

The centrality of the Himalayas as a connecting point or perhaps a sacred core for the Asian continent and its civilisations has captivated every explorer and scholar. The Himalaya is the meeting point of two geotectonic plates, three biogeographical realms, two ancient civilisations, two different language streams and six religions.

This book is about the determinant factors which are at work in the Himalayas in the context of what it constitutes in terms of its spatiality, legends and myths, religious beliefs, rituals and traditions. The book would suggest that there is no single way for understanding the Himalayas. There are layers of structures, imposition and superimposition of human history, religious traits and beliefs that continue to shape the Asian dynamics. An understanding of the ultimate union of the Himalayas, its confluences and its bridging role is essential for Asian balance. This book is a collaborative effort of an internationally acclaimed linguist, a diplomat-cum-geopolitician and a young Asianist. The book provides countless themes that will be intellectually stimulating to scholars and students with varied interests.



Niraj Kumar is the author of a magnum opus on Asian Integration—*Arise Asia: Respond to White Peril* (2002). His recent works include *Sriyantra and Geophilosophy of India* (2014), *Asia in Post-Western Age* (2014) and *Rainbow of Indian Civilization* (2015). He received initiation from Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj of the Ramakrishna Mission in 1992 and is associated with the Society for Asian Integration (SAI).



George van Driem is the Director of the Linguistics Institute at the University of Bern in Switzerland, where he holds the Chair of Historical Linguistics. He has conducted field research in Bhutan, Nepal, northeastern India and the western Indian Himalayas since 1983. In 2001, he produced the first major ethnolinguistic synthesis of the Greater Himalayan region—extending from Central and South Asia to Southeast and East Asia—*Languages of the Himalayas: An Ethnolinguistic Handbook of the Greater Himalayan Region Containing an Introduction to the Symbiotic Theory of Language* (2 vols). Nowadays, he is working on the Asian populations' prehistory in collaboration with linguists and population geneticists in order to finally reconstruct the prehistory of the human population.

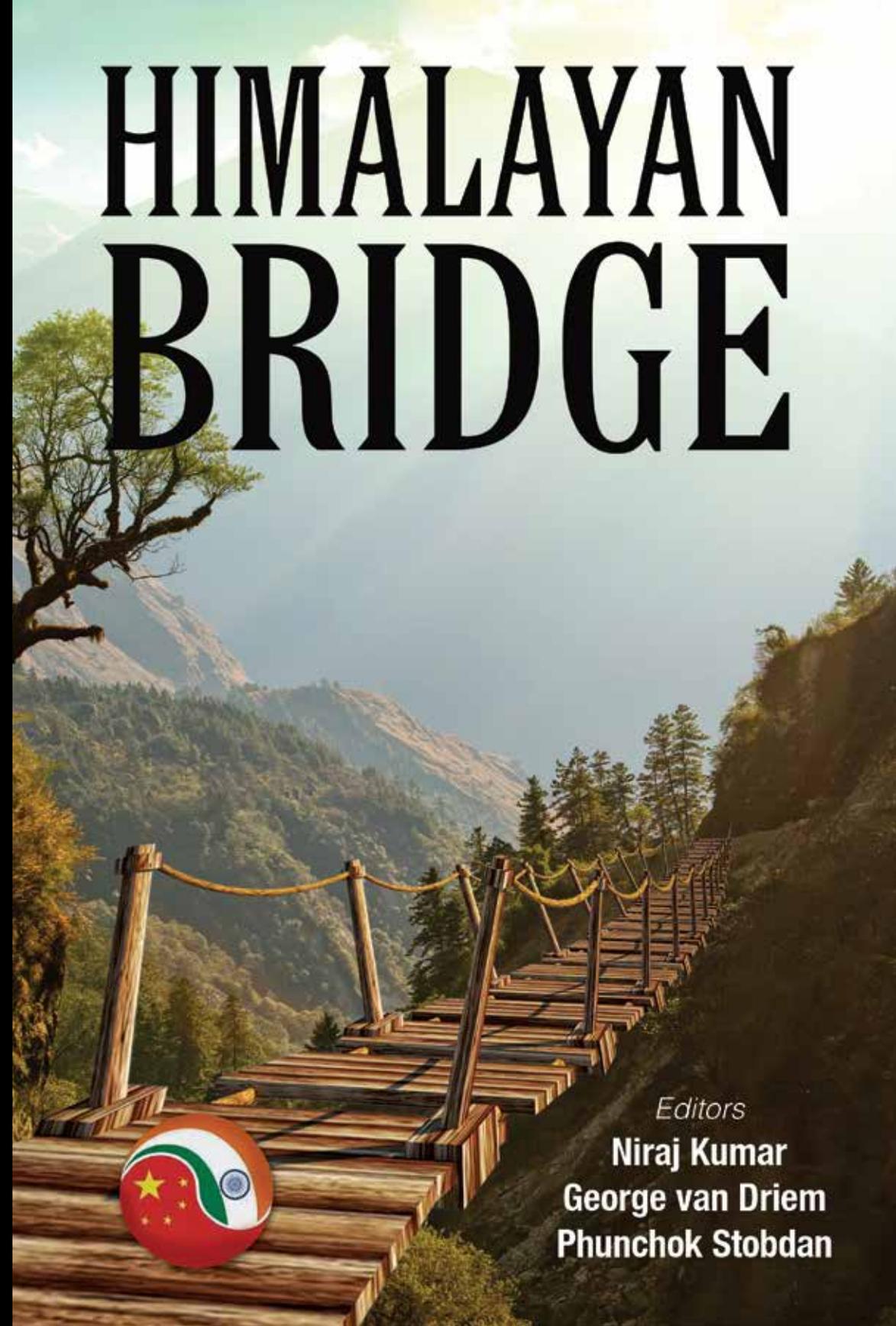


Ambassador Phunchok Stobdan is a distinguished academician, diplomat, national security expert and Senior Fellow at IDSA. Ambassador Stobdan is a specialist on Asian affairs covering Central Asia and Inner Asia—including Xinjiang, Tibet, Myanmar and the Himalayan region. He served in Central Asia twice: first, as Director at the Embassy of India, Almaty (1999 and 2002) and then as the Ambassador at the Embassy of India, Bishkek (2010–2012). He has also served as Joint Director in the Indian National Security Council. He has established the Ladakh International Centre (LIC) at Leh to promote research on Himalayas.

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Niraj Kumar
George van Driem
Phunchok Stobdan

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Editors
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Preface

The title *Himalayan Bridge* at once conveys the Trans-Himalayan scope of the present volume. It is a great credit to Niraj Kumar and to Phunchok Stobdan to have put together an interdisciplinary anthology of contributions which provide a narrative that spans the Himalayan range at various levels. The volume contains articles on the orogeny of the Himalayas, on the challenges of Himalayan watershed management, on the Himalayas as the ethnolinguistic cradle of major language families and linguistic phyla, on the warp and weft of material cultural, textiles and ethnic identity, on textual attestations of the Himalayas in ancient Indian texts, a contrastive study of Russian vs. Occidental Buddhism, an historical account of the administration of the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA), on recent historical vicissitudes of Himalayan Buddhism, the geopolitics of the Himalayan region, the potential for transnational synergy across the Himalayan region, the crucial strategic and symbolic importance of Siachen glacier, the issue of drug and arms trafficking in the eastern Himalayas, empowerment in Kashmir, political aspects of Buddhism in Nepal, two studies on the Nālandā tradition in Buddhism, on indigenous Himalayan medical lore, as well as several contributions on Himalayan pictorial, choreographic and culinary art and finally on spiritual culture in the Himalayas. The vantage points presented in this book are heterogeneous, both in substance and in the perspective taken by the individual authors, but geographically the articles are unified in their areal focus, offering readers a rich and varied *smörgåsbord* of Himalayan perspectives.

Prof. Dr. **George van Driem**
University of Bern, Switzerland