



## **Himalayan Traders: Life in Highland Nepal.**

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off-made prediction that the 'green revolution' will bring class conflict may be true for one part of a district, but a different pattern of agrarian relations may produce a very different result in the other part. Yet again, Bêteille does not agree with the common view that class is taking the place of caste: the latter may be declining, but amorphousness rather than a class system seems to be emerging.

In short, Bêteille suggests that it is much too early for conclusive, much less dogmatic, pronouncements about classes in rural India to be made. Rather, we must at this stage collect a great deal more material and consider its complexities. Here we come to Bêteille's suggestion that the flagging interest of many of his contemporaries in village studies be revived by work on agrarian relations there—not to supersede but to complement the work done on village caste systems.

Like all of Bêteille's work, the essays are clearly written, thought-provoking, and argued with skill and authority. As he ruefully remarks, his use 'as the occasion demands, [of] the Marxist method of analysis without paying too much attention to the ideological objectives of Marxism . . . is likely to make my work suspect in the eyes of both orthodox sociologists and orthodox Marxists' (p. 13). Perhaps; but readers of all views will recognise the book's importance.

ADRIAN C. MAYER

SOAS, London

FUCHS, STEPHEN. *The Aboriginal tribes of India*. viii, 307 pp. Delhi: Macmillan India, 1974

The author of this book has set himself the formidable task of providing in just over 300 pages an ethnographic survey of all the major aboriginal tribes of India. As if this were not a sufficiently daunting enterprise he has added an introductory chapter on the prehistoric races of India and concludes the book with a brief account of the problems of tribal welfare. The volume is obviously intended for Indian students embarking on an introductory course of anthropology and looking for a guide through the complexity of the tribal scene. As such it may serve a useful purpose, and those without access to the old 'Castes and Tribes' series will find in it short accounts of numerous tribal groups many of which were described in greater detail by the authors of those voluminous works. As far as possible these sketches take modern developments into account and it is an advantage to have relatively recent census-figures, though through no fault of Dr Fuchs those of the

1971 census were not available when the book went to press.

In a compilation of this kind a certain unevenness is almost unavoidable. The sections relating to areas with which the author is familiar from his own extensive field-research in Middle India reflect a greater depth of understanding than those based on literary sources of varying reliability. More fundamental is the difficulty of summarising in chapters devoted to regions as large as 'Eastern India' or 'Southern India' such subjects as the social structure, political organisation and religion of the many different tribes living in the area. Such summaries inevitably contain generalisations which may apply to some but by no means to all the tribal societies described in the section.

In chapter 2 which deals in a general way with various aspects of Indian tribal societies the author demonstrates his well-known expertise on the problems besetting the aboriginals in modern times, and in his assessment of the present situation he evinces insight and a genuine sympathy with the tribesmen's struggle against the economic as well as the cultural pressures of more advanced populations. Readers acquainted with the position of the tribal populations of India are not likely to disagree with Father Fuchs when he writes:

At the present rate of progress it will take at least fifty years more for the tribal people of India to catch up with the rest of the population as they are now. In the meanwhile 'the rest' will progress further at an even faster rate during the next fifty years. Thus the gap between the tribals and the non-tribals will widen even more (p. 299).

C. VON FÜRER-HAIMENDORF

SOAS, London

HAIMENDORF, CHRISTOPH VON FÜRER. *Himalayan traders: life in highland Nepal*. xvi, 316 pp., plates, map, tables, bibliogr. London: John Murray, 1975. £7.50

This book makes little contribution to current anthropological theory but will be of inestimable value to future anthropologists. It is in the best tradition of ethnographic recording, a nostalgic journey through an area where very little has been recorded and much is disappearing rapidly. The peoples studied are all of Tibetan origin and live on the northern border of Nepal. Four chapters describe change in the Khumbu region since the period studied in the author's earlier *Sherpas of Nepal*. Three further chapters provide a brief description of other Bhotia groups, one near the Sherpas and two in western Nepal.

The central paradox to which Professor Haimendorf seeks an answer is that the inhabitants of the high, stony, inhospitable mountains are conspicuously richer than the peoples living in the agriculturally more prosperous regions. The reason for this is trade, particularly the movement of Tibetan salt from the north to be exchanged for Nepalese grains from the south. Fieldwork over the period 1953 to 1971 enables the author to see the way in which the closing of the Tibetan frontier by the Chinese in 1959 affected a people so heavily dependent on trade. He suggests that the Sherpas turned their surplus manpower towards exploiting the growing mountaineering and tourism business. Some of the other Bhotia peoples, who were less accessible and less well known as guides, were unable to survive as well and there has been a drop in living standards and population. Although in the short-term the situation is not desperate, and the author constantly stresses the resourcefulness and adaptability of these peoples, there are long-term dangers. As Professor Haimendorf notes, if the current population growth in central Nepal continues there will be no grains to export. Furthermore, improved communications from India will make Tibetan salt totally superfluous. The last vestiges of the trade will fade away. Meanwhile, the one major asset of Nepal, her forests, are shrinking very rapidly in these high regions, as elsewhere. Fuel shortage and erosion lie ahead. On the whole, however, the tone of the book is optimistic and there is little sentimental attachment to the old order.

The presentation is well suited to the theme and to the publishing of useful ethnographic data. The case studies of trading and agriculture, as well as the statistics on economics and demography, are most helpful. The maps and photographs are excellent and, combined with certain descriptive passages, really do convey a vivid feeling of what the region is like. The only criticism here is that a curious system of randomly indenting many paragraphs is irritating.

Negatively, as the author admits, brief acquaintance with some of the areas makes it impossible for him to discuss social structure, religion, cosmology and a number of other dimensions represented in the *Sherpas*. Nor is there any real attempt to draw wide conclusions or to place the study within any wider theoretical framework. There are interesting speculations on the reasons why these peoples are such avid traders. Some of the effects of trading patterns on social mobility and hierarchy are explored tentatively. Yet there is very little reference to wider theoretical discussions. This is a book almost devoid of explicit theory. Given the

nature of the fieldwork and scarcity of even elementary information on the area surveyed this is both understandable and justifiable. Once again Professor Haimendorf has been to regions hitherto largely uncharted and has given us a fascinating preliminary description.

ALAN MACFARLANE

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BEYER, STEPHAN. *The cult of Tārā; magic and ritual in Tibet*. xxi, 542 pp., illus., maps. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1973. \$20

Anthropological studies of Tibetan religious institutions and practices are few and far between. Regrettably no trained anthropologist ever worked in Tibet when western scholars such as Guiseppe Tucci could still enter that country, and most Tibetologists concerned themselves with the study of scriptural texts rather than with the observation of Buddhist ritual and inquiries among its practitioners. Ironically it was only when Tibet was no longer accessible that such observations were undertaken among the Tibetan speaking Buddhist populations of Nepal, Sikkim and northern India, regions on the periphery of the Tibetan culture sphere. Dr Beyer's study too is based on data collected in a monastic community of Tibetan refugees in Himachal Pradesh, where he spent more than a year.

Beyer has chosen the cult of the goddess Tārā as the focal point of his study, but his observations extended beyond the rituals connected with her worship. After a historical introduction, in which he traces the development of the Tārā cult as far as the fourteenth century, he describes in great detail the organisation of the Drugpa monastery from which his informants hailed. There is a vivid account of the training of novices and monks, and this is followed by a description of the rituals which bind the monastery to the surrounding lay community. An essential condition for the effectiveness of rituals is the contemplative training which enables a young monk to visualise the assembly of the deities to whom the ritual is directed. Simultaneous with this training in visualisation is the conscious inculcation of certain basic Buddhist attitudes with which the monk has to approach the magical power he is expected to attain through the rituals. There is great emphasis on processes of purification by which the proper use of magical power is guaranteed. Extremely instructive sections deal with the ritualisation of metaphysics and the classification of the gurus and deities invoked in tantric ritual regularly practised by the monks. Distinct from the fierce and potent deities with their weapons and sexual