

Editorial

REFLECTIONS ON *SINHAS*, PAST AND FUTURE

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As *Studies in Nepali History and Society* enters its fourth year of publication we take the opportunity to reflect on its strengths and weaknesses thus far, and on its future prospects. In the inaugural issue we described *SINHAS* as an attempt to address three divides that, in our view, weaken Nepal studies. As we put it then,

First, there is a linguistic divide. Studies in English rarely make use of the large body of scholarship written in the languages of Nepal. Second, there is a divide between description in the mode of area studies and analysis in the mode of metropolitan theory. Third, there is a divide between Nepali and foreign scholars who, with some individual exceptions, do not communicate as much as they might (*SINHAS* 1996:1).

How have we done so far? It seems to us that many, though not all English articles have engaged with the Nepali literature more extensively than is typical. This has sometimes been spontaneous, sometimes a result of editorial assistance and insistence. Our sense, though, is that such contributions have tended to come from among those who already recognized the seriousness of this issue. Hence if *SINHAS* has done anything to chip away at this divide, it may be simply in the form of providing examples of how analysis is enhanced by such attention.

In the editorial marking the beginning of *SINHAS*' second year (Des Chene and Onta 1997), we had more to say about the language politics of scholarship. With that issue, *SINHAS* began to publish pieces in Nepali, and translations from Nepali to English. The latter marked recognition both that not all our readers are Nepal specialists and that not all Nepal specialists, whatever we may wish, are going to learn to read Nepali. Hence it seems useful occasionally to provide English translations of pieces that bring into view aspects of Nepal not generally represented in English language writings. It is, however, publication of Nepali language articles that strikes us as the more important development. Indeed, our understanding of the truth of the following statement has only deepened:

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Anyone who imagines that, writing in English, they reach the bulk of Nepali academics, is probably mistaken. If we expand that category to serious Nepali social analysts, academics or not, it is definitely a mistaken assumption (Des Chene and Onta 1997:1)

Responses to articles in Nepali have led us to revise our opinion (1997:1) about the desirability of simultaneous publication in both languages. In particular, making English language writings available in Nepali strikes us as a critical task. While we are still not in a position to make a policy of dual language publication, there are efforts to address this issue: the dual language publication in the previous issue (Maskarinec 1998a,b) and, commencing with this issue the addition of another configuration - publication of an article translated from English to Nepali.

Strategies for dealing with such language questions inevitably represent a compromise. As we continue to experiment, the key criterion against which we will measure success is the relevance of SINHAS to those within Nepal who are struggling in a serious way with the profound challenges that face the country.

A great deal of editorial effort has gone into attempts to bridge the second divide, between depiction and analysis. The mixture we seek is not a common one. Its rarity, as we see it, is a result of styles of pedagogy and the political-economy of academic knowledge production. Most, though not all submissions have tended to one extreme or the other (not excluding those of the editors). The success of the final results is for readers to judge. The expressions of appreciation from authors who have carried through with an often demanding editorial process, encourage us to think that SINHAS is having some success on this front.

The third divide, that between Nepali and foreign scholars, will not be eliminated quickly, nor in the pages of a journal. We have been somewhat disappointed, though not necessarily surprised, by few submissions from university faculty in Nepal, and sometimes disdainful responses from scholars to our insistence on “thick description” of Nepali realities. Nevertheless, it seems to us that the above described efforts in the domains of language and content have potential to contribute to bridging this divide as well.

The future of SINHAS depends on the submissions it receives. We once again extend an invitation to all those who study Nepal. We reiterate that while SINHAS has a strong “line” with regard to the relation between theorizing and evidence, this does not amount to a “line” on content. We need not agree with an interpretation to publish a piece. We need only

agree that it is well argued and documented, and adds to our understanding of Nepal.

We express our thanks to individuals and organizations who have helped to bring SINHAS this far. First among them is Lazima-Onta Bhatta who retires from the editorial team with this issue. We are also grateful to our publisher Mandala Book Point, Dongol Computers for layout, Bhaskar Gautam for editorial assistance, and those who have generously served as reviewers. SINHAS remains a voluntary effort. We thank Madhab L. Maharjan of Mandala for the financial commitment that makes it possible, and the institutions of editor Mark Liechty (first the University of California, Santa Barbara and now the University of Illinois at Chicago) for small grants that cover some editorial expenses. We apologize to subscribers for having fallen behind in our publication schedule. Like everyone else we nurture millennial hopes - in our case that SINHAS 2000 will appear in a timely fashion.

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