

## BOOK REVIEW

Hardman, Charlotte E. 2000. *Other Worlds: Notions of Self and Emotion among the Lhorung Rai*. Oxford: Berg. Maps, figures, glossary, appendices, bibliography and index. pp. 315.

There is quite a good number of anthropological monographs and dissertations on various groups of Rai in Nepal: Nick Allen on Thulung Rai, S. Toba on Khaling Rai, C. McDougal on Kulung Rai, M. Gaenzle on Mewahang Rai and Dilli Dahal on Athpahariya Rai. The present book under review is another volume on the Lhorung Rai. Considering the diversity in the Rai languages and cultures (there are well over 20 groups within Rai with different languages and culture) we need more publications on the Rai so that it is easy to assess the nature of the Rai people and similarities and differences in their language, history and culture, particularly the myths, rites and traditions.

*Other Worlds* is a big book containing nine chapters. In a nutshell, attempts to explore the other world view of the Lhorung Rai, by examining their concepts and discourse on self and emotion of the Lhorung as an individual. In other words, the book provides an indigenous concept of a person or self in the local context. In her own words, "The book is concerned with how notions of self, person, which have some biological basis, are also constructed by peoples' cultural understandings, the concepts, premises and discourse of the group they identify with, such as the underlying assumptions of the nature and how they relate to the social world" (p. 12). In Thulung culture (I think this is more universal in all oriental cultures, and this is true for all ethnic/ caste groups in Nepal), every person must retain the correct bond with his or her ancestors. In the context of Lhorung, it is with "sam-mang" (or ancestors) – a bond, which is internally represented by saya (the ancestral spirit with a person) – otherwise the person, is vulnerable in his everyday life (p. 15). In brief, the book attempts to explain, "How Lhorung experiences are culturally constructed?" (p.16). The culture and personality

theory is glossed with “ethno-psychological approach” in explaining the behaviour of everyday life of Lhorung people through the participant’s point of view.

In Chapter I “Theories in my Boots” she admits that she reached the village “with a myriad of unanswered thoughts and a baggage of possibly useless anthropological theory weighing down to her walking boots”(p.4). As usual, like many young anthropologists she was overloaded by her own theories and preconceptions while landing in the field sites with uncertainties what she would do, where she would stay, etc. But while looking at Lhorung Rai settlements in the Arun valley with their house structures and rituals, she gained confidence in herself that Lhorung Rai culture could be explained grasping their notions of *sammang* (ancestors) and *saya* (the ancestral spirit with a person).

Chapter II is on “Pangma People”, where she describes the landscape of the Arun valley vis-à-vis the Lhorung villages, households, peoples and settlements. She notes how she stayed in Gairi Pangma, the old Lhorung Rai settlement with more than 194 households. This chapter also deals with her methodological approach as she describes in detail how she was accepted by the community and vice versa, her initial mistakes in the field, and how Kahili, the wife of the fourth son, became a most patient teacher and interpreter for her in the field (p. 21). Lhorung women accepted her as a woman with male freedom (p.25). But she did not forget to include male informants to rely on many rituals, the core text for explaining self and emotion. Rai women are distinct from others because of their dress and jewelry but men are differentiated only because of their physical appearance. She describes the clan structure, as she believes that this is one of important ways to relate the notion of self and identity of a person in a particular locale and culture (p.35). Lhorung, Yamphu and Mewahang Rai are considered one’s own group or blood brothers (p. 36).

In Chapter III “Ancestors are Angry”, she meticulously discusses the Thulung Rai’s ancestors in relation to their day-to-day lives. Sickness of a person is closely associated with *Sammang* or ancestors and the local healer or *Yatangpa* will easily diagnose the causes of sickness. No doubt, super-human beings are closely associated with pain or illness experienced by Lhorung (p. 44). She discusses how a man or woman becomes *yatangpa* (male), *mangpa* (male) and *mangmani* (female).

The Chapter IV “Super Human World and Knowledge of Illness” is one of the biggest chapters of the book where she deals with complex pantheons

prevalent in the Lhorung culture: i) *sammang* (ancestors spirits) with varieties – *pappamma'chi* (the guardian or grandparents spirits), *chawatangma*, with more than twenty names (the creative old woman of the forest), Khimpie and *lataba* (house ancestors – woman of the snakes, Lord of the Monkeys), and *Waye warema* (brother and seven sisters), ii) *Chap* (ghosts of the dead or spirit of ancestors). A dead person becomes *chap* because of unnatural or premature deaths such as from childbirth, falling from a cliff and so on (p.91). The *chaps* are called to visit the living at funerals and at *nuagi*, the ceremony while renewing the household shrine (p.90). If *sammangs* are offered uncooked meat or blood, *chaps* are given only cooked meat or raw fruits and vegetables (p.90). *Chaps* could also bring a number of different kinds of sicknesses if not properly propitiated, and iii) *khammang* and *yimi* (the husband and wife spirits or brother and sister as couple or the first incestuous couple as spirits). Because of inbuilt constraints within their culture, Hardman further suggests that Thulung Rai people were marrying with their close relatives throughout past, and this is so even today. Relating with their myths she has even narrated how brothers and sisters developed incestuous relationship (pp. 94-96) and established themselves as deities. This mythical story is not very different as described by David Holmberg (*Order in Paradox*, 1996) how one of the Tamang original clans emerged from the union of one's own blood brother and sister.

In Chapter V "Knowledge of the Past for the Present" she discusses *Pe-lam* or *mundhum*, the oral text among the Lhorung, which narrates knowledge about the ancestral past and the ways of maintaining it in the present (p.103). It is the oral tradition of the Lhorung customs, habits, traditions, rituals and myths (p.104), or the traditions of people as a whole. Rituals remain central in Lhorung lives and these *Pe-lam* (texts) are recalled by ritual specialists, which is itself a history of their own identity (p.109). *Pe-lam* for Lhorung is one of the important ways of coping with the modern world (p.113). *Pe-lam* spells out the relationship between man and nature (p.113) and narrates creation story that how they (or human beings) are related or interdependent with nature. The text provides narration of the ancestral mother of Lhorung (the picture of the father is blurred), who gave birth to many human and non-human species such as the thorny cripper (*chiching*), bamboo (*baphu*), the tiny black fly (*busunna*), bear (*maska*), monkey (*pubbang*), tiger (*kiba*), and man (*pomnohang*) or the Kiranti, and all of them are considered brothers to one another (p.114). Within humans, the brothers of Lhorung also include Khambu living to the west of the Arun, all

the Yakthumba(Limbu), all the Yakha as well as the Mech, Koch of the Tarai and the Lhorunge of the Tibetan speaking Lhomi of upper Arun living in Symadang village (p.116). They separated themselves from each other because of three main components involved in breaking the bones of a clan, such as an incestuous union, separation and the ideal of sharing (p.117).

Apart from *saya*, *chawa* and *samek* are two other concepts essential to the Lhorung notion of a person. *Samek* is the original proto-name, which identifies people, clans and objects in their relations with the person. *Chawa* is both the first clan watering place and the territorial name, which identifies and binds together a clan. They link the person through the identification of a clan to a particular area or territory (p.121).

In Chapter VI "Lhorung Houses: Saya and Nuagi," Hardman notes that ancestral identity can reveal itself in any place, person, object possessing *saya*, or *saya* can be seen as an institution in the Lhorung society (p. 137). For Lhorung, each object in the house that has *saya* is valued as super humans and are said to rest in those places that they recognize as belonging to them. So the different sections of the house, such as the hearth, the doorways, the beams and pillars are always regarded with respect (141). *Saya* is the form of ancestral deity or identity, which resides everywhere; it can reveal it at any place, in person and object (p.137).

The *nuagi* ceremonies are held annually by every Lhorung household and takes place inside the house. The household shrine and household – ancestors (*khammang* and *yimi*) are renewed at *nuagi* (p. 140). In *nuagi*, super-humans lived along side of the living in the society (p.146). *Nuagi* is big ceremony among the Thulung where they invite everybody to attend and enjoy the good food, etc. "All Lhorung know that their household gains status if lots of adults and children attend the household *nuagi*" (p.148). A big *nuagi* signifies a healthy and wealthy house (p.148). Hardman even compares *nuagi* of Thulung with that of the potlatch system of the Kwakiutal Indians (p 148). Likewise, *nuagi* is the most important ceremony or ritual in which the house and every member of the family revitalize new energy. The main purpose of *nuagi* is to raise *saya* of the household members, strengthen *lawa* (the soul) and clear *niwa* (acquired understanding)in the ritual chant (p.147). In terms of personhood, it points to the essential nature of relations with living and dead kin (p.150). In brief, "to enter a Lhorung house is to enter Lhorung metaphysics"(p.169).

Chapter VII is "The Person and the Cycle of Life", where she describes the life cycle rituals of Lhorung: birth, marriage and death. Growth and

development of the child is discussed in the context of *niwa* (acquired understanding, capacity of an individual about judgment and feelings or mind of the person or mental attitudes) and *lawa* (the soul) that can leave the child's body and wander around) (p.187). The interesting conclusion is that "when *niwa* hurts, *saya* falls; if *niwa* is not strong and big, *lawa* leaves" (p.211). Though given freedom to both the boy and girl to select their spouse, two-thirds of Lhorung marriages are arranged. The one-third marriages, which are performed through elopement or by theft, parental discretion is taken special consideration or sometimes parents force their daughter to marry a particular boy though a girl may not like the boy initially (pp. 204-210). In almost all types of marriages, the boy has the advantage of marrying the girl. In other words, the superiority of male is taken for granted even in the ethnic/tribal culture such as Lhorung. Death ritual as a whole is discussed briefly though it reflects the core values sacred to the society.

Chapter VIII "Emotions and Concepts of Mind: Understanding Lhorung Behaviour and Social Institutions" deals with emotion terms within specific contexts and meanings, such as anger, fear, *negesime* (sense of shame), love and happiness, and *saya pokme* (raise *saya*). She further brings the issue of universalism versus relativism to justify the notion of self in the Lhorung culture and considers Lhorung's position in between these two approaches. The anthropologists declare emotions to be the part of culture (relativist approach) while most psychologists take the view that they belong to our nature and are universal (p.266). She notes that emotions for Lhorung are both cultural and grounded in the bio-physiological processes (p. 268).

In Chapter IX, "Personhood, Emotions and Ethno-psychology: Concluding Remarks" she discusses the theoretical implications of the knowledge about Lhorung emotions and mental states in terms of their ethno-psychology (p.274). The Lhorung, at times, define an individual according to such roles as household head, husband, wife, brother, and mother (p.274). Lhorung emotions are noted as: a) the context or the situation of the emotion, b) the mental state, c) behavioral expression d) physiological accompaniments and e) linguistic and paralinguistic expression (p.276). She concludes that how folk models of personality, thinking, and or feeling may be used to explore three domains: that of cultural patterns and symbolic structures (i.e. the cultural system); that of social institutions, marriage ,ritual ,socialization and social life; and the domain of individual motivation, individual psychology, and experience. In brief, the other worlds of Lhorung are closely embedded with their notions of self and emotion (p.281).

Hardman, however, does not discuss women's role in economy as dimensions of Thulung social life vis-à-vis expressing the notions of "self" and "emotion" in Thulung culture. Nowhere sexual life of Thulung women is highlighted as the reflection of dissatisfaction though she presents herself as a sick person to understand the phenomenological world of Thulung. No doubt, her narratives of the whole book are based on Kahili's story and her worldviews. She focuses her entire discussion of Thulung women personhood and acquisition of power exclusively on men even without even alluding to similar (or dissimilar) processes through which girls become women. When the reader is introduced to various spirits, their gender is not specified. Her narratives between males and females, and humans and animals in which much of the tension results are from the respective gender of the protagonists. She hardly mentions how sacred are the oral texts as these texts could be sung only in the particular rituals or occasions in many Rai cultures.

Description of indigenous peoples and their culture is not a new phenomenon in the anthropology of Nepal. But the ethnography of this kind has an important role in the anthropology of Nepal for a number of reasons:

- i) How qualitative methods could be used in understanding of the cognitive, emotional and behavioral development of groups of people;
- ii) Context and meaning in social inquiry, particularly extensive uses of diaries to provide meaning of the specific cultural context; and
- iii) Socio-psychological perspective on gender.

At the same time, she has not forgotten to include the romantic British approach describing her position in presenting the text such as "how to urinate standing up without lifting my skirt"(p. xviii), and her "masculine dress and small breasts" (p.24) and so on.

Some typological errors are rather apparent on many pages of the text such as "noone" for "none"(p. 21,p.188), Yama not Zema (p.154), nigh for night (p. 244) and so on. Sometimes, Hardman overexplains by saying "Brahmin and Chhetri categorize Lhorung low caste and untouchable"(p.177). No doubt, they are considered lower caste than they but by no means Brahmins /Chhetris of the area would dare to say that they are untouchables.

Again, one wonders, why the publication of the book was delayed for more than two decades. The book is very interesting for readers for two

reasons: i) Hardman did field work on Lhorung Rai between 1976-78 and also paid visits of shorter duration between 1978-80, but received her PhD degree from the Lhorung material only in 1990 (after the gap of more than ten years) and the book was published eventually in 2000, almost the gap of 20 years), and ii) Nowhere in the book she mentions that she was associated with “the Status of Women Project” run by CEDA, Tribhuvan University though everybody knew that she was one of the members of the study team, to study Lhorung Rai. Only in bibliography she notes, “Lhorung Women of the Arun Valley (not dated).”

Notwithstanding, this is an important contribution to the ethno-psychology of Rai people of Eastern Nepal. The virtue of this book is that she brings a lot of mythological stories together in a coherent and skilful way to give a meaning of self and identity in the local culture. Her stories have become compelling because of her ability to talk and understand the Lhorung language.

Finally, though feminist and gender studies is finding a good space in the anthropology of Nepal since the 1980s there is an increasing awareness of the importance of women and gender issues in indigenous communities, organizations and research but little attention is given to ethno-psychological perspectives of people. Her annexes equally provide rich materials for those who are interested in knowing more about the Rai culture (A1 provides characteristic features of the Lhorung language, A2 Kinship terminology, and, A3 Lhorung texts, where she provides texts of *nuagi*, *sokma*, *umcha*, words to recall infant's lawa, chant of the women after marriage and to raise *saya* in the Thulung language). I feel that these texts would have been more meaningful to the lay readers if they were translated into the English language, as they are the source of ethno-history of local people.

– Dilli Ram Dahal