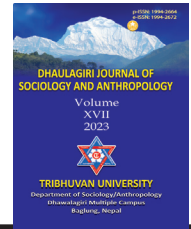


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Dhaulagiri Journal of Sociology and Anthropology



Book Review

Belonging in Motion: Contested Social Boundaries in South Asia by Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka

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Article Info

Received: February 20, 2024

Revised received: June 17, 2024

Accepted: June 18, 2024

Available online: June 30, 2024

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/dsaj.v18i01.67556>

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Scholars or anthropologists rarely return to their ethnographic field site after completing their research. However, Prof. Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka is one of the few academics who continued her work for research and the institutional development of academic institutions in Nepal.

This book is an accumulation of comprehensive work Joanna has done around the area of belonging. Belonging, identity, and ethnicity are recurring themes in her past work (For example Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2011; Pfaff-Czarnecka, & Toffin, 2011). The book enables the readers to access her works under the concepts of belonging in one collection. The collection focuses on the dynamic interactions of community, inequality, and power in Nepal and India, which were key issues when the author started her research 40 years ago, and these themes are of academic concern even today. This collection lies under the sub-field of political anthropology. All chapters largely fit into the concept of belonging.

Belonging is a dynamic concept that helps to understand caste, ethnicity, and transnationalism in Nepal and South Asia. The author has clearly distinguished how belonging differs from mutuality, identity, and attachment. Belonging is not a static concept but rather dynamic as it shifts according to the time and context. Unlike identity construction scholars, identity as a categorical concept is insufficient and inadequate to combine categorization with social relations. For the author, belonging rationality consists of forging and maintaining social ties and buttressing commitments and obligations. Clearly showing the distinction between identity and belonging, the author states that identity caters to dichotomous characterizations of the

social while belonging rather highlights its situatedness and the multiplicity of parameters forging commonality, mutuality, and attachments (Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2022, p. 5).

Debating the state of the nation is an interesting chapter. Unlike the other scholars, the author perceives Nepal's ethnic problems differently. There are two contrasting concepts melting-pot ideologies and cultural heterogeneity. Many scholars saw the hegemonic treatment of minorities in Nepal. They portray the causes of this phenomenon as assimilation through Hindu ideology and the Hindu nation-state. Hindu ideology is one of the factors in the assimilation of small minorities, however, assimilation is not only a state project but a process where small groups have been mixed-up with each other. For instance, there were assimilations before the unification, contrary to the state project's narrative. In this regard, Khemraj Nepal (2079 B.S.), senior anthropologist and former secretary of the Government of Nepal, questions whether assimilation is a by-product of circumstance or self-protection or necessity in his recently published book मिश्रित जातजाति: हामी नेपाली. According to him, there are no pure groups, and all groups have been mixed up in Nepal. His works raised the issue that the studies of the assimilation process do not cover the micro-level assimilation processes.

Frictions, Frames, and Fragments is an interesting chapter of the book. The author asks how rituals fare and evolve under the condition of rapid social change and what their contribution to political communication in Nepal has turned the ritual complex of Dasain (P.78). The author demonstrates the substantial power inherent in the Dasain ritual to provide continuity in times of radical change.



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Celebrating and not celebrating Dasain was a contested field for the ethnic groups in Nepal. After the radical changes of the 1990s and 2006/07s, the radius of Dasain festival including other Hindu festivals such as Teej has expanded well beyond the Panchayat era. Therefore, why Hindu festivals are more accepted than in the past is unanswered in the identity and ethnicity literature.

The chapter *Challenging Goliath: People, Dams, and the Paradoxes of Transnational Critical Movements* is based on *Dams and Development of Sanjeeb Khagaram and Dam Development. The Dynamics of Social Inequality in a Hydropower Project in Nepal* by Kabita Rai (Khagaram, 2004; Rai, 2005). The author reinterpreted the cases based on human rights perspectives. The author has given attention to environmental and human rights issues including the civil society's roles in dam projects in South Asia. According to the author, the human rights issue is more fragmented, and very selective knowledge of human rights abuses.

Complex Communities in Nepal-Himalaya, or Solidarity- A Global Category and a Way of Life, is a theoretically based ethnographic chapter. The images of communal harmony that various development projects' descriptions evoke do not reflect the self-perceptions within the local societies where complex communal forms are present. The author sought to analyze unconnected processes: the case of development intervention in a small Himalayan rural society here is directly linked to a matter of global consequence (p.141). In this regard author writes:

Current development practices oriented towards a specific set of ideas, for example, a participatory model seeking to implement projects through collective action link global discourses to ideas and practices salient in the local societies, connecting even those living in the remote parts of the world (P.141).

Taking the case of Bhate Khola village, Bajhang, the author says the images of communal harmony that the various project descriptions evoke do not reflect the self-perception within the local societies where complex communal forms are present. These societies are certainly not free of conflict. It is not enough to merely point out this discrepancy. A more interesting task is to show how, at the interface between external institutions and local societies, the clash of opposing concepts generates social dynamics not only within the local societies but also within the intervening institutions.

The distributional coalition in Nepal discusses the governance in democratic transition. Taking the example of Bajhang, she shows how individual civil servants used their positions to establish informal horizontal and vertical networks within and outside their organizations meant for their personal gain. The distributional coalitions, according to author, are the ways in which politicians, bureaucrats, and entrepreneurs channel money and services allotted to local communities into their own pockets (p.159).

Kinship and friendship in migratory practices: the case of Nepali night-watchmen in Bangalore is a very fascinating chapter. She shows the ambivalent character of kinship- the two constellations characterized by the

proximity of those belonging together (p. 206). According to the author, kinship is a form of belonging that can confer on people both the highest degree of feeling safe, and of warmth and trust, but it also creates coercion, oppression, and suffering. Transnational communities thrive on kinship and friendship relations. This chapter demonstrates how closely the constellations of proximity and distance are intertwined. According to the author, transnational communities thrive on kinship and friendship relations (P. 207).

The chapter *Minorities-in-minorities in South Asian Societies between Politics of Diversity and Politics of Difference* talks about the internal heterogeneity of minority groups coming to light. Minorities and minorities in minorities is a key concept of this chapter. The author presented this concept as conceptual problems. According to the author, it is impossible to discuss the predicaments of minorities-in- minorities without formulating two major disclaimers. First, the notion of minority is academically unclear and often contested in political communication. Second, the notion of minorities-in- minorities can consequently be used only as a problematic 'short-cut' term (p.212). Based on the South Asian cases, the author says that the minorities-in- minorities perspective analyses minority predicaments being viewed from the margins, that is, from 110 minorities in South Asian Societies 111 the perspective of those individuals and collectivities who do not fit into a minority's self-representations and social arrangements.

The interview section shows the career, interests, and concepts of belonging of the author. In this interview, the authors mentioned her interest in anthropology, fieldwork in Nepal, and its transformation over the year.

Finally, this book is a compilation of her decades of rigorous work. The readings are equally important today regarding their concepts, contents, and methodology. It is an intense read. From the beginning, the author has been adopting "belonging" as an analytical tool to understand the phenomenon. Belonging is not a static but a dynamic phenomenon; this concept is more relevant in times of transnationalism.


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