

by Ben Campbell, with additional information by David Gellner

The community of scholars of the Himalayan region lost one of its sharpest minds in February 1998. Graham Clarke was an important figure of the second generation of anthropologists doing research in Nepal. After a first degree in experimental psychology at the University of Sussex, he went to Oxford to study anthropology. His proto-deconstructionist work on 'Who are the Dards?' (*Kailash* Vol. V (4) : 323-56) presaged the themes taken up later in his doctoral thesis. His first fieldwork in Nepal, in the remote valleys of Mugu, had to be abandoned after severe illness necessitated calling out a helicopter from Kathmandu. He then switched to Helambu and the result was *The Temple and Kinship among a Buddhist People of the Himalayas*' (Oxford D. Phil., 1980), which analysed the social dynamics behind ethnic labels in the upper Helambu valley. This work remains one of the best-kept secrets of Himalayan ethnography. For those persistent enough to locate a copy (who are understandably usually anthropologists of the same region, e.g. Desjarlais, 1992, *Body and emotion*, Univ. of Pennsylvania Press), it has become highly influential as a source of historical and ethnographic data, and in providing a tightly argued and many-stranded analysis of the role of religious institutions in social change. *The Temple and Kinship*' deploys the insights of Leach, Needham, and Bourdieu to explore the contradictory processes of status and power centring on the mobility afforded by Tibetan forms of household, community organisation and ritual practice to the illiterate Tamang cultivators of the area. Temple land grants had been made by the Newar kings of the Kathmandu Valley in the eighteenth century, and Clarke interpreted the use of the ethnonyms 'Lama' and 'Tamang' as contextually dependent means of distinguishing the oscillating fortunes of whole village communities, and socio-religious climbers within them, in terms of proximity to positions of power over the temple lands. The intimate local linkages of wealth, power and ritual status created a Buddhism which Clarke observed to be notably antithetic to the figure of the world-renouncing monk. He described as 'religious capitalism' the circulation of goods between households via the temple adding value in the form of merit (see, i.e., 'Hierarchy, Status and Social History in Nepal' in R.H. Barnes, D. de Coppet, and R.J. Parkin eds. 1985, *Contexts and levels*:

*anthropological essays on hierarchy*, Oxford : JASO). In the ordering of temple rank, however, principles of status hierarchy were at work which contradicted the hierarchies of Dravidian kinship and affinity characteristic of Tamang communities. For Tamangs to enter temple membership, they would have to repudiate original lineage principles, though successive generations could later build into temple-focused lineages. Clarke saw a dropping of classificatory kinship among Lama households in favour of kindred-based alliances, requiring an analysis of tactics rather than rules, though the break from hierarchies of affinity could never be complete, and in these inconsistencies social change could be understood. What makes Clarke's ethnography particularly convincing is his clear appreciation of the variant instances of these social processes across the Helambu region. Few anthropologists manage to achieve such expansive regional familiarity, but it is precisely this understanding of gradated transformation that is the key to Himalayan society. He sought, moreover, to understand the historical background to this by co-operating with the late Thakur Lal Manandhar on the translation of the copperplate grants by the Newar kings. A collection of Clarke's articles on the history and society of Helambu is currently in press with Bibliotheca Himalayica. Later periods of fieldwork, supported by an ESRC Fellowship held through IDS, Sussex, brought Clarke back to Helambu to observe local political and developmental discourse during elections and at other times, and resulted in his paper, 'Development (Vikas) in Nepal: Mana from Heaven' (paper given at the ASA Decennial conference in Oxford: was this ever published?). His interest in household, property and economic change was further extended in his research in Tibet ('Aspects of the Social Organisation of Tibetan Pastoral Communities', 1992, in *Tibetan studies: proceedings of the 5th seminar of the international association of Tibetan studies*, Narita). He also travelled widely elsewhere in Nepal, as well as in the rest of South Asia and in Tibet, carrying out consultancies for the ODA, SATA, and a range of other agencies. Clarke's unique grasp of Himalayan society as deserving of overall comparative treatment can be seen in his provocative article, 'Blood and Territory as Idioms of National Identity in Himalayan States' (*Kailash* Vol. XVII (3-4): 89-132, 1995). This was clearly the outline for a bigger work, which few others could ever entertain the ambition of completing.