

Book Reviews

Tatsuro Fujikura. 2013. *Discourses of Awareness: Development, Social Movements and the Practices of Freedom in Nepal*. Kathmandu: Martin Chautari.

Development has long been the subject of anthropological investigation. Anthropologists have variously scrutinized a wide range of issues and subjects related to development pertaining to the essence of development programs and their impacts for the lives of people in the so called underdeveloped world. A large body of anthropological literature on development examines the effectiveness of development programs in dealing with the needs and aspirations of people. Another significant body criticizes development as an essentially exploitative process, which only reproduces ‘power asymmetry’ and underdevelopment.

Tatusuro Fujikura adds a new dimension to the investigation of development process by his focus on awareness, social movements and practices of freedom in the context of Nepal’s five decades old development process. In his book *Discourses of Awareness: Development, Social Movements and the Practices of Freedom in Nepal* Fujikura beautifully examines, in his own words, “practices of pedagogy and self-disciplines” (p. 1) involved in social movements to illustrate how they “articulate new visions and practices of democracy within a rapidly changing socio-political context” (p. 1).

Fujikura begins by positioning his research interest amidst some popular theoretical trends in anthropological engagement with development. His critique of Arturo Escobar’s call – to explore visions and practices that would lead to the ‘unmaking of development’ – is particularly interesting. Heterogeneity and contradictions, Fujikura argues, characterize contemporary discourses of development which makes anthropologists’ pursuit of local resistance to or subversion of development a mere theoretical fancy. Fujikura also examines in detail Partha Chatterjee’s views on social movements (as opposed to civil movements) as well as Arjun Appadurai’s concept of “alliances” (p. 23) to elucidate difficulties and diverse possibilities of alliances and collaboration in some Nepal’s social movements. In the same

chapter, Fujikura describes the history of development interventions and some major discourses concerning ‘underdevelopment’ of Nepal.

In the second chapter titled ‘Discourses of Awareness,’ Fujikura discusses the sources, state and essence of awareness as they manifest in his ethnographic setting. He examines Devendra Raj Panday’s portrayal of development as an ideal/desirable condition as opposed to Nanda Shrestha’s criticism of development as the sources of many of the ills in contemporary Nepal. Through the nuanced analysis of the concept of nation and/or the idea of doing something for Nepal in the writings of both Panday and Shrestha, Fujikura argues that people’s understanding of the awareness may exist in very different and multiple forms, which makes the singular and overarching description of development largely useless.

In this chapter, Fujikura critically examines two perspectives popular among anthropologists interested in development and modernity. Discussing James Furguson’s critique of development as a central ‘de-politicizing’ force, Fujikura claims that development cannot be reduced to the mere expansion of the power of the state and formal institutions. Ferguson’s obsession with formal institutions, Fujikura argues, only exotifies development process detaching it from the lived experiences of people. Fujikura also criticizes Stacy Pigg’s call to “strive to step outside the development paradigm altogether” (p. 72) by arguing that development is not only about asymmetrical distribution of people and places into categories. Ethnographic contexts, Fujikura argues, could be different. People are not just the subjects of the map of the world provided by development. He explains this through an account of Kamala Pun, a local woman who took part in women’s literacy class, by showing how she tries to distinguish herself from herself. Fujikura warns us against separating politics from development and emphasizes on the need to see the variety of aspirations and desires through the history of development interventions.

In the third chapter Fujikura presents a comprehensive analysis of development interventions in Nepal under the community development program. There he presents an interesting story of a large scale community development program known as Village Development Project which was designed under the assumptions of “rising expectations” and “awareness of the possibilities for better life” among the Nepalis (p. 91). Against this backdrop, Fujikura discusses the place of people, their culture, and tradition within the notion of community development outlined by Paul Rose, Eugene Mihaly and

Kurt Lewin. Discussing the concept of democratic society, Fujikura argues that a definition of democracy solely focused on freedom cannot capture the true essence of a democratic society. Criticizing Devendra Raj Panday's view that authoritarian regime prevented the possibility of democratic development until 1990, Fujikura argues that 'associations' or 'group formations,' which characterize community development program, had built the ground for democratic social change in Nepal even during the authoritarian rule.

In the next chapter, Fujikura discusses the next phase of community development approach which replaced state-centered top-down approach with private, non-governmental, informal sectors aimed at 'empowering' people. The previous focus on harnessing the life-worlds of the villagers to the project of national development was, therefore, replaced with participation, empowerment and community-based initiatives in the 1980s. To illustrate this case Fujikura describes a community empowerment program of a Japanese NGO Shapla-neer implemented in cooperation with a national NGO. The Shapla-neer supported group saving initiatives aimed at creating self-sustaining local groups. The program activities included exposure visits, training, workshop, literacy classes, etc. Contrary to the argument that the community development projects for saving-credit promote neo-liberal ideal of economizing individual, Fujikura states that the community development interventions are characterized by multiplicity of features and have wide-ranging and multiple influences on community. In this chapter, Fujikura also explains the rights-based approach to development with an interesting example of Shapla-neer's refusal to support the Kanara Committee of the former *kamaiyās* (bonded laborers).

In the fifth chapter, Fujikura examines the dichotomy between the 'designers' (of the development programs) and their 'targets.' He explains the multiplicity of contexts in which development or modernity become relevant to people, which in turn, obscures the distinction between designers and targets. Examining people's perception towards the national family planning policies/programs in general and vasectomy operation in particular, Fujikura shows how people exercise their agency in relation to the local and global communities. Fujikura presents the cases of resistance and/or alternative narratives which people form to deal with the dominant discourses of family planning. Following Talal Asad, he argues that modernity is not just a conditioning factor, it has introduced new kinds of 'games' which compel the actors to 'choose' among a set of moves.

In the sixth chapter, Fujikura presents a simple yet nuanced description of the origin and expansion of the Maoists' 'people's war' as a special 'project' of national development. He explains the Maoist mobilization as the 'rupture' of modernity resulted from development interventions. Critiquing the general perception that Maoist insurgency needs to be understood in the context of the failure/absence of development, Fujikura argues that the insurgency needs to be understood as people's desire to get attached to a national project as opposed to a desire to find an employment. In order to illustrate his argument on the national project, he quotes Pratyoush Onta's account of the notion of brave Nepali ready to fight for the nation enshrined in school textbooks.

Fujikura dedicates the last chapter of the book to the description of the liberation movement of the *kamaiyās*. He starts with the introduction of the *kamaiyā* practices and its consequences for the lives of the indigenous Tharu people, and analyzes the bonded labor practice through the discourses of human rights and development. Following Katherine Rankin, Fujikaru argues that the idea of liberation of *kamaiyās* is not adequately addressed within the framework of human rights discourse as the human rights advocates and development policymakers see solution of the *kamaiyā* problem in the free wage labor rather than seeing the political solution to the problem.

Fujikura presents a detailed ethnography of the grassroots NGO named BASE (Backward Society Education) established by a Tharu man for its leading role in the *kamaiyā* liberation movement. The ethnography of BASE includes detailed description of how Dilli Chaudhari, its founder, established the NGO through the traditional Tharu institution of *Khyāla* and how it rapidly expanded among the Tharus as well as non-Tharus for its various activities aimed at empowering 'backward' people. Similarly, Fujikura describes in detail the actual liberation movement in 2000 which BASE led and Martin Chautari actively supported. Fujikura describes the role of BASE in effectively organizing people through various traditional institutions and modern practices of awareness for building one's own society as opposed to building the nation – which was the primary motivation in the Maoist movement.

Fujikura's book is a profound contribution to the anthropology of Nepal for two reasons. Firstly, it presents a nuanced analysis of development and modernity with the help of important insights from people's lived experiences. Despite the claims of the focus on 'micro-narratives,' the contemporary critiques of development usually offer singular, universal view

on development intervention in which people and communities are the mere subjects of large scale development interventions. Fujikura tries to reverse this thinking by showing how people actively build and revise discourses of development, empowerment, participation and rights based on their choices and needs, like in the *kamaiyā* liberation movement, by using the approaches and methods popular in development practices. Secondly, Fujikura offers very interesting insights to the understanding of the Maoist movement and the *kamaiyā* liberation movement with detailed ethnographic observation.

One would wish that Fujikaru had discussed at some more length the role (and place) of the anthropologist in fieldwork setting where s/he actively shares the concerns and aspirations of the people under study. His active involvement in and support to the *kamaiyā* liberation movement as a fieldworker should have been augmented by his own reflections on the anthropologist's place in the multilayered ethnographic context. This would have provided some additional flavor to the overall insights of the book.

The expressions of the respondents, which Fujikura presents to make his case on some key aspects of development, awareness and social movements would have needed more intensive examination. It is not unusual that respondents often have readymade answers on certain aspects of their agency which may not necessarily reflect the social realities which they live and interact with. The expressions, for example, of Comrade Jamuna, Parvati Adhikari, Yagyaraj Chaudhari, Dar Bahadur and Indra Bahadur need to be examined against the complex social and economic realities of their everyday lives. People often have multiple statements to fit multiple contexts.

In summary, Fujikura presents a superb analysis of the discourses of awareness in development, social movement and the practices of freedom in Nepal. The book is a must-read for all those interested in the contemporary state and society of Nepal.

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