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## Book Reviews

will change the way we understand ethics and its place in national memory and political and social reform.

JUSTIN MCDANIEL, *University of California, Riverside*.

LEVINE, SARAH, and GELLNER, DAVID N. *Rebuilding Buddhism: The Theravāda Movement in Twentieth-Century Nepal*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005. \$45.00 (cloth); \$22.50 (paper).

Unlike on the Indian mainland, Indic Buddhism with Sanskrit as its sacred language has persisted to the present in the Kathmandu Valley among the indigenous population, the Newars. Reflecting the state of Buddhism in India before its demise, this tradition (which is commonly known as Newar Buddhism) is a highly ritualized form of tantric Buddhism that has evolved in close contact with Śaiva and Śākta forms of tantric Hinduism. Monasticism in this tradition only survives in the paradoxical form of hereditary “householder monks.” By the exclusive principle of patrilineal descent, these quasi monks belong to a particular monastery and its *saṅgha*, even though as boys they formally disrobe only three days after their ordination in order to later marry and beget children. Another hallmark of Newar Buddhism is its accommodation to a highly complex and stratified caste system. This entails the restriction of higher forms of tantric teaching to members of the upper castes, and the exclusion of the “impure” castes from most forms of Buddhist practice. Not surprisingly, this archaic form of Buddhism with its social restrictions and its pronounced ritualism has been challenged in the twentieth century. This challenge began in the 1920s with a few Newars who, under the influence of a handful of charismatic Tibetan monks, turned away from their tradition and eventually were ordained as Theravāda monks. Initially operating from exile in India, they settled in the valley after the overthrow of the Rana regime in 1950 and began to practice Theravāda Buddhism. At present, this vibrant religious movement counts more than two hundred monks and female renunciants and poses an ever greater threat to traditional Newar Buddhism.

The present study is the first monograph dedicated to this subject, which should be of general interest for students of Buddhism (and religion) notably because it allows one to observe how Theravāda Buddhism with a modernist soteriological orientation was introduced and adapted to a very different religious tradition and how in the process it changed itself and affected that tradition. The study has been coauthored by the social anthropologist David Gellner, one of the foremost authorities on traditional Newar Buddhism, and Sarah Levine, whose extensive fieldwork on the female protagonists of the Theravāda movement (itself the subject of her Harvard dissertation) forms the material basis for large parts of the book. The combined expertise of these two authors makes for a carefully researched book that offers much new material and analysis, grounded in the authors’ intimate knowledge of the religious traditions of the Newars and their current sociopolitical situation.

LeVine and Gellner treat their subject historically and introduce it with an overview of the beginnings of Buddhist Modernism in Sri Lanka, which underlies the Theravāda movement in Nepal (chap. 1). They then chronicle the development of this movement, starting with its pioneers in the twenties and thirties, and the religious and sociopolitical backdrop of their time (chap. 2). The bulk of the book (chaps. 3–8) is dedicated to the post-Rana period when

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it became possible for Theravāda monastics to operate openly. It chronicles the growth and transformation of this movement, its principle protagonists, the support and patronage it received, the economic and other challenges it had to face, and, finally, its arrival at a more settled stage in which Theravāda Buddhism is firmly entrenched in the valley and begins to attract also non-Newars. The two final chapters look at responses to this new presence, particularly at attempts to modernize and revitalize traditional Newar Buddhism, and provide an outlook for the future. The book is illustrated by fascinating historical photos, many published for the first time. It is supplemented by a glossary of technical terms and by two appendices that conveniently introduce the principle figures of the Theravāda movement and list all its monastic establishments (*vihāra*).

The authors look at the movement through the lens of the life stories of its most important protagonists. This approach makes for engaging and lively reading and sheds much light on the background and aspirations of these interesting figures. However, it also has downsides. Most seriously, it foregrounds the monastic dimension of the movement and does not do equal justice to its impact on the laity. As a result, the book does not deal in detail with the ritual practices that have come to play such a major role in Nepalese Theravāda Buddhism as it has adapted to the needs of the people. For instance, the authors only mention briefly (65ff.) that Theravāda Buddhism has come to offer rites of passage that mirror the *saṃskāras* of Newar Buddhism, and they do not offer a thick description of these substitute rites. However, the authors treat in laudable detail (207–31) the lay *vipassanā* meditation movement among the Newars. The great attention they pay to this and the relative neglect of the ritual dimension convey a somehow skewed picture that, while in agreement with the professed orientation of the Theravāda movement, does not do full justice to the reality of the movement's far-reaching adaptation to a religious environment whose hallmark is the pronounced ritualization of all forms of religious practice. A similar bias is also reflected in the problematic title of the book, which frames the introduction of an entirely alien form of Buddhism to Nepal as the rebuilding of Buddhism writ large and thereby implies the same critique and depreciation of traditional Newar Buddhism that inspires the Theravāda movement. Even so, this is a very useful and well-grounded study that draws together the findings of prior research and, more importantly, adds much new material, particularly on the situation of female monastics. It lays the foundation for future work on particular aspects of the Theravāda movement in Nepal and on its interaction with Newar Buddhism and other local traditions.

ALEXANDER VON ROSPATT, *University of California, Berkeley*.

GRIEVE, GREGORY PRICE. *Rethorizing Religion in Nepal*. Religion/Culture/Critique Series. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. xviii+167 pp. \$65.00 (cloth).

Despite its title, this book does not focus on religion in Nepal as a whole but on the small and complex Kathmandu Valley city of Bhaktapur. Gregory Price Grieve approaches this largely Hindu city as a site through which to effect a shift in religious studies methods away from what he terms "scripturalism" and to give attention to the lived religious worlds of the city's Newar residents. To