

impacts of trade liberalization. Socio-economic case studies and the experiences of development practitioners indicate the on-going process of marginalization, whereas econometric studies on the national level provide evidence for economic "trickle down"-effects. This discussion is extended to the problem of appropriate approaches (inductive vs. deductive) and methodologies, and the level of aggregation of data. This is also the case with the discussion about the potentials of up-scaling successful projects on the local level ("best practices") to programmes on regional or national levels. Gender issues were not dealt with in a separate paper, but the important role of women within the processes of rural production and domestic reproduction as well as their vulnerability during the economic transformation were taken up in several papers and also in the discussion sessions.

This conference raised an important issue and drew attention to a region which is characterized by a complex interrelation between cash crop- and staple food-production, agro-exports and food-aid, inefficient government policies and huge internal socio-economic disparities. No blue print solution was readily available at this conference and no direct recommendations were made. However, only on the basis of interdisciplinary contributions can this complex set of problems be assessed and hopefully targeted for the improvement of food security on local and national or even global levels.

The conference proceedings provide a useful overview of scientific, cultural and political issues of food security, with a special focus on South Asia. However, a shortcoming of this interesting and important book is the lack of English summaries which might limit the number of readers.

*Jürgen Clemens*

APARNA RAO, *Autonomy. Life Cycle, Gender and Status among Himalayan Pastoralists*. New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1998. XVII, 350 pages, £ 50.00. ISBN 1-57181-903-7 (Hb.)

Rao's book is an ethnography about agency and autonomy among the Bakkarwal, nomadic pastoralists in Jammu and Kashmir. The volume concentrates less on concepts/ideologies about autonomy than on day-to-day practices with a focus on gender.

The book is the result of twenty-eight months of fieldwork in several phases plus several longer visits between 1980 and 1992. As regards norms, values and worldview, the Bakkarwal are a composite group and thus very suitable for a study of individual autonomy. They combine elements from the East Pashtun with traditions coming from the Punjab further south. They are of Islamic faith but of a South Asian variety, living in a mixed religious setting with egalitarian values of Islam and hierarchical ideologies of the Hindu order.

The book falls into six chapters framed by an introduction and an afterword. The introduction provides the theoretical and methodological basis. Regarding theory Rao draws on general literature on agency and especially on works on self, person and autonomy within the recent discussion on individuality in South Asia. Contrary to some authors she assumes human beings as striving towards the attainment or

maintenance of as great a degree of well-being as possible. This requires individual action and decision-making within culturally specific settings. The life-cycle perspective was the main guide-line for data collection in the field.

The chapters are arranged according to the life-cycle of Bakkarwal people. As the results are often fascinating, but too manifold and complicated to sum up in the space given, I give only a glimpse of the contents. Chapter 1 ("Coming into Being") deals with conception and birth. Chapter 2 ("Growing into Society") considers the concepts and practices in becoming a person, e.g. naming, and explains those relating to age. Chapter 3 ("Producing Norms") treats briefly several units of collective identity, but is mainly about endogamy and the decision processes in marriage. Chapter 4 ("Perpetuating Life and Producing Values") deals with sexual and economic reproduction and gives a very detailed and gender-sensitive picture of household dynamics. One core theme for the question of autonomy is the dynamic balance between independence and co-operation. Chapter 5 ("Reproducing Values") considers mainly questions of status and concepts of well-being related to status and different types of "men of influence". Chapter 6 ("Waiting for the Life Beyond") returns to questions of age, especially old age and relations between old people and the young. The short afterword refers to the recent events in Jammu and Kashmir and includes a political statement in favour of the people of Kashmir. A second point here is the author's plea for more deep ethnographic studies of autonomy and a critique of some recent studies of self and the individual, which tend to compare Asian and non-Asian people in all too general and often stereotype ways.

Technically the book is well produced. I found only one figure not readable (map, fig. 1.1, p. 2), one author cited but missing in the bibliography (La Fontaine, p. 12) and very few printing errors (e.g. tekonym instead of teknonym, p. 193). There are a lot of good tables and instructive figures which help in understanding difficult concepts and especially their interrelatedness.

Only a few points of criticism. As regards theory and methods, surprisingly little of the more systematic literature on decision-making is used. Especially the works by cognitive anthropologists which try to elicit systematically data on real-place, real-time decisions (e.g. Peggy Barlett's work) would be useful in pursuing the author's aims further. Despite the clear language the book is sometimes a little difficult to read. Basic ethnographic information regarding the Bakkarwal is scattered over several chapters. There are no chapter summaries and no general summary. A glossary of the many Bakkarwal terms used in the text, especially the important or often used ones such as *phesla* (decision), *shakas* (self), *osh* (personhood), which are not included in the index, would make reading much easier for non-specialists.

In sum, Rao's book is not only a well-crafted ethnography but a study that combines a focus on practice with a gender-focus in researching individuality (not individualism!) and autonomy in South Asia. Its special strength lies in a fine combination of abundant emic information with a theoretically based etic analysis. In conclusion, it was very appropriate that this remarkable book was recently selected as an "Outstanding Academic Book of the Year".

Christoph Antweiler