

reproduced in the volume, exemplifies that there is no lack of documentary evidence in colonial archives, while non-official sources have so far not even been tapped.

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MIHIR K. JENA / PADMINI PATHI / JAGGANATH DASH / KAMALA K. PATNAIK / KLAUS SEELAND, *Forest Tribes of Orissa. Lifestyle and Social Conditions of Selected Orissan Tribes*. Vol. 1: The Dongria Kondh. (Man and Forest Series 2). New Delhi: D.K. Printworld, 2002. XXVII, 433 pages, 4 maps, 19 figs., 19 tables, 40 col. plates, Rs 800.00. ISBN 81-246-0189-5

In the name of development, a group of four Indian scientists in co-operation with the Chair of Forest Policy and Forest Economics, Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH), inquired into the indigenous knowledge of the "Dongria Kondh" (usually Dongria Kondh) and have now jointly published a voluminous book (433 pages) with many maps, tables and pictures. The authors' research objectives are manifold: they intend to understand the people's "attitude towards or perception of the local environment", their "general way of life", to record data on economic activities, oral traditions and ethno-botanical knowledge and to inquire into the role of specialists for the preservation and transmission of indigenous knowledge as well as the changes that take place due to "the intervention of external forces like the Forest Department" in particular (p. 5-6).

The results of their inquiries are presented in ten chapters the last two of which directly discuss the role of indigenous knowledge for forest management. The first chapter informs us briefly about the geographical location of the Dongria Kondh, a rather small 'scheduled tribe' living in the Niamgiri hills of Orissa (India), about research objectives and the methods and techniques of data collection. The bulk of ethnographic data is contained in chapters 2 to 8 which deal with the social and economic organisation of the Dongria, the role of certain specialists, oral traditions, religion, classifications and their practice of shifting cultivation. Chapter 9 deals with the question of what can be learned from the Dongria for forest management, while chapter 10 informs us about forest policy and forest legislation in India that prohibits shifting cultivation.

In the list of contents no mention is made of the respective authors, but the quality of the individual chapters differs. Outstanding are chapters 5 and 7 dealing with oral traditions and classifications of the Dongria Kondh. Having myself done fieldwork among them, I have experienced the difficulties in collecting their mythology. All the more surprising is the richness of myths presented in chapter 5 which will be of great value for the understanding of Dongria society. Rather than interpreting this rich mythology the authors, however, restrict themselves to comments on the interrelation between a few mythemes and prohibitions of killing certain animals or the protection of particular trees, undoubtedly the main theme of their general inquiry into forest management.

Very rich ethnographic data is also presented in chapter 7 which deals with indigenous classification of hills, forests and types of soil. This chapter combines exact botanical knowledge with sociological observations and impressive inquiries into

Dongria religion, like their dualistic concept of life (*jela*) and soul (*jiu*). From the text it can be inferred that the author has a good knowledge of the Dongria language and has learned how Dongria perceive their world by inquiring into the social significance of the "natural world". More technical but also well researched is the chapter on shifting cultivation and horticulture which is probably written by the same author.

In contrast to these well written pieces of 'ethnobotany' the chapters authored from the perspective of social anthropology are rather disappointing. Chapter 2 on the "Dongria Kondh Community" contains few new insights into Dongria Kondh social morphology and political organisation but rather reproduces classical textbook clichés about clans, lineages and family which are better explained in P.K. Nayak's first book on the Dongria (1989). Life-cycle rituals are described in a traditional manner without any interpretation. The diagrams presented in this chapter are rather confusing, in particular the sketch of a Dongria house (p. 36) which more resembles a holiday cottage by a Swiss lake than any traditional Dongria habitat. The translations of Dongria expressions contain many mistakes (the answer on p. 59 should be: *kaska beta vai manambu*; on p. 61 the word *kalu* meaning alcohol is confused with *kodru* meaning buffalo, etc.) and there is a permanent shift between quotations in (Indo-Aryan) Oriya and the (Dravidian) Dongria language without any hint to the reader.

Better written and richer in ethnography by comparison are those chapters on the "Transmission and Specialists of Knowledge" and the "Knowledge of the Super-natural Environment", although the presentation of data often reminds one of the classical District Gazetteer, especially in the description of the nature and function of Dongria deities and of the yearly festivals. It is not at all clear which of the religious ceremonies the authors have witnessed personally or what information they have collected in interviews. It remains unclear how the many additional ethnographic details, for example on dreams and riddles, relate to the main question of forest management on the basis of indigenous knowledge.

In general, this is the weakest point of the book. While the ethnography is often very rich and will influence studies on Middle Indian tribes, the self-imposed task of applying the insights for development purposes prevents the authors from fully exploiting the rich ethnographic data and understanding of Dongria Kondh society and culture. It is, for example, surprising that the authors classify the Dongria as a 'forest tribe' and permanently stress the few taboos concerning forests. The name of this tribe ('Dongria' and 'Kondh', both meaning mountain) as well as the rich ethnography clearly show that the 'land of the hill' (*neta* or *horu*) and not the 'forest' is the focus of their oral traditions, rituals and economic activities. The most important festival of the Dongria, the Meria, is in honour of the earth goddess and – according to elementary anthropological classification – the Dongria are not hunters and gatherers depending on the 'gifts' from the forest but shifting cultivators who actively destroy the forest in order to gain cultivable land. The forest is not the only and not even the most valued natural resource to a Dongria as the authors themselves write: "The Dongria argue that without *jiu* [soul] of the hills, neither trees, nor forest, nor streams and animals would exist." (p. 267) The more general chapters at the end of this book would have gained much if the authors had generalized about the different concepts of nature among those involved in exploiting Orissa's forests.

The conclusion in chapter 9 that the "traditional practices began to deteriorate with the advent of modern utilitarianism and commercialisation and today, the common people are rather unfamiliar with them" (p. 311) is not substantiated by the rest of the book which contains much information on present-day practical knowledge of the Dongria. The authors often make references to past decades, where the Dongria are supposed to "have lived in harmony with the forest" (p. 335) because "the tribals would only fell a tree if it was necessary for constructing a house" (p. 312). The "main threat" (p. 335) of the present is identified in the practice of shifting cultivation which is increasing due to population growth and other factors. What data support these conclusions? What is known about the economic practices of the past and of the demographic development of the Dongria? To make shifting cultivation, rather than the increasing local and global pressures on the tribals' natural resources, responsible for deforestation may be a more serious distortion of reality than the reproduction of a mirror image of two Dongria boys on the cover page (Dongria wear their nose ring on the left nostril) or calling them a 'forest tribe'.

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HARKA GURUNG, *Mountains of Asia. A Regional Inventory*. Kathmandu: International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development, 1999. 86 pages, US\$ 15.00. ISBN: 92-9115-936-0. (together with a map-booklet-supplement: *On the Map. The Mountains of Asia*. Kathmandu: International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development, 1999. 17 pages. ISBN: 92-9115-953-0)

This timely contribution to the "International Year of the Mountains, 2002" has been published with the objective of providing a "description of Asian mountains" and of an "overview and insight into the principal mountain ranges as dynamic entities". Thus, this small book aims at the holistic approach of mountain research and development that has recently been identified as crucial for a better understanding of the diverse and often complex mountain habitats.

Since easily available information for a wider readership is still lacking for the mountain ranges of Asia, the unique approach of combining a description of mountain ranges from the Mediterranean Sea to the Pacific and Australasia is highly commendable.

This book is primarily a description of issues of geology, topography, climate and vegetation, occasionally supplemented by information on land use and indigenous population. Unfortunately, the publication falls short of its own holistic objective, since only scarce information on settlement history, access to transportation infrastructure or on territorial claims and political conflicts is given. All these issues really contribute to the diversity of Asian mountains, not only their physical features. Of course, the coverage of the different mountain ranges and highlands varies widely in depth and topics discussed, according to the availability of literature and data. However, even for comparatively well documented regions, such as the Himalayas, Karakoram and Northern Pakistan, the regional coverage seems rather selective.