these regimes is fairly well covered, the operation of power in the lived social experiences of the people is poorly understood.<sup>19</sup> Acts of protest also give insight, however limited, into the culture and consciousness of subaltern classes of Nepal.<sup>20</sup>

As for Hobsbawm's third sense of social history – one that appears in combination with economic history – Mahesh C. Regmi's corpus and Stiller's *The Silent Cry* (1976) are outstanding examples. Regmi has described in great detail the economic programs adopted by the Gorkhali rulers to mobilize human and material resources for territorial expansion. His work has helped, on the one hand, to understand the political lives of the rulers better, and on the other, the impact their policies had on the lives of the ordinary people for the period between the 1740s and 1900. His *Thatched Huts and Stucco Palaces* (1978) is a succinct essay that describes agrarian relations in Nepal during the nineteenth century. When the peasant, the actual cultivator of the land, is "compelled to share the major portion of his produce with parasitic groups who have no role in production, and whose income from the land is not available for use as capital in increasing agricultural productivity" (1978:x), endemic poverty is the result says Regmi. We also have in Regmi's work a description of the hierarchy constituted by political rulers, landowning elites, village level tax and rent collectors, moneylenders, and the peasantry.<sup>21</sup>

Regmi is well aware of the limitations of his research. In one place he has written: "Economic history seeks to portray only one aspect of the life of our ancestors, albeit an important aspect. A proper understanding of the economic life of a nation during any particular period in its history necessitates an understanding of its political history, the history of its social institutions, including, in a country such as Nepal, of caste and communal organization, religious and cultural ideas and ideologies, literature, and so on" (1978:xi). One attempt toward such an understanding, however limited it may be, can be found in Stiller's *The Silent Cry* (1976) which comes with a subtitle *The People of Nepal: 1816-39*. The main argument of this book is that Bhimsen Thapa, facing multiple *bharadari* onslaughts against him in the immediate wake of the failure of his leadership in the Anglo-Nepal war (1814-16), maintained a needlessly large army (one whose seventy plus year-old empire-

building role had been put to an end by the Treaty of Sagauli) "to provide critical support to his own political power" (1976:114). As the Gorkhali empire's expansion had come to an end and no new lands for military jagirs could be found, the cost required to maintain this army and other administrative structures imposed additional burden on the peasantry of village Nepal. Their increased impoverishment, their cry for help, Stiller argues, was not responded to by Bhimsen Thapa because doing so would have required reduction of the *jagirdār* army officer corps, the main pillar of his political support.<sup>22</sup>

Stiller is persuasive in his characterization of the increased burden on the peasantry, but it is far from clear how the army's draining of the "the vitality out of village" (1976:250) was played out in the different areas of Nepal. However we must note that despite the possible presence of a sense of incipient national affinity in the preexisting rajya states and what Stiller calls the 'bonds of union' – supra-local movement of people because of the hulak system, munitions industry, the army and the development of Terai lands – the administrative and economic integration of the Nepali state during these years was fragmented and weak. Centralized agrarian bureaucracy – the apparatus that ensured revenue extraction from the peasantry all the way to the rulers in Kathmandu – was not in place until some years into the Rana administration (Regmi 1978). Given the weak integration of the silent years, Stiller's argument cannot be sustained at an all-Nepal level. The additional burden on the peasantry identified by him needs to be regionally mapped.

Moreover, as Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka (1991) has pointed out, it would be a mistake to see local, village-level units as just "abstract victims of central policies". She suggests that the migration of people inside Nepal (west to east) – and I would add from Nepal to India – should be seen as "a constituent factor in the processes of changing power relations within local societies" (1991:233). To a certain extent Stiller is aware of this issue. Close inspection of Nepali villages, he suggests, would "reveal that it was not only government policies that were creating economic burdens for the villagers in Nepal," but the social structure of these villages also "had a great deal to do with the impoverishment of the people" (1976:300). While he recognizes that this factor might have strong moderating influences on many of his observations and on the central thesis of his book, Stiller adds that on the basis of historical data available to him, it would be impossible to analyze this aspect of village life.

Even as we may not totally agree with Stiller on the last point, at least one question in this context remains unanswered. How much of the ordinary Nepalis' lived social relations – those of the so-called peasants, artisans and others – can we learn from Regmi's and Stiller's work?<sup>23</sup> It is true that their

contributions have greatly enhanced our understanding of the effects of the Shah and Rana institutions of rule on the "ordinary people of Nepal as 'victims of history'" (Whelpton 1993b:2). However, it is my argument that their work relies too heavily on the extractive categories of the Shah state and Rana agrarian bureaucracy. When viewed from below and begun with the experiences of people occupying various social positions, possibilities for different – perhaps radically different – understandings of the 'effects' of these structures of power and institutions of rule will be obtained.<sup>24</sup> Therefore we might ask, for instance, what labour obligations legislated by the Nepali state meant in the localized politics of a village, and what forms of resistance were put up against these obligations. Similarly we might want to know in detail the complex relationships between poor peasants and moneylenders as well as other revenue-farming middlemen whose presence was so central to the functioning of the *jagir* system. We would like to know more about the presence and limits of monetization during the nineteenth and earlier centuries and how money's presence influenced elite and non-elite commercial transactions and consumption.<sup>25</sup>

I will now turn my attention to the second sense of social history – what Hobsbawm called the 'residual view of social history.' This 'history with the politics left out,' I suspect, is equivalent to the 'socio-economic' category employed by some of our writers. Despite Hobsbawm's blunt dismissal of this residual view as something requiring 'no comment,' it is with us. Take for example, the book *Social and Political History of Nepal* by B. D. Sanwal (1993). Two features of this book need to be highlighted here.<sup>26</sup> First Sanwal believes in a notion of historical staticity for Nepal that no one sufficiently familiar with the existing literature can really support. He therefore molds his argument for change in Nepal within a 'tradition versus modernity' framework that reigned supreme during the heyday of modernization theory some 25 to 35 years ago. History's disappearing object viewed as 'traditional society' is for Sanwal a rhetorical construct legitimising his book. Nepal is fast losing the character of a closed society, but do not worry as I have recorded it all in my land-mark survey is what Sanwal seems to be telling us. Such a mode of analytical operation inherent in which is modernity's creation of the 'traditional' as a way to make itself sell better cannot give us good history – social or otherwise. This becomes quite obvious as one reads through the chapters. Secondly his social history comes to us as disparate treatments of topics as diverse as geography and people of Nepal, society and religion, the Nepalese personality, art and literature, communications, trade and commerce, the army and the government, land administration, women in Nepal, rituals, family life, food habits and dress, and music, dance and drama. How the art, literature, religion, rituals, food habits, dress, music, dance and drama of the

people of Nepal might have evolved in response to Nepal's political or economic evolution or vice versa is not for him to discuss. He happily treats these subjects in the most discrete manner as if they were ships passing each other by in the night. His twelve-page discussion of the army, government and land administration makes no reference to the land-military complex identified as the central feature of Prithvinarayan's unification scheme by Stiller and Regmi. In fact, Sanwal's bibliography does not include a single work by these two authors.

Sanwal's ignorance of discussions in social theory and of the recent research literature on the history of Nepal is frightening, considering he calls his book a 'land-mark survey.' Even others who claim to write about social life in Nepal end up discussing just the state initiatives on things like slavery, sati, position of women and education from once-again the 'tradition to modernity' approach (e.g., Thapa 1988, Maskey 1989). Another recent book that has tried to discuss the social lives of Nepalis is *Social History of Nepal*, jointly authored by T. R. Vaidya, Tri Ratna Manandhar, and Shanker Lal Joshi (1993). This book almost fits Hobsbawm's 'residual view of history' category since it is largely a descriptive omnibus on a diverse array of topics: people, family system, habitational sites, food habits, dress and ornaments, social entertainment, and education. However, unlike Sanwal, they do make some attempts to link the changes in our social structure, position of women, and in above mentioned themes to changes in the political apparatus of Nepal. The strength of this book lies in the encyclopedic rendition of information on those topics. Its weakness is that the authors fail to provide any tangible framework of analysis within which much of the information provided could be intelligently processed.

In their discussion of the social structure, the authors describe the Varna system and changes in it throughout the long centuries between the eras of the Licchavis and the Shahs, including Jung Bahadur's 1854 code. While the varna and allied caste schemes are important aspects of the ancient and medieval social structures, the latter can not be reduced to a hierarchy based only on the notion of ritual purity along varna or caste lines (cf. Inden 1990). As it has become increasingly clear from the related literature for India, caste was almost always a politics of hierarchy in which other notions of authority, honor, and so forth were also important (e.g., Appadurai 1981; Dirks 1987). In our own case, caste and the so-called out-of-the-world renouncers (Dumont 1980) have been shown to be very much linked with state power (e.g., Bouillier 1991a, 1991b; Burghart 1984b, 1987; Levine 1987). Therefore varna and allied caste schemes can not be described as complete entities separate from political authority. The completeness of varna and caste classifications, as much as that of the 'national caste



hierarchy' (Höfer 1979) laid out in the 1854 code, is always an ideological assertion from a position of power (cf. Chatterjee 1989).<sup>27</sup>

Historical accounts as this one, based on normative and political texts and codes designed by ruling classes, tend to be limited in what they can say about the social structure of past societies as experienced by people occupying various social strata.<sup>28</sup> It is also unclear to what extent these formulae of rulers can be said to have initiated change. To say, as in this book, that the 1854 code divided the people into four general classes is easy. To study its internal logic, as done by Andras Höfer (1979) and others, is not that difficult either. But without knowing how much of that code was actually implemented, we cannot adequately assess its role in bringing about a change in the social structure. In the absence of any analytical framework, the information provided in this book on themes such as food habits, dress, ornaments and entertainment, appears in the form of discrete discussions that fail to provide a conceptual breakthrough in the writing of Nepali social history. In the conclusion the authors state that Hinduism is largely responsible for keeping the Nepali society stable and stagnant. Nepali society's stability (by which the authors implicitly mean the absence of revolutions, conflicts, cultural change and destruction) is as much the concoction of scholars as it was of the rhetoric of the Panchayat years.

I understand these limitations as evidence of how much remains to be done if we want to realize in concrete terms a more inclusive social history of our society. It is useful to remember that the central argument of Hobsbawm's article used here was a call to enlarge "social history" into "the history of society." In this schema of his, social history could never be just another hyphenated sub-field or specialization. As he said, "the social or societal aspects of man's being cannot be separated from the other aspects of his being, except at the cost of tautology or extreme trivialization" (1971:25).<sup>29</sup> History based on great personalities is of course one possible type of social historical research. But a social history that is at the same time history of the society can and must illuminate what we call the 'social' from different positions and interpretive frameworks. Eschewing a trickle-down theory of history based on the exclusive study of elite personalities does not mean that elites cannot be the subject of social history. If one lesson can be learnt from recent historical scholarship done elsewhere, it is most certainly that semiotic studies of power can illuminate the processes of domination and subordination in ways that can enhance the history of society in important directions.<sup>30</sup> Any attempt at a history of our society cannot neglect oral history for too long. In the following section, I argue in this sense that oral history must constitute an integral aspect of future historical research in Nepal.

### Using Oral History

The need to use oral sources, especially oral traditions, for the writing of history in Nepal has been recognized in the past (e.g., Uprety 1992b).<sup>31</sup> Some Nepali historians have made substantive use of oral history in their work (Gautam 2046 v.s.; Pangeni 2049 v.s.). However, widespread suspicion regarding the academic legitimacy of oral history by "document-driven historians" (Prins 1992) continues to relegate it to the margins of the discipline. Here I first examine two published opinions on the use of oral sources and then suggest that the general neglect of oral history by Nepali historians is related to research agendas that focus narrowly on the political history of the Nepali state and more importantly to their adherence to the Rankean notion of the past 'as it actually was.' I then visit some heavily relied upon nineteenth century British writings to remind us of their dependence on oral primary sources. Oral history as method is highlighted here under the belief that its use will partially rescue Nepali history from some of its current obsessions (cf. Onta 1993b), democratize our history to some extent (cf. Thompson 1988), and extend the possibilities of our past (cf. Davis 1981) into thus far uncharted territory.

Two published opinions provide some feeling of the prevailing attitude toward oral sources as historical sources for the writing of history in Nepal. The first comes from the preface to *Nepalko Sainik Itihas*, recently published by the Royal Nepal Army Headquarters (Sharma, Vaidya and Manandhar 1992). This military history of Nepal is a collection of ten chapters written by different authors, predominantly in the 'guts and glory' mode. Such a thematic orientation prevents the possibility of a critical evaluation of the role of the army in modern Nepali society. In the editorial preface to the volume, previously published works on this subject are briefly assessed and at one place (the preface pages are not numbered) the following is written: "Another author who has written a book on the Nepali military is Tek Bahadur Khatri. In the course of discussing the Nepali military in his book *Nepalko Sainik Itihas*,<sup>32</sup> he has put forth his arguments by giving emphasis to events he had heard. *Since most of the descriptions presented in his book are based on hearsay, the book cannot be seen as a work of scientific history.*"<sup>33</sup>

By assuming that "scientific history" cannot be written on the basis of what is heard, the editors rule out the possibility that oral history might significantly contribute to the military history of Nepal. They do not seem to recognize that information obtained from the process of hearing need not be conflated with hearsay. Furthermore, this book fails to recognize that what living individuals, both retired and current military servicemen, have to say about their years in the military can be as important a subject of military

history of Nepal as the state's past and present organisation and administration of the military, its military policies and accounts of some great warriors.<sup>24</sup> Chapter four analyzes the recruitment and service of the Gurkhas in the British Indian army (in the British and Indian armies after 1947) within the framework of conventional diplomatic history. As I argue below, the history of the Gurkhas encompasses many other aspects that can be discussed through use of oral history. The author of the following chapter on the Nepali army's contribution in the international arena acknowledges information received from various individuals who took part in Nepali army's international peace-keeping roles, but tells very little about the men's individual experiences and history.

I will now move on to the second example, related to Rajesh Gautam's book, *Nepalko Prajatantric Aandolanma Nepal Praja-Parishadko Bhumika* (1989). The analysis of the role of the Nepal Praja Parishad as a political entity in the anti-Rana movements of the 1930s and the 1940s is presented in this book at a level of detail unmatched by any other work. Gautam resorts to written sources whenever appropriate, but his work is largely based on the oral history he recorded from the members of the Parishad, including the late Tanka Prasad Acharya, Ganeshman Singh and others from their cohort. Although Gautam does not include an explicit theoretical statement regarding his position on oral history in general, through his use of it we can figure out that he considers oral sources as both legitimate and necessary for research on the recent past.

At least four reviews of this book were published in different Nepali newspapers.<sup>35</sup> One reviewer who otherwise praised the book for what it had accomplished had the following to say with respect to its use of oral history:

"This book is largely based on interviews with people who were asked to recall events that were 40 to 50 years old. What it reports is very subjective. Therefore, on the basis of objectivity, its reports will be found to be less than convincing. I consider some reports on King Tribhuvan and his son mentioned in this book to be evidence-less and fully fictional.<sup>36</sup> It would have been better if such fictional accounts had not been included in this book.

"In the absence of authoritative records and other kinds of evidence, it is extremely difficult for anyone today to analyse the truth of what was claimed in these interviews. There was no mechanism to record these events then. They could not have been recorded. Therefore I accept that the writer had no choice

but to rely on interviews with and memories of available participants for events beginning with 1993 [v.s. when Prajaparisad was established]. Even though based on interviews and memories, this book is definitely very important.

"But scientific history writing is a difficult body of knowledge. This science tries to establish itself upon real and uncontroversial evidence. Whatever they might be, memories that are 40-50 years old cannot be accepted by this science as evidence. Science can only make tangible evidence, not memories, its basis.

"Those of us whose view of history is as stated above, despite appreciating this book's importance, cannot accept that in this research work, sufficient basis had been established for the awarding of a Ph.D. by the University. I feel that it is inappropriate and unacceptable for a university to accept memories and interviews as the basis of history writing. In this, I am in total disagreement with TU.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, I am in total praise for the book....*Most of the interesting descriptions given in the book are based on memories. They might be all true – in the view of the author and in my own view – but our view does not grant them a status of evidence for scientific history*" (Dixit 1989).<sup>38</sup>

This review was written by the veteran writer Madan Mani Dixit. Although he is not a professional historian, I have extracted his review at such length because for me it shows the extent to which the view of history as documented in written sources has influenced educated opinions on history as science. Dixit's dilemma regarding Gautam's book based on oral history – a good work to be appreciated for sure, but not a piece of appropriate scientific history – is honestly and eloquently put. But why this dilemma?

As the Italian microhistorian Carlo Ginzburg has recently reminded us, "in any society the conditions of access to the production of documentation are tied to the situation of power" (1993:21). Ruling elites usually leave some quantity of documentation behind them.<sup>39</sup> Since historians of Nepal have, in the main, concerned themselves with the lives and politics of Nepal's rulers, they have turned to these documents as primary source material. It then becomes easy to neglect oral sources. But I think there is a more deep reason why oral history is neglected or its legitimacy doubted by Dixit and others.<sup>40</sup> As in the history writing traditions elsewhere at other times (e.g., Novick 1988), 'true and objective history' has been one of the disciplinary fetishes of history writing in Nepal. In practical terms, this is translated to a Rankean attempt to capture the past 'as it actually was' based on 'real and uncontroversial evidence.' Such true and objective history, "universally available to anyone who has mastered the requisite scientific procedures"

(Scott 1992:47), is opposed to what gets called subjective history – an account that is necessarily biased and susceptible to political manipulation (e.g., Khanduri 1993) – an undesirable disciplinary object.<sup>41</sup> Oral sources are thought to be inherently biased and subjective. Thus they do not qualify as 'evidence for scientific history.'

Questions regarding the reliability of oral sources have haunted proponents of oral history for a long time. An extended discussion on this topic for our purposes is not necessary, as it has been done by others (e.g., Hoffman 1974; Prins 1992; Thompson 1988; Vansina 1985).<sup>42</sup> Instead, two issues inherent in such a discussion are mentioned here. First, the relationships between written sources and the 'reality' they putatively describe need more scholarly attention in our historiography than they have thus far received. Documents are not simply repositories of tangible and uncontroversial evidence of a past reality. They construct reality as much as they reveal it. Critical historiography cannot be unaware of this.<sup>43</sup> Secondly, it is instructive to view the issue of 'reliability' and 'true and objective history' in terms of the chimera of complete and neutral history versus partial and consciously positioned history.<sup>44</sup> All historical accounts are necessarily – as an epistemological matter – partial and written from a particular position. Therefore, along with Rosaldo (1989) and many others, I believe it is necessary to specify, as far as possible, both these characteristics of historical work. This to me is a matter of intellectual integrity. It must be emphasized that to specify these characteristics is not to eschew accuracy which is often conflated with a claim of objectivity. Instead accuracy means that the production process of the our interpretation is clearly articulated. It follows then that our job is not to record a grand positivist claim regarding the 'truth' in history, but to provide a differentiated assessment of the subject, specifying in the process the theoretical and other assumptions used and the degrees of likelihood regarding the plausibility of our arguments.

While advocating oral history, I do not propose that we use only oral history for our writings. There might be instances where the absence of other sources might require exclusive reliance on oral sources. But on most occasions, production of competent histories requires intelligent use of a wide variety of sources. An enduring hierarchy between sources need not be established a priori. Oral history need not be naively associated with only the subaltern classes of Nepal, although I suspect that given the conditions of differential access to the production of written documents, oral sources will usually be the primary sources in the writing of their histories. As has been demonstrated by Gautam (2046 v.s.) and Pangenji (2049 v.s.) oral history can also enrich the writing of elite political history.

Anthropological studies of Nepal, led in the main by foreign researchers, have used oral sources quite extensively. Apart from the use of interviews to collect basic ethnographic information and individual oral history, some of these anthropologists have made use of native oral traditions to reconstruct the history of various peoples within Nepal. This is especially true of those anthropologists who were interested in pursuing a historical dimension to their work or were investigating the cultural histories of the people they were studying. The apparent and real lack of documentary sources that could throw much light on the history of various peoples living in different regions of Nepal was only one of the reasons that encouraged these anthropologists to consider oral traditions for their work. These oral traditions in turn have been profitably used to enrich other aspects of their ethnography as well.<sup>45</sup> Anthropologists in recent years have also looked at oral ritual texts.<sup>46</sup> While works that show how oral traditions interpenetrate the traditions of the written word and vice versa remain to be done, the contribution of the anthropologists to a deeper historical understanding of Nepal is significant.<sup>47</sup> However, Nepali historians are yet to adopt anthropological methods in their research. Their absence during the two anthropology conferences held in Kathmandu in September, 1992, and the absence of anthropologists during the history seminar are evidence of a lack of an active inter-disciplinary interest among the practitioners of both disciplines here in Nepal.<sup>48</sup>

British writings on the history of Nepal during the nineteenth century are precursors to the disciplinary products of the past few decades. Writers like Francis Buchanan Hamilton and Brian Hodgson, colonial employee-scholars who were not necessarily professional historians, have made significant use of oral sources. In mentioning their works briefly here, I want to simply highlight that these works have used oral sources in ways which historians of today might find useful for their own research.<sup>49</sup> Hamilton visited Nepal with the Knox mission of 1802-03 and stayed in the Kathmandu Valley for fourteen months. Later on as part of an assignment for the East India Company begun in 1807, he travelled in north Bihar and other frontier areas for two years. His account is a product of substantial research which, as he mentions in the introduction to the book, is heavily dependent upon oral sources (1819:1-6).<sup>50</sup> Hamilton's work, especially the second part (1819:117-290), is still regarded as a good source for the political history of the hill kingdoms of central and west Nepal prior to the rise of the house of Gorkha (Stiller 1973).<sup>51</sup> To get around the restrictions imposed by the rulers of Nepal on the staff of the Knox Mission of which he was a member, Hamilton employed "an intelligent Brahman" from Calcutta and took him to Nepal. The Brahman's information-gathering work had to be done prudently lest he offend Nepal's "jealous government" or the head of the British

Mission, Captain Knox.<sup>52</sup> Since any place beyond the valley of Kathmandu was off-limits to him, Hamilton, during the course of his travels in the frontier areas, also elicited information from many other people (he provides a list of their names and the areas of which they could speak about in an "informed" manner). Among other things, they provided him with information on the various (by-then) vanquished hill principalities and their diverse peoples. Therefore, the oral nature of his sources, both in the form of interviews with people on the contemporary conditions of life in various parts of Nepal and oral history about the conquered territories, is a central fact of his work. However, the possible motives of his sources in volunteering such information cannot be adequately discerned from what he has said about them in his book.

When the British Residency Office was established in Kathmandu as part of the treaty of Sagauli which recognized the defeat of the Nepali side in the 1814-16 Anglo-Gorkha war, it provided a venue for certain administrators to do scholarly writing. Among the scholar-administrators related to the British Residency in Kathmandu, Brian Hodgson is undisputedly the best known.<sup>53</sup> Like Hamilton before him, Hodgson too relied on oral sources to gather information he eventually edited and used in his several essays. Whenever possible, Hodgson resorted to directly contacting "most respectful" persons to obtain necessary information (Hodgson 1874, part ii: 92).<sup>54</sup> Who these people were and how Hodgson's role as a editor and writer transformed the information they provided him, remain obscure. Nevertheless, I mention this point here to once again emphasize the central role of the oral sources in the work of the most important foreign scholar of Nepal during the nineteenth century.<sup>55</sup> Now I turn to some examples where oral history has or can be of use.

1. Raktapat Committee. The first example comes directly out of the political history of the anti-Rana activities, that of the so-called Raktapat Committee.<sup>56</sup> Prem R. Uprety writes, "This was one of the many little known organizations that sprouted in Nepal with the sole objective to reduce the Rana oligarchy into ashes; and establish a republican government in Nepal. It operated from Kathmandu as well as Cwanpore and its permanent secretary was J. B. Malla. This small group of revolutionary activists had drunk deep from the cup of Russian revolutionary nihilism that appeared in the later half of the nineteenth century" (1992a:83). According to Uprety, the Committee issued a pamphlet dated September 7, 1940, in which it criticized Rana rule in general and the then Rana Prime Minister Juddha Shumshere in particular in most trenchant terms. Later, in February, 1942, it issued another leaflet which repeated the criticism against Juddha ("He should be banished or shot dead at once.") and, for the first time, expressed "the absolute need for

inaugurating a republic in the very heart of the Himalayas" (Uprety 1992a:85).<sup>57</sup> Uprety adds that the Committee had "built high hopes and expected full support and cooperation from the Japanese government in their effort to establish a republic government in Nepal" (ibid). Japan's fall in August 1945 shattered the Committee's republican dream.

Rajesh Gautam, in the above-discussed book, also mentions the Raktapat Committee briefly (2046 v.s.:51-2).<sup>58</sup> On the basis of oral history he had collected from two members of the committee, Marichman Nakarmi and Ganesh Raj Shrestha 'Gorkhali', Gautam tells us that under the initiative of King Tribhuvan, a group of men, mostly from his personal staff, were organised and trained in the use of arms. This group consisted of the then Crown Prince, the two princes, Agni Shumshere (son of Juddha Sumshere and an aide-de-camp to Tribhuvan), Chandra Man Sainju, Ram Das, Katak Bahadur Nakarmi and the two named above. It was planned that Joodha Shumshere would be called to the Narayanhiti Palace on some pretext, and when he came he would be made unconscious. Other prominent Ranas in the roll of succession would then be invited to the same place under a fake order from Juddha and a *Kot*-style massacre (from which Jung Bahadur had emerged as the most powerful man in Nepal) would be carried out. The plan did not succeed. After its failure, the group went to Guheshwari and all the members promised, while their fingers were immersed in the water, not to tell anyone about their failed scheme. Members of this group were later arrested in 1997 v.s. by the Ranas and imprisoned for various lengths of time. Following the writing of another scholar, Gautam says that it was the Ranas who called this group the "Raktapat Committee."

It is unclear from the descriptions of Uprety and Gautam if the Raktapat Committee they each talk about is the same one. I cannot definitely resolve, way but a few comments can be made here. The man identified as Ganesh Raj Shrestha 'Gorkhali' by Gautam is my grandfather, otherwise known as Ganesh Raj Onta.<sup>59</sup> He was a member of the personal staff of King Tribhuvan, having obtained his job in 1990 v.s.. During the course of the action described by Gautam, he too was inducted into King Tribhuvan's scheme. According to Ganesh Raj, this group never gave itself a name and therefore it seems plausible that the name "Raktapat Committee" was given to the group during their trial in 1997 v.s.<sup>60</sup> It is likely that a different group of anti-Rana activists identified by Uprety were in operation during (based on their two pamphlets) at least during 1940-42, calling themselves by that name. Who J. B. Malla (identified as the permanent secretary in the first pamphlet) was is not known to Ganesh Raj. We must note that the group with which the latter was involved had mostly been arrested, along with the members of the Nepal Praja Parishad and others, during the second half of



October 1940 (Gautam 2046 v.s.:155-65) and given various prison sentences. While they were in prison, the second pamphlet identified by Uprety was issued by the Raktapat Committee in February, 1942. J. B. Malla could be a pseudonym. It is also possible that these pamphlets were the work of one individual or a small group. It is also likely that having received the first pamphlet by September 15, 1940 (Uprety 1992a:84), Juddha and the other Ranas felt that the plans of King Tribhuvan's group matched the threats included in the pamphlet and decided to call it the Raktapat Committee.<sup>61</sup> We may never know that for sure. Nevertheless archival and oral historical research have raised the possibility of the existence of two separate groups of anti-Rana activists identified by the same name.<sup>62</sup>

2. Gurkhas in Oral History. Gurkha history has been a charged field. The Gurkhas have been "a currency of diplomacy in Anglo-Nepalese relations" (Des Chene 1991) and a pet theme in diplomatic histories of Nepal. For Nepali nationalists Gurkha history either embodies celebratory Nepali bravery, or as "mercenary labor," it is a subject of deep embarrassment. Even though these two positions are usually associated with right-leaning and left-leaning politics respectively, such clean correlations are not to be found. Therefore it is fair to say that the history of the Gurkhas has been subsumed under sanitised diplomatic and nationalist history (Onta 1993b). It seems to me that we should now explore themes in the Gurkha connection that seriously engage with the lives and jobs of the Gurkhas. Oral history can make us attentive to some of these themes. Mary Des Chene's (1991) pathbreaking dissertation on the cultural history of the Gurkhas uses oral history in many an innovative way. Here I look at three booklets of oral history published by the United Mission to Nepal under its "Pipal Pustak" scheme. Like the other books in this scheme, these three booklets, published in its "Sainik Jeevan" series, are used as reading materials for recent adult literates.<sup>63</sup> They can help us to write the theme of *dukha* into Gurkha history.

In the first booklet entitled *Aaphanee Khuttama Uvine Prayas* (Trying to be Independent) we learn about the struggles of a woman whose Gurkha husband was killed in one of the India-Pakistan confrontations. After getting married, this woman did not get to spend much time with her husband. After his death, we learn about the harrassment she underwent at the hands of her in-laws. Later she was able to obtain a sweater sewing machine with help from the Pension office of the Indian Gurkhas. She now makes a living that way. The second, entitled *Ladainye ko Pida* (The Pain of War) relates the experiences of Jas Bahadur Dambur Pal Magar who was wounded in the 1965 Indo-Pak war. This describes the scene of war in a vivid way: "A red river of blood was flowing on the while snow....Everywhere there were dead

bodies."<sup>64</sup> He recovered from the first wound only to be wounded again. Abandoned because medical personnel thought he would die, he recovered. His eyesight became bad and he was sent off on pension.

The third, entitled, *Lahureko Katha* (The Story of a Lahure), is the life-history of Om Bahadur Rana, who joined the Indian Gurkhas in 1949 and saw action during the 1962 India-China conflict. Making a living as a porter in the impoverished economy of Syangja, Om Bahadur went to Gorakhpur to get himself recruited in the Indian Gurkhas after an accidental meeting with the *gallawalla* (recruiter). In early phases of his training Om Bahadur remembers an occasion where the food he was given to eat did not satisfy his hunger. At that time, he writes, "I remembered home and I wanted to cry." During the India-China conflict of 1962, he was wounded. "Many who were nearby were killed. Many were made prisoners of war.... We went into the jungle and toward the hills to save ourselves from the attack by Chinese. It was snowing very heavily then. We could not see the sun. It snowed continuously for seven days. Many friends were abandoned on the way because of the cold, hunger and fatigue, many died. The face of those who died were covered by their own caps as we left them. Despite our efforts to save the lives of many, we could not do anything."

He continues: "We ate grass on the way. When we became thirsty we drank the ice that had melted under our friends' boots and licked some salt.... On the ninth day of our walk, I could walk no more. I thought I was going to die as well. My friends abandoned me and continued walking. I was alone. When I could not move my body anymore, I threw myself on the ground inside a cave and slept through the night. On the tenth day, there was some sunlight. My body started to warm up as well." Om Bahadur's troubles did not end there, but he was lucky. He eventually recovered and later participated in the 1971 Indo-Pak war. He was pensioned in 1974.

Dhuka remains central to the lives of these three individuals. In the first case, the dukha of a Gurkha wife is brought to our attention, whereas in the latter two cases, we learn about dukha and death in wars in which Gurkhas participated. Dukha can also be a theme that might profitably link the pre-army and post-army lives of Gurkhas in history and in the present.<sup>65</sup> Yet this theme finds very little mention in the historical literature on the Gurkhas.<sup>66</sup> This kind of oral history helps us to divert our attention to important aspects of the Gurkha connection other than the well-known charged themes. It makes it possible for us to get a preliminary view of how Gurkha warriors experienced various kinds of dukha in and out of the army. It also brings our attention to what they consider as important in their renderings of the past. Extending Gurkha history in this way begins to enrich it with themes omitted in the celebratory or denunciatory accounts written the past.

## Conclusion

As I have repeatedly argued here and elsewhere, the dominant disciplinary tendency to reduce the history of Nepal to a biography of the state and the class that controls its complex apparatus is no longer tenable. A respectable history of our society that supersedes this tendency requires that we first broaden our notion of what counts as historical knowledge and claim more areas of the past as the subjects of our history. In practical terms this means that we adopt a greater pluralism in our research subjects, methods and interpretive frameworks. New research themes will have to be pursued both inside the domain of conventional political history and on the largely unexplored turf of social history as discussed here. New evidence and methods need to be used to throw fresh light on themes treated by earlier historians just as much as old evidence needs to be used to answer new questions about things we thought we knew and things we did not know. It also means that we historians will have to step out of state archives and trespass disciplinary turfs traditionally occupied by anthropologists, sociologists, folklorists, literary critics, and economists, among others. We need not follow any one particular combination of research subjects, methods and approaches. The method highlighted here, oral history, is one among many that have been heretofore largely neglected. Its adoption in our research work just as the pursuit of "history from below" approach can enrich our understanding of the past in important ways. As researchers we should remember that what matters ultimately are the results we produce and how much of the history of our society we can illuminate through our studies. Rich possibilities exist if we can rise up to the challenge of doing broad-based social history in Nepal.

## Notes

1. I am variously indebted to Manisha Aryal, Saurav Bhatta, Lee Cassanelli, Rajesh Gautam, Ram N. S. Rawat, Ajay Scaria, Tek B. Shrestha, Nirmal M. Tuladhar, and Kathy White. Critical comments by Mary Des Chene and Rachel Tolen on a related paper and by my sister Lazima Onta and Sudhindra Sharma on an earlier draft of this essay have helped me greatly. Stephen Mikesell gave extensive editorial comments on the final draft. I thank them all. However, I am solely responsible for the deficiencies that still remain.
2. The most tragicomic moment of the seminar was when during discussion time on the second day a participant read out a long list of historians whose names had not been mentioned in the three papers and in the subsequent discussions. Unless such seminars are thought to be an occasion for scholarly name-dropping, it was not clear what purpose would have been served by the inclusion of these names. For

- reports on the seminar, see Khanal (1993), Khanduri (1993) and Onta (1993e).
3. For the purposes of this paper, the "modern period" refers to the years since the 1740s. Vaidya has suggested that the "periodization of Nepalese history should be reclassified on the basis of some important events which have proved to be a turning point in the history of the country. Further research on the subject will reveal many things which will be helpful in the scientific periodization of Nepalese history" (1993:7). Instead of hoping for some scientific periodization that will be valid for all historical inquiries, I find classifications that are based on the thematic requirements of the concerned research to be more helpful.
  4. Almost all disciplinary historians of modern Nepal are Nepalis (Onta 1993b). This essay is targeted to that group of Nepali historians.
  5. See Adhikari (1980, 1993), Gautam (2041 v.s.), Stiller (1974) and Upreti (1993) for general discussions on the historiography of the modern period. See also Sharma, Stiller and Upreti (1978). Despite the important contributions made by historians of the Samsodhan Mandal, an obsession with elite political history also marks their work. A thorough evaluation of the contributions of the Mandal – which also pays adequate attention to its genesis and growth, the later decline in the number of its members and the intellectual differences between them, debates between the Mandal and other historians – will make for an interesting project in the history of the discipline in Nepal. See also an interview with Jagadish C. Regmi by Ramchandra Gautam (2049 v.s.).
  6. A similar attitude can be detected in political science writings in Nepal (see Onta 1992b).
  7. Nepali poets have also noted the absence of 'the history of the people' (e.g., "Unwritten History" by T. R. Onta 1984:11-12)
  8. For an extended discussion of 'people's history' see Samuel (1981). In one place, he writes, "People's history always represents some sort of attempt to broaden the basis of history, to enlarge its subject matter, make use of new raw materials and open new maps of knowledge. Implicitly or explicitly it is oppositional, an alternative to 'dry as dust' scholarship, and history as taught in the schools. But the terms of that opposition are necessarily different in different epochs and for different modes of work" (1981:xvi, my emphasis). As he also points out, 'people's history' has a long history of its own that is associated variously with left, liberal and right-wing usages. Also see Burke (1981).

9. I use the word subaltern to refer to the oppressed in any social relationship.
10. In Trevelyan's defence we need to state that in the same paragraph where he presented that definition of social history he also wrote, "It is perhaps difficult to leave out the politics from the history of any people, particularly the English people. But as so many history books have consisted of political annals with little reference to their social environment, a reversal of that method may have its uses to redress the balance. During my own lifetime a third very flourishing sort of history has come into existence, the economic, which greatly assists the serious study of social history. For the social scene grows out of economic conditions, to much the same extent that political events in their turn grow out of social conditions. Without social history, economic history is barren and political history is unintelligible" (1978[1942]:1).
11. Economic history also had a headstart in India primarily as an effort on the part of Indian nationalists to understand and critique colonial economy (Chandra 1966; Bhattacharya 1982).
12. The separation between economic and social history came as economics rushed to become the 'queen of social sciences', within which economic historians increasingly became cliometricians. Those historians still interested in questions related to the economy but who eschewed the mathematically precise pretensions of the economic historian preferred to call themselves social historians. But according to Hobsbawm, far more significant a reason for the rise of social history was the "general historization of the social sciences which took place during this period" (1971:23). This happened at a different rate in the different disciplines and for different reasons, but as a general realization that as social scientists you could not pursue many of your analytical activities "without coming to terms with social structure and its transformations," that is, the history of societies, was common to all (1971:24).
13. Ghimere's book is reviewed elsewhere (Onta 1993a). Whelpton, in his letter to the editor, reminds me that the works of Mahesh C. Regmi and Ludwig Stiller are "very much concerned with the ordinary people of Nepal as 'victims of history'" (1993b:2). I will return to this point shortly.
14. See for example Manandhar (2048 v.s.:143-47), Nepal (2040 v.s., 2050 v.s.:77-91, 109-11, 144-60, 173-82) and Rana (1980[1909]:302-4). Scattered references to 'disturbances' can also be found in the Regmi Research Series (e.g., 20(5):67-68, May 1988). For the 1840

- army mutiny and for the case of 'near mutiny' by a Gurung regiment against Jung Bahadur in 1857, see Whelpton (1991:73-86, 210-12). For anthropological writings, see Aziz (1993), Caplan (1970), Enslin (1990), and Upreti (1975). Low-caste protest is mentioned in Joshi and Rose (1966:43).
15. Aziz (1993) also makes a point about how Yogamaya is not remembered in Nepali historical consciousness. This is acknowledged with embarrassment by the late Parijat in a letter appreciating Aziz's research on Yogamaya (see Parijat 2048 v.s.:29-31).
  16. These observations warrant comparison with cases observed elsewhere in the subcontinent and beyond. The ruthless violence used by Nepal's rulers to put down these rebellions and the language used by writers and historians to represent them also deserve our attention. For instance, the language employed by Pudma Jung Rana to describe Lakhan Thapa the Second's rebellion (e.g., 'fanatic') reminds one of what Ranajit Guha has called "the prose of counter-insurgency" (1983).
  17. Some descriptive writings on "position of women" in Nepali history do exist (e.g., Thapa 1985, 1988; Sanwal 1993:66-72; Vaidya, Manandhar and Joshi 1993:96 - 137). For anthropological writings, see Aziz (1993), Enslin (1990, forthcoming), Holland and Skinner (forthcoming), Parajuli and Enslin (1990), Skinner, Valsiner and Basnet (1991), Skinner, Holland and Adhikari (forthcoming), and Thompson (1993). Enslin, and Skinner et al. have taken up the performances and texts of the songs of teej as instances of resistance. While their discussions are informed by current contributions in social theory on this subject, for a similar treatment coming from a different intellectual context, see Parajuli (2051 v.s.). However, I hope teej songs will not become the only staple for this sort of analysis and scholars will continue to search for other instances and texts. For theoretical discussions of gender in history, see Scott (1988, 1992).
  18. For instance, see Abu-Lughod (1990). But see Ortner (forthcoming) for a critique of the ethnographic thinness of the 'resistance' literature. For caution against the romanticization of resistance, see Adas (1991).
  19. For discussions of the former, see the corpus of Mahesh C. Regmi, Adhikari (1984), and Edwards (1976), among others.
  20. The theme of culture and consciousness of subaltern classes for the case of Indian history has been raised most vigorously by historians belonging to the Subalten Studies group (see Guha 1982-1989; Chakrabarty 1991). Other Indian historians have also worked on this theme (e.g., Ramchandra Guha 1989; Menon 1993). The relevant

literature for the case of European and American history is quite large. For a discussion on the contradictions that might be involved in the valorization of the popular, see Strauss (1991, 1993) and Beik (1993). For recent overviews of 'history from below' see Hobsbawm (1985) and Sharpe (1992).

21. Also see the interview with Regmi in Gaenzle (1992a) and Regmi (1993a).
22. Stiller also writes that the needlessly large army was also restless. The 'roll' system (one year of paid active service followed by two years of unpaid stand-by duty), irregularity of pay emanating from difficulties within the jagir system, and restrictions of promotion were three of the main causes of restlessness within the army (1976:205 -12). The relationships between this restlessness, including the stunting of the possibilities of social mobility through a career in the Nepali army and the growth in Gurkha recruitment in the British Indian army during these 'silent years', remain to be studied. Stiller also provides important insights into village justice and its relationship with rent/tax collectors, and Sanskritization through state means and its dialogue with local customs. I cannot do full justice to the many other insights presented in this book here.
23. I was reminded of this question most recently when I read Adrian Sever's *Nepal Under the Ranas* (1993). Sever claims in his preface that his is a "history of peasants as well as prime ministers" and that it provides "some small insight into the world of the unnamed, unsung peasantry of rural Nepal." These are laudable sentiments, but this book – its narrative is organized around the regnal years of the successive Rana rulers and its contents borrowed from previous works without proper acknowledgement – teaches us next to nothing about the the worlds of Nepali peasants. Mahesh C. Regmi has rightfully accused Sever of using his material without giving him proper credit (1993b:25). The photographs included in Sever's book, however, could be useful visual evidence to historians interested in Rana history.
24. For an example that partially illuminates my point, compare Shrestha's (1990) general account of labour migration from the Nepali hills with Des Chene's (1992) account of Gurung journeys in search of wage labour. Pigg (1992) is illuminating on the theme of bikas as viewed from different locations within Nepal. The studies by Italian microhistorians could also be instructive. For overviews of their work, see Ginzburg (1993), Levi (1992), and Muir (1991).

25. With respect to other themes in economic history, vertical trade linkages connecting North India to Tibet via Nepal, that preceded Nepal's unification and existed in important ways until recently and their relationship with the Nepali state, remain to be comprehensively documented. For recent works focussing on various aspects of the trade with Tibet for the case of Newars, see Jest (1993), Lewis (1989, 1993a, 1993b). By the middle of the nineteenth century, mercantile capitalism's exponents were important players in the economy of the central hills (Mikesell 1988). How these exponents mesh with what Regmi and Stiller have taught us is unfortunately not very well worked out by Mikesell or anybody else for that matter. Similarly we know little about short and long-distance labour networks that existed amongst the peasantry and about remittance economy in general. Also with respect to the twentieth century, one important question that we might pursue is, what was the economic base of the anti-Rana politics.
26. For a separate review of this book, see Onta (1993d).
27. The relationship between political power and caste can also be seen in the Ranas' invention of an elevated caste status for themselves (Whelpton 1987). This happens to be the best known case in our period and there are others that remain to be fully documented.
28. This limitation can also be seen in Vaidya and Manandhar's (1985) historical discussion on the important topic of crime and punishment in Nepal.
29. So in this sense, social history is equivalent to what historians from the Annales school have called 'total history' (Burke 1990).
30. Here one recalls what the American anthropologist Clifford Geertz once wrote: "The locus of study is not the object of study....where an interpretation comes from does not determine where it can be impelled to go" (1973:22-3).
31. Jan Vansina defines oral traditions as "verbal messages which are reported statements from the past beyond the present generation" (1985: 27). Ajay Scaria prefers to call oral traditions "transmitted past", because more often than not, the literature on oral traditions tacitly assumes that these traditions are universally shared or at least widely shared by the community under study. By calling it 'transmitted past', he wants to emphasize the contestatory nature of these traditions (1992:11fn33). See also Prakash (1990). My use of the term 'oral traditions' combines the sense given to it by Vansina and Scaria and I use the term 'oral history' in this paper to refer to oral accounts of a past that is contemporary to the narrator.



32. I have added this footnote. Here the editors have made an error with respect to the title of Khatri's book, although they give the correct title in the bibliography (1992:621). It is Sahi Nepali Senako Itihas and was published in 2041 v.s..
33. My translation and emphasis. I have translated janashruti of the original as hearsay. Pradhan and Pradhan (1983:213) also give rumour and common talk as synonyms to hearsay.
34. See chapter seven written by Shiva Prasad Sharma and Kamalraj Singh Rathaur for the great warriors who incidentally are all from the unification era that began with Prithvinarayan Shah and ended with the treaty of Sagauli. See Chapters 2, 3, and 9 for military organisation/administration and policies.
35. The book was also given the prestigious Madan Puraskar for the year 2046 v.s..
36. It is unclear which reports mentioned by Gautam are considered 'fictional' by this reviewer.
37. Gautam had received his Ph.D. from Tribhuvan University (TU) for this book.
38. My translation and emphasis.
39. Cf. the notes on business records by Mikesell and Shrestha (1990: 78-9). Even though the merchant records which included "ledgers, letters, purchase orders and receipts, railroad freight-bills, shipping insurance documents, court and other litigation records, and tax and land records" are not 'official' documents, they "provide documentation for the extension and rise of a major new form of state representing the global dominance of capital, as it was experienced in Nepal. Importantly, the documents give insight into the struggle of capital to establish its control and legitimacy in the countryside" (ibid).
40. Paul Thompson writes: "...the opposition to oral evidence is as much founded on feeling as on principle. The older generation of historians who hold the chairs and the purse-strings are instinctively apprehensive about the advent of a new method. It implies that they no longer command all the techniques of their profession. Hence the disparaging comments about young men tramping the streets with tape recorders" (1988: 71). Prins suggests that the historians' pride in writing and their respect for the written word make them "hold the spoken word in contempt" (1992: 116).
41. For a relevant discussion of professionalism versus politics, history versus ideology, and politics versus theory, see Scott (1992).
42. A useful set of essays on oral history can be found in Dunaway and Baum (1984).

43. On the rhetorical aspects of this, see LaCapra (1985), among others.
44. I owe this particular formulation to Mary Des Chene.
45. To list only a few examples, see Burghart (1978), Clarke (1980), Gaenszle (1993), Gauchan and Vinding (1977), Oppitz (1974), Ortner (1989), Ramble (1983), Stevens (1993), and Vinding (1978). See also Jest (1991). For oral traditions as origin legends, see for example, Dahal (1985), Holmberg (1989), Levine (1976), McDougal (1979), Messerschmidt (1976), Oppitz (1983) and Rai (1985). A one-day seminar on "Oral Traditions and Literature in Nepal" was organized on 22 May 1992 by the University of Heidelberg South Asia Institute, Kathmandu Branch Office in Kathmandu. A brief report on the seminar by Martin Gaenszle can be found in the European Bulletin of Historical Research, N.3, 1992, pages 63-5. Other examples of the use of oral sources in anthropological studies of Nepal by French and German scholars also exist. Their publications, however, are mostly only available in French and German, languages that I cannot read.
46. See, for example, Holmberg (1989), Mumford (1989), and Strickland (1983). This literature has been recently reviewed by Gaenszle (1992a). See also Höfer (1992).
47. I am not aware of any comprehensive review highlighting this aspect of the anthropological literature of Nepal. One might read James Fisher (1985) and Dahal (1993) for general reviews of the anthropology of Nepal, and Onta (1992a) and Pfaff-Czarnecka (1993) for discussions of its relationships with the development process of Nepal.
48. The discussion about the 'meeting' of history and anthropology has actually taken place in many levels and has encompassed questions related to method, theory and disciplinary turfs. There have been suggestions made that interdisciplinary research does not mean just combining the methodological and theoretical concerns of history and anthropology, but it involves "exploding" one discipline with another so that neither remains the same thereafter. See Cohn 1987, Davis 1981, Dirks 1987, Sarkar 1985 for just some examples of this discussion. A comprehensive discussion on this topic for the case of Nepal is long overdue.
49. While a comprehensive rereading of these sources as has been done for colonial history of India is now due for Nepal, I am not able to do that here.
50. The reference to page numbers are to the 1986 reprint published from New Delhi by Asian Educational Service. On Hamilton's research work on India, see Vicziany (1986).

51. Tek Bahadur Shrestha, historian at CNAS with extensive research experience on the immediate pre-unification history of Nepal is of the opinion that subsequent research has found Hamilton's sections on political history of the Baise and Chaubise kingdoms to be remarkably accurate (personal communication, 1992).
52. On the relationship between information and empire for the case of India, see Bayly (1993).
53. He was a pioneer researcher by many counts. Besides being central to the resurgence of Buddhist studies in the subcontinent, Hodgson wrote many essays on the language, people, flora and fauna of the Himalayan region. His collection of essays (1874, 1880) are a valuable source of pre-ethnographic work on Nepal. His contributions to Himalayan ornithology have been described in Cocker and Inskipp (1988). See Hunter (1896) for a dated biography of Hodgson. Many volumes of Hodgson's unpublished writings – administrative, scholarly, personal – are now located in the National Archives of India (New Dehi) and in various libraries in Europe.
54. See also Hodgson (1880ii: 211). Contact between ordinary Nepalis and the Residency staff was severely discouraged, and Hodgson is known to have used “agents” for his scholarly endeavors.
55. Among the works published during the last decade of the nineteenth century and first half of this century, military handbooks on the Gurkhas of the British Indian Army, written with an aim to facilitate the work of Gurkha recruitment officers, contain chapters on the history and “customs” of the inhabitants of Nepal. The first editions were put together by Eden Vansittart, the chief Gurkha recruitment officer between 1888-95. Since Nepal was off-limits to British recruiters, Vansittart and his successors relied on oral reports of the temporarily displaced Gurkha natives/soldiers even as the published works of Kirkpatrick, Hamilton and Hodgson served as important references. I have written more on the contents of these handbooks elsewhere (Onta 1990, 1993c). A more sophisticated analysis can be found in Des Chene (1991).
56. See Hamal (1986) for a rather unusual kind of historiographic discussion regarding the literature on anti-Rana political activities.
57. Uprety found the 1940 and 1942 pamphlets in the archives of the Foreign Ministry of Nepal when it was still open to scholars. They are reproduced as appendix A and E respectively in his book (1992a: 186-91, 195-96). There are some minor discrepancies between the text reproduced in these appendices and their extracts included in Uprety's

- discussion. Uprety had discussed the Raktapat Committee in much the same way in his earlier book (1984: 244-46, 249-51).
58. Gautam's book is not mentioned by Uprety (1992a). Gautam, who also did research at the Foreign Ministry Archives, in turn, does not refer to the two pamphlets of the Committee.
  59. In the list of persons who were punished in 1997 v.s. by the Ranas published by Dinesh Raj Panta (2043 v.s.: 39), his name is given as Ganesh Raj Shrestha and address as Thamel. In the list presented by Gautam (2046 v.s.: 410) in his Appendix 27 (which he obtained from an unpublished manuscript in the possession of late Marich Man Nakarmi, a driver who worked for King Tribhuvan), he is identified as Ganesh Lal Shrestha of Thamel.
  60. Interviewed on various dates in 1992-93. Their trial was put under the section of Narayanhiti parba phant (Uprety 1992a:79). Ganesh Raj and Marich Man were two of those who were sentenced for twelve years in jail. After serving five years of their sentence, they were among those released in 2002 v.s..
  61. Just as the arrested members of the Praja Parishad were tortured in the course of investigation (Gautam 2046 v.s.:169 -72), members of King Tribhuvan's group were beaten up while information was saught from them. In one such beating, the fist of Bahadur Shumshere knocked off two front teeth of Ganesh Raj.
  62. In Panchayat-period writings the anti-Rana movement was described in a breathless narrative of liberation from Rana autocracy. Anyone involved in anti-Rana politics was described as a "freedom fighter." The personal agendas and politics of those thus described were all subordinated to the grand narratives of 'awakening' and 'revolution'. Just as it is important to reevaluate Rana rule in general (Whelpton 1993a; Sever 1993), it is high time to begin to look more carefully into the agendas and politics of anti-Rana activists. The democratic credentials of those called 'martyrs' and 'freedom fighters' need not escape scrutiny. Shukra Raj Shastri, one of those executed in 1997 v.s., had dedicated at least one of his books to a Rana prime minister. See also Thulung (1988). Such contradictions need to be discussed if we are going to have a history that is critical of the grand claims made by nationalist narratives. If being democratic includes having the humility to acknowledge one's mistakes and having respect for the opinions of those who are younger than yourself and a belief in gender equality, then Ganesh Raj, despite his contributions to the anti-Rana movement, is not one.

63. Kathy White (personal communication, 1993). Also see "Stories from the Heart of Nepal" *Himal* May/June 1994, p. 43. The three booklets discussed here are similar to what is called testimonio or testimonial narrative (Beverly 1989). Beverly defines testimonio as a "novel or novella-length narrative in book or pamphlet (that is, printed as opposed to acoustic) form, told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events he or she recounts, and whose unit of narration is usually a "life" or a significant life experience" (1989:12-3). He suggests that while in oral history the intentionality of the recorder (researcher) is paramount, in testimonio it is the intentionality of the narrator that is paramount. I find this distinction to be less than convincing. L. Onta introduced me to the literature on testimonial narratives.
64. All translations from Nepali are mine.
65. For more on this, see the issues of *Gorkha Sainik Awaj*, a magazine that claims to represent the interests of all former and serving Gurkhas.
66. Uprety (1984: 104 - 08, 236-37) is an exception. An elaboration of this theme is under process in my forthcoming dissertation. For examples of attempts by scholars of south Asia to include pain and violence in academic discourse see, among others, Das (1990) and Pandey (1992, 1994).

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