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
Principal Investigator: Nirmal Man Tuladhar, CNAS. Tribhuvan University
Sponsored by: UNESCO

Since a motorable road reaches up to Jiri (Dolakha district), the Jirel community 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 BAHAHUR BISTA
Fatalism and Development: Nepal’s Struggle for Modernization.

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 Matwals. 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, practised 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 back-scratching 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 Chettri status. The new initiatives who took the title of Thakuri subsequently got the Bahuns to manufacture genealogies that linked them to the Rajputs of India and legitimating 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 independ-
ent 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 syopphants (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 tute-
lar deities are worshipped and cared
for exclusively by Magars - by Brah-
manic 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 "hierarchi-
cal 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 conse-
quences for the behaviour of individ-
uals, 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 despite all effort. This is why
salaried work, preferably in adminis-
tration, 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 responsi-
bility, 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 depend-
ance 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; a newmane
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 specula-
tion rather than a domain to be planned
- which gives some idea of the misun-
derstandings with which development
programmes are received. Foreign aid
reinforces the father figure on which
the Nepalese show themselves to be depen-
dent, and to which they abandon all
their responsibilities in the event of
failure.

Bista very clearly sets out his posi-
tion 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
discouraging 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, encour-
aging his countrymen 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 busi-
ness of politics.

Anne de Sales

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 occa-
sional 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 Poli-
tics 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
Gelner gave a Seminar on the types of
approaches utilise in the study of
Newar religion, a complex topic with its
own long literary history. More
recently, in the wake of Nepal's election
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

NEWS