Reviews


During the 1960s and 1970s there was a boom in studies of Asian trade in the early modern era. Some distinguished and highly innovative work appeared in notable books by scholars working in both Asia and the west, such as Niels Steensgaard’s Carracks, Caravans and Companies, K. N. Chaudhuri’s The Trading World of Asia and the English East India Company or Ashin Das Gupta’s Indian Merchants and the Decline of Surat. Important questions were analysed, such as the nature of the European presence in Asia in the hands of the Portuguese, of the great chartered companies of northern Europe and of the private traders and the continuing vitality of trade carried on by Asian merchants. The collection of essays edited by Das Gupta and Michael Pearson as India and the Indian Ocean 1500–1800 (Calcutta, 1987) summed up the findings of these decades.

From the 1980s, however, interest in these questions seems rather to have declined. Fewer younger scholars seem to be taking them up and consequently this collection of essays, based on a seminar in Paris in 1990, has rather less to report on what was then and is probably still now the state of the art. (The editors disarmingly accept responsibility for the delay in publication.)

It has to be said that the collection is uneven. Some of the pieces are too slight to merit publication. At least two which offer promising themes do not live up to their promise. Michel Morineau takes up the great question of comparisons between European and Asian merchants. The well-known debate about whether Asian merchants can be appropriately characterized as ‘pedlars’ is reviewed and Max Weber is properly taken to task for his orientalism, but nothing much emerges. Frank Perlin discusses ‘the knowledge base of commerce’ across the continents. This seems to be an attempt to address the intriguing problem of how merchants from different cultural backgrounds communicated with one another and designated commodities in ways that could be universally understood. Unhappily, however, this reviewer may not be the only reader who could not make the connection between the section of the essay that sets out that problem and the later sections that deal with ‘agricultural creationism’.

Other essays offer original scholarship and some important findings. The work on the Armenians of Michel Aghassian and Kéram Kévonian is particularly striking. They show how the Armenians were a community without formal political institutions beyond their town in New Julfä but with a cultural unity and a social hierarchy derived from their church that sustained their commercial networks. Credit and the transmission of knowledge were...
based on the ‘relations of trust and solidarity’ that held the community together. Geneviève Bouchon has an illuminating essay on the Indian Ocean on the eve of the Portuguese incursions and Niels Steensgaard offers a valuable assessment of the fragmentary evidence on the volume of overland trade from India by ‘the route through Qandahar’. Gilles Veinstein presents some even more fragmentary material on the market for Indian goods in the Ottoman empire. Sushil Chaudhury produces convincing statistical evidence of the importance of Asian exports from Bengal up to the middle of the eighteenth century.

As is inevitable, it is not easy to find unifying themes in so diverse a collection. In their Introduction the editors put most emphasis on the light that the volume throws on the role of Asian merchants and the great quantities of trade that remained in Asian hands up to the mid-eighteenth century and, it might be added, well beyond that. This is a well chosen theme. For all the difficulties in finding statistical evidence, which inevitably comes almost entirely from European sources, that case has long been established and seems generally well proven.

The argument is, however, pushed to the conclusion that there was ‘more competition than collaboration between the Companies and Asian merchants . . . Hence it was perhaps more an “Age of Competition” than an “Age of Partnership”’. That seems to be a rather pointless distinction. If partnership implies good feeling and deliberate co-operation, then it would be a misleading term to use. Merchants by and large do not work like that. They compete with one another, but merchants also depend on other merchants, whatever they may feel about them, and so it was in early modern Asia, as this collection abundantly demonstrates. The Dutch Company might try to exclude Asian merchants from Indonesian ports, even though as Femme Gaastra shows in his essay, they largely failed to do so. Such attempts to enforce monopolistic exclusions were, however, the exception. Europeans needed Asian merchants to procure commodities for them, to advance them money and to provide freight for their ships. Asian merchants welcomed the opportunities for selling to Europeans as well as trading on their own account and they made vigorous use of European ships for their own purposes. The implied dichotomy between ‘Asian’ trade from India to the Middle East and ‘European’ trade from India to Europe is misleading. Much of the trade that went to the Middle East was carried in European ships and much of what went to Europe was provided by Asian merchants. Portuguese ships, as Om Prakash points out, linked the Indian ocean and the China Sea for Asian as well as for Portuguese merchants. If it is worth coining such phrases, this was an Age of Interdependence.

P. J. Marshall


Though its aim is not stated explicitly, this book seems to address itself to readers who wish to familiarize themselves with various aspects of Hindi.
It offers an introduction into the linguistic background and the pronunciation and script, an in-depth treatment of the morphology and syntax of the language, an extensive survey of present-day Indian culture and the Hindi terminology used for it, seventeen dialogues referring to different situations of day-to-day life (At the railway station, Renting an apartment, Let’s go to see a movie, At the police station, etc.), a 55-page French–Hindi glossary, and a brief bibliography of works mainly in French on Hindi language and Indian culture and literature.

The book serves the above purpose well. When consulted together, its two sections on morphology and syntax (37–138) provide the reader not only with the main traits of the language but with many details as well, which are illustrated with numerous sample sentences, and a feature like the clear exposition of the characteristics and evolution of the notoriously difficult numerals (43–9) is decidedly useful. The sections are strictly systematic, though, and contain no exercises, and in this respect readers who wish to learn the grammar in order to use the language themselves in a correct and independent way, will benefit from using other course books as well. The explanation of many facets of Indian culture in the light of Hindi vocabulary will be found very valuable. Among the many subjects dealt with in that part (141–88) we find the caste system, family life, meals, transport system, education, film, press, political parties, Hinduism, and names. The section about invectives (195–6), which follows that about politeness formulas and is supported by a dialogue (212–14), will be appreciated by many readers. The glossary is elaborate, and explains many points of idiom and grammar, for example, the headword ‘anger’ (‘colère’ 232) not only furnishes two translations of the word (krodh, gussā) but also explains how ‘to be angry with’ is expressed in Hindi. Both in respect of its grammatical details and its cultural expositions even readers who already have a fair command of Hindi will benefit from the book. For example, the explanation of the different syntactic structures of ‘to look’ and ‘to see’ (112), that of the ambiguity in some sentences containing the reflexive possessive pronoun apnā (123), and that of the use of the relative pronoun (125–8) will also be welcomed by more experienced readers.

Inevitably, in an elaborate survey like the one under review there are also points for criticism and discussion. Almost all Hindi words and sentences are printed both in devanagari and transcription (in a system different from that used here). The devanagari printing is not always clear, for example, the subscript ū and ū in some combinations (e.g. 58 ādbhut and buddhā), while in forms like bol(aj)tā (131) and lage (133) the -la- merges with the character that follows it. And the fact that the sections on morphology and syntax should be consulted together for gaining a proper understanding of some features does not always make for swift insight, the more so because the list of contents, though fairly detailed, is not always sufficient. For example, the syntactical section presents a meaning of the suffix -vālā (79–80: ‘being about to’) not found in the discussion of this element in the section devoted to suffixes (35), and because the syntactical unit concerned is entitled ‘Future tense’, readers who do not study the entire book but try to find the meanings of -vālā by looking it up under ‘derivation’, will probably fail to find the reference in the syn-
tactical section. And the terse discussions of the ‘absolutive’ (73) and of the adverbial use of participles (72) in the morphological section are only later put into perspective (117–19, and 119–22 respectively). The fact that the idiomatic use of some verbs, which in similar works tend to be discussed within the main text, is here dealt within the glossary only, is another reason why insight is not always easily gained. For example, the verb milnā is discussed in the glossary under the entries ‘to receive’ (‘recevoir’, 265), ‘to meet’ (‘reconstrer’, 266) and ‘to find’ (‘trouver’, 276), without any sort of cross-references being provided. An objection of a more theoretical nature, finally, is the fact that there is no information about the sources of the dialogues and the examples in the sections on morphology and syntax. It would be useful to know their linguistic background. (The examples found below stem from different course books, or have been made up by the reviewer.)

While the discussions contain many details which will be useful also to more experienced readers, explanations of other phenomena are not always detailed enough and may confuse readers with little previous experience in the language. Some examples may suffice. In the section on sounds the special pronunciation of the combination -ah(a)- (as in mahal, mahila) is ignored. In the discussion of the demonstrative pronouns (60–1, cf. 41–2) it could have been mentioned more clearly that forms like unheēm cannot feature as alternatives of unko when the pronoun is used adjectivally. No mention has been made of the suffix -om (47, 60) used with larger numerals and indicating an approximate number, e.g. hazārom ‘thousands’, lākhom ‘hundreds of thousands’. The discussion of possessive pronouns (62) does not refer to their use in the case of personal pronouns being combined with a compound postposition (55), as in mere pichi ‘behind me’. The negative particle nahim is used, not only with the indicative mood (69) but also with the imperative mood (76), and in the counterfactual. The phenomenon that adverbial past participles of transitive verbs have an active rather than a passive meaning (e.g. liyā ‘taken’, liye ‘having taken, holding’) is illustrated through two examples (72) but nowhere explained in words. The combination of a perfective participle of an intransitive verb with jānā is not emphatic (87–8) but has been explained correctly by Vincenc Pořízka (Hindština/Hindi Language Course I, Praha, 1963, § 118,12) as ‘to approach some condition rapidly’. In the discussion of the verb saknā (90–1) ‘to be able to’ the fact that its imperfective tense often expresses the counterfactual mood (maiā jā sakīt thī ‘I could have gone’) is left unmentioned, and so is the similar use of the so-called imperfective tense of cāhīe, which expresses an obligation (115–16), as in use vahām jānā cāhīe thā ‘He/she should have gone there’. The combination of adverbial present participles (199–20) with substantives which express emotion is not discussed, for example, use vahām jāte hue khusī hai ‘He/she is happy to go there’ (rather than ‘while going there’). Nor is that of adjectival present participles with substantives meaning ‘time’ (vahām jāte samay/jātt āfō ‘at the time of going there’). The discussion of ‘until’ followed by a verb (133) is insufficient in that it fails to mention the use of the negative particle in this construction in Hindi (jab tak vah na āegt, tab tak maiā rahūngt ‘I shall stay until she comes’).

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THEODAMSTEEGT
REVIEWS

A Special Corps. The Beginnings of Gorkha Service with the British. By A. P. Coleman. The Pentland Press Ltd., 1 Hutton Close, South Church, Bishop Auckland, Durham, 1999. 60mm × 250mm; xxxiv & 317pp; 4 colour plates, 19 b/w illus., 9 line maps, 24 tables, 874 source notes, 9 appendices. ISBN 1-85821-606-0. £20. All proceeds to the Gurkha Welfare Trust.

With characteristic clarity of mind, ‘Jimmy’ Coleman saw some years ago that despite the publication of scores of books on the British/Gorkha connection, the vital first stage had never yet been given the focused scholarly scrutiny that it deserves. His response has been to create a classic academic work which all future writers on the British/Gorkha link will need to read as their starting point. The book’s credibility and quality are underpinned by his multiple qualifications: he has first-hand experience of Gorkha soldiers (in WW2), academic training and experience, and the diplomatic sensibilities of a senior civil servant. If the book is intended more for scholars than for general readers, Coleman’s lucid, readable style will certainly broaden the accessibility.

The framework of the book is a chronological account of events, from Prithvi Narayan Shah’s establishment of Gorkha power within Nepal in the 18th century, on to Gorkha conquests along the Himalayas and resulting contact with the Sikhs and British, through the central event, the Anglo-Nepal War of 1814–16, and ending in 1850, when a Gorkha regiment first achieved the status of regular troops under the British. Within that framework Coleman has constructed a many-layered work.

He gives due mention to Gorkha service under the Sikhs (before either had ever served the British), as commemorated in the term lahure (one who goes to Lahore), still today the Nepali term for a man who enlists in a foreign army. He examines what was meant at different dates (among Nepalis and Britons) by the terms ‘Gorkhali’ and ‘Gorkha’ (‘Goorkhas’, ‘Gurkhas’, ‘Gorkhas’ etc.). He chronicles the formation and consolidation of early British Gorkha units during and after the Anglo-Nepal War, giving fresh details of their internal establishments and their ‘class composition’ by jat (clan and caste). He recounts the difficulties which the British long encountered in enlisting Gorkhas, including the hostility of the Nepal Durbar, and examines why they persevered: the early appreciation of Gorkha skills in hill warfare and fortifications; the later recognition that they could also fight superbly in the plains; the widespread perception that Gorkhas provided a counterbalance to over-dependence on the lowland Bengal sepoys from Awadh.

The book is quite different in scope and emphasis from John Pemble’s account of the Anglo-Nepal War, The Invasion of Nepal: John Company at War (Clarendon Press, 1971). Coleman re-examines the origins and course of that war, but with an original approach that is driven by the archival evidence of what happened; he concentrates on the perceptions of key Britons who conceived and facilitated the early employment of Gorkhas by the Company. These were principally Major General Sir David Ochterlony, his friend the warlike Bengal civil servant William Fraser, and three officers at unit level: Lawtie, Ross and Young (four of these five were Scotsmen, Col-
eman notes). Coleman shows that there was ample scope for major developments to flow from the views and wishes of these individuals, especially under their supportive Governor-General and C-in-C, Lord Moira (later the Marquess of Hastings).

A major theme within the narrative is flagged by the title ‘A Special Corps’ and further highlighted in the foreword by Professor Needham of All Souls. It is emphasized that from the very first there was a real specialness in Gorkha soldiers, and a conscious appreciation of it by the British. The sub-text here is that whilst one can seek to deconstruct the outgrowths of myth that the specialness has caused to grow up around Gorkhas, it is mere delusive word-play if that becomes an attempt to deny that there has always been a special concentration of high soldierly qualities in Gorkhas, also a sincere and explicit British appreciation of those qualities and consequently an unusual rapport between the two groups.

Another layer in the book is regimental. Such matters may not be of prime interest to readers of Modern Asian Studies, but they are not unimportant. Coleman celebrates his own connection with 1st Gurkha Rifles, and that of the book’s benefactor, and of the writers of both the ‘Introductory Commendation’ and the Foreword. This is in part an assertion of credentials, and in part touches on inter-unit pride and rivalry, though Coleman handles specific issues with diplomacy. For example, his account of the earliest British employment of Gorkhas, and in particular Ochterlony’s attack on Malaun fort in 1816, confirms that 1st Gurkha Rifles deserved their primacy among the early British Gorkha units. Coleman also shows that the regiment’s first title of the ‘Nusseeree Battalion’ (Nasiri Battalion) means not ‘friendlies’ as hitherto thought, but was probably given at Ochterlony’s wish and to reflect his honorary title ‘Nasir-ud-Daula’, granted by the Mughal Emperor.

The Regimental dimension is a social factor of real historical and military importance. Those who have not served in Gorkha units generally imagine them all to be much alike. In reality different units have long recruited different mixes of Nepali jats. Also, the Gorkha regiments have always differed from one another in outlook, approach and temperament just as much as any one British regiment differs from another. Indeed, there has always been intense rivalry between the Gorkha regiments—shared in by the Gorkhas as well as the British officers—and this rivalry has played an important role in maintaining high standards. In the past, other regiments have perhaps been better than 1st Gurkha Rifles at celebrating their historical credentials, but Jimmy Coleman has now done them justice. This dimension is not merely academic: it pertains to a living military tradition. In the year 2000, as India and Pakistan glare at each other in Kashmir, 1st Gorkha Rifles still serve at a strength of several battalions as the senior regiment of India’s Gorkha Brigade, under Indian officers who appreciate and celebrate their men’s specialness in the same ways as did their British predecessors, and the regiment will draw pride and strength from this book, regardless of whether that was the author’s main purpose in writing it.

D. F. HARDING
‘I was born here. I grew up here. My parents were born here, my grandparents and many others before them. You came here. You never asked anyone if you could. Now you want my ID papers. I should be asking you for your ID papers. Now let me through’ (p. 258). Thus an irate Bishop Belo of East Timor when stopped at a military checkpoint during the Indonesian occupation (1975–99). The story is emblematic of the determination, pride, patriotism, not to mention outbursts of temper characteristic of the winner of the 1996 Nobel Peace Prize. And he was let through.

Carlos Felipe Ximenes (‘Belo’ being added in honour of his godfather) was born in 1948 near Baucau, both his parents being catechists of comparatively high status within the Timorese social system. His father died in 1951 as a long-term result of injuries sustained under Japanese torture during the Second World War. As a result Belo was raised in poverty by his mother, who provided ‘a mixture of warmth, hard discipline, and religion’ (p. 71). Further tragedy struck the family, two brothers (Fernando and António) dying in the 1960s, both at the age of twenty-two. Belo spent the years 1968–81 overseas (except for eleven months in 1974–75), mostly in Portugal. On 6 October 1974 he joined the Salesian Order and on 26 July 1980 he was ordained priest at Lisbon, followed by an extended spell of further study at Rome. After only two years as a priest (at Fatumaca), he was appointed leader of the Catholic community of East Timor, first as ‘Apostolic Administrator’ (1983) and then as ‘Bishop’ (1988). He may have been chosen because the Vatican felt that he would not create difficulties with the Indonesians; the latter expected him to be ‘easily controllable, timid and meek’, in contrast to his predecessor. If so, both parties lamentably misjudged the man.

East Timor had been invaded by Indonesia on 7 December 1975. The ensuing death toll from the combined effects of the occupation amounted to 200,000 by 1979 alone, out of a starting population of fewer than 700,000. Conversely, the country was flooded with Indonesians in an attempt to swamp the indigenous population: about one-half of the population of Dili, the capital, came to be Javanese. Many more East Timorese have died since, particularly during the events of 1999. To these may be added the three thousand East Timorese killed in the ‘Great Rebellion’ of 1910–12 against the Portuguese and the 40–50,000 who perished under the Japanese in 1942–45.

In a general sense, therefore, the whole of East Timor was a ‘place of the dead’; worse, of dead ignored or forgotten by the international community. During the 1990s, however, the world began to take greater notice, particularly after the Dili Massacre of November 1991 had been captured by television cameras. More specifically, ‘the place of the dead’ refers to Mount Ramelau, the highest peak in the country, located inland from Dili. In the East Timorese belief, the spirits of their ancestors dwelt on the mountain
peaks, so the higher the peak, the more sacred the site. Bishop Belo led a thirty-thousand strong procession to Mount Ramelau in early October 1997, the culmination of which was to have been the placement on the summit of a statue to ‘Our Lady of East Timor’. During the course of the ascent two people were murdered and the pilgrimage had to be abandoned. Nineteen more people were killed in an accident on the descent. Nevertheless, the spirit of hope lingered.

By this time Bishop Belo’s stature was incontestable. Initially rejected even by his fellow clergymen (partly because of his youth, partly because he had been outside the country during the 1975 invasion, and partly because insufficient consultation had taken place), Belo was widely regarded as a ‘stooge’ of the Indonesians. Undeterred, he shepherded his flock and gradually built up a base of popular support through a display of leadership, toughness and humour. Furthermore, the Catholic Church was the one institution in East Timor of international consequence; so Bishop Belo was likely to be propelled into prominence whether he liked it or not. As his moral and spiritual authority grew, he became recognized as one of the foremost leaders of his people. His mentors included St Francis Xavier, St John Bosco, and Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. A forceful critic of the Indonesian occupation, he protested against human rights abuses, gave voice to the popular thirst for national liberation, and sought to raise awareness of East Timor in international consciousness. At the same time he refused to allow the Church to be used for political purposes; and he attempted to restrain his own people from sacrificing their lives in fruitless acts of revolt.

East Timor existed in an atmosphere of terror. Bishop Belo himself was subjected to psychological warfare (death threats, surveillance, infiltration of agents, press vilification) and pressure to endorse colonial rule. His courage is undoubted; if nothing else, he constantly had before his eyes the fate of Archbishop Oscar Romero, gunned down in 1980 at his altar in San Salvador.

Meanwhile, Belo had also achieved conspicuous pastoral success. The Catholic proportion of the population rose from 30% to 85% in little more than two decades. Masses are packed to overflowing with people of all ages; and local seminaries are full. Even so, he was still subjected to lectures from Western colleagues (fresh from their own empty churches) about the need to confine himself to pastoral duties; and certain quarters within the Vatican (though not the Pope himself, who had visited East Timor on 12 October 1989, attracting ‘tens of thousands’ at Dili and a crowd of 100,000 at Taci-Tolu) were not always supportive: papal diplomats were more than willing to sacrifice the interests of East Timor if that was the price of maintaining good relations with the colonial power. On occasion the treatment meted out to Belo in Rome was little short of inexcusable (pp. 185–6, 243–4, 286).

At a UN-sponsored referendum held on 30 August 1999, 78.5% of registered voters in East Timor cast their ballots in favour of independence. Subsequently, ninety per cent of the population was displaced, including two hundred thousand forcibly relocated to the Indonesian side of the island.
Arnold S. Kohen, an investigative reporter from the United States, has produced a lively account of the life and times of the bishop. He is best when he concentrates on East Timor and avoids inappropriate comparison with trouble-spots elsewhere in the world.

A. V. M. HORTON