

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Himalayan Buddhist Villages : Environment, Resources, Society and Religious life in Zangskar Ladakh* : (eds) John Crook and Henry Osmaston : pp. xxx + 866, figures and 113 plates, a general index and an index of place names, Lama Kings and important people, with an index of some Tibetan Buddhist and Monastic terms : Motilal Banarasi dass : 1994, price Rs. 800/-

The volume incorporating the results of a series of field investigations, sometimes lasting for several months conducted by Bristol Study Group, led by John H. Crook, a psychologist and Henry Osmaston, a geographer, both stationed at Bristol, carries a background shared by several institutions like Bristol University Investigations Committee, the International Association of Ladakh studies, the Centre for Regional Development Studies of the JNU, Delhi, and many funding agencies and individuals. The publication has to be credited to the Bristol Study group, which conducted the survey under the title 'The Zangskar Project'. The field work for the study was conducted in 1977, 1980 and thrice in 1989, besides the earlier visits of J. Crowden in 1976 and 1977, before the design and framework of the present study were finalized. Additional field work by individual members of the team continued till 1990. The findings, as published in the volume, are based on intensive field work and a first hand knowledge of the reality of Ladakh situation.

There are seventeen contributors - 11 from U. K, 3 from Australia and three from India, the contributions having been edited and collated by the two editors. The important contributors who figure prominently and frequently are, Henry Osmaston (Part 1), the Atten boroughs (Robert and Margherita

(Part-2). John Crook (Part 3 and 5) and Tsering Shakya (Part 4), discussing in the same order 'Environment and resource utilization', 'Demography and work patteredns', 'History and Social life' and Transition and change' and 'Monastic life and values.'

The study in focused an a specific area of Ladakh, the Zangskar, also a tehsil of Ladakh district having an area of 7000 sq. km. and a population of around 10,000 with a cultivated area of less than 2000 hectares. The population is distributed in 63 settlements, all grouped under 25 principal villages. The area lying between 3500 and 5000 m. ASL and traversed by the river Zangskar, a tributary of Indus, occupies the southern part of Ladakh about 100 km. south of Leh and is relatively less accessible. For a very comprehensive socio economic survey, the group has chosen a village called 'Stongde' located on the river Zangskar.

The volume organized in five parts and 26 chapters, has themes that range from geology, structure, geomorphology and stratigraphy to Tibetan calender, astrology, demography and monastic life. About a third of the volume is devoted to environment, resources and farming, and about 100 pages each to the remaining 4 parts.

The book has a conventional opening like

a regional geography text. The geomorphic details are filled up in a tectonic framework resulting from the movement of the Indian plate subducting under the Tibetan land mass. Structure and surface features like gravel terraces, screes, moraines and fans are discussed, followed by a sketch of the region's climate, based on the climatic data of the three weather stations, viz Leh, Kargil and Dras, not lying exactly in the study area. Human adaptation to this climate is well brought out by following it with settlement study, house plans and their elevations, all beautifully drawn on scale or sketched schematically.

The farming system, a very important aspect of the study, talks of tenure systems, common lands, crops, their growth and yield. The village land is partly owned by monasteries, but substantial chunk of private land, and grazing land owned in common is the norm. With the melt water irrigation and a judicious rotation, the farmer of 'Stongde' produces enough food to guarantee an energy level of 4000 k cal, though the actual intake is much less. The average villager harvests enough grain to supply 4000 k cal/day, well above the original FAO standard energy needs. The estimated production is almost embarrassingly high, and an ideal combination of farming and pastoralism has led the author to compare one of the villages named 'Sha-de' with the garden of Eden.

The health profile of the villages is based on the study of the village named 'Kumik', at an altitude of over 12000 feet. Though 'rheumatism' appears to be a common health problem yet the investigators think that given the geographic and economic resources, people in Kumik have developed a way of life that promotes the best possible health under the circumstances. Hygiene is not a cherished word in Ladakh villages : most people never cleaned

their teeth and the hands that put dried dung on fire, also made the chapatis.

The 3rd, 4th and 5th parts of the volume discuss history and social life, monastic life and values, and tradition and change. Jhon Crook and his colleagues have not only looked closely at the social life in Laddakh villages, but even explored themes as diverse as the study of the philosophical training of the Mahayanist monks or yogins of Ladakh concluding with the last chapter entitled 'Tradition, Development and Conservation in Ladakh'. One admires the dedication with which John Crook has reconstructed the history of Zanskar. The only contribution in the volume by an Indian is that of Sandhya Gokhale-Chatterjee who talks of Socio-economic Transition and Development Strategy. She advocates the need for the retention of the ethnic character of Zanskar. In a similar vein John Crook says, 'The key to Ladakhi happiness and a beneficial balance of development with conservation depends primarily on education. The initiatives of the Lama dron school and other private establishments are much to be respected since they focus on self expression and self help.

The book has a large data-base generated by the survey of a few villages, documentation of its history, analysis of the village communities in association with monasteries and finally the Ladakhi understanding of Buddhism. Most chapters are very scholarly, yet each one stands apart from the other. In many situations these are based on the study of only a couple of villages and an integrated account is missing. The book, undoubtedly, will be an excellent reference book, presenting as it does, first hand information and data. References at the end of every chapter are of lasting value to those interested in further research, and photographs index and appendices add to the usefulness of

the volume. The large volume, the result of years of dedicated research succeeds in educating the readers in understanding the environment, economy, tradition, culture and philosophy of Ladakh - all dominated by Buddhist institutions.

The price of Rs. 800/- is not much and is well warranted by the subject matter and the

quality of production, besides the length of the volume.

The present reviewer recommends the accession of this scholarly volume in every library in India, as it certainly promotes our understanding of a long neglected yet very important trans - Himalayan region of our country.

- K. R. DIKSHIT