

Book Review

The Himalayan Aspects of Change, Edited by J. S. Lall, India International Centre / Oxford: New Delhi, 1981. Pages 481 + xviii, Index Bibliography, 19 plates and 3 maps. Price Rs. 180 (I. C.).

Himalayas - the King among Mountains - have evoked human emotion since times immemorial. In ancient times these lofty ranges soared the human spirit as witnessed in the references made in different Hindu texts and scriptures. For the ancients the beautiful icy heights of the Himalayas symbolised the culmination of the real and the ideal both in the spheres of mind and matter. The Himalayas remained the sentinals of hope in the search for higher knowledge. These ranges had a different appeal for the nineteenth and twentieth century explorers epitomised by Kipping's "wildest dreams of Kew", the Shangrila of The Lost Horizon or the ardent desire to face and, if possible, conquer the unknown as expressed in Mallory's famous answer - "because it is there." But even as the explorers went back with unbelievable stories and even as Victorian scholars like Hodgson turned over prodigious amount of information on anthropological, sociological, and religious aspects of the Himalayas, the operative political, social, economic demographic and ecological forces went on unrelentingly in the region. The sparsely populated middle ranges swelled in population; the demands on the ecological system multiplied while few innovations took place. Colonial policies took their own toll in the Indian Himalayas. The natural process of change was exacerbated by human interferences, and untold scenarios of social and institutional changes began to unfold. As forested ridges and slopes began to be "conquered" by man, the cultivator, gradually and with perceptibly increasing momentum the delicate balance between human occupancy and the natural system began to show signs of obvious strain. This is the story of our times and of our dilemma.

The Himalayan, Aspects of Change is a reader on the varied geographical, geological, economic, social and cultural aspects of the long catalogue of changes that are manifesting in the entire Himalayan region today. Development, truly, has been a mixed blessing for the 40 odd million people inhabiting the Himalayan region and development - whatever one might interpret it to mean - has to be the solution. In a very real sense

region. An environmental approach to biosphere reserves has been the demand of time. As Anna Mani puts it "nature is resilient and has survived. But its balance is delicate." It may sound deterministic but the only way of commanding nature is to obey it. In order to obey and therefore command, we need to understand the varied and complex logic of nature. In this sense the Himalayas the greatest of the mountains also pose the greatest of challenges in man's perception of nature. In saving the *Panthera Uncia* or the *Sapria Himalayana* we might, after all, be saving ourselves.

The more material basis of the Himalayan region is traced by the noted Indian geologist A. G. Jhingan. He discusses in simple lucid style the complexities of Himalayan geology, the orogenesis and the stratigraphic sequences of the Himalayas and puts the ideas in the context of plate tectonics. It is true that "like empires rising and falling, the vicissitudes of decay and renovation operate in the Himalayas .. we neither see the beginning, nor the end" but we are not so completely helpless in orienting these vicissitudes in an environmental sense. Earthquakes another geologic phenomena, is discussed by H. M. Chaudhary who details the Himalayan experience in this field. Soils, the ultimate manifestations, of geological formations, is presented as a case study for the Kumaon and Garhwal region, The fragile nature of Himalayan soils, the risks of erosion that go with slope and the cost both in ecological and economic sense are all vividly portrayed.

The last two chapters of Part I deal with two of the most potential and interdependent resources: glaciers and water resources. C. P. Vohra analyses the pertinent relationship between annual glacier balance and run-off and indicates snow and ice as the most valuable economic resources of the region. Y. K. Murthy describes the water resource potentiality of the Himalayan region. Though the figures on potentiality have been changing with time and technical know-how, there is no question about the enormous potentialities of the Himalayan river system both in the generation of power and irrigation. The most difficult and often neglected area in the field of water resources is the ecological implications of water resource development. This is also an area where regional cooperation can be fruitful. But before such developments can take place it is essential to agree on a common ecological strategy. The present trend of water resources development in the Himalayan region in this sense leaves much to be desired. Economic logic when taken to the extreme often makes mockery of ecological sense. A trade-off has to be worked out not only because, for the immediate Himalayan region, water is the only major and viable resource but also because the strategies we pursue today will determine in the not-too-distant future the fate of well over 300 million people living in the reaches of the great Himalayan rivers and their tributaries.

Part II of the book consists of ten chapters dealing essentially with the social, cultural, political and even artistic aspects of man's occupation in the Himalayan region. The approaches veer towards the more sociological and anthropological aspects of change and the economic ramifications are only implied.

Prof. Heimendorf's contribution on Social Change in the Himalayas derives from his studies in the Thak-Mustang region of Nepal, a theme more fully explored in his book **The Himalayan Traders**. He portrays vividly the change, the mobility, and the flowering of the incipient entrepreneurship of a remote community based on rather limited resources, forced to face south as a result of the closing of the Tibetan border and their "success" due, to a major extent, to the social and cultural resiliency inherent in them. It is instructive to compare this case of the Thakalis of the Thak-Mustang region with that of the border communities of the Kumaon Himalaya presented by J.S. Bhandari. While the Thakali response to changed politico-economic circumstances was to carve a new economic niche in the major settlements and thoroughfares in the hill region and beyond, the Bhotiyas of the Kumaon region failed to diversify their economic activities. The closure of the Tibetan border for effective trade due to hostilities in 1962 had a traumatic effect in these communities. In want of the social resiliency so characteristic of the Thakalis these trade-based communities were forced to turn back to agriculture in an extremely fragile environment. These two case studies provide insights into the reason for differential responses of communities when faced with almost similar problems, in not too dissimilar environments. This is where the cultural and sociological basis of communities plays a very crucial role - a factor which is often ignored by "planners" and the so-called agents of "development."

The next four chapters in Part II are studies devoted to Sikkim, Bhutan, North-eastern borderlands of India, Nepal and Ladakh. J. S. Lall, the editor of the volume, derives his contribution on Sikkim from his politico-administrative experiences in Sikkim when it was an independent state. He focuses on the problem of ethnic mix, particularly the problem of economic and political integration among the Nepali and the Lepcha communities but skillfully by-passes the Indian role in the socio-cultural, administrative, and the political interface among these communities which could have made this study on Sikkim more objective and revealing. Indeed, Sikkim's take-over by India is regarded as a fait accompli and therefore not worthy of explicit analysis. Rustonji's contribution on Sikkim, Bhutan and North-eastern borderlands of India again bases his experiences in these areas and follows lines similar to Mr. Lall's treatment of Sikkim. Sikkim, the author contends, "provides the foremost example of the devastating effect of a policy

that takes insufficient account of the factors of change" and by implication Bhutan has been able to contain the "devastating effect" because it has somehow been able to accommodate the "factors of change." The implied "factor of change" is perhaps India's perception of its smaller neighbours in their India-locked geo-political framework. In both the contributions the Indian "factor" has been given much less attention than it, in all fairness, deserves. One wishes for a Sikkimese or Bhutanese perception on these rather sensitive, but none-the-less pivotal, issues.

The chapter on Nepal is a Nepali's contribution. Professor Bhatta describes the physical and resource basis of the Nepal Himalaya. The focus is on ecological problems, and the problems of migration from the hills to the Tarai—both problems of contemporary significance in Nepal. Ecological stress, poverty, population explosion, migration and development are all interrelated factors in a complex process of natural and induced changes that are taking place in the Nepal Himalaya. This is a plight similar to other areas in the Himalayan region. Development has not always been conducive for ecological stability, or rise in the standards of living in the far-flung Himalayan villages. The emphasis, therefore, should be on self-sustaining rural based development which is gradual and which take sufficient cognizance of local culture and resource base. This is the conclusion of H. N. Hodge in her contribution on Ladakh. She takes exception of the growth in tourism in the Himalayan region and the impact it is having on local culture and resource base. Ecological stability and economic growth have to be seen as mutually reinforcing ideas and not ideas that are mutually exclusive. This is a theme that runs throughout the book.

Two chapters in this Part are devoted to art and architecture in the Himalayan region. Both the contributions reflect a critique of indiscriminate advances made by "modernism" on the defenceless ways of traditional life and its artistic manifestations. The challenge of development perhaps lies in making the judicious trade-off between the "old" and the "new."

The last two chapters in Part II deal with two entirely different areas of human interference in the Himalayas. K. L. Khosla describes the romance of surveying in the Himalayas and recapitulates the difficulties faced by the surveying pioneers who, in effect, paved the way for the western-oriented development in the Himalayan region. The transformation of Peak II to Peak XV to Mount Everest, the excitement as well as the difficulties of early exploration that we often tend to ignore while using modern topographic sheets are all brought into sharp relief. Part II ends with a chapter on mountains, for that is what the Himalayas physically are. The history of mountaineering in the Himalayas is sketched from the 1880s to more recent times. The lure of the Himalayas is no where as evident as in the attraction these mountains

had, and still have, for men set to conquer them!

The contributions in Part III put the man-nature interrelationships in the Himalayan region in perspective. The basic question all the seven contributions tend to implicitly address is this: What should be the methodology of approach in dealing with the environmental and human problems of the Himalayas? The demographic, technological and ecological threats to the Himalayan ecosystem are traced by A. D. Moddie in the very first contribution. Statements like, "The earth has cancer and the cancer is man" are surely not enough answers to the complex questions of the Himalayan ecosystem. The environmental problem of the Himalayas is a basic human problem and has to be addressed as much in favour of the environment as for the man who gives meaning to the environment. Moddie places emphasis on land use planning and the search for alternate energy resources.

By far the most exhaustive contribution in the whole volume is Hans Reiger's treatment of the Himalayan ecosystem. It is comprehensive in scope, rigorous in methodology and approach, and instructive in its wide ranging implications. The natural factors (topography and slope) and the man-made factors that augment the process of destruction of the Himalayan environment are analytically related in seeking to explain the causal interrelationship between population, agriculture, forests and livestock - the basic macro-variables operative in the Himalayas. While the major rivers of Nepal shift millions of cubic meters of solid material from the hills of Nepal to the Gangetic outlet propelled by natural and man-made causes, the ecological connection between the hill / mountains and the plains is made evident not only through landslides and floods but also through the migration of people from the hills to the plains and consequent deforestation in the Tarai areas. The dynamics of the ecosystem destruction is made explicit through the use of a simple simulation model. The picture that emerges is admittedly a gloomy picture and the prospect look bleak. What can be done? Little obviously can be done to alleviate the process of natural erosion. But in dealing with the causes of man-made erosion considerable advances can be made as Reiger points out. In the demographic and technological fronts, in the areas of forest management, agriculture, livestock and river control there is scope for positive interference through government policies and programmes and through conscious community efforts. The problem is not simply technical, it is social, as Reiger points out, and it is structural / political as he rightly implies. A multi-disciplinary pilot project approach is obviously needed but beneath it all a strong political, bureaucratic and technical commitment is imperative. In recent years environmental problems have come to

be seen as structural problems par excellence and there is a limit beyond which technical solutions become irrelevant to structural problems. International cooperation can only help initiate program, they cannot be a substitute for native efforts as exemplified by many bilaterally or multilaterally funded resource conservation and rural development projects in Nepal today.

Mountain environment is very fragile and this adds a critical dimension to the problem of man-environment balance. Jack Ives in his contribution on Applied Mountain Geocology discusses these problems with respect to three different mountain regions. He suggests concerted action on many fronts simultaneously. Case studies, pilot projects, research monitoring and long range planning are all called for because even now so little is understood about the complexities of the mountain ecosystem: S. L. Shah suggests watershed development like in the Kumaon hills as one way of approach. Local participation, creation of off-farm employment, intensive basic needs programme should all be intrinsic to environment related development programmes.

The final contribution to Part III, and the volume itself, deals with the crisis in the evolution of environmental policy and programmes in the Himalayas, Deriving from experiments made in U. P. in India N. Reynolds points out the administrative and organizational hurdles involved in policy and programme formulation and implementation. He proposes a change in the balance of power between the central authorities and the local community. Community forestry schemes, as in U. P. in India or as proposed in Nepal, have a great scope provided there is a devolution of financial authority and the creation of community budgets. Environmental problems, indeed, cannot be addressed from afar as has been the case hitherto: they have to be addressed at places and through channels that really matter, i. e., at the level of the community. Balance of power as suggested by Reynolds is very much a structural issue and it is open to question whether the respective governments in the Himalayan region have the commitment and the will to bring about a meaningful devolution of power.

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The Himalayan, Aspects of Change surveys for the laymen as well as the specialist and to all those interested in protecting the Himalayan heritage the "insidious" processes at work. Economic aspects of change; the impact of infrastructures on the economy and the environment. urbanization in the Himalayas, these are some of the areas where contributions could

have been added. But a reader like the present book has of necessity to be selective. One of the avowed purpose of the book as indicated in the introduction is 'to generate a movement for a new dynamic change' in the approaches to environmental problems in the Himalayas. Some of the selections in the book have at times an overtly "back to nature" approach, but that might have been because of the urgency of the problem and the zeal and the dedication of the authors in saving the Himalayan ecosystem from destruction. What is perhaps required in equal measure is sympathy and understanding for both the landscape and the population. In saving the Himalayan ecosystem the wants and needs of the population have also to be attended to.

The book is well produced, and the editors and the contributors should be commended for their commitment to the Himalayan environment. More maps and plates could have added to the presentation of many of the case studies. The book is definitely a welcome addition to Himalayan Studies and fills a revealing lacunae in the literature on aspects of change in the Himalayas. The typographical errors this writer came across occur in Page 12 where the maximum temperature of Kathmandu - of all places - appears as -37° C and Pokhara is misspelt as Pokharan !

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Book Review

Adhikari, Krishna Kant, **A Brief Survey of Nepali Historiography** Kathmandu: 1980, pp. 74, Price Rs 50 (5 dollars).
Shayogi Press.

The remote Himalayan Kingdom of Nepal was manifested as a stark geographical expression or a conglomeration of individually independent principalities, each possessing own social, economic and political heritages preceeding to her unification in the eighteenth century. Intellectual curiosity to explore and evaluate these heritages even after the unification took long time to evolve and not until the last decades of the nineteenth century there was any history book written on Nepal. Thus Mr. K. K. Adhikari correctly asserts, "the history of historical writing (in Nepal) as such began in the nineteenth century."

While the Nepalese had to wait so long to find out something about their history, not surprisingly, it took another century for them to know their historiography. Adhikari's book -- though must not be taken as a superior intellectual exercise -- is the first to appear in the field. For which the author deserves a hearty congratulation.

The book is divided into four chapters. They cover diverse fields ranging from a short introduction to European historiography to shortcoming of Nepalese historiography. Careful study reveals the author's unequivocal appeal to historians of Nepal to be selective in source materials, professional in interpretation, objective in attitude and detached from emotionalism on their treatment of a topic. Also implicit is Adhikari's advice to aspiring historians to avoid the "scissors-and-paste method" infection from their predecessors.

The first section in the first chapter narrates in brief the development of European historiography from the time of Herodotus to the twentieth century. Undoubtedly, the account is useful to the Nepalese students to learn something on European historiography, yet it suffers from some conspicuous inadequacies. Firstly, the description on each historian is too short and secondly the author has not given any information on the areas of their

writings and the schools of thoughts they belonged to. Also surprising to discover, Mr. Adhikari gave no reference to Hegel and Marx, while discussing European historiography. The omission of these two intellectuals, knowingly or otherwise by the author, deprives the Nepalese readers of their privileges to get at least a general idea on the influences enjoyed by Hegelian dialectic and Marxian economic determinism in the development of world historiography today. Other aspects ignored, but could have been dealt with are the development of scientific historical writing in the East and the impact of Muslim historians such as Ibn Kaldhun in shaping the course of European historiography.

The second section of the first chapter and the second chapter cover the development of history writing in Nepal. Adhikari has chosen chronological instead of thematic or main headings approach, such as ancient, medieval and modern to deal with the progression of Nepali historical writing. His reason for doing so is, "In Nepal not a single note worthy history book was written and published before the 19th century." Prior to it, he asserts, Nepali history was confined only to the form of original documents and no attempts were made to construct the nation's history based on them.

The year 1880, Adhikari correctly argues, was a landmark in Nepali historiography. In this year Col. Kirkpatrick's *AN ACCOUNT OF THE KINGDOM OF NEPAL*-- a treatise which can be hardly classified as history-- was published. Kirkpatrick's work opened Nepal for further investigation. Foreign scholars such as Francis Hamilton, H. T. Princep, B. H. Hodgson and others published more informative books on Nepal and her history. It was not until the twentieth century the native historians began to write and Nepalese history became a popular topic for historians of all nationalities only after the fifties. While evaluating critically the contributions of these historians on Nepal, her history, society and foreign relations Adhikari's same assertions are pertinent. He has selected certain areas of controversies surrounding a particular historical incident and tried to demonstrate how some historians have treated a given field to fit their preconceived notions or have attempted to create significant historic episode without having any documentary base. In this context, Adhikari is very critical of the inconsistencies of historians such as Babu Ram Acharya, D.R. Bhandari, Chitranjan Nepali and others.

Adhikari has done a good service to his readers and the researchers in the field by cataloguing different sources of Nepali history. He has described their locations, availability, and usefulness. Also, strongly presented in the

account is the discouraging fate of Nepali historians in their academic exercises. Unfortunately, for the mans there are more problems than their solutions. Problems range from the absence of any institutional support researches to cold and often negative attitudes of the parochial government bureaucrats at different public offices. One such incidents of cold hospitality, which weakened Adhikari's research has been mentioned.

By far the most interesting and critical chapter in the book is "the Shortcomings in Nepal Historiography." In this chapter the author proposes to "give a critical note on the limitations," of Nepali historiography along with some suggestions in order to rectify them. Heavily sheltering under R. G. Collingwood's four characteristics of history- that it is scientific humanistic, rational and self-revelatory- Adhikari evaluates the extent to which Nepali historians have fulfilled them in their writings. Predictably, he discovers, with the exception of a few, Nepali historians have failed to fulfill them and have heavily resorted to the "scissors-and-paste method." To prove his point Adhikari chooses the controversies surrounding Bhrikuti's marriage with Tibet's son-Tsen Gampo, Yaksha Malla and the division of his kingdom among his sons, Prithivi Narayan Shah and the Kirtipures, Rana Bahadur Shah's second marriage, fall of Bhimsen Thapa, Mathbar Thapa and the British, Kot Parva and so on. Concerning the carefree use of the "scissors-and-paste method" by these historians Adhikari concludes once again by quoting Collingwood, "in so far as an historian accept the testimony of an authority and treats it as historical truth, he obviously foreits (sic) the name of historian; but we have no other name by which to call him."

Adhikari's strong endorement of collingwood's statement should be welcomed with caution. He is corret in demanding cold objectivity and professionalism from Nepalese historians however, it must be noted that the "scissors-and-paste method" historians of Nepal have made significant contribution in the field. The fact that they lacked professionalism of a true historian should not obscure their contributions. It must be understood by any one in the field that these historians were or are mere apprentice than professionals and even in the West, historians belonging to extreme nationalist and economic determinist schools have succumed to the temptafons of interpreting given historical incident in a way that supports their preconceived hypothesis.

CEIVED HYPOTHESIS:

Adhikari addresses the problems of Nepali historical writings and suggests some points to make it scientific. According to him the materials at different libraries be classified, be made readily available to researchers, scattered documents from England to Nepal be catalogued, all bonafide scholars be treated fairly and equally by officials. History should be written

dispassionately even if the truth is bitter. No censorship on the freedom of historical writings to interpret the testimony and present the truth should exist. And lastly, no more history should be confined to the history of the ruling elites. These ideas are valid but must be seen how they are fulfilled in the future.

Despite of some inadequacies, the book is useful to every one interested in Nepali history. Adhikari's criticisms must be welcomed by every body working on Nepali history without misrepresenting it. Hope the book will inspire further work in the field.

-Shyam Bhurtel

Activities

Nepal Geographical Society

TALK PROGRAM:

1. Dr. Walter A Frank, University of Bonn, West Germany gave a talk to Nepal Geographical Society at Padma Kanya Campus Auditorium, Kathmandu on April 26, 1982. The subject of his talk was "Anthropological Research and National Integration in Nepal."
2. Dr. Navin K. Rai, Institute of Nepalese and Asian Studies (INAS), Tribhuvan University gave a talk on "The Hunter gatherers of the rain forest of the Philippines" at Padma Kanya Campus Auditorium on August 13, 1982. The talk was followed by relevant slides.

MEETINGS:

1. Dr. Mangal S. Manandhar presented a slide show at a meeting held at Padma Kanya Campus Auditorium on July 30, 1982. The slides depict the morphology and life in Qinghai Xizang (Tibet) plateau where he visited in 1980 in connection with a symposium organised by Academia Sinica.
2. Mr. Indra N. Manandhar presented slide show of the far western Nepal at a meeting held at Padma Kanya Campus Auditorium on August 20, 1982.
3. N.G.S. General meeting was held at Padma Kanya Campus Auditorium on September 3, 1983. While Dr. Pitamber Sharma presented the annual report, Mr. Indra N. Manandhar gave the statements of annual budgetary position of Nepal Geographical Society to its general body.