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Book review of 'Civilized Shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies' by Geoffrey Samuel

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Applied Ethnobotany in Natural Resource Management: Traditional Home Gardens - Highlights of a Training Workshop (18-23 June 1997, Kohima, Nagaland, India)

A. Rastogi, A. Godbole and Shengji Pei. eds., 1998, ISBN 92-9115-810-0, Price: US\$ 15.00 (Developed Countries); US\$ 10.00 (Developing Countries); US\$ 7.50 (ICIMOD Member Countries)

A training workshop on applied ethnobotany at Kohima in Nagaland was organized jointly by ICIMOD, NEPED and AERF covering various aspects of nature conservation and community development projects and utilising home gardens as a thematic focus. Twenty-two participants and resource persons from all over the north-eastern states of India came together to share their experiences and learn about research approaches in the field of ethnobotany. The report, *Applied Ethnobotany in Natural Resource Management: Traditional Home Gardens*, highlights the aspects of traditional knowledge in household production systems. Home gardens are known to complement swidden agriculture and animal husbandry practices utilising land and other resources extremely efficiently in mountain areas. Involvement of local experts to talk about indigenous knowledge aspects during the course of discussions on various topics proved very helpful for clarifying many concepts and issues that surfaced during the workshop. The report consists of three main sections. An introductory section provides relevant background information and introduces

the theme of the workshop in detail, and the second section provides an overview of research and approaches to analysing home garden systems. The third section provides information on various field visits, an account of interactions with NEPED, and orientation to the market survey exercise. Five annexes give details of survey formats, programme of the workshop, participant information, and workshop evaluation.

Appropriate Farm Technologies for Cold and Dry Zones of the Hindu Kush-Himalayas

S. Hafeez, ed., 1998, ISBN 92-9115-838-0, Price: US\$ 20.00 (Developed Countries); US\$ 15.00 (Developing Countries); US\$ 10.00 (ICIMOD Member Countries)

The HKH region is the world's highest mountain region, extending over 3,500km. Appropriate farm technologies of the cold and dry HKH mountain areas of China, India, and Pakistan have been documented in this monograph. Technologies for water conservation are being used for the management of water and the irrigation of staple crops and orchards. There is one innovative technology for the artificial recharge of groundwater, i.e., delay action dams (DADs), that has been documented here. There are a total of 17 technologies for land and soil management. Land management technologies are mostly biological tools that improve land productivity levels under natural conditions, whereas soil-related technologies focus on soil fertility, tillage, and so on for crop production.

Most of the technologies to increase productivity focus on fruits and vegetables, with a few concentrating on animal production and farm machinery. The agro-enterprise-oriented technologies motivate farmers to transform their traditional subsistence-oriented economies into commercial, income-generating farm economies. Indigenous agro-based technologies are women-specific and focus on gender equity in the male-dominated social structures of the HKH region by strengthening the economic empowerment of women. These technologies include farm produce reservation and commercial processing, beekeeping, mushroom production, palm leaf household products, and other cottage products. Some recommendations for study and dissemination of these technology packages at various levels have been listed. The annexes are valuable and list well-known fruit and vegetable varieties found in the different agro-ecological zones of the HKH region.

Draught Animal Power in Mountain Agriculture: A Study of Perspectives and Issues in The Central Himalayas, India (MFS [Mountain Farming Systems] discussion paper, 98/1)

V. Singh, 1998, ISSN 1024-7548, Price: US\$ 15.00 (Developed Countries); US\$ 10.00 (Developing Countries); US\$ 7.50 (ICIMOD Member Countries)

This discussion paper discusses several important issues relating to the role of draught animal power (DAP) in sustainable agricultural development in the Central Himalayas of India and gives recommendations for policy changes and technology development. The nature and intensity of problems related to DAP are different for different ecological areas - Shivalik Hills, Middle Himalayas (traditional), Middle Himalayas (transformed), and Greater Himalayas, and the policy measures to overcome these specific problems also have to be different. Even within the transformed Middle Himalayas, three principal types of transformation have been included in the study: vegetable-based, modern cereal crop-based, and fruit tree-based. These areas vary greatly in terms of demand for and supply of DAP, accessibility, adoption of new technologies, and so on. These all have important implications for the potential for mechanization, animal breeding strategy, and feed and fodder supply. Also discussed in the paper is the commercialisation of agriculture as an important strategy in the hills and mountains of the Hindu Kush-Himalayan Region promoted in recent years to achieve the multiple objectives of increasing farm employment and incomes and protecting the environment. Commercialisation of agriculture has increased the demand for DAP relative to its supply. The author asserts that this may lead to the adoption of mechanical technology in the hills and mountains with negative environmental impacts. These issues are discussed and analysed in the paper.

Fields of Grass - Portraits of the Pastoral Landscape and Nomads of the Tibetan Plateau and Himalayas

Daniel J. Miller, 1998, ISBN 92-9115-824-0, US\$ 40.00

Wordsworth's pensive line on nature sets the scene for **Fields of Grass - Portraits of the Pastoral Landscape and Nomads of the Tibetan Plateau and Himalayas** by Daniel J. Miller.

The book contains some astounding portraits of the Himalayan and plateau environments and a way of life that may or may not outlast the incursions of a monetary economy and rapid globalisation. In a poignant preface, George B. Schaller of the Wildlife Conservation Society, New York, talks of the 'remnants' of wildlife that have retreated "into the most inhospitable terrain." He reminds us that humans are an integral part of mountain life and that everywhere "they live beyond their means, ecologically speaking."

The photographs presented span a period of twenty-two years, from 1975 to 1997, and provide a valuable record of vegetation changes on the rangelands over time. They also provide a record of a time in humanity's history, the wandering of the peoples, that co-exists today with a new era of wandering into near space and beyond. It is the same spirit that pervades these gaunt, sometimes inhospitable, ecosystems that pervades the journey into space.

The book is well worth a visit for its unforgettable portraits of the peoples and environments of the Himalayas and the Tibetan Plateau. It is an enjoyable book, with clever aesthetic photographic records of a hardy group of people and their environment.

Amongst other things it will serve as a constant reminder that the movements of humanity were, from the very beginnings of time, an adaptation for survival. Call it what we will, but our ancient nomadic instincts are the key to all our futures.

Mountain Tourism for Local Development: Training Manual for Local Community Groups and Organizations

K. Banskota and B. Sharma, 1998, Price: US\$ 20.00 (Developed Countries); US\$ 15.00 (Developing Countries); US\$ 10.00 (ICIMOD Member Countries)

Mountain Tourism for Local Development: Training Manual for Policy Planners in Tourism and Related Areas

K. Banskota and B. Sharma, 1998, Price: US\$ 20.00 (Developed Countries); US\$ 15.00 (Developing Countries); US\$ 10.00 (ICIMOD Member Countries)

The Journal of Newar Studies, Number 2, Contents

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Book Reviews

Civilized Shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies

Geoffrey Samuel. Washington and London: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1993.

Geoffrey Samuel's **Civilized Shamans** is a massive work of scholarship that will prove useful both to students of Tibetan Buddhist religion and philosophy and to researchers focusing on political and ethnographic aspects of Tibetan societies. The book doubles as an argument regarding the socio-political underpinnings of Tibetan Buddhism vis-a-vis other forms of Buddhism, and as a general reference to Tibetan history and society. The encyclopedic nature of the volume affords both its strengths and weaknesses, as Samuel's central thesis is sometimes obscured by a wealth of details.

The historical tension between what Samuel terms "shamanic Buddhism" and "clerical Buddhism" is the theme around which Samuel builds a very wide ranging survey of Tibetan societies. Shamanism entails "the regulation and transformation of human life and human history through the use (or purported use) of alternate states of consciousness by means of which specialist practitioners are held to communicate with a mode of reality alternative to, and more fundamental than, the world of everyday experience" (p. 8). Many Vajrayana practices can be characterized as "shamanic" when defined in these terms. Although adepts of the Vajrayana view their practices as ultimately in accord with the more purely spiritual "Bodhi orientation," *siddhis* or powers may be developed, and Tantric (or "shamanic") lamas may use these powers to aid their lay followers' more pragmatic ends. Some may object to his association of the "shamanic vision" with the Vajrayana, for shamanism is usually considered a "primitive" religious practice, and Samuel never clearly discusses the differences between shamanic practices inside and outside the Buddhist tradition. However, his terminology usefully highlights the contrast to "clerical Buddhism" which "dismisses activity within the cycle of rebirth as irrelevant."

Clerical Buddhism's "primary mode of activity is scholarship, philosophical analysis, and monastic discipline. Its typical figure is the scholar-monk" (pp. 9-10). Samuel argues that only in Tibet, largely because of its unique political and social structures, did clerical Buddhism fully integrate the shamanic vision. In Theravadin societies, such as pre-colonial Thailand, Burma, and Sri Lanka, Samuel claims that Buddhism was "domesticated." Legitimate practice was state sponsored and regulated. Concern with the pragmatic orientation was "marginal" to the role of urban monks or village monasteries. At the fringes, cults may have formed around charismatic forest saints, but since these shamanic practitioners represented potential sites of rebellion against the state, they were kept subordinate when not actually repressed.

Samuel argues that the presence of relatively autonomous monastic orders and a decentralized political structure led to a failure to "domesticate" Tibetan Buddhism. Here he persuasively characterizes "pre-modern" Tibet as essentially

stateless. Samuel points out that, like Islamic societies, Tibet had a low population density, difficulties in communications, and heavy reliance on long distance trade. These factors inhibited the development of a strong centralized political authority (p. 360). Samuel criticizes previous "Lhasa-centric" analyses of Tibetan history and culture which have led to confusions about the nature of Tibetan states. His usage of the plural—"Tibetan societies"—emphasizes the fact that there was no unified, homogeneous Tibetan social formation, and he includes in his survey of Tibetan polities the peoples of Bhutan, Ladakh, Sikkim, and the border regions of India, Nepal, and China. Samuel argues that taking Lhasa as representative of Tibet as a whole has led to an exaggerated view of Tibetan society as isolated, static, centralized, and rigidly stratified.

Samuel seems to want to comment on every important issue in Tibetan studies. He presents his central thesis in the first two chapters, then returns directly to the argument only in Part Three, hundreds of pages later. There, Samuel analyzes the development of the Tibetan shamanic-clerical synthesis from its beginnings in Indian Buddhism to the "Gelugpa synthesis and shamanic reaction." For Samuel, the Gelugpa sect of Tibetan Buddhism, headed by successive incarnations of the Dalai Lama, represents the clerical extreme of Tibetan Buddhism, while the Rimed movement of the last several centuries was partially a reaction to Gelugpa institutionalism. Linking the philosophical to the political, he notes that the Rimed movement began in K'am, "politically a patchwork of small secular and monastic states with little or no centralized authority," while the more clerically oriented Gelugpa was most influential in central Tibet.

Samuel emphasizes that he does not wish to "reduce" the unique Tibetan religious synthesis to material determinations. Instead, he wants to "treat consciousness and material reality as co-equal components of the developmental process" (p. 372). He attempts to do so through the use of the concept of "cultural patterns" or "patterns in the use of the minds and bodies of human beings," but this is never really developed or tied to larger historical processes. It is surprising that Samuel makes no reference to Bourdieu, who has attempted precisely to tie cultural patterns, bodily dispositions, and sociological determinants through his delineation of the "habitus." Instead, Samuel provides several tables charting the development of indexed "cultural patterns." For example (p. 458), during Tibet's "Local Hegemonic Period" from about AD 841 to 1276, he presents "T7 folk Religion; T8 Old Tantric and terma complex; T9 Kadampa monks; T10 New Tantric complex" etc. It is not clear what this enumeration is supposed to accomplish in terms of clarity or explanation. He never directly ties political and social life to philosophical developments, rather demonstrates only their loose association in time and space. The focus is almost entirely on macro-level social processes, and thus it is precisely a materialist "reduction" that proves most persuasive. Samuel seems to realize this, admitting that the relationship between "transformations in consciousness and those in the perceived world have been dealt with only implicitly" (p. 566).

Although Samuel does not (nor could be expected to) achieve a fully realized vision of the connections between individual consciousness and the social world, for those interested in Tibetan societies, particularly a theory relating Tibetan Buddhism to Tibetan political-economy, there is presently no better source than Samuel's book. Those unconvinced by his argument will nonetheless find the work valuable as perhaps the most comprehensive, recent reference and summary of the history and sociology of Tibet.

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The Good Heart: A Buddhist Perspective on the Teachings of Jesus

His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Introduction and Christian Context by Laurence Freeman, OSB. Translated from the Tibetan and Annotated by Geshe Thupten Jimpa. Edited with a Preface by Robert Kiely. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1996.

This book represents the proceedings of the John Main Seminar which met in September 1994 at Middlesex University in London. The Dalai Lama has been presented with eight texts from the Christian scriptures (two from each of the four gospels) and invited to comment on them in light of Buddhist teaching and spiritual practice. For those unfamiliar with those texts, Laurence Freeman's contextualization of the gospel passages toward the end of the book provides helpful background. (Helpful too are the two brief glossaries of major Christian and Buddhist terms.) Those familiar with the Christian texts under discussion will be disappointed if they look to the Dalai Lama's comments for insights into those texts, or even for providing a considered Buddhist response to selected teachings of Jesus. The texts serve instead as jumping off points for an exposition of Buddhist teaching and practice which a Christian reader could find both illuminating and religiously stimulating.

After reading what the Dalai Lama had to say about on the Sermon on the Mount, for example, it is hard to find any basis in his comments for responses such as the following: "I speak for myself, and I think for all of us here, when I say that it was very moving for me as a Christian to hear you read the words of Jesus with such purity and deep understanding of their meaning" (p. 56), or "It is a Christian belief that when Scripture is read by someone with a good