

BOOKS REVIEWS

Gender and Slum Culture in Urban Asia

By Thorbeck Susanne

Sage Publications, New Delhi (1993).

Rs. 300.00 (Cloth).

In 'Gender and Slum Culture in Urban Asia', Susanne Thorbeck compares gender relations and the wider economic, material and social circumstances which influence them in slums in Bangkok and Colombo. Arguing that these share a common cultural background (Theravada Buddhism) as well as important differences, Thorbeck outlines the principal objectives of her study: to make visible the lives of women, to highlight features arising from common structural conditions in the two communities, and to examine cultural differences in understandings of gender.

The greatest strength of the book is its empirical content. By outlining the circumstances which structure local gender relations, a vivid impression is created of women's everyday lives. I particularly enjoyed reading the texts of interviews, where the women are allowed to speak for themselves. Thorbeck writes compassionately and clearly; as an account of the lives of slum women in Colombo and perhaps to a lesser extent, Bangkok, 'Gender and Slum Culture in Urban Asia' is a useful contribution.

The book's theoretical analysis however, is more flawed. Key to this is the supposition that urbanisation affects women more negatively than men and leads to intensified gender struggles. Empirically there seems little reason to doubt this: Thorbeck's ethnography indicates that conflict between men and women is a constant feature of the lives of slum women. In Ratmalana, the Colombo slum, whilst remaining largely responsible for the well-being and reproduction of their households, women are still encompassed by a dominant ideology which stresses their subservience to and reliance on men. Both because of their

need to conform to prevailing social codes, and the physical threat of male violence, women's actions are continually constrained. However in Khlong Toey, the Bangkok slum, women are far less dependent upon men, experience lower levels of male violence, are less constrained by cultural emphasis on their purity, and generally appear to suffer less hardship than their counterparts in Ratmalana.

Whilst Thorbeck does discuss important cultural and historical differences between the two communities she ultimately prioritises different rates of urbanisation as the main explanatory factor for the varying constructions of gender in Ratmalana and Khlong Toey. What are surely crucial issues - the 'traditional' norms of matrilocality, bilateral inheritance, and women's central role in production in Thailand, as opposed to dowry, patrilocality, settlement and stress on female purity in Sri Lanka - are thus downplayed in favour of generalised conclusions about the nature of urbanisation. She argues that although both communities have a common high-culture, and despite the existence of Sri Lanka's welfare system, the main difference between Thailand and Sri Lanka has been that the latter has gone through a lengthy period of urbanisation, leading to wage labour, new emphasis on commodities and a separation between production and reproduction, thus creating deep contradictions between the sexes. It is this, she asserts, which explains the greater degree of patriarchy in Sri Lanka.

I do not find this line of argument convincing. Firstly, since gender relations are everywhere culturally constructed and thus culturally specific, comparing cultures which may indeed share Theravada Buddhism but which are in so many other ways radically different seems to me to be of limited usefulness. Second, her argument relies upon problematic generalisations about the nature of urbanisa-

tion. Comparative material from other parts of the world indicates that circumstances which she takes as universal (the preference of men for nuclear families, or the devaluing of reproduction, for example) are not automatic corollaries of urbanisation (see for example, Parry, 1979). Thorbeck also associates urbanisation with a puritanism which she suggests is the result of Westernisation. Again, 'Westernisation' is neither the automatic result of urbanisation (as illustrated by communalism in contemporary urban India), nor does it necessarily take the form of puritanism. The sex industry in Thailand, so strongly supported by western tourists, is a case in point.

Lastly, inherent in Thorbeck's analysis appears to be an evolutionary schema: women in Khlong Toey are less subordinate than in Ratmalana because urbanisation and Western influence have not been taking place for so long, and state power has, so far, been relatively limited. The implication is that over time gender relations in Bangkok will become similar to those in Ratmalana. Given the cultural, economic and political differences between both places this seems to me to be deeply problematic.

REFERENCE

- Parry, J.: *Caste and Kinship in Kangra*. Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., London (1979).

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Revolution for Nature : From the Environment to the Connatural World

By Klaus Michael Meyer-Abich
145 pp. *The White Horse Press,
Cambridge, UK and University of North
Texas Press, Denton, USA, (1990).*

The book considers why we continue to

destroy the environment, in spite of being quite well aware of the consequences. The man is guided by some conflicting socio-economic-political interests and to fulfill his interest he very often disregards the nature as well as the survivability of the human species as a whole. In order to maintain peace with nature which absolutely necessary not only for overall development of human and non-human parts of the world but just for the survival of the eco-system as such, the author cultivated a new and revolutionary relationship between these two component parts of the nature. The book is divided into five formal chapters respectively, Thinking and Acting for Change, From Human Environment to Connatural World, Responsibility for Nature, Foundations for a Holistic Ethic, and Social and Nature State. But we have remained throughout the write-up a bit informal in discussing the chapters.

The author described the non-human part of the nature as 'Connatural World'. Thus according to the author, "the unity of all being 'nature' and everything which belongs to it apart from humanity is the 'connatural world'". The author observed that the human part of the nature (i.e., consumers and producers or employers and employees etc.) would try to maximise their shortrun gain knowingly or unknowingly at the cost of damage to the connatural world (i.e., animals and plants, landscapes, seas, air and light etc.). This is in fact a major limitation of the capitalist economy which promotes environmental destruction for large turnover and profit. But this could not be continued for a long time as we might have to confront the threat by nature for the imbalances created by us between human and non-human part of the nature. The author, therefore, suggested a framework on the basis of which a peaceful consumer revolution could be achieved without going into the path of life-destroying economy that the capitalist economy used to follow.

The framework suggested by the author is

based on the foundations for a Holistic Ethic which put forward some criteria for testing out the economic process as an alternative to the 'incomplete enlightenment' of the dominant western world-view. He in this context considered the basic limitations of the market economy and examined how the selfishness of the market economy could erode the foundations of human existence in terms of food, art and work. Thus in a given concrete situation of capitalistic economic system, one is unlikely to find a coexistence of material and cultural determinants to bear on the economic process. But it is a well-known fact that the economy must be bounded by goals and restrictions which may not be justified economically, provided a cultural frame of reference for deciding what is an economic success and what is not, comes into the agenda. Since culture (arts, political and legal culture) is humanity's contribution to natural history, it is necessary to bring culture in the full sense of the term into the world with humanity belonging to the connatural world.

The logical implications of such theorising is consensus-creating rather than dissensus-generating, nature-state building rather than nature-state destroying. The idea is that in the nature state, the state participates in the natural order in the same way as humanity participates in nature so that the interest of both humanity and connatural world are met with, and balances between these two are made in such a way that the culture comes into the world.

The book is a most timely, informative and important contribution to the field of growing, but still small literature on the environmental science, provoking fundamental thoughts about the philosophy of nature. Covering from human environment to connatural world and focussing on the responsibility of teachers, professors, scientists of different fields in the environmental movement and recommending for environmentally responsible courses of action, the author addresses a most thoughtful analysis on nature in a very brilliant way. It

deserves a careful reading by anyone interested in environment, connatural world, and world economy.

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**Ethics, Religion and Biodiversity :
Relations Between Conservation and
Cultural Values**

Edited by Lawrence S. Hamilton

*x + 218 pp., Figures, Tables, References,
Contributors' Bio-data*

*The White Horse Press, Cambridge,
U.K., £ 14.95*

The papers included in this volume were presented at a symposium held as a part of the XVII Pacific Science Congress, Honolulu, Hawaii, 27 May-2 June 1991. The basic premise of the symposium organizer was : "It is not the ecologists, engineers, economists, or earth scientists who will save spaceship earth, but the poets, priests, artist and philosophers". He goes on to add: "It is a heedless consumer-culture...and the unmitigated faith in the ability of science and technology to provide ever-increasing levels of consumption and supposed welfare that needs to be changed in relationship with the earth" Such recognition of the fact that biodiversity conservation is not the exclusive domain of science but involves the realms of ethics, values and religions, provides a breath of fresh air in this age of over-scientism and consumer-culture. Herein lies the strength of the volume.

The introductory chapter by L.S. Hamilton briefly describes the "amazing and valuable biological diversity of the earth (e.g. about 10 million living species), essential for human life support"; the destruction of this variety by reckless human action following technological advancement (e.g. 1500 local varieties of

rice becoming extinct in Indonesia during the last 15 years); the mechanisms of biodiversity loss; and the scientific and ethical approaches to biodiversity conservation. Some major efforts towards the latter objective are mentioned. The following chapters deal with two types of materials: "The philosophical underpinnings of...human-environment interaction and...case studies where values derived from religion, ethics, or culture have provided a measure of nature conservation".

Chapter 1, by D. Goulet, begins with Arnold Toynbee's theme of the existence of an inverse relationship between the cultural level a society achieves and its technological attainments (has not Bertrand Russell made an analogous statement somewhere?). It then raises certain questions regarding human poverty being the worst form of pollution, what biological diversity should be preserved, man's duties towards himself, other forms of life, and his distant posterity; asserts that "Diversity is a general requirement in all living beings for flexible adaptation and survival in adverse conditions"; and adds an ethical component to the concept of development. Chapter 2, by H. Rolston III, discusses the concept of biodiversity and its conservation in the Christian religion; and raises the eternal question about chance or design in the emergence and evolution of life on earth, quoting Loren Eiseley in favour of his own fancy for a divine designer, "The Great Face behind" (but where is the solid evidence?). Chapter 3, by T. Weiming, emphasizes the need for "an ethic significantly different from the social Darwinian model of self-interest and competitiveness"; laments the wanton destruction of biodiversity by "the runaway technology of development"; and advocates the idea of global community with the following principle: "In order to establish myself, I must help others to establish themselves; in order to enlarge myself, I have to help them to enlarge themselves". Chapter 4, by L.E. Sponsel and P. Natadecha-Sponsel, refers to eight principles (namely unity, inter-

dependence, limits, sustainability, diversity, rights, responsibility and individual) as constituting an ethical basis for conserving biodiversity; compares the basic tenets of the Eastern and Western religions to show that the former have greater relevance to biodiversity conservation; and concentrates on the "potential contribution of Buddhism to developing an environmental ethic for conserving biodiversity". They emphasize the conservation efforts of Buddhist monks and villagers with special reference to Thailand, but concludes with a question about "whether there will be enough effective action in time to avoid even graver environmental and social crises in Thailand". Chapter 5, by R. Senanayake, discusses the ecological diversity in Australia, its disruption, and the traditional and European approaches to its conservation and management; but the traditional ("aboriginal") perception of land and its management is illustrated with only one example. Chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9, by P. Shengji, H. Anson and W. Raynor, S.P. Juvik and M.K. Dudley present more specific and detailed case studies on traditional environmental perceptions and practices in Yunnan (China), Pohnpei (Micronesia), Marovo Lagoon (Solomon Islands) and Hawaii (USA), respectively. These papers show, implicitly or explicitly, that traditional cultures conceive of the humans as part of nature and living in a reciprocal relationship with its different components, and therefore being more environmentally sustaining than "introduced cultures" which bring in consumerism and commercialization and threaten the environmental diversity. This set of papers are likely to appeal to the anthropologically-oriented reader more than the rest.

The concluding chapter has a title which is self-explanatory: "The role of ethics, culture, and religion in conserving biodiversity: A blueprint for research and action". This chapter is a grand proposal: thoughtful, ambitious and comprehensive. My only cautious criticism is that it is not very concrete, but

perhaps a grand proposal of this type, by its very nature, can not be very concrete.

I have enjoyed reading this volume, even if it is not written in the technical style to which we are used. My only major criticism is not about the content but about the production: pp. 197-204 are in duplicate in the copy that I have received.

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**In the Absence of their Men, The
Impact of Male Migration on Women**
By Leela Gulati

174 pp., Tables, References, Index
Sage Publications India Pvt. Ltd.,
New Delhi (1993), Rs. 200.00 (Cloth).

Leela Gulati has produced an interesting study of socio-cultural phenomena that an investigating ethnographer only rarely comes by. It is a study of migration of single individuals, the male earning members of families, for eking out livelihood in West Asian countries. The phenomenal migration of males of Kerala to these foreign lands for earning livelihood leaving behind their women and children occurs but rarely elsewhere in India. The study is based on extensive ethnographic data collected through unstructured interviewing of migrants' wives and mothers left behind to manage household. It is through cultivation of friendship with a fish-seller lady and other petty lady-workers that the author established rapport with the women of the migrants living in two sub-wards of Alakad and Bhimpally at the outskirts of the city of Trivandrum. The case-studies euphemistically called autobiographies that have formed the basis of generalization of the work have provided the testimony to what an authentic scientifically oriented work ought to be. The study focuses its interest on the issues concerning the migrant families espe-

cially the women and the children left behind by migrants to West Asia. The ten autobiographies (case-studies) reveal the socio-cultural life of the migrant families, both in the pre-and post-migration periods. The underlying basic theme of the study is a delineation on the socio-economic changes that are visible in the enrichment and betterment of the pre-migration day life of the people. A migrant and his family could enhance the quality of life by coping with, and reconciling themselves to, the emergent situation that developed in the family following the migration to foreign lands. The study has clearly revealed the Kerala semi-literate folk women's dexterity and acumen in managing the household aiming at family prosperity and comfort. This is ensured through acquisition, on priority basis, of a residential plot of land in the neighbourhood and constructing a modest comfortable structure thereon. In these endeavours at home, the migrants' remittance had a crucial role. With it the family's dream of owning a comfortable shelter in place of the old thatched one and also some modern gadgets, fructifies, and without it, calamity is likely to befall a household.

The author's delineations of 37 migrant households including 10 in-depth case-studies will provide the reader with an insight into the life-patterns of the migrants. This is in fact a comprehensive study of the overall impact on women of overseas male migration. The author has endeavoured to present post-migration spectacular material as well as aesthetic achievements, and these have been presented in the penultimate chapter as findings on the field-data. The generalizations contained in the chapter are the total life-ways in the aftermath of the overseas migration.

By far, to a student of social science, the entire study appears as one of the metamorphoses in the socio-cultural life of the migrants' households of Alakad and Bhimpally following change of a single aspect of life, namely, the occupational pursuits of the people over the pre- and post-migration periods. The work is

written in clear lucid language. It is worth studying by social science researchers and general public evincing interest in human behavioural dynamism.

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Perceptions of South Asia's Visual Past

Edited by B. Asher and Thomas R. Metcalf

305 pp., 79 Plates,

Oxford & IBH Publishing Co. Pvt. Ltd.,

New Delhi (1994).

Price Rs. 595.00 (Cloth)

Visual art, particularly in the form of sculpture, has been the theme of many a voluminous publications before. The present volume is entirely different when compared to these. Here papers presented in an International Conference held on the same topic at the American Institute of Indian Studies Center for Art and Archaeology at Varanasi have been brought together by two eminent professors of Art history and history. 18 papers have been selected carefully and arranged under four different sections. The titles of these sections themselves demonstrate that the editors did not have the usual iconic or indological analysis in their mind unlike what is normally expected. The sections are *Construction of the Canon*, *The Past in the present*, *The Imperial Appropriation of the past and finally Independent India and the Colonial past*.

The Canon is constructed with the help of Tartakov, Dar, Guha-Thakurta and Malandra. The Durga temple at Aihole and its various reports are shown to demonstrate how a slow metamorphosis of opinions can be seen in the reporting of art. This process is termed as 'orientalization'. The obvious limitation this tendency can bring about in studying art history is examined at length. Finally the author shows how a more positive direction of post-orientalists has begun to develop in the later 20th

century. Dar attempts to understand Gandhara art from the so called classical to modern approaches. The rich diversity of dress and physiomorphy represented in Gandhara art was never looked as representing a poly ethnic society by the Western scholars and Dar feels that there is no reason to believe that these, indeed, shows the reality. Guha-Thakurta discusses the rise of a distinct tradition in Calcutta and connects this with the rise of nationalistic urge which might have generally given shape to what is meant by orientalism. For this the author goes into the thematic aspects of two great Indian artists - Ravi Varma and Abanindra Nath Tagore. India possessed a spiritual essence that had since antiquity shaped its art. The author goes at length to examine this inner essence which culminated in the rise of Calcutta School of art and finally was articulated into the forces of nationalism. Malandra concerns himself about the art evidences of Ajanta and Elora and goes to argue for the need of going beyond the conservative chrono-stylistic interpretation. Besides exhaustive foot-notes here one can get select chronological bibliography divided into two stages for both these sites, which are genuinely useful for researchers in this field.

The second set of papers are on the indigenous views and reconstructions of Indian Visual past. In his article, R.N. Misra extends valuable arguments on different perspectives of Indian philosophies (Hindu, Jain and Buddhist). These provide a continuum from the past to the present and probably also will play part in constructing future world view. As a result Misra argues that Indian artist's perception is characterised by a fluidity and flexibility. In support of this argument the author examines the study of Udayagiri relief, Bhitargaon terra cotta figures and other relevant motifs of narrative art form of icons belonging to Buddhist and Brahminical connections. The next article by M.C. Joshi attempts at a general survey of early Historic plastic art. The author deals with the evidence

of Mauryan and Post Mauryan art form varieties of available source material such as Kautilya's Arthashastra, Asokan inscriptions as well as sculptural traditions and terra cottas. Joshi feels that the conceptual and traditional symbolism was probably introduced mainly by the craftsman and later on accepted by their patrons. The narrative nature of such expressions as the life of Buddha were probably aimed towards educating the common populace, and may not have been done with an aim of historicity. The next two articles of this section are two case studies. One is on Mathura by R.C. Sharma and the other is on Ajanta by M.K. Dhavalikar. Sharma's paper starts with a discussion on the existing archaeological sites and monuments of Mathura. To give a clear picture of image worship the author emphasises the reuse of sculptural deities. Recycling of art trends of Mathura school, its use of Kushana idiom and its influence on Sarnath school and shikhara style of architecture are discussed. Since the publication of *Ajanta: A Cultural Study*, in 1973 Dhavalikar is working on the different aspects of Ajanta and Ellora to enrich the Maharastrian School. Here the author re-emphasises Ajanta as centre of ancient cultural heritage of not only of Deccan but also of India as a whole. This claim is based on the argument that Jatakas were written in the northern India and artists came from all over and stayed at Ajanta. Finally Dhavalikar argues the often repeated opinion that, "The Indian artist had no perception of the past... (thus) while delineating past events he was unconsciously portraying contemporary life. This was true at least for secular themes, though in religious subjects he was guided by tradition and certain conventions. This feature, however appears to be universal, as it is also present in ancient Greek and Roman art" (page 132). Vishakha Desai writes about pre-modern paintings of Ragamala from Bundi and discussed their copying and marketing imperatives. Jyotindra Jain describes in detail the interplay of individual artistic expression and the use

of motifs and stylistic devices of preceding era. For this he examines the works of Ganga Devi (1928-1991) of Madhubani School of painting in Mithila region of Bihar. The works of Ganga Devi has sharp clarity and one can discern the interplay of tradition and innovation in them.

The third section, containing 5 papers, deals with an important aspect and significant concern of art historians. The section, therefore, is rightly called Imperial Appropriation of the past. Richard Davis discusses art objects being transported as war trophies. The author sites the case of a Chalukya art object brought as a war trophy by the Chola King Rajadhiraj after burning the capital city of Kalyanapuram. He discusses in detail how such trophies used to be plundered as part of tangible evidence of one having over run an enemy capital. One wonders why millions of decapitation of iconic sculptures all over India by Muslim invaders cannot be likewise discussed and documented in such a section as this. Nagaswamy considers the 1500 years old temple of Nataraja at Chidambaram in Tamil Nadu which has been rebuilt several times between 12th to 17th centuries. This is done to demonstrate the shift in emphasis of the builders in a diachronic perspective. George Michell examines the Vijaynagara period and its sudden proliferation in temple building activity. In order to demonstrate this architectural revivalism the author delineates the history of temple building activity over a larger and contiguous area during this period. The author goes to demonstrate that this Kannada-Telugu zone had to draw from Tamil area in giving it a grant and imperial style. Mary Beth Coffman Heston examines the art of Marttanda Varma who ruled south Kerala during 1729 to 1758. It shows how Marttanda Varma borrows from both local and larger south Indian architectural past and yet manages to create a unique individuality. Colin Mackenzie arrived in India in 1783 and died in 1821. During this 38 years he had amassed a collection of 3000 stone

and copper plate inscriptions, 1568 literary manuscripts, 2070 local tracts and a large portfolio of visual sketches of rare ethnographic accounts. Nicholas B. Dirks traces the work and activities of this remarkable man and laments that he had never been given a serious consideration by historians. It is a fascinating paper which has been laboriously researched.

The last section embodies only 3 papers which take stock of Independent India and its colonial past. Barbara N. Ramusack discusses the attempt of using princely state as spots for luxury tourism and in the process selecting only a few Rajasthan palaces out of something like 600 such states. The author could have probably found an answer to this if she would have examined the long and intensive contact the Rajasthan princes had with the western world. Narayani Gupta examines the landscape of Delhi with special reference to Lutyens' Kingsway and its change into Rajpath. She records in detail the debate that emerged out of the decision of free India to install the statue of Gandhiji in the India Gate canopy in place of George V which was removed in 1968. Anthony King examines some of the discourses on architecture and urbanism in India between 1960 to 1990. With the rise of globalization, 'a touch of Italian romance in your bathroom' seems to have permeated down to the inner portals of conservative Indian homes.

The volume scans diverse regions of Indian culture and soul and does it commendably well. The glossary is a very thoughtful addition which would be enormously useful to anybody wanting to enter the field of oriental art. Excellently produced and richly illustrated, this volume should be a hot preference for both experts and uninitiated readers.

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Genetic Disorders and Health Care

By Salil Basu

152 pp., Figures, Tables, References.

Shree Kala Prakashan, Delhi (1994)

Rs. 200-00 (Cloth).

In recent years, the field of medical genetics has become an important and integral part of the curriculum in physical anthropology/human biology courses being offered by several Indian universities. It is therefore timely that a book on "Genetic Disorders and Their Implications" has brought out by a distinguished teacher and research worker.

The 14 sections of this slick book are spread over first 100 odd pages, followed by 4 appendices and references. The first two sections briefly touch the general concepts and scope of human genetics in relation to genetic diseases and quality of life. The third section gives an account of different methods employed in genetic studies in man viz. twin studies and pedigree analysis etc. A detailed account of abnormal haemoglobin conditions, thalassaemia and G-6PD deficiency, and their distribution in India is presented in section 4; the association of these and other genetic markers with malaria is discussed in section 5.

The concept of consanguinity, its prevalence in India and effects of parental consanguinity in terms of reproductive performance, mortality, morbidity, congenital malformations, genetic load and growth and development are the subject matter of section 6. Colour-blindness and inborn errors of metabolism in man are briefly touched upon in sections 7 and 8. This is followed by a lucid account of normal human chromosome complement and various chromosomal aberrations (syndromes) encountered in man (section 9). Section 10 briefly mentions common congenital malformations in man. The consequences of the Rh and ABO blood group incompatibilities on foetus are illustrated in section 11. This section also lists associations of various diseases with the ABO blood groups;

those observed with various HLA antigens are listed in section 12. The relationship between the mother's age with occurrence of different genetic disorders is briefly mentioned in section 13. Finally, section 14 dwells in detail upon the scope of genetic counselling and gives an account of various techniques that are currently available for routine antenatal diagnosis.

On the whole, this concise book on human genetics is well presented and is recommended for both graduate and post-graduate students of physical anthropology, human biology, medical genetics and human population genetics.

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