

thusiasm for her subject is evident. While no new ground is covered, the book was not intended as a scholarly tome. Rather, it is an introduction to the subject for a popular audience. The superb photos constitute the real message.

Robert M. Hill II
Tulane University
Department of Anthropology
New Orleans, LA 70118

Plants and People of Nepal. Narayan P. Manandhar. 2002. Timber Press, Portland, Oregon. Pp. 599. \$49.00 (hardcover). ISBN: 0-88192-527-6

The country of Nepal is particularly rich in human and plant diversity. The terrain ranges from a tropical 70 meters above sea level to an alpine environment over 8,000 m. This encyclopedic book, aided by 36 pages of color photos and over 600 pen and ink drawings of useful plants, represents the ethnobotany of every eco-zone and a similar sample of the different ethnic groups. Clearly it is destined to be the definitive work on Nepal for its quality, because many of the plants described are near extinction and botanical knowledge is declining rapidly with modernization.

While all readers will marvel at the encyclopedic scholarship and artistic merit of this book, those of us who have spent even one Nepalese monsoon in the field pursuing ethnographic or botanical research will probably be as impressed with the hardship which went into the 30 years of research as with the final product itself. For the reader to truly appreciate this effort, it is necessary to recall that in addition to the complexity of peoples (around 60 different ethnic groups) and plants (7,000 species are native with 1,500 deemed useful by the locals), there are also the problems of terrain and economic underdevelopment. Almost all local travel is done by walking, and Nepal is subject to four months of heavy monsoon rain at the height of the collecting season. This rain brings a luxuriant growth of vegetation and also heralds slippery and dangerous footpaths, leeches and snakes, washed out bridges, and landslides that erase whole villages. This makes it all the more impressive that Manandhar has collected plants and ethnobotanical information from all 75 of Nepal's administrative districts.

Ever modest, Manandhar briefly mentions only some of these difficulties in the preface to his book. Chapter one, entitled "The Land of Nepal," includes the best, most concise introduction to the history, demography, geology, geography, climate, and vegetation zones of Nepal that I have ever read. Also included are a short discussion of deforestation, its causes and consequences, and the history of plant collecting in the Nepalese Himalaya.

The second chapter, "The People of Nepal," proffers ethnographic profiles of 14 of the 20 ethnic groups whose ethnobotany was surveyed. Chapter three, "The Ethnobotany of Nepal," is a discussion of the most common uses for both wild and domestic plants in that country, ranging from plants used in animal husbandry, to agriculture, foods and beverages, medicine, dyes, and other special uses.

The 400+ pages of chapter four, "The Useful Plants of Nepal," contain detailed descriptions of all the 1,500 useful plant species gathered (including scientific name, local name, morphological description, and local uses), replete with over 600 meticulous drawings done by the author himself. These line drawings will be easily identified by specialists and villagers alike, an important aspect as one of the purposes of this book, according to the author, is the creation of a record of their heritage for future Nepalese.

Two appendices are included, the first of which is a list of all the useful plants by botanical name, and the second a list of the plants utilized by particular ethnic communities. The author concludes with a glossary, index of common names, index of scientific names, and a select group of references. Given the diversity of both plants and people in Nepal, it would also have been helpful to have a list of the actual villages from which information was collected.

From the viewpoint of an anthropologist, the ten pages of ethnography included in chapter two have some problems. While I have small quibbles about Manandhar's very subtle bias favoring urban, high caste groups and their religion, I was more annoyed at his propensity to emphasize the exotic and odd when looking at tribal groups other than his own. For example, he portrays fraternal polyandry, the marriage of two brothers to one wife, as the Sherpa norm when in fact it never constituted more than 5% of traditional society. The greater problem, however, is that Manandhar attributes certain characteristics to various tribal groups as though he were describing plants rather than people. By doing so he is guaranteed to alienate the newly educated members of these ethnic groups, the very people he hopes will use his book in the future. Two examples of this include: "The Limbu people are said to be honest and simple but with tempers that may lead them to kill" (p. 32), and "Tharus are simple, honest, gentle, industrious people but . . . they labor under myths and superstitions" (p. 38).

Manandhar is not the first person to become entangled in the complex ethnic perceptions of Nepal and the biases of the caste system. More importantly, these problems illustrate the difficulty of writing in two disciplines at once, and illustrate the need for a good ethnobotanical editor, which is not the author's specialty. Manandhar is to be commended for his efforts and it should be noted that his ethnographic facts are substantially correct. It is only his occasional personal judgments and interpretations that are the problem.

To reiterate the positive, this is a magnificent work which belongs on the shelf of every library and private collection interested in the botany or ethnobotany of Nepal, or ethnobotany in general, as it sets, with a few small exceptions (10 pages out of 599), a new high standard for the field.

Janice Sacherer
Dept. of Anthropology & Asian Studies
University of Maryland, Asian Division
Okinawa, Japan