

Yogesh Raj and Pratyoush Onta. 2014. *The State of History Education and Research in Nepal*. Kathmandu: Martin Chautari.

History teaching as a part of higher education in Nepal started with the foundation of Tri Chandra College in 1918. However, the commencement of professional academic training and research had to wait until the establishment of the Tribhuvan University (TU) in 1959. It was not until 1961 that the TU first rolled out the Masters Program in History, which was followed by the inauguration of the PhD program nine years later. The concept of the Central Department of History (CDH) officially materialized only after 1985. Prior to 1972, it was generally known as the Post Graduate Department of History. Since then the history teaching and research at the TU have been through major changes. But, there has not been an attempt made till to date to trace the evolution of the history discipline in Nepal. Two promising historians of Nepal, Yogesh Raj and Pratyoush Onta, seek to address this lacuna in their recently co-authored volume, *The State of History Education and Research in Nepal*. In the words of the authors, this study has three objectives: to analyze, “the present state of teaching and research, institutional and methodological innovations and weaknesses of the past dozen years” and to put forward “an agenda for the advancement of history as a discipline in Nepal” (p. 1).

Raj and Onta, briefly but meticulously, examine the history curricula since 1991 (pp. 6–8, 40–45). They particularly focus on the changes between 1999 and 2010. The authors acknowledge that the recent history syllabus of 2014 could not be incorporated as it was not finalized at the time of the writing of the book. The authors are correct in their observation that the last syllabus was drafted “under tremendous time pressure” and “with minimal intra-departmental consultation” (p. 45). That being said, I believe that the study of the history curricula is incomplete without the discussion of the syllabi from 1965 and 1972. These had respectively introduced thesis writing and historiography in the Master’s program. Even studying the Master’s level curriculum alone will not give a comprehensive picture of history teaching and research at the TU. As such a comprehensive study of bachelor’s level and 10+2 level syllabi becomes necessary to draw a more holistic picture. An analysis of the high school level syllabus of history could be equally beneficial.

I agree with the authors that in addition to TU, many other independent individual scholars, private institutions, and government organizations have made valuable contributions on historical research in Nepal. But the treatment of this subject in the book seems a bit incomplete. Two influential historians, D.R. Regmi and Surya Bikram Gewali, who have produced several volumes on the various periods of Nepali history are left out. Gyanmani Nepal is considered to have “completed the full requirements” of the Samsodhan Mandal (p. 6), but Dhanavajra Vajracharya, who produced the monumental volume, *Licchavi Kālkā Abhilekh* (1973), which also won the prestigious Madan Puraskar, is not given enough credit. Similarly, in the list of Nepali historians receiving PhDs from foreign universities (pp. 18–19n), Krishna Kant Adhikari goes unmentioned. Adhikari received his PhD from Nagpur University and wrote the first book on Nepali historiography and a well-researched monograph on Jang Bahadur Rana.

In light of many history books and journals being published today, the authors correctly observe: “The scale of publication suggests that history as a discipline is certainly not dead in Nepal nor is it necessarily in the decline” (p. 24). But one of the major issues confronting us today is an extremely low enrollment of students in the history program. This topic is briefly touched upon in the book (pp. 15–16), and the authors do offer some suggestions to address both the question of low enrollment and the promotion of faculty research (pp. 59–63).

On a side note, the book provides (Table 4, p. 15) the number of students admitted in the Master’s level history in the years 2069 v.s. and 2070 v.s.. The figures show a drastic decrease in the enrollment in the history departments, be it at TU’s University Campus, Kirtipur or Post Graduate Campus, Biratnagar. Since the authors do not explain, the readers, I am sure, will fail to understand this sudden decrease in the student enrollment. This change is in fact triggered by the announcement of the student union elections that particular year (2069 v.s.). In the subsequent year(s) when there was no such activity scheduled, the enrollment figure slumped.

Coming to the financing component of the academic research, Raj and Onta correctly state that “TU’s budget has not provided additional research funds to the CDH ever” (p. 27). Their claim that almost all CNAS (Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies) sponsored projects are handled by CNAS members is also fairly accurate. Perhaps one exception is the National History Project in which CDH collaborated with CNAS to produce several volumes.

I agree with the authors that “the funding scene in historical research in Nepal is generally bleak” (p. 31). However, there exists a small possibility of garnering research finance from the University Grants Commission (UGC) for conducting research. In the past a few academic historians or teachers have received grants from the UGC to conduct research. However, it needs to be mentioned that in most cases the researchers often submitted their already completed works (e.g., PhD dissertation/chapters) under the guise of new research. Had the funds been channeled through respective departments, rather than directly from the UGC, perhaps such malpractice could have been avoided.

In the section ‘Recent Past of the Institutions,’ the authors critically analyze the publication activities of various organizations involved in history studies (pp. 34–40). In addition to the established ones, the authors highlight the activities of several relatively new institutions: Suthan (publishes a research journal *Pāsukā*); Martin Chautari (editorial home of this journal); Asa Saphu Kuthi (holds the largest archive of Newari manuscripts); Tamang Pragyasabha (published one issue of the academic journal, *Tamang Journal*, in 2009); Kirat Yakthung Chumlung (reprinted books by Iman Singh Chemjong); Lotus Research Center (digitalized several documents of Kathmandu Valley; and Madan Puraskar Pustakalaya (holds one of the largest collections of Nepali books, journals and magazines). The authors also mention the transfer of Foreign Ministry documents to National Archives (NA), and the use of Kaushi Tosha Khana documents in the CDH. As to the first, the Foreign Ministry had transferred less than 20 percent of its documents to the NA for a very long time and has, only in the last few years, transferred the remaining documents. Regarding the Kaushi Tosha Khana documents available at the CDH, it seems that so far only one historian has utilized them, which is a pity. As suggested by the authors, the archive available at the CDH “deserves a better infrastructure and management for its care by scholars and students of history” (p. 39).

The book critically reviews some of the recent trends in historical research in Nepal, mostly by looking at the post-2002 publications. Even though the literature review is brief, it certainly provides a good synopsis of current and future possibilities for research in Nepali history.

The authors point out that most of the MA theses written in the TU are not published. But the fact is that, with the exception of a few, most of these theses are based on secondary sources, and the writers hesitate to publish

them in journals. The publication record of the PhD dissertations is not that impressive either. So far only 43 out of 99 dissertations submitted to national and foreign universities have been published. The publication of dissertations should be increased – and this will, to an extent, also help to check the practice of plagiarism. One way to achieve this may be to link the degree with the publication of completed dissertations, as is the case in some European universities. The authors “suspect that...the research interests of the supervisors guiding these MA students are also influencing the latter’s research topics” (p. 49). Having taught and supervised students at the CDH for more than three decades, I can state that this is not the case.

The authors identify publication regularity, peer review protocols, and production quality (pp. 50–52) as three main criteria in evaluating publications. Since irregularity may be a result of so many factors, regularity alone cannot be taken as a benchmark for quality. As for the peer review, it is definitely an important aspect. But, the authors themselves admit that the editors “who have tried to adopt even basic versions of peer-reviewing in the journals under their care have faced hostile reactions from their colleagues” (p. 52). In terms of production quality, the publishing houses of Nepal have made good progress in the last two decades.

In the final section of the book, the authors offer several suggestions to advance the history discipline, and also highlight some strategies to link teaching and research components of the discipline (p. 55). The recommendation part is divided into a) institutional changes and networking (pp. 55–59), b) recruitment of students, faculty and researchers (pp. 59–63), c) future research themes (pp. 63–66), and d) quality and impact of publications (pp. 66–69). These recommendations should be widely discussed in the academic circle without any personal or institutional biasness, and sincerely implemented wherever possible.

The ‘References’ section is very rich. It covers more than 20 pages of the book (pp. 50–70). But the two publications of CDH are missing from the list. They are *Nepālko Itihāskā Vivādāspad Viśayaharū* (2037 v.s.), and *Political Instability in Nepal: Impact on Nepali Democracy* (1999). The book also lists 63 academics with their respective dissertation titles who completed their PhDs in history from TU.

The printing is fine. I did not notice any printing mistakes. The book is not divided into chapters, with sections and sub-sections demarcating the areas of analyses. Nine tables and four annexes give the details of some of

the issues discussed in the book. I congratulate the learned authors for their fruitful endeavor and thank Martin Chautari for its publication.

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