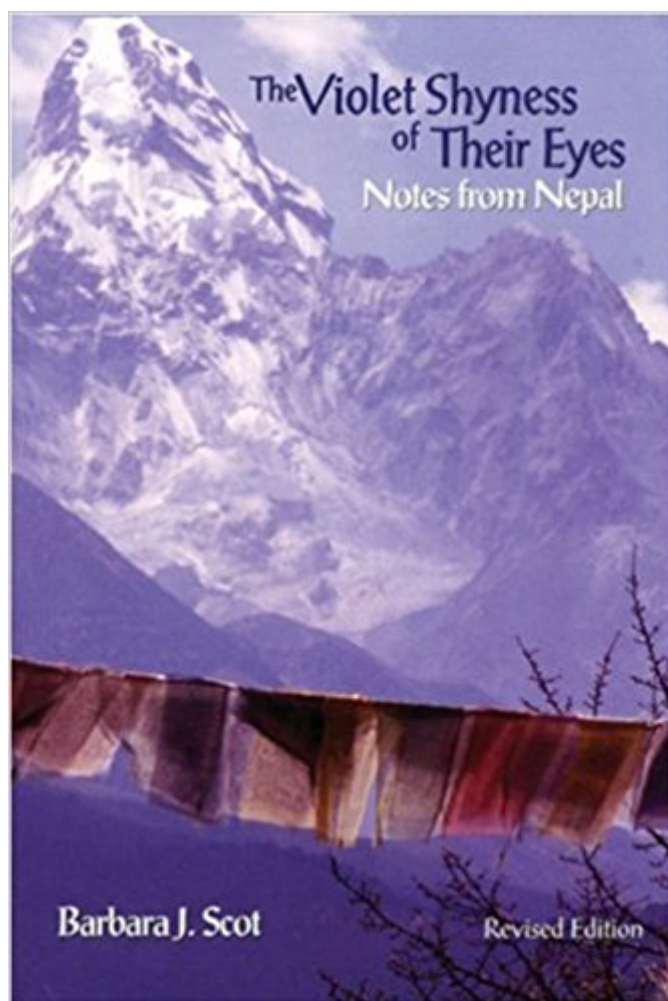


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# The Violet Shyness Of Their Eyes: Notes From Nepal



## Synopsis

Cultural Writing. Travel. Memoir. Revised Edition 2005. Ranging across mountains and memories, Scot's classic journal of her experiences in Nepal in 1990 is now published in a revised edition that includes reflections on a return trip in 2004. "Scot's year in Nepal was extraordinary. What she discovered about herself, about Nepal and the Nepalis is beautifully told"--Seattle Times. "THE VIOLET SHYNESS OF THEIR EYES will enter your heart, and stay"--Margaret Randall.

## Book Information

Paperback: 288 pages

Publisher: Calyx Books; 2nd.printing edition (January 1, 1993)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0934971358

ISBN-13: 978-0934971355

Product Dimensions: 9 x 6 x 0.9 inches

Shipping Weight: 14.4 ounces

Average Customer Review: 3.9 out of 5 stars 11 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #796,850 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #67 in [Books > Travel > Asia > Nepal > General](#) #368 in [Books > Travel > Asia > India > General](#) #702 in [Books > Travel > Asia > General](#)

## Customer Reviews

A travelogue of Nepal is by its very nature an intriguing piece because Nepal is such an exotic locale with such a wealth of material to write about--its scenery, wildlife, people, and customs. But Barbara Scot's account of her Nepalese adventure shines above the ordinary travel yarn. She has a flair for description, understands the language, and shows a genuine respect for Nepalese culture that infuses every scene and anecdote. More than just a travel-jaunt memoir, *The Violet Shyness of Their Eyes* is a feminist's view of the women of Nepal. Whether trekking in the Himalayas or exploring Katmandu, Scot watches and contemplates the Nepalese treatment of little girls, mothers, and old women, and her observations offer both a perceptive work of cultural anthropology and a riveting travel tale. Her prose features lurching buses jam-packed with humanity; morning fog lifting from terraced fields; the stale-sweet smell of too many bodies; naked, shivering children gathered at the village tap, lathered and scrubbed by industrious elders; and women bent to the task of scouring black soot from pots with handfuls of sandy mud. Scot's eye is attuned to the smallest details. She thoughtfully ponders the large questions, and she wields her pen with finesse, creating a travel book

that transcends the genre with a rare sensitivity and skill. --Stephanie Gold

A sudden mid-life crisis in 1990 prompted high school social studies teacher Scot to leave Portland, Ore., for a stint teaching English in Nepal. The brief entries in this diary interweave her experience of Nepalese society, including the inferior status of Nepali women, with memories of what she describes as "a male-dominated childhood with no men," her father having left home when she was an infant. Although occasionally the analogies Scot draws are forced or disjointed, a sincere and generous tone strengthens the writing, and sometimes her observations are uncommonly just, as when she notes how her difficulties with the Nepali language have brought greater understanding of her son's struggle with dyslexia. Stories of culture shock are less revealing, such as the stilted dinner party at which Scot's roommate served spaghetti for their native neighbors. The most amusing anecdotes come out of Scot's attempts to assist a Nepali man in studying for the standardized Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), which involves listening comprehension of passages on topics like ordering the house dressing in a restaurant and the uses of Muzak. Photos. Copyright 1993 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Unlike many travel narratives that deal with conquering the Himalayas or giving a traveler's view of the Nepalese people, Barbara J. Scot's *THE VIOLET SHYNESS OF THEIR EYES*, shows an insight into the region that few experience. She is a teacher living and working in a small village in Nepal. As a teacher, she works at a small, overcrowded school and sees how western education is hurting, not helping the Nepalese. Frankly, when Scot comes to the realization that people like herself are making things worse for the Nepalese, I was overwhelmed with her honesty and her plight. However, she says it far better than I can: "I think the main trouble with motivation for teachers in Nepal is that they have no self-esteem. They are told they must learn from westerners how to do things the right way . . . You ought to get rid of all westerners. You are an ingenious people. Let the Nepalis figure out what works for education for Nepal." As a professor, I was stunned to read this statement. After all, I had bought the text because it was marketed as a travel narrative of Nepal, and I am a climber and hiker who has wanted to go this area for ages. So, when I started reading this book, I was surprised to see that, yes, it is a travel account of living in another land that happens to be smack up against the most beautiful scenery in the world, but I was more intrigued by Scot's voice in the book. It has an earnest and sincere quality. It made me think. And, it made me agree with her view on the situation. Scott is not against western education, but western educators who ardently believe that their viewpoint on universal education is the only one of worth. These

educators go to other countries and inform the local educators that their view on educating is wrong or, at least, misguided. Scott wants us to realize that what western education has to offer is valuable to non-western people, but these people must be able to pick and choose what they need from western education methodology and mix it with their own cultural values and beliefs. An insightful and well written book. I hated to see the narrative end.

I read this book researching an upcoming trip to Nepal. I was not looking for a feminist dialog about the culture, but I figured I could get some insider knowledge about the people (and women) of Nepal. To my surprise, I did not get an anthropological view, but rather a detailed description of the flora and fauna of Nepal through the eyes of a jogger. I was hoping this book would provide insights into the people of Nepal, but after the author spent nearly a year there her observations were as foreign as mine half a world away. Many questions concerning the culture were left unanswered and I was left with many more questions than answers. This might be great for discussion, but did not aid my search for understanding of this admittedly complex culture. Ultimately, the observations are outdated (almost 9 years old) and the insights hollow.

I have read many trips to the Himalayas written from a man's point of view, but this was certainly unique. The typical story of racing down narrow, dangerous roads on a bus is totally different when paying attention to nauseous women and where do the women have to go to the bathroom. When she wrote of climbing mountains, she mentioned the wildflowers. That is something the men rushing up mountains at the very edge of their skills never mention.

Lovely book. Looking forward to going to Nepal.

I really enjoyed this book. Barbara Scot does seem like a woman it would be interesting to know. I appreciated her heartfelt, thoughtful, introspective approach to her teaching experience in Nepal. As someone with a strong family connection to Nepal, I really appreciated the respect and humility she communicates through her writing. I was especially interested in her reservations about the wisdom of the effort to teach English to Nepali children. It seems so many western efforts to "help" in Nepal and elsewhere go awry. I hope accounts such as this one will encourage more mindful involvement. Ms. Scot has written with an eloquent, touching, respectful voice about a country that an acquaintance recently described as "beguiling". If you have been to Nepal and have been beguiled, or are dreaming of going for whatever reason, or even just curious about a western

perspective on an enchanting and very different culture you would probably enjoy this book.

I was really surprised by the quality of this book. Many people who have lived or worked abroad try to write about their experiences, but few actually have the talent to create something worthwhile and lasting. Barbara Scot, however, has managed to capture some moments of incredible poignancy and beauty. A few passages even approach the level of poetry. The book is a bit uneven in places, but nevertheless I consider it an excellent effort for a first-time author. You come away with a deep respect for both Nepal and her people, and for Barbara, who as an adventurous woman in her late 40s, will be an inspiration for many. She's the kind of woman you'd like to know. On another note--When I saw this book came from a feminist publishing house I was afraid I might be subjected to preachy diatribes about the evils patriarchy, but mercifully that was not the case. Scot does have a special concern for the women of Nepal, but she doesn't preach about it. In fact a sense of evenhandedness is one of the many virtues of the book. She poses many good questions without claiming to have the answers.

I loved the writer's voice and accounts in this book. It was subtle yet powerfully written. The stories that are meant to touch you will find you and stay with you. I can't help but think how America handled the educating of Natives here so long ago and how this chance in Nepal to give their own educators esteem and freedom while maintaining their innocence, the violet shyness could be such an empowering era for the children and people. This is written by a wonderful writer. I loved it. [...]

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