

EDITORIAL

Richard Burghart, our Editor-in-Chief, colleague and friend, died on January 1st at the age of 49, after long months of suffering. Born in the United States, he received his higher education at Williamstown (Mass.) and Ibadan (Nigeria), and then settled in London to take up the study of social anthropology at the School of Oriental & African Studies in 1966. After obtaining an M.A., he first worked for the Belgian newspaper "Le Soir", writing articles on South Asia for its supplement. Dissatisfied with this experience as a journalist, he soon resumed his studies in London. He received his Ph.D. in 1976 and stayed at the SOAS where he worked as a lecturer in Asian Anthropology for nearly ten years, and where his colleagues came to value him as an outstanding partner. A hard start awaited him when, in 1987, he accepted the chair of Ethnology at Heidelberg University and became Head of a Department with a large number of students and with too small a staff. It took

him some time to achieve the first steps toward "modernizing" the Department, in the widest sense of the term, by amending the curriculum, improving the technical equipment and, above all, by intensifying exchanges with scientists from other departments of the South Asia Institute and from institutions abroad. Stimulating seminars on the "Structure of Hindu Tradition" and "Sovereignty in the Himalayas", with participants from France, Britain, the United States, Nepal and India, were just two of his attempts to reconsider old ideas and motivate new research.

This is not the place for an appreciation of Richard's work as a whole. It will be sufficient to mention his articles analyzing the social organization of the Vaishnavite pilgrimage centre at Janakpur (where he did extensive fieldwork), the concept of the nation-state in Nepal, and the structure of Hinduism, and to point to those writings in which he made an attempt to transcend the then-prevailing structuralist and Dumontian perspectives on Indian society. His was a vision which always aimed at what one may call the *essence in its context*; it drew benefit from his talent for perceiving contrasts, hidden boundaries and underlying unities, and was articulated in concise, unpretentious language, without indulging in rigidly abstract or wholesale generalization. Sadly, several book projects, among them *Spoken Maithili in its Social Context* and *State and Society in Nepal* remain unpublished.

The European Bulletin of Himalayan Research owes its existence to Richard's initiative and commitment. He intended it to function as a genuinely European undertaking, a forum of information devoted to recent publications and ongoing research, to be produced in cooperation between different countries, and to be developed, step by step, into a Journal. It is in the spirit of this legacy that we shall continue with two new members on the editorial board: Michael Hutt, Lecturer in Nepali at SOAS in London is now in charge of the work of editing, while Brigitte Merz, the recently appointed representative of the South Asia Institute at its Kathmandu Branch Office, will supply us with ideas and manuscripts from Nepal. It is planned (according to a preliminary agreement reached in 1990) to pass on the Bulletin to the Centre d'Etudes Himalayennes in Paris around 1996 for a term of two years or so.