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Book review of 'A Descriptive Grammar of Nepali and an Analyzed Corpus' by Jayaraj Acharya

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Jayaraj Acharya, *A Descriptive Grammar of Nepali and an Analyzed Corpus*.
Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1991. 378 pp.

This book, a printed version of the author's dissertation, is really two books in one, the first a descriptive grammar of Nepali, and the second a grammatical analysis of a prose text. The corpus that the author analyses in this second part is a short story by Guruprasad Mainali, *Naso* (Ward), that the author explains is a written representative of the standard speech of Brahman and Ksatriya castes of Kathmandu Valley and the hills around it, the dialect that the author speaks.

The author blends the two parts of his book by using as many references as possible from the corpus of the short story to illustrate features of grammar in the first part of the book. Indeed, one of the reasons Acharya analyzes a prose text is to test the validity of his grammatical analysis of Nepali; another is to provide a check that the grammar can account for all the items in the prose text. The grammatical framework that the author uses to analyze the prose text is tagmemic analysis. *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* defines a tagmeme as "a constituent of a meaningful grammatical relation that cannot be analyzed into smaller meaningful features and that may be marked by features of word order, selection of allomorphs, agreement with finite verb forms, and elaboration by preceding adjectival modifiers."

This tagmemic form of grammatical analysis was made popular by the linguist Kenneth Pike, and is used by the Summer Institute of Linguistics to analyze languages. This form of analysis is certainly more accessible to the layman than analysis according to some of the current linguistic theories would be, but at the same time, it does not fit the traditional concept of a grammar book with its simple terms of noun, verb, direct object, and the like. This book uses some of these terms, but goes much deeper into grammatical features than traditional grammars. The result is rewarding for the reader, but makes the book less accessible for quick reference.

In spite of the heavy linguistic terminology, this book certainly fills a void for students of Nepali. Till now, no complete grammar of Nepali has existed. This book is exhaustive, and addresses practically every feature of Nepali ranging from simple phonemes to discourse features beyond the sentence level. The second part of the text, the analyzed corpus, is an extra bonus, because the writer analyzes the clauses, phrases, and lexicon of the story, so that the reader can see grammar in use.

The author designed the text for the foreign learner and for teachers of Nepali. For this reason, he gives a lot of attention to pronunciation, stress, intonation, and the writing system in the first section of the book devoted to phonology. In the section covering lexicon, he gives detailed information about traditional categories of words, such as nouns, verbs, and pronouns. In the third section of the grammar, the part devoted to phrases, clauses, sentences, and discourse features, the author presents every form and conversational element that a learner of Nepali is likely to discover.

The first section of the book is therefore invaluable for the student of Nepali. But non-linguists are going to have to be dedicated in their reading. The author uses terminology and concepts that could put off students, but with determination and a helpful teacher, these students will be rewarded by reading this book. Teachers of Nepali who familiarize themselves with the text can use it to illustrate and explain any feature that might come up in the traditional class. The text has the added benefit of providing tables of pronouns, verb conjugations, and other forms.

Linguists especially will delight in the second half of the book. The story is presented first in Devanagari, then in transliteration, and finally in literal translation. Then follows a clause structure analysis, a sorting of the phrase structures employed in the text, and the lexicon in order of occurrence and in alphabetical order. This detailed analysis would be very helpful to those working on machine translation, and computer analysis of natural language.

Overall, this is a book to savor, to mull over, rather than a book to glance at and quickly put down. It is a book that exhausts the subject of the Nepali language, but invigorates the reader with its

thoroughness, and attention to all levels of language. The book is indeed a practical and thorough grammar that will enrich every student of Nepali at any level.

Anyone who has knowledge of Nepali will benefit from using *A Descriptive Grammar of Nepali*. I will conclude with one recommendation for the author, or some other adventuresome and dedicated person: take the information in this text and make a short and easy reference grammar to complement this text. Nepali will then be in the same class as world languages, which have several books available to all levels of learners.

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Robert I. Levy (with Kedar Raj Rajopadhyaya), *Mesocosm: Hinduism and the Organization of a Traditional Newar City in Nepal*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990. 830 pp. \$84 (cloth).

Rich in architecture, cultural performance, and social diversity, the city of Bhaktapur, in Nepal's Kathmandu Valley, endures as one of the great surviving traditional cities of Asia. Robert Levy's *Mesocosm* is an ambitious and exhaustive study of its urban community and culture, a culture shaped in a thoroughgoing manner by Indic traditions, predominantly Hinduism. Crossing disciplinary boundaries, this extraordinary book speaks to a host of important issues in South Asian sociology, urban anthropology, and Indology.

A formerly walled city with a population of more than 40,000, Bhaktapur is home for over one hundred named castes, nearly all from the Tibeto-Burman ethnic group called "Newar." Like other Newar settlements, Bhaktapur has an especially vital cultural life: there are 120 major temples (wooden "pagodas," many ornate and of exquisite design) and thousands of minor shrines; over seventy-five festivals, some running to multi-day events, are celebrated each year; and the individual life-cycle is marked by twelve highly orchestrated rites of passage. The book's great length is in part necessitated by the author's extensive ethnographic documentation of these complex subjects.

Mesocosm constructs a magisterial overview, addressing multiple audiences. It is certainly a landmark in Newar studies and the first book-length ethnography of Bhaktapur. *Mesocosm* provides a wealth of thoughtfully assimilated data, along with wise, perceptive interpretations of Newar urban life. One especially attractive organizational feature is the use of appendices for setting forth data not of critical importance to the central analytical focus, which frees the non-specialist reader from the burden of excessive "thick description."

The author organizes his ethnographic presentation around the mesocosm, a term first used in Paul Mus' *Barabudur*. For Professor Levy, the Mesocosm is "an essential middle world . . . situated between the individual microcosm and the wider universe . . . a resource not only for ordering the city but also for the personal uses of the kinds of people whom Bhaktapur produces" (p. 32). Through this analytical-contextual perspective, Levy identifies Bhaktapur as an example of Fustel de Coulanges' "archaic city"; he thus sees the city as constructed of successive, interlocking cells (household, lineage, neighborhood, city), each sustained by its own culture and cultural performances. After the city's conquest by non-Newars in 1769, Bhaktapur's traditions were selectively shaped to become a "unicultural," Brahman-dominated "climax Hinduism" through which the city "turned in on itself." Since then, Bhaktapur's Mesocosm has functioned to maintain a distinctive, shared experience for those within by "turning accident and history into structure, for trying to escape the contingencies and consequences of history, for trying to capture change, to make change seem illusory within an enduring order" (p. 616). Regularly stepping out from the complex descriptions of Newar urban culture, Levy's narrative uses the metaphor of dance theater to assemble and assess the overarching model of the Hindu Mesocosm being developed.