



Himalaya, the Journal of the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies

Volume 27

Number 1 *Dalits in Nepal No. 1 & 2*

Article 17

December 2007

From the Editor

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Recommended Citation

Guneratne, Arjun (2007) "From the Editor," *Himalaya, the Journal of the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies*: Vol. 27: No. 1, Article 17.

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FROM THE EDITOR

This is the first time in 14 years that *Himalaya* has had a new editor, and taking over the editorship is both an honor and a challenge. It is an honor to have been entrusted with so responsible a task; it is a challenge to meet the standard set by the journal under Barbara Brower's tenure as editor. Under her guidance, *Himalaya* has developed from modest beginnings into an ambitious and exceptionally well-designed journal with an impressive subscriber base among many of the world's major universities. She has presided over a name change (to reflect the journal's transition from a bulletin disseminating news and information on the state of Himalayan studies to a venue for the dissemination of research), a major and very professional redesign, the extensive use of graphics and photographs, and finally, a full color cover, and has sought to broaden the range of the journal's content to make it appeal to a broader audience, including non-academics. Her work with the journal, and in more recent years as Honorary Treasurer of the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies, has been vital to the continued health of the ANHS, and I am deeply grateful for the energy she has poured into the Association as well as the help she has given me in effecting a successful transition from Portland State University to Macalester.

Bringing the journal to Minnesota from Oregon would not have been possible without the staunch support of Macalester's former provost, Dianne Michelfelder, who unhesitatingly supported my request that Macalester host it, and who provided funds to underwrite part of the costs of producing it. The director of the Macalester library, Terri Fishel, has also been an enthusiastic supporter; most importantly, she has provided *Himalaya* with a strong presence on the web through the library's Digital Commons initiative, which promotes open access to journals. *Himalaya* now has a web site hosted by the Macalester College library (<http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/himalaya/>), which not only allows for online submission of contributions to the journal, and provides the editor with an online database to manage the editorial process, but will eventually make all of the content of the journal since its inception available online and searchable. Lindsay Skog at Portland State has done a superb job of laying out this issue and I am most grateful to her, and to Jacki Betsworth at Macalester, who finalized this issue for the printers.

As editor, my aim is to build on the solid foundation laid down by Barbara and her assistants at PSU, as well as by her predecessors, to continue to develop *Himalaya* into an excellent interdisciplinary area studies journal that will be a worthy public face for a re-energized and revitalized Association. The journal began as a newsletter for the newly established Nepal Studies Association in 1972, when it was edited first by John Scholz and Ruth Schmidt and later on by Donald Messerschmidt (1975-1981). As a newsletter, it was essentially a clearinghouse for information (of conferences, grants, and reports on the current state of Nepal Studies) for the small membership of the NSA. Vestiges of this early era continue in the conference abstracts that we continue to publish; to the best of my knowledge, we are the only area studies journal that does so. In 1981 the newsletter became the *Himalayan Research Bulletin*, under the editorship first of Donald Messerschmidt at Washington State University and subsequently of David Holmberg and Kathryn March at Cornell (1981-1986); the volumes of *Himalaya*, of which this issue is the 27th, are counted from this date. Since then, the journal has been produced at Columbia University (1986-1990) under the joint editorship of Bruce Owens, Ted Riccardi and William Fisher, who expanded the bulletin to include research articles, at the University of Washington in Seattle by Ter Ellingson, Linda Iltis and Leonard van der Kuijp (1991-1992), and finally, from 1993 onwards, by Barbara Brower, first at the University of Texas-Austin and subsequently at Portland State. *Himalaya* has also benefitted over the years from the work of guest editors who worked on themed issues: Mary Des Chene, Alfred Pach and Tom Fricke, Mark Baker and Vasant Saberwal, David Seddon, and John Metz. The journal would not be what it is today without the efforts of all of these people, who have given unstintingly of their time to advance the study of Nepal and the Himalaya in the United States and to keep the ANHS as a going concern.

The journal will continue to emphasize articles based on original research, short reports on recently concluded or ongoing research, book reviews and reports on conferences. In a break from the past, after this issue, we will cease to publish abstracts of major conferences, such as the meetings of the Association for Asian Studies and the American Anthropological Association. Instead, we will make these abstracts available on line. Under the editorship of

Geoff Childs, we propose to publish descriptions or discussions of thematically oriented conferences; readers of this journal are encouraged to submit such reports online at the journal's website. Thanks to the enthusiastic work of Tom Robertson, we have a very strong book reviews section, and we depend on your suggestions for books to review as well as your own contribution as reviewers. Reviewing new books in the field is an important service to academic life and we look forward to working with our members to develop and expand on this. One of my major goals for the journal is to have it indexed in online databases, thus enhancing its usefulness and visibility. Once it comes online at Macalester and all the back issues are archived online, Google Scholar will automatically index it, but in addition, we will seek indexing in other academic databases.

The journal ultimately depends on contributions from its readers to be viable. We have not lacked for this in the past and I look forward to a steady stream of submissions in the future. Because this is an inter-disciplinary journal read by people in a broad range of fields as well as by non-academics, I encourage writing that is lucid, direct, and as free of technical jargon as it is possible to be. All articles will undergo peer review; I will give every paper an initial reading to determine whether it is suitable for *Himalaya*, and then have them reviewed by two people with expertise in the topic the article discusses. We welcome proposals for themed issues, such as this one, as well as individual submissions, which will be published in omnibus issues of the journal. I hope, by the end of 2009, that we will have the journal back to a more timely publication schedule, although to do so will require the publication of at least one more double issue; thus, volume 29 will contain most of the papers presented at the Social Science Baha conference on the Tarai in 2005 and will focus attention on this relatively neglected part of Nepal. For those of you who may be organizing panels on Himalayan subjects for upcoming conferences, or simply presenting individual papers, please consider *Himalaya* as a venue for their publication.

The present volume speaks to the general theme of the Dalit experience in Nepal, a topic that *Himalaya* has paid little attention to in the past. Laurie Vasily did most of the work of recruiting submissions, and I am most grateful to her. Three of the four papers, by Cameron, Folmar and Kharel, deal with the formation of political identity among Nepali Dalits as they seek to become full and equal members of Nepal's polity. Cameron focuses on the complexities of the relationship (including that of the moral economy) between rural Dalit households and other caste groups in Nepal's villages, to develop a critique of proposals for social and legal reform that emanate from policy makers and activists located in urban centers who are informed by notions of political identity that have limited relevance for the social experience of rural Dalits. Based on fieldwork conducted in central and western Nepal, Folmar discusses the strategies that Dalits use to manipulate their identities, and, in his words, "challenge, subvert, bend or skirt the caste system to individual and group ends" (p. 44) as they seek greater political freedom and access to the public sphere. The paper by Kharel discusses the divergent strategies used by Dalit activists based in political parties and in NGOs in their struggle to assert full rights of citizenship in Nepal for Dalits, and the ways in which they invoke the discourse of state sovereignty on the one hand and international human rights law on the other. Bishwakarma, Hunt and Zajicek argue for a more complex understanding of social reality in policymaking that takes account of the multiple dimensions of social experience, including, where Dalit women are concerned, the lived experience of caste, class and gender. We round off the issue with a report by Debarati Sen on research she recently concluded in Darjeeling in which she examines the question of why women who independently grow tea on their own land tend to be more politically active than women plantation workers.

Arjun Guneratne
St. Paul, Minnesota, January 2009