different ways in which people may belong to different social categories at different times, and the plurality of perspectives on group membership. He stresses the difference between the social categories used by the local people in their daily lives and theoretical abstractions applied from outside: the step from observations or talks with individuals in the field to a generalization must be reconstructible.

Consequently, the three chapters which follow focus on identity processes and discourses in Gilgit. By meticulously evaluating the ethnographic material collected during his field work, Sökefeld characterizes social categories along the lines of indigenous notions. He divides his material regarding the processes of identity into three parts. In the first part (Ch. 3), he discusses differences between people from Gilgit and people from outside. He starts with accounts of the ‘original settlers of Gilgit’, who claim to have undertaken the difficult task of first cultivating the barren land; they had the power to integrate newcomers by sharing land and arranging marriages. Due to historical events—i.e. the arrival of the Kashmiri Dogras and the British colonizers—the ownership of land changed and waves of migration into Gilgit took place, turning the ‘original people of Gilgit’ into a minority. The chapter proceeds to describe various categories, such as descent groups, groups living in the same area, kinship groups, craftspeople of low status (including their noteworthy attempts to improve their social standing), and people migrating into Gilgit from adjacent valleys. In the discussion of all these categories the author convincingly shows the multi-layered process of identity formation, which is both a personal matter—with perspectives depending on the single person narrating and elaborating on the respective subjects—as well as a matter of integration and segregation on a higher level.

In the second part (Ch. 4), he deals with the conflict between religious groups, namely between the Twelver-Shia and the Sunni. After outlining the process of different waves of Islamization, the author discusses accounts of the so-called tensions between the religious groups in the area, which culminated in the massacre of 1988, or, as Sökefeld himself puts it, “the Kerbala of the Shia in Gilgit” (p. 218). These events had a strong impact in that they further polarized the groups in spite of the ties which had existed between them (e.g. through intermarriage) and changed the political environment (elections were fought along religious lines, for example). Identities were re-examined and religion became a dominant factor in the ascription of identity, although individuals from both sides expressed their regret and chose to act on categories of identity other than those defined by religion.

In the third part (Ch. 5), the author explores the Kashmir conflict with regard to the formation of a political identity. Due to the Kashmir conflict the Northern Areas are under the sole administration of Pakistan. Today its inhabitants are still deprived of fundamental civil rights such as the right to vote in the elections for the National Assembly. This unsatisfactory political situation led repeatedly to insurrections in the area, to reforms in the 1970s, and finally to various demands by different people and political parties. One is for the integration of the area within the state of Pakistan as a fifth province, another is a call for an independent state. In the process of the new political mobilization since the mid 1980s, different categories of identity which are supposed to support the creation of a political entity, such as language and local culture, are being discussed; but one may doubt whether the pluralistic political culture with its differing aims and ideologies can be united into one force against the domination of the Northern Areas by Pakistan.

In the final chapter (Ch. 6), Sökefeld summarizes his central point: Individuals cannot and should not be seen as representatives of a group but rather be taken seriously as those who speak, act, and interpret events on their own account. Citing Giddens, he stresses the mutual influence of actors and structure. Throughout the presentation of his ethnographic material, Sökefeld shows that the positioning of the actors and the practical logic of daily life can only be understood if one takes seriously the flexibility of mutual ascriptions.


Reviewed by Michael Hutt

Pallav Ranjan divides his English adaptation of the Swasthani Vrat Katha, the ‘Story of the Fast to the Goddess Swasthani’, into twenty-two short ‘readings’. Two thirds of these deal with characters and myths from the Hindu Puranas. Readings 1 and 2 deal with cosmology and the creation of the world. The main theme of readings 3 to 7 is the story of Shiva’s marriage to Satidevi, daughter of Daksyaprajapati, Daksyap’s insulting of Shiva, Satidevi’s self-
immolation, and Shiva's mourning and scattering of the pieces of Satidevi's body, during which the demon Taraka takes over the world. Readings 8 to 15 begin with the birth of Parbati, who manages to secure Shiva as her husband by reading the Swasthani stories, and go on to recount the myths of Shiva as Kirateswor in the forest near Pashupati, the births and exploits of Ganesh and Kumar, the defeats first of Three Cities, and the bizarre series of seduction, murder, and suicide involving Bishnu and Shiva, and Jalandar and his wife, Brinda.

Finally, readings 16 to 22 contain the story of Goma, a girl who is cursed by Shiva to marry a man ten times her age. This is in some ways the most interesting section of the text. At the age of seven, Goma marries a 70-year-old man, Shivasharma, and they live with her parents. Some years later, Shivasharma decides he must go home, and Goma goes with him. As soon as they have departed, her parents die in an accident, and on their journey thieves steal everything from Shivasharma and Goma, then Goma becomes pregnant. When they reach Shivasharma's village he goes begging for food but dies in a fall. Goma bears a son, Nawaraj, and they are supported by some local rich people. In time, Nawaraj marries Chandrawati, then he searches for and finds his father's bones and they live with her parents...
Which brings us to the question of readership. For whom is this 'adaptation' intended? Nepali readers with a mastery of English will admire the elegance of its prose, and will also appreciate this effort to bring this text to the attention of a wider readership. To introduce the text to a foreign readership which is unable to approach it in its original language would be a worthy aim, but if this is indeed the intention the success of the initiative is rather circumscribed by the absence of any real explanation or analysis of the text's precise significance and meaning, despite the fluency and accessibility of the English rendering itself. To fully understand what is going on here, a foreign reader would need also to be directed to a work like Bennett's.

This is not to detract from Pallav Ranjan's achievement, which is notable and worthy of praise. The text is also greatly enhanced by the inclusion of illustrations whose abstract nature suggests that they emanate from the same mythic dimension in which these stories take place.

Information for authors

Proposals for articles should in the first instance be sent to the lead editor, Michael Hutt. All articles submitted are subject to a process of peer review.

Please use author-year citations in parentheses within the text, footnotes where necessary, and include a full bibliography. This is often called the 'Harvard' format.

In the body of your text:

It has been conclusively demonstrated (Sakya 1987) in spite of objections (Miller 1988: 132-9) that the ostrich is rare in Nepal.

In the bibliography:


We welcome information on upcoming conferences and publications. For advertising rates please contact the editors.

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