December 2007


Arjun Guneratne
Macalester College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/himalaya

Recommended Citation

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the DigitalCommons@Macalester College at DigitalCommons@Macalester College. It has been accepted for inclusion in HIMALAYA, the Journal of the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Macalester College. For more information, please contact scholarpub@macalester.edu.
Kisan points out in his analysis in chapter 3 of the representational politics and organizational leadership of the movement. Kisan criticizes Dalit organizations for excluding other lower caste groups, “a phenomenon [that] has brought a 53% Biswakarma majority in the present leadership of the Dalit Social Movement” (131).

Although Kisan tries to be objective in his overview of Dalit organizations and their approaches to liberation, he advocates a revolutionary socialist vision for the Dalits. Following a Leninist philosophy, Kisan calls for effective leadership with “broad political outlooks [and] revolutionary spirits” (117). The Nepal Dalit Mukti Morcha of the CPN (Maoist) seems to provide such a vision for Kisan, who argues that “the change needed to bring Dalit social justice is radical,” and that only radical struggle, either violent or non-violent, can change the status-quo (192).

Kisan’s analysis of the caste system in Nepal comes when the Nepali state is on the verge of failing, if it has not already failed. His look at the Dalit political and cultural movement provides important insights into the armed conflict in Nepal and the political complexity within the Dalit liberation movement. As Kisan sees things, the psychological, economic, cultural, and political toll suffered by Dalit people calls for radical methods of transformation. And Kisan rightly calls for recommendations that the government and the society must fully implement. However, strategies that operate through violent means may not bring positive changes, as violence usually begets more violence. The violence suffered by the Dalits and the powerless in society during the People’s War was grave, and thus one ought to question strategies that employ violence as a method of bringing about a caste-less, egalitarian society. The champions of peace and non-discrimination, Buddha, Jesus, Ambedaker, and Gandhi, did not espouse violence, yet they were able to change societies and bring about revolutions.

ENDNOTES


Rama Lohani-Chase defended her dissertation entitled “Women and Gender in the Maoist People’s War in Nepal: Dislocation and Militarization” from Rutgers University in January of 2008, and is currently teaching at The College of New Jersey.
day was still focused on nomenclature and classification, the
drawings of architectural monuments he commissioned and
the descriptions he compiled of languages, many of which
are today extinct.

Confined for the most part to the Kathmandu Valley,
Hodgson relied on a corps of Nepalese to collect his data,
ranging from the Newar scholar Amritananda, who collected
and interpreted the Buddhist manuscripts, to hunters who
brought him specimens (9,512 birds, for example, represent-
ing 672 species of which 124 were new to science) and who
provided him with detailed observations of bird behavior.
Hodgson trained a number of talented Nepali artists to paint
and draw birds and mammals as well as buildings and monu-
ments with great scientific fidelity; little is known about most
of them. He was “the first person to describe the geographi-
cal distribution of the mammals and birds of the Himalayas”
(p. 136) and was an important figure in creating the field of
Indian ornithology. Despite his contributions, however, he
had little support for his endeavors from the scientific estab-
ishment in England. He published mostly in Indian journals
that were not readily available in Britain, so while he was
well-known and esteemed in scientific circles in India, he
was marginal in the scientific community at home.

There exist only two other books that discuss Hodgson’s
life and work: W. W. Hunter’s biography, originally published
in 1896, and a discussion of Hodgson as an ornithologist by
Mark Cocker and Carol Inskipp (1988). This volume makes
the life and work of one of the most remarkable Englishmen
to work in the subcontinent accessible to scholars and will be
of interest to a very diverse readership—as diverse, in fact, as
Hodgson’s own interests. The contributions are all uniformly
good, and some are outstanding in their ability to place him
in his context and illuminate the workings of colonial forms
of knowledge. There are three biographical chapters that give
an overview of his life, his political work as British Resident,
and insights into his personal life in Kathmandu; two contrib-
tions discussing his study of Buddhism (with an essay by
Hodgson on architectural illustration of Buddhist monuments
as an appendix); three on Hodgson’s contributions to zool-
ogy; one that discusses Hodgson’s relationship with Joseph
Hooker; and two chapters that assess Hodgson’s contributions
to linguistics and ethnology. The final chapter introduces a
complete bibliography of his works. The book is profusely
illustrated throughout, mostly with the black-and-white il-
lustrations that Hodgson himself commissioned, and there
are sixteen color plates showcasing the work of his Nepali
artists. This no doubt contributes to the book’s price, which,
unfortunately, is likely to put it beyond the reach of most in-
dividual scholars and beyond the reach even of institutional
libraries in the Himalayan region, where it most deserves to
be. This volume is an excellent and valuable contribution to
our understanding of the praxis of colonial knowledge forma-
tion and deserves to be widely read.

Arjun Guneratne is Professor of Anthropology at Macalester
College in Saint Paul, Minnesota and Editor of Himalaya.
Reprinted with permission from The Journal of Asian Studies/
Cambridge University Press.