

breaks the narrative with a biographical interlude of the three architects of QED. Incidentally, for anyone interested in the Feynman story, James Gleick's *Genius* must be mandatory reading – as much for the portrait of the whimsical genius of one of the most extraordinary scientists of all times as for the wealth of its anecdotal detail. In the final quarter of the book, some historical and biographical footnotes bring to a close this excellent account. It is a presentation written with a vigour and verve which do justice to one of the most turbulent epochs in theoretical physics. And, in this as in his other books, Venkataraman has established and maintained a high level of professional rigour in a field which has remained largely neglected in this country.

And what are we to say of QED? Richard Feynman was as clear in his assessment of it as he was in its affirmation, when he called it 'the jewel of physics'. But philosophically, he was an operationalist to whom the quintessence of science resided in its predictive capability. And if he could find an equation which could do just that, he would not concern himself with ontological enquiries into the nature of physical reality – an attitude entirely consonant with an age which had derived its philosophical orientation from logical positivism and the Copenhagen Interpretation. Dirac, on the other hand, died believing that the problems raised by self energy had merely been papered over by a theory cobbled together to permit computational facility. In the final analysis, it must be clear that the last word has not been said about the quantum. A cheerful acceptance of inevitable ignorance might perhaps not be a bad attitude with which to ride out this age of uncertainty – rather like old Kaspar in Southey's *Battle of Blenheim*.

'But what good came of it at last'
Quoth little Peterkin.

'Why, that I cannot tell', said he,
'But, 'twas a famous victory'.

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Banking on Biodiversity: Report on the Regional Consultation on Biodiversity Assessment in the Hindu Kush-Himalayas. Pei Shengji, ed. International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development, Kathmandu, Nepal. Price not known.

Managing biodiversity is managing contradictions. This is more so in frontier areas where international issues become additional problems. At the same time, knowing the fact that the more mobile components of biodiversity do not respect political boundaries, it is necessary for the nations to cooperate if at all they want to see success in the conservation of biodiversity especially in the border areas. Viewed from this perspective, this book is a timely contribution to society.

This book is the outcome of a workshop, on the assessment, monitoring, and management of the biodiversity of the Hindu Kush-Himalayas (HKH) region, that was organized by International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) in December 1995 at Kathmandu, Nepal. Experts from eight HKH countries, namely, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal, and Pakistan participated. The participants reviewed the status of biodiversity in the region and made recommendations about future plans of actions for each country.

The book is organized into three parts. The first part spells out the proceedings of the workshop and working groups' reports on the issues and needs of biodiversity management in the HKH region, the second contains the country review papers from experts of eight HKH countries and the third contains seminar papers from experts representing international organizations engaged in biodiversity conservation. The book also contains 26 beautiful colour photographs of wildlife.

The title of the book gives a mistaken impression that it contains information about the biodiversity of those HKH regions on which people rely for their future, while the contributors, in their respective country reports, talk about more than what is present in HKH regions of their respective countries. This extra information is welcome in the sense that it informs us about what we have and what we do not. The country

reports give an overall review of the current state of biodiversity in the respective countries.

The HKH region is ecologically highly diverse as it covers polar-like environments and cold deserts to the rainforests. Mountain regions are rich in biodiversity because of their inherent environmental heterogeneity. At the same time, they are fragile and prone to degradation due to disturbances. Most of the country reports emphasize this fact. However, a limited human intervention enriches the biodiversity of the mountain regions also.

This book will be useful for biogeographers, policy makers, environmentalists, nature enthusiasts, soldiers of the green brigade, teachers and environmental awareness generators. Initially it looks less useful for the technical professionals who like to go deep into the functioning and processes of nature and then devise measures for the better functioning of the system. However, any technical advice will have to be implemented taking into consideration the other ground realities of the system. A number of such points and issues have been discussed well in this book. Experiences based on the effect of Afghan war on biodiversity and its conservation, importance of predators in rodent (pest) control in Afghanistan, effect of deteriorating law and order and erosion in the sense of value in Bangladesh, emphasis on maintenance of essential ecological processes, and the work of international organizations like WWF, IUCN, IBPGR (now IPGRI) in various countries in conserving biodiversity, could prove useful for technical professionals.

The quality of write-up, information given and the presentation from various contributors to the book are indicators of the technical know-how, scientific capabilities and the work already done in various HKH countries. China and India have done relatively well in this regard and have vision and future plans like undertaking integrated regionalization of biota, replanning of nature reserves on the basis of the regionalization and overall regional considerations. Small countries also have success stories and experiences of all sorts that will be very useful to the policy makers and the researchers. Most of the countries have emphasized studies on species of economic impor-

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tance and their wild relatives. Simultaneously, the HKH region has a number of botanical curiosities to offer to us.

In most of the HKH countries the earlier plant explorers were the westerners and at present also there is shortage of taxonomic expertise in these countries mainly because of lack of funds, motivation and mismanagement. Examples of the experiences of small countries include the success of the great one-horned rhinoceros in Royal Chitwan National Park in Nepal, and wildlife conservation in the Bar Valley with the help of locals in Pakistan. However, the author (contributor) from Pakistan seemed to be better experienced about the factors causing loss of biodiversity. He was even suspicious about the process of economic development itself which, he thinks, could widen the inequality and force the poor to depend

more on natural resources. Pakistan's experience, of the effects of the Afghan war on its biodiversity in the regions where Afghan refugees came, the effect of the hunting culture of Mughal emperors and the hangover of this culture (a number of its wild animals hunted to local extinction), could be seen in the book. A number of other factors like low literacy, absence of respect for law, lack of political commitment and environmental awareness, etc. have added to such local extinctions. Such local extinctions would add to global extinctions about which all conservationists should worry.

The seminar paper by Busby and Gordon on biodiversity information management and their call for information cooperative not only makes very good reading but also seems to be a very good idea. However, only time will tell

whether such enlightened people really want to conserve biodiversity with the intention of empowering the custodians of biodiversity or want to seek monopoly on whatever is left with others. Conservation issues are quite complicated and depend on many factors. That is why there are situations when legislations convert forest use from necessity to crime. The book brings out such inherent contradictions in conservation issues. The editor and the contributors deserve hearty congratulation for their effort in educating us.

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