

The publication promises to be an important contribution, and a Nepali language edition would be very worthwhile. Finally, a well-designed website houses the abstracts of all the papers presented as well as further information on the conference and the Social Science Baha. It can be found at:

[www.himalassociation.org/baha/nepalidemocracy](http://www.himalassociation.org/baha/nepalidemocracy)

### **Report on the Conference *Nepal – Current State of Research and Perspectives* held in memory of Prof. Bernhard Kölver in June 2003 in Leipzig**

By Alexander von Rospatt

A conference on Nepalese studies was held at Leipzig, Germany from June 19th to 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2003. It was organized by the Institute of Indian and Central Asian Studies at the University of Leipzig in commemoration of Prof. Bernhard Kölver (1938-2001), who had been chair of that Institute until 2001. Prof. Kölver has been one of the foremost scholars in Nepalese studies since 1970 when he came to Nepal as the first director of the Nepal German Manuscript Preservation Project. As coordinator of the Nepal research programme (Forschungsschwerpunkt) funded by the German Research Council (DFG) from 1980 to 1990 he was one of the key figures to promote inter-disciplinary approaches to research on Nepal. The agenda of the Leipzig conference was very much in accordance with the kind of studies he supported and to which he dedicated so much of his life. Moreover, the organizers felt that after the dramatic changes undergone by Nepal during the years since the establishment of democracy in 1990, the time had come to take account of these changes and assess how they have affected Nepalese studies. The conference was especially meant to serve as a platform for discussing ideas and experiences and for developing new perspectives of inter-disciplinary cooperation on an international level.

The Conference brought together indologists, anthropologists, historians, geographers, linguists, art historians, sociologists, ethno-musicologists and tibetologists from Nepal, Europe and the U.S. While many of the invited scholars had participated in the aforementioned Nepal research programme of the DFG, there were also numerous other scholars, most of them representing a new generation who were drawn into the field of Nepalese studies more recently. In addition to the 29 scholars who read papers, there were 13 further official participants, among them Dr Ulrike Kölver, the wife of the late Prof. Kölver, who herself is a renowned scholar of Newari lexicography and linguistics. Furthermore, a small but enthusiastic group of students from Leipzig and other parts of Germany had congregated for the event. The venue of

the conference, a stately villa belonging to the University, turned out to be an ideal setting. It did not only accommodate all participants in one lecture hall, but also created a congenial atmosphere that was conducive to the many fruitful informal exchanges that took place alongside the talks.

The conference was opened with a lecture by Siegfried Lienhard in which he recalled his "way to Newari." The following two and a half days were divided into sections dedicated to particular topics. The first section was on the "Changing Social Structure and Identity among the Newars." Gérard Toffin looked at the ethnicisation of caste, focusing on the *gyāpu* agriculturists of Kathmandu, while David Gellner reflected more broadly on the study of the Newars and the recent ethnicisation and politicisation of Newar Buddhism. Todd Lewis dealt with the localisation of the Buddha's life story among the Newars in Chittadhar Hridaya's epic poem *Sugat Saurabh*, while Nutan Sharma examined the "social topography of the Rājopādhyāyas in Patan." The next section took stock of the dramatic political changes of the last years. Anne de Sales and Gaby Tautscher treated aspects of the Maoist movement, while Diwakar Acharya addressed the contested status of Sanskrit in Nepal, and Elvira Graner examined patterns of Nepalese labour migration. In the following section papers were read that reflected on the current state of Nepalese Studies (Nirmal Tuladhar) and presented specific research projects, such as the initiatives of the Swiss National Centre of Competence in Research 'North-South' (Ulrike Müller-Böker), the survey of the Hodgson Manuscripts from the British Library (Ramesh Dhungel) and the Nepalese-German Manuscript Cataloguing Project (D. Dimitrov and Per Sörensen, with reference to a comparable project of the National Library in Bhutan).

The second main day was introduced by a section dedicated to the historiography of Nepal. Axel Michaels dealt with "the religious judge and rituals of purification" on the basis of the *Muluki-Ain* of 1854, while Heiko Frese examined the representation of Jayasthitimalla in the "Later Chronicles." Further papers in this section were read by Mahes Raj Pant who surveyed the varying categories of Brahmins under the Newar kings, by Kashinath Tamot who reassessed the boundaries of "Nepal Mandala" and by Marie Lecomte-Tilouine who studied the "Pancakoshi of Western Nepal." The subsequent Tibetological section drew together a survey of the "Tibetan varieties spoken in Nepal" by Roland Bielmeier and a presentation of "old and new Tibetan sources concerning Svayambhunath" by Franz-Karl Ehrhard. The afternoon was dominated by a section on "Religion and Ritual." After an ethno-musicological analysis of "spirit possession ceremonies in Kumaon" by Franck Bernède, there followed a paper on the planetary deities in the "ritual traditions of the Kathmandu Valley" by Marianna Kropf and a "first appraisal" of the "life-cycle rituals of old age among the Newars" by Alexander v. Rospatt. The section was rounded off by an overview of the "guthis and rituals in the town of Sankhu" by Balgopal Shrestha. The final section of the day brought together "ethno-historical reflections" by Martin Gaenzle on the "Nepali community in

Benares," and a paper by Michael Witzel in which he placed Nepal in a larger Himalayan context, relating it in particular to Kashmir.

The only section on the last day was dedicated to art history. Adalbert Gail examined mutual iconographic influences in "Buddhist and Hindu tantra art in Eastern India and Nepal," while Anne Vergati presented a Newar painting depicting Kathmandu Valley and the pilgrimage to Siluthi. The conference concluded with a final plenary session dedicated to a resume of the conference.

It is not in good style for someone involved with the organization to declare the conference a success. However, I feel that it was precisely this: densely packed programme with many excellent talks that demonstrated progress in the field of Nepalese Studies and showed that new vistas of research are opening up. There were lively discussions which demonstrated that despite their high degree of specialization the talks were of general interest for the interdisciplinary audience. Most importantly, there was a relaxed and amicable atmosphere which aided the resumption of old contacts and the formation of new ones. The conference showed how useful and fruitful it can be to occasionally convene such interdisciplinary and international meetings of scholars dedicated to the study of Nepal, so it is comforting that there was talk of organizing a similar conference in France in a few years' time.

It is planned to publish the conference's proceedings in a joint Nepalese-German publication. Until then the homepage of the conference (<http://www.uni-leipzig.de/~indzaw/indo/gemeinsam/nepalkonferenz/>) may be consulted for precise details of the programme and abstracts of the talks. Thanks are due to the conveners of the conference, and most importantly to Adelheid Buschner from the Institute of Indian and Central Asian Studies who took care of all practical arrangements most competently. The conference would have been impossible without generous funding by the German Research Council (DFG) and the support of the Akademisches Begegnungszentrum Leipzig which provided the venue for the conference, the beautiful Villa Tillemanns, the traditional guest house of the University of Leipzig.

## **Research Report: Labour Migration from Far West Nepal to Delhi, India**

By Susan Thieme, Michael Kollmair, Ulrike Müller-Böker

Labour migration from Far West Nepal to Delhi, India, is the topic of the ongoing PhD project from Susan Thieme at the Department of Geography at the University of Zurich. The thesis is part of the NCCR (National Centre of Competence in Research) North-South funded by the Swiss National Science