

Michael Mühlich: *Traditionelle Opposition: Individualität und Weltbild der Sherpa*, Freiburg im Breisgau, 1994, Centaurus Verlag, Kulturen im Wandel vol. 7, Pfaffenweiler, 1996, 305 pp. (Published dissertation).

Since Nepal opened its borders to the western world in the 1950s, the Sherpa of Solu-Khumbu have continuously attracted researchers focusing on the Buddhist religion and rituals. In addition, researchers interested in their history, economy and trade have also contributed to make the Sherpa probably one of the best-known ethnic groups in South Asia and the Himalayas. However, their character and lifestyle have rarely been examined independently from their adherence to Buddhism. Within that perspective, a one-dimensional point of view has also contributed to the rather uncritical subsumption of different lines of thought encompassed in what Ortner (1989) called "the concept of high religion".

As my own research in Solu and Baudghanath, from November 1991-May 1993, has shown, opposing views exist among the Sherpa concerning Buddhist institutions, with consequences reaching into the present. I did not, however, try to point out different schools of thought but to concentrate on the endurance of diverse lifestyles expressed in religious and social institutions and their organisation. The chief opposition exists between what I call the *Lama* system, on one hand, and the indigenous *mortsas* system, on the other. The title *Lama* connotes "superior", and the "ideal" system derived from it is built on the high religious precepts of hierarchy with religious institutions, sustained by promoting asceticism, lifelong vows of celibacy, a tendency to segregate the common people and the exclusion of people from lower castes to achieve membership within religious institutions as well as within ritual organisations of the village. On the social level, mutual assistance is reduced to a minimum, while formal contracts and wage-labour relations are taking over the role of informal relations and relations of equality. However, to conclude, as Ortner (1978) did, that Sherpa Buddhism completes the atomistic tendencies of their social structure seems far-fetched.

Thus, a rather different picture of their communities emerges when one looks at the "common" Sherpa *mortsas* system. The Sherpa word *mortsas* denotes "common account" or "common interest", or more precisely, "to collect funds and other help within the community and contribute to a primary or common interest". At first glance, this does not seem very different from the Newar *guthi* system. However, their system was traditionally more restricted to outsiders than the Sherpa system.

Historically, the *mortsa* system is first mentioned at the foundation of religious institutions, for example, the *gompa* of Chialsa in the southern Sallerie Valley or the *gompa* of Trakshindo east of the Solu Valley. These Sherpa projects resulted from the common interest of local communities, whereby outsiders, such as Newar and even low-caste Sherpa (Yemba), could contribute and be integrated, thus in a sense also opposing the subordination demanded by the very religious elite. Next to these *gompa*, villagers have built small houses for the aged, hence reflecting the social dimensions of their projects. Furthermore, these monastic institutions have never been segregated from village life since they were also conceived as schools (Sh. *sheta*) and there has been no introduction of lifelong ascetic vows, like that of the *Gelung* of high religious tradition. Furthermore, the position of women in these monasteries was not related to lifelong vows.

Without looking at the village background, these institutions could be construed as an imitation of the high religious ideal by the common people. However, as I have tried to show in a detailed analysis of the social structure, these diverging institutions seem to be built on the endurance of diverse lifestyles within Sherpa society as a whole. While the social structure of communities adhering to the *Lama* system proves to be associated with a more sedentary peasant lifestyle, the social structure of the communities related to the *morstar* system still shows a stronger reference to a former nomadic-pastoral lifestyle. The difference is that relations based on mutual help and sharing common land-use of the wider locality (in the sense of the valley-community) are more highly valued than relations based on common descent and its atomistic tendencies whence connected to the private ownership of land and titles. In theoretical terms, this contrast could also be explained as the opposition of personality versus territoriality, although political, ethno-historical and ecological perspectives may also be taken into account.

The endurance of these opposing tendencies is also relevant to the Sherpa concept of the household (*mikhang*). There are many instances to which I could refer, where the Sherpa have themselves expressed the idea of an extended household based on the idea of mutual help. The inclusion of siblings' children as well as attached household workers proves that the principle of a common locality and mutual assistance is as important as the Sherpa concept of the house itself. In the traditional perspective of the Sherpa, the house is a "living being" (to borrow this term from R. Waterson's book *"Living House" in Southeast Asia*, 1991). Titles, such as those of the mediator in village affairs are associated more with the esteem

of a certain house than with a certain person and may in case of the absence of the holder be transmitted to other persons in the household and thereby also to women. The house is also thought to possess a soul, and when it is gone, people say that the house is empty (*khangpa tongba*), as they would say for a person who had died (*mi tongba*). In order to build a house, the local gods, the *lu sabdag*, must be appeased; and hence symbolically, relations among members of the household are as dependent on locality and mutual help as they are on kinship and descent.

Michael Kollmair: *Futterbäume in Nepal. Räumliche Verteilung und Stellenwert in kleinbäuerlichen Betrieben*, University of Giessen, Department of Geography, 1996, 205 p., maps, illus., figs.

This dissertation deals with the spatial distribution and the status of fodder trees in the land-use system of the Nepalese Middle Hills. The term "fodder trees" is defined as arborescent plants integrated into the fields of private land and pruned annually for feeding purposes. Fodder trees are found throughout Nepal, though only in the Middle Hills are they a distinct feature of the landscape and the land-use system.

Livestock husbandry, intimately coupled with the practice of arable farming, occupies a key role in the predominantly smallholding and subsistence-oriented land-use system of the Nepalese Middle Hills. Virtually all the nutrients needed to maintain soil fertility make their way onto the fields via livestock. Moreover, such animals represent the only possible means of providing draught power for farming on the steep, narrow-terraced slopes. Overall, the land-use system is characterised by an exceptionally tight-knit spatial, functional and economic integration between animal husbandry, arable crop production and the use of forested areas. In this production system, maintaining the supply of feed during the dry winter season poses a basic problem for animal husbandry. Foliage of fodder trees is able to provide a considerable amount of fodder needed during this critical period of the year. Although more than 100 different tree species in Nepal are cultivated to obtain fodder, only 20 to 30 species are frequently encountered and characterise the mix of species at local level. Common to all is a great variety of additional uses—for example as fuelwood, litter, bedding, fruits or medicinal properties.