

## A Few Words on the Theme

The main theme of the researchers of today is the study of man and his environment. The history of civilization reveals the fact that nature is an open book of the history of civilization. To dig out the culture of the past one should study in detail the characteristics of civilization. To quote a maxim, "culture is the essence of civilization." With the more proper scanning of civilization the culture element will be more apparent. Thus civilization and culture are co-related.

Natural and cultural heritage so far are being neglected in writing a history of a country. To adopt a scientific approach in writing history of any geographical unit one should trace the co-relation of man and nature. How the habitat of a man determines his course of life, how a man has struggled against the hazards of nature, what achievements he had done in the course of his life, how the environment has affected his course of life are the issues to be analysed to trace the history of mankind. Environmental sensitivities are the determining factors in the genesis of development of any culture.

Nepal-German Project on High Mountain Archaeology has been designed for the exploration of the Cultural heritage of the Himalayan region of Western Nepal especially in Mustang district of Dhaulagiri zone of the western region. German experts like archaeologists, archaeological anatomist, Tibetologist, geographer, cartographer, along with the archaeologist of Department of Archaeology have jointly been involved in the research work in the region. They have been studying the geomorphology; the settlement process, socio-economic and cultural life of the people of Mustang with the aim of tracing the

stages of evolution from ancient time to present day life.

Today, the Muktinath valley attracts many tourists. Its natural heritage fascinates them and they are equally curious at their cultural life. The study reports try to trace their cultural tradition on the basis of literary as well as archaeological sources. They have also been using the contemporary sources to dig out the remote past. Review of the exploration reports will bring out multi-dimensional aspects of the cultural life of the area.

The German archaeologist, Dr. Hans G. Hüttel's report entitled "Excavation of Khingar Mound 1991" gives an account of the presuppositions and of the main results of the Nepal German excavations of the Khingar Settlement mound in the Mustang district. Mr. Chandra Prasad Tripathee of the Department of Archaeology and Dr. H. G. Hüttel of German Archaeological Institute (Bonn) started excavations at Khingar in August 1991. Excavation in the Muktinath valley was not executed previously; the archaeological work needed basic research laying a stratigraphical foundation for future research. The researchers to begin with decided to excavate a small but multi-layered settlement with the aim to study cultural sequence. They tried to investigate the relations between prehistoric open air settlements, respective castles and the pre and protohistoric cave-sites of Mustang. The researchers selected for excavation the fortress of Dzarkot and also a settlement mound nearby Khingar. The Khingar Settlement mound is situated just opposite a series of cave system. It is situated by the roadside as

well as halfway between Muktinath and Kagbeni within sight of the fortress of Dzarkot and Dzong. The report says that the pottery samples from surface collections correspond in many characteristics with samples collected from the fortresses and also from some cave sites. Preliminary analysis of surface collections as well as hints to stratigraphy as given by modern robber trenches have given a multi-stratified situation which will show cultural sequence. The report mentions that Khingar mound is about 130m long and 80m wide. The mound is rising up to a height of about 11m above the field path at the western edge of the mound. The team laid three trenches within a grid system. From the stratigraphic data the structure in the mound seemed like a fortification structure. As it was only the result of only one season's stratigraphic digging, it is said to be incomplete to give more reliable data. Future field work will bring about more information. At the moment there is no archaeological evidence for a castle or fortress at Khingar mound but the team has found striking indications of a fortified dwelling. The report further says that the small finds or antiquities excavated at Khingar has given no reliable information about the dating of the settlement. Some of the finds yield some evidence of the spiritual and the religious culture of the settlements of the last period.

The report entitled "Faunal Remains from early houses in Khinga" by Prof. Dr. Angela von den Driesch gives an account of the findings of the study at the old houses in Khinga carried out in July and August 1991. According to the researcher the exact dating of the archaeological deposits is not yet known. But on the basis of several archaeological records it has been assumed that the remains of Khinga could be dated between 12th and 15th centuries A.D. In the report it was stated that out of 8689 pieces of bones 7065 could be identified to species and 98.7 percent of the total materials consist of domesticated animals. Most of the remains were accumulated through human intervention and are considered as kitchen refuse.

There is no clear evidence for the presence of the yak in the assemblage. The researcher has tried to draw this conclusion by giving inference of very old sacred practices of slaughtering the animal and distributing the carcasses including the bones. The bones of the animal are boiled and then given to the dogs. At the end nothing remains except the horn-cores. This specific cultural behaviour might have caused the disappearance of yaks' remains in archaeological deposits. To quote the report, "The percentages of bone finds from the other livestock such as horse, mule, donkey, sheep, goat, dog, cat and chicken fits neatly into the pattern of modern times except from meat of equids."

"Tibetan sources on Muktinath-Individual Reports and Normative Guides" by Dr. Franz-Karl Ehrhard, the Tibetologist, gives an account of Muktinath as mentioned in historical documents. He has given the account of the journey of Kahthog Rig' dzin Tshe-dhang nor-bu in the year 1729. He came to Muktinath from Dolpo. Kahthog Rig' dzin Tshe-dhang nor-bu (1698-1755) had described his journey of the sacred site in the following words - "I went to "Hundred and some springs", the renowned holy spot, revered by both Hindus and Buddhists which is called Mu-mu-ni-se-ta or mu-khum-kse-ta-sata in border dialects. It is a place where a natural fire burns on rock and water and where dakinis mass together like clouds."

Dr. Eharhard has also quoted Tibetan texts of 16th to 19th centuries. Dr. Eharhard further makes mention of a visit of young Tibetan priest in the holy site of Muktinath. He remained there for three years. The description of his sojourn which began in 1528 provides first of all insight into the early period of Mustang as a region dominated by Buddhism and secondly shows Muktinath to be a place of pilgrimage for Nepalese and Indian Kings. He also makes mention of two biographies of the 17th century on the ruling families of the fortresses beneath the shrine of Muktinath.

"Settlement Processes and the Formation of States in the High Himalayas Characterized by

Tibetan Culture and Tradition - Concept and First Results" by Prof. Dr. Willibald and Dr. Perdita Pohle highlights the activities of Nepal German research programme conceived to last for a period of 5 years. To quote them, this is a interdisciplinary project. With a primary base in humanities and cultural studies it was initiated by Tibetologists and architectural historians. It was designed by representatives from the fields of settlement archaeology, historical settlement, geography and ethnology. Methodologically it included the disciplines like natural and engineering sciences, e.g., dendrochronology, photogrammetry and cartography. The scope of inquiry and thrust of the research are related with the programme which concentrated on the whole High Himalayas and the field work is concentrated on exemplary areas in the Mustang district of Northern Nepal. The other site mentioned by the researchers is the high mountain valley of the Indus in Ladakh which does not come under the domain of Department of Archaeology. The reasons of selecting the sites as mentioned by the researchers are due to their settlement history which dates back to prehistoric times. Preliminary work has shown a great amount of historically exploitable sources, mainly written sources but also others bearing archaeology, architectural and settlement history.

According to the researchers the settlement processes and formation of states in High Himalayas should not be viewed in isolation from the likewise constantly changing natural environment, the depending and reciprocal relations between man and the not seldom threatening aspects of nature in the high mountains. Therefore, the research project is said to be an effort to establish highly specialized disciplines out of their isolation by selecting themes and research topics which can be dealt only through an interdisciplinary approach. To quote the researchers, the High Himalayas are a habitat of extreme living conditions for humans. The rough topography, the inhospitable features of the

high mountain climate, the threat posed by natural hazards (earth-quake, landslide, outburst of glacier lakes) are ecologically limiting factors for the economy of the high mountain dwellers. A deeper understanding of the processes of settlement formation and decay can only be achieved if one starts out on the basis of an environmental analysis that is relevant to present conditions and integrates questions concerning history of the ecological environment into the overall picture. To quote them again, the High Himalayas today represent the most significant refuge for Tibetan religion and livelihood.

The research has shown that the ruins of settlements, fortresses/palaces and monasteries, abandoned fields and deserted groups of once inhabited caves are a striking feature of the cultural landscape of the High Himalayas. The study gives an account of the natural hazards which led to the abandonment of sites in the region of Baragaon in southern Mustang. Such sites included cave settlements, abandoned villages and fields, fortresses/palaces and monasteries which lie along rivers between 2800 and 3800m as well as in the valley basins of the side valleys of the Kali Gandaki. It also gives the reason of cultural influence in Mustang by different cultural and ethnic groups. The reason has been its geographical location and command of trade route to the high plateau of Tibet from Nepalese Himalayan foothills and India. Primarily, grain from the south was transported in large caravans to Tibet and salt from the north to Nepal and India. So to control over such routes was meaningful in the past for political power as well as economic gain.

"Geographical Research on the History of the Cultural Landscape of Southern Mustang" by Dr. Perdita Pohle is a report of the project carried out with the object of studying the settlement history of natural and cultural landscape of Mustang district. With the aim in view the project comes within the bounds of historical genetical settlement geography. So it is concerned with the

questions linked to the past, e.g., the origin of settlements, motives for the founding of settlements and the preference for particular sites as well as genesis of settlements. The project tried to trace the development of settlement region stepping into the past from the present. How the natural, economic, social and political forces influenced the settlement process, how the current situation helps to better understand the past cultural landscape have been the issues adopted by the project. To get such insights the study was localized in Kagbeni's cultural landscape. Dr. Pohle has given several reasons to begin the geographical settlement studies in Kagbeni.

The study gives a detailed account of natural setting of Kagbeni, fertility of soil, irrigation water from the riverbed of Dzong Chu, the relatively flat terrain which facilitates the layout of houses and fields etc. Besides the topography, the climatic condition of Kagbeni has also been mentioned. It is openly exposed to strong wind. The land use pattern has been studied in detail. The study also gives an account of traditional law of inheritance in Ka Kpa society, i.e., law of primogeniture. Mention has been made about the cropping system, harvest yields, settlement pattern, evidence relating to the founding of the geneses of the settlement, layout of physiognomy of the settlement. Kagbeni comprises 18 to 19 villages nowadays. In the old administrative system of division of Mustang district - Lo, Baragaon, Panchgaon and Thak, Kagbeni is in the region of Baragaon.

Kagbeni's environmental features show that it is a dry high mountain region inhabited by Tibetan speaking population. The region is characterized by Tibetan culture and tradition. It is located along one of the historically most important trade routes of Nepal. As witnesses of the past, it has several written sources (Nepali as well as Tibetan documents). There are settlement relics in the close vicinity of Kagbeni, i.e., the anthropogenic

caves on the other side of Kali Gandaki, the ruined settlement of Phudzeling and Kak Nyingha and the dilapidated palace ruins in the middle of the village. Kagbeni also provided favourable conditions for interdisciplinary collaboration. The Tibetologists have been analysing historical texts. The architects have prepared detailed ground plans of the locality based on terrestrial photogramatic survey. Samples of building timber are being taken for dendrochronological dating.

"Cartographic Activities in the Mustang District" by Prof. Dr. Robert Kostka gives an account of the space related research programme. The thematic maps were based on the study of geographical, historical, archaeological and other specialized fields in High Himalayas. For space related scientific investigations a lot of cartographic work was done. The study clarifies that maps at the scale of 1:200,000 and 1:50,000 using space-borne LANDSAT images and existing sheets of the one inch map of Nepal has been produced for Mustang district for large scale maps i.e. 1:10,000 and 1:2500. Hasselblad aerial images were taken with a fisheye lens and results of terrestrial photogrammetric and geodetic fieldwork were used. Thematic maps for different areas of interest containing only special research-related information were prepared. Study maps for fieldwork were prepared, then base maps to localize thematic items. Results of research work were presented in visual ways.

This is the second special issue of Ancient Nepal which focuses mainly on the results of the research activities of Nepal German Project on High Mountain Archaeology. The issue will be more useful for the researchers as well as scholars who have interest in archaeological exploration. Further research in the northern part of Mustang will make more exposure on the ancient as well as the modern culture and civilization of this part of the country.

- Khadga Man Shrestha