

and valuable book written by Sahni for the interested lay person. A book becomes a treasure when an amateur finds it exciting, friendly and instructive and even the expert finds new information and insights. *The Book of Indian Trees* belongs to this category and should be a prized possession and a companion to students of natural history, forestry, botany and wild-life. The Bombay Natural History Society deserves our gratitude in supporting this publication. We should thank the Department of Science and Technology (DST), New Delhi, and Purshotamdas Thakurdas and Divaliba Charitable trust, Mumbai for providing financial support to keep the cost reasonable for those who wish to buy a personal copy. A paper back edition would be more welcome to students.

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Mountains of the World: A Global Priority. Bruno Messerli and Jack D. Ives (eds). Parthenon Publishing Group, One Blue Hill Plaza, Pearl River, New York 10965, USA. 1997. 495 pp.

Embodying a collection of 22 papers by preponderantly western scholars, bound together with a sense of commitment for a mountain development agenda, this wonderfully informative, aptly illustrated and eruditely crafted work presents individual perceptions and findings, and incisive analyses of conditions and problems of highlands and highlanders. The canvas of the treatise is vast – (i) the ethnic diversity, culture, spiritual heritage, comparative inequalities, poverty and plight, and

conflicts and dilemmas of mountain peoples; (ii) the vulnerable positions of the women and children in highly stressful situations obtaining in the mountains; (iii) the subsistence agriculture tied inexorably to animal husbandry and the critical fragmentation of landholdings and resultant acute deficiency despite high labour inputs which forces the young and the competent out of the mountains; (iv) the glaring fact of inequalities between highland and lowland areas in the matter of developments, culminating in the relegation of mountain states to the periphery of development programmes, putting them in the 'shadows of economic centres' located in the plains and subjecting highlands to short-term exploitation of resources; (v) the impact on environment and mountain communities of tourism ('socially, culturally and economically a double-edge sword') and amenity migration (without compensatory participation of emigrants in development and community affairs) (vi) the mountain physiography, ecosystems, biodiversity, ecological interaction and forestry; (vii) the natural assets, assessment and conservation of water and mineral resources, hydrological regimes, floral cover and watershed management; (viii) the problems and perils of development activities; (ix) the mountain hazards and the alternative sources of energy and risk-coping measures, (x) and agenda and strategy for sustainable development.

As the editors themselves admit 'the book is a balance between documentary and theoretical materials'. It brings out eloquently the perceptions, the philosophy and the life-long mission of the two editors – Bruno Messerli and Jack Ives. Written as the articles are by more than two dozen authors from different countries, there is understandably no 'consistent and unanimous message'. The editors anticipate that in the 21st century the humankind will increasingly depend on mountain resources and em-

phasize the need for initiating practical steps for sustainable development.

Exuding enormous sympathy for the marginalized communities of the mountains, the book about the mountains, ironically, does not provide opportunity to even one active scholar/worker from the world's highest mountain Himalaya to write about his land, his people, his experiences and perceptions and his blueprint of development dreams (Alas, the thinking/working man of the Himalaya mountain stands out in the margin!).

The quintessence of the development agenda is spelled out in Chapter 15 – 'Sustainable mountain development occurs when the needs and aspirations of mountain people and the capacity of the natural resource-base to supply them are in balance over time'.

There is an erudite piece (Chapter 17) on the controlling factors and trends of climate changes in the mountains and their impacts on the flora, fauna and human endeavours.

The last chapter provides the synthesis of the book and spells out prerequisites for perspective development, coping with hazards, and policy and strategy for sustainable development. There is a strong plea for having political will for undoing inequalities, for having appreciation and support for indigenous knowledge and management systems, and for open and continual dialogue between the stake-holders.

If you are involved in the development of mountains, or have love for mountains and highlanders, then you must read this book and have it in your shelves.

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