Review: [Untitled]

Reviewed Work(s):

Les dieux du pouvoir: les Magars et l'hindouisme au Népal central by M. Lecomte-Tilouine
S. S. Strickland


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Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London is currently published by School of Oriental and African Studies.

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complete absence of references to the place of origin of the contributions is a major shortcoming. But in spite of these drawbacks, this book should be of considerable use for anyone interested in Bankimchandra's life, writings and impact on present-day India.

HANS HARDER


Some years ago Oxford University Press in Delhi undertook the present series as much to bring focused attention to historical issues that had attracted debate and serious discussion amongst historians of India as to make available readings on important topics that were beyond the library resources of even the most well-funded centres of learning in the country. Each volume was to contain three elements: an extended introduction setting the issue in its context and recapitulating the various arguments that continued to hold allegiance among scholars; a selection of essays or parts of monographs without which genuine understanding of the themes would not be possible; and finally, an annotated bibliography to guide readers into further research.

Ten essays comprise the volume, including the long introduction by Sanjay Subrahmanyan, its editor. Chronologically anchoring the collection is Kenneth Hall's paper on the trade system of Tamil country in south-eastern India during the twelfth century. This discussion departs from the technical concern of Subrahmanyan's introduction about money and prices to the subject of exchange. For Hall, what really matters is the admittedly thin evidence of Chola-period trade within the theoretical frame provided by Karl Polanyi many years ago, as modified by the more recent work of W. G. Skinner on Chinese market structures. Hall proposes that trade in Chola times was not governed by open, price-setting markets, but was "administered", perhaps by the state, through the intermediate institutions of local and itinerant merchant guilds. Following this is a reprinting of an essay by Irfan Habib arguing that Zia' Barani's 1557 account of the price regulations of Ala-uddin Khalji (1296–1316) should be accepted as accurate and rescued from the dismissiveness of modern scholars; the regulations showed an imaginative statesman seeking to impose control over the costs of his army and administration.

John Dewey provides an analysis of numismatic evidence of medieval Bengal that traces a network of silver and gold supplies for monetary media into Bengal from southern China via Burmese, whose gold and silver mines added to the specie flow, the amplitude of these monetary stocks contrasted with the simultaneous dearth of such media in the Gangetic basin between 1200 and 1500. John Richards's paper affords a rare glimpse of the monetary policies followed by Afghan Lodi during their hegemony over Delhi, from 1451 to 1526, when they were displaced by Babur and the Mughals. From Aziza Hasan comes the argument that the output of silver coinage during the great era of the Mughals in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries suggests that a price revolution might have occurred in India as it did in Europe as a result of the import of American treasure. This finding underlines the intensification of trade ties between India and the rest of the world then, an issue which Sanjay Subrahmanyan takes up in his paper comparing south and west Asia from 1500 to 1750. Then, flows of precious metals and prices were such as to permit the testing of various propositions about world and Asian trade, such as the notion of 'price revolution' in Asia and the validity of reasoning about 'world-systems'.

Three further papers complete this volume. B. R. Grover's 1966 paper argues that the integration of commercial life in rural north India during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries was based upon a hierarchy of urban places, and that the expansion of both urbanization and commerce began to decline during the eighteenth century with the decline of the Mughal state. The notion that there was such a political and economic failure is currently contested by, among others, K. N. Chaudhuri and Frank Perlin, whose papers conclude the volume. Chaudhuri draws attention to the technical sophistication that obtained in the Indian commercial world of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and accounted for the ease with which Indian trade extended well beyond India, as Dutch and other European documentation make clear. These same sources inform Perlin's discussion of monetization before the era of colonial domination in South Asia.

Sanjay Subrahmanyan's introduction to these papers is concerned almost exclusively with money: coinage, both precious and debased, banking and financial instruments and prices. The 'Market' in the title is dealt with as an abstraction rather than in the sense of transactional fields where money in its various forms is deployed in the service of commerce. That is a defensible limitation and one which permits him eagerly to explore aspects of money that most readers will find as stimulating as they are instructive.

BURTON STEIN


The hill tribes of Nepal make up a quarter of its population but are the subject of around nine-tenths of its ethnography. Few would deny Marie Lecomte-Tilloune's claim that this anthropological bias has arisen from a Western taste for the exotic; an assumption that these tribes would represent a pre-Buddhist, pre-Hindu Indo-Tibetan cultural substratum inaccessible through written texts, a lack of access
to Tibet itself even after the opening of Nepal in the 1950s; a feeling that the Indo-Nepalese caste system had been already well studied in colonial India; and a belief that this system was being imposed on a passive, hitherto isolated and purely tribal area whose peoples were disposed simply to imitate, not actually incorporate the trappings of Hinduism. Her aim in this absorbing and well-documented study of the Magar of Gulte District is to show how, in contrast, the process of Hinduization has occurred consciously, selectively and with particular political ends in mind.

The book is divided into three main ethnographic parts of which the first concerns the general anthropological context. The Magar seem to have been consistently underenumerated in official censuses over the past 30 years. The author estimates that they number about 150,000 and live in two Districts between Kanchanpur in the West and Late in the East with a marked concentration in Palpa in central Nepal. In their relations with local Brahmin-Chhetri, Kami and Damai, the Magar do not see themselves as other than part of a caste, clearly defining the rules of commerciality and interaction. On the part of the Nepalese scale, however, they stand as a tribal group.

Before the inception of the Panchayat system in the early 1960s, religious power among the Magar was subordinate to the political power of their chief (mudhia) in whose house certain rites were conventionally held. The author suggests that the emergence of the Panchayat leader or pradhan could have entailed conflict between these two. She claims that the Magar of Daling village resolved this problem by making the mudhia into the pradhan, and moving rites of Dasaí from the house of the former to a temple at the Panchayat administrative centre. In this way, they avoided placing religious power into Brahmin hands, or giving temporal power to Chhetri, thereby exemplifying a subtle process by which the author parses through her analysis of religion. This part also contains much interesting ethnographic material on origin stories and marriage patterns of kinds familiar from elsewhere in Nepal, although wider comparative analysis is limited.

The second part concerns the religious world of the villagers seen through the study of calendrical and life-cycle rites, and of shamanism. Worship of a village deity called Grame replaced that of an ancient Bishne cult, after bad hailstorms led to the prohibition of local cattle herding. The author interprets this to represent the unifying nature of the new political system of the Panchayat, in which all castes have a role. She claims that exclusion of women from this shrine reflects their political impotence, and a tendency to conform to high-caste practices is also suggested by the exclusion of women and Brahmins from local mines. Careful description of rites in each of the five seasons of the year reveals a concentration of ritual activity during the monsoon. Universal celebration of Snak Dum in Spring, and Nag nata in winter, shows how the Snaké is held responsible for seasonality: perhaps a true index of adoption of the Hindu calendar. Central features are the separation of the village priest from the chief, the former being a wife-taker of the latter and therefore subordinate to him, and the importance of lineage worship.

The chapter devoted to life-cycle rites shows how in ritual terms the Magar have drawn the Kami towards them; the Brahmin-Chhetri is the Damai. The further North one travels, the less the Brahmin officials affect them, this similarity in ritual practice between Magar and Kami intermarriage between Magar and Kami appears to have been fairly frequent, if disapproved; but their association results in part from their common work in mining. Particularly valuable is the author’s lucid analysis of the weight placed by the different groups on components of the ritual timetable.

The author brings out various ways in which, in contrast to the Brahmin-Chhetri, the Magar can be associated with service castes and, especially Kami, forage with baby to the mother’s melia soon after birth, the wedding ceremony is simplified in a temple ceremony at marriage, marriage ceremony has no pavilion or sacred space; the lineage elder alone undertakes simple, unrecorded rites of ancestor worship; much more importance is attached to initiation or marriage ceremonial.

Passing on to local shamanic practices, Lecomte indicates that the rama (lampa) is primarily used by the Magar and Kami, although it resembles that of the Newari (Kham) Magar suggesting a common tribal basis. An interesting story, given in Nepali/French parallel text, recounts the origin of the first shaman and his nine witch sisters. Elements of the narrative (multiple sons, consequent catastrophe, shamanic disembodiment) will strike chords with readers acquainted with mythology from the wider cultural area. The author seeks to show that, far from representing traditions foreign to Indo-Nepalese culture, this myth effectively integrates shamanism within the local context of the shaman as village shaman. There are few Magar cultural traits which are incompatible with Hinduism; and easy integration is therefore possible. Thus, in shamanic mythology, Siva is the son-in-law of Indra and creator of the universe; in the classical Hindu stories contained in the Svalbhäsí kathá, Siva is the son-in-law of Daksa and subsequently Himalaya, while Vishnu is the creator of the universe. Daksa and Himalaya are therefore confused with Indra, and Siva has attributes of Trimurti. Shamanism, the author argues, is an indigenous religion which results not from personal choice but from divine election; and the shaman resembles in this respect the Hindu bhakti. Thus, this account provides an enlightening counterpart to Anne de Saint’s recent study of the shamanism of the Northern Magar, "En val de nos jeux de tambours" (Nantes: Société d’Ethnologie, 1991, rev. in BSOAS, LV, 2, 1993, 392).

Part 3 of this book describes the regional pantheon of deities. These are classified more according to the Brahmans than to the presumed function. Thus, the inhabited world, the forest, and the rivers provide the framework of analysis. The account begins with the house as temple of the family, describing its pur, but
Unlike the Magar, the Brahman-Chetris do not break their lineage for the worship of the *kvi devata*, a fact which suggests that they do not split the lineage for reasons of exogamy. Female ancestors are invoked and fed during the *sradha* worship, but their names are more difficult to recall than those of men, and the author emphasizes the closer associations which are made between women and witchcraft. Description of the deities moves on to the stables, and then to the Bhumib goddess, worship of whom plays an important part among the Magar people and who is often associated with women in this area. Careful accounts follow of *bhii*, *jankari*, *mariam*, *piil*, and associated forest or lesser deities which have a more human presence than do the great deities. Lecomte presents the *bhii* as comparable to men, each steeping the property of the other. The *bhii* sacrifice wild boar to men, who in turn offer produce to these forest beings. The shaman can be easily become ancestors, and on death must therefore become these beings. The author argues that the world of these beings is an inverted model of the established order which enables people to see their conventional rules as a part of a coherent whole. However, one may doubt whether people ordinarily have such a broad conception of their cosmology as to merely be able to do this other than partially or in context-dependent fashion.

Finally, the author considers the deities of the ridge: Malioka, Siddha, Baraha, Mastaj, Sadeutti, and Dackali. The small areas of forest on ridge tops around streams protect these in the original places of the deities, allowing men to use the rest of the land for cultivation. The yogic deities are orthodox Hindu deities (Sadeutti, Varshila); the others are ascetic or forest deities, powerful and sensitive to disturbances, for whom Brahmin priests intercede for the high castes, *akshi* officials for the Magar. The final chapter of this book concludes that the ancient sacred sites of the Himalayas and wandering ascetics were probably the earliest sources of exogenous Hindustani influence in the region. Subsequently, the sixteenth century saw both the kings and Brahmins, Chetris and artisans taking power in the area. The author suggests that it is scarcely possible for a people like the Magar, lacking a firmly organized religion, to avoid becoming Hindu once under a Hindu ruler. The strength of this influence worked through persuasion of the Magar to adopt their own language in preference for that of the rulers, and that of the Brahmanic texts which some early twentieth-century schools enabled Magar children to learn to read. Perhaps more interesting is the suggestion of early influence imparted by the Kaki and Damar, who had been called by Magar chiefs to settle in their villages and remained in close and longstanding contact with them. The author aduces motives for social advancement which have begun to split the Magar into upper and lower sub-groups depending on whether busis and *fakir* have been wrongly that the Magar have been adopting Hindustani characteristics for purely political reasons.

In a final, perhaps typically French anthropological flourish, Lecomte attempts to develop a psychological dimension to her model of hinduization. This builds on the success of an analogy between components of the ideology of a social group, and components of individual personal identity analysed in terms of intersubjectivity which were first proposed by Lacan in the 1950s. Without claiming any special reductionism, this theory delineates four dimensions of relationship between the Magar and the high castes: cultural coincidence (tripartite, spatially organized structure of the pantheon); identification on the basis of two close characteristics (certain forest deities and their relationship to the cow); identification of divergent symbols (the deity Bhumib, guardian of the fields for all, but of the village territory for the Magar); the cultural quid pro quo which demonstrates incomplete identification (entailed by different systems of kinship and contrasting status relations between wife-givers and wife-takers).

A brief review can do scant justice to a work of this meticulous quality. It is unique in its attempt to give an integrated analysis of both Magar and high caste/low caste religious practices, and to lend this an historical dimension usually lacking from ethnographic studies in Nepal. The one surprising omission is that the author nowhere cites Sylvain Lévi's much-quoted claim *Nepal, c'est l'Inde qui se fait*.

S. E. STRICKLAND


Before he died last year, Vaikom Muhammad Bashieh had left an indelible mark on modern Malayalam fiction; he is known to many English readers from R. F. Asher's translation of his novella *Mo Grandad 'ad un elephant* (1980). The 16 stories included in the present volume represent the best of Bashieh's short fiction, spanning the full spectrum of his writing career from 1937 to 1975; all but one of the stories appeared earlier in English translations, also by V. Abdulla, who deserves high praise for producing fluent translations without obscuring the phrasing of the Malayalam original.

In these stories Bashieh creates a tragicomic world of simple pleasures and exaggerated failings. In the title story, "Poovan Banana", a husband's self-induced fantasies of his undying devotion to a demanding wife lead him to near-death in a failed attempt to satisfy her request for the highly prized banana, unable to find the bananas, he buys more expensive and (he assures himself) more nutritious oranges, swims down the flooded river at night, and is swept away by the current, his head emerging through a monsoon rain, setting his body on sharpened horns, and finally reaches home but his wife refuses the surrogate fruit. Peace is restored only when she accepts his fantasy that he did