

wider society, i.e. the significance of ethnic identity in social interaction and the structural characteristics (economical conditions, power relations etc.) of this interaction. To elucidate this topic three problems are being examined.

First, the domains (religious, political, economical etc.) in which the Dom act as specialists are being analysed with regard to the roles they play, the positions they take up, their possibilities to manipulate and enlarge the scope of their acting, and the space for interaction created by themselves. Moreover, the domains from which they are excluded (e.g. by rules of endogamy) as well as the implications of the various restrictions on their interaction are being taken into account.

Second, the ways by which the Dom are qualified to articulate central societal and cultural values of the wider society are being investigated: namely by their musical apprenticeship, their intimate knowledge of the wider society's requests, the skill to control this knowledge, etc; and secondly their low status and social exclusion.

Third, the ideas and concepts by which the Dom are categorized and perceived and by which the Dom perceive themselves are being analysed. This implies the study of the

local mythology and the numerous stories about the Dom.

Since Hunza underwent a dramatic change after the removal of the local ruler in 1974 the study has to account for both, the diachronic and synchronic perspective. It will be argued that the analysis of the interethnic relationship shows a specific pattern of integration and segregation which varies in historically and situationally different contexts.

The data will be presented as a Ph.D. thesis.

Project: Sociolinguistic Survey of the Jirel Community

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Sponsored by: UNESCO

Since a motorable road reaches up to Jiri (Dolakha district), the Jirel community - in and around Jiri - is increasingly subject to social change. The aim of the project is to study the impact of this on the Jirel language. This will be done by collecting data on bilingualism, the domains and patterns of language use, attitudes towards the native language and towards the other languages spoken in the community.

The project is scheduled to be completed within one year.

## BOOK REVIEWS

**DOR BAHADUR BISTA**

*Fatalism and Development: Nepal's Struggle for Modernization.*  
Calcutta: Orient Longman, 1991. 187 pp.  
Rs. 150

D.B. Bista's long-awaited book presents a picture of the social organisation and values that govern Nepalese society with a view to assessing the country's chances of development. This synthetic treatment of the subject has the agreeable quality of avoiding digression while adopting a personal point of view; the relative partiality of the author's position is a necessary feature of a work that confines within the space of 187 pages the entire history of a country and the analysis of its institutions. The author addresses his compatriots (the book is dedicated to the people of Nepal) in a manner that is simultaneously critical and optimistic. The critical aspect is levelled at the caste society imported from Hindu India, and at its basically fatalistic system of values, whereas Bista's optimism arises from the country's inherent capacity for work and endurance, qualities that are demonstrated by the indigenous ethnic groups, the Matwali. The central argument is clearly stated and provides the thematic framework of the book.

The diachronic perspective that extends from the earliest times up to the present day highlights the importance of two pastoral groups, the Kirat and the Khas, in the prehistoric area. They represent the original substratum of Nepal, which had very little connection with the Gangetic plain. In the ancient historical period, with the first waves of Hindu immigration, the caste system appeared beside Vaishnavism, prac-

tised by an elite, whereas two other religious currents, Shaivism and Buddhism, remained independent of this system. The organisation of society into castes was adopted during the Middle Ages in the Magar and Khas kingdoms in the West, and by the Mallas in the Kathmandu Valley. But the adoption of this system was far from homogeneous in the country. For a long time the Gandaki region showed little interest in Brahmanism; moreover, it was only in recent times that the latter penetrated the eastern part of the country, where it encountered a flourishing local religion. Not to mention the northern Himalaya, in which the Bahuns themselves showed little interest.

In retracing the history of the Nepalese caste system, the author is at pains to emphasise a point that has perhaps been too frequently overlooked. It would be misleading to imagine a country passively allowing itself to be invaded by immigrants from the plains and their ideology. It is likely rather that there was some mutual backscratching between the Nepalese rulers and the Bahun immigrants. The latter, Bista proposes, created castes of clients by inviting the wealthier Khas, Magars and Newars to be initiated into Chetri status. The new initiates who took the title of Thakuri subsequently got the Bahuns to manufacture genealogies that linked them to the Rajputs of India and legitimated their ambitions to rule.

These manipulations led to a complete historical confusion, for the Khas, who moreover spoke an Indo-Aryan language, were attributed the same origin as the immigrants. But for D.B. Bista

"It is hard to believe that Nepalis, with their reputation for an independent spirit and martial qualities, could not produce their own leaders but had to wait for fugitive nobles to arrive from India and paid homage to them as soon as they set foot in the hills. There is evidence suggesting that such Indian pedigrees for the Thakuri-Chhetri are the artifacts of their own sycophants (p. 37)."

This line of reasoning does not spare the Shah dynasty, who "have been given a Rajput ancestry by a few historians, yet all their clan deities and family tutelary deities are worshipped and cared for exclusively by Magars - by Brahmanic standards a polluted low-caste ethnic group" (p. 38)

The next step in the process, according to this scenario, was that the system of values which originally belonged to an immigrant minority, ended up by ruling Nepalese society. The analysis of this dominant "hierarchical sub-culture" in the succeeding chapters shows a ruthless clarity on the part of an anthropologist observing his own culture.

The key concept of this analysis is fatalism: the order of the world and society is divinely ordained, and the course of events is irreversible. This doctrine has several distinct consequences for the behaviour of individuals, particularly with regard to work. According to a stratified conception of activities physical labour and material preoccupations are the province of the low castes, while the higher castes who are the exclusive beneficiaries of learning and religious speculations essentially despise all effort. This is why salaried work, preferably in administration, represents the ideal career for a Bahun: "In such jobs one is not expected

to actually work" (p. 80). It is also why students do not expect the educational system to provide them with training for future work, but rather with the means of acquiring a status - a status which will eventually allow them not to work. Moreover, a sense of responsibility, individual competence and the success that might derive from this, as well as a spirit of competition - in short, all the values of modern Western society - are discouraged by fatalism.

The author argues that dependence on the father is a fundamental aspect of the Nepalese character, a "national trait". A description of intra-family relations in its most concrete aspects shows that the very free upbringing of young children does not favour the development of their independence. Throughout his life an individual searches for a father-figure, with his authority and protection. In association with fatalistic preconceptions this dependence produces two institutions that Bista describes with perspicacity: *chakari*, which consists of playing oneself under the protection of someone more powerful, and to pander to him in exchange for the advantages that he is then entitled to receive; *afno manche* designates a sort of coterie, a network of social relations in which information and favours circulate. The operation of official institutions depends on these two unofficial strategies that inevitably invite corruption.

Another feature of this society of privileges, rather than rights, is its conception of time, which accords little reality to the present and sees the future as a subject of religious speculation rather than a domain to be planned - which gives some idea of the misunderstandings with which development programmes are received. Foreign aid

reinforces the father figure on which the Nepalese show themselves to be dependent, and to which they abandon all their responsibilities in the event of failure.

Bista very clearly sets out his position on this matter:

"Nepal cannot look to the cornucopia of foreign aid for solutions to all its problems and it is no use blaming it for the negative fallout of fatalistic belief.... It would be short-sighted to wish it away (150-151)."

The author briefly mentions a few studies criticising foreign aid without endorsing their position. Here the reader may be surprised to note that the acute incisiveness - tinged with humour - that Bista applies to his own society, disappears as soon as he mentions the

matter of foreign aid. Is this because he considers that a criticism of this nature would be ungracious in view of Nepal's effective economic dependence on foreign finance? Has he perhaps taken his cue from the development literature that systematically adopts a tone of dutiful self-criticism? The impression with which one is left is that in this severe but optimistic message, encouraging his compatriots to get a grip on themselves and to change their own society, the author himself adopts the role of the father-figure, admonishing his children without wasting his time on explaining to them what only grown-ups can understand, the serious business of politics.

Anne de Sales

## NEWS

### Himalayan Studies at Oxford Today

Over the last twenty years, as an increasing number of scholars of Nepal and the Himalayan region have progressed through Oxford University, many of these have been working in 'Social Anthropology and Ethnology', while others have come from Forestry and Oriental Studies. In the last decade these have been joined by Nepalese students, studying for degrees at Oxford across a full range of academic subjects from maritime law to medicine.

In the past there have been occasional seminars on Nepal at Oxford. In 1989 these included two presentations by the Swiss geologist and development specialist, Toni Hagen. At the Asian Studies Centre of St. Antony's College he talked from his unparalleled forty year's experience of Nepal; his talk for

the Refugee Studies Programme at Queen Elizabeth House covered the history of the Tibetan Refugee relief programme for which he was largely responsible in the 1960s. In 1990 Graham Clarke gave a seminar on Politics and Development in Nepal for the Contemporary South Asia Seminar Series, again at Queen Elizabeth House. This year at the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, David Gellner gave a Seminar on the types of approaches utilised in the study of Newar religion, a complex topic with its own long literary history. More recently, in the wake of Nepal's election a panel discussion was convened to debate the future of Nepal in the Contemporary South Asia Series (by Neville Maxwell and Graham Clarke). This seminar was exceptionally well-attended, and chaired by Tapan