

BOOK REVIEWS

THREE SPECIAL ISSUES OF FRENCH JOURNALS OF NEPAL AND SOUTH ASIA

1. *L'Ethnographie* cxx annee 1978 II, 201 p.: Les Migrations du Sud, presented by Ph. Sagant.
2. *L'Homme* xviii Jan-Jun 1978 Nos 1-2 246 p.: Caste, Lignage, Territoire, et Pouvoir en Asie du Sud, presented by M. Gaborieau.
3. *L'Homme* xxii Jul-Sep 1982 No 3, 141 p.: Les fetes dans le monde Hindou, presented by G. Toffin.

This is less a review than an overdue advertisement. The three issues recommended here are the fruit of a special series of seminars held by a group of anthropologists and historians, the equipe "village", at the Centre d'Etudes de l'Inde et de l'Asie du Sud in Paris between 1976 and 1980. All three issues are inspired by a prevailing intention: to find common ground for explanation between the individual contributions, headed each time under specific topic.

The first issue deals with *migrations* in and from Nepal, India and Sri Lanka. This is a subject of great importance, not only in tribal mythologies, but also in the present history of the peoples involved; and it is these actual movements of recent times — undertaken often as a response to a colonial and capitalist challenge — with which the special number of *L'Ethnographie* deals. Sagant, the editor of the issue, tells the story of this challenge in his introductory essay: how under the British rule in India a labour-market developed in the newly established plantations

and how, due to the influence of capitalist marchandize, land became a subject for speculation. Such factors were decisive for the dislocation of many people in the Indian subcontinent from their tribal homelands. Population growth and over-exertion of the soil helped to accelerate this process.

In two consecutive contributions the same author pursues two such migrational movements, as it were in reverse directions. One of them is the permanent or temporary emigration of Nepali (hill people for the most part) to Bengal, Assam, NEFA, Burma, Sikkim, Bhutan and the North West Provinces. The study as such is one in historical statistics. The other article takes a look at Gurkha soldiers — a solid group of temporary expatriates — when they return from their services in the Indian or British armies to their natal villages, in Sagant's case to Limbu country. The article investigates the Gorkha soldier's problems of reinstallation and what he does with the money accumulated in the foreign armies.

Two other articles in the migration issue of L'Ethnographie are case studies carried out in Central Nepal. One of them (by G. Toffin) describes the various forms of migration in the Ankhlu Khola valley in the Dhading District. This is populated mainly by Tamang and the importance of the peoples' shifts for the ecological equilibrium of the area is elaborated.

The second of the Central Nepalese case studies picks out a village in the Tanahu District, which is mainly composed of mixed ethnic groups and castes. Here, a correlation is established by the author (M. Gaborieau) between migrations and the caste system.

Three articles of the issue pay attention to migrational movements in India. One of these gives an account on migrations in a village in Madhya Pradesh (J.L. Chambard) over a period of

25 years. It is stated that in this period and in the four centuries preceding it, the demographical situation seems to have been quite stable.

The second essay concerned with Indian data (by E. Chaussin) evaluates biographical information on migrations made by the Orissa ethnic group of the Saora to Assam. The recent increase of such dislocations is explained with the introduction of the monetary system and the indebtedness of the farmers in their struggle for land.

The third article takes a glance at migrations to the urban agglomerations of Calcutta and Bombay, the industrial capitals of the subcontinent. The attraction of these cities is great (as it is vague): 60% of their inhabitants have been born elsewhere. As a rule the new immigrants to these industrial capitals are young, male, unmarried and illiterate — a pool for a good catch for the exploitative intentions of the urban employers.

One final article in the collection describes the historical and contemporary migrational movements from and to Sri Lanka, both interior and exterior (E. Meyer). It gives a background for the recent political clashes between Tamil and Singhalese. Unfortunately, the heavy movement of Sri Lankan *Gastarbeiter* to the Gulf States remains unmentioned in this contribution.

Nevertheless, the issue as a whole is not interesting only for the specialized scholar it also provides indirect hints to the understanding of critical issues of a wider range, such as the present day political dramas in Assam and in Nagaland.

Forum for the next two special issues on well defined anthropological subjects in Nepal and South Asia is the renowned French journal *L'Homme*. It is not astonishing, therefore, that some of the contributions have a marked structuralist

flair. The first of these special issues, introduced and supervised by M. Gaborieau, concentrates on *power* on the micro-level of the village and its foundation in the land, in caste and in lineages, to be exact: in patrilineal descent groups. Three of the articles concern villages in the Himalayan environment of Nepal, two concern villages in India.

In his lead article M. Gaborieau searches the division of power in a Central Nepalese community first of all in the administrative tradition. Two types of land tenure are classically distinguished. In one, the *raikar* system, land is given by the king to the villagers in return for a tax payment that is paid on the *thum* administrative level headed by a *mukhiyā*; this tax goes right into the royal treasury. The high Hindu castes and the tribal groups of the area are subject to this system. The remaining part of the community consisting in Muslims were granted another type of land tenure, *tusal* or *sevā birtā*, a privileged system, according to which chiefs depended directly on the king and in which the administrative subdivisions could multiply by segmentation. In both cases, however, these subdivisions were identical with the original territory of the founding lineages; and the administrative chief was the lineage head. These kernal lineages were then extended by other families through alliance and dependants. Whereas the high caste Hindus had solid lineages, those of the Muslims were weak and tended to segment soon. From the latter part of the 19th century on the politically dominant castes of Hindu Nepali dispossessed the tribal people of their territory and colonized it for their own profit. Thus, taking a diachronical perspective a complex evolution of land tenure can be registered, involving original tribal lineages that slip into the administrative categories of the state which in the end are destroyed by a group of alien settlers.

In the second contribution, which like the former is historical, Sagant investigates the previous powers of the Limbu chiefs in Eastern Nepal. These chiefs were called *subbā*. They had to deal with land: It was the *subbā* who granted uncultivated jungle to clan members who wished to make it arable; it was him who decided about the settlement of immigrants; he was the chief tax collector for the king of Nepal; he administered justice in his locality; he had privileges: duty service; hunting rights such as those over bears, tigers and musk; monopolies over certain natural products such as wild honey, large frogs, small fish, certain medicinal herbs; in his position to the common Limbu inhabitant the *subbā* was regarded with respect: he was spoken of and treated as a senior common man.

The author of the third article, Toffin, studied power in a Newar community of the Kathmandu valley, in Pyangaon. He demonstrates that here all social relations and consequently also those of power are expressed in religious terms. Dharma is king. Through the process of sanctification a local kin group legitimizes itself. Likewise, a village chief receives his power not only by his administrative attributions but also by his leadership in religious affairs. Tutelary deities play a central role in the segmentation process of kin groups. Moreover, it is via these deities that different village factions confront each other through their leaders. The religious order paves the way for the political and the social order in the village.

The remaining two articles in the power issue of L'Homme deal with Indian villages. One is located in Tamilnadu, the other one concerns the Saora tribe. One of the articles (M.L. Reiniche) confronts the traditional agrarian relations, which were built on the appropriation and redistribution of agricultural products on which the whole social order was based, with

reform plans of the British administration. The British attempted to standardize land taxation throughout the colony and, misunderstanding the indigenous people's attitude toward the land, tried to lift it to the status of private property. The British administrative reform took nearly a hundred years to come through and helped to transform the traditional relations of power along with all other social relations previously existing in the region.

The last article (by E. Chaussin) brings to light the spatial aspects of the social organization of a Munda speaking tribe in Orissa, the Saora. The principal kinship unit in this society is the patriline, *birinda*. It is the mythological founding group of the various hamlets in the village. In actuality, it is a group with territory. In addition, each of the patriline has the right to own funerary locations on the territory of the village, places where the cult of the dead is practiced. Thus the soil and the structuring of the land is neatly tied to the social structure which gives the village cohesion and its equilibrium.

The third special issue on Nepal and South Asia, introduced by G. Toffin, assembles four articles on the topic of *Hindu festivals*. The first one of these (by M. Gaborieau) investigates the relationship between the annual festivals amongst Hindu Nepali and the division of the year into periods. It documents that the major festivals fall into the period of the monsoon rains, *caumās*, the 'four months' when god Visnu departs into hell to retreat for a seasonal sleep and when the world is left for the demons. It is considered the time of midnight darkness, it is the end of time in a cosmological sense. This time belongs to a metaphysical third dimension for it is in this vertical direction that the gods and the humans get into contact in this period of Sacred Time. Ethnographic data from the observer's notebook are confronted in

this contribution with calendarical concepts written down in an old sanskrit text of the first millenium. Thus, actual practice and indigenouse theory are compared.

The second article describes and analyses three festivals amongst the Telugu from a multicaste village in Andhra Pradesh (O. Herrenschmidt). All three festivals are linked by the fact that in each a procession takes place which orders space in a social sense. The relationship of the festivals and castes is elaborated, — once in connection with functions during the enactment of the festivals and once in the sense that special types of castes prefer special types of festivals, so much that a general village festive calendar cannot be written; it would have to be written for each caste separately.

The third article (by G. Toffin) describes a nine-day communal festival *deś jātrā*, amongst the Newar of Panauti, a town in the Banepa valley a few miles east of the Kathmandu valley. The analysis of this festival is structural in the sense that relations are established: between carnivorous and vegetarian deities and Chetris and Brahmins; or between spatial and sociological frames of order — the outside world of the jungle corresponds with chaos and death, the inside world of the village corresponds with social order. Moreover, the festival described announces a change of season: the transgression from the dry to the monsoon season and as such it displays a number of agricultural features related to this change.

The fourth and last article in this third special issue of French journals on South Asia is dedicated to the study of six festivals performed amongst the higher Hindu castes in Nepal. As some of the Hindu festivals exclude women altogether from participation, these festive events are performed exclusively by women. They are: the *bhai tika* reflecting the role

of women as sisters; the *kṛṣṇa astamī* and *tīj* reflecting the role of women as seducers; and three festivals with women in the roles of maintainers of marital order: *swasthānī puṣṭā*, *thulo ekādaśī*, *ṛṣi pañcāmī*. A seventh festival, this time not performed by women but one in which women are the heroes celebrated, the *mātā tirtha*, is one where the female role of motherhood is in the centre of the cult. It is clearly stated by the author (V. Bouillier) that these women festivals as a whole comprise the spectrum of women's roles as sister, sexual partner, wife and mother and thereby reflect the common ideology concerning women in a society made by the thoughts of men.

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Kamal Prakash Malla: *Classical Newari Literature: A Sketch*.
Educational Enterprises Pvt., Kathmandu,
1982, pp. 90 + xii. Price not given.

Nothing has been so much misunderstood and adversely commented upon as the study of the Classical Newari Literature. The hostility of some educational heads in power during the Rana regime and after as also the indifference of the educated Newars to their literary heritage were no less responsible for this regrettable state of affairs than the lack of genuine enthusiasm on the part of the students of Nepalese history to discover the hidden treasures of their own culture. Professor K.P. Malla, who is a well-known man of letters, deserves my warmest congratulations for his very able and trustworthy exposition of the intrinsic character of classical Newari literature 'in the broad sense including the technical literature or sastras' as he puts it.

The book covers a large ground. There are twelve chapters and all of them are mines of information. The first six chapters present a brief survey of the literate culture and traditions of the Newars and the last six chapters deal with the literature proper.

The book opens with an intelligent survey of some prevailing attitudes of scholars, both foreign and indigenous. To quote the author 'if at one end of the spectrum there is hostility, indifference and presupposition, at the other end of the spectrum is complacency: the readiness and willingness to believe that the Newars have a long and glorious heritage of creative and original literature which is both quantitatively and qualitatively of an outstanding merit. One often gets this impression in the writings of the Newar men of letters'; and 'conflicting responses and attitudes to classical

Newari literature make it desirable to have a clearer picture than we have at present.' With this end in view he has attempted this essay and he has done this creditably well. He writes:

'Classical Newari Literature exists in all the three major genres, prose, poetry and drama. It began as a bilingual literature of translation and commentary in prose under the court patronage of (King) Jayasthiti Malla (A.D. 1380-1395). The earliest group belongs to this period.

'Out of some 500 dialects and languages of the Sino-Tibetan Family of languages, Newari is one of the five languages with a literary tradition of some age and merit. Although Newari is a Tibeto-Burman language by stock, its literary dialects are deeply influenced by the Indo-Aryan dialects, models and traditions. Just as Newar social and cultural systems are a product of a fusion of two streams, similarly classical Newari literature is a most tangible evidence of the symbiosis between a Tibeto-Burman language and the Indo-Aryan literature culture.'

This reviewer recommends the book to all who want to get correct information on the characteristics of classical Newari literature. The book is undoubtedly a valuable addition to the existing stock of this kind of literature and will be found exceedingly useful by all students of Nepalese history and culture. The printing and get-up of the book leave nothing to be desired in view of the shortcomings for the publishing business in this part of the world.

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