

A Few Words

Nepal is endowed with rich national heritage. Exploration of the antiquities which reveal the civilization and culture of ancient times is still in its preliminary stage. Many of the antiquities have still remained hidden. Such treasures could not have been exposed in a scientific way. The sporadic traces of culture and civilization somehow or other takes us even to the prehistoric times. So far exploration has not been undertaken on the basis of regional distribution of the country. Unlike the exploration in the terai and hilly region, exploration in the Himalayan range has not been done. There were human settlements in the high mountain areas in the caves, valleys and alongside the river-beds etc. since time immemorial. Archaeological investigations in these areas are in a very limited form. National history has not been written on the basis of archaeological evidences covering all areas.

Since a long time, transit trade to Tibet passed through Nepal. Among many passes which commanded the trade route to Tibet, Mustang was one of them. The literary sources testify the fact that Nepal had flourishing trade with Tibet. Nepal's interaction with Tibet had its impact on each other's culture. We find the traces of settlements in the high mountain areas in the remote areas in the past. Indications of indigenous culture are also apparent. Archaeological evidences in the caves in those areas would certainly take us back to a pre-historic period. If scientific and systematic investigations could be carried out in those areas we would be able to give an account of the chronological history of the area

and trace their eventful life and culture. Careful and scientific analysis of the antiquities, therefore, is imperative.

With this aim in view His Majesty's Government, Ministry of Education and Culture, Department of Archaeology signed an agreement with Coulfield-Meisezahl Institute for High Asian Studies, Bonn on the 22nd of November 1990, for the archaeological exploration of cave settlements in the high mountain areas of Mustang district, Dhaulagiri zone, Western development region of Nepal. This project is known as a Nepal German Project on High Mountain Archaeology. The project made the provision of training two archaeologists, who would be involved in the actual excavation works at the Institute of Prehistory University of Cologne, Federal Republic of Germany. It also provided permission for the transport of a selected number of findings to Germany for the purpose of scientific analysis in the laboratories of the Institute for Prehistory, Cologne. The Coulfield Meisezahl Institute for High Asian Studies, Bonn (CIHS) would be responsible for ultimately returning all these objects to Nepal after an appropriate time after study. The project also provided for establishing a committee to assist and support the execution of the project, which composed of equal number of representatives nominated by HMG/N and CIHS. The project would remain valid for the period of five years and could be extended and amended by mutual consent of the parties. The project is being financed by CIHS.

The project committee decided to publish a special issue of 'Ancient Nepal', the two-monthly journal of the Dept. of Archaeology. This issue includes the report about the findings of the archaeological works carried out in the lower Mustang area. In other words, the articles throw light on the different dimensions of exploration carried out in the Muktinath valley. The scientific analysis of the findings, the procedure adopted for the research work are all included in this report.

The article of Mr. Angela Simons entitled "Trial Excavation of a Cave System in Muktinath Valley" gives an account of cave system. She also refers to the study made by G. Tucci in (1953-55), the first investigation done by Prof. Dr. Dieter Schuh, Director General of CIHS in 1987, the preliminary archaeological investigation of 1990 and the systematic archaeological work carried out within the framework of Nepal German Project on High Mountain Archaeology which began in spring 1992. Charles Ramble's article on "Ritual of Political Unity in an old Nepalese Kingdom" throws light on the political organisation of the settlements based on religious rites. He has analysed *m'dos* ritual in detail and by taking a case study of a group of eighteen settlements that once constituted a kingdom. To refer to the author the *m'dos* rite was performed for the purification of the settlement. He also gives an account of the performance of the *Loyak* - the yak sacrifice and its evolution with the influence of Bon and Buddhism. The writer has tried to reveal the cultural elements which unify the people of the settlement.

Dr. B. Schmidt's article entitled "Dendrochronological Research in South Mustang" has elaborately mentioned the scientific research process i.e. the tree ring research to correlate the wooden specimens for dating purposes.

Dr. Rainer Graafen and Christian Seeber's article on "Important Trade Routes in Nepal and Their Importance to the Settlement

Process" analytically deals with the impact of trade in the settlement process. Scientific research process adopted to reveal maintenance of trade route mainly focus the community involvement on making the economy of the settlement areas.

Dr. Niels Gutschow's article on "Chörten in Mustang" gives a preliminary architectural account of Chörten with special reference to the Chörten of the cave at Luri. The author has given detail account of the paintings and regards them as of extraordinary quality. They are regarded as photographic evidence of the 14th century. The style of the paintings according to the author shows a peculiar blend of influences from Nepal to the south and Tibet and China to the north.

Thus the articles included in this edition will throw light on different dimensions of life and culture of the past. Further research works in the upper part of Mustang will bring about more information and explore the hidden treasure of high mountain areas.

The editorial board is indebted to Prof. Dr. Dieter Schuh for editing all the reports of the scientists and scholars befitting to the standard. We have treated him as the Co-editor of this journal.

We owe our sincere gratefulness to the Coulfield Meisezahl Institute for High Asian Studies (Bonn) for financial assistance for the publication of this journal and for the conduction of the project by providing necessary equipments and the resource persons. We anticipate that this cooperation will be further extended in the future.

Mr. Chandra Prasad Tripathy and Mr. Sukra Sagar Shrestha are being involved in this project as representatives from the Department. The Department is thankful to them.

- Khadga Man Shrestha