

ULRIKE MÜLLER-BÖKER, *The Chitawan Tharus in Southern Nepal. An Ethnoecological Approach*. (Nepal Research Center Publications 21). Stuttgart: Steiner, 1999. X, 224 pages, b/w & colour photographs, 7 maps (5 in pocket), DM 88,-. ISBN 3-515-07632-8

This study is an inquiry into the social world and the environment of the Tharus of Chitawan, an ethnic group living in the Terai, the lowlands of Southern Nepal between the Churiya hills and the Mahabharat Lekh. It is an English translation of the author's habilitation thesis. Based on approximately eight months of field research, Müller-Böker presents data that have been collected in Chitawan over a period of more than ten years. Her theoretical approach is a combination of ethnography, ethnobotany, geography, ecology and environmental sociology.

The book is divided into eight chapters. Transcription rules, several lists of tables, figures and maps etc. are presented at the beginning. The introduction into the theory and methodology and the particular conditions of field research are described in chapter 1. Chapters 2 to 8 provide detailed information and reflections on various aspects of the Terai natural environment from the Tharu perspective, their indigenous knowledge, use and management of resources and their traditional technology. The historical and demographic development of the region is shown in chapter three after the ecological conditions have been presented in the second chapter. The ethnic composition of the area, everyday life and the socio-religious world is described in chapter four. The following chapter deals with the Tharu perception and mode of classification of their natural environment in their local terminology. This makes a very useful introduction to the next chapter, where the use and management rationale of natural resources are described, as well as their appropriation by local culture. An account of Tharu material culture, and the technology predominantly used by them, is given in chapter seven. Finally, social performance and its dynamics with regard to resource use conflicts in general and the National Park in particular are the focus of chapter eight. All chapters are to a large extent self-contained, each concluding with a summary. Chapter nine summarises the main findings, also indicating the relevance of the ethnoecological approach here adopted. The many references at the end of the book are a valuable guide to the reader.

The remarkable achievement of this book is that it highlights the interface of socially relevant information focussing on the natural environment of the Tharus from the perspective of their indigenous knowledge. It provides the reader with insights which can only be obtained through an inter-disciplinary approach. It reflects the urgent need expressed by many professionals for an adequate means of investigation into the world of rural resource users. Thus it is an attempt to combine a Western scientific approach with the authentic views of the concerned community. It transcends the narrowness of conventional descriptions and refers to indigenous knowledge as an important, if not *the* most important dimension of local resource use according to the principles of what is nowadays called sustainable development. The question as to whether a society guided by traditional norms is prone to endanger its habitat due to increasing population pressure and the challenges of dwindling resources and declining wealth, or whether it represents the best solution to safeguarding the local environment has been discussed for decades. Müller-Böker tends to support the latter faction, namely those who favour a development approach

based on social structures well adapted to local environmental conditions. In her theoretical background she refers to the cultural ecology approach developed by D.A. Posey and M. Münzel in the mid 1980s. It requires a wide range of methodologies from various scientific disciplines and a profound knowledge of the cultural background of the ethnic group concerned. The author has succeeded in mastering the first prerequisite and, as for the second, she has brought the knowledge gathered by her in previous field research in other regions of Nepal.

The study avoids romanticising the living conditions of the local Tharu community, but elaborates on the development potential the population can activate by relying on their age-old and partly still self-sustaining way of living. One of the most severe conflicts the Tharus are confronted with are the restrictions imposed on them by the national park regime of the Royal Chitawan National Park. Müller-Böker's analysis of a contradictory development points to general problems in development planning. It is the dilemma of conserving the biosphere without paying adequate attention to the sociosphere. Social development on the basis of indigenous resource use strategies has not yet been able to be harmonised with nature conservation objectives. To enable integrated planning, and this strongly underlines the importance of Müller-Böker's studies, an ethnoecological approach could prove to be the most appropriate. Apart from this general value the lasting merit of this study is the collection of many valuable details in the field of ethnobotany and indigenous knowledge of soil, forest, and traditional strategies to cope with natural calamities. Last not least, it is a laudable undertaking to have had this work translated into English, so as to attract the attention of the English-speaking world, and not just that of the region concerned, to this important topic.

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KWOK KIAN-WOON et al. (eds.), *'WeAsians' Between Past and Future*. Singapore: Singapore Heritage Society and National Archives of Singapore, 2000. 301 pages. ISBN 981-04-2824-3

The search for identity has gripped Asian intellectuals for some time. Politicians picked up the theme by stimulating a discourse on 'Asian values' in the 1980s that was eagerly commented upon by European and American scholars as well. This volume is an interesting addition to this debate in that it presents a number of fresh self-critical insights. The contributions, papers as well as comments, to a Millennium Regional Conference sponsored by the Japan Foundation, are published in their draft form. This is an advantage as the freshness of the vivid discussions is preserved. The volume should therefore be judged as a primary source for those interested in the Asian values debate rather than as a scholarly publication.

The opening address by Tommy Koh, Law professor, long-serving Singapore ambassador to the UN and chairman of the Asia-Europe Foundation, is a gem of a brief, six-page history of Asia, which should be required reading for any undergraduate embarking on the study of this region. According to Professor Koh, the terms "Asians" and "Asia" are not meaningless, but it is difficult to define "the glue that holds Asians together". Could it be the vision of future prosperity? His dream for the future of Southeast and East Asia is, indeed, truly Singaporean: He wants the