

Article Review

Recent Trends in the Himalayan Studies : An Appraisal of the Significant Publications in 1975-76.

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It is surprising the way the Himalayas, spread in half a dozen countries in the heart of the Asian mainland; have empirically been ignored by social scientists. The earliest glimpses of the land and people of the area may be discerned from the diaries and travelogues of the administrators, writings of the missionaries and reports of the explorers, journalists and casual visitors. The British needed and, thus, prepared the *Descriptive Ethnology* (1872), *Studies on the Tribes and Castes* (1891, 1897), *District Gazetteers* (1886, 1894 etc.) and the decennial *census reports*. Some of the district administrators were asked to write *monographs* on various tribes of Assam, which were published between 1907 to 1937. But most of the Himalayan region was not fortunate enough to attract the attention of the scholar-administrators as it happened in the case of Assam. And that is why there is a lack of sound base-line data on various communities of the region.

The first serious efforts to study the Himalayan communities, made by the social scientists, were that of Pant's (1935) and Gorer's (1938). Then there was a lull for almost two decades. In 1950's we have some exotic studies such as the *Himalayan Barbary* (1955) and the *Naked Nagas* (1959). Early 1960's saw the publication of the *Himalayan Polyandry* (1962), a title reflective of the Plains Indians' attitude to the hill social institutions. Then we find the scholars turning to the life of the Hindu Himalaya, and we have the *Hindus of Himalayas* (1963), *Family and Kinship* among the Kashmiri Pandits (1965) and an infructuous enterprise, the *Valley of the Gods*. In case we venture to generalize, all the above studies suffer either from too much macroscopic or microscopic approaches. Middle range regional studies on the themes

of ethnic, social, political and economic dimensions have not been undertaken. This becomes all the more demanding when we glance over the expanse, diversity, and uniqueness of the Himalayas. And that is why some recent studies on the above themes are most welcome trends of the Himalayan studies, and more specific on (south) central Himalayan belt.

We have before us a series of four significant studies on the Nepal Himalayas,* incidentally all published within the last one year (1975-76), contributed by a British, an American and two Indian scholars. All the above are unconventional anthropological studies from their conceptual, methodological and developmental delineations. The British Prof. Christoph von Furer Haimendorf, the doyen of the Himalayan studies, concerned himself with the dynamics of the Lamaist mountain dwelling traders of northern Nepal. American Frederick Gaige concentrates on the issues of the national integration in Nepal with reference to Nepal *tarai* versus Kathmandu valley in the light of the economic importance of the former and political dominance of the latter. Sinha selects the eastern fringe of the Nepal cultural area and portrays the given social forces of the polity, social characteristics of the elite and quality of the institutional emergence in Sikkim, leading to the eclipse of the Lamaist theocracy and its immediate merger with Indian Union. From the western fringe of Nepal, Sanwal's posthumous publication on Kumaon social structure provides a historical perspective for conceiving the dominance of political power and significance of the quality of occupation in determining the relative rank of the individual castes. All these studies are regional studies addressed to the economic development, social change, political participation, rising expectations and emergence of an articulate regional elite. Taken together, these studies provide a complete picture of *Nepali* cultural-linguistic zone in which the Lamaist trading community of north, peasantry settled on the pattern of the Gangetic plains of the *Tarai* in south, the Hindu Nepalese, Lepcha tribals and Bhotia Buddhists of Sikkim and caste, complexity of Kumaon, provide variety in the tapestry of the Himalayan life.

Furer—Haimendorf, C. von :

Himalayan Traders : Life in Highland Nepal, John Murray, London, 1975.

Gaige, Frederick H,

Regionalism and National Unity in Nepal, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1975.

Sinha, A.C.

Politics of Sikkim : A Sociological Study, Thomson Press (India) Ltd. New Delhi, 1975.

Sanwal R.D.

Social Stratification in Rural Kumaon, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1976.

II

Prof. Haimendorf's *Himalayan Traders* provides an insight into the trans-Himalayan trade in Nepal in which their entire economy was based. It portrays an exotic and primitive method of trade, which was suddenly disrupted in 1959. The first four chapters devoted to settlement pattern, farming economy, trade and craft, and socio-political dynamics, are in a way an extension to his earlier work, *The Sherpas of Nepal* (1964). These Sherpas of Khumbu region, who speak Tibetan dialect, profess Lamaism and had trading contacts in Tibet upto Lhasa, Nepal and India, have substituted, their trade earnings with that of employment in the mountaineering expeditions, which has a profound effect on their entire way of life. In Chapter 5 he examines *Lhomis or Khar Bhote* of north-eastern Nepal who are settled in Arun and Tamur regions. He finds the Tibetan influence on Lhomis in the nature of a thin veneer. Other wise they reminded the author of such tribes of the Indio-Tibetan borderlands such as Monpas, Daflas and Hill Miris.

The next chapter on the highlander's of the Dhaulagiri zone examines the unique cultural assimilation of the *Thakalis of the Thak Khola* and delineate how have the enterprising Thakalis combined the Tibetan, Hindu and cultural traits of the tribes such as Tamangs, Gurungs and Magars into their own system. Until a few generations, these Thakalis were known as the Bhotias. But with the increasing contacts with the elite of the Kathmandu valley, they realized it to be advantageous to identify themselves with one of the major tribes of Nepal and now they have begun to call themselves *Gurung* and their *Kutuks*, upper class traditional leaders, have been changed to *Thakuris* (151-152). From conceptual point of view these Bhotias (Thakalis) present a curious inconsistency in their society in the form of discrepancy between the internal structure and the outward attitude of Thakali and Bhotia society. To quote Prof. Haimendorf, "Thakalis...represent a basically egalitarian society, organized on segmentary lines and devoid of institutionalized internal status distinctions, but they look at the outside social world as a hierarchic structure stratified on caste-lines. The Bhotias on the other hand, recognize internal status distinctions, but do not see the outside world in terms of social superiority and inferiority." (155) Referring to the prosperity of the Thakalis as unequal by that of any other ethnic group in comparable regions of Nepal (181), he describes a "highly civilized style of living of the great merchant families" (182). He goes in detail to describe their indigenous credit system, known as *dhigur* (196-201) and concludes, "There is probably no other numerically small community in Nepal which has been so successful in turning a changed economic and social climate to its

advantage" (203).

Chapter seventh of the book is devoted to the Buddhist and Hindu traders of the Karnali zone, in the north-western Nepal. The author finds the two communities culturally distinct from each other. However, he discovers that the Bhotias have been relegated to an inferior social status and lumped together among the *matwali Chetris*. (234). The author continues: "Socially too they (Bhotias) are looked down upon by their Hindu neighbours. As eaters of beef and drinkers of alcoholic beverages, they share the low status of most of the Bhotia populations in Nepal's Hindu-dominated caste-system. However, their response to this situation is different from that of either the Sherpas or the Bhotias of Baragaon (Thakalis). While the former are proud to identify themselves as Sherpas and the Beragaonlis now claim to be Gurungs, the Mugu people (Bhotias of Karnali zone) describe themselves as Chetris and even call themselves by such genuine Chetri clan-names as *Rokh* and *Burathoki*...I was mystified by the strange phenomenon of people obviously Bhotia in appearance and dress calling themselves Chetri clan-names...when speaking in their own Tibetan dialect, they use different names. They admitted that Chetri names were equivalents which they had been using only for past four decades."

The situation has been even more confused by the practice of the government officials classifying them as Tamangs, even though there is no apparant connection with the Tamang tribe of central-eastern Nepal, and most Mugu people have never met Tamangs and know nothing about them. The explanation for this odd nomenclature is the policy, reputedly introduced by the prime minister Jung Bahadur Rana, not to use the term 'Bhotia' for any community settled within the frontiers of Nepal. The motivation for this policy decision, was probably the wish to forestall any future claim of Tibet to border areas in habited by Tibetan speaking populations hitherto described as Bhotias, i.e. Tibetan" (233-34).

Last chapter examines the entire perspective of trade and social relations of the Bhotia highlanders of Nepal. Their peasant economy, based on agriculture and animal husbandary, was supplemented by the trans-Himalayan trade, an occupation specialized by them because of their geographical location. The author examines the question : Whether the persuance of trade as a central economic activity produces certain social attitudes and arrangements ? Whether people motivated by a specific outlook on life are more likely to achieve success in trading than communities conditioned by a different ideology ?

On way to answer the above he finds that Bhotia social system allows wide scope for individual choice both in economic activities and ordering of social relations. They have no obligation to, or control by

a joint family in which the members are subject to the authority of an elderly head of the family (287). Marriages coincide with the establishment of households independent of their parents. Similarly, their womenfolk engage in a number of business activities independent of their spouses (288). Hospitality and mutual trust are maintained not only to further one's business contacts but also as a means of building up of one's social prestige. Their society is basically an equalitarian one in spite of a wide range in the wealth and political influences of individuals. Their society provides unlimited opportunities open to the energetic and talented individuals which puts mercantile economy on different footing from that of an economic system based on agriculture, where land-holding of any member of a community can increase only at the expense of other villagers. That is why the wealthiest men are found at the places such as Walong Chung, Namche Bazaar and Tukcha where agricultural resources are minimal and the need to concentrate on trade is the greatest. Why the highcaste Hindu neighbours of the Bhotias do not reach the same excellence of trade as the Bhotias? The author provides some possible answers: they may find the life of long-distance traders distasteful; they lack the initiative which induces Bhotia traders to devote their wealth to the religious cause, and the requisition of prestige by offering hospitality and charity.

Then the author compares two traditional trading communities of Nepal: *Thakalis* and *Newars* and raises the questions: Why the former have been more successful entrepreneurs than the latter? The long-distance caravan trade makes great demands on stamina and personal courage of the operators, qualities in which the Thakalis of the older generation surpassed the basically urban, comfort-loving and perhaps somewhat timid Newars. They have been able to evolve a simple system of barter in which heavy capital investment is not required. They have been able to operate the salt/grain barter trade through their egalitarian communities. Time spent on the journeys is not regarded as an economic asset which could be put to more rewarding use. Thakalis, poised between the Buddhist civilization of Tibet and the Hindu culture prevailing in many of the communities of middle Himalayan ranges, found themselves within a familiar cultural atmosphere and readily adopted to the prevalent fashions to the north and south on their trading visits. In this context the author identifies an ideological non-committal attitude of the Bhotias, who remained "hard-headed traders dealing in salt and grain and such other commodities as could profitably be transported from one economic sphere to the other and not protagonists of the cultural achievements of either" north or south of their region.

III

Gaige's publication includes two studies, (a) a regional study of the Nepal *Tarai* (in the first five chapters) and (b) a study of the national-integration in Nepal presented in the last five chapters of the book. The first chapter on geo-politics of the *tarai* delineates the complexity of the region. We find that this 500 miles long and 20 miles wide area shares 17 percent of the land area, is the home of 31 percent inhabitants and contributes 59 percent gross domestic product (G.D.P) and 76 percent of the revenue of Nepal. Culturally, the *tarai* is an extension of the Gangetic plain of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. About 90 percent inhabitants are Hindus and 10 percent are Muslims, which corresponds to the Hindu-Muslim ratio of the Indian districts, adjoining the *tarai*. These inhabitants, who maintain marital alliances across the border, speak Maithili, Bhojpuri and Awadhi dialects of Hindi language.

Importance of the *Tarai* is understood by the volume of the agricultural surplus such as rice, jute, tobacco, oilseeds, sugarcane, which are exported to the Indian market in lieu of the manufactured goods. In this way, economic ties between India and the *tarai* are stronger than the ties between India and the hill regions (31). This becomes convenient because "the plains Hindus hold a dominant commercial position throughout the region. Most of them were businessmen when they migrated to the *tarai*. They were looking for new business opportunities, and it appears that many of them maintain marriage and business ties with extended family and caste members in the Indian villages and towns from which they or their families migrated sometimes as long as three or four generations ago." (34) No wonder that 88 percent of Nepali's industrial investment and nearly 100 percent of nation's industrial labour force are located in the *tarai*. The capital is invested in the *tarai* industries and the labour force come from Indian business houses. However, the "government officials tend to distrust businessmen of plains origin...This distrust arises from the complex and, from the officials' point of view often confusing relationships between businessmen living in the *tarai* and in India. Some officials tend to suspect that Indian economic interests may threaten Nepal's political integrity." (38). All these led to a situation in which "some government officials and other members of the Kathmandu elite, almost all of them, hill people, have difficulty thinking of the *tarai* as more than a Nepalese administered but otherwise alien region." (42)

The chapters third and fourth on Nepal-India border problems identify four issues on which controversies arise : border demarcation, political terrorists, use of the region as sanctuary, smuggling, and migration of settlers from one country into the other. All these lead to a

blurred and uncontrolled border between the *tarai* region of Nepal and India. Among the Indian migrants, members of the clean backward castes such *Ahirs*, *Kurmis* etc., who are traditionally land-hungry peasant, predominate. In pursuance of the Government policy of *Nepalization* of the *tarai*, majority of the hill migrants to the *tarai* are high-caste Brahmins, Chetris, and Newars. Chapter five is on the intricate issue of the subjecthood of the settlers in the *tarai*, a controversial and touchy issue between the two sovereigns, Nepal and India.

The strategic elite of the Kathmandu valley have been using a dubious device for *Nepalization* of the *tarai*. While they deliberately make a broad definition of Nepali language inclusive of various dialects, they have raised a statistical war on Hindi. That is why number of Hindi speakers was reduced from 30, 181 in the 1952-54 census (a figure which was hardly reliable in itself), to 2,867 in the 1961 census (116). The author works out that at least 63% of the *tarai* population spoke Hindi in 1961. Members of the Kathmandu governing elite tend to view Hindi as the symbol of the plains people's resistance to the hill culture. This attitude has prevailed in the absence of an effective political party system.

An essential aspect of national integration process is the definition and articulation of economic, social, and political ideals and goals for the new nation. Such goals can be communicated to dispersely settled Nepali speaking villagers through various channels: radio, newspapers, local government officials, personal contacts with the rural masses and the educational system. But, the government must be willing to communicate in languages other than Nepali if it hopes to do so effectively with most *tarai* villagers. However, the author finds a very different picture: "government policy seems to be based at present upon the assumption that ability to speak Nepali is associated with first-class citizenship." (132)

Chapter VIII on politics in the Nepalese traditions examines the *Panchayati* system with reference to empirical situation existing in the country. He finds that the constitutional provision for the class organizations such as peasants, youth, women, industrial workers, ex-service men, and college graduates bear little resemblance to the real class structure of Nepalese society. The economic classes are based on ownership of land and the cultural classes are those of the caste system. In this way, operation of the class organization in the body politic of Nepal means dominance of the large land owners, mostly of the Brahmin and chetri castes. This dominance is cleverly articulated by indirect electoral practice for a relatively smaller size of the voters. Below at the district levels officials are less than dedicated to the welfare of the community. Many of them sabotage the land reforms and take sides

in factional disputes by intimidating the voters, stuffing the ballot boxes, or even arresting the candidates before the election. In such a situation, it is not a wonder that the hill people, who count for not more than 10 percent of the population in the five *tarai* districts combined in 1967 held 63 percent of *National Panchayat* seats from these districts.

Another artificial arrangement is that of the zonal units, which invariably consists of *hill and tarai districts*. The zonal *Panchayat Act, 1963* has two basic functions: first, to create national unity by encouraging the use of Nepali language and by adoption of *national (hill) "culture"* and character; and secondly to elect representatives to the *National Panchayat*. "In effect the elective function of the zonal assemblies is to put the election of *National Panchayat* representatives from *tarai* districts into the hands of hill people, because hill people represent the majority of assembly members in all but one zone" (157). At the national level, control of land and high caste status are decisive factors in politics of Nepal. Beside these two, additional determinants of success in national politics may be identified as identification with hill culture and educational attainments. Only two groups, the Hill Brahmins and Chetris, possess all four of these prerequisites of successful participation in national politics. Newars, who are regarded by orthodox Hindus as outcastes, possess three of four pre-requisites mentioned above : control of economic sources, identification with the hill culture, and education. Low caste hill people such as Saraki, Kami, Damai, etc. lack three of the above and possess only one criterion identification with the hill culture. The upper-and-business-caste plains people such as Brahmins, Bhumihars, Rajputs, Kayasthas, Marwaris etc. possess three of the blessed requirements of the social status, economic resources and education, but cannot identify themselves with the hill culture. The last category includes the low-caste Hindus of plains, muslims and the plains tribals, who lack all the four prerequisites of national importance.

Since the *National Panchayat* is just a consultative body, the real centres of power in the present political system are the palace, the central secretariat, and the army. These three centres of power are controlled by the coalition of Chetris, Hill Brahmins and Newars in the way they did before the revolution of 1951. It is convenient to the ruler to control the traditional elite, who are always fond of court intrigues. Thus "the *panchayat system* presents the King with much more manageable political process than did the parliamentary system." (140). The answer to the key question about the present Nepalese policy, whether it has brought about the type of changes in traditional Kathmandu oriented politics needed to move the nation ahead more

rapidly toward political integration than did the political party system, is negative. The introduction of the *Panchayati System* has increased the problems of the plains people to gain representation in Kathmandu and thus, it has reinforced their sense of alienation.

King Mahendra, who essentially derived his support from the traditional sources, wished to project his image as a modernizer of the Hindu Kingdom, but the spirit of his entire *modus operandi* was *dharma-shastric* in its fundamentals. One of the major national problems of Nepal has been the management of the land reforms, which had been based on age old oligarchic bondage. But partisan attitude of the national administration introduced new areas of tension through their land reforms. This may be seen in large scale eviction of tenant families of plains, who had been tilling the land at least for a few generations. This was partially one of the causes of the agitative politics of the essentially *tarai* based political parties such as the Nepali Congress, *Tarai* Congress. It is essentially a Nepali problem to accommodate the *tarai* people in the body politic of its national main-stream, which is yet to be accomplished. For this failure of their own the Nepali elite tend to accuse the Indian support for the democratic elements in Nepal and economic, cultural and social dominance of the Indians in the Nepalese life.

The last chapter on the problem of national integration identifies two external factors, which influence the process of *Nepalization* in Nepal. First, presence of Nepal's southern neighbour, India, a nation of enormous potentiality, always looms large on the cultural and political horizon of Nepal. Second is the economic power of the plains people, who belong to plains Indian social-cultural setting. We have already examined how national Nepalese culture is the hill culture, dominated by the ruling *Hill-Brahmin-Chetri-Newar* coalition. Thus, there is a big gulf between the *hill* and *tarai* regions of Nepal on all the planes. The critical dilemma faced by the monarch was to choose between political participation or political survival in the body politic and the Nepalese ruler chose the latter for himself and his brand of Nepalese national system. This choice was hurriedly made in 1960 because "they fear that Nepal could be assimilated into the greater Indian economic, cultural, and political sphere and might lose its national identity. In order to forestall this possibility, from their points of view, Indian influence in all aspects of Nepalese life must be reduced." (201) But they tend to forget that anti-Indian-oriented nationalism thwarts the process of national integration. Many hill people have genuine difficulty in differentiating the Nepalese *tarai* dwellers and the Indians. The plains people on the teeth of opposition to Indian heritage find little in the *hill culture* of Nepal to be shared. However, Kathmandu may take some

positive steps to integrate her own people in her national interest. Recognition of Hindi as an associate national language, removal of the clauses in citizenship laws, discriminating against the plains people, simplification of citizenship acquisition, stoppage of the land alienation, provision of direct election, recruitment of the plainsmen in the constabulary and administrative set up may go a long way to win goodwill of plainsmen in favour of the Nepalese nationalism. But monarchy, brought up in an atmosphere of intrigue and conspiracy, tended to be suspicious of the political participation. Thus, Nepal's travail to broad based shared political system is yet to be complete.

IV

Sinha's work on social bases of the Sikkimese polity examines three major themes: social forces, elite role performance and viability of nation-building efforts and sikkim's search for national identity. The author combines the anthropological techniques of data collection with that of sociological devices and thus provides us with a happy marriage of the microscopic and macroscopic approaches. Intensive field work and extensive surveys were conducted to gain insight and collect useful data on Sikkimese transition from a feudal theocracy to that of the democratic set up. After providing a brief profile of ethnic, demographic and political culture of Sikkim, he traces out the political evolution of Sikkim of 1975. The pre-theocratic phase was the period when indigenous *Kirati* tribes ruled their land with their primitive institutions. This was replaced by the phase of medieval theocracy of Lamaist origin. This was the beginning of the Namgyal dynasty, Tibetan overlordship and preponderance of the lamas in the body politic of Sikkim. This also saw the origin of the institutions of the *Kazihood* and *Lamahood* as inseparable parts of Sikkimese feudalism. With the phase of colonial feudalism, the British Indian Government started playing decisive role and affected basic changes in Sikkimese system. Ultimately, the ruler was reduced to the status of an ordinary zamindar of North India in 1947. The last phase of transition to modernity saw the clash between an ambitious ruler and his democratic subjects in which medieval court intrigues were resorted to stifle the growing democratic aspirations.

The chapter on Organization of Social Forces delineates the religious, social, economic and political institutions as bases of Sikkimese power structure. Sikkim had been a theocracy in which ruler was incarnate god; Lamas played significant roles and Lamaism was the state religion. The Kazis of the Lepcha and the Bhotia origin emerged as the Sikkimese overlords and were one of the two pillars of the

political system. Entire land tenure was on feudal pattern. Among the political institutions, a competitive party system, bureaucracy, and a facade of local self government was introduced. All these resulted into a complex situation in which three alternative identities emerged : i. tribalism of the Lepchas, Bhotias, Limbus, Rais etc., ii. Lamaist feudalism in which Lepcha, Bhotia, a section of Limbus and Sherpas aligned against the non-Lamaists and iii. democratic liberalism of the dominant Nepalese. With these the first part of the book comes to an end.

The second part of the book is on elite and delineates how the above social forces were instrumental in recruiting the type of elite Sikkim had. It is significant to note the emergence of two segments of elite, the contractors and the ex-soldiers of Indian army. Both these elites got their sustenance to the Indian sources; were recruited and thrived on the Indian money; and were influenced by the material wealth of Indian standard and widening aspirations. But these were the elites, who were the most anti-Indian and the greatest supporters of the ex-ruler's endeavour to perpetuate his despotism. A chapter on "*the men at the top*" describes the recruitment pattern of the strategic elite, who control the ultimate destiny of Sikkim. It gives biographical sketches of top ten Sikkimese elite who really matter. These *men at the top* have been classified into the patricians (Kazis), the neo-rich plebians (mainly the Bhotias), and the commoners (the Nepalese immigrants).

Part three of the book on political development provides an idea as to the devices adopted by the Namgyal rulers to show that their regime was benevolent, judicious and universally accepted by their subjects. The author gives the details of the institutional attempts to seek for the devices of transferring the indigenous, adopting the external and evolving the new institutions in body politic of Sikkim. The last two chapters present the implications of Sikkim's search for her 'national' identity. He identifies the basic foundation of community life in the form of *tribalism*, because individuals are identified for significant roles on the basis of their tribal and ethnic affiliations. However, it goes without saying that politically dominant tribe (the Bhotias to which the Namgyal rulers belonged) was in minority. On the other hand, the Nepalese immigrant majority population had no access to power. This second model had been that of the *Lamaist traditionalism* with its monk-incarnate ruler, theocratic political structure, aristocratic and theocratic bureaucracy and a preponderance of the Bhotia immigrants from Tibet. It is needless to mention that its origin can be found in the political culture of Lamaist Tibet. The ruler, the monks, the Kazis, the Bhotias, the Lamaists and the feudal elements wanted to strengthen this model as their own. But majority of the Sikkimese of

Nepali cultural origin, constituting about three-fourths of the total population, were not able to identify themselves with it. These elements proposed a secular model in the form of *democratic liberalism*, which was opposed by the Lamaists. So, this was the national dilemma and crux of the entire Sikkimese upheaval in recent years. The book provides a fascinating story of how this dilemma was resolved in favour of the democratic liberalism.

V

Sanwal's work on caste stratification may be taken as an exercise in the socio-cultural bases of Kumaoni power structure. He finds the role and complexity of castes different from the Indian melting pot. He proposes to identify a set of basic social categories, and examines their mutual relations and ways in which these relations (and the categories themselves) have been changing over time. The study is neither a conventional anthropological nor an historical in nature, as claimed by the author. Though intensive field work was undertaken in three villages of Kumaon division, a great reliance was placed on a variety of historical material for reconstructing the regional past. Chapter two on caste and distribution of power examines the association between caste and the distribution of power. He finds Kumaon to be "the only example in the country of a local system in which caste groups have emerged on the basis of politico-legal distinctions (21). For, analysing the above implications, the author identifies the social conditions of the traditional Kumaon immediately preceding the establishment of British rule as his base line.

He presents an analytical description of eight social categories in order of political precedence: *Char-Chauthani*, *Char Burh*, *Panch-Thok*, *Chhai-Gauri*, *Bar-Adhikari*, *Panchbiri*, *Khatakawai*, and *Pauri-pander-bisu*. None of the caste groups except the *Dom* were completely closed groups. The ritual status of the individual *dharamadhikari* which was an hereditary office duly recognized by the then Hindu Kings. The traditional hierarchy of the castes in Kumaon is a complex phenomenon in which *Bith* and *Dom* correspond to the line between the 'clean' and 'unclean' castes. These are very broad-categories. The *Bith* includes *Thul-Jat* (or *Asal*) and *Khasi*, i.e. immigrants and indigenous stocks among the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas known as *Asan Baman* and *Khasi Baman* and the like. It should also be borne in mind that *Thul-iat* as a whole rank higher than *Khasi* as a whole. The members of the *Chauthani* sub-caste never took up ordinary priestly functions. They were *raj-gurus* (religions preceptors of the Kings), ministers, treasurers, court-writers, emissaries and often royal advisers, provincial governors,

army commandars, revenue and police officers etc. But the greatest stabilizing source of *Chauthani* status was the monopolistic, hereditary—control over the office of the *dharamadhi-kari*, as in-charge of the public religion and morality and final authority in all matters relating to caste and inter-caste relations. The Kshetri caste was the most ill-defined and fluid in Kumaon. Many of them came to the region as mercenaries in the Chand army and chose to stay on and were relegated to Khasi status. It happened so because they did not command political power, adopted cultivation as means of their livelihood and took wives from the Khasi groups. "The ill-defined and loosely-integrated Khasi group, however, fulfilled the very important function of recruiting individuals to clean-caste Hindu status from tribal groups which were on the periphery of Hinduism and caste system in Kumaon." (53). The Dom lacked all formal political power and had no civil rights except that of receiving adequate sustenance from their *Bith* masters. Restrictions were imposed on their physical movement. On the basis of their roles and relationships with the *Bith*, the rural Dom in pre-British Kumaon were grouped into two broad levels: *Khalait* and *Mangkhani*. Among them Mangkhanis, which includes *Hurki-Badi* (drummers), *Mirasis*, and *Nats*, are ranked the lowest.

The chapter on Caste and the Economic System is concerned with the organization of production associated with the ownership, control and use of land. The author shows how the control and use of land provided the basis for an elaborate and hierarchically-oriented division of labour. The *Bith* had rights of various kinds on the land; and the Dom had none. Only those of the immigrant Kshtriya, who held the estates, were able to retain *Thakur status* in Kumaon because they had the material means to follow the culturally valued and status-relevant style of life. On the other hand, the Doms were not allowed to control or become cultivators and thus excluding them from becoming a tenant of any kind. Society had classified occupations according to their prestige into *suddha* (pure), *bhal* (good but not pure), *neech* (low and polluting) and *asuddha* (absolutely polluting). The greatest prestige was attached to those occupations which did not involve the performance of physical labour. Such occupations were those of ritualist, priest, religious preceptor, astrologer, physician and teacher.

The fourth chapter shows how the Gurkha and the British rulers of Kumaon were instrumental in changing the caste structure. The formal abolition of slavery and serfdom and a land revenue policy in favour of the actual cultivators brought significant changes in the status of the *Khasis* and *Doms*. Caste offences were denied formal legal cognizance. The exalted and powerful institution of the *dharmadhikari* was first replaced and then abolished, Administrative offices were

made available to every one irrespective of caste. All land owners were subjected to provide coolie services to touring government officials and travellers. This helped the non-*Thul-jat* castes to equate themselves to their erstwhile ritual superiors. Kumaon was also linked with an improved communication net-work. The British rulers recruited their domestic servants from the Dom groups, which brought them not only economic gains, but also gave the Doms confidence in their aspiration to change their status. Then there were educational centres such as the cantonment towns and availability of formal education, which changed the social scene.

In the last chapter the author points out "that practices such as vegetarianism, teetotalism, religious austerity and connubial exclusiveness which are normally listed as ritually edifying in studies of caste in India, had low status-relevance in Kumaon" (184-85). This study reflects vividly that the secular Brahmin enjoyed a higher status than his priestly compeer. The desire of traditionally inferior groups to improve their position in the status hierarchy so as to match their secular power and the refusal of the traditionally superior groups to treat the former as status equals created tension and conflict between the different castes. This found expression in organized efforts on the part of inferior castes to force recognition in the form of the caste associations. These associations, formed mainly by the *non-Thul-Brahmin castes*, were meant for securing economic, political and educational concessions for members and to exhort them to emulate the next higher caste in order to justify claims to status equality. However, there is another trend in the social transformation. The elite of the two numerically largest castes (Jimdar and Dom) have spearheaded movements aiming at achieving orthodoxy in ritual matters. This trend has also facilitated these lower castes to claim equality in ritual excellence with the Brahmins.

VI

I propose to conclude this appraisal with Bharati's (1976) attempt to treat the Himalayas as a cultural area unit of study. He finds the Himalayas different from South Asia, South-East Asia and China as a socio-cultural unit. No doubt, there are various trends such as the Indian caste culture, Tibetan Lamaist traditions and indigenous tribal ethos operating in the area simultaneously. But it makes the endeavour all the more rewarding: Whether the Himalayas can be a viable unit of study in itself? The author affirms such a possibility and suggests to arrange the multiple ethnic groups consisting of the Himalayan population along a continuum in the form of *Sanskritization-Modernization-Westernization*. He will like plains and other *Hinduized* tribes to be on

the trend of sanskritization; the Lamaist groups, the Sherpas etc. as being in the process of modernizing themselves. The typical example is provided by the *Thakalis'* endeavour to up-caste themselves for economic advancement. The higher caste Hindus of the urban centres such as Kathmandu, Nainital, Almora etc. and the *Brahmin-Chetri-Rana* ruling stock of Nepal present a trend of Westernization. Perhaps it will be instructive to examine the above four studies in the light of the proposed continuum of culture change. Will the Himalayan traders of Haimendorf be put into the stocks which are modernizing themselves? Is it that the *Non-Bith* Kumaoni castes are sanskritizing themselves? Similarly, Gaige's *tarai*-dwellers and Sinha's Sikkimese elite may be arranged somewhere on the line of the continuum.

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