
**Review by Ann Hecht**

Susi Dunsmore is no stranger to Nepal. Readers may already be familiar with her two previously published titles, *Weaving in Nepal* and *The Nettle in Nepal*, two small books with the directness and intimacy which comes from reproducing handwritten script. But now she has joined the big league, adding another title to the excellent series on textiles published by British Museum Press.

Susi Dunsmore’s knowledge is built on practical experience in the field, gained on her frequent visits to Nepal, often while accompanying her husband who was involved with the Land Resources Development Centre’s programme in east Nepal. She worked with the weavers and the spinners, especially in the Kosi Hill area, the centre for dhaka cloth, and further north, Sankhuwasabha, where the giant nettle (*allo*) grows. Her personal involvement in these crafts enables her to write in depth and with clarity about all the details that are so important to people in the field of textiles: how the fibres are prepared, how the heddles are made, how the looms are put together and how the weaves are made. This is not to say that the history and legends have been neglected; only to point out that the focus in books on textiles vary.

No textiles from ancient times exist in Nepal, therefore the author has to embark on detective work, studying sculptures, wall paintings and manuscripts to glean what is possible about the textiles in antiquity. Susi Dunsmore identifies designs on the folds of clothing, for example, from stone reliefs or sculptures dating between the third and sixth century AD. And, miraculously, she locates the figures of a spinner and a weaver amongst the hundreds in the large topographical scene of the Pilgrimage to Gosainthán in the early nineteenth century, visual evidence of cotton cloth weaving.

The chapter on raw material is particularly interesting because of the inclusion of more unusual fibres: the yak, both the inner and outer hair; the central Asian species of mountain goat (*Capra hircus*) from which the renowned cashmere shawls are made; and the Himalayan giant nettle *allo* (*Girardinia diversifolia*) which is proving to be a most versatile fibre used for anything from a sack to a lacy hand-knitted fashion garment sold in London.

"A new type of allo cloth began to be developed in the 1980s, when some weavers of Sankhuwasabha asked if KHRDEP, a rural development programme operating in the area, could assist them with improved processing and marketing of the traditional allo products for which the returns were very low." Experiments were started in which an allo warp was combined with a wool weft in traditional twills and diamond patterns. The resultant tweed became a popular alternative to the previously imported cloth used for men’s jackets.

Similar experiments were made with the cotton dhaka cloth used in making men’s tops and women’s blouses. Traditionally woven wool weft in traditional twills and diamond patterns. The resultant tweed became a popular alternative to the previously imported cloth used for men’s jackets.

The relevant chapter and the longest, under the title ‘Middle Mountains’, concludes with the weaving of the woollen *rais*. This is followed by chapters on two more regions: ‘Himalayan North’ on the Sherpa and Dolpo-pa (information for the latter gratefully acknowledged as coming from Dr. Corneille Jest of the CNRS); and the ‘Subtropical south’, the home of the jute, where biodegradable jute
is being put to new issues in large mats of netting laid on bare roadside slopes to prevent surface erosion.

Unfortunately in a short review one cannot do justice to the contents. However, what stands out above all else in Nepalese textiles is the feeling that the text is about the present and the future rather than the past. The weavers and spinners are prepared to experiment and are taking responsibility for their own future.

**UPDATE OF HIMALAYAN ARCHIVES IN PARIS**

*(EBHR n°3 & n°4)*

by

Lucette Boulnois, Jenny Ferreux & Pierrette Massonnet

Since the publication of papers on Himalayan resources in Paris in issues n°3 and n°4 (1992) of this bulletin, some changes have occurred as to the locations of the collection.

**Maison de l’Asie**

22, avenue du Président Wilson, Paris 75016 (Tel : 01 53 70 18 20)

The Maison de l’Asie was closed for a long time for repairs and reorganisation; it has reopened and now shelters not only the library collections of the Ecole Française d’Extrême-Orient and the Centre d’Etudes pour les Religions Tibétaines (see *European Bulletin of Himalayan Research*, n°3, 1992, pp.34-36 and 32-33), but also the collections of two libraries previously located at 54, boulevard Raspail in the Maison des Sciences de l’Homme : the Centre d’Etudes de l’Inde et de l’Asie du Sud and the Centre de Documentation sur la Chine contemporaine (see *EBHR* n°4, 1992, pp.28-31).

The three libraries, EFEO, Centre d’Etudes de l’Inde and Centre de Documentation sur la Chine contemporaine, have been regrouped there and their collections (with the exception of some periodicals on India which are still kept at their former address, boulevard Raspail) are available to readers (no special conditions for admission) in a spacious common reading-room. The Chief Librarian in charge of this library is M. Jean-Louis Taffarelli (Tel : 01 53 70 18 41); the Deputy Chief Librarian is Mme Barrès-Koteli (Tel : 01 53 70 18 43). Opening hours : 9 a.m.-6 p.m., Monday to Friday.