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# Book review of 'Nepalese Textiles' by Susi Dunsmore

Kathryn Hartzell  
*Cornell University*

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consider marriage to be a major social or religious event (1993:202), there are some interesting comparisons that can be made with other groups of Magars among whom Hinduization has proceeded along different lines.

These are minor points, however. *Les dieux du pouvoir* offers many new insights into the interconnections between religion and politics. Moreover, it is well organized and clearly written. It merits a wide readership.

Adhikary, Kamal Raj. *The Participation of the Magars in Nepalese Development*. Doctoral dissertation, University of Texas, 1993.

Ahearn, Laura M. *Consent and Coercion: Changing Marriage Practices among Magars in Nepal*. Doctoral dissertation, University of Michigan, 1994.

Ortner, Sherry. *High Religion: A Cultural and Political History of Sherpa Buddhism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989.

Thapa, M.S. *Prachin magar ra akkha lipi*. Kathmandu, Nepal: Vriji Prakashan, 1993.

### Laura M. Ahearn

*University of Michigan*

**Susi Dunsmore. *Nepalese Textiles*. London: British Museum Press, 1993. Pp. 204, 100 color and 80 Black and White Illustrations. £16.95.**

In her lavishly illustrated work *Nepalese Textiles*, Susi Dunsmore catalogues the rich varieties of traditional textiles found among the equally varied ethnic groups of Nepal. Dunsmore begins this long overdue exploration of textiles in Nepal with a description of textiles in Nepalese history, legend, and art. Through her examination of sculpture, early depictions of Nepalese daily life, and illustrations of Hindu and Buddhist legends, for example, Dunsmore traces the history of textiles. She also notes mentions of textile in early colonial and scholarly literature on Nepalese society and culture.

The main body of Dunsmore's book details and chronicles raw materials, production techniques, and uses of textiles in several of Nepal's ethnic groups. With a background in both art and museum work, Dunsmore approaches textiles and textile production with an eye to collection, description, and cataloguing. Chapter two, for example, examines both the usage and processing of raw materials including extensive photographs of the processing of wool (especially yak and pashmina), nettle (*allo*) and cotton, among others. The following chapter, Chapter 3, investigates dyes and dyeing techniques. What both of these chapters demonstrate is the extensive use of local natural resources, contributing to a greater appreciation for environmental conservation in Nepal.

Chapters 4-6 contain a survey of the weaving techniques and textile designs associated with several of Nepal's ethnic groups. Dunsmore pays particular attention to the Rai and Limbu of Eastern Nepal where both she and her husband lived for several years. Dunsmore gives a detailed step by step description of the production of Dhaka cloth by Limbu weavers including intricate diagrams, illustrations, and photographs. Her in-depth examination of dhaka patterns, for example, emphasizes the beauty, complexity, and artistic quality of this textile. Dunsmore also includes more superficial descriptions of the weaving and embroidery of Athparia Rai shawls and nettle fabrics, Newar cotton saris and printed fabrics, and Gurung woolen blankets. Chapter 5 examines what Dunsmore calls the "Himalayan North," including the woolen textiles of the Sherpas (most especially the colorful aprons of Sherpa women), and the tents, blankets, and carpets of Tibetan-speaking groups in Dolpo and Manang. She also emphasizes the different techniques (including looms) of these groups. Finally, Dunsmore gives a brief account of the textiles of Southern Nepal, including the Tharu and Rajbansi ethnic groups.

Finally, Dunsmore concludes by examining the role that development has played in altering traditional textile production techniques and distribution. Most particularly, she explores the possibilities for weavers in income generation projects supported by both development and the tourist industry.

The book is limited by the fact that it is not as comprehensive as the title suggests. The greatest attention is paid to the Dhaka cloth of Limbu weavers, but little mention is made of textiles in many other weaving communities in Nepal, such as the Tamang and the Tharu. Furthermore, this book does little to place textile use and production within an ethnographic context and fails to consider the cultural significance of textiles in relation to ritual, gender, and socio-economic considerations.

Nevertheless, *Nepalese Textiles* is a welcome exploration of an otherwise widely ignored aspect of Nepalese society. Those interested in collections will appreciate the extensiveness of Dunsmore's project, especially the detail with which she catalogues textiles, equipment, and production techniques. An extraordinary collection of illustrations enriches the book with images from a variety of archival sources, photographs of weavers and their work, sketches of tools and techniques, maps, and even an appendix of garment patterns. Weavers will revel in the intricacy with which Dunsmore has recorded weaving techniques, equipment, patterns, and designs. Dunsmore succeeds in portraying the diversity of Nepalese ethnic groups and their equally diverse textiles.

**Kathryn Hartzell**

*Cornell University*

**Vyvyan Cayley.** *Children of Tibet: An Oral History of the First Tibetans to Grow Up in Exile.* Pearlfisher Publications, 226 Darling Street, Balmain NSW, 2041 Australia (fax +61-2-8106024) Aus \$25.95.

"Maybe you wonder how I preserve my Tibetan identity" remarks Sonam Rapten, an architect in Nepal, to author Vyvyan Cayley. "It is as if you're wearing layers and layers of clothes which you shed as you go from one country to another. Eventually the least important things seem to go out of your life, the superficial things. But the core remains, and that core is Buddhism."

"It's a funny life I've had, isn't it?" asks Jampa Choedon, after narrating her story. "I've had five *amalas* [mothers] and three *palas* [fathers] and still I don't know where I belong. Sometimes I joke about it, but it crosses my mind that when we go back to Tibet. I won't know where to go."

"We don't know in the next five years what will happen," observes K. Dhondup, a writer living in Delhi. "If the Dalai Lama decides to return to Tibet, I think all Tibetans will have to ask themselves what they will do. Politically things are very chaotic. Right now, as I'm talking to you, I'm a very confused Tibetan."

*Children of Tibet* is a collection of twenty life stories narrated by Tibetans who were either born in Tibet shortly before the Chinese takeover of that country in 1959 or who were born in exile soon thereafter. They are, therefore, members of the first generation of Tibetans to be raised and educated entirely outside of their homeland, as the result of decisions made by their families to follow their leader, the 14th Dalai Lama, into exile. The personal experiences of these narrators, then, cover a remarkably eventful historical span, especially considering that most of them are still only in their late 30's or early 40's. Their memories and current observations regarding life in pre 1959 Tibet, their escape into exile, the hardships endured by their families, their education and vocational training in foreign schools, and their assumption of roles as parents, workers, and, in some cases, leaders in the Tibetan exile community factually and emotionally document an important transitional or pivotal phase in Tibetan history.

The experience of living in exile for 35 years, combined with the knowledge that Tibet has drastically changed during that time under Chinese rule, has heightened and foregrounded the concerns of many Tibetan refugees about the continuity of their linguistic, religious, artistic, and other cultural practices. At the same time, they know that, realistically, they must accommodate to their present circumstances and take full advantage of the opportunities available to them in exile. These oral histories bring to life the intersections of official, communal, and personal efforts of Tibet refugees, and the various individuals and organizations which have supported them, to accommodate both a deeply-felt responsibility to preserve their "Tibetan-ness" and a practical need to adapt to their host cultures.