

BOOK REVIEW

Markus Viehbeck, *Transcultural Encounters in the Himalayan Borderlands Kalimpong as a 'Contact Zone'*, (Heidelberg: Heidelberg University Publishing; 2017), pp.viii+350, £38.48, (ISSN 2365-7987).

This book depicts Kalimpong during the early 19th century. It focuses upon the cultural interchange that took place before the Sino-Indian war. The migration of Tibetans, the trade activities between Tibet, China and India are the main concern of the book. The articles contained in the book also discuss some important figures such as Reverend John Anderson Graham, Thomas Parr, Dalai Lama, Charles Bell, Prince Peter's, Rindzin Wangpo and many more who played an essential role in the phase of transcultural activities. Further, the book is an amalgamation of cultural history and introduction of western education, and it dwells upon the importance of Kalimpong as a contact zone due to its location. However, the book only focuses upon the early phase of 19th century and overlooks the cultural variation that is witnessed in the district. Especially because apart from Tibetans, Bhutanese, and Lepchas it fails to record the arrival of the other cultural groups that migrated to Kalimpong and also played a significant role during that period. However, the book does help us to familiarise with the Tibetan history that is still unknown to many.

The introductory part is written by Markus Viehbeck who is the editor of the book. In his "Cultural History as a History of Encounters- A 'Contact Perspective'" he describes the socio-cultural environment of Kalimpong. Digging into the history of the place we find that the arrival of British prompted a number of people to convert themselves to Christianity. As a result the first church, boarding schools, and hospitals were built and thus, Kalimpong became the centre for elite education. Similarly, he regards trade to be the most important factor in the development of the area. He substantiates this by adding that a thriving economy led to the increase in population, ensuing in a heterogeneous mix of peoples from the neighbouring countries. Further, Viehbeck particularly notes that 'in 1931, Kalimpong was recognised as a town; and in 1945 a municipality was established'. Hence, due to economic upturn, Kalimpong was developed into an urban centre. Then he even talks about the political scenario of Kalimpong i.e. the new political claim in the form of an independent state of 'Gorkhaland'. However, the article most importantly focuses on the heterogeneous group of people assembled in the town having different geographical, cultural, national, or ethnic background making Kalimpong to be a 'contact-zone'. It considerably discusses the social space where different cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other due to which the concept of transculturation was highlighted and promoted through people's encounter. Therefore, in this context he particularly mentions that 'in the context of Kalimpong, cultural plurality was clearly an important feature of the social fabric. In fact, a certain sense of 'cosmopolitanism' was often noted, especially by foreign visitors.' Consequently, the article discusses about how the encountering of people from different background made Kalimpong the prime example of 'contact zone'.

Jayeeta Sharma in 'Kalimpong as a Transcultural Missionary Contact Zone' most importantly focuses on the work of the Reverend John Anderson Graham, arguably the most influential missionary in Kalimpong. She shows how encounters between Christian missionaries and localities' shaped the various projects around print culture, education, health, and social welfare that originated in this context. The chapter also deals with Scottish Presbyterian associational networks around print, religion, education, social reform, and self-help enterprises enabling Kalimpong develop itself into a transcultural and transnational hub functioning as a key contact zone in the Eastern Himalayan region. Sharma also discusses about Graham's first book, *On the Threshold of Three Closed Lands*, a work that vividly described his Guild-sponsored activities at pleasing Kalimpong, she illustrates Graham and his colleagues' adoption of different methods to make contact with the local people. For instance, roadside preaching was a cherished strategy that appealed strongly to the older generation of missionaries as well as to their supporters in Scotland. However, late nineteenth-century British India, missionaries of all denominations pragmatically began to focus on education and health care as the best methods to make lasting contact with locals. The article also highlights the desperate necessity of modern education in the region for which the Scottish missionary during that time had built a small formal school. Similarly, there were many schools that were established throughout the region to promote education. Simultaneously, Kalimpong also grew in Arts and Crafts products. Moreover, this article discusses about the major changes that Kalimpong went through after coming in contact with the missionaries.

In 'The Scottish Mission in Kalimpong and the Changing Dynamics of Lepcha Society' Charisma K. Lepcha points out that in comparison to the Bhutias and the Nepalis, the indigenous Lepcha's were the most responsive to the Gospel. In this article the researcher discusses about how the adoption of the new religion created a new identity making them leave their old practices and beliefs behind. The major socio-cultural changes that the Lepcha's underwent after accepting Christianity are the main focus of the article. She also examines the relationship among the Lepcha's who regarded themselves to be superior after adopting Christianity. She looks at the vanishing cultural trends of Lepcha as well as the revival of some practices arriving at the conclusion, that the strong hold upon cultural identity is still missing.

The article 'Photography in the "Contact Zone": Identifying Copresence and Agency in the Studios of Darjeeling' by Clare Harris highlights the power of photography in the contact zones of the Himalayas, due to which it is possible to determine the signs of indigenous agency and transcultural interaction. Through this article we come to explore the history of postcard and know its cultural significance. The images that were photographed always hold cultural significance which pronounced the ethnic identity of the area. It mostly highlighted the pictures of different cultural groups that existed during those periods. Thomas Parr is one of the prominent figures who played an essential role in exhibiting the cultural scenario of the era. Hence, overall the chapter sketches for the reader the entire journey of photography and its significance.

“Imagining the Wild Man: Yeti Sightings in Folktales and Newspapers of the Darjeeling and Kalimpong Hills” by Anna Sawerthal and Davide Torri is an article that explores the entanglements of folktales, travel accounts, and newspaper reports involving sightings, encounters, and rumours about the existence of Yeti believed to be inhabiting in the snowy peaks and forested slopes of Himalayan range. Different groups of people have different beliefs regarding the history and significance of Yeti in their social belief systems. The chapter partly deals with the history of the birth of Yeti’s and partly with descriptions of the physical appearance. Moreover, different ethnic groups such as Bhutia, Sherpa, Sikkimese and Lepcha are shown as having different views on the existence of Yeti. However, the passage of time gradually decreased the belief in the existence of Yeti and today it has become a mere myth which cannot be validated.

The first question that comes to the mind is about the cultural significance of Yeti in the transcultural process. Given the basis in a belief system, how far can it be regarded as a foundation for cultural exchange remains an open question.

Prem Poddar and Lisha Lindkvist Zhang in their article “Kalimpong: The China Connection” tries to identify contact between Kalimpong and China. The article draws reference from newspapers, articles and events to explore the connection. The writer specially regards that Kalimpong plays a pivotal role in the border politics of the People’s Republic of China and Republic of India. Kalimpong due to its location became the hub of trade due to which people from Tibet and China migrated on large scale. Most importantly Dalai Lama coming to Kalimpong for political asylum is discussed in the article which drew the attention of the then existing government. Kalimpong at a point of time was regarded to be a spy zone more specifically by Nehru who refers to Kalimpong as ‘a nest of spies’ and is supposed to have commented lightly that ‘spies are probably more than the population’. However, the authors claimed that there was no significant evidence available that could prove this allegation. The article although, does discuss the trading activities, it does not give us more information about the huge scale migration that might have taken place during that period.

Emma Martin in “Object Lessons in Tibetan: The thirteenth Dalai Lama, Charles Bell, and Connoisseurial Networks in Darjeeling and Kalimpong, 1910-12” discusses about the process of objective gifts given by the Tibetans to the British which had deep meaning inscribed in it. Although, ‘those hundreds and thousands of objects collected during colonial encounters are increasingly thought of and labelled as loot, trophies, curious, fieldwork specimens, and gifts’ yet the reality is that ‘these pieces of art are very difficult to reconstruct’. More specifically this chapter discusses Charles Bell’s encounter with Dalai Lama and the gifts he received and their significance. Each of the gifts that were exchanged holds specific cultural meaning and an objective lesson. The first gift was a Buddha statue an item from Lama’s personal prayer room. Dalai Lama hoped that in exchange of this gift he would get political favour from the British. The other object was a Chinese Jade made by his chief carpenter during his exile period. The other gift was a land offered by Ugyen Dorji in Kalimpong on which he built

Bhutan House which was an important hub for Bhutanese diplomatic and trading affairs. Hence, the chapter uncovers through these artefacts the lessons Bell gained 'not wholly as a professional practice, one purely tied to the building of colonial knowledge and power, but as the embodied experiences of someone living in spaces defined by cultural plurality.' However, the article does not give any information on the type of benefits that the Tibetans received from the British government. The gifts highlight cultural significance but do they equally indicate transcultural activities as discussed in the article, because the objects were taken by the British as a reward of their conquest.

Tina Harris chapter "Wool, Toothbrushes, and Beards: Kalimpong and the "Goldan Era" of Cross-Border Trade" discusses the run from 1947 to 1963 in which the main focus is trade and the development of the district. As the history of trade in Kalimpong is particularly centred in the Lhasa-Kalimpong wool trade in the 20th century the chapter dwells on the different activities that unfolded as the trade business. Initially, it explores the way mules were one of the main transporters of the goods. Then gradually we see the coming up of men porters along with mules for better earning. After that we see the role of technology through which a rapid growth of trade could be recognised. Introduction of motorcycles and bicycles became the source of development of the area as their introduction led to the improvement in the quality of roads. Wool and Yak tail were the main materials that were traded during those periods. However, with the passage of time the scenario gradually changed and most importantly the non-renewal of Sino-Indian Trade became the turning point that closed the border for trade. This forced Kalimpong to focus on other economic activities, namely, horticulture, sericulture and tourism. Cheese and milk manufacturing dairies were setup and thus Kalimpong became famous for its lollipops and cheese. Hence, in this way Kalimpong adopted different methods of trade to improve its economic condition. The chapter does give appreciable picture of cultural exchange leading to the growth of the place through increasing trade.

Amy Holmes-Tagchungdarpa in "Sacred Economies of Kalimpong: The Eastern Himalayas in the Global Production and Circulation of Buddhist Material Culture" deals with the different religious objects among the Tibetans and Himalayan Buddhists that hold the historical importance of its existence. This article sketch out the outlines of the materiality of Kalimpong's Buddhist culture by outlining the processes of production and distribution attached to religious objects produced and procured in Kalimpong. For instance, prayer flag is one of such object that is produced for religious purpose and later become one of the main industries of production. The article moreover deals with the transformation of religious items into industrial benefits. However, the article does not discuss sufficiently the workers who were involved in the process of making the religious material. For instance, if a Tibetan worker makes the prayer flag they will make it with proper devotion whereas the other community people may not. Further, the article does not discuss about the process of global production of the cultural material in detail. However, the article does give us the different phases of increasing trade activities of the cultural materials.

Trine Brox and Miriam Koktvedgaard Zeitzen's *Prince Peter's Seven Years in Kalimpong: Collecting in a Contact Zone* is most probably a type of autobiography that discusses Prince Peter's life in Kalimpong to collect materials for his thesis on the life of the Tibetans. Peter wanted to collect them himself by going to Tibet. However, Peter never got an opportunity to go to Tibet but fortunately he managed to collect much information from the Tibetans who migrated to India.

Here the writer focuses mainly upon the phase of Peter's collecting materials for the completion of his thesis work. It does not bring to discussion the transcultural activities that may have happened during that time, nor the type of cultural practices the migrated people brought along with them.

Markus Viehbeck in "The First Tibetan at a Western University? – Entanglements of Scholarship, Buddhism, and Power in Kalimpong and Beyond" discusses about life of Rindzin Wangpo's addressing the entanglements between different agents, their aims, and the knowledge they produced as their pathways intersected in Kalimpong and other locations in the middle of the twentieth century. Through this process of knowledge we witness the growth of Wangpo and his religious interests. Overall, the article focuses upon the life history of Wangpo and only indirectly touches the issue of transcultural discourse.

Kalzang Dorjee Bhutia in the article "Looking Beyond the Land of Rice: Kalimpong and Darjeeling as Modern Buddhist Contact Zones for Sikkimese Intellectual Communities" explore the life of Kazi Dawa Samdup, a prominent Sikkimese intellectual who undermined Orientalist depictions of local Himalayan Buddhist traditions through his campaigns of scholarship and activism between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During his prolific career as a translator and scholar, Dawa Samdup made use of his hybrid education and training in the British civil service in Darjeeling, Kalimpong, and the Dooars region to counter pejorative colonial claims made by Waddell and others about Buddhism. However, his works were only highlighted after his death in Evans-Wentz book titled *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* the centre of which was Kazi Dawa Samdup's translation of the *Bardo Tödröl* (Bar do thos grol), a Treasure Text revealed to Karma Lingpa. According to the article Dawa Samdup was a translator who worked as a medium between the Tibetans and the Western government. Dawa Samdup was more inclined towards the spiritual life and never left the path, and even as he continued his work for the government as an interpreter for all the major Anglo-Tibetan meetings of the period, he continued to engage in Buddhist pursuits. Through these translations he facilitated an insight into Tibetan Buddhism that had never previously been possible, and thereby conceived of new relationships and affiliations beyond the political present. Overall, the work of Kazi Dawa Samdup demonstrates the presence of auto ethnographic expression in Kalimpong and Darjeeling as a way for local agents to insert their own voices into global representations of Tibetan and Himalayan Buddhism. Overall, we can sum up by saying that this article too is a biography of Samdup, his religious practices and his journey as a translator. However, the role of Samdup in spreading the cultural

importance would be an example of transcultural insertion, albeit of an individual having had national significance.

Overall, the book does contribute in understanding the phase of 1910-12 which was the era of cultural exchange, an era of increasing trading activity and also an era of rising of prominent figures who contributed in holding the religious believes. Moreover, the book sketches for us the birth of Kalimpong as a hill station and also helps us to understand the history of some ethnic groups.