

# Looking up to the mountains

## A centre for Himalayan studies located in the plains

MARK TURIN in SILIGURI

It is always heartening to find a group of good scholars working on interesting topics and better still if they are doing so together.

On a recent research trip to Darjeeling and Sikkim, I twice happened to come across Occasional Papers from the Documentation Cell of the Centre for Himalayan Studies at North Bengal University in local archives and libraries. Some of the publications were press digests and news clippings from dailies in South Asia, while others were indices of parliamentary proceedings pertaining to relations between India, Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim (before the mid-1970s) and China. This corpus of data exemplifies a kind of meticulous documentation that few scholars have the time to do these days, so I set myself the task of tracking down the elusive centre.

Even in the hub of urban Darjeeling, the first point of call for learning anything about anything is naturally Google, and sure enough it delivered: a single entry with a telephone number and email address of the Centre for Himalayan Studies. I got in touch and resolved to pay the



centre a visit in Raja Ram Mohan Pur, just outside of Siliguri and strategically located on the road to the Nepali border.

Nestled in the tree-lined campus of North Bengal University (NBU), with a Himalayan backdrop true to its name, lies the Centre for Himalayan Studies (CHS). Directed by the dynamic and welcoming Karubaki Datta, and populated by a range of scholars and support staff, this interdisciplinary research centre falls under the Area Studies Program of the university.

It was established in December 1978 and is treated as a

fully-fledged department of NBU. In the past 27 years, the Centre has had eight directors and a number of impressive resident research scholars, including two who are particularly well-known to the Nepali-speaking academy: N C Sinha and T B Subba.

The activities of the centre range from research projects, seminars and publications, to guidance and supervision of graduate students. Collaborative research projects include a profile of the Eastern Himalayas, while individual scholars are presently investigating topics as diverse as the women of Bhutan,



the carrying capacity of the Teesta basin of Sikkim, the growth of Kalimpong as an urban centre and others are compiling a resource planning atlas of the eastern Himalayan Region. Twenty-nine MPhil dissertations and 14 PhD thesis have been completed by students at the centre, largely in the social sciences and during my short visit, I witnessed a large number of students coming to make use of the library and documentation cell.

A specific project worthy of mention is the Geographic Information Systems (GIS) settlement information for

Sikkim based on maps and statistical information from the Indian census, spear-headed by the cartographer DB Boot. The publication's wing and the documentation cell of the centre deserve special attention. Along with seminar proceedings and special lectures, the centre publishes a useful annual journal entitled *Himalayan Miscellany* which is regrettably not subscribed to by many university libraries in the west, while the documentation cell focuses its attention on producing Regmi-like digests of events that transpire in the eastern Himalayas. The library is well-run and contains a set of standard texts along with some delightfully rare volumes and the staff are eager for more scholars to pass through, avail themselves of the resources and perhaps give a lecture or two. I would encourage any researcher, should they find themselves in the area, to pay a visit. ●

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