

The Himalayas

A Syllabus of the Region's History, Anthropology, and Religion

by Todd T. Lewis and Theodore Riccardi, Jr.
Foreword by Gerald D. Berreman

ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN: ASSOCIATION FOR ASIAN STUDIES, INC., 1995
240 PAGES

"Syllabus" brings to mind an outline, a skeleton to be built upon by both learner and instructor. This occasional paper for the Association for Asian Studies provides such a skeleton, and gives us a great deal more at the same time.

Lewis and Riccardi have synthesized a very large number of strands with skill and sophistication using the uniqueness of the region as their powerful, overarching theme.

The Himalayas: A Syllabus is likely to have limited use in high schools, but could be helpful to selected students. Few high school courses can devote an entire year to this part of the world; more typically, there is a six or eight-week unit focusing on the dominant cultures and political entities of South Asia. The need to avoid a superficial covering of every area of the globe may lead to minimal attention to frontier areas.

This syllabus is more useful as a place to send the occasional student who wants to get started on a project. The document could be used to best effect by a highly motivated secondary school student who has a clear picture of his/her research needs. The student who spends some time with this syllabus cannot miss the importance



Asan Tol Bazaar of Kathmandu.

of the region and religious pilgrimage routes. Also noteworthy is Lewis's and Riccardi's description of the symbiotic relationship between humans and animal life, which they see as critical to the ecology of the region.

Lewis's and Riccardi's syllabus could be a resource of the very highest import to the college instructor or student researcher engaged in the study of the Himalayas. Bibliographic data are matched specifically to each section of the syllabus. Also, the document suggests how the tools of the various social sciences could be used in

concert to yield insights into a most complex region. The historian, for example, will focus on generalizations and will find the individual list of sources for each area to be extremely valuable. Also helpful are lists such as the authors' enumeration of the artifacts of cultural diffusion: relics, religious texts, and even Greek coins from the time of Alexander the Great.

For the instructor in a university where there is no specific course on the Himalayas, the syllabus will inform her/his courses on general Asian, Chinese, Indian or other anthropology, geography, or history. For any student interested in pursuing research on the Himalayas, the syllabus provides a solid point of departure.

There are several facets of the authors' approach that make it "user-friendly." One is the inclusion of a separate section on research sources for each of the authors' geographical regions. Thus, we learn that although the sources of information for study of the Eastern Himalayas (a region encompassing Sikkim and Assam) include Chinese histories, Tibetan Buddhist histories, rock inscriptions, and sacred mythological texts, this region has turned up little in the way of coins or archaeological sites. Another helpful fact is the wealth of generalizations, which usually appear in large type. Generalizations appear in full sentences, giving the syllabus a mixture of sentence and phrase outline formats.

Students may also be engaged, as I was, by the striking black-and-white photographs and useful maps. Less helpful was the periodization of the history of each area into three eras, with division points at 1200 and 1800 A.D., provided without a rationale. Explanation was absent. The large, paperback format and presentation are excellent, even if proofreading is not quite flawless.

The Association for Asian Studies has given us a unique volume that should be an extremely valuable reference tool. It is much more than a syllabus. While the document will be of limited use in high schools, those who use it may open the door to an exciting field of study. University instructors and researchers of the geography, anthropology, and history of the Himalayan region have cause to celebrate this volume. ■

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