

## Early Christian missions in the Himalayas: including a note on the location of missionary archives in Italy

Dipak Raj Pant

Christian missionaries were one of the most important channels through which the European world received historical and ethnographic information about the Orient. The exactitude, impartiality and truthfulness of their observations -- and indeed their missionary aim itself -- may be questionable for many today, but no one can deny that ethnologists and historians today owe much to the works of the early Christian missionaries.

The Himalayas, one of the regions of the world most difficult of access, was first approached by missionaries in the early 17th century. Over the next two hundred years many missionaries visited the region, some of whom remained for a considerable period of time, studying the local languages and cultures. The documents relating to their activities (circulars, decrees, letters, memoirs, etc.) form a huge corpus of literature scattered in various ecclesiastical and civil archives in Italy. Parts of that literature have been edited by scholars, the most important of which for the missionary activities in Nepal and Tibet being Prof. Luciano Petech's massive *I missionari italiani nel Tibet e nel Nepal*. The more modest aim of the present report is to summarize these missionary activities and to bring to the attention of scholars, both from Europe and the Himalayan region itself, the extent and location of the missionary archives in Italy.

### Early Expeditions to the Himalayas

Muslim traders were already active and geographically mobile in western and central Asia during the centuries preceding the European Renaissance. Their role in bridging the gap between East and West and

in stimulating the Renaissance is well-known. Petech (1952-56: 1, 18) stresses how the story attributed to Muslim traders of "...remote, forgotten and degenerated Messiah-following communities" somewhere inside the highlands and valleys of the Asia Interior fuelled European curiosity and later stimulated missionary expeditions to the region. Most probably the Muslim traders confused the Buddha-image with that of the Messiah. The Persian term for idolatry *būt-parastī* (būt = statue, idol) might be related to the term Buddha (*Buddha* > *Budd* > *Būt*) whose images and statues were abundantly found in Central Asia when Muslims began to convert local peoples.

Christian missionaries were already in the process of consolidating their bases in China and India by the beginning of the 17th century. Goa, Macao and other Portuguese colonies served as base-camps for explorative ventures. The sea-way between China and India became increasingly dangerous due to the attacks of local pirates and Dutch corsairs around Macao, the south Chinese waters and Indochinese coasts. The need for a new route between the Chinese mainland and the Indian subcontinent, *via terra*, was felt as an utmost priority by missionary authorities. The missionaries were not always escorted or assisted by the European powers so they sought to establish their own routes and support centres. Many of the early travellers, and especially the Jesuits, used to operate autonomously, but they did not hesitate to take full advantage of the facilities intentionally or unintentionally provided by the European powers.

The earliest missionary explorations of the Himalayan region were undertaken with

the aim of opening new channels of communication between China-based and India-based missionaries. The first western missionary to cross the Himalayan passes and visit the Tibetan plateau was a Portuguese Jesuit, Father Antonio de Andrade (1580-1634). In 1624 he reached Tibet from India, via Garhwal, and one year later established a residence and chapel at Tsaparang (or rTsa-bran) in south-western Tibet. A further visit to India enabled him to return to Tsaparang with additional resources and manpower. Father Antonio de Andrade wrote two reports on his travels and missionary operations, which were published under the title *Novo descobrimento do Gram Cathayo ou reinon de Thibet, pello padre Antonio de Andrade de Companhia de Jesu, Portuguez, anno de 1626* (see Peireiro, 1921). His reports aroused much curiosity and were soon translated into Spanish, French, Italian and Polish. Called back to India by his superiors in Goa, Fr. de Andrade left the Tsaparang mission to his assistants. About a decade later the centre was closed due to political upheavals and the subsequent Ladakhi forces, who did not view the presence of Christian missionaries as a positive influence in the region.

During the same period two other Portuguese Jesuits, Fathers Estevão Cacella (1585-1630) and João Cabral (1599-1669), arrived in the region. Fr. Estevão Cacella went to Goa as a Jesuit missionary around 1614, and worked for some time on the Malabar coast in southwestern India. In 1626 he and Fr. João Cabral went to explore Tibet via Bengal and Bhutan, but they did not remain there for long. Fr. Cabral is said to have returned to India passing through Nepal in the year 1628 (B.C. Sharma 1975: 195).

In 1629 Fr. Cacella received a mandate to open a permanent missionary centre in the area previously visited by him and Fr. Cabral. He left for Shigatse (south-eastern Tibet) with a clear mandate and a long-term project. Soon after his arrival in Shigatse he fell sick and died there in 1630. After his death the Shigatse mission was abandoned,

and the Jesuits remained inactive in the region for almost three decades. Fr. Cacella's memoirs contain interesting historical and ethnographic accounts of the area around Shigatse (cf. C. Wessels 1924: 120-63).

At this time another Portuguese Jesuit, Fr. Manoel Dias, was sent to the eastern Himalayas by the Jesuit authorities at Cochin. Very little is known about his travels. Fr. Dias is supposed to have died in the Morang (Terai) of Nepal on his way to Tibet.

Two Jesuit fathers, Johann Grueber and Albert d'Orville, are said to have reached Lhasa in 1661, thereby becoming the first westerners to reach the political and cultural centre of Tibet. Fr. Johann Grueber (1623-1680), an Austrian Jesuit, travelled as a missionary to Macao in 1658 and then went on to Peking, where he remained for a couple of years. He was entrusted to explore the land-route from China to India. In 1661 he passed through Tibet and Nepal in the company of the Belgian Jesuit, Fr. Albert d'Orville. In the winter of 1661-62 the two Jesuits halted at Kathmandu for a month or so, where they were received by the then King, Pratap Malla. The fathers presented the Malla ruler with a telescope. The king was an author of verses in Sanskrit and a great admirer of learned persons; so he was pleased to meet the two erudite and experienced Jesuit travellers. In one of the inscriptions found inside Hanuman-Dhoka words in Roman letters have been found; the inscriptions belonged to Pratap Malla. It is supposed that the King learned Roman letters from these Jesuits. The king was fond of learning many languages and he used to invite many scholars from different parts of the Indian subcontinent (B.C. Sharma: 168).

Fr. d'Orville died after reaching Agra, and Fr. Grueber went back to Europe via Persia and Turkey. Many of the letters, reports and memoirs of Fr. Grueber are still unedited. Wessels (1924) and Petech (1952-56) note that some were published by A. Kircher in Amsterdam (1667) and M. Thévenot in Paris (1672).

In 1679, another Jesuit, Fr. Marcanonio Santucci, is said to have visited the Nepal valley. Fr. Santucci was an Italian missionary resident at the Patna quarters of the Jesuits. Neither Grueber and d'Orville nor Santucci tried to use their foot-hold in the Nepal valley for the evangelization, but they did collect accurate information and building good rapport with the local authorities.

### Missions to Nepal

After the explorative phase of the Jesuits, Europeans with a more zealous temperament and a clear religious goal started to appear on the Himalayan scene. In 1707, a group of Capuchin fathers ventured to Nepal and Tibet. The Capuchin fathers halted in the Nepal Valley for a couple of months without revealing their true identities and goals, presenting themselves instead as medical practitioners. In those two months they did nothing to consolidate their base: Petech notes that they left no significant report or memoir behind, except for some personal letters containing superficial observations and remarks regarding the life in the Valley.

In 1715, again on its way to Tibet, the Capuchin expedition passed through Nepal. Unlike the previous expedition, some of the Capuchin fathers remained and sought to establish links with local society with a view to evangelization. The Head of the Capuchin expedition was Fr. Francesco Orazio da Pennabilli (1680-1745). He was perhaps the brightest of all the Capuchins. His *Breve raguglio dell' operato da Cappuccini nella missione del Thibet*, Rome, 1738 (cf. *Analecta Ordinis Min. Cappuccinorum* - 37, 1921) and *Relazione sul principio e stato presente della missione del Gran Thibet*, Rome, 1722 (cf. *Analecta Ord. Min. Cap.* - 4, 1888) are accounts of the difficulties and problems related to the "evangelization" of the Nepalese and Tibetan peoples. It also contains many other details of the missionary expeditions and operations and

some valuable information about local conditions. Fr. da Pennabilli was the first to translate Christian writings in Tibetan and to prepare Italian-Tibetan vocabulary (cf. F. d'Anvers 1934; also Petech op. cit.).

Unlike the Jesuits, the Capuchin fathers were less interested in learning about local society through a study of local language and culture. Instead, they were mainly interested in evangelization, the task for which they had dedicated their lives. The Capuchin mission had a mandate from the Church of Rome. The *Santa Congregazione de Propaganda Fide* (a huge section of the Church of Rome presiding over the missionary affairs of all Catholics) had already given the charge of evangelizing the Himalayas to the provincial capuchin authorities in Ascoli-Piceno (Le Marche, central Italy).

The Capuchin missionaries are said to have established bases in Patan and Kathmandu with the disciples of Fr. Orazio da Pennabilli remaining in the Valley to launch their mission. Their medical practices were continued along with the effort to "evangelize" the people. The local élite grew uneasy with the Capuchin fathers; and in 1735, the Capuchin transferred their centre to Bhadgaon because the authorities of Kathmandu and Patan were no longer friendly to them. Bhadgaon was relatively smaller and less influential than Kathmandu or Patan, it was basically a quiet agrarian place. But the difficulties pertaining to the mission's resources and man-power and their contact and communication with other Capuchin bases in India and Tibet rendered the operations problematic. The locals were not openly hostile but stubborn and confident. Evangelizing such people was not an easy job. Frustrated with the difficulties and meagre results, the Capuchin fathers gradually retreated from Tibet and Nepal to their Indian base at Patna.

After three years from their retreat to Patna, the Capuchins -- already well-known to the authorities of Kathmandu, Patan and

Bhaktapur -- were approached by the emissaries of the Malla rulers. The rulers of the Nepal Valley and central midhills were notorious for their rivalry and shifting alliances amongst themselves. By that period the presence of westerners in various parts of the Indian sub-continent was already well-known to the Nepalese feudal lords. Many of them were quite eager to build good relations with the Europeans, which in their eyes, were replacing the Muslims as the dominant power. By courting and favouring the missionaries they wanted to establish closer contact with the Indian-based European colonizers. They wanted to use the missionaries as strategic bridges to win sympathy and, eventually, military assistance for their own territorial ambition and to settle their scores with internal rivals. Of course, the reality was quite different; the missionaries were not so close or directly related to the colonial powers.

Utilizing fully the nice opportunity, two Italian Capuchin missionaries, Fathers Joachim da S. Anatolia and Vito da Recanati left Patna immediately. King Ranajit Malla of Bhaktapur offered the best opportunities, and so the missionaries opted to open their base there. They were lavishly helped by the King. After some time, they were lured to open another centre in Kathmandu. It is said that the then King, Jaya Prakash Malla, did his best to please the missionaries, (B. C. Sharma 1975: 195-6)

The Capuchin mission continued without any perturbation until 1769 at which time the Gorkhali conquerors, who had been planning the capture of the valley for some time, succeeded in their aim. Soon after the Gorkhali conquest the missionaries were expelled from Nepal along with their neo-converts, altogether 62 persons. Gorkhals still repeat the saying: "Traders come with Bible and then the Bible comes with the sword" (*vyâpâr-ko sâth Bible ra Bible-ko sâth tarvâr*). They had witnessed the subjugation of many Indian rulers and associated the European traders and colonizers with the missionaries. When the Gorkhali were

completing their take-over, they did not want a single missionary or even a single neo-convert to remain. But nobody was physically harassed or killed for this reason. The Nepalese neo-converts went to Bettiah (Bihar) and settled as an exiled community.

According to Petech (1952: 1, 68) the Capuchin had been able to establish good contacts with the coterie of Prithvi Narayan, the Gorkhali king; i.e. before the Gorkhali take-over of the valley (cf. Petech, ... op, vol. I, p. LXVIII). In 1767, some of the Capuchins are said to have visited Nuwakot (north-west of Kathmandu, then under Gorkhali command) on the explicit request of the Gorkhals themselves (Petech 1952, 2, 294-97). But nothing regarding this is to be found in the history narrated by the native scholars.

After the death of Prithvi Narayan, the Gorkhali king who unified the numerous principalities of the central Himalayas and laid the foundations of present-day Nepal, his son and successor Singh Pratap is said to have invited the Capuchins to resume their mission. Singh Pratap, who is considered a weak, meak and insignificant ruler by native historians, was held to be a polite and benevolent king by the missionaries who were watching the Nepalese scenario carefully.

Prince Bahadur Shah, Singh Pratap's brother who was at odds with the queen for power, is said to have had a very cordial relationship with the Capuchin fathers at Bettiah. The prince was in exile there for some time. After the end of his exile, he is said to have invited the fathers to come and resume their mission in Kathmandu, (Petech 1952-56: 1, 69; 187, n. 75). Fr. Guiseppe da S. Marcello, an Italian Capuchin, went to Kathmandu following the invitation in 1786. In 1787, another Italian Capuchin, Fr. Carlo Maria da Alatri, joined Fr. da S. Marcello, but soon after his arrival he was called back to Patna for another assignment. Then Fr. da S. Marcello was also called by the Capuchin authorities in India to cover a post in Varanasi. The scarcity of missionary manpower in several parts of India affected adversely the

missions in the Himalayan region.

In 1794, Fr. Romualdo da Senegallia was sent to Nepal. He too left soon due to serious health problems. In 1796 or 1797 Fr. Guiseppe da S. Marcello, already familiar with Nepal, was sent back to Nepal from Varanasi by the Capuchin authorities. He is said to have taken his job too "lightly" - mixing with local people, forgetting to "evangelize" them and keeping a local woman as a concubine. In 1803 he was ex-communicated by his superiors. At that point the Capuchin mission in Kathmandu was over. The 'missionary', however, did not leave. Fr. da S. Marcello remained in Nepal till the end of his life -- without any missionary mandate and living on his own. In 1810, the missionary chapter was closed in Nepal with the death of Guiseppe da San Marcello (Petech 1952-56, 70-1).

#### Missions to Tibet

The first phase of missionary activities relating to the evangelization of Tibet was initiated by the Capuchins after the explorative ventures of the Jesuits. In the early days of the Capuchin mission to Tibet (1707-1711) the missionaries accomplished very little. The beginning itself was problematic due to the difficult terrain, the distances involved, the insufficient manpower and the strangeness of the local environment. These problems were compounded by their failure to maintain contact and secure reinforcements from their Indian bases.

After a pause of a half-decade, the Capuchin fathers renewed their effort. In 1716 a few Capuchin missionaries reached Lhasa. To their surprise, they found an Italian Jesuit, Fr. Ippolito Desideri, who was already there learning the local language and culture. The accounts of Fr. Ippolito Desideri, S.J. (1684-1733), native of Pistoia (Italy), constitute the most precious source of information regarding Tibet. He remained in Tibet for five consecutive years (1716-1722). The rivalry between the two societies resulted in a series of disputes and contro-

versy for years. Upon leaving Lhasa, Fr. Ippolito Desideri travelled to other parts of the trans-Himalayas. In November 1721 he reached Kathmandu on his way to the Jesuit bases in India. After a month-long sojourn in Nepal, he proceeded towards India. His accounts of Tibet constitute an excellent ethnographic work. Even the memoirs of a short stay in Nepal is a very interesting work. His mastery over the local languages and his good rapport with the natives gave him an edge over the Capuchin fathers. His inclination to knowledge rather than "evangelization" contrasted with the Capuchin's naive self-righteousness and zeal for "evangelization".

The second phase of the Capuchin mission to Tibet (1716-1733) was a more fruitful in converts than the previous one. The Capuchins had acquired more knowledge of the language and slightly better rapport with the locals. But this phase also could not last long due to the lack of new reinforcements and regular contacts with other bases in India. The problems in adapting to the local food, climate and customs were equally pressurizing. Notwithstanding the formerly tolerant and indifferent attitude shown by the Tibetans, the missionary fathers were not viewed with good eyes by the local élites and authorities.

In 1741, for the third time, the Capuchin tried to establish themselves in Tibet. Soon after their arrival hostilities from the Tibetans surfaced more clearly. The local neo-converts were socially marginalized. Some of them were even prosecuted by the local authorities. Harassments and hostilities to the Capuchins increased. Three out of the six missionaries left Tibet. Day by day, the other missionaries found it hard to continue. Having sensed the futility and hopelessness of their efforts, all the remaining Capuchin fathers left Tibet for good. In 1745, the mission in Tibet was abandoned. Immediately after their departure, a mob (most probably, incited by their preachers) is said to have demolished the

Capuchin establishment (residence and chapel) - a symbolic action marking the end of the Christian presence.

The missionaries did not succeed in their efforts to evangelize the Himalayas but their expeditions left a wealth of information for historians and ethnologists.

#### Reflections

Christianity originated as a spiritual movement in the Middle East, a region criss-crossed by many civilizational and religious-philosophical currents. Politically it was a part of the Roman empire. The Christian movement grew in a relatively cosmopolitan environment and its message was imbued with transcultural and universalistic outlook. Among many other favourable circumstances, the spread of Christianity in other parts of the Roman empire was facilitated by two novelties: a deep ethico-existential concern and a radical universalism.

With the official adoption of Christianity by the Roman emperor Constantine (three centuries after Christ), Christianity ceased to be a spiritual movement and became an established religion operating from the urban centre-stages. The initial Christian urge to spread the spiritual message was an immediate and natural consequence of the "prophetic eruption". With the institutionalization of Christianity "universalism" and "movementism" acquired new significances. When the urge to spread the spiritual message was forcefully stretched beyond the contextual and temporal range of the "prophetic eruption" (i.e. Christ event) it transformed into an official campaign of converting the non-Christians living beyond the shores of the eastern Mediterranean.

The advent of Islam, another universalistic religion from the same Abrahamic (Semitic) roots, stopped the eastward expansion of the Christianity for a long time. The Islamized Asians, especially the Turks and the Mongols, became strong bulwarks against the Christian march into Asia Interior. Nevertheless, in a sporadic way, Christian missionaries kept on trying.

During the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries numerous missionary expeditions in the Asian hinterlands were attempted. The Himalayas were also approached in that particular period.

Western man has always been, since the times of the ancient Greeks, curious and practical-minded. The combination of religious zeal in the Judaic-Christian tradition, the curiosity and passion for unknown horizons (Greek element) and the practically and expansionism (Roman characters) produced what we may call the western activism. As long as the religious vision dominated, the quest was for the unknown "skies" (as in medieval Christian and Islamic cosmology) through intense inward movements. As soon as the religious vision was diluted with social and material aspirations, the quest turned towards the unknown "surfaces". With the Renaissance, western man "lost" the paradise but gained "freedom" from absolutist theocentric vision. The quest for adventure, a psychic residue of the mystique of the wilderness, exploded during the transitional period from the Middle Ages through the Renaissance and beyond. Since that period western activism has manifested itself in great artistic, intellectual and material achievements. On the other hand, it has also been reflected in the westerners' restless, trouble-shooting and encroaching behaviour throughout the transitional and modern periods. Christian missionaries, as westerners, are no exception; they reflect both aspects of the western activism.

Meanwhile the Gorkhali campaign to unite the central Himalayan principalities gathered momentum and swept across the southern flank of the Himalayas. The campaign was imbued with a pronounced anti-colonial sentiment. In the mean time, the Capuchin were in their most crucial phase of mission in Nepal. The mission in Tibet depended heavily upon the mission bases in Nepal and India since the way to China from Tibet was longer and much more arduous. The Gorkhali élites (Brahmins and Kshatriyas, orthodox Saiva Hindus) were

quite suspicious of the western missionaries' presence in the Valley, whom they linked with the politico-military network of European powers. Even to this date many people in Nepal think in the same way. With the Gorkhali take-over of the valley the mission was destined to fail.

The attempt to evangelize the Himalayas failed. The harsh topography, the long distances and the lack of political support (for Nepal and Tibet were never colonized by western powers) determined the outcome of the missionary attempts. The apparently tolerant but quite stiff and stubborn attitude of the locals also contributed to the mission's lack of success. The predominantly *Saivite* Nepalese and *Mahâyâni* Buddhist Tibetans have a permissive, flexible and polyhedric religiosity. So they did not mind the presence of Christianity among them, which was just one more cult and *avatâra* in an archipelago of uncountable cults and *avatâra*.

In fact, the Christian missionaries were welcomed by the locals in the beginning. Soon they realized that the newcomers were overbearing in their insistence in making the people accept their "their" religion (a very disgusting behaviour as per Oriental standards) and abandon their own old "things" (e.g. polygamy or polyandry; rites and ceremonies, polytheism, etc.) as well as disobeying their traditional authorities (i.e. Brahmins, Lama etc). Such exclusivism was unknown to Himalayan people. The combination of insistence to convert and exclusivist preaching came to be seen as the "danger" of Christian proselytism. The concept and practice of conversion is absent in local traditions. *Dharma-parivartana* (change, or 'reversal', of dharma sounds negative to local ears).

In the same way, the modern fashion of adopting Oriental religion or mysticism by a section of the westerners is not appreciated at all by the authentically traditional Hindus and Buddhists. A westerner is disrespected or suspected as soon as he/she pretends to convert or induce behavioural changes, or, for the same reason, behaves in a self-

denying, "converted" way (e.g. *Hare Krishna*, Rajneesh-followers, the "white Lamas" etc.). Even, too much insistence from western churches in the "dialogue" could provoke uneasiness. For them the all-pervading and self-evident (i.e. *Dharma*) must not be abstracted, extrapolated and made the object of formal discourses. The different ways (*mârğa*) to conceive and sustain the Order (*Dharma*) should be equally respected (*Sarva-dharma sama-bhâva*)

#### A note on missionary archives in Italy

*ARCHIVIO GENERALE dei FRATI MINORI CAPPUCINI*, Rome. *Analecta Ordinis Minorum Cappuccinorum*, Rome

*ARCHIVIO della SANTA CONGREGAZIONE de PROPAGANDA FIDE*, Rome. This archive is the one which contains the hugest part of the missionary activities abroad. See two sections within this archives: (i) *Scritture riferite nelle congregazioni generali* (ii) *Scritture riferite nelle congregazioni particolari per la Cina e per le Indie orientali* (this section contains most of the documents related to the missionary activities in eastern Asia).

*NECROLOGIO dei FRATI MINORI CAPPUCINI della PROVINCIA PICENA*, ed. by Guiseppe da Fermo, to be found in Ancona (central Italy). This is a succinct biographical list of all the dead Capuchin Fathers and contains some information about the Capuchin missionaries.

*ARCHIVIO della CURIA PROVINCIALE dei CAPPUCINI*, Ancona. This contains most of the information on those Capuchin missionaries who organized the first substantial and established missions in Kathmandu valley and Lhasa.

*ARCHIVIO VATICANO*, Vatican City, Rome. It contains many of the edited and

unedited documents on the missionaries to all directions.

*ARCHIVIO STORICO ITALIANO*, Florence, contains materials on Italian travellers and explorers including the missionaries (e.g. the Jesuit father Ippolito Desideri).

*BIBLIOTECA APOSTOLICA VATICANA*, Vatican City. It contains edited materials by and on the missionaries.

*BIBLIOTECA NAZIONALE VITTORIO EMANUELE II*, Rome. It contains some materials regarding the Italian explorers abroad (e.g. Ippolito Desideri's *IL MANUALE MISSIONARIO DI P. DESIDERI*)

*ARCHIVUM HISTORICUM SOCIETATIS JESU*, Rome. Most of the materials and notes on the Jesuit missionaries are to be found in this archive (e.g. Andrade and other early Portuguese missionaries).

There is a huge documentation by C. Sommervogel, *BIBLIOTHEQUE DE LA COMPAGNIE DE JESUS* (10 volumes), Bruxelles-Paris, 1890-1900, which is to be found in many important libraries of the Jesuit institutions.

#### References

Andrade, Fr. Antonio de *Novo descobrimento do Gram Cathayo ou reinon de Thibet, pello padre Antonio de Andrade da Companhia de Jesu, Portuguez, anno de 1626* (republished together with other writings of Fr. de Andrade and edited by F.M. Pereira, *O descobrimento do Tibet pelo padre Antonio de Andrade*, Coimbra, 1921.

d'Anvers, F., 1934. *Missionnaires Capucins et civilisation thibétaine*. In *Etudes Franciscaines*.

Archarya, B.R. 1968. *Śri Barâmahârâjâd-hirâj Prthvinârâyaṅ Śâh*, 4 vols. Kathmandu: HMG,

Desideri, I., *Notizie storiche del Thibet e memorie dei viaggi e missioni ivi fatte dal padre Ippolito Desideri della Compagnia de Gesù. Dal medesimo scritte e dedicate 1712-23*; parts of it have been edited and published by F. de Filippi, *An Account of Tibet; the Travels of Ippolito Desideri of Pistoia, S.J. 1712-1727*, London: Routledge.)

Gyanwali, S.B., *Prithvî Nârâyaṅ Śâh*. Darjeeling: Ne. Bha. Pra. Sa., 1946.

Hamilton, F., *An Account of the Kingdom of Nepal*, Edinburgh: A. Constable, 1819.

Kirkpatrick, W., *An Account of the Kingdom of Nepal*, London: W. Miller, 1811.

Luca, A., *Nel Tibet ignoto. Lo straordinario viaggio di Ippolito Desideri, S.J. (1684-1733)*, Bologna: EMI, 1987.

Norothy, W.B. & Morris, C.J., *The Gurkhas: Their Manners, Customs and Country*, Delhi: Cosmo, 1974.

Petch, L., *I missionari italiani nel Tibet e nel Nepal* (in ser. IL NUOVO RAMUSIO II, under the scientific direction of G. Tucci), 7 vol., Rome: IsMEO, 1952-56.

Petch, L., *Medieval History of Nepal*, Rome: IsMEO, 1984 (2nd ed.).

Puini, C., *Il Tibet (geografia, storia, religione, costumi) secondo la relazione del viaggio di Ippolito Desideri, 1715-21*, in MEMORIE della SOCIETA GEOGRAFICA ITALIANA - 10, Rome, 1904.

Regmi, D.R., *Medieval Nepal*, 3 vols., Calcutta: Mukhopadhyaya, 1966.

- *Modern Nepal*, Calcutta: Mukhopadhyaya, 1961.
- Sharma, B.C. 1975. *Nepal-ko Aiti-hasik Rupa-rekha* Varanasi: B. Mahadev Pd. Sharma.
- Snellgrove, D., *Buddhist Himalaya: Travels and Studies in Quest of the Origins and Nature of Tibetan Religion*, Oxford: Bruno Cassirer, 1957.
- Stein, R.A., *Tibetan Civilization*, (Eng. trans. by J.E.S. Driver), London: Faber & Faber, 1972.
- Stiller, L., *The Rise of the House of Gorkha*, New Delhi: Manjushree, 1973.
- Toscano, G.M., *Alla scoperta del Tibet*, E.M.I., Bologna, 1977.
- Wessels, C. 1924. *Early Jesuit Travellers in Central Asia*. The Hague.

## INTERVIEW

### On the Topicality of History: An Interview with Mahesh Chandra Regmi

Martin Gaenszle

Having been tutored by his father he "never saw the inside of a school", and as he had to discontinue his university education after a B.A. at the age of eighteen, Mahesh Chandra Regmi, today the unquestioned authority on Nepal's economic history, started his academic career - as he says - "with hands tied behind the back". After four years at Trichandra College in Kathmandu the Rana government sent him to Patna University, where he stayed for two months to prepare for his B.A. examinations. He then tried to run a book shop, later a cloth shop, in Calcutta, but eventually returned to Kathmandu just before the changes in 1950.

It was only around 1956, when he met a Ford Foundation scholar who was doing research on the agricultural system of Nepal and asked him to translate some documents, that M.C. Regmi started to get interested in doing research on Nepal's economic history. In 1960 he received support from the University of California and in the following years he wrote the four volume study *Land*

*Tenure and Taxation in Nepal*, which still stands as the authoritative source on the subject. This was followed by several books on the economic history of Nepal: among others *A Study in Nepali Economic History* (1971), *Thatched Huts and Stucco Palaces: Peasants and Landlords in 19th Century Nepal* (1979), *The State and Economic Surplus: Production, Trade and Resource Mobilization in Early 19th Century Nepal* (1985).

Rather than striving for a university career, he set up his own private Regmi Research Institute, which provides several regular publications that are valuable sources for scholars on Nepal, such as the Nepal Press Digest, the Nepal Recorder, and - until recently - the Regmi Research Series. In 1977, Mahesh Chandra Regmi received the Ramon Magsaysay Award for Journalism, Literature, and Creative Communication Arts. Though he usually prefers to stay away from the academic arena of seminars, conferences and workshops, he still