

***Resistance and the State: Nepalese experiences*, edited by David N. Gellner. New Delhi: Social Science Press, [2003]. Pp. 383 + xiv. ISBN 81-87358-08-4.**

Reviewed by John Whelpton, Hong Kong

This collection of papers, originating in a South Asia Studies Conference held in Edinburgh in 2001, is not narrowly focussed on Nepal's current political crisis but addresses a wide range of problems now confronting the country. After the editor's own introduction, which discusses the basic concepts of "state" and "resistance", and outlines the historical background, the ten papers are categorised into three sections, focussing on development and local politics, ethnic activism and the Maoist insurgency.

The first section begins with two essays exploring how government initiatives, sanctioned by the international development industry, can be experienced at local level as restricting individual and community autonomy and as a threat to livelihood strategies. In a paper with jointly authored discussion of theoretical issues but separate accounts from the field, Ian Harper and Tarnowski find similar issues raised by both public health and conservation programmes. Tarnowski argues that despite the switch from centralised state control of forests to the "community forestry" approach, management remains in practice very much a top-down affair whilst the formalised committee structure of user groups makes it easy for members of the existing village-level elite to retain key positions. Harper examines dilemmas posed by the D.O.T.S. (Directly Observed Therapy Short-Course) T.N.B. control programme. To avoid sufferers' failing to complete a full course of medication, and thus both jeopardising their own recovery and strengthening the TB bacillus's drug-resistance, D.O.T.S. requires health workers to observe the patient taking each dose of medicine and withhold treatment if this condition is not met.

Very similar ground to Harper's and Tarnowski's is covered by Ben Campbell's examination of how the local Tamangs circumvent the regulations imposed upon them by the authorities of the Langtang National Park, whose establishment criminalised villagers' traditional use of forest resources. In line with much recent thinking in the social sciences, he is concerned with the state's overriding of local interests and local knowledge, and also questions how far the Nepalese bureaucracy genuinely wants or is able to put into practice the environmentalist theories in whose name it claims to act.

The remaining two papers in the first section concentrate on popular attitudes towards the state in general and on the political process itself.

William Fisher finds a growing disenchantment with officialdom and party politicians in Myagdi district during the 1990s, together with increasing responsiveness towards *janajāti* rhetoric and, among the untouchable castes, towards Maoist propaganda. The monarchy did remain the focus of loyalty during the decade, but this was compromised by unwillingness to accept the official explanation of the 2001 royal massacre. Krishna Hachhethu's "Political parties and the state", summarises the author's recent monograph (Hachhethu 2002) on the functioning of the Congress and UML party machines at grass-roots level. This shows how, despite misgivings amongst local activists, the two major parties have come to concentrate on channeling benefits through patronage networks rather than on seeking broad popular support for their policies.

The section on ethnic activism, combines a broad overview with two papers focussing on particular groups. Karl-Heinz Krämer restates the general argument of his 1996 study, though adding more recent data, particularly from the 2000 survey of public opinion in 51 *janajāti* groups by Media Services International. Aligning himself firmly with the Janajati Mahasangh (to whose members he dedicated his earlier monograph), he argues that Nepal's key problem is systematic discrimination against groups other than the Parbatiya and Newar high castes and that Nepal's official status as a Hindu state helps perpetuate this. Gisèle Krauskopff contributes an analysis of different forms of activism amongst the Tharu, contrasting in particular the elite-based Tharu Welfare Society, an ethnic association dating from the end of the Rana period, and BASE (Backward Society Education), which was once known as the Tharu Workers' Liberation Organisation. Marie Lecomte-Tilouine contributes a study of the rebel Lakhan Thapa, a Magar who proclaimed himself "king" in his home village in Gorkha district and was later captured and executed by Jang Bahadur Rana's soldiers in 1877. She contrasts the various readings of the episode, including the older mainstream view of him as a mere charlatan, Magar ethnic activists' portrayal of him as a champion of both Magar interests and Nepalese nationalism, Janaklal Sharma's suggestion that he was a *santa* of the Josmani religious sect and also (in an addition to the earlier version of the paper published as Lecomte-Tilouine 2000) the story as told by the great-grandson of one of Lakhan's collaborators, who serves as priest at the shrine now standing on the site of Lakhan's "palace". Interestingly, local tradition as reflected in Magar activists' account tend to make the local Chetris rather than Jang Bahadur the chief villain of the story whilst the priest's version of that tradition almost totally empties it of political significance, suggesting that Lakhan was merely interested in the "uplift" of his own home area.

The section on the "People's War" begins with Colin Millard's paper combining a brief history of the Maoist movement up to the 2001 ceasefire with a first-hand account of attitudes towards the political system in Dhorpatan Valley south-west of Dhaulagiri, just beyond the Maoist core area. As

in Fisher's study of Myagdi, the main motif that emerges is total disillusionment with the functioning of parliamentary democracy and also some nostalgia for the pre-1990 era. Judith Pettigrew gives a sensitive portrait of the impact of the rebellion on Gurung (Tamu) villagers in Kaski district, acknowledging the attraction of the movement for some young Gurung but focussing more on the fear and incomprehension it has spread, particularly amongst older villagers and those with sufficient resources to be worth looting. The volume finishes with Anne de Sales' account of how the Maoists established their initial hold in Kham Magar country in Rukum and Rolpa. Originally published in *Puruṣārtha* (2001) and in this journal (2000), her findings need supplementing with more recent material, in particular Gersony (2003) and Thapa (2003) but the basic analysis is sound enough. The Leftists skilfully exploited not only Kham alienation from the Nepalese state but also the divisions between different clans, and they have been using ethnic discontent in the hope of building a political order where ethnic distinctions are transcended by the control of the Communist party itself. Both the state's security forces and the Maoists were generally seen as unwelcome intruders but the Maoists often seemed the lesser of two evils as their exactions were, at this initial stage, less onerous.

Fortunately for potential readers who are not academic anthropologists, most chapters are free of abstruse theorizing, even though small portions in the otherwise reader-friendly contributions by Harper, Tarnowski and Cameron are hard going. The editor's introduction discusses in detail the concept of "resistance" but in jargon-free fashion. In addition to direct confrontation with authority and the indirect and subtle opposition analysed by James Scott, Gellner also classes as "resistance" the ways in which in pre-1951 Nepal "ordinary... people attempted to use the state for their own ends, by joining it, co-opting its personnel, bribing them, or morally coercing them" (p. 3). Such responses were (and still are) widespread but it is arguable that at least some of these are best classified as "coping with" rather than "resisting" the state. Accommodation to the dominant power, whether this involves active alignment or simply avoiding being seen as opposed to it, has been a key motif throughout Nepalese history and its importance in post-1990 politics is clear from Hachhethu's paper. He attributes the success of both Congress and of the UML in the 1990 election and the poor performance of the two Rashtriya Prajatantra parties to the rural population's wish to "follow the victor". He also describes how locals flocked to the office of the governing party with their problems rather than trust the workings of the supposedly neutral courts and bureaucracy. The success enjoyed so far by the Maoists rests on their having been able to draw upon this tradition as well as on the spirit of resistance: they attract a minority ready to revolt and then skilfully coerce a majority concerned mainly with keeping out of trouble. The latter attitude is well illustrated by an inhabitant of Jumla in 2003: "We obeyed the Ranas and during the Panchayat we did what we were told. Democracy came and we followed.

Tomorrow there may be another system and we will have to listen to them too. We can never say we won't obey" (Mainali 2003). Such attitudes are likely to persist whilst the powerful – whether “feudals” or Maoists – readily resort to intimidation of their opponents and while access to public resources depends on personal favour rather than impersonal regulations.

Against this background, the empowering of “communities”, which everyone agrees is desirable in principle, is clearly a tough order. In his critique of community forestry, Campbell rightly points out that “it is not possible to overcome ecological underprivilege by transferring roles, rewards, and duties to an ideal construction” and that policy-makers have to deal with the fissiparous communities that ethnographers actually reveal (p. 106). Policy-makers also have to accept that inequalities of power and status within local communities cannot be entirely overridden: over the long-term there is hope for making dominance less absolute, but, as in other societies, elites have to be co-opted into the process of change.

Several authors do seem to be hankering after some form of pure community assertiveness which would not require compromises with those currently holding power whether within or outside Nepal. This applies possibly to Campbell himself and also to Krauskopff's particularly interesting contribution. She displays a rather different approach from that of Guneratne (2002) towards the *kamāiyā* system in the western Tarai and towards the role of BASE (Backward Society Education), the NGO whose campaign against the institution paved the way for its formal abolition in summer 2000. Whilst acknowledging the energy and radical intentions of BASE's founders, her account is less enthusiastic than his, Krauskopff is troubled by BASE's switch from a relatively confrontational stand against landlords in Dang to a human rights approach dependent on international donor agencies; a change which is in fact partly a reversion to the group's origins as it had initially been financed by USAID through the No Frills NGO. She also argues that the *kamāiyā* system was not unique to the western Tarai nor a uniquely Tharu problem but rather something “which ... occurs all over Nepal and in the eastern tarai as well under another name” (p. 220).

Krauskopff, who also reports, contrary to what Guneratne implies, that there are still a significant number of Tharu landlords in Dang, has extensive personal knowledge of the area and her analysis deserves to be taken seriously. However, there probably needs to be more research done before a definitive account of the *kamāiyā* issue can be written. Marked dependence of debtors upon their local creditors does indeed occur throughout the country but arguably took a particularly extreme form in the western Tarai. As for the appropriacy of BASE's NGO status and dependence on foreign donors, my own feeling is that the organisation should be seen as making tactical switches to maximise its effectiveness rather than as having “sold out”. Fujiura, who shares Krauskopff's worry about depoliticisation

(Fujiura 2001), points out that without external funding BASE would never have been able to mobilise the Tharu peasantry on a massive scale and Guneratne reports that securing this backing effectively ended the physical harassment of its members by landlords and their allies. As all observers agree, the formal “liberation” of the *kamāīyās* has not led to a happy ending since so many were evicted by their former masters and the government failed to make arrangements for their resettlement. This was not, however, the fault of BASE or other campaigners and its overall record, particularly in the field of adult literacy and general consciousness-raising, remains a good one.

Turning to the analysis of elites themselves, Gellner, in attempting to situate the Maoist rebellion in long-term historical context, points to the similarities in method (though not, of course, in ideology) between the Maoists and the Ranas, both of whom relied to a large extent on military coercion and on the conscription of labour. The comparison is a valid one but should be made with the whole of unified Nepal’s pre-1846 history rather than just with the Rana period. Indeed if a specific period is to be singled out, then that of “unification” under Prithvi Narayan and his immediate successors is arguably a better candidate. Although Gellner states that under the Ranas “the tax burden” was severe, this was true only of the proportion of his crop forfeited by the actual cultivator, not of the proportion going to the central government. In fact, during the latter half of the Rana period, the real value of land tax on a given cultivated area was steadily declining, with the benefit going to local landlords whilst the Ranas’ own total receipts continued to grow as new land was brought under cultivation. In contrast, in Prithvi Narayan’s time, the bulk of rent paid went directly to the “king’s share”, even if its assignment as *jāgīr* income meant that the revenue passed only notionally through the central treasury. In areas where the Maoists have established control they are themselves again appropriating for their “people’s government” the fifty per cent share of the crop the cultivator had traditionally been required to surrender.

Lecomte-Tilouine’s contribution adds to our understanding of the complex relationship between the political elite and religious practitioners. She points to the complex of legends associating Magar priests with Thakuri monarchs, the most famous of which associates the first Lakhan Thapa (after whom the 19<sup>th</sup> century rebel is named) with Ram Shah’s queen Mankamana. She also refers to the contradictions in the Rana attitude towards the Josmani sect, to which the later Lakhan may have belonged: at about the same time as Lakhan’s revolt, a Josmani *santa* recruited *matawālīs* to his monastery and was imprisoned by Jang Bahadur, yet later emerged as a trusted member of Jang’s circle and initiated his brother and successor, Ranauddip Singh, into the sect. This bears comparison with Maharaja Bir Shamsheer’s initial encouragement of the Arya Samaji Madhavraj Joshi and perhaps also with Mohan Shamsheer’s reported

sympathy to a request that the Bishwakarmas (normally regarded as a section of the untouchable Kami caste) should be recognised as Kshatriyas. Possibly, though the Ranas were in many ways champions of Hindu orthodoxy, they at times wanted to lessen their dependence on the Brahmans and other twice-born castes by giving some recognition to other groups.

Running through the whole book, even where not explicitly addressed, is the question of the categories of caste, ethnic group and caste and their relationship to each other. Millard argues that *jāt* and *jāti* were separate concepts until the Muluki Ain of 1854 made the “dramatic change” of equating one with another (p. 287). The Ain certainly marked a new commitment by the state to the maintenance of a single caste hierarchy throughout the whole country (see Höfer 1979). Most likely, however, for the ordinary Nepali the term *jāt* (probably best translated by ‘descent group’) has always combined the concepts of “caste” and “ethnic group”, the boundary between which is in any case a problematic one. Social change is now reshaping group boundaries and Fisher argues that Myagdi society can now be seen as composing three major blocks: Brahmans, the “middle castes” (with whom he seems to include Thakuris and Chetris as well as Magars and other *janajāti* groups) and finally the “Untouchables” or *dalits*.

Though Krämer argues that ethnic rather than class divisions are the key factor in Nepalese society, for most other contributors, both are important and the two sets are intersecting ones. This is brought out especially strongly in Krauskopff’s analysis of BASE’s difficulties in reconciling divisions between Tharu landlords and tenants with the demands of Tharu ethnic solidarity. However, in some areas, including certainly parts of the Dang Valley, class and ethnic/caste boundaries do roughly coincide and this, of course, tends to sharpen social conflict. For example, the clashes in the hills west of the Kathmandu Valley cited by king Mahendra amongst his justifications for removing the Congress government in 1960, were frequently between wealthier Parbatiya settlers and the poorer Tamang population. Right across the country, the *dalits*, at the bottom of the ritual hierarchy, are also largely at the bottom of the economic one.

The absence from this volume of a chapter focussing on *dalits* as Krämer’s focusses on the *janajātis*, is in itself symptomatic of this group’s failure to organise themselves effectively. This is mainly, of course, because of the formers’ particularly depressed state, but also because of their internal divisions.<sup>1</sup> The *dalit* groups have long resented the predominance of the Bishwakarmas, who have taken the lead in the broader *dalit* movement as well as having made an attempt just before the end of the Rana regime to claim high-caste status for themselves. Such tensions are

---

<sup>1</sup> For a fuller discussion of the factors obstructing the emergence of a strong and united *dalit* movement, see Bishwakarma 2001/02.

obviously further increased when, as Millard reports for Dhorpatan, some Bishwakarmas continue to assert that they are higher in the caste structure than the *dalits* generally. But while specifically *dalit* organisations have had limited success, these groups have, not surprisingly, been particularly responsive to Maoist propaganda as is well shown by Fisher's Myagdi informants. If and when the western hills are able to vote for a government of their choice free of intimidation, it is conceivable that substantial *dalit* support for the Maoists will cause many in other castes to swing behind the Maoist opponents.<sup>2</sup> But then, as the editor points out, social scientists do not often have a good record when it comes to predicting the future.

The editing and general appearance of the book are generally of a high standard and I particularly liked the cover photograph of a 1999 Gai Jatra skit on the then prime minister's relationship with his secretary. The only clear lapses I spotted were the publisher's failure to include the date of publication and the introduction's placing the start of the Rana era to 1845 rather than 1846 (p. 3) – I may myself be partly responsible for the latter as I saw the introduction in draft.

Overall, the book is an excellent contribution to our understanding of Nepal's current situation and worth the attention of everyone seriously interested in the subject.

## References

- Bishwakarma, Padmalal. 2001/02. Kina uṭhna sakena ekīkṛt dalit āndolan? In *Chāpāmā Dalit*, edited by P. Onta et al., pp. 303-311. Kathmandu: Ekta Books (2058 V.S.).
- Fujikura, Tatsuro. 2001. Emancipation of Kamaiyas: Development, social movement, and youth activism in post-Jana-Andolan Nepal. *Himalayan Research Bulletin* 2(1): 29-35.
- Gersony, Robert. 2003. Sowing the wind... History and dynamics of the Maoist revolt in Nepal's Rapti Hills. Report for Mercy Corps International.
- Guneratne, Arjun. 2002. *Many Tongues, one People: The making of Tharu identity in Nepal*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

---

<sup>2</sup> I am grateful to Mrigendra Karki for pointing out that this factor may be behind the persisting support for the Nepali Congress (Democratic) suggested by a report of a victory for its candidates in an election organised by the Maoists themselves for "People's Governments" in two Achham villages (*Kāntipur* 1/7/04). The villagers evidently imagined they were being allowed an unfettered choice and were warned by the Maoist commander against repeating their mistake!

- Hachhethu, Krishna. 2002. *Party-building in Nepal: The Nepali Congress Party and the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist)*. Kathmandu: Mandala.
- Höfer, András. 1979. *The Caste Hierarchy and the State in Nepal: A study of the Muluki Ain of 1854*. Innsbruck: Universitätsverlag Wagner. (reprinted by Himal Books, Kathmandu 2004)
- Krämer, Karl-Heinz. 1996. *Ethnizität und nationale Integration in Nepal: Eine Untersuchung der ethnischen Gruppen im modernen Nepal*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag.
- Lecomte-Tilouine, Marie. 2000. Utopia and ideology among the Magars: Lakhana Thapa versus Mao Dzedong? *European Bulletin of Himalayan Research* 19: 73-97.
- Mainali, Mohan. 2003. One country, two systems. *Nepali Times* (on-line edition) 20/6/03.
- Thapa, Deepak (with B. Sijapati). 2003. *A Kingdom under Siege: Nepal's Maoist Insurgency, 1996 to 2003*. Kathmandu: The Printhouse.

***Other Worlds: Notions of self and emotion among the Lohorung Rai* by Charlotte E. Hardman. Oxford/New York: Berg, 2000. ISBN 1859731554 (pbk), ISBN 1859731503 (hbk), xix + 315 pp.**

Reviewed by Mark Turin, Ithaca

*Other Worlds* addresses the *Weltanschauung* of the Lohorung Rai, with specific emphasis on what it means to be a socialised person in their culture. The book follows in part Hardman's doctoral dissertation of 1990, itself based on fieldwork conducted between 1976 and 1980. The Lohorung, conventionally grouped under the Rai ethno-linguistic division of Himalayan peoples, number 3,000 and live slightly north-west of Khandbari in eastern Nepal.

Hardman draws on "ethno-psychological" notions, such as Lohorung concepts of self and articulations of emotions, to elucidate the values and codes of social behaviour she witnessed during her fieldwork. To contextualise this chosen frame of reference, the author explains how she turned to ethno-psychology much "the same way that some anthropologists have