

BOOK REVIEW

*Review By Rigzin Chodon**

HIMALAYAN BRIDGE

EDITORS: Niraj Kumar, George van Driem and Phunchok Stobdan

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Living up to its title, the book—*Himalayan Bridge*, is a rich and a refreshing collection of twenty four scholarly papers presenting an array of study, ranging from geology, history, politics, philosophy, art, culture in a broader spectrum along with detailed study of spirituality, language, Himalayan food culture, border study, identity politics, education, ethics, religion, study of murals, dance forms to mysticism.

The editors of the book, Niraj Kumar, George van Driem and Phunchok Stobdan are experts in their respective fields of Asian Studies, linguistics and geopolitics. They have been able to present to their reader, a succinct and a well covered text encouraging young scholars and interested Asian enthusiasts to venture into new paradigms of understanding the Himalayas.

The book has been divided into five major parts which are then carefully categorized under the following topics—Himalayas: Geology, Genetics, Identity; Prism of the Past; Mosaic of Politics; Philosophy, Art and Culture and Spiritual Odyssey. Informative papers in each section help the reader to explore and better understand the Himalayas.

The first section focuses on papers related to geological, genetic and identity aspect of the Himalayas; Prof A.K. Jain, explores the geological and geochronological data from the Northern parts of the Himalaya and Trans-Himalaya mountains with data references to state how these mountains did not initially evolve by the collision of continents of the Indian and Asian plates. Uttam Kumar Shinha discusses the critical players—China and India, in the hydropolitics of the region. The author focuses on China, the world's most independent riparian country and its hydrological position in shaping larger political equations with its riparian neighbours. George van Driem, a renowned linguist revokes the fascinating modern discourse of how "Scientific" racism prevails in the myths of Mongoloid race and the Sino-Tibetan language family tree. He states that both myths must be abandoned. He draws our attention

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towards the false “Sino” theories, founded upon methodologically flawed comparisons, historical explanations with inadequate knowledge of Trans-Himalayan languages. Thereby, leading the readers towards the prehistoric understanding of the early Holocene episodes that led to the ethnolinguistic phylogeography, observed in eastern Eurasia and Oceania today. The author also focuses on the basis of ethnolinguistic prehistory, supporting evidences that our ancestors emerged from Africa on their way to East Asia, Southeast Asia, Oceania, Siberia, the Americas and even Lapland, whence many first passed through the Eastern Himalaya and crossed the Brahmaputra. Thus creating a cradle for ethnogenesis of various Uralo-Siberian and East Asian language families that can be traced even today.

While on the other hand, Niraj Kumar and co-author Chingngaih Biak’s paper induces an interesting study of entire Himalayan belt inhabited by the Tibeto-Burman speaking people (Trans Himalayan) using the concept of Nomadia (concept used by French philosopher Deleuze & Guattari) along with an introduction of the concept of Zomia. The authors extend their study further by intricately talking about the idea of how textile can be read as texts and how new Textile Tree can be created to discover the connectivity among various migrating communities in Asian regions. These regions have been divided into four culture bands— Kanji, Kang, Karma and Koran, from east to west respectively, with the major focus on the textile of the Nagas from the Kang culture.

The second section titled, the ‘*Prism of the Past*’, includes papers ranging from the use of different terms for the Himalaya. These terms are reflected by the author, Krishna K Mandal, who cites the terms used in the Ancient Indian Texts like—the Vedas, the Ramayana, Mahabharata, Arthashastra, Jatakas, *Atanatiya Sutta*, *Rajatrangini*, the Puranas, etc. making the readers revisit the historic importance of the Himalayas in different contexts like local traditions, religious, linguistic and historic. The author demonstrates how the use of different names for the Himalayas created a sacred presence of an Indian imagination for millennia.

Claude Arpi, discusses Nehru’s philosophy of NEFA. His paper highlights the chronicles of some of the IFAS officials who served in Tibet as well as Gangtok. The NEFA civil services and the Indian Frontier Administrative Services and their experiences have been discussed in his paper. Glenn Mullin, an authority on the Kalachakra tradition, traces the efforts of Himalayan Buddhist lamas in rebuilding their variant of Buddhism in the western culture and at the same time actively engaging in the rebuilding of their institutions back in Tibet after ‘The Cultural Revolution’ in China destroyed most of the monasteries in Tibet.

The third part of the text focuses on politics in the Himalayan belt with seven papers to the reader’s disposal. Phunchok Stobdan articulates the discussion on trans-Himalayan geopolitics in his paper. He argues that Western Science cartography represents a distorted reality of the conceptual circle of unity and infinite relations, in a cosmic sense under the Mandala thought in the context of Asia. He states that tools of cartography have pierced through borderlands and frontiers that tend to split nationalities, societies and ethnicities. With the flow of culture, social and economic interdependency in time, the cartography borders have often become illogical. He argues that the Asian paradigm of political order for Trans-Himalayas should be implemented to thwart radicalization of the Himalayas in changing the geopolitical landscape, keeping India and China in mind. Namrata Goswami, discusses the flow of drugs and arms in

the Eastern Himalayan region i.e. Northeast India. The paper identifies the sources of these illegal trade as well as the linking areas with the help of extensive mapping. Goswami also deliberates on China's presence especially in Myanmar and the former's engagement with some of the ethnic Myanmar groups and its impact on Northeast India. Bhutanese scholar Dorji Thinley, ascertains the concept of GNH (Gross National Happiness) of Bhutan and highlights the interaction of culture and education in Bhutanese schools by stating the government policy of recognising teachers and children as the custodians of culture and catalysts of cultural transmissions.

The fourth section of the book is an interesting mix of papers on Philosophy, art and culture. Dorji Damdul, Director of the Tibet House, New Delhi has aptly discussed the great Nalanda tradition of monastic study as a university that flourished from the 1st to the 13th century by introducing to its readers the glorious intellectual heritage of various fields of study like philosophy. His Holiness Gyalwang Drukpa, has in a very short but succinct paper discussed the legacy of the saint Naropa (956 A.D- 1050 A.D.), an accomplished disciple of Tilopa. The sites of Kashmir like the Jama Masjid in downtown in Srinagar used to be a huge monastery where Naropa gave teachings to over ten thousand people. The author has introduced its readers to the ancient sites of Buddhist saints, from the Drukpa Kagyu school of Buddhism in relation to the present Islamic places of worship.

Pema Dorjee, a Tibetan physician writes about the Tibetan medicine system called the 'Sowa Rigpa' meaning 'the science of healing', practiced in the Himalayan region in a nutshell. This was his last piece before he succumbed to an untimely death. Famous food researcher, Jyoti Prakash Tamang based in Sikkim elaborates upon Himalayan food in the region ranging from India to Nepal, Bhutan and Tibet Autonomous Region in China have been discussed with several tables enlisting food items including fermented food.

In the same lines, Geetika Kaw Kher looks at the Alchi monastic complex in Central Ladakh, as an amalgamation of a unique and vibrant art form. Sinam Basu Singh, goes on to discuss the Manipuri dance, a major classical dance form in South Asia. He discusses the Manipuri dance, called the Lai-Haroaba which was a Pre-Vaishnavite traditional festival and with the advent of Hinduism, the Post-Vaishnavite period began with a new era for the dances and music in Manipur. The last section of the text takes the reader on a Spiritual Odyssey, first to Rishikesh then to the Himalayas, the sacred abode of Gods. Swami Paranand Tirth has described the mythological significance of few Himalayan peaks on the Indian side from an esoteric and exoteric perspective while keeping in mind the sacredness it has for religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism.

The book tries to cover a whole range of studies of the Himalaya and helps the reader to see it in different light altogether. And hence, becomes an essential text to understand different contexts of the Himalaya for anyone pursuing studies or formulating policies related to the Himalayan region.