the author confesses, an exploration of her current research interests while the latter were written over a long span of time and at varying periods of the writer's research in the general area of education. However, the references and endnotes fill many gaps and often update the materials, thereby situating them in a contemporary context.

Interrogating Women's Education: Bounded Visions, Expanding Horizons by Karuna Chanana is not a radical book; nor was it meant to be. The writer claims to use the functionalist paradigm in viewing education as an 'instrument of equality and change without arguing for a radical structural transformation.' Although she does not suggest shifts in

existing paradigms she believes in restructuring of social roles if education is to have real meaning and be a catalyst for change. However, this volume of essays is important because in its historical spanning as well as the relevance/ contemporaneity of the issues interrogated it clearly shows that many of the problems faced by girls in the arena of education today are as alive and troubling as they were some decades ago. Often the reasons too have hardly changed and have deep roots in cultural, religious, social (patriarchal) condition-ings/ biases, and thus defy any effective measures.

It would be an unfair expectation to seek in this book suggestions for path-

breaking strategies or new theoretical parameters, for understanding, analysis or problem solving approaches. How-ever, it is perceptive and investigative, provides a great deal of information and data across a huge and important historical span, data that can be meaning-fully interpreted and evaluated and would help in understanding much better the constraints, status, state policy, etc. on women's education in India both in the past and in the present.

Alka Kumar teaches English at S.P. Mukherjee College University of Delhi

A Remarkable First

The release of the first novel of a woman writer usually generates familiar reactions: "O, one more of that feminist stuff!" No? "Then surely, femalecentered?" No, again! Manjushree Thapa's debut novel *The Tutor of History* is anything but a battle place of genders; instead, it enters the vast arena of politics, dives into the murky waters of Parliamentary elections, reveals the stupefying incongruities that impede democracy in Nepal and agonizes over the loss of history. There are women, and quite a few of them but they are simple, self-effacing and too preoccupied with life's daily burden to stand up against their men folk in the name of liberation. Love, petty jealousies, small joys of life, social evils like alcoholism, the questions of women's emancipation, and betterment of their lot are woven dexterously within the fabric of the novel.

These simple human beings acquire heroic proportions as they struggle against the odds and try to improve their fate. The fact that arts and culture are being overshadowed by what is conveniently termed 'politics', pains the author. Political culture and competitive

consumerism masquerading as progress or the ethos of the age catches her attention. She knows this is the current scenario in the countries of the subcontinent also. She captures the small nuances of life and builds the thematic pattern of the work. In short, the novel deals with several themes and it is for the reader to see how Thapa handles her 442-page *Magnus opus*, which also claims to be the first major novel in English from Nepal.

Daughter of Nepal's Ambassador in India, Manjushree Thapa is a free-lancer and a creative writer with a penchant for social service. The experiences she gathered while working with an NGO and the shock and disillusionment she encountered when helping her father in his election campaign are at the basis of The Tutor of History. She saw the complexity of the Nepali life and chose to write in English because, as she says in an interview, she felt "it was my responsibility to bring on English readership into the Nepali society." For a person who has spent a large chunk of her life abroad, Thapa shows remarkable The Tutor Of History by Manjushree Thapa Penguin India, New Delhi 2001, 442 pp., Rs.295

•understanding of the life-pattern and culture of Nepal and particularly of the villages. It is probably due to her travels in the villages of Mustang district on her return to Nepal.

After her graduation in 1989 in Fine Arts from the Rhode Island School of Design she returned to Nepal to take up freelancing and social work. During this period she travelled extensively which resulted in the publication of her personal travel narrative. Her first-hand knowledge of the terrain of Nepal, its villages and the changing patterns of life is reflected here. The novel is compelling in its range and, as a critic observes, has a "sweep of vision." 'History' is the focal point of the plot and it gets re-defined vis-a-vis the Nepalese socio-cultural milieu. The author gives voice to the aspirations of the society and shows its confusion through the various characters moving about in Khaireni Tar. As the story advances Khaireni Tar etches out more significantly than the protagonist, Rishi Parajuli, the tutor of history. The title of the novel appears out of focus, as it is Khaireni Tar that stays with you for long,

not the tutor.

The novel begins with Rishi, "originally from the town of Khaireni Tar in Tanahun district," giving history tuitions in Kathmandu and ends with Rishi preparing his room in Kathmandu to receive Binita. The rest of the story is soon taken over by the election campaign, the women's groups and their meetings at Akalaa Mai's shrine, and the party politics. The author dwells time and again on Khaireni Tar with delicate touches and evokes the atmosphere of warmth and "rich humanity" associated with it. Here people are "big-hearted," and considerate. "In times of need, they always helped each other. Inevitably, there were always a few souls willing to guide those who had lost their way" (p.9). Its landscape is

. . . set apart from the others by its tropical vegetation, uncommon in the hill region. Ringed by rich green rice fields and spotted with jacaranda, gulmohar and bougainvillea plants, its bazaar was slightly less drab than most highway bazars. . . . Khaireni Tar was a middling kind of town where it was common, while walking through alleys, to enter a twilight of cultures: to hear the screech of Nirvana on a transistor radio while passing a group of women carrying loads of freshly scooped dung. (14-15)

The residents feel proud to belong to the town and it is here that Rishi Parajuli finds his love. The novel is, in a way, designed to capture the predicament of the person who leaves the town and finds solace only when he comes back to its folds.

Into the election fray are three parties: the UML, the Congress and the People's Party, and a lot of people busily engaged in diverse activities. The town seethes with enthusiasm; discussions are rife with betting and bickering; later, there are fights and booth capturing. Nayan Raj Dahal, a former movie star, staged by the Nepal People's Party, as its candidate is the center of attraction. Committed to public service, he stands for value-based

politics and promises clean administration, "We have yet to spread social values, build institutions and systems, which actualize democratic ideals. First we have to rescue party politics from those who use it to fulfill their greed." His commitment and affable personality endear him to his voters. He earns their respect, but loses the election to his Congress rival. The novelist leaves a big question mark here: can noble ideals alone win the vote? Is it fair to adopt other means?

Giridhar Adhikari, a former district president of the People's Party is denied party ticket. He reels under humiliation of rejection and spends his days in inebriation. An alcoholic and a dismissed Bank Manager, Giridhar fights the battle on two fronts: at the political level with his rivals and at the personal level trying to fight off his alcoholism. Om Gurung is a former British Gurkhas serviceman who runs a school and works for the party. Rishi Parajuli, the history tutor and protagonist has been a leftist activist who stages a comeback. He is a modest man with few wants, though he is often "overwhelmed by the hardness of his life, its abjection and lack of charity"(p.57).

Manjushree Thapa draws her women characters with loving care and understanding. There is Binita, the widowed sister-in-law of Nayan Raj, who has reduced her wants to almost nothing. She is an epitome of simplicity and selfeffacement. She is running a tea shop and has to deal with her male customers daily but she carries herself with dignity. "In all the years since she'd opened her tea shop in Khaireni Tar, she had maintained reserve with strangers and townspeople alike. A lone woman, still young, draped in a gray widows' fariya, a woman unloosened from the custody of men: she tried to ward off critical voices by subduing herself" (p.7). This is a recognizable picture of the subcontinental woman. But, Binita is not dumb. She is one of the active members of the Mothers' group and here she conducts herself well. There are other women, young and not so young, painted lovingly: Madhu,

Gaumati, Sani and a whole lot of them whose aspirations, and struggles add a new dimension to our understanding of the Nepali women.

The author is particularly impressive when she describes the men and women at work in their fields, resting, cracking jokes, feigning annoyance and enjoying what life holds out to them. The portrayal of harvest, for example, is authentic and reminiscent of Hardy's Wessex farm hands in their fields:

The rice fields had ripened, the stalks were golden brown, and the sky a deep blue. Flocks of parakeets roved the skies. Poinsettia was in bloom. Sickles glinted in the hands of the youth and love songs rang in the air. The harvest had begun. In the fields surrounding Khaireni Tar, bands of girls and boys went to work (p. 227).

Such effortless writing is a plus point of the book. But this cannot be said about her style on the whole: there are passages that are marred by bland tone and the flat, reportage-type expression. The descriptions of the election campaign are too lengthy and boring. However, the author's ability to spot tiny patches of humor in daily happenings is enlivening.

Thapa guides the readers through the turbulence of Khaireni Tar successfully. The elections are held despite bomb blasts, and other disturbances; the danger is deflected; the winners return to the capital jubilantly; people get down to their routine expecting that the promises made during elections would be fulfilled. The novel ends on a note of hope and cheer despite confusion, corruption and disorder. As Chiranjibi asserts, "There are ideal to follow. Small and gleaming visions which survived brutal attacks . . . the vision of true democracy: one person free, then another one, and another. For if the world was corrupt, it was also . . . at the core, noble" (pp. 423-24). If one could stand its bulk, it is a readable work, as it offers a significant insight into our neighboring country.

Usha Bande is a Fellow at the IIAS