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***Trans-Himalayan Caravans: Merchant princes and peasant traders in Ladakh* by Janet Rizvi. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999. ISBN 019 564855 2, bibliography, 20 black-and-white and 13 colour plates, 4 maps, 359 pp.**

Reviewed by Nicky Grist

I am reviewing my second copy of this book. The first was not lost in some fast-flowing glacial stream or over the edge of an unimaginably high

precipice, as Rizvi reports was the fate of many a box or bale of trade goods in Ladakh. Rather, having purchased it in Leh bazaar and returned to my hosts' house nearby, a cursory reading revealed that it recounted their grandfather's life in great detail. Therefore, it was an ideal gift to leave for them. He had been an initially poor man who made his fortune by trading between Ladakh and its neighbours in India, but sadly had been dead for several years. Fortunately, when he was still living, Rizvi had interviewed him as part of her work to gather as many memories as she could of the now (mainly) discontinued trade of Ladakh. Many of the others whom she interviewed are now also dead, but their fascinating accounts provide the core of the invaluable contribution made by this book.

Until the middle of the last century, Ladakh was the centre of a cosmopolitan and complex set of trade routes which extended all over Central Asia, the Himalayan region and sometimes beyond. The trade routes were without roads or even necessarily a navigable path. They crossed some of the highest passes in the world and inhospitable deserts in conditions of extreme heat or cold. On them travelled caravans of traders, servants, and animals who risked daily hardships and sometimes death. Hence, there is a wonderful story to tell, which Rizvi does in this meticulously researched and beautifully written book.

The author points out that Ladakh does not seem an ideal place to travel through, as it is cut off from its neighbours by difficult high passes. However, for political and other reasons, it was an important centre of trade and an entrepôt for centuries. The long distance trade linked Yarkand and Central Asia with Tibet and British India and involved mainly luxury goods. For part of the 19th century, both charas and opium were also staples of the business. From the time of partition until the early 1960s the international trade came to an almost complete halt with the closing of India's borders with Pakistan, China, and Tibet.

The long distance traders were predominantly from other areas such as Yarkand and Hoshiarpur in the Punjab, but there were also a number of Ladakhi (mainly but not exclusively Muslim) trading families. They dominated the trade between Tibet and Kashmir in particular, and usually had family houses in all the major centres. These people are the merchant princes of the title. The peasant traders are the Ladakhi villagers who traded both within Ladakh and with its immediate neighbours, mainly in subsistence goods.

An important product for a significant number of these traders was pashm-wool produced by goats living in the high-altitude plateaus of Chang Thang, that borders eastern Ladakh and western Tibet, and in parts Chinese Turkestan. Pashm was used for the manufacture of pashmina shawls in the Kashmir valley and latterly by shawl manufacturers in the Indian plains. By the early part of the last century, Ladakhi peasant traders, who had exchange relationships with the Tibetan nomads who owned the goats,

collected much of the shawl wool from the Chang Thang area. They would travel to Chang Thang once a year and also usually make trading trips to Skardu in Baltistan, possibly Kashmir and other areas in the region, engaging in exchange of subsistence goods by barter as well as the more commercial pashm trade. There were also many peasant traders from other parts of Ladakh, most of whom traded with neighbouring regions on a smaller scale and more exclusively in subsistence items. One of the strengths of Rizvi's book is that she has given equal weight to interviewing peasant traders in areas such as Suru near Kargil, who had been engaged in less glamorous, but essential subsistence trade.

The peasant traders, for the most part were from the ranks of the wealthier (although rich would be an exaggeration) peasant farmers who had sufficient land and animals of their own to produce a surplus, and carriage animals (mainly donkeys) with which to start trading. As Rizvi describes, poorer Ladakhis were often involved in the trade as servants and carriers; or, particularly on the main long distant route to Yarkand and Srinagar, as pony men who hired out horses to large commercial traders.

The picture that Rizvi paints of the trade and the life of the traders is one that was extremely hard, but at the same time frequently enjoyable. It seems likely that adventure was sought out by some of the (almost entirely) men who made a career in trade. This may seem absurdly romantic to some, but as she herself points out, Ghulam Rassool Galwan, who was a worker on many large European expeditions travelling these routes, in the only first-hand account from a century ago, has left a first-hand account of his experiences in which he describes his life as highly sociable and interesting. In her writing Rizvi manages to capture the excitement and sense of adventure and achievement which seems to have been a part of the enterprise.

Nevertheless, the majority of Ladakhis' role in the trade was as load carriers, servants, and pony men. These people were mainly from poorer families, who may often have taken part less enthusiastically, and many of whom were in a client relationship to a richer landowner. This landowner could be a monastery, a wealthier peasant or a traditionally "noble" family and the relationship often involved working for the patron in return for what was often a basic subsistence. I did feel that one weakness of the book was that little use was made of the now extensive literature on Ladakhi village society, which would have thrown more light on the relationship between the trading economy and other aspects of society, particularly in respect of social differentiation. For example, in the 1980s and 1990s there were still very many older people in Ladakh who talked quite bitterly of their lives prior to Independence.

Since Rizvi has transcribed all her interviews it would have been helpful if she had included more quotes from the traders themselves, and I hope that she might consider publishing their own accounts in the future.

Nevertheless, she has performed a huge service by providing an annotated historical account of the trade routes, traders, and economy of the trade itself, which will be essential reading for anyone interested in the area, or trade in general. I do have a criticism of the production, which is that there is such a wealth of information and detail in the book that I would have found it useful to have more detailed maps and tables to summarise some of the information. However, she has managed to present the story in such a readable way that I believe that the book will be of interest even to those unfamiliar with Ladakh. But it is likely that her most appreciative readers will be in Ladakh itself.

***Party Building in Nepal: Organization, leadership and people. A comparative study of the Nepali Congress and the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist)* by Krishna Hachhethu. Kathmandu: Mandala Book Point, 2002. ISBN 99933-10-13-1, 25 tables, 2 appendices, index, 311 pp.**

Reviewed by Karl-Heinz Krämer

Democratic experiments in the 1950s saw political parties in Nepal as a rather weak agent compared to the monarchy which managed to regain more and more of the traditional power it had lost to the Ranas in mid 19th century. For lack of constitutional regulations, the political parties of the 1950s had few arguments for greater power sharing besides the late King Tribhuvan's vague promises of 18th February 1951. Even King Mahendra's constitution of 1959 left little doubt that parties were only tools in the monarch's hands to manage state powers. King Mahendra finally outlawed parties altogether and introduced his partyless *pancāyat* system of government.

It took another 30 years before a western democratic system with a constitutional monarch was introduced in 1990. The people have now become sovereign and use party politicians as their democratically elected representatives to exercise executive and legislative powers.

Two parties stand out as the most important ones right from the beginning of this new political system: the Nepali Congress [NC] and the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) [CPN-UML]. There may have been other books on Nepali parties before, but Hachhethu's book