

**CORRESPONDENCE
AND
ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Crossfire!

Following the publication of EBHR 19, the editors received a communication from Lt.-Col. (retired) J.P. Cross which took issue with certain aspects of Judith Pettigrew's article "Gurkhas" in the Town: Migration, language, and healing'. We reproduce the objections raised by Lt.-Col. Cross, and Judith Pettigrew's responses.

John Cross writes:

The monthly pension of Rs 7,881.60 (see fn. 5, p. 9) actually represents an excellent wage in Nepal where the average yearly income is less than US\$200 a year and where a teacher earns, on average, Rs 2-3,000 a month. Of course, the new and equitable pension rates, welcomed by His Majesty's Government of Nepal, reflect the tenets of the Tripartite Agreement between the United Kingdom, India, and Nepal. As to pay and salaries, serving Gurkha soldiers receive exactly the same take-home pay (and death-in-service benefits) as their British counterparts.

No British or Gurkha soldier gets a pension after 3 years' service (see fn. 5, p. 9). The current arrangements for British soldiers are that they receive a full pension gained after 22 years' service. A deferred pension is paid, at the age of 60, to those who have served over 12 years in the Army. But a Gurkha gets an immediate and index-linked pension after the completion of 15 years' service. This reflects the different terms and conditions of service accepted when each enlist.

But pensions should not be viewed in isolation and cognizance should be taken of the outstanding work done by the Gurkha Welfare Scheme in Nepal to assist further our retired soldiers. This ranges, for example, from community aid (such as the construction of eight schools a year) to individual aid (an extensive medical aid package and education bursaries for pensioners). The GWS budget for the last financial year was £5.5 million. In short, there is an unequivocal commitment to our retired *Gurkha soldiers*.

Judith Pettigrew replies:

While it is accurate that Gurkha pensions are considerably above the average yearly income in Nepal, I do not feel that a comparison with other earners such as teachers is appropriate. By joining the British Army, young men and their immediate family members join an elite group of people whose lifestyles, expectations, and patterns of consumption are those of an urban, sophisticated, cosmopolitan, consumerist world. It is an upwardly mobile urban environment that is pervaded with social pressures and expectations as well as extensive financial responsibilities. Because of this unique set of circumstances, socio-economic comparisons with other sectors of Nepali society are inappropriate.

Retired British soldiers get the same pension regardless of which country they live in. I suggest that the same should hold for Gurkhas, not all of whom live in Nepal following retirement. That pensions are inadequate is clearly demonstrated by the fact that almost all ex-Gurkhas must re-migrate for work, which results in ongoing and long-term separation of men from their families.

I acknowledge that take-home pay is equal: lines 5 and 6 of footnote number five read: "... the pay and salaries of Nepali citizens and British citizens in the Gurkhas were unequal until recently."

John Cross is quite correct: no British or Gurkha soldier gets a pension after three years. A Gurkha who read a draft of the article pointed out this error to me. That the correction was omitted in the final version is entirely my mistake, for which I take full responsibility.

Nature and Culture in the Himalayas: A workshop planned for February 2004

organized by Marie Lecomte-Tilouine

A workshop is planned for February 2004 on the theme of nature and culture as conceptualized by and within the different groups inhabiting the Himalayan region. The region is characterized by enormous cultural diversity, whether viewed from a linguistic, religious, or occupational point of view: Indo-European and Tibeto-Burman languages; Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and shamanic religions; hunters and gatherers, nomadic pastoralists, sedentary agro-pastoralists, rice-agriculturalists, and artisans, all living side by side within the same area.

The workshop will have English as its lingua franca. It will aim to bring together specialists on different representative groups of this heterogeneous region in order to initiate discussion and general consideration both of the preconditions and of the consequences of the coexistence, within a shared social or political framework, of highly diverse cosmologies, and especially differing conceptions of nature and culture. These concepts are of particular interest for anthropological discussion, since they were once deployed far more widely and their relevance has recently been the object of extensive critiques.

Following the doubts expressed about the existence of the categories of nature and culture in the specific context of Indian groups of Amazonia, there has been a sort of universalization of such scepticism. One example of this can be seen in the response to the creation of national parks in the Nepalese part of the Himalayas, a process which some have interpreted as a Westernized urban elite imposing on local people a set of concepts of which they have no knowledge. However, it must be said that at least the majority group of Nepal has an opposition in its own language which is very much a part of current usage and which is used to label a wide variety of phenomena and processes, namely the distinction between the *prākṛitik* and the *sāmskritik*, the 'natural' and the 'cultural'. This does not mean that the opposition is to be understood with exactly those associations which we would make. But what this short example does show is that the great complexity of the Himalayan region,

whose peoples find themselves at the crossroads of at least four Great Traditions, cannot be fully grasped by, or reduced to, the simple confrontation of the anthropologist with 'her' or 'his' ethnic group and the misunderstandings to which this gives rise. Frequent migrations, the creation and disappearance of diverse political and religious structures, borrowings from Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam (and from numerous different traditions within these), as well as from polymorphous shamanic practices—all these immediately place the researcher in front of a tangled web of which the researcher's own ideas also form a part.

Thus it is proposed in first place, as a prelude to the presentation of case studies and as a framework for them, to include some more general contributions on the notions of nature and culture in the textual traditions of Hinduism, Indo-Tibetan Buddhism, and Islam, and in the shamanic religions.

The workshop will then consider the manner in which local populations conceive of their relationship to the world and how far that world is seen as wild, modeled by gods or by men. We shall examine what ideas these groups have of their interventions in the world, both today and in the past, including the mythic past; the definitions and limits of the different spheres of nature (in particular the place of animals and spirits in the definition of humans); metaphors of and between nature and society; ideas about the wild and the domesticated; and the role of ritual in the conceptualization of these categories.

It is also proposed to attempt to understand and compare the means by which cultural models are projected on to the environment in the process of making use of it and dividing it up, and to consider the countervailing possibility that the features of a specific environment may affect in specific ways particular cultural models.

The workshop aims to bring together specialists from various European countries whose research is represented by the *European Bulletin of Himalayan Research*.

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