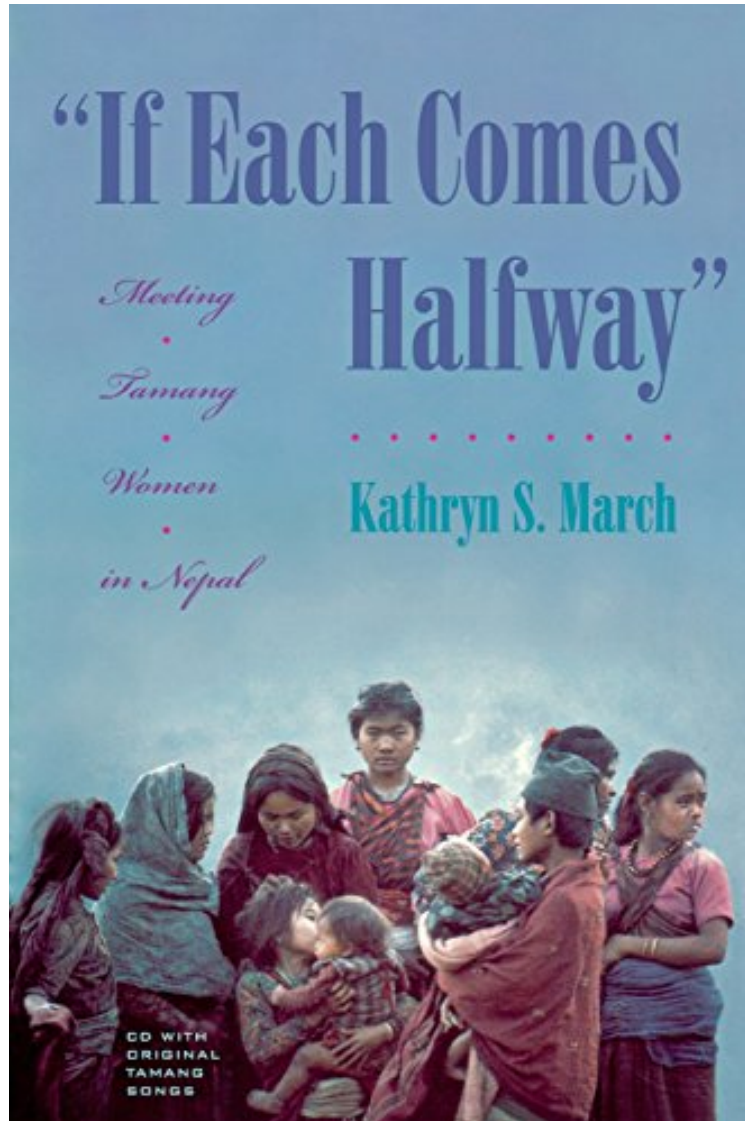


"If Each Comes Halfway": Meeting Tamang Women in Nepal

Kathryn S. March

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Kathryn S. March : "If Each Comes Halfway": Meeting Tamang Women in Nepal before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised "If Each Comes Halfway": Meeting Tamang Women in Nepal:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. A must-read before visiting Nepal! By Joe Niemczura Because of my own writing on the subject of Nepal (The Hospital at the End of the World), it's been a privilege to get in touch with a wide variety of other westerners who have also visited the country and to learn of their work. Kathryn S. March is one such person, and her experience in Nepal goes waaaaaay back, spanning more than twenty five years, and she focused

on a specific ethnic/tribal group, the Tamangs. Now, there are more than forty such groups in the country, and yes they do have specific cultural practices and attributes; but this book goes a long way toward explaining the other "hill tribes" of Nepal who also face similar challenges of climate and geography. And so, even if you are not visiting the Tamangs, this book is a wealth of information on Nepal, which you would do well to study prior to a visit. The book was originally a doctoral thesis in anthropology, and has the earmarks you would expect to be associated with this purpose. It is painstakingly researched and verified. The author has kept the awareness of cultural bias and/or imperialism in the forefront and stops to check her perceptions on these issues to explain how her own worldview might frame the description of events and therefore to maintain integrity from a social scientist's point of view. Also, the book meticulously explores the major themes of women's lives as defined by the general anthropological literature (family, work, childbirth, marriage, cooking, widowhood, etc) and describes each systematically. The focus of the book is one small village named "Stupahill" and we meet the major female figures of the book early. They are used as exemplars of the women in general, and many of the interviews are printed verbatim (in translation). Furthermore, there is an explanation of the translation idioms typically encountered. From that perspective, Dr. March's PhD was richly deserved and well-earned. The next perspective is that of enriching the reader's ability to observe the culture and indeed, to interact with local people. Buried in the description of the anthropology is Dr March's love for her subjects and the ability to observe the little things of life that many persons take for granted or would never even notice. Her subjects talk with her about failed relationships, about fractured families, about love and marriage, a mother's relationship with her daughters. In Nepal many marriages are arranged, for example; and in the west we don't even know how to go about discussing the ins and outs of this. She opens a window to this facet of life that is fascinating. Her window of observation also spans a key period in which subtle (and sometimes not-so-subtle) increments in westernization have occurred, and she is able to document aspects of culture that are withering away due to this phenomenon. On my own trips to Nepal I have adopted a daily practice of making notes that you might call "field observations" - she takes hers to a higher level as you might expect from a trained anthropologist. Anybody who was thinking of studying Nepal would be well served to use this book as a basis of their own field work. Even for a casual tourist to Nepal, this book has immense value. Every one who visits the country will come away with an impression of the spirituality of the average person as well as the colorful festivals. Dr March is able to explain the meaning of some of these selected rituals to the participants, beyond the simple level of spectacle. It is an act of humanity we should all emulate. Along these same lines, I found the discussion of shared farmwork to be excellent and interesting; to an outsider the collective nature of agriculture in Nepal is one of those wonderful and astounding mysteries of Nepal and this author explains the micro-economics of how it is organized and carried out. Likewise, for a medical professional who has been privy to suffering and death among the people of Nepal, I found Dr March's insights about her subject's view of health and illness to be especially poignant and enlightening. If you buy the book, be sure to get it new, or to confirm that you are also getting the CD which accompanies the new copies. The CD is a compilation of songs from the field recordings. These are "raw" and include a few spots where the singer stops to laugh or banter with the listener, but they convey a sense of the cultural nuances of Nepal that many of us love. Music is a way to get transported to that place..... The only drawback I can find, is that the book has so much interesting stuff packed into it, that it takes awhile to read and digest. This will never be a best seller in the "chick lit" genre. She needed a car chase, an evil villain, and a romantic plot of unrequited love (!). On the other hand, she does just fine without these things. In short, this is an important and excellent contribution to the literature about Nepal that goes well beyond Lonely Planet and will enrich your experience of the country if you should ever visit. Five stars!

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Compassionate In-depth Account By su3p0t This book demonstrates Kath March's compassionate dedication in entering into and recording the lives of the Tamang women on their own terms. It is amazing how she was able to assimilate herself into their culture and learn the language without imposing any Western society judgments or criticisms whatsoever. Despite the enormous differences in their culture such as the lack of education and technology, Kath March enables us to recognize that we all belong to the same family of flesh and experiences that bring laughter and tears, joy and sorrow. The book truly helps the reader "come halfway" and feel the bond of sisterhood with women we never knew existed. Well done!

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Appreciate the effort By Astha Lama It has an amazing insight into tamang womens' lives....her (Kathy's) efforts of depicting the life stories from the subject's point of view and trying her best to translate it word to word is worth noting. The CD of tamang songs really brought the lives of these women to life. From this book I learnt to appreciate what I have now more than ever and to be thankful for what my parents and ancestors have sacrificed for us. Last but not the least TAMANGS ROCK.. \m/

For twenty-five years, Kathryn S. March has collected the life stories of the women of a Buddhist Tamang farming community in Nepal. In *If Each Comes Halfway*, she shows the process by which she and Tamang women reached across their cultural differences to find common ground. March allows the women's own words to paint a vivid portrait of their highland home. Because Tamang women frequently told their stories by singing poetic songs in the middle of their conversations with March, each book includes a CD of traditional songs not recorded elsewhere. Striking

photographs of the Tamang people accent the book's written accounts and the CD's musical examples. In conversation and song, the Tamang open their hearts-and-minds as they address a broad range of topics: life in extended households, women's property issues, wage employment and out-migration, sexism, and troubled relations with other ethnic groups. Young women reflect on uncertainties. Middle-aged women discuss obligations. Older women speak poignantly, and bluntly, about weariness and waiting to die. The goal of March's approach to ethnography is to place Tamang women in control of how their stories are told and allow an unusually intimate glimpse into their world.

"A beautiful ethnography that especially gives younger scholars a profound insight not only into the complexity of village life but more generally into fieldwork methodology." Anthropology Database

"If Each Comes Halfway is a beautiful ethnography that especially gives younger scholars a profound insight not only the complexity of village life but more generally into fieldwork methodology. As the title suggests, the book requested not only the engagement of these five Tamang women but also requires an open and engaged reader." Stefanie Lotter, University of Heidelberg, Anthropology

"Kathryn March's careful research has resulted in a book that captures the essence of agricultural society as seen through the eyes of its female inhabitants. The result is an original project that blends anthropological scholarship with oral history. Interestingly, the narratives are a complex compendium of song and narrative. . . . Interwoven throughout these themes and narratives is the emergence of song as important adjunct to storytelling. The poetry and rhythm of songs help convey meaning and inspire an audience to focus its attention on the storyteller, March writes. Her research indicates the integral role music plays in preserving Tamang history. . . . The author evokes an otherworldly sense of this specific culture even as she strives to record their life histories as accurately as possible. The women interviewed literally put their hearts and souls into the telling and singing of their personal stories and of the larger story of the Tamang people." Andrea Kleinhenz, Z Magazine Online, September 2003, vol. 16, no. 9

"If Each Comes Halfway ' is compelling, insightful, and deeply honest. Kathryn March brings the reader to these Himalayan women and their unfolding lives with the nuance of a friend and the authority of a scholar. March translates their words, concepts, and worldviews with meticulous care and offers a warm and vivid account of complex lives in a village world." Ernestine McHugh, University of Rochester

"If Each Comes Halfway 'is a moving work of love, a unique tapestry of ethnography and poetry. Its title is from a Tamang women's song and refers to courtship in a mountainous landscape, but Kathryn March means equally to evoke the anthropological project of knowing others. Her book is about remembering, aging, singing, giving birth, caring for children and elders, and mourning. IT ALSO TREATS gender, power, and a great deal more, including beer, popcorn, fieldwork, and life histories. March guides us with impeccable care and utmost respect through Tamang women's complex narrative self- portraits." Ann Grodzins Gold, Syracuse University

"Kathryn March's rich and provocative book is rooted in a strong sense of the local and shaped by a fine ear and remarkable linguistic skills." If Each Comes Halfway " is exceptional in both its scholarly quality and the humane and insightful intelligence which informs it." Don Brenneis, University of California, Santa Cruz