

## **Masculinity and Mimicry: Ranas and Gurkhas by Sanjeev Uprety.**

Kathmandu: Social Science Baha Books (*Baha Occasional Papers 5*), 2011, 48 pages, 2 black and white photos, ISBN 978-9937-8421-7-4 (paperback), US\$ 8.

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Masculinity studies as a discipline within social science has seen a marked proliferation and diversification over recent years. However, there is a very limited literature on masculinities in relation to Nepal, which in turn reflects wider limitations of literature on masculinities in South Asia. Within this context, Sanjeev Uprety's book represents a significant contribution to what is an emerging area of scholarship in the Nepali academic context. The short 48 page-book reviewed here corresponds to a seminar held at Social Science Baha in 2008.

Uprety's book sets out to examine and compare British colonial representations of Gurkha soldier masculinity with representations of the contrasting masculinities of the Rana prime ministers Jung Bahadur Rana and Chandra Shumsher Rana. The visits both Rana prime ministers made to England are further considered.

The central argument made in the book is that through considering the masculinities of these two prime ministers, one can better understand masculinities more generally in the first half of 20<sup>th</sup> century-Nepal. Uprety approaches this by developing and then contrasting the masculine performances of the two prime ministers, particularly in relation to the representation of effeminate Indian rulers, Shah kings and Gurkha soldiers.

Methodologically, Uprety analyses the representations of both Jung Bahadur and Chandra Shumsher in a wide range of sources, including European newspapers of the time. The analysis of these sources successfully illustrates the differences between the masculinities of the two men.

Initially, Uprety provides a political context focusing on the various interactions (including conflict) between Nepal and British India. Second, he considers the ways in which Gurkha valour and fighting skills resulted in these soldiers being recruited into the British army. This was in a context in which the British imagined a homogenised Gurkha identity

of 'Gentlemen Warriors' (Caplan, 1995). British representations of Indian men are then outlined, with a focus on the mimesis of femininity within this group (in contrast to the Gurkhas, who were detached from such forms of mimicry). Uprety also teases out some of the different representations of British masculinities in relation to class.

Uprety then moves on to consider the construction of what he calls Jung Bahadur's 'oriental, royal masculinity', through a convincing exploration of John Whelpton's (1983) *Jung Bahadur in Europe* and a range of Nepali and English sources of the time. Subsequently, Chandra Shumsher is considered, through a focus on various political-cultural considerations. This leads to Uprety presenting Chandra Shumsher's masculinity as both imperial and 'rational' in contrast to Jung Bahadur's oriental masculinity that was explored previously. Uprety moves on to examine anti-Rana Nepali nationalism that resulted in effeminate representations of Chandra Shumsher.

Uprety discusses the importance of clothing (royal, military, western, etc.) in relation to the constructions of the masculinity of the two prime ministers quite often in the text. Uprety points towards other influences (such as education) on changing constructions of masculinity between the two prime ministers, but other facets influencing masculinity might have been considered (for example, embodiment). Furthermore, while the book is historically orientated, it might have been interesting to explore the legacy of these performances of masculinity and mimicry in contemporary Nepal. How do the constructions of masculinity that Uprety skilfully explores resonate in contemporary Nepal?

Although Connell (2005) reminds us that masculinities are multiple and contested, this book only focuses on Rana and Gurkha masculinities. It would have been illuminating for the author to consider other, less obviously 'hegemonic' performances of masculinity at this time in Nepal, and how these were represented. The author outlines this in relation to British masculinities (where class is identified as a key determinant), but not in the Nepali examples. Therefore, a consideration of the importance of caste (caste and masculinity are mentioned on p. 25, but only briefly), sexuality, ethnicity and religion in shaping Nepali masculinities would have been informative.

Given the short length of the book it is perhaps understandable that masculinity theory is not more fully elaborated in it. For example,

the theoretical distinctions between ‘masculine’, and ‘hyper-masculine’ might have been illustrated more clearly. Considering masculinity theory in more detail, and in relation to two very interesting and contrasting performances of masculinity, would have also created a space to explore any potential issue in applying theories of gender that have been developed in locations outside of Nepal and South Asia.

Overall, Upreti’s book excels in examining the masculinities of two important figures in Nepali history, but leaves the reader wanting more on a number of levels, principally due to the brevity of the book and the limitations this places on the text in relation to theory and context. This reader hopes that the book reviewed is a starting place for a longer and more complete account of the masculinities that are explored, which would provide a unique insight into a significant time in Nepal’s history as well as a contribution to masculinity studies in Nepal and South Asia.

### References

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