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**Book review of 'The Yogins of Ladakh, A Pilgrimage Among the
Hermits of the Buddhist Himalayas' by John Crook and James
Low,**

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The Yogins of Ladakh, A Pilgrimage Among the Hermits of the Buddhist Himalayas

John Crook and James Low; Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Ltd., 1997

When John Crook first entered Ladakh, his intention was to study local culture and history from the perspective of social science and anthropology. But, as he states in an introductory passage, "walking at high altitudes and visiting monasteries can open the mind to unusual experiences." Those experiences compelled Crook to investigate the practices of Tibetan Buddhists of Ladakh. In this volume he has written about the intersection of their world and the worlds of visiting Buddhists in a engaging and highly experiential fashion, more completely and provocatively than in any of his previous writings.

The book that resulted from the collaboration between Crook and co-author James Low documents their exploration of the possibility that Buddhist principles, particularly as practiced by the reclusive hermits of the mountains of Ladakh, reflect a theory of mind which is fundamentally different from Western theories of mind. One question that the authors considered as they began their pilgrimage was whether this difference, if it existed, might be illuminating to thinkers seeking wisdom from non-Western intellectual and religious traditions as we face an increasingly challenged, and challenging, moral, ethical and environmental landscape.

To address this question Crook and Low went to investigate who yogins were, what they did in their meditation caves, how they figured in local communities, whether they still practiced their remarkable yogas in modernizing Ladakh, and if those yogas could be understood from a Western viewpoint. This took them on a physically and emotionally fantastic journey through mountainous Ladakh, to remote monasteries and caves and to many places where Western people had not been. Both investigators are accomplished Buddhist practitioners, both fluent in Tibetan, and both had spent extended periods in Buddhist and non-Buddhist South Asia, including Ladakh.

The book is divided into three sections; Background, Travelogue, and Teaching and Practice. The Background section explains the intellectual, religious and philosophical basis of the present investigation. This is developed personally from the points of view of Crook and Low, as well as historically, in their discussion of the emergence of Buddhism in Ladakh and the many influences upon Ladakhi Buddhism from Tibet and India. In the Travelogue section, Crook and Low relate their many incredible adventures traveling and studying with some of the most learned and humble religious men and women in the Tibetan world. In this section, descriptions of their experiences with these people and others who help them traverse the forbidding landscape are at once touching, inspiring, and downright funny. The third and last section, Teaching and Practice, is an illuminating exegesis on the basic teachings of the Buddha and on some of the more complex practices including Madhyamaka, Mahamudra and Dzogchen. In addition, in this section the authors describe some of the subtle and elusive differences between Drigungpa Kargyu, Drugpa Kargyu, and Gelugpa approaches to teaching, practice and intellectual debate. Western Buddhists, inclined by our intellectual tradition toward Gelugpa intellectualization of the principles of Buddhism rather than the Nyingmapa or Kargyudpa practice paths may find this section especially useful in their understanding of Vajrayana Buddhist traditions. Toward the end of this section, Crook's description of the time he spent practicing Chod in 120 cemeteries of Ladakh over several months is especially remarkable, and marks what was perhaps one of the crowning moments in his personal quest to understand his spirituality as a Buddhist in and outside the context of his citizenship in the modern industrialized world. The description of this experience dovetails nicely with an earlier discussion of the ways in which Crook's intellectual background as a scientist interact with his belief and training as a Buddhist.

At the end of the third section comes a translation of a previously unknown Mahamudra text by Khri. dPon Pad. Ma. Chos. rGyal. This text was photographed by Crook in 1980 at the gumpa of Urgyen Dzong. In an incident related earlier in the book, Khamtag Rimpoche, a former student of Tipun Padma Chogyal (the text's author) encouraged Crook to have a translation made so that the wisdom of his teacher might be made available for the benefit of Western Buddhists. The translation was prepared by Low with assistance from Chimed Rigdzin Rimpoche, and the insightful commentary following each passage, written in collaboration by Crook and Low, will be helpful to all students of the Mahamudra.

A dominant theme in the book relates to the difficulty the authors had in answering the questions originally proposed; having to do with the nature of mind. The reification of mind that those raised in Western intellectual tradition are so

comfortable with was not an important component of the daily life and practice of the yogins encountered by the authors. This eventually became a cause of considerable concern to Crook and Low. A scene related in Chapter Ten, in which Crook and Low attempt to tackle the "nature of mind" question head-on with two elderly yogin friends, is poignant and instructive, and is perhaps the book's most brilliant moment. Readers will recognize it when they get there.

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A Life Worth Remembering: *Moran of Kathmandu*

by Donald A. Messerschmidt; White Orchid Press, Bangkok, 1997

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Very few people are able to create possibilities and persevere for success in the face of unimaginable odds. Fewer leave behind lasting legacies which future generations will remember and admire. And there are not many with the diversity to be priest, teacher, radio operator, social worker, sports enthusiast and more, in one. Fr. Moran was endowed with all these skills and abilities, and his is a life worth remembering and celebrating.

Donald A. Messerschmidt presents the biography (this could be called an "authorised" biography) of Fr. Marshall D. Moran, SJ in his book *Moran of Kathmandu, Priest, Educator and Ham Radio "Voice of the Himalayas."* In sixteen chapters, the book tracks Fr. Moran's life as a child and student in Chicago, his early adulthood as a novice and junior in Jesuit training schools, his journey to India and, ultimately, his adventures in Nepal. Fr. Moran's own views on events at various stages of his life are published as "looking back". Also included are anecdotes of old friends, students and fellow Jesuits who knew Moran. The book further provides some history of missionaries in Nepal over the centuries.

Fr. Moran first came to Nepal in 1949 to administer exams though Patna University, India, at Tri-Chandra College, Kathmandu. It was at that time, during the reign of Mohan Shamsher, that he decided this was where he wanted to work. There was then only one school in Kathmandu that catered to the upper class and royal household. Few had the courage or interest to establish a modern school in Nepal. Moran had to wait patiently until the ousting of the Ranas to realise this dream. On the afternoon of King Tribhuvan's return from self-exile in India on 15 February 1951, Marshall received a telegram, "Come at once." This was indicative of the manner in which Fr. Moran operated. He knew people in high places, sensed forthcoming opportunities and was prepared to take them up as they came.

Fr. Moran had many friends. He made friends as teacher, missionary and ham radio operator. They included royalty, ambassadors, actors and actresses, astronauts, politicians and bureaucrats: people from all walks of life. He came to know many Indian leaders, including Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, both of whom he chauffeured in Bihar during India's fight for independence. He talked to King Mahendra over his radio two times when the latter was travelling abroad. He would also talk to the King of Jordan over his radio, and encountered other famous people of whom most of us would only read about.

Most inspiring of Fr. Moran's accomplishments, however, is his establishment of several educational and social institutes. Apart from his courage to travel through India on his own (in the 1930s and as a young Jesuit), one admires also the number of institutions he helped set up and operate while there, and later in Nepal. These included the Country School in Bettiah (1930s), St. Xavier's High School for Boys in Patna (1940), the Women's College in Patna (1940), Holy Family Hospital in Patna (late 1940s), St. Xavier's Godavari School (1951), St. Xavier's High School, Jawalakhel (1954), St. Mary's School for Girls, Jawalakhel, (1955) and the Tibetan Refugee Camp at Jawalakhel (1959-1960). For Fr. Moran, nation-building was about providing disciplined education to young men and women, a true example of investment in indigenous capability building. We oftentimes lament the state of Nepal's education and the products of our educational system. Perhaps if more of our planners and educators were to internalise Fr. Moran's vision for the country, we would make more progress.

Fr. Moran, as a Christian priest, had absolute respect for the non-Christian traditions of India and Nepal, which he studied in depth. Fr. Moran shared Mahatma Gandhi's views on equality of religion and culture. In today's Nepal, these messages of tolerance and equality are important.

Overall, this book is a worthy token of appreciation for the life and work of Fr. Moran. No book, however, could do entire justice to his achievements. It is not an easy task to bring forth a character so diverse, so intense and driven to achieve the high standards he set for himself. As a former student of Fr. Moran, I read these pages with full admiration for its protagonist, his courage and accomplishments. Fr. Moran's life should inspire many others. This book is recommended for all planners, educators and pioneers.

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