

Tanka B. Subba and A.C. Sinha, eds. 2016. *Nepali Diaspora in a Globalised Era*. Oxon: Routledge.

T.B. Subba and A.C. Sinha's co-edited volume is a first of its kind to address the Nepali diaspora question rather comprehensively. The editors incorporated all varieties of migrant experiences of the tellurian Nepalis as they themselves were not convinced in accepting the term "diaspora" as a generic category for a large section of people who have left Nepal for various reasons at different points in time. Flanked by an introduction and a conclusion the eighteen chapters of the collective bear the imprint of this elusiveness, which made this lengthy collective a curious read. The collective revealed an intriguing assemblage of scholarly attempts that followed plural methodologies, diverse sources, and myriad locales to reflect on a single theme—the Nepali diaspora.

Both P.K. Misra and Pravesh G. Jung reflected rather theoretically on the diaspora question vis-à-vis the Nepalis in their respective chapters. Misra's emphasis on the dialectics between movement and sedentarization in fact highlights the crux of other chapters. His discomfort with the appellation diaspora for the Indian Nepalis is based on his understanding that the inalienable historicity of Indian asceticism and its spiritual fulfillment in the sacralized Himalaya situated Nepal metonymically at India's civilizational core throughout history. Jung on the other hand unpacks the connotation of space in defining the notion of diaspora. For Jung "space" serves the purpose of a double edged razor where while being central to the definition of diaspora it also stands for the loss of the qualification of diaspora, thus being dialectically linked to any discussion of diaspora. Jung offers us three significant formulations firstly, that the *diasporicness* of the diaspora is essentially *a-personal*; secondly, the diasporic self is contingent upon

its engagement with the idea of faraway homeland; and thirdly, that there exists a distinction between *nostalgia* and diasporic *longing*. Jung claims that in the absence of any articulate diasporic image Indian Nepalis could be considered as an incipient one. Jung's chapter further claims that the question of Nepali diaspora is entrapped within the vestiges of colonial discourse of Gorkha martiality/military establishment.

Appropriating Gorkha as a nomenclature to distinguish between Indian Nepalis and Nepalis of Nepal, Rajendra P. Dhakal analyzes the temporal evolution of Indian Nepali distinctiveness. Further, concentrating on Darjeeling Nepalis, he reflects on the literary imagination of their distinctiveness by referring to the emergence of Darjeeling as a modern hill station which became the epicenter of Nepali nationalism outside Nepal. He also ponders on the in-betweenness of a *pravāsi* between Nepal and India/Darjeeling as found in the literature produced during the phase of consolidation (1890–1947). Dhakal insists that such ambivalent positions must be replaced by the “new and emerging Gorkha identity”—epitomized by the forthcoming generations of Darjeeling Nepalis—in the literary narratives. Utpala Ghaley Sewa on the other hand reflects upon the Sahitya Academy award winning Nepali historical fiction *Brahmaputrakā Cheuchāu* (In the Neighborhood of the Brahmaputra River) by Lil Bahadur Chhetri. Sewa shows that the fiction and its theme, plotlines, characters, metaphors are all described in meticulous historical fashion to emphasize how the diasporic leaning of a precarious Nepali migrant from Nepal gets absorbed into the lifeline of Assamese society, thereby giving birth to an Assameli-Nepali identity, a painful journey that builds his tenacity to deal with his host society without mitigating his sense of loss. Geetika Ranjan comments on the representation of the Nepalis in Kiran Desai's novel *The Inheritance of Loss* where she develops robust critique exploring the pitfalls of etic representations of a sensitive theme like statehood movement and the sentiments and aspirations of people interlaced with the cause.

Bhim Prasad Subedi and Jens Seeberg have Nepal as their reference point. Subedi claims that since 1990s there has been a paradigm shift in Nepali outmigration from Nepal, which he attributes to the role played by an interventionist state and its facilitating policy regime regarding national outmigration. Although he insists that short term migration (*ghumphir*) is inadequately studied but he himself does not shed enough light on it, nor does he discuss how *ghumphir* could make significant addition in understanding

Nepalis in diaspora. Seeberg's chapter deals with the multiple perspectives of the Gurkhas and evaluates them with reference to their homonymic alterity—the Gorkha/Lahure tradition. Seeberg's subscription to Viveiros de Castro's methodological stand of perspectival anthropology and equivocation help us to understand the different perspectival positions associated with Nepal's identity politics, although his attempt obscured the avenues—other than martiality/military establishment—that might have enriched the idea of Nepali diaspora.

Two chapters by Miriam Wenner and Anastasia M. Turnbull have Darjeeling as their reference point. Wenner argues that the diasporic predispositions of Darjeeling Nepalis are strategically transposed in the imaginative geography of Gorkhaland which bears home the ideas that guaranteed self rule and self determination on the one hand and the territorial delinking from both Nepal and West Bengal on the other. In her attempt to continue with life history and auto ethnography Turnbull attempts to relate her own fragmented identity—as a Canadian and as a grandchild of a Darjeeling Nepali grandmother—to the stories of displaced Indian Nepalis where she connects through her grandmother's "nostalgia" towards Darjeeling.

Nepalis of Sikkim, Manipur and Assam have been the subject matter of three chapters by Melanie Vandenhelsken, Vijaylakshmi Brara and Tristan Bruslé. Vandenhelsken's chapter focuses on Sikkim and shows how the instrumentality of Gurung identity politics gained political purchase as state built categories. In a situation where ethnic politics continues to express itself as the dominant discourse of state politics the attempt of the Gurungs to find their religious anchorage in Buddhism and thereby to an alternative self identity—other than the Nepali Hindu one—is reflective of their non-diasporic stance at least in political terms. Brara's chapter has noted down the history of Nepali migration and their systematic settlement in Manipur way back from 1930. The Nepalis of Manipur are predominantly soldiers and rarely shared any significant position in the government. The Mongoloid segment of the Manipuri Nepalis is better integrated in Manipur than their *tāgādhārī* counterparts. However, anxiety of being a diasporic community led them to continue with their cultural tradition and identity. Bruslé's chapter on the Nepalis of Bokakhat, Assam makes it a point that the claim of Nepalis as diaspora is neither an etic discourse nor even an emic realization. Nepali diaspora is not a "category of practice" nevertheless Nepalis of Bokakhat continue to remain as de-territorialized, de-ethnicized community for whom

a reference to Nepali ancestry is still very real. Although diasporic identity is unsafe to display, Nepal has a special room in the minds of Indian Nepalis.

Three chapters refer to rehabilitation of Nepali refugees. Tejimala Gurung's chapter detailed out the Nepali presence in Burma in response to British war efforts since the early nineteenth century and their further displacement from Burma in 1942 and rehabilitation in Motihari (Bihar, India) camp as their entry was prevented by the Nepal monarchy, guarantee enough of being a precarious community of shifting identities. This diasporicness has also been depicted in two chapters by A.C. Sinha and jointly by D.N.S. Dhakal and Gopal Subedi on the Nepali refugees of Bhutan—the Lhotshampas. Both the chapters emphasize on the polemics between diplomacy and human rights that finally rehabilitated some of the Lhotshampas to first world countries where they got better life opportunities but kept alive their longing to move back to Bhutan thus becoming instructive specimens of an emic realization/claim of being a diaspora despite rehabilitation.

Based on a comparative study of Nepalis in Switzerland and India, Ulrike Müller-Böker claims that the notion of “home” in diaspora is contingent upon the time duration of being “away from home.” Hence while belongingness to one's own caste, community, village or town is not important for the Nepali diaspora in Switzerland, such notions bear significant import for the Nepali migrants of Far Western Nepal who keep on migrating seasonally to India in general and to Delhi in particular. Hema Kiruppallini's chapter on the Singapore Gurkhas problematizes our received notion of diaspora. She argues that “gated community” status of the Singapore Gurkhas failed to wipe out their sense of belongingness to Singapore and was reflected in their attempt to establish *Singapore Tole* in Pokhara after their repatriation just as a *mini Nepal* was created out of Mount Vernon Camp in Singapore while they were in service. Their wards, who cannot stay on in Singapore after their father's repatriation choose another foreign country where they subscribe to their Singaporean identity which is itself a diasporic one. The reference of homeland here offers a peculiar case of *simulacra* where the notion of “homeland” appears to be an image of an image which precludes any real referents (Baudrillard 1994). Mitra Pariyar maintains that the rituals and religious practices are crucial in understanding the migrant community's attempt to integrate into the host society and also in maintaining its diasporic consciousness. Based on a study of Gurkha families mainly of the Limbus in an Oxford suburb Pariyar showed how the symbolic performances of the

various religious practices and rituals have resulted in a “spiritual deficit” amongst the UK Gurkhas which while strengthening their transnational ties, also kept their diasporic leanings to an extent that a reciprocal space has been created where their kinsmen in Nepal expect material support from them and they expect spiritual support in return.

As its title suggests the collective in fact makes an impressive attempt to examine the Nepali diaspora in a globalized world, although focus on the Nepalis in Japan, Thailand, Middle East, Australia, the USA, and Canada would have made the attempt a more comprehensive one. All the chapters do not provide equal leverage in problematizing the idea of diaspora vis-à-vis the Nepalis, although they share a common assumption in considering Nepali migration as the necessary entailment in all the experiences so documented. To come across inconsistent citation patterns (chapters 6, 13 and 17 ended with notes while others have notes and references), disorderly arranged references (p. 143), prepositional absence (p. 124, second paragraph eighth line) and misspelling (Arendt was spelled as Arnett, p. 100) in a volume published by Routledge was quite a discomfort in an otherwise pleasant reading journey. Overall, the impression one gains is that the very idea of Nepali diaspora in a globalized world has been constantly producing and reproducing itself giving birth to a heterogeneous space in which it encounters newness, uniqueness and contradictoriness as well.

Reference

Baudrillard, Jean. 1994. *Simulacra and Simulation*. Sheila Faria Glaser, trans. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Swatahsiddha Sarkar
University of North Bengal