REVIEWS

Manjushree Thapa *The Tutor of History and*  
Samrat Upadhyay *Arresting God in Kathmandu*  
Sarah LeVine 108

Tomek Lehnert *Rogues in Robes: An inside chronicle of a recent Chinese-Tibetan intrigue in the Karma Kagyu lineage of Diamond Way Buddhism*  
David N. Gellner 112

Gyurme Dorje *Tibetan Elemental Divination Paintings: Illuminated manuscripts from the White Beryl of Sangs-rgyas rGya-mtsho with the Moonbeams treatise of Lo-chen DharmaSri*  
Martin Boord 113

Vasant K. Saberwal *Pastoral Politics: Shepherds, bureaucrats, and conservation in the western Himalaya*  
Ben Campbell 116

David N. Gellner 119

Contributors

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NGOs as thekādārs or sevaks?
Identity crisis in Nepal’s non-governmental sector

Celayne Heaton Shrestha

Yogis and stomachs

It’s staff meeting day in the field office of BEACON, a national NGO. Around 12 p.m. staff drift into a small square room, with chairs and benches scavenged from other parts of the cement office. The office head, Dharma, opens the proceedings: “You, Ram Chandra, take the minutes” and to staff, some sitting two to a chair, caps bearing the NGO’s logo, others sitting on a mat in the centre of the room, he says: “We’ll go on until 3.30 p.m. Say anything you want inside this room and time, but tomorrow do not go and say something else outside. What’s the agenda today? What will we discuss?”

“I have one, sir: Budget and programme?” says Kiran. Dharma writes on his notepad. (There is no board in the room.)

“I also have something, sir, it’s for example—”

“Don’t explain it now!” Dharma interrupts him.

“Ticket” corrects the first.

Dharma writes the word ‘ticket’ down. “Aru (anything else)?”

Another member of staff suggests: “bhāt (cooked rice),”

“What do you mean, bhāt?”

“Say DA (daily allowance),” a third person urges the first.

“When one comes to the meeting one has to eat, one needs DA,” the first explains.

Dharma jots down ‘DA’.

“And in relation to trainings, sir.”

“And communications.”

“Torch batteries.”

“Cycle repairs!”

1 A yogi or jogi generally refers to an ascetic, a religious mendicant. This passage, as all narratives of the field in this paper, is based on my fieldnotes. All details are as recorded at the time of fieldwork (October 1996-December 1997) and verbal exchanges are verbatim. A list of acronyms used appears on pp. 32-3.