FOREWORD

It would be appropriate to commence with a word of tribute to the author of this volume, Shri Mahesh C. Regmi, for he is truly a unique phenomenon in the intellectual and scholarly community in Nepal and one deserving of emulation. In the late 1950s, Shri Regmi made a decision that was almost inconceivable in Nepal at that time—to establish a private research and translation program without any assured sources of financial support from either the government of Nepal, a Nepali educational institution, or a foreign foundation. This was indicative not only of a proclivity for entrepreneurship rare in Nepal but also of an independence of mind and a dedication to scholarship.

It was my good fortune to fall into the hands of Shri Regmi during my first field trip to Nepal as a graduate student in 1957. Indeed, much of my initial socialization into that very alien but warm and hospitable society was a consequence of the close working relationship that developed between the two of us. Not that we agreed on everything—or even on most things. But the combination in Shri Regmi of an inherent skepticism, intellectual honesty, and a tolerant (if occasionally bemused) attitude toward a struggling foreigner trying desperately to comprehend the intricacies and subtleties of the Nepali political culture was just what was required.

This study of the land-tenure system in Nepal in a historical context is an excellent example of the author’s dedication to scholarship in the true meaning of the term as well as of the persistence and thoroughness with which he approaches difficult research projects. It is the product of a decade or more of work in the copious but chaotic record resources on the subject matter in several government offices in Nepal. (One important by-product of his study was the substantial improvement in the organization, and hence the accessibility, of these records.)

Shri Regmi has used this mass of documentation from many different sources to derive general conclusions and to present a coherent history of the evolution of land-tenure policies, in realistic rather than
formalistic terms. He then offers conjectures about the best strategies for development in the crucial agrarian system in contemporary Nepal. By doing so, he provides a model for similar studies not only in Nepal but also in other Third World countries in which the need to comprehend existing institutional structures before attempting to reform or abolish them is recognized increasingly, and in which the assumption that an institution is incidental to current development-needs if it is "traditional" is no longer accepted dogma. Discovering the past may be an academic enterprise; but using the past for innovation purposes is the most relevant scholarship. The latter is what Shri Regmi has accomplished in this definitive study which is, in my view, the most important volume yet published on Nepal.

LEO E. ROSE