The ethnographic study concentrates in chapters 2 to 4 on the dilemmas of livelihood facing the various artisan communities who for the most part can no longer rely on their occupational specialisms. These consist of Lohār blacksmiths (the most economically secure), Sunār goldsmiths, Oudh masons, Pārki basket weavers, Damāl tailors, Sārkī leather workers (described as the poorest, most malnourished, and uneducated), Okheda ex-palace guards, and Bādī potters and prostitutes. These groups dislike the collective appellation de prem. The collapse of service patronage under the Bhalara kingdom by the 1960s resulted in a move into economically more diverse occupations, with women much less involved in artisanal production than the men, and more motivated to support their families by taking on agricultural work for high-caste families. The proximity of India has enabled an increase in migrant labour, and also offered low castes an alternative self-perception through processes of caste reform in India.

Cameron claims that in the analysis of Bhalara's social inequalities the concept of class is culturally inappropriate, not being a locally recognized category. This is perhaps one of the least convincing aspects of the book, as she supplies sufficient material to argue the contrary. The appropriation of land by high castes through registration, reinforcing patrilineal control and high-caste gender ideology, is central to her analysis. Untouchables are denied access to the land market through the exclusionary monopolization of high-caste inheritance practices (pp.70-3). The somewhat surprising response to differential land holding is the system of māda tenancy of land, taken as collateral for 'loans' made by low to high castes, funded by the former's agricultural and migrant earnings. Whether some low castes are more involved in migrant labour than others is not discussed. It is not clear if the data generated by Cameron's Time Allocation methodology is amenable to answering this sort of question. On the whole, only sketchy attention is given to many issues of livelihood strategy, given the insistence on the importance of women's efforts to achieve economic autonomy. There is, for instance, little discussion of livestock keeping. One footnote records a high proportion of loans taken for animal purchase, while another footnote discusses one woman's reputation as a good dairy producer, but it is not even made clear whether she is from the low castes.

Perhaps the issue of class and its (mis)recognition would have been better argued if the author had addressed the important studies of rural low castes in central and west Nepal respectively by Hiroshi Ishii (1982) and Inge-Britt Krause (1988). It is surprising that these are overlooked, along with Tom Cox's work on the Bādī community in Jajarkot, in a book that castigates anthropologists for not studying rural untouchability. Their research on the historical conditions of indebtedness and bonded labour would have given this book a firmer comparative basis. Cameron hardly mentions indebtedness, but alludes obliquely to its effects on the system of patronage for artisanal services in her discussion of the way in which Lohār women's contributions to 'reciprocal' work groups controlled by high-caste women is not reciprocated by work, but in the securing of contracts for their further services (p.114). Krause's argument is that class consciousness in Mugu is inhibited by a similar embedding of command over low castes' labour in delayed and diffuse advances and returns. Furthermore, Cameron's entire rationale for arguing against symbolic interpretations of caste in favour of forms of control over people and resources, stressing transactions of material values between castes rather than ritual giving denoting status hierarchy (p.49), contains at the very least an implicit theory of class.

This point of difference apart, I must strongly recommend On the Edge of the Auspicious as a perceptive treatment of gender that is pertinently located within regional scholarship and contemporary anthropological theory. There are some memorable passages of writing on jakram women's dances (p.215), on the sexual imagery of ploughing, on the wit deployed against exploitation, and on the effectiveness of stylized public insult (invoking a variety of possible incestuous relationships, and an eloquent wishing of death on an offending woman's male relatives (p.163)). Cameron creates a vivid sense of her own position and experience within the community of research, and does not hold back from mentioning the sometimes physically 'repulsive conditions' of fieldwork, and the 'loathsome' treatment by high castes of the women and men whose voices speak out from the pages of her book.

References


Reviewed by Mark Turin

The Thakali are one of very few ethnic groups autochthonous to the Nepali Himalaya who can boast that the academic bibliography pertaining to their culture runs to almost fifteen pages of small print. Michael Vinding’s eagerly awaited monograph concludes a good five decades of intense anthropological debate on this famous Tibeto-Burman population of lower Mustang simply by having more information in one place than any previous study. Thankfully, although published in an era marked by navel-gazing anthropology, The Thakali shows no sign of having been caught up in such reflexive discussion. Whilst
critics may take issue with the lack of cutting-edge theory, Vinding's curiously traditional yet personal style has much to recommend it.

The structure of the book is pleasingly classic. Vinding writes of the flora, fauna, and topography of the Thak Khola valley, describes his first arrival in the area and offers an in-depth historical analysis of the whole of Mustang. Thereafter, in chapters 4 to 13, Vinding describes the economic strategies of a Thakali household, the kinship system, patrilineal descent groups, Thakali household structure, social stratification within the group and in the area as a whole, marriage, death, and other salient moments in the Thakali life cycle, the political systems of Thak Khola, the different religious influences on the Thakali and their own indigenous belief system, and finally a descriptive analysis of the major Thakali festivals. Chapter 14 deals with the history of Thakali emigration and Thakalis living outside Thak Khola, while chapter 15 offers a careful analysis of continuity and change among the Thakali. Appendix 1 is a collection of historically important documents relating to the Thakali, all culled from the invaluable Regmi Research Series, and Appendix 2 presents a few salient Thakali myths and fables, which are well chosen and thoughtfully translated.

In *The Thakali*, Vinding offers us more of a summary of his own previous writings on the ethnic group than an overview of the previous literature in general. As he writes in his Preface, his monograph was submitted for the degree of Doctor Philosophiae in May 1997, and "no major changes have been undertaken since then." Moreover, his dissertation, and thus also the book, is largely a synthesis of all his earlier articles. Of the fifteen chapters, eleven are based (at least in part) on his twelve previously published articles, many of which appeared in *Kailash* and *Contributions to Nepalese Studies*, albeit "...revised and updated to take into account the findings of recent studies" (p.46, footnote 2). Whilst this is standard academic practice, two serious issues relating to content should be raised. The first is that for anyone who has read Vinding's articles, there is little new to learn from reading his 470-page monograph. Second, and perhaps more importantly, Vinding's descriptions of life in Thak Khola are noticeably dated. Chapter 4, for example, entitled 'Making A Living', reads more like a historical document than a contemporary description of Thakali economic strategies. Vinding is clearly aware of this, and takes care to warn us that, although updated, "the chapter presents a picture of mainly the early 1980s" (p.93, footnote 1). Notwithstanding these two issues, there is a lot to be said for having his thoughtfully written articles reworked into book form, thus making them accessible to a wider audience.

The greatest strength of Vinding's work lies in his unflinching attention to detail, which is supported by 25 years of accumulated experience. There are few other Himalayan anthropologists who have invested a quarter of a century in their first full ethnography. Vinding's monograph is both meticulously researched and satisfyingly comprehensive. Some of his asides make for the best reading: for instance, footnote 4 on p.11 reads, "The wind blowing from the south is called nambar, while the north wind is known as phamar." These details are the backbone of Vinding's monograph as a record of Thakali culture, language, and society in the latter years of the 20th century. Moreover, it should be added that it is precisely because Vinding is not encumbered by proving or disproving any particular contemporary anthropological theory that he has the space to include such details.

There is, however, a more pedantic side to his thick description, which may not appeal to all readers. In his section on goods and products used by the Thakali, we learn that when it comes to cigarettes, "...most smokers use cheap brands, but some prefer more expensive filter cigarettes" (p.103). The inclusion of such details does make one feel rather as if no fact which Vinding has gathered can escape inclusion in the monograph. Other such comments, whilst being ethnographically valid, are at risk of coming across as rather plate­tudinous or, at worst, downright odd. In his discussion of what a Thakali man would find attractive in a woman, he informs us that "her bosom...should be neither too big, nor too small" (p.223). Although surprising, the inclusion of such details does have the advantage of livening up a sometimes plodding list of ethnographic facts.

The other high point of Vinding's work is Chapter 2, 'Living Among the Thakali'. Unlike the authors of many traditional ethnographies who are noticeably absent from their own monographs, Vinding quite overtly paints himself into the social fabric he is documenting. He shares with the reader his fears, doubts, and also his initial excitement in a most forthright, at points even disarming, manner: "There exist only general guidelines on how to conduct fieldwork, and in the field the anthropologist has to find his/her own way through trial and error" (p.28). Vinding's decision to describe his *ritue de passage* will be of enormous value to students of anthropology. Moreover, his candour comes across as honest and sincere, a most refreshing kind of reflexivity in a climate in which such confessions either dominate a book or are relegated to the position of a disclaimer in a preface. Vinding effortlessly strikes the right balance between personal anecdote and serious ethnography—no small achievement. To my knowledge, there are no other published ethnographies of the Himalaya which deal with the trials and tribulations of fieldwork so candidly, and for this alone, if for no other reason, *The Thakali: A Himalayan Ethnography* should appear at the top of every South Asian anthropology syllabus.

Vinding's highly personal approach may have something to do with the fact that he is no career anthropologist with a tenure-track position to justify. Arriving in Nepal for the first time in 1972, at the age of 21, he has spent a great deal of time in the country since, and is presently based in Bhutan. Save a few related articles, Vinding has concentrated his focus on the Thakali for 27 years, and so it comes as no surprise that at times he comes across as a little possessive of the ethnic group as a whole: "...the Thakali came to be 'my' people" (p.29).

Vinding's explicit purpose is to "present a comprehensive ethnography on the Thakali" (p.4) and in this he succeeds masterfully. We can but hope that he will prepare a South Asian edition, since £30 is rather steep for Indian and Nepali scholars, not to mention the Thakali themselves for whom he hopes his book "may also be of use" (Preface). As minority languages and ethnic cultures are increasingly subsumed into the global whole,
there remains ever less time to document them. Vinding has described a rapidly-changing Himalayan society, and in so doing has made a lasting contribution to anthropology. The Thakali is at once refreshingly personal and pleasingly traditional, a truly rare combination in modern ethnography.

Kathmandu Valley Painting—The Jucker Collection by Hugo E. Kreijger.

Reviewed by Julia A.B. Hegewald

This publication is a descriptive and interpretative catalogue of the Newar paintings and drawings in the private ownership of the Swiss collectors Mischa and Angela Jucker. The catalogue contains 39 religious paintings on cloth (paubhās) (32 Buddhist, 7 Hindu), four works on paper, four bookcovers, and seven artists' sketchbooks. Most of the paintings have not been previously published. The main catalogue section is preceded by a short introduction to the geography and cultural history of Nepal, the artistic milieu of the painters, and a brief commentary on the stylistic development and religious context of the paintings in the collection.

Kreijger's book is an especially valuable contribution to our knowledge of the wealth, beauty and development of Newar painting and its relation to the painting traditions of India and Tibet. Despite the current proliferation of illustrated publications on the arts of Tibet and the Himalaya, it is rare for a study to focus on Nepal and in particular on the Newar paintings of the Kathmandu Valley. This publication provides a wide audience access to an unpublished collection through high quality reproductions. It successfully portrays and describes individual items in the collection, but also provides a solid overview of the pattern of development and change which has taken place in the painting tradition of the Newars over eight centuries.

The paintings are arranged in chronological order with the earliest dating from circa 1200 and the latest from 1912. The individual paubhās are described in minute detail, and with every new picture the reader is invited to consider the paintings closely, following register by register and scene by scene, details which are easily identifiable on the photographs. Kreijger also provides useful and informative interpretations of certain colours, mudras, and symbols specific to the Newar painting repertoire, and narrates many of the stories depicted on the paubhās, thus drawing attention to the important narrative quality of the paintings. Unfortunately, only two of the many substantial inscriptions incorporated in the paintings and translated by Ian Alsop and Gautamvajra Vajracharya are published in the book.

Whilst Kreijger provides a mass of detailed information on individual works, this does not detract from a comprehensive presentation of Newar painting in general. Of particular interest are those sections in which he traces the development of specific recurrent motifs over the centuries from one painting to another, and in doing so outlines innovations and stylistic developments in the Newar paubhā tradition. Examples illustrating such stylistic changes are the roundels containing flying vidyāharas, the garments of the patron and his family, and decorative motifs such as flowers or the shapes of the headaddresses worn by certain divine beings. A considerable amount of helpful dating is done through the examination and relative sequencing of such motifs. In this context, Kreijger is also able to show that the collection contains several groups of representations of one and the same deity dating from different periods. The fact that important stylistic developments in the Newar painting tradition can be identified in the paintings contained in this collection without any need to refer to examples elsewhere highlights the comprehensive significance and importance of this private collection.

Particular attention has been paid throughout this monograph to the dates of the scrolls. However, whilst the age of a painting and its location in a secure chronology is both desirable and helpful, the precision implied by dating based on stylistic comparisons alone requires caution. Such 'precise' dating coupled with frequent assurances that many paintings, compositions and subject matters are 'most unusual', 'extremely rare', 'relatively unknown' and 'uncommon', may mislead the reader. Kreijger's understandable eagerness to promote the attributes of the collection occasionally gives the impression of salesroom persuasion—a metier which is familiar to the author. In his preface, Kreijger briefly draws attention to the fact that many pieces are without precedent (p.9), but it might also have been valuable to consider the question of why it is that such a large number of paintings in this collection are unusual in so many respects. On the one hand, the collection might simply reflect the collector's eye for atypical works whose availability confirmed their unorthodoxy. On the other, might the paintings in this collection reflect a previously unrecognized extent of individual expression and interpretation in a very conservative painting tradition? The lack of answers to such questions should not distract from the considerable contribution which this book makes to the study of painting in Nepal.

The catalogue's short introduction might have achieved more without being longer. On the other hand, it is extremely helpful that, where possible, individual paintings of the collection have been directly related to historical periods and developments. In his account of the artistic milieu, the author comments on the "low caste status presently held by the painting profession in Nepal" (p.15). Here, it might have been helpful to have differentiated between the traditional paubhā painters of the Chitrakar caste, and painters who have been more experimental in terms of their choice of media, techniques, and subject matter and may be referred to as 'modern painters'. Most of these come from higher