

Preface

The historiography of slavery in South Asia is much under-represented compared to that of Africa and North America. In the historiography in Nepal, in particular, the topic of slavery has found only a marginal place despite its considerable presence in the past. The present volume is intended to remedy this shortcoming. It focusses on documents and legal texts written in Nepal from the period of the eighteenth to the early twentieth century. Thus, rather than dealing with complex theories relating to slavery, it aims to be a reader of resources to assist prospective studies on historical slavery in Nepal.

This work is partly an outcome of the conference “Masters and Servants: Slavery, Bondage and Unfree Labour in Nepalese History” held on 3–4 March 2019 in Patan, Nepal, and jointly organized by the Research Unit “Documents on the History of Religion and Law of Pre-modern Nepal” of the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities and the National Archives of Nepal. The participants included (alphabetically listed, paper presenters being indicated by “P”) Manik Bajracharya (P), Christiane Brosius, Simon Cubelic (P), Thomas Holstein, Michael J. Hutt, Mrigendra Bahadur Karki, Sharad Kasaa, Rajan Khatiwoda (P), Axel Michaels (P), Shamik Mishra, Arik Moran (P), Pratyoush Onta, Dinesh Raj Pant (P), Philip Pierce, Nadine Plachta (P), Saubhagya Pradhananga (P), Sanjog Rupakheti (P), Bernd Schneidmüller, Nutandhar Sharma, Omkareshwor Shrestha, Tek Bahadur Shrestha, Kashinath Tamot, Ramhari Timalisina (P), Kesang Tseten (P), and Catherine Warner (P). The papers explored manifold forms, practices, representations, and economic aspects of slavery and unfree labour in pre-modern Nepal.

This volume consists of three parts. In part I, a general introduction into slavery in Nepal is given with a special focus on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Part II is a collection of editions and translations of documents and is divided into seven sections. It is comprised of fifty-one documents concerned with donations, transactions and the emancipation of slaves prior to 1924, on the one hand, and others relating to bondservitude, forced or unfree labour, labour within the

postal system and the slavery abolition of 1925, on the other. These documents, most of which were microfilmed as part of Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project, have been edited and translated by Manik Bajracharya or Axel Michaels over the years within the Research Unit “Documents on the History of Religion and Law of Pre-modern Nepal” of the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities. They are also hosted in the database “Documenta Nepalica” (<https://nepalica.hadw-bw.de/nepal/editions>) of the research unit.

Part III of this volume contains selected articles concerning slavery and unfree labour from the *Ain* of 1854 preceded by an introduction. The *Ain*, being the first legal code of Nepal, is the most crucial and the only comprehensive source that helps us understand the legal aspects of slavery in the nineteenth-century Nepal and the early Śāha and Rāṇā rulers’ legislative attempt to regularise slavery. Moreover, it is contemporary to other documents presented in this volume and its inclusion provides the reader with a broader view of historical slavery in Nepal. The articles of the *Ain* included in this volume have been translated by Rajan Khatiwoda, Simon Cubelic and Axel Michaels under whose authorship a complete translation of the *Ain* of 1854 into English has recently been published (Khatiwoda, Cubelic and Michaels 2021).

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