

# Nepali History as World History

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We need to reflect theoretically on such basic features as periodization and special eras, as being not simply convenient ways to organize data, nor simply as the teleological path to modernity, but as rhetorical strategies to conceal the aporias and repressions necessitated by the imposition of a master narrative. When we do so, we can see how the everyday work of historians writing within these categories may reproduce the ideology of the nation-state.

—Prasenjit Duara<sup>1</sup>

‘Oceania’ connotes a sea of islands with their inhabitants. The world of our ancestors was a large sea full of places to explore, to make their homes in, to breed generations of seafarers like themselves. People raised in this environment were at home with the sea. They played in it as soon as they could walk steadily, they worked in it, they fought on it. They developed great skills for navigating their waters, and the spirit to traverse even the few large gaps that separated their island groups.

—Epeli Hau’ofa<sup>2</sup>

## Introduction

In recent decades the historical scholarship emanating from South Asia has received worldwide attention. Much of this scholarship has been the result of work on the history of the Indian subcontinent and especially concerning regions and populations now lying in India. In this connection, Nepali history has for long been viewed as an obscure cousin to these traditions of historical scholarship. This need not necessarily be the case. Developments in the field of world history might point to another way out. World history seeks to understand the rich historical interconnections that have bound

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1 Duara, 1995, p. 33.

2 Hau’ofa, 1995.



together human societies into webs of exchanges. World historians have studied the flows of humans, ideas, objects, and diseases over time and space in ways that have allowed them to connect localities, regions, historiographies, and disciplines. Such an approach offers new possibilities for the study of Nepali history.

A world history approach suggests that the study of Nepal's history might not provide a case for historical exceptionalism. Rather, insights derived from the study of Nepali history might speak to wider issues, debates, and theoretical concerns that animate scholarship in other parts of the world. For instance, historical evidence from the Anglo-Gorkha frontier concerning the organisation of territory can speak to wider ongoing debates in cultural geography and the history of cartography. This evidence helps generate new historically grounded explanations about the production of space or territory. It allows for the writing of thicker descriptions of the history of cartography that go beyond the traditional accounts of surveying institutions or the study of the representational effects of mapmaking.

This paper seeks to do the following: First it will discuss the largely insular perspective that has informed the writing of Nepali history. Second, it will then proceed to introduce the field of world history and broadly outline the focus of the work of world historians. Third, it will examine the possibilities of writing Nepali history in a world historical vein. The last section will draw upon evidence from the Anglo-Gorkha frontier in the 18th and early 19th centuries to present a possible world history of the Anglo-Gorkha frontier.

### **The Island of Nepali History?**

The study of Nepali history presents itself as an intellectual enterprise that affords a range of expressions. Perhaps dominant among them is the view that Nepal exists as a unique bounded stage on which its history has unfolded. In many respects, Nepali history continues to be perceived as an island, cut off from wider developments elsewhere. Within the broader historiography of modern South Asian history, Nepal (perhaps along with Bhutan, the Mal-

dives and Bangladesh) occupies the status of an island surrounded by a sea of Indian sub-continental historical activity. This tendency can be discerned in the historical writings on Nepal over the past 250 years. Prior to the 20th century, the writing of history in Nepal assumed the form of chronicles (*vamsavalis*) or narratives of political events, kings, family histories, battles, tales of bravery, and so on, preserved in oral traditions or written documents.<sup>3</sup> Since the late 18th century a number of western accounts of the country were also prepared.<sup>4</sup>

While the writing of history has burgeoned in Nepal since the 1950s, indigenous Nepali historians (who constitute the bulk of the participants)<sup>5</sup> continue to remain in 'splendid' historiographic isolation, shielded from the numerous disciplinary and inter-disciplinary avatars that have emerged around the world. For example, historians belonging to the Samsodhan Mandal collective produced a valuable genre of history writing that has revolved largely around the translation and publication of Sanskrit and Nepali primary sources in order to construct narratives of political, diplomatic, and military exploits. The Samsodhan Mandal historians, through their mouthpiece journal, *Purnima*, generated much of the early impetus for history writing in Nepal that followed the demise of Rana rule in 1951.<sup>6</sup> Other historians wrote from strong nationalist and objectiv-

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3 By 'modern', I take to mean the period after the 1740s when the little hill kingdom of Gorkha entered into a territorially expansionist phase of state-making, that by 1814 would stretch its boundaries from the Tista river in the east to the Sutlej river in the west, and from Tibet in the north to the frontiers of the Company state in the south. For work on Nepali chronicles, see Vajracharya and Malla (eds), 1985; and Paudel (ed), 2020 BS.

4 I do not intend to go into a detailed account of these works, except mention that they can be found in the writings of Francis Buchanan-Hamilton, Captain William Kirkpatrick, Brian Houghton Hodgson, Henry Ambrose Oldfield, Eden Vansittart, Sylvain Levi, Perceval Landon and many others. The Capuchin monks who had lived in Tibet since the 16th century did leave some accounts of Nepal. For a brief history of their work in Nepal, see Vannini, 1977.

5 Onta notes that while anthropologists on Nepal are mainly foreigners, historians of Nepal are mostly Nepalis. Onta, 2003.

6 Samsodhan Mandal historians include, among others, Nayaraj Pant and his sons,

ist perspectives focusing on issues of diplomacy, politics, and war. Such writings represented modern Nepali history in terms of the biographies of important (mostly male) personalities, sequences of significant events, and state formation, usually framed within a unique discourse of Nepali unification and independence from European colonial interventions.<sup>7</sup>

The rise of the house of Gorkha has consequently been viewed as an isolated event, disassociated from the embroidery of wider forces at work in the subcontinent or beyond. For instance, can the rise of Gorkha be contextualised within the framework of a weakening Mughal system and the rise of new South Asian regimes in the 18th century?<sup>8</sup> In this regard, there has been considerable debate about the significance of the 18th century in the history of South Asia. Nepal's independence from formal European colonisation, which most of South Asia had to endure, while fuelling nationalistic celebration unwittingly encouraged its continued historiographic isolation. The almost pedestrian insight that modern nationalism underwrites its own history-writing, barring a few examples, has yet to be taken up

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Maheshraj and Dineshraj, Yogi Narharinath, the late Dhanavajra Vajracharya (in his early days), and the late Ramji Tiwari. Some of their works include Yogi Naraharinath (ed), *Itihas Prakash*, 4 vols (Kathmandu, 1955-56); Yogi Narharinath, 1966; Nayaraj Pant et al (eds), *Sri Panch Prithivinarayan Shah ko Upadesh*, 4 vols (Lalitpur, n.d.); Dhanavajra Bajracharya, *Triratnasaundariyagatha* (Kathmandu, 1963); Dhanavajra Vajracharya et al (eds) *Aitihasik Patrasamgraha*, Part 1 (Kathmandu, 1957); Dhanavajra Vajracharya, *Lichchhavalin Abhilekh* (Kirtipur: Research Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies, 2053BS); Ramji Tiwari et al (eds), *Itihasik Patrasamgraha*, Part 2 (Kathmandu, 1964); and Ramji Tiwari et al (eds) *Abhilekh Sangraha*, 12 vols (Kathmandu, 1961-63). For a defence of the work of the founding member of the collective, Naya Raj Pant, see Pant, 1984.

7 The literature that has emerged is too vast to be enumerated here. But for a sampling, see the following, Regmi, 1961; Calcutta, 1975; Stiller, 1976; Vaidya, 1996; Bajracharya, 1992. For a similar sampling of readings in Nepali, see Nepali, 1957; Gyawali, 1951; Baburam Acharaya, *Sri Panch Prithivinarayan Shah ko Sankshipta Jivani*, 4 vols (Kathmandu, 1967-68).

8 This has already been suggested in a number of works on north Indian state systems. See, for instance, Alam, 1986; Alavi, 2002; Barnett, 1980; Chaudhuri, 1997-1998; Habib, 1998; Singh, 1991; and Stein, 1989.

by most Nepali historians.<sup>9</sup> Noting this, historian Pratyoush Onta has observed that 'Working under this framework the Nepali historians chose the nation-state with all its claims to unity, freedom and progress and the class in power as the subject of all history.'<sup>10</sup> Onta argued Nepali historians should stop paying exclusive attention to elites and more to 'subaltern classes of Nepalis.'<sup>11</sup> The late Mahesh Chandra Regmi, an authority on the agrarian and political history of Nepal, once explained this isolationist tendency in terms of a 'traditional mindset'. He noted, 'The traditional Nepali mind seems unwilling to make the distinction between conceptual history on the one hand, and chronicle, or *vamshavali*, marked by a bare account of unconnected facts, a dysgenic selection of the immaterial and the futile, on the other.'<sup>12</sup>

While Regmi's concern with a peculiar *mentalitie* giving rise to historiographic tendencies in Nepal is open to debate, his general assertion that 'interpretation is the lifeblood of history' is well taken and relevant to our discussion here.<sup>13</sup> Still, there have been few attempts to answer the most fundamental historiographic question – why do historians write the way they do? Barring a few notable exceptions, there has been a remarkable disinterest in examining the theoretical and social contexts within which Nepali historiography has been produced. Most historiographical accounts take the form of bald and, at times, polemical surveys of the literature.<sup>14</sup>

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9 Writings that interrogate the rise of Nepali nationalism and the processes of Gorkhali state-building and colonisation can be found in the recent work of Pratyoush Onta, Kumar Pradhan and the late Mahesh Chandra Regmi. See Onta, 1999; Regmi, 1999; and Pradhan, 1990. For a call to write ethnonational histories that take into account the ethnological perspectives, see Kramer, 2000.

10 Onta, 1994. The quotation is from page 2.

11 Ibid, p. 2.

12 Mahesh Chandra Regmi, speech delivered on occasion of conferment of the POLSAN award, Kathmandu, 17 February 1999.

13 While Regmi's work is not replete with theoretical concerns, he has admitted to being influenced by the work of agrarian historians such as Irfan Habib and sociologists like J. Barrington Moore. Mahesh C. Regmi, personal communication, 15th April 1999.

14 For surveys, see Adhikari, 1980; Chhetri, 1996; Malla, 1984; Mehra, 1981; Vaidya,



The study of Nepali history's continued historiographic isolation is visible within the immediate context of South Asia. It is indeed intriguing to note that while much of the intellectual ferment generated by the Subaltern studies group from across the border has had epistemological and methodological ramifications around the world, indigenous Nepali historians have yet to engage with this fertile body of literature—in terms of its epistemologies, methods and claims.<sup>15</sup> And, surely the lack of textual material cannot account for this absence. In fact, it would be safe to state that this focus on the inarticulate, oppressed and marginalised groups of society has never been the monopoly of the Subaltern school or a uniquely South Asian intervention. Rather, many elements of this scholarship can be found in the New Social Histories which emerged in European and American academia in the 1960s. Moreover, the Subaltern school has its share of critics who, through their perceptive writings, have considerably enlarged the conversation on the subject.<sup>16</sup> While Nepal in the 1960s remained peripheral to academic concerns elsewhere, this cannot be said to be the case by the end of the first decade of the 21st century. And this makes the silence on these matters within Nepali academia even more puzzling. The historian Pratyoush Onta echoes this concern when he notes that what history writing lacks in Nepal is a 'greater pluralism in history writing practices' and conversations between such practices.<sup>17</sup>

Similarly, collaborations between the academic study of his-

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1990; and Vaidya et al, 1993. For exceptions to this trend, see Onta, 1994; Onta, 2003; and Onta, 2004.

15 New creative readings of the subaltern variety, while too numerous to cite here, can be found in the following samples of writings: Amin, 1988; Guha, 1994; Guha, 1983; Guha and Spivak (eds), 1988; and Mani, 1992. Useful and critical introductions to the subaltern studies movement can be found in Chakrabarty, 2000; Dube, 2004; and Prakash, 1994. See also, Ludden (ed), 2002.

16 See, for instance, Sarkar, 1998; Sivaramakrishnan, 1996; Spivak, 1988; Washbrook and O'Hanlon, 1992.

17 This point has already found timely expression in some of the writings of Nepali historian Pratyoush Onta. See Onta, 1994. See also, Onta, 1993; and Des Chene and Onta, 1997.

tory and other disciplines have not kept up with developments elsewhere. For example, the rapprochement worked out between history, anthropology and literary criticism since the 1970s in the writings of scholars like Bernard Cohn, Natalie Zemon Davis, Robert Darnton, Nicholas Dirks, Greg Dening, Bronwen Douglas, Elizabeth Clarke and many others have imparted new energies to historical research and writing.<sup>18</sup> Today, historians have moved away from the once-familiar confines of national and disciplinary insularity to embrace new themes and methodologies that are sometimes touted as 'The New Cultural History'.<sup>19</sup> Historical writings in this vein are empirically engaging, nuanced in their texture, rich in their recording of voices, versatile in their engagements with various disciplines, and yet critical of their own epistemological underpinnings.<sup>20</sup> They interrogate the primary sources they employ more rigorously, seeking out blind spots and the presence of ideological forces.<sup>21</sup> Such works have presented valuable methodological insights that have enabled historians to pursue creative ways of 'doing' history.<sup>22</sup> These trends have been captured by a spate of recent writings on the state of affairs within the discipline of history.<sup>23</sup> The older metanarratives of nationalist writing have given way to the insertion of a multiplicity of, sometimes discordant, voices revolving around the themes of gender, sexuality and ethnicity, just as they coalesce around the axes of culture, power, history and

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18 While the literature on these engagements is too vast to cite here, the following samples will suffice: Cohn, 1987; Comaroff, 1992; Davis, 1983; Darnton, 1984; Dening, 1980; Dirks, 1987; Douglas, 1998; and Clarke, 2004.

19 Bonnell and Hunt (eds), 1999.

20 Critical and perhaps polemical readings of this kind can be found in Chakrabarty, 2000. The unconventional and sometimes adisciplinary writings of Ashis Nandy might be of some relevance here. See Nandy, 1995. For a general introduction to Nandy's work, see Lal, 2000.

21 A sampling of such interrogative writings can be found in the following: Ghosh, 2004; Guha, 1994; Mani, 1992; and Symonds, 1999.

22 Axel (ed), 2002; Des Chene, 1997; Douglas, 2001; Douglas 1992; Isaac, 1984; and Thompson, 1977.

23 See, for instance, Gaddis, 2002; Appleby, Hunt and Jacob, 1994; Lerner, 1997; Jenkins (ed), 1997; Wilson, 2004.

space. Even the archive, the work site for the historian, has been made vulnerable to all kinds of critical reinterpretations that have generated a 'postcustodial' turn in archival studies. In such studies, archives are no longer viewed as innocent repositories for historical texts. Rather, they stand exposed as peculiar products of history and structures of power; deeply interested and therefore amenable to critical (re)readings.<sup>24</sup>

One reason for this historiographic innocence could be the relative historiographic insularity that informs Nepali history writing. Perhaps this has, in part at least, been reinforced by the perceived isolation of the country from foreign domination over the past 250 years. This, along with nationalist sentiment, has accentuated the exceptionalism that has marked Nepal's history as unique and separate from developments elsewhere in the region. Such an island-like mentality is not entirely unique to the history of Nepal. A similar outlook has characterised the histories of other nations. For instance, there was a time when the United States, Britain, and Japan were viewed as exceptional cases—insulated from continental or transcontinental influences. Today, there is greater awareness among historians of these countries of the interconnections that bound them to lands and regions across the seas. These new comparative histories spawned new fields of inquiry—Atlantic World studies, New Imperial Histories—that would connect peoples, regions and historiographies across time and space.<sup>25</sup> The necessity for such reconceptualisation has been felt in the island world of the Pacific Ocean (sometimes referred to as Oceania) where scholars such as Epeli Hau'ofa have tried to make sense of the histories of

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24 See, for instance, Arondekar, 2005; Burton (ed), 2005; Brettell, 1998; Dirks, 2002; Steedman, 2002; and Stoler 2010. See, especially, the collections of articles in Hamilton et al (eds), 2002.

25 At Harvard University the International Seminar on the History of the Atlantic World (1500-1825) was established in order to encourage comparative research in Atlantic history topics. For a recent work that embeds the local history of New Jersey within the wider context of an Atlantic world, see Fea, 2008. For comparative studies of European imperialism, see Wilson (ed), 2004; and Cooper and Stoler (eds), 1997.

individual islands within the wider context of a connecting sea and human interactions across it over the millennia.<sup>26</sup> In this manner, even isolated islands can be unanchored from their very isolation and participate in human flows and processes from beyond – past, present, theoretical, and historiographic.<sup>27</sup> The writings of anthropologists such as Marshall Sahlins and Gananath Obeyesekere on the islands of Hawaii, for example, have placed these islands in the centre of anthropological controversy and debate.<sup>28</sup> In this fashion, the island world of Oceania has been placed at the centre of significant academic debate. Reversing the isolation of Nepali history and recentring it within wider academic developments and debates call for a conversation with the field of world history.

## World History

Nowhere is this impulse to transcend geographical, national, and epistemological boundaries in order to write connective histories more evident than in the branch of world history. While attempts to write world histories can be found in pre-modern periods, it is only in the decades following the Second World War that this trend witnessed its greatest spurt.<sup>29</sup> World history in its current disciplinary *avatar* seeks to understand the rich historical interconnections

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26 The argument favouring the use of the term Oceania over that of the Pacific, is Epeli Hau'ofa's. See, for instance, Hau'ofa, 1995. This important short piece by Hau'ofa has appeared in a number of places. See Hau'ofa, 1993; and Hau'ofa, 1994.

27 For more on the idea of 'unanchoring', see also, Lal, 2000.

28 See Sahlins, 1985. For a spirited response, see Obeyesekere, 1992. Sahlins responded to Obeyesekere's criticisms in Obeyesekere, 1995. Details about this debate can be found in Borofsky, 2000.

29 Premodern writings of a 'world historical' kind can be found in the following: The multivolume history of the Islamic world by Al Tabari (839-923CE) called *Tarikh al-rusul wa'l muluk*, or *The History of al-Tabari*; The *Muqaddimah* of Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406CE); the various oral traditions of creation and survival found across the world; Hindu and Buddhist cosmologies, and so on. While these writings might not exhibit the sensibilities of modern world historians they do present narratives that connect regions, peoples and cultures, while making transcendental claims.

that have bound together human societies into webs of exchanges. World historians have studied the flows of humans, ideas, objects, and diseases over time and space in ways that have allowed them to connect localities, regions, historiographies and disciplines. World historian Patrick Manning notes that

To put it simply, world history is the story of connections within the global human community. The world historian's work is to portray the crossing of boundaries and the linking of systems in the human past. The source material ranges in scale from individual family tales to migration of peoples to narratives encompassing all humanity. World history is far less than the sum total of all history. Nevertheless, it adds to our accumulated knowledge of the past through its focus on connections among historical localities, time periods, and themes of study.<sup>30</sup>

Building on this, Ross Dunn clarifies that 'world history is the search for answers to questions about the past in which the inquiry embraces whatever geographical, social, or cultural field is appropriate and in which conventionally defined entities such as nation-states are not allowed to limit the scope of investigation arbitrarily.'<sup>31</sup> Dunn's point about transcending the limits of the nation state is an important historiographic move that has animated recent conversations on the writing of history.<sup>32</sup> Consequently, world historians have invited attention to broad themes spanning time and space, that connected human societies around the planet.<sup>33</sup> In this connection, world historians have used cross-cultural interactions between

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30 Manning, 2000, pp. 3. See also, pages xi, 6, 7, 15 and 36.

31 Dunn, 2000, For a succinct account of the various strands of modern scholarship that have contributed to the emergence of world history, see Bentley, 1995.

32 See, for instance, Duara, 1995.

33 Useful introductions to world history can also be found in the following: Clark, 1997; Goudsblom et al, 1996; Gran, 1996; Hodgson, 1993; and McNeill and McNeill, 2003.



societies or comparative developments across them to devise their own distinct temporal and spatial units for the study of world history.<sup>34</sup> World historians track the movements of peoples, objects and ideas across vast distances and periods. This has allowed them to open new lines of research on nomads, transoceanic and trans-regional networks of exchange such as the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea networks, and the Silk Roads and nomadic cultures that straddled much of Afro-Eurasia.<sup>35</sup> Historians have taken a world history approach to study themes such as imperialism, environmental history, and the rise of distinct large-scale networks of interaction called world systems.<sup>36</sup> Yet others have assessed the impact of powerful forces such as globalisation, diasporas, diffusion of faith traditions, and technological innovation and social change.<sup>37</sup> Finally, a number of historians have tried to explain the rapid rise of the western European nations in world history after the 18th century.<sup>38</sup>

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34 See the special issue on 'Periodization in World History', in the *American Historical Review*, 101:3 (June 1996). See articles by Jerry H. Bentley and Patrick Manning.

35 See Bentley, 1993; Curtin, 1984; Carter Findley, 2005. Studies of overland and transoceanic exchanges can be found in the following: Bentley et al (eds), 2005; Bentley et al, 2007; Braudel, 1972; Chaudhuri, 1985; Driessen, 2001; and Foltz, 2000. The American Historical Association sponsored a number of pamphlets on world history under the series called Essays on Global and Comparative History. More information on this can be found at <http://www.historians.org/pubs/globals.cfm> (accessed 2 February 2008).

36 For studies on imperialism, see Blue, Bunton and Croizier, 2002. Works on environmental history from a world history perspective can be found in the following: Crosby, 1972; McNeill, 1977; and Richards, 2003. For works on world systems, see Arrighi, 1994; Abu-Lughod, 1991; Gunder-Frank, 1998; Wallerstein, 1974-1989; and Wolf, 1982.

37 These themes are explored in the following: Hokpins, 2002; Vertovec, 2007; Eaton, 1990; Folz, 2000; Walters, 1998; Bulliet, 1990; Headrick, 1981; and White, 1966.

38 The debate about the 'rise of the West' is a longstanding one and continues with scholars still trying to explain this 'great divergence'. See the classic work by McNeill, 1963. See also, Goldstone, 2008; Pomeranz, 2000; Tetlock et al (eds), 2006.

World historians have been willing to transcend disciplinary boundaries drawing extensively from the work of anthropologists, linguists, archaeologists, political scientists, and literary theorists, establishing connections between their theoretical and empirical findings, and world historical themes. They have also engaged all kinds of intellectual currents (for instance poscolonialism, post-structuralism, and postmodernism) in order to give greater theoretical impetus to their studies on world history. World historians have taken the work of scholars scattered across disciplines and assessed its significance for the study of world historical topics such as globalization, the cultural transformation of societies, diasporas, religious conversion, the trade in exotic goods, and mercantile diasporas in the Indian Ocean.<sup>39</sup> Such a strategy has allowed world historians to connect the work of specialists with larger historical forces at work in the world. World historians have been able to use the work of historian Shlomo Goitein on the maritime operations of Jewish diasporic merchant communities to better understand their economic and socio-cultural role in the Indian Ocean world of the 10th to the 12th centuries. Goitein's work was based on the rich documentary evidence stored in the synagogue of old Cairo (also known as the Geniza records).<sup>40</sup> Still others, who are not historians by training, have taken their expertise to make world historical claims, a notable instance of this is the work of evolutionary biologist Jared Diamond on the relationships between societies and their environment forged thousands of years ago that prepared the groundwork for the development of some societies at the cost of others.<sup>41</sup> Some scholars like David Christian step back to take a longer view of the history of the world. Christian understands the history of the world as part of a wider unfolding cosmic drama. In doing so, he extends the temporal horizons of historical analysis to

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39 Examples of such writings can be found in Appadurai, 1996; Comaroff, 1985; Chow, 1993; Clifford, 1994; Shafer, 1985; Helms, 1988; Rafael, 1993; and Dale, 1994.

40 Goitein, 1967–1993.

41 See Diamond, 2005.

the formation of the very Universe.<sup>42</sup> Needless to say, practitioners of world history have their own share of critics who may disagree over terminology, periodisation and focus.<sup>43</sup> In the United States, where the field of world history has witnessed rapid growth, it is being increasingly taught at the high school and undergraduate levels.<sup>44</sup> A growing number of universities such as the University of Hawaii and University of Pittsburgh offer graduate programmes in the study of world history. More recently, the field has undergone a period of stocktaking and consequently a number of encyclopaedias of world history have appeared.<sup>45</sup> Today, as an emerging field, the study of world history continues to evolve energetically as it engages themes, concepts and theories drawn from other fields of study.<sup>46</sup> Perhaps David Christian is right to comment that the popularity of world history today might be due to its promise to become the creation myth of modern peoples encountering each other in a rapidly interconnected world.<sup>47</sup>

## Nepali History as World History

World historians insist that the study of human communities be viewed part of a wider interconnected canvas of human history. Nepali history too is part of such a wider unfolding canvas of human activity that extends beyond its national boundaries. Historians with a 'cosmopolitan' outlook are perhaps best suited to write

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42 Christian, 2004.

43 Gunder-Frank and Gills (eds), 1993; and Mazlish & Buultjens (eds), 1993.

44 In addition to this there has been a proliferation of textbooks, encyclopaedias, teachers' guides, workshops, and conferences on the subject of world history. For a sampling, see Bentley and Ziegler, 2000; McNeill, Bentley et al (eds), 2005; and Roupp, 1997. In 1982, the World History Association (WHA) was established with its official mouthpiece, the *Journal of World History*, along with an annual conference.

45 An impressive example would be the *Berkshire Encyclopedia of World History* (Berkshire, MA: Berkshire Reference Works, 2005).

46 Entries in the above cited Berkshire Encyclopedia of World History are evidence of this. See, for instance, Michael, 2005.

47 Christian, 2004, pp. 1-11.

such transnational histories. Thomas Bender, when arguing for the same outlook for the study of American history, has this to say:

The historian needs to be a cosmopolitan. For that to happen, both historiography and the historian have to restore some sense of strangeness, of unfamiliarity, to American historical experience. American historiography has become too familiar, too technical and predictable. One aim of destabilizing the nation must be to defamiliarize the stories that make up American history, thus inviting a fresh curiosity that is not prompted by the ever more refined and increasingly technical analyses of long-established themes and questions.<sup>48</sup>

There are many reasons why such a rethinking might be appropriate for the study of Nepali history. Due to new and intense pressures of globalisation and the changing character of global geopolitics in the wake of the fall of the Soviet Union and its allies, the older area studies paradigms that framed the world are being reimagined. More recently, a number of writings have attempted to reconceptualize area-studies frameworks by dispelling the idea of the Indian subcontinent being an isolated and unique land mass. They have tried to blur boundaries and discuss the history of the subcontinent in terms of flows, processes, patterns, and connections.<sup>49</sup> Barring a few exceptions, and that too mostly by anthropologists and linguists, there have been few interventions of this kind by Nepali historians, despite the country's overlapping locations in South Asia, High Asia, the Himalaya and Tibet, and its engagements with global forces such as capitalism and colonialism.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, the Himalaya

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48 Bender, 2002, pp. 11.

49 For a representative sampling of works on this subject, see Lewis and Wigen, 1997. For a regional approach to the question, see Sivaramakrishnan and Agrawal (eds), 2003. See also, Ludden, 1994; and Onta, 2001.

50 Anthropologists working on Nepal have been far more adept at making trans-regional connections. See, for example: Deschene, 1991; Fisher, 1986; Leichty, 2005; and Mikesell, 1998. In the area of linguistics, the work of George Van Driem

themselves have never been an isolated region; rather they have always been connected with the movements of peoples, objects, languages and ideas elsewhere in South and Central Asia and even beyond.<sup>51</sup> In recent times, the growing Nepali diaspora abroad too has dispersed the location of Nepali culture across the world.<sup>52</sup> The study of Nepali history could potentially raise the same questions about human agency, the nature of historical change, cultural interactions, the social and historical construction of knowledge, and the effects of power and the environment that have been explored by historians in other parts of the world. To adapt from the work of anthropologist Tim Ingold, such an approach recognises Nepal as an integral part of wider, emergent, and continuous landscapes of social action and theoretical reflection.<sup>53</sup>

Historiographic debates emerging in one part of the world may very easily impact historical work being conducted in another area of the world. For instance, the debates surrounding the limitations of approaching Oceania in terms of insular histories of its islands have caused archaeologists to reassess this approach within the context of Mediterranean archaeology.<sup>54</sup> Elsewhere, new scholarly initiatives are examining a possible convergence between American history and postcolonial studies.<sup>55</sup> New developments in the study of Imperial history have opened new connections between the study of empire, the environment, statemaking, gender and sexu-

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and his students has been particularly influential. See Van Driem, 2001. For a useful review of this work, see Whelpton, 2004. Van Driem's students such as Mark Turin have continued work among the various languages and dialects that dot the Himalaya. See Turin with Thami, 2004; and Shneiderman and Turin, 2006.

51 For a call to reintegrate Himalayan history with developments elsewhere in South Asia, see Singh, 1993. For South Asia's integration into the world capitalist system, see Bose (ed), 1990.

52 See, for instance, Sinha and Subba (eds), 2003; and Perry, 1997. See also, Kunreuther, 2006.

53 Ingold, 1994.

54 See Rainbird, 1999. Scholarly reactions to Rainbird's article can be found in pages 235-260 of the same issue of the journal.

55 Schwarz and Ray, 2000.



ality. This has generated new historical writing on the nature of European Empires, colonising states and languages, and the oft-overlooked 'intimacies of Empire'. Its impact is already being felt in the work of a new generation of South Asian scholars like Antoinette Burton, Durba Ghosh, Gauri Vishwanathan, Saurabh Dube and K. Sivaramakrishnan.<sup>56</sup> Such kinds of theoretical, historiographical and disciplinary swapping are beginning to fuel diverse historical agendas across the world. The study of Nepali history need not be excluded from these developments. Rather, it needs to be deeply 'worlded' within them, thereby affirming that the local is always embedded within wider processes and emerging forces.<sup>57</sup> The theoretical, methodological and thematic issues presented by the study of Nepali history can serve as a hinge that connects with similar issues being presented by historians in other parts of the world. After all, in the end, the study of Nepali history addresses the age-old questions and debates about structure and agency, power, state-making, culture, time, space, memory, method, epistemology and meaning. Examining the conditions which have encouraged or dissuaded Nepali historians from participating in scholarly initiatives in other parts of the world calls for a 'politics of comparison'.<sup>58</sup> This entails a comparative approach that is not primarily focused on nation states, but that maps the transnational connections between them in addition to understanding the politics that animate attempts

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56 See Burton and Ballantyne, 2005; Ghosh, 2006; Vishwanathan, 1989; Dube, 2004; and Sivaramakrishnan, 1999. Important writing on the role played by gender and sexuality and child-rearing, domesticity in determining relationships between coloniser and colonised – the intimacies of empire – can be found in the work of Laura Ann Stoler (2006).

57 For the literary and historical understandings of 'worlding', see the following: Said, 1984; and Spivak, 1987. For work on 'worlding' maps, see Bernardo A. Michael, 'Inscribing Maps on the Land: 'Non-Cartographic' Practices in Colonial South Asia', paper presented at a session on Worlding Maps: Culture, Power, History, and Space in the Cartographic History of South Asia, 19th European Conference on Modern South Asian Studies, Leiden University, The Netherlands, 27-30 June 2006.

58 The term 'politics of comparison' is Laura Ann Stoler's. See Stoler, 2006, p. 1.

at historical comparison. That is, we need to treat comparison as an object of inquiry, in trying to understand the political rationalities that inform efforts to compare in the first place. Such an approach might be better placed to deny the isolationism, exclusivism and exceptionalism that have for long marked the production of historical knowledge in Nepal. Rather, Nepal may be viewed as a space that is uniquely forged by diasporic flows, circulations, and movement. This might help dispel easy notions of Nepali history being made up of singular identities, forces, and cultures.

Such broad-based comparative approaches that explore transnational political, cultural, economic and linguistic connections are already evident in the study of South Asian history. The themes of historical memory, transcultural linguistic formations and connections animate these works. For example, the rich and varied work of Sanjay Subrahmanyam, among others, has connected the worlds of the Mughal, Ottoman and Safavid empires along with the oceans lying in between.<sup>59</sup> The work of Sheldon Pollock and others has taken the study of the ancient and mediaeval periods of the subcontinent's history into new and exciting areas such as the transcultural spread of premodern languages such as Sanskrit.<sup>60</sup> The work of Muzaffar Alam on the changing political role of Islam as its Arabo-Persian culture traversed the dense social terrain of the Indian subcontinent is yet another example of the emergence of new scholarly work on the 'mediaeval period'.<sup>61</sup> It would be interesting to learn if the case of Nepal confirms these trends or not. The study of history anywhere also brings to the fore questions concerning history as forms of emergent consciousness and knowledge that have been variously preserved in oral and textual traditions through power-laden social struggles.<sup>62</sup> The study of oral

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59 Subrahmanyam, 2005; 2005; Subrahmanyam, Markovits and Pouchepadass (eds), 2007; and Subrahmanyam and Alam, 2007. See also, Bose, 2006; Metcalf, 2007; and Raj, 2007.

60 Pollock, 2006; and Pollock (ed), 2003.

61 See Alam, 2004. See also, Inden, Walters and Ali (eds), 2000.

62 Samples of work in this vein would include the following: Appleby, Hunt et al

history itself has generated a number of rich and insightful studies within and beyond South Asia. For instance, the work of William Cummings on 16th- and 17th-century Makassar (Indonesia) has shown that as the area witnessed a transition from an oral to a literate culture there were profound changes in the way people conceived of and consumed historical knowledge.<sup>63</sup> While work on oral history has found considerable expression in India, in the case of Nepal work on this subject has been produced mostly by non-historians.<sup>64</sup> Elsewhere, given the paucity of sources, historians have nevertheless produced insightful works in a genre sometimes called 'microhistory'.<sup>65</sup> Such works might have serious implications for our understanding of how traditions of history writing in Nepal compare with trends elsewhere in South Asia. Again, the attempt here is not to suggest that a world historical approach should monopolise all historical approaches on Nepal. Rather, it might be coexist contrapuntally with other approaches that taken together promise rich rewards to all involved – teachers, students, and researchers.

Such pious meditations, needless to say, have to confront the realities of teaching and researching history in Nepal—from the school to the college level. Serious bottlenecks in the form of lack of money, the politicisation of education in the country, lack of incentives for historians, and poor infrastructure continue to plague the teaching, research and writing of history in Nepal.<sup>66</sup> The cultural

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(eds), 1994; Amin, 1995; Chakrabarty, 2000; Nandy, 1995; and Subrahmanyam, 2004.

63 See Cummings, 2002. For a similar work from Southeast Asia, see Drakard, 1999. For a classic work on oral history, see Portelli, 1990.

64 For works on India see the numerous writings of A.K. Ramanujan. See Ramanujan, 1973; 1990. See also, Velcheru Narayana Rao et al, 1998, and Skaria, 1998. Within Nepal, see Meyer et al, 1998; and Maskarinec, 1998.

65 A notable practitioner of this is Carlo Ginzburg. See Ginzburg, 1992; Carlo Ginzburg et al (eds), 1989. See also, Spence, 1989.

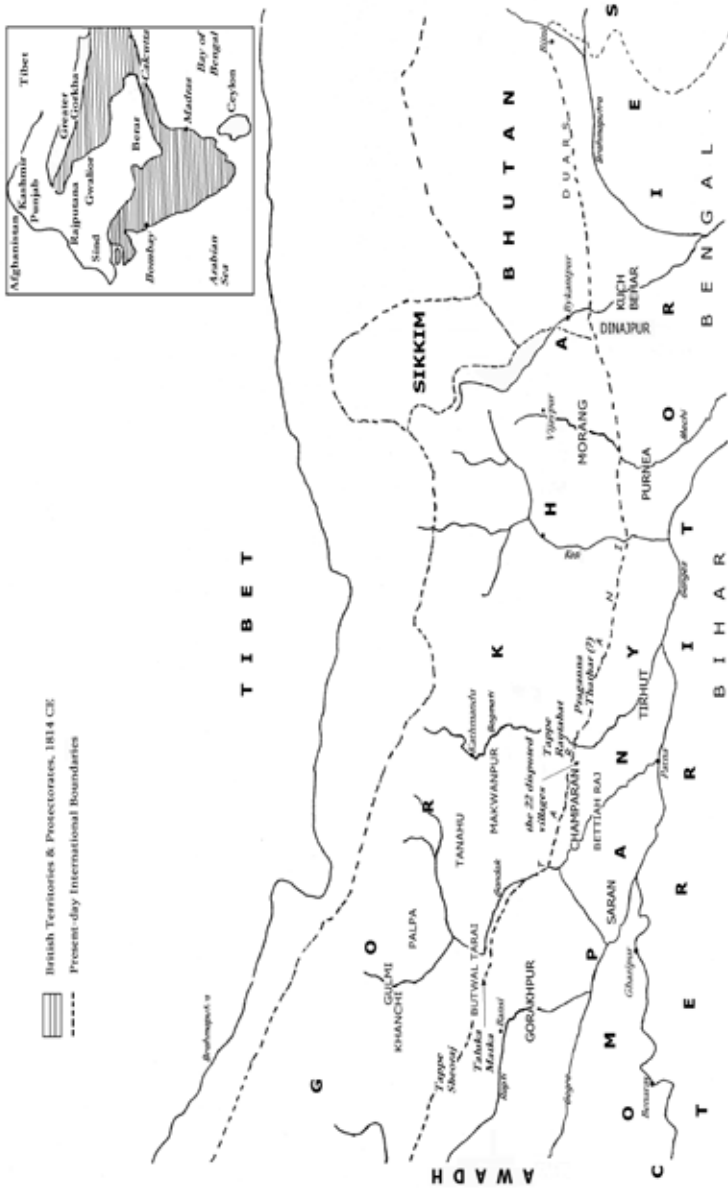
66 For more information on this, see Onta, 'Institutional Geography and the Future of Academic History on Nepal', unpublished paper, pp. 25; T.R. Manandhar, et. al., 1995; and T.R. Manandhar, 1997, see, especially, pp. 38-53..

diversity of the country and the difficulties of conducting archival research have historically attracted the attention of anthropologists and political scientists rather than historians. Perhaps recent political developments (represented by various ethnic, political and social movements) in the past decade or so will generate new voices that will render the study of Nepali history a pluralistic enterprise. As various ethnic nationalities (*janajatis*) demand recognition, they will undoubtedly push for greater representation of their histories, resisting the celebratory traditional accounts of the Nepali nation, the Shah dynasty and the dominant hill castes that have ruled the country for the past two centuries.

### **Land, Labour, and Environment on the Anglo-Gorkha Frontier**

In the 18th century the Anglo-Gorkha frontier formed the shared boundary of the English East India Company and Gorkha (see map 1). This strip of land stretched all along the foothills of the Himalaya and soon gave rise to a number of territorial disputes that left the frontier illegible and deeply contested. For reasons that should hopefully become clear the study of the Anglo-Gorkha frontier can be an exercise in the approach taken by world historians—in terms of the blurring of nationalist histories and establishing valuable historiographic connections with disciplines and debates taking place elsewhere. A closer examination of the agency of local actors along the frontier also reveals that considerations other than nationalist imperatives drove their agendas and activities.

In this connection, of particular significance are the territorial disputes that took place along the border between the English East India Company and Gorkha, which ultimately led to the outbreak of war in 1814. These disputes can be unpacked to reveal a number of important historical themes and historiographic concerns that are not bound by the confines of nationalist history writing. Thick malarial forests and mobile labour, and a range of other factors combined to render the Anglo-Gorkha frontier a dense zone of interaction and struggle where political identities were fluid. The defeat of the Gorkhalis in 1816 was followed by their surrender of territory



Map 1: The Anglo-Gorkha Frontier, 1814 CE.

The map is not drawn to scale. Boundaries and locations of tappas, pargannas, and villages are approximate. Mapwork by Saramma and Sharon Michael. Mapwork by Saramma and Sharon Michael.



and the demarcation of the Anglo-Gorkha boundary by the British.<sup>67</sup>

The war has been examined by scholars from a number of diplomatic and military perspectives that are mostly nationalistic in sentiment.<sup>68</sup> Most of these accounts treat this conflict in term of stark dichotomies of British expansionism thwarting Nepal's nationalist driven project of territorial expansion and unification initiated by King Prithvi Narayan Shan in the mid-18th century. For long, they have ignored the complexities and flows that animated local governance and agrarian relations along a forested malarial frontier that were not driven by nationalist sentiments. Consequently, what has slipped from focus has been a detailed examination of the Anglo-Gorkha territorial disputes from the perspective of local agents. By viewing the Anglo-Gorkha frontier as a zone of persistent interaction, historians are able to explore various themes such as the environment, cross-border flows of people, the histories of little kingdoms, agrarian entitlements, and the spatial construction of territories. In particular, exploring themes of spatiality allows historians to undertake a number of parallel engagements—thematic and disciplinary—which are world historical in their thrust in so far as they connect communities, individuals and kingdoms across the frontier. In particular, examining the territorial disputes for their spatial implications allows historians to reinterpret the record, all the while opening new conversations with the fields of cultural geography and the study of cartographic history.<sup>69</sup>

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67 For details, see Pemble, 1971.

68 Both Nepali and Indian scholars have participated in this enterprise. See Chaudhuri, 1960; Gould, 1999; Jha, 1974; Khanduri, 1997; Mojumdar, 1963; Ramakant, 1968; and Sanwal, 1965. Among Nepali historians, Mahesh Raj Pant has written a number of articles on the Anglo-Gorkha war, which while too numerous to cite here, may be found in several early issues of *Purnima*, the mouthpiece of the Samsodhan Mandal group of historians. But see Pant, 2021 BS. See also, Rana, 1970; Sharma, 1973; and Thapa, 2048 BS.

69 This is not to say that there have been no references to such questions in scholarly works. For instance, questions concerning the agentive role of spatiality in the territorial disputes leading to the Anglo-Gorkha war have already been broached in the works of Stiller and Des Chene. See Stiller, 1974; Stiller, 1976, pp.

For instance, the evidence from the territorial disputes leading to the Anglo-Gorkha war allows historians to open engagements with the geographical conception of space. For long, space has been treated as a neutral container within which human actions unfold or as a loosely used and highly abstract term. Despite the recent reassertion of space in social theory, there are not many works that try to discern the production of space from a rigorously historical perspective.<sup>70</sup> The idea that space is 'the product of interrelations; as constituted through interactions, from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny,' allows for an understanding of a state's territory as being cobbled together out of social relations and interactions from the micro to the macro levels.<sup>71</sup> Consequently, historical research on the forested Anglo-Gorkha frontier allows for a nuanced understanding of the social production of space.

Historical evidence from the Anglo-Gorkha frontier sheds considerable light on the agency of the environment and local society in producing the mobile spaces of the frontier.<sup>72</sup> In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the Champaran-tarriani and Gorakhpur-Butwal sections of the frontier formed an expanding agrarian frontier (see Map 2). The agrarian environments of Gorkha's Tarai districts were

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216-227; and Des Chene, 1991, pp. 25-33, especially p. 30. For a broader spatial understanding of the kingdom of Nepal, see Burghart, 1984.

Questions of space have been explored elsewhere mostly by anthropologists, scholars of architecture and religion. See for instance, Des Chene, 'Traversing Social Space: Gurung Journeys', and Enslin, 1993, pp. 1-10 and 11-25, respectively. For accounts that seek to link themes of religion and ritual practices to the production of urban space, see Gutschow and Kolver, 1975; Gutschow, 1982; and Kolver, 1976. For a monumental exposition on the construction of Newar Macrospace, see Levy, 1990.

70 See Pickles, 2004; and Soja, 1989. But, see also, the monumental work of Lefebvre, 1991.

71 Such a notion of space quoted here is Doreen Massey's. See Massey, 2005, p. 9.

72 For a similar treatment of the Indo-Bangla boundary, see Willem van Schendel, 'Stateless in south Asia: the making of the India-Bangladesh enclaves', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 61:1, 2002, pp. 115-17. Van Schendel's work focuses on effect of the 'Chit Mahals' — small exclaves lying along the present-day Indo-Bangladesh boundary — on the lives of their inhabitants.

forged by many variables—dense and malarial sal (*shorea robusta*) forests, the constant shortage of labour for agricultural activity, and the shifting character of cultivation along the frontier. Ruling elites (both local and supra local) were keen to exploit the agrarian resources of the Tarai. Gorkhali authorities issued grants of land and contracts to individuals or groups (ascetics, monastic orders, local magnates, and cultivating groups) who were willing to undertake, manage and extend cultivation. Numerous cultivating groups such as the Tharus, Ahirs and Kurmis, mobile ‘tribes’ such as the Domkatars, Bhars and Musahars, and the Banjaras provided the labour required for cultivation.<sup>73</sup>

Despite the growing intensification of agrarian activity and rising population, political instability and ecological constraints produced recurrent shortages of labour. In fact, so serious was this shortage of labour that, authorities in Kathmandu frequently issued instructions to their eastern Tarai officials to do everything in their power to attract cultivators, even if it meant giving generous concessions to lure them from *Moglan* (plains of north India).<sup>74</sup> Interestingly, the orders also clearly state that where possible labour was to be procured not only from India, but even by enticing labour (by giving tax concessions and breaks) already working on Gorkhali *birta* or *jagir* lands.<sup>75</sup> For instance, in 1810, *Sardar* Gaj Singh Khatri was ordered to procure respectable persons (*bhala manis*) and cultivators (*ryots*) from *Moglan* to retain and settle cultivable forest lands (*kala-banjar*) in Morung.<sup>76</sup> Again, for instance, in 1805 (1862 BS), we hear

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73 The Banjaras, who could be both Muslim and Hindu, were active as merchants, as mercenaries and also, more infamously, as robbers. In 1790, the Raja of Bansi ousted them from his territories. See, Nevill, 1909; see also, Bhargava, 1999.

74 ‘Moglan’ is the broad term by which the hill people would refer to the plains of north India.

75 *Birta*—tax free, and often inheritable, land grants; *jagir*—land assigned to government employees in lieu of cash salary.

76 A sardar was a high-ranking civil and military official below the rank of *kaji*. See royal order to sardar Gaj Singh Khatri, Regmi Research Series (RRS) 16 (May 1984), p. 78. Similar orders were given to gosain Baburiya Das regarding reclamation of lands in Saptari. See, *ibid*, pp.78-79. See the following documents for



Map 2: Sketch of the line of boundary between the Nipaul tarriani and the Zillah Sarun prepared for the information of Government and reduced from the original survey by Lt. J. Pickersgill. Scale 4 miles to an inch, 1822. North at the left. 52 x 43cm. Cloth backed on paper. Color on cloth backed paper. © British Library Board, IOR/X/2994, India Office Records, Asia Pacific & Africa Collections, The British Library (reproduced with permission).

that *jagirdars* and *birtadars* of Bara and Saptari districts (in Gorkha's Tarai) were attracting peasants from India, and replacing local revenue-paying peasantry on *kalabanjar* (uncultivated forest) lands.<sup>77</sup> Given this labour scarcity and its attendant dialectic of competition between the organisers of cultivation and tax collection, there was much back and forth movement of labour between the territories of Gorkha and the Company.<sup>78</sup>

Cultivators too preferred to shift to new lands or were enticed to do so in order to take advantage of tax concessions and breaks being offered by these states or local landlords. Cultivators also abandoned their fields in order to escape political instability and oppression by local officials. In this connection, cultivating groups such as the Tharus would migrate elsewhere at the slightest sign of oppression. For instance, in 1791, the *gosains* (Shaivite monks who exercised broad political and economic influence as bankers, merchants and soldiers in north India) and Tharus of *pargana*<sup>79</sup> Koradi (Mahottari district) who had fled to India (*Moglan*) following oppres-

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additional evidence: Land Tax assessment rates in Mahottari; arrangements for reclamation of wastelands by tenants from India, 1793 AD, RRS 36, p. 26; Sardar Gaj Singh Khatri ordered to issue pattas to tenants procured from India for settlement of wastelands in Morung, 1810 AD, RRS 39, p. 230; Tenants emigrated to India invited back to Morung; assurance of resolution of grievances by subba Anup Singh Adhikari and Dhokal Khawas, 1813 AD, RRS 39, p. 561. See also, the Royal order granting chaudharis of Chitwan the authority to invite settlers from India to reclaim wastelands, 1818 AD, RRS 42, p. 321.

77 Warnings of severe punishment were issued to such landholders by Kathmandu, but it seems unlikely that such threats were actually carried out. See RRS 5, p. 537.

78 Shortages of labour were not always uniform in their manifestation. Francis Buchanan-Hamilton, who surveyed the northern reaches of Gorakhpur District in the first decade of the 19th century, noted that while the thana of Parrona had much wasteland, the shortage of labour was not so acute. In fact, there seems to have been plentiful labour, when compared with the other northern thanas. See, Hooper, 1891. See also, Francis Buchanan-Hamilton, 'An Account of the Northern Part of the District of Gorakhpur', Volume 1, part 2, pp. 8 in Eur MSS G 22-23, European Manuscripts, OIOC, BL. Hereafter this account will be referred to as the 'Gorakhpur Report'.

79 A fiscal division in north India which could be further subdivided into tappas.

sion by *amils* (revenue collectors), were asked to return and restore the *pargana* to its former state.<sup>80</sup> In 1762, following the conquest of Makwanpur by Gorkha, many Tharus fled the eastern Tarai regions to the safety of Champaran. Later, the authorities in Kathmandu recalled them on the promise of restoration of their former holdings.<sup>81</sup> At the same time, large numbers of cultivators migrated from the neighbouring kingdom of Awadh to the Company's territories in order to escape the heavy assessments imposed upon them by the revenue collectors (*amils*) of that kingdom.<sup>82</sup>

A similar dynamic could be observed along the Gorakhpur-Butwal section of the Anglo-Gorkha frontier where there was a tendency for patches of forest and grasslands to fall out of cultivation and acquire the ambiguous status of 'commons'. This could be observed, for instance, along the northern reaches of *pargana* Ratanpur Bansi and the *taluka* of Matka.<sup>83</sup> In 1814, the *tappas* that marked the northern boundary of Gorakhpur (viz, lying in the *parganas* of Ratanpur Bansi, Binayakpur and Tilpur) registered frequent fluctuations between cultivation and waste. An instance of this can be found in the case of *tappa* Dhebrua. *Tappa* Dhebrua lay across the disputed Gorkhali *tappa* of Sheoraj and was at one time made up of 60 *mauzas* (villages). In between 1752-92, the lands here lay waste. Since 1792, 14 *malguzari* (revenue-yielding) tenures and 8 rent-free tenures were present. The *malguzari* tenures fell to 11 in 1805, 12 in 1806 and 11 in 1807. In the meanwhile, two rent-free villages had fallen out of cultivation. Thus, in November 1811, there were a total

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80 See RRS 5, p. 20-22.

81 See Panjiar, 1993. See, especially, the *lal mohar* (royal document bearing the red seal of the king of Gorkha) to Hem Choudhari, grandson (*nati*) of Ranpal Choudhari, pp. 25 and plate 2. See also, Krauskopf, Panjiar and Shrestha et al (eds), 2000, and Shrestha (ed), 2000.

82 Bhargava, 1999, p. 83.

83 For details on the *taluka* of Matka see, 'Reports and Observations submitted by Paris Bradshaw on the negotiations and correspondence with the Nepalese Commissioners', April-May 1813, FP Procs. 18 June 1813, nos. 18-24, NAI. It is unclear if these lands were indeed 'commons' or became 'common' lands during periods of fallow or uncultivation.

of 48 *mauzas* in cultivation.<sup>84</sup> On many occasions, it became difficult for Company officials to distinguish between lands that lay under their jurisdiction, and those that belonged to Gorkha. Uncultivated lands in this event, as D. Scott, the acting Magistrate of Gorakhpur in 1811 explains, remained in 'a state of commons than of private pasture grounds, it becomes in many cases a matter of difficulty to ascertain what wasteland has been hitherto subject to the British government and what has been usurped by the Nypalese'.<sup>85</sup>

It is possible that on the Anglo-Gorkha frontier such patterns of flexible and shifting cultivation indicated the availability of a class of *pahikasht* cultivators (those who cultivated lands in a village other than the one in which they reside).<sup>86</sup> Francis Buchanan-Hamilton noted the presence of just under twenty thousand persons who would qualify as *pahikasht* and who were active in the northern *thanas* (police post/station) of Bansi, Dholiya Bandar, Pali, Lotan and Nichlaul.<sup>87</sup> *Pahikasht* cultivators were constantly on the move, drawn to cultivate *banjar* lands, on short-term leases for up to three years, after which they would move on in search of new lands to cultivate.<sup>88</sup> Christopher Bayly's observations on the phenomenon

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84 See, D. Scott, Acting Magistrate of Gorakhpur to Dowdeswell, secretary to government in Judicial department, 19 November 1811, FP Consol. 17 January 1812, no. 46, NAI.

85 D. Scott, Acting Magistrate to G. Dowdeswell, secretary to Government, 19 November 1811 in Letters issued to Magst., GCR basta 25, vol. 164, pp. 100-06, RSA. See also, FP Consol. 17 January 1812, no. 46, NAI.

86 Standing opposed to this category was the *khudkasht* cultivator, or one who cultivated lands in the village of his residence. For details, see Hasan, 1983. Yasin's Glossary notes that a *pahikasht* cultivator was a *raiya* (cultivator) resident in one *mauza* belonging to a zamindar, but cultivating land in a zamindari of a different zamindar. See, Hasan, 1984. Thus, Meena Bhargava clarifies when she notes that the *pahikasht* 'were such cultivators who cultivated lands in villages, not belonging to the same zamindari, tribal or clan settlements as their own.' See Bhargava, 1999, p. 160; see also, Bhargava, 1993.

87 'Estimates of the proportion of different classes of society employed in agriculture in the Northern Part of this District of Gorakhpur', Table no. 3, in Francis Buchanan-Hamilton's 'Gorakhpur Report'.

88 Meena Bhargava, 1999, pp. 31-32.



of *pahikasht* cultivation in north India are relevant to the argument here when he notes that, 'Cultivators of this sort [i.e., *pahikasht* cultivators] provided a shifting population of agrarian servants and specialists whose movements in response to political change could rapidly transform an area from high cultivation to wilderness, or vice-versa'.<sup>89</sup> Commenting on the synergistic relationship that existed between *pahikasht* labour and the land in the northern tracts of Gorakhpur, historian Meena Bhargava concludes that 'the ability of the economy of Gorakhpur to re-people, recycle and revive agriculture speaks for its resilient, adaptive and flexible nature during the period of the study'.<sup>90</sup> Bhargava's comments about the northern reaches of Gorakhpur district probably echo similar patterns unfolding all along the Anglo-Gorkha frontier.

In this fashion, the agrarian landscape pulsed in sync with the flows of labour – that is, patches of land fell in and out of cultivation depending on the availability of labour. This, in turn, left their spatial fingerprints on the layout and internal organisation of administrative districts along the frontier. They possessed fuzzy and shifting boundaries, dispersed and non-contiguous bodies that all too often left the political authority of states unclear, inextricably entangled and intermixed. In the 18th and early 19th centuries, this gave rise of to numerous territorial disputes between the English East India Company and the kingdom of Gorkha.

## **A World History of the Anglo-Gorkha Frontier**

Tracing the role of spatiality, thus defined, in the territorial disputes leading to the Anglo-Gorkha war allows historians (of Nepal and India) to be part of a wider conversation on the relationship between state-making and spatiality.<sup>91</sup> Furthermore, adding the crucial vari-

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89 Bayly, 1983, p. 39.

90 Meena Bhargava, *ibid*, pp. 31-32. Most *pahikashts* were also *khudkasht* cultivators as well, the latter often working as *pahikashts* in fields other than their own in order to supplement their income. See, Bhargava, 1999, pp. 159-68.

91 See, for instance, the work of Kierstead, 1992; Scott, 1998; Sahllins, 1989; Samaddar (ed); 2002; and Sparke, 2005.

able of spatiality to ecological dynamism is a connection that has been infrequently explored in the literature on environmental history.<sup>92</sup> More specifically, the issues of spatiality that animated the Anglo-Gorkha disputes allow historians of Nepal/India to connect the dots between the oft-disconnected fields of agrarian history and the history of cartography. While historical research now abounds in these two areas of inquiry, there have been few attempts to bring about a rapprochement between them.<sup>93</sup> A spatial approach could provide the crucial connective tissue to bridge these two bodies of knowledge.

It is well known that these elites along the Anglo-Gorkha frontier held a wide portfolio of agrarian entitlements expressed in the form of rights to land, property, tribute and taxes. The historical evidence on these agrarian entitlements suggests that the structure of these entitlements was being constantly renegotiated within specific contexts of meaning and power. Local and supra-local elites jostled with one another as they tried to align and realign themselves to shifting centres of authority and power in their efforts to control symbolic and material resources such as land, capital, labour and loyalty. The very act of granting land, levying taxes and extracting tribute carried a semantic and spatial baggage that has never been fully explored.<sup>94</sup> Political identities along the frontier were rarely singular and often unstable. Frequently, inhabitants and local elites

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92 I have found useful introductions to these issues in Bailes (ed), 1985; Cronon, 1983; Crosby, 1994; Grove, Damodaran and Sangwan (eds), 1998; and Rangarajan, 1996; Richards (ed), 2002; Singh, 1998; and Worster (ed), 1988. For recent works that stress a broader interdisciplinary and theoretically informed study of the environment, see Sivaramakrishnan, 1999; and West, 2005.

93 Recent introduction to the field of agrarian history can be found in the following: Agrawal and Sivaramakrishnan (eds), 2000; and Scott and Bhatt (eds), 2001. For more on the constitutive role of agrarian territories in South Asia's history, see Ludden, 1999.

94 See, for instance, Michael, 2003. The dangers of such ethnographic refusal have already been highlighted by Sherry Ortner; see Ortner, 1995. The agrarian history of Nepal has constituted the central focus of the writings of Regmi; see, for instance, Regmi, 1978.

owed allegiances to multiple sources of authority, being subjects of more than one kingdom. Such a shifting structure of entitlements and political loyalties left their impress on the organisation and layout of territories—leaving them mosaic-like, with blurred edges and bodies.

The research conducted along the Anglo-Gorkha frontier generated new insights into the production of space—in this case the production of territory in a manner that was empirically detailed and included a range of actors—elite and subaltern. In many ways this pushed forward the research agenda initiated by scholars like Thongchai Winichakul, whose pioneering 1993 work on the production of the space of the Siamese state needs no recounting here. Thongchai examined the evidence concerning the formation of modern Siam as a geopolitical unit. He wrote from the perspective of the centralising state of Siam rather than from the perspective of states and societies lying along its boundary or the structure of agrarian entitlements and their cultures of governance along Siam's frontiers.

It is such questions of spatiality and their connections with agrarian history that can be fruitfully explored by studying the Anglo-Gorkha frontier prior to the outbreak of war in 1814. The territorially unclear spaces that made up the frontier were replicated elsewhere in the territorial possessions of both Gorkha and the British. Consequently, the colonial state had to struggle with discerning the organisation and layout of its territories during the early years of colonial rule. Ultimately, the British would gain their first visual preview of pre-colonial territorial divisions such as the *pargana* by surveying and mapping their territories through the Revenue Surveys of the 19th century (see Maps 3 and 4).<sup>95</sup> The Gorkhali state would undertake similar surveys in the 20th century through the work of the Bureau of Census and Statistics.<sup>96</sup> Successive govern-

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95 For more on these revenue surveys, see Michael, 2007.

96 For details, see Nepalko Naksa (thum/pragannama vibhajit janganna jillaharu) (Kathmandu: Department of Statistics, 1958); and Interim Report of the Census of Nepal (Kathmandu: Department of Statistics, 1955). I am also grateful to Thir

ments and administrative bodies would use the maps produced by the Census Department to undertake administrative and territorial reorganisations in the country.

Pursuing questions of spatiality simultaneously allows historians to make the critical transition to engaging the emerging literature on the history of cartography. For long the history of cartography has remained the exclusive privilege of a few scholars and map collectors whose primary focus was the study of the history of surveying institutions, map production, scientific and mathematical techniques employed and their ultimate distribution. It was the pioneering work of J.B. Harley and the later commissioning of the History of Cartography project under the joint editorship of Harley and David Woodward that introduced a sea change in the way we look at and understand maps. For long considered neutral and unproblematic representations of the world, and celebrated for their technical qualities, maps were now placed under critical scrutiny. A new field of cartographic inquiry that may be called critical cartography emerged over the last two decades. It became evident that maps are not the mere products of some technical practice or skill, but are also socially produced and are deeply political representations of the world.<sup>97</sup> Critical cartography invites us to go beyond understanding the technical rules of mapping to excavate the deeper layers of meaning, the social contexts and relations of power that combine to produce maps.<sup>98</sup> 'Any cartographic history,' notes Brian Harley,

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Bahadur Rajimajhi and Nara Kanta Adhikari, former officials from the Census Department, for providing valuable information on these matters in the summer of 2005.

97 See Harley, 1992. Here, Harley defines cartography simply as a 'body of theoretical and practical knowledge that map makers employ to construct maps as a distinct mode of representation' (p. 233). See also, the following articles by Harley, 1989, 1988, 1997 and 1990. In these articles, Harley calls a theoretically sophisticated and ethically informed exercise of cartographic history that excavates the hidden agendas, aporias, silences and hierarchies inherent in cartographic exercises by contextualizing their production within time and space and relations of power.

98 A summary of the theoretical concerns of critical cartography can be found in the



Map 3 (above): Detail from the Revenue Survey of India's Map of the District of Purneah surveyed by J. Fitzpatrick and J.J. Pemberton from 1840 to 1847. North at the top. Scale 4 British miles to the inch. The district, which covered some 5712 sq. miles (14794 sq. km), was divided into 38 parganas whose names and acreages are listed in a table (not shown) on the map. Eleven of the smallest parganas are listed as being 'indicated in another' pargana. Note the excessive intermixing of the parganas of Powakhalee and Futtehpoor [Fattehpur] Singheea in the Himalayan foothills in the north, close to the frontier with Nepal and Sikkim. © British Library Board, IOR, X/1058/1, India Office Records, Asia Pacific & Africa Collections, The British Library (reproduced with permission).

Map 4 (facing page). Detail from the Revenue Survey of India's Map of the District of Bhagulpoor (1852). Whole map 116.5 × 86 cm. The surveyors were Capt. W. S. Sherwill and Mr J.J. Pemberton. North at the top. Scale of four British miles to the inch. The district covered nearly 7803 sq. miles (approximately 20210 sq. km) as was divided into 40 parganas ranging in size from 0.3 to 700 sq. miles (0.7 to 1813 sq. km). In the 'Alphabetical Statement of Purgunnah Areas' (not shown) Huzar Tukee pargana is described as having two detached portions. Note, below the Ganges River, the two detached sub-divisions (tappas) of Lodweh and Simrown that lay separate from the main part of the pargana of Purbutpara (the upper and lower circles respectively) by the pargana of Kurruckpoor. The map also contains a Tabular



Statement of Latitudes and Longitudes (not shown), compiled by 'A.H.' © British Library Board, IOR, X/1419/1, India Office Records, Asia Pacific & Africa Collections, The British Library (reproduced with permission).

‘which ignores the political significance of representation relegates itself to an ‘ahistorical history’.’<sup>99</sup> Though Harley’s pioneering work has its detractors, it has been followed by a spate of writing that explores critical cartographic themes from interdisciplinary perspectives.<sup>100</sup> More recently, this genre of writing has extended itself to the study of South Asian history.<sup>101</sup>

Despite Harley’s critical interventions, the history of cartography retained its focus on the activities of surveys, surveying departments and the technicalities and representational effects of mapmaking. While there have been a number of attempts to write nuanced social and political histories of maps and mapmaking, there remains the question whether more could be done to include a greater plurality of voices in such narratives. Attempting this calls for the location of cartographic agency within the sphere of everyday life. Such a view recognises that the drive to survey and produce maps emerges within a wider context of deep seated spatial impulses – which in the case of the Anglo-Gorkha frontier emerged out of the structure of agrarian entitlements that left territories ill defined in their layout and organisation. Such spatial illegibilities were ultimately resolved through the surveying and mapping projects of the colonial state in the 19th century and by the Gorkhali state in the 20th. Research

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following: Woodward, 2001; Edney, Jacob, and Delano-Smith in 1996. See also, Edney 1995; and his discussant notes at the session, ‘Cartographic Narratives in the History of North America’, American Historical Association, 5 January 2001. I am grateful to Matthew Edney for sharing these notes with me.

99 Harley, 1989. The quotation is from p. 303.

100 For an overview of Harley’s work, see Edney, 1992. More recently, Harley’s work has been collected and edited in a recent book by Laxton, 2002. For critical engagements with Harley’s work, see Belyea, 1992, pp. 1-9. Critical cartographies can be found in the following: Akerman and Karrow (eds), 2007; Barrow, 2003; Burnett, 2000; Conley, 1996; Craib, 2004; Hannah, 2000; King, 1996; Turnbull, 1993; and Wood, 1992. The relationship between mapping and non-western cultures has been explored in the following: Mundy, 1996; Rundstrom, 1993; and Rundstrom, 1991. The call for non-linear histories of cartography has been recently voiced by geographers such as Matthew Edney. See, for instance, Edney, 1995.

101 See, for instance, Chester, 2009; Edney, 2003; Raj, 2007; Ramaswamy, 2004 and 2001; and Tickell, 2004.



on the Anglo-Gorkha frontier reveals that a wide range of actors—cultivators, labourers, local and supra-local elites, little kings and officials—neither Nepali nor Indian in nationality—contributed to the creation of these illegible spaces. It is by including their agency in the production of territory that historians are able to populate the current literature on the history of cartography. It is now possible to write thicker descriptions of the history of cartography that transcends the traditional studies of surveying institutions and the representational effects of mapmaking. Such an understanding of cartographic cultures recognises the contributions of agents, both elite and subaltern, whose agency provided a powerful groundswell located outside the activities of surveying departments and state agencies. Cartographic cultures understood in this sense can be viewed as diagnostic of the workings of deeper historical forces and transformations unfolding within specific contexts of culture, power, history and space.<sup>102</sup>

The territorial dynamics unfolding along the Anglo-Gorkha frontier adds the critical variable of spatiality to our understanding of frontiers. World historians have for long portrayed frontiers as zones of cross-cultural interaction traversed by ideas, objects and people. Here, powers, identities, landed relations and territories were being frequently reconstituted. The research on frontiers has provided fertile ground for undertaking historical research on various world historical themes such as nation-building, colonialism, trade and exchange, ethnogenesis, missionary activity and statebuilding.<sup>103</sup> By intentionally unpacking the spatiality that animated agrarian life on the frontier, historians of Nepal provide the indispensable fourth element of space to the existing trialectic of culture, power and history that for long has been the staple of social theory. Furthermore,

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102 For more on this diagnostic approach, see Moore, 1987.

103 For a classic understanding of the role of the frontier in the formation of national identity, see Turner, 1962. For various approaches to the study of frontiers, see Barfield, 1992; Baud and Schendel, 1997; Eaton, 1996; Gommans, 1998; Kopytoff, 1987; Prescott, 1990; Sahlins, 1989; and Tagliacozzo, 2005. See also, the special issue on Frontiers in the *Journal of World History*, Volume 4 (1993).

such research invariably tends to blur boundaries of various kinds: area studies, national and disciplinary. Individuals and communities living along this frontier zone were involved in longstanding mutually transforming relations and exchanges that were driven by local agendas, concerns and conflicts. Such dense accounts of political activity and struggle characterised the cultures of governance along the frontier and fall under the rubric of state-making. Such thick descriptions of state-making that recognise local agency and struggle would most certainly add to the output of voices emerging from Nepal and elsewhere on this subject.<sup>104</sup> In the case of Nepal, its frontiers with India and China are uniquely situated to generate historical studies that indulge in the national and disciplinary border crossings that previous generations of historians were hesitant to undertake. Nationalist historians in both India and Nepal have been reluctant to place Nepal within a wider unfolding context of colonial regulation in South Asia, instead viewing the country as a unique case, produced out of splendid isolation. Transgressing such self-imposed nationalist boundaries (both geographical and historiographic) allows historians, for instance, to assess more carefully the curious and continuing relationships between Gorkha and the colonial order being established to its south by the British.<sup>105</sup>

## Conclusion

The study of Nepali history from a world history perspective has potential benefits. A broader definition of Nepal, not in terms of a hermetically sealed organic space within which historical events unfold, but as a zone of connections, contacts and flows, might open new avenues for historical research that focus on themes of state-making, European colonization, long distance exchanges, nomadic histories, subaltern consciousness, caste, ethnicity, gender, sexuality and so on. Moreover, there is much to be gained through the pursuit of a comparative engagement with the histories, themes, debates,

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104 But see the following: English, 1985; Boullier, 1993; Burghart, 1987; and Pfaff-Czarnecka, 1991.

105 But see Des Chene, 1993.

methods and historiographic traditions emanating from other regions of the world. Such a move would allow historians of Nepal to interrogate nationalist presumptions that have, for long, guided history writing in Nepal. Like histories elsewhere, 'Nepali history' is valuable not only because it tells us more about Nepal but also because it addresses the age old questions of culture, power and history—in terms of the lived realities of the human condition and human speculations about the same. In this sense, insights derived from the study of Nepali history can speak to wider issues, debates and theoretical concerns that animate scholarship in other parts of the world. Methodologically, this might call for greater interdisciplinarity, analysing a broader range of sources (local, regional and national) possibly across national and area studies boundaries. Ultimately, such moves would, in the case of Nepali history, generate new scholarly dialogue and collaboration across disciplines, question long held assumptions, and provide fresh methodological shifts that would spur greater theoretical and empirical reflection. Needless to say, the writing of Nepali history will continue to be beset by numerous logistic, professional and practical obstacles that have already been highlighted elsewhere. However, its ultimate fate will have much to do with the kind of engagements—institutional, thematic, theoretical and empirical—historians of Nepal will foster across time and space. Nepali history will benefit much from the embracing attitude that world historians have been displaying for the past 50 years or so. As Nepalis begin to participate in greater numbers in the transnational flows that animate contemporary globalization, shouldn't historians of Nepal be doing the same?

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