

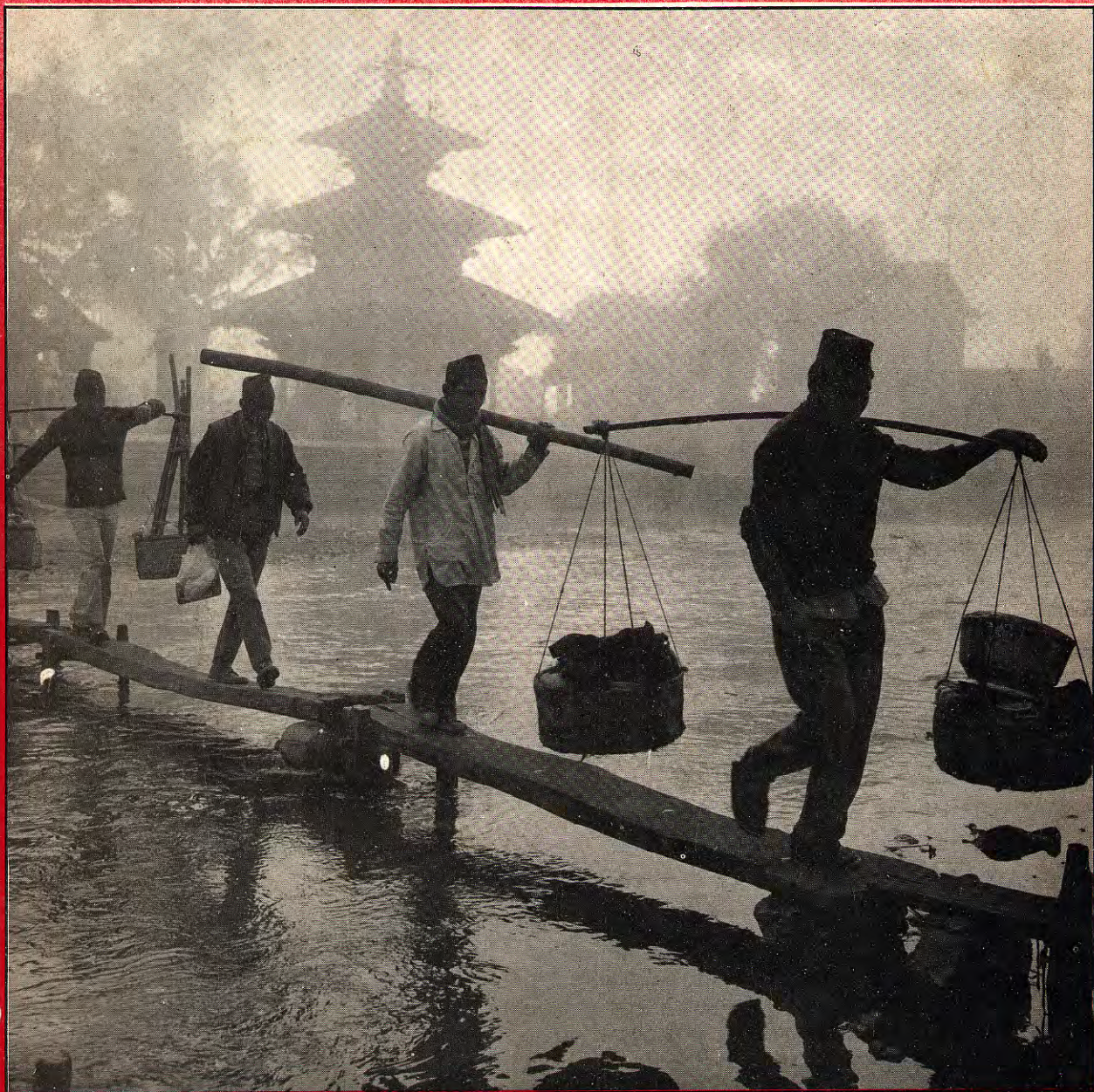
JAN/FEB 1992

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HIMAL

HIMALAYAN MAGAZINE

Book Review
FATALISM & DEVELOPMENT



LIMITS TO GROWTH

The Weakening Spirit of Kathmandu Valley
Special Issue

COVER

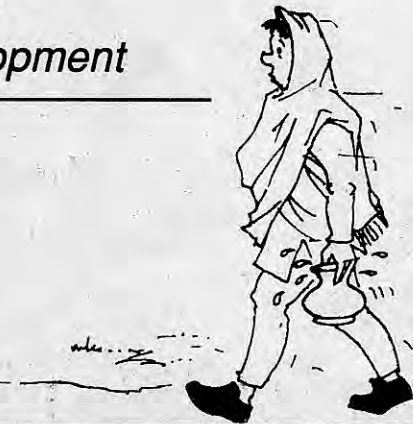
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Cover picture by Kevin Bubriski shows Jyapu agriculturists crossing the Bishnumati River at Shova-Bhagawati, Kathmandu, on a winter morning.

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HIMAL

Vol. 5 No. 1 Jan/Feb 1992

अस्त्युत्तरस्यां विशि देवतात्मा
 हिमालयो नाम नगाधिराजः
 पूर्वापरौ तोयनिधी बगाह्य
 स्थितः पृथिव्या इव मानदण्डः

*The Abode of Gods, King of
 Mountains, Himalaya
 You bound the oceans from
 east to west*

*A northern yardstick
 To measure the Earth*

— Kalidasa (*Kumara Sambhava*)

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MAIL

MULUKI AIN

We applaud Bharat Upreti's article "Under the Weight of the Muluki Ain" (Sep/Oct 1991). As one of those couples described (Nepali wife, foreign husband) in the side feature, "A Citizen's Rights Denied," we recognize very well the situation described. It was gratifying to hear the case stated so directly and strongly.

But allow us to point out that for many of us, gaining citizenship for the foreign husband is not actually the issue at hand. Rather, gaining the right to receive residential visas, as is granted automatically to foreign women who marry Nepali men, would be a satisfactory solution, and would go a long way towards correcting this obvious inequality.

It is easy to understand that Nepal faces a very delicate situation concerning citizenship. We do not wish to complicate an already extremely complex issue, but to be denied the

of marriage partner, strikes us as a grievous flaw in any society that strives to be just and egalitarian. And it begs the question: would Nepali men tolerate such a restriction?

We've often heard the justification that simple Nepali women would be taken advantage of by wily foreigners. This is not only insulting to women in general, but clearly implies a serious lack of faith in the legal apparatus of the State. Why would it be so impossible for local authorities to make enquiries and take other action which would establish whether a marriage with a foreigner is legitimate or not? There are certain obvious criteria that define the state of marriage, and the issuing of residential visas could be directly tied to these being fulfilled.

This surely lies within the spirit and ability of the new democracy that prevails, and we only hope the Government will see fit to act towards us in that spirit of justice.

*Eric Wiele and Mina Karki
Bhaisipatti, Lalitpur*

SPIRITUAL MORBIDITY IN PATAN

As reasonable as Mark Leichthy's rebuttal (Sept/Oct 1991) to Bijaya Lal Shrestha's article "Patan: A City No More Shining" might be, the former disregards some of the inferred underlying rationale.

I do not believe that Shrestha attempted to misconceive the present while idealising the past. Also, one must realise that nostalgia, *per se*, is no worse (or better) an emotion than the drive to modernize. Often, there are valid reasons for such emotions. Anthropologists recognize that any change introduced in a society brings with it unknown, unimaginable collateral baggage; some changes are welcome, some barely tolerated, and it is only after years of generations that, retrospectively, one can judge the quality and the effects of the past. Mr. Shrestha's perspective coincides with those who see the balance tipped towards the downside of what modernity has brought to our city.

Sure, many wish to make money! And with emphasis on fiscal matters, people's souls are deposited in savings accounts. The urban shift towards a market economy creates cracks in

traditional economies resulting in the consolidation of wealth and power in the hands of a few. The "cognoscenti", in their turn, concentrate not on contributing to a better future for their fellow citizens, but rather on more adeptly maintaining the *status quo*.

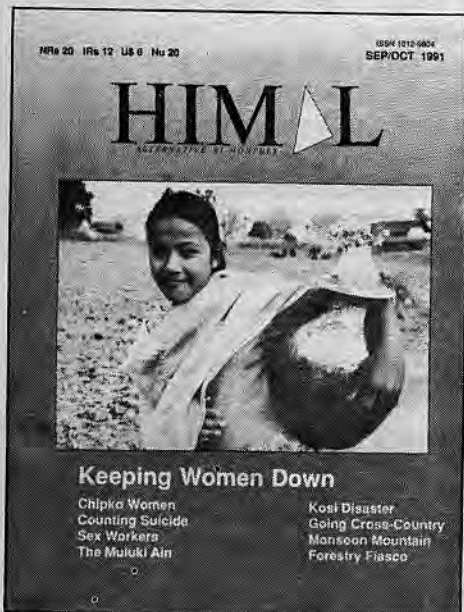
Those migrating to the city who cannot obtain credit and who have no "source-force" remain as endemically indebted as ever. Moreover, much like in rural areas where newcomers might not be accepted for at least a generation, villagers trying to settle in an urban social milieu find cultural impediments to comfortable integration.

Mr. Leichthy's "today's Patan's residents" are confronted with splintered families, minutely sub-divided residences, land speculation, price gouging, increased crime; drugs and thugs, and declining sanitary conditions. Regarding the architecture, it has been long known to designers and architects that the form and appearance of a building influences certain behaviour that occur therein. Could it be that some behaviour and attitudes are, indeed, influenced by changes in architecture?

The consequence of the foregoing is not just, as Mr. Liechty suggests, irreversible progress, but as well a social mortality and spiritual morbidity jointly supporting a new, human morass that is preoccupied with survival as opposed to living.

I fully comprehend Mr. Liechthy's counter-arguments to Mr. Shrestha's piece. However, the values of modernity are subjective, and there are compelling reasons to abandon traditional ways at a *measured* pace and to be wary of foreign influences. Progress in some cultures has meant the importation of myths which were transformed into fact only to be later exposed as the fiction they really were. Do we really need to do *pujas* and *darshans* vicariously by television?

Nepal is already like the picture of the Virgin Mary in a certain church: a devotee wished to see the picture even in the dim of the evening and so entered the church with a candle. Others, seeing the devotee, followed likewise with candles burning, not quite knowing why but entering anxiously, piously and with interest. In



right of residence, which in effect denies the same right to the Nepali partner in the marriage as well, is clearly a serious violation of a Nepali Woman's rights as a citizen. The fact that the right to live in one's own country is effectively taken away from a women because of her choice

time, the picture became so coated with soot from all the candles that the Virgin could not be clearly distinguished even in daylight.

So gentlemen, both your points are valid; but let us progress in a transition in tune with the local life rhythms. It is easier to resuscitate a wayward culture than to resurrect a dead one.

Ivan Gyozo Somlai
Lalitpur

FORESTRY FIASCO

I do not agree with the article "Forestry in an Accountable Democracy" by Amulya Ratna Tuladhar (Sept/Oct 1991) regarding the following points.



The view that community forestry is successful only in areas where there is strong proclivity to bow to authority, while perhaps applicable to some project areas, cannot be generally true. My own experience shows that scarcity of forest products (for the user group) is the prime factor for success for community forestry projects. It is not possible to generalize for the whole country on the basis of specific, localised observations as the situation varies from place to place and over time.

After the advent of democracy in Nepal, the advent of different political ideas, and the after-effects of the elections have affected the smooth running of community forestry projects. Hopefully, these effects will subside in the future.

The writer states that it is imperative to enunciate a new forest policy. In my view, we do not need another forest policy. The Forestry Master Plan cannot be called a fiasco because it was conceived in the dying days of the Panchayat regime. However, it does need modification. As the article rightly points out, "the only major [I would say minor] change introduced in the Plan was the substitution of the word 'Panchayat' with the word 'Community' whenever it cropped up in the Master Plan document, so that we now have 'Community Plantations' and 'Community Protected Forests'.

Lastly, I wonder how a learned scholar like the writer could have come to the conclusion that, "many students who join the Institute of Forestry campuses in Pokhara or Hetauda seem to do so with the primary motive of making quick money as foresters." This is simply not true.

Chandra Prasad Giri
Assistant Forest Officer
District Forest Office
Sindhuli

TROUBLED WATERS

I read with great interest the issue on "Troubled Waters" (May/June 1991). The articles were informative and provocative, but made very little mention of what is being done in Nepal to build Nepali expertise in small- and medium-scale power projects.

In 1966, the Nepali Government and United Mission to Nepal (a non-governmental organisation comprising of volunteer professionals from 37 Christian missions) began a long-running partnership by establishing the Butwal Power Company Pvt. Ltd. to design, construct and operate a 1 MW hydropower plant

and electrification scheme, with major funding coming from the Norwegian Government. In the ensuing 25 years, this arrangement has been used successfully to implement the 5.1 MW Andhi Khola Hydel and Rural Electrification Project, and currently the 12 MW Jhimruk and Rural Electrification Project, both of which are shown as major hydropower projects in the map carried in your issue.

Today, larger projects are being considered for the future. Other Nepali companies in the private sector have been established which are developing expertise in civil construction, tunneling and manufacture and installation of electro-mechanical equipment. The specific intent of these projects has been to build a recognised hydropower industry in Nepal, and the undertaking has been very successful so far.

As we look to the future, we must ensure that when hydropower projects come under consideration, the projects should be chosen and implemented in such a way as to build Nepal's capability to develop its own hydropower resources. The Government must take a firm stand on this issue. Secondly, donor agencies and

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Back Issues of *Himal*:

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1	1	Green	Jul/1988	Highlanders on the Move
1	2	Blue	Nov/Dec 1989	Dharma's Changing Landscape
2	1	Red	Jan/Feb 1989	World of the Girl Child
2	2	Purple	Mar/Apr 1989	Prosperous Himachal Pradesh
2	3	Orange	Jul/Aug 1989	An Obsession with Tourism
2	4	Green	Sep/Oct 1989	Changing Food Habits
2	5	Blue	Nov/Dec 1989	Development Refugees
3	1	Red	Jan/Feb 1990	The Shangri-La Myth
3	2	Grey	May/June 1990	A Nepali Interregnum
3	3	Green	Sep/Oct 1990	The Tarai, A Backwater?
3	4	Blue	Nov/Dec 1990	Hill Poverty
4	1	Purple	Mar/Apr 1991	Tibetan Diaspora
4	2	Grey	May/June 1991	Troubled Waters
4	3	Orange	July/Aug 1991	Nepalis in Foreign Uniform
4	4	Green	Sep/Oct 1991	Keeping Women Down

consultants must jettison their traditionally imperious attitudes, and allow local Nepali companies with *proven capability* the opportunity to compete for jobs. Thirdly, international contractors should be required to collaborate with Nepali contractors to add as much local participation as possible.

Wynn Flaten
United Mission to Nepal
Kathmandu

ROLWALING IN DANGER

Whilst trekking in the Rolwaling Valley in late August with the Oxford University Officers Training Corps, we learnt that a month previously a flash flood had caused considerable damage to the village of Beding in the upper reaches of the valley. The village playing field has disappeared as a 1,000 sq m area has been covered with moraine deposit. The grounds and outbuildings of the Beding monastery have been damaged.

It turns out that the bursting of a tarn known as the Omai Tso had led to the flash flood. This glacial-melt lake is shown in the Rolwaling Himal map (1:50,000) at grid 476 870, having an approximate area of 30,000 sq m.

There is a larger glacial-melt lake lower down in the map grid, called Tso Rolpa. It is approximately 3.5 km long and 0.5 km wide, which means that it is about 20 times the size.

During our trek, we found that the lake is enclosed by a terminal and lateral moraine, some 30-40m high, consisting of large rocks suspended in fine alluvial sand which settles and moves constantly. Water pours over the terminal moraine section, taking material with it. Considerable erosion has taken place at the head of the lake, proving that the water level frequently reaches the level of the moraine.

It is common knowledge in Beding, and indeed among friends and associates I have met in Kathmandu and in Rolwaling Valley, that the moraine's capability to withstand increasing amounts of water diminishes by the day. From the simple data I have compiled, I cannot forecast when a severe weakening of the moraine supporting the Tso Rolpa will occur. I can only resign myself to thoughts of hope and prayer for the people of Beding and indeed the entire valley, that a flash flood from the Tso Rolpa *never* occurs.

It is not my intention to scare people into action, but with Nepal's socio-economic problems that I have tried to understand during my stay, it is my belief that something can be done to a) eliminate the threat of Tso Rolpa, and b) to utilise the energy-producing capability of this particular valley.

In particular, let me quote Paul Terrell in his article on the Karnali (Chisapani) Project (May/June 1991), "The technical institutions

and private engineers are in place in Nepal to perform most of the work with minimal outside guidance." Surely, now is the time to fully survey the problem of Rolwaling, undertake a feasibility survey worth using, and at a low cost kill two birds with one stone.

Robert Thomson
Physiological Research Expedition
Oxford University Officers Training School
Kathmandu

ROLWALING II

We are a trekking agency which is known as a "Rolwaling agency" because we recruit most of our staff from Rolwaling. We regularly organise treks to the glacial areas to the eastern end of the Valley. The bursting of Omai Tso this summer led to panic throughout the valley, and today there is lingering fear that the bursting of Tso Rolpa could be catastrophic.

A committee of household heads from Rolwaling have written expressing their fears about Tso Rolpa. Stressing that the damage of an outburst might stretch far beyond their valley, they seek assistance from any source. The assessment of looming danger is shared by the whole community.

Suggestions and offers of help to the Rolwaling committee will be greatly appreciated. For the time being, we at Summit Nepal Trekking will act as an "office" for the committee. Our address is PO Box 1406, Kathmandu (Tel: 525 408).

Cas de Stoppelaar
Summit Nepal Trekking, Lalitpur

Readers are invited to comment, criticise or add to information and opinions appearing in *Himal*. Letters should be short and to the point, and may be edited.

Send to: PO Box 42, Lalitpur, Nepal.
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YOU CAN EITHER LAZE AROUND
OR YOU CAN READ *HIMAL*



Readers please note that there was no Nov/Dec 1991 issue of *Himal*. We hope that this special issue on Kathmandu Valley will have made your wait worthwhile.

- Editors

GURKHA AND THE TIGER

Having read your issue on the Gurkhas (Jul/Aug 1991), I thought the following work by Anmole Prasad, a Kalimpong poet, might be of interest to your readers. The poem is particularly relevant in relation to the news-clip you carried on Indian Gurkhas in the IPKF in Sri Lanka (Jul/Aug 1991). The poem appeared in *Debonair* magazine last year.

P.Chhetri
Darjeeling

"The Gurkha and the Tiger"

Tied 'n dyed
With shock seeing
The burning-bright lungi
Step lightly from the brush
Ambassador Mark IV grin
Radiator across the strong dark face
Lit by two headlamps of hate
And the short thudding Kalashnikov
Drowned by my own dreadful
silence

When I left
My country on this
peace keeping farce
I was so ill-prepared
To meet Him thus
One parrot-green afternoon
Face to face for an instant
And then forever
On the fearful paradise of
non-violence



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KEVIN BUBRISKI

No Future for an Urban Past

Through the reigns of the Kirats, the Lichhavis and finally the Mallas, the Valley's towns developed and maintained a "religio-cultural urbanism" that was unique. Sadly, the last forty years have been enough to destroy much of the cultural fabric of these settlements.

by Sudarshan Raj Tiwari

Dense settlements began to emerge in Kathmandu Valley at least 1500 years ago. But first, there were the Kirats, who inhabited and ruled Kathmandu Valley in the latter half of the first millennium BC. Although nothing definite can be said about the settlements established by the Kirats, it can be surmised from place-names that their settlements were mostly located at the foothills of the Valley rim and on the ridge spurs extending inward. The Kirat places of worship were located on hilltops, which today remain active as Hindu or Buddhist *piths* ("power places") such as Phulchoki, Nagarjun, Changu and Bishankhu.

Around the 2nd century AD, towards the end of the Kirat period and by the early Lichhavi period, small town-like settlements began to emerge on high ground on the Valley floor. Using the Lichhavi names, they were towns like Khopring (now Bhaktapur), Lembati (Lele), Bungayumi (Bungamati), Thencho (Dahachok) and Mathang (possibly today's Bansbari). Along with these settlements, new *piths* took root, like the Adinath of Chobar, Bungmalokeswor of Bungamati and Saraswati of Lele.

By the middle of the Licchavi period, about the 7th century AD, many temple towns had developed within the Valley, which may have vied in size and importance with the capital towns of Maneswor, Sankasya, Gokarna and Deupatan, which were themselves expanding. These towns usually developed on ridges adjacent to rivers, on land that was not agriculturally productive. The cultural nucleus was provided by the ruling temple or *pith*, and the economic base was intensive farming and expanding trade with each other and with states to the north and south of the Valley.

Strategic considerations probably account for the periodic shifting of settlements within the Valley, and the growth of towns like Gokarna, Deupatan, Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, Lele, Kisipidi and Naxal. The changes in the ruling houses during the Kirat and Lichhavi times might have been another reason for the dispersal. During the late-Lichhavi and early-Malla periods (8th to 12th century) the temple towns also doubled as tax collectorates and as defence units away from the capital towns, further polarising settlements around them.

The smaller Lichhavi settlements developed into the Malla towns. These small towns, energised by abundant agriculture and trade, developed into the accomplished Malla period settlements whose ambience is so decisively present even today. Imbued with a strong sense of religio-cultural urbanism, these towns saw continuous development over the next 600 years, until the 18th century.

From about the beginning of the Malla period, we are able to get some indication of town size and population. Just prior to the Mallas' dominance, Kathmandu town had grown to about 1,800 houses. This "Kathmandu" most likely referred to a settlement between Pashupati and Naxal, and not, as many historians tend to believe, the current Basantpur-centric Kathmandu.

In the 13th century, Ananda Malla expanded the town of Bhaktapur to about 12,000 houses, while the nearby Banepa, Panauti, Nala and other settlements on the eastern reaches of the Valley had about 700 houses each. By the year 1655, Patan had 24,000 houses.

Meanwhile, the Lichhavi villages producing specific agricultural produce or labour services

were developing under the Mallas as specialised satellite towns, one focusing on oil pressing, another on pottery-making, and so on. These specialised towns served either a particular city-state, or the whole Valley.

Even in the early Malla period, efforts were made to restrict the growth of the capital towns, such as when satellite settlements like Kirtipur were laid out. Kirtipur's *tole* (ward) names were derived from those of *toles* in the parent city, which was Patan. At least 11 such place-names which have their origins in Patan survive to this day in Kirtipur.

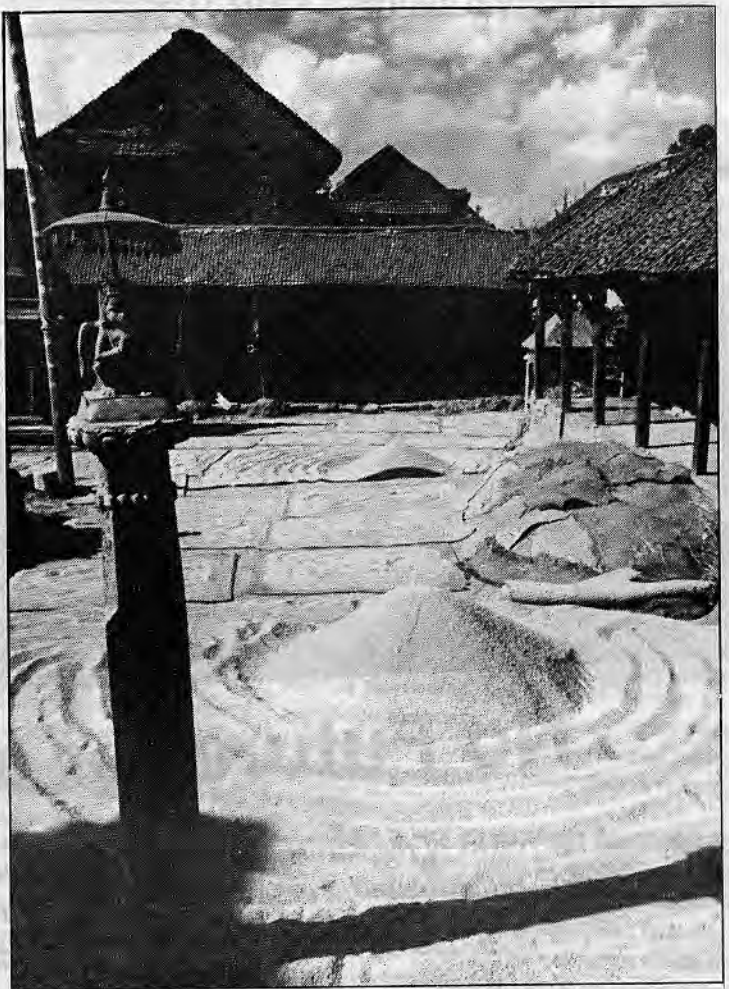
A DEVELOPING MOSAIC

The pre-1950 urban form of the Kathmandu Valley towns was thus a result of cultural accretion over two millennia, made possible by a unique cultural continuity and the overwhelming dominance of religious strictures which directed the lives of the urban inhabitants. The physical space was philosophically defined through the Vastupurusha Mandala, a unified design principle in the shape of a square diagram. The principle extended doctrinal control over the physical activity of building houses, palaces, villages and towns. The Mandala dictated specific locations and 'directionality' of temples and dieties in the Valley settlements, with specific boundary deities and cremation grounds serving as the outer markers.

Towns which were expanding could not ignore the location of the boundary gods and *piths* as they shifted outwards. Often, a growing town would create new series of cultural sites at its expanding perimeter. This process of expansion around the original nucleus, which

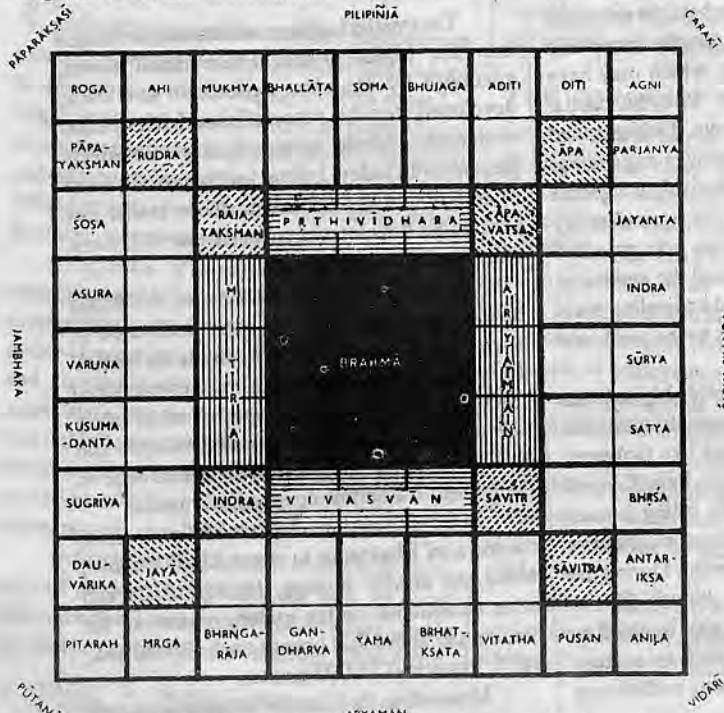
could have been a palace, a major temple or a tax collectorate, placed politico-religious nobility at the center, circled by markets with middle-class housing. These were in turn surrounded by lower-class housing interspersed with religious sites which served as perimeter markers. The whole of this was enveloped by agricultural land.

These distinct sectors of the Valley towns were sprinkled with various religious sites and temples, which became the polarising centers for the neighbourhood population. These nodes, distanced by time and space, were controlled by an ordered framework in which godly movement remained as conceptually meaningful as the response of the expanding town to the welfare and peace of the living being. With the



Rice dries in Harisiddhi town.

UNITED NATIONS



VASTUPURUSA MANDALA (Source: *The Hindu Temple* - Stella Kramrisch)

RESILIENCE

The Valley towns' culture, demographics and character proved resilient to the historical vicissitudes following the eclipse of the Mallas. For example, Prithvi Narayan's takeover of the Valley in 1769 left them largely intact. Neither did the various other political and cultural changes that took place in the Valley before 1845, when Jung Bahadur took power, appear to cause adverse impact on the character of urban settlements. Among the significant changes were the increasing Parabatey population, the rise of non-Newar nobility, the infusion of ethnic groups with no urban history, the lack of community-based life-style of the non-Newar population, and so on.

The Rana rule brought significant psychological distress into the urban fabric by introducing Victorian palaces and their underlying concept — the occupation of large chunks of agricultural land outside the old boundaries of urban Kathmandu and Lalitpur. For the common people and craftsmen, the temples and the durbar squares lost some of their importance. The new points of reference for many became the Victorian palaces with their



decor, materials and technology. The marvels of traditional culture were psychologically in eclipse.

However, the occupation of lands by the Ranas could be seen as a boon in disguise: the urbanism of the Valley towns remained unaffected because the Ranas built their fantasy estates outside the settlement boundaries. For better or worse, the Rana enclaves also served as physical barriers to expansion. The deliberate Rana policy of restricting migration into the Valley ("Nepal Khaldo") also helped maintain the physical and cultural integrity of the settlements.

CULTURAL DEATH MARCH

The changes since the collapse of the Rana regime in 1950 have been so powerful that four decades have been enough to culturally destroy the Valley urbanism developed and maintained over 15 centuries.

The nature, scale and speed of urban expansion since the 1950s have been marked by accelerating breakdown of the religio-cultural framework of the Valley towns. The fast and culturally incongruous physical expansion of Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur has brought severe stress both inside the towns (*Duney*, as Newari speakers will know) and outside (*Piney*).

Duney, there has been cultural and physical destruction of the city nodes such as the durbar squares, market squares and other *chowks*,

essentially reducing the religious landmarks into building artefacts bereft of cultural meaning, surrounded by incongruous development. The characteristic main streets and their cultural hubs are on a death march.

The *Piney* stresses are more visible, particularly to the non-Newar outsider. The expansion of settlements beyond the cultural and religious boundaries into historically protected agricultural and natural areas has engulfed the *piths*; even funeral areas have forcibly been brought into the urban domain. The power places of Maitidevi, Tunandevi, Kankeswori and Sovabhagbati have all been reduced to "in-town" features, without a planned outward

placement of new *piths*. The cremation ghats and Kumaris, perimeter deities, no longer serve a boundary function.

Only the location of the monuments and the *piths* are intact; their religio-cultural domain has been much reduced, physically and otherwise. Their potency and meaning are on the verge of being erased forever. Additionally, today's urban development is engulfing unstudied archaeological and historical sites. Careful study of un-built areas might have led to the discovery of Lichhavi and early Malla sites, but today's urban march makes them forever inaccessible.

The loss is not only one of physical space. The cultural festivals which link the urban settlements are more and more difficult to enact because the ordained sites are out of reach. For

example, the *jatra* of Maitidevi can no longer travel up to Kankeswari because the responsible Guthi household was pushed off. The Mahalaxmi *khat* can no longer be pulled up to Kiladol because the site has been erased, it is said, because public lands have been encroached upon. The Bhagabati of Naxal can no longer make her *jatra* rounds to Basantapur and Batsala.

There are numerous other instances of such profound cultural losses occurring due to the physical destruction or change in the environment of religious sites. The recent legal provision allowing conversion of *guthi* (religious) lands to *raikar* land (paying rent to government) has further speeded up the process of destruction.

URBAN FUTURE

Unfortunately, many cultural, religious and historical sites, and the meaning they hold, have already been obliterated and it is too late to resurrect them. However, potent sites still remain, and they can be protected from conversion into cultural deserts.

It is important to understand that the problem of the changing urban landscape is not only one of the Newars losing cultural sites related to their past. Though it is true that major aspects of the cultural development of Kathmandu Valley owe their origins to the Newars and their ethnic predecessors, the Valley's legacy has a multi-ethnic substance. This makes cultural preservation of the Valley important to all communities.

The future of the Valley's urban milieu would indeed be culturally barren in the absence of the legacy of its cultural and religious past. The assimilation of in-migrants into the cultural milieu of the Valley towns is still possible, since the religious mix of the migrants is similar to the religious mix of the population in the hey-day of these towns.

Though the Kathmandu scene may be physically beyond repair, Patan and Bhaktapur still remain well within the possibility of a planned urban expansion in which there is limited urban conservation as well as sufficient infusion of cultural nodes to serve as polarisation centers. A realistic cultural conservation strategy combined with good urban sense can give our urban planners a hopeful approach towards evolving a future urban space which will demonstrate and justify continuity with our brilliant past. The ultra-conservationists and ultra-modernists should both take to the sidelines if we are to try for a healthy response to the malaise of the past four decades.

May the gods remain undisturbed in their power places and may the Valley inhabitants derive urban peace from the continuing potency of their deities!



A Kathmandu dyochhe.

S.R. Tiwari, an architect, is a reader at Tribhuvan University and Dean of the Institute of Engineering.

Little Water, Dirty Water

While the Kathmandu cognoscenti continues to dream of Nepal's hydro-power potential, the subject of water supply receives short shrift. Because enormous amounts are being spent on the Valley's drinking water supply and because the Melamchi Project proposes to become a reality, debate must begin on water, the lack of which, more than any other natural resource, will set limits to the Valley's growth.

by Ajaya Dixit

Planners were perturbed enough when Kathmandu Valley's population growth rate was thought to be 4.8 per cent a year. Recently released data shows that the figure is more than 5 per cent. This means that every year, about 23,000 new residents make demands on the Valley's services and extremely limited resource base. Both land and water are limited in Kathmandu Valley, but it seems likely that we will run out of water before we run out of land.

The limits to Kathmandu's growth in terms of the availability of drinking water were set millions of years ago by evolving Himalayan geology. Kathmandu is a "hanging valley" far above the snow-fed abundance of the Indrawati and Trisuli rivers on the east and west, which flow 750 m and 1,000 m below the Valley floor. The Valley's own Bagmati River and its tributaries rise in the surrounding hills and are spring-fed.

If the Valley's rivers provide but a trickle, the amount of money that has been pumped into its water supply system may be likened to a flood. And it is not for want of spending that Kathmandu's water supply remains poor and erratic. The Nepal Water Supply Corporation

(NWSC) is well into its fourth credit package from the International Development Association (IDA), the World Bank affiliate that provides soft loans to developing countries. A total of NRs 1 billion has been digested since IDA first opened its purse strings, and the most recently sanctioned loan is for "network rehabilitation" and is worth US\$ 60 million. Due to extraordinary ineptness in their implementation, none of the earlier loan programmes met their targets.

It was not always so, says Rabindra Man Shrestha, an engineer who was with the Corporation in the early 1970s, before the IDA largesse was showered on the NWSC. "We did not have much money then, and the approach was hands-on, and the goal was to improve water quality. Every visible leak used to be checked and repaired, and we learnt a lot about the water supply." It is Shrestha's view, shared by many other engineers and managers, that the Corporation allowed its own institutional experience to lapse when the big money arrived.

The first IDA credit package was sanctioned in 1974, the second in 1977, and the third in the early 1980s. Programmes meant to install a functional water distribution system in the capital

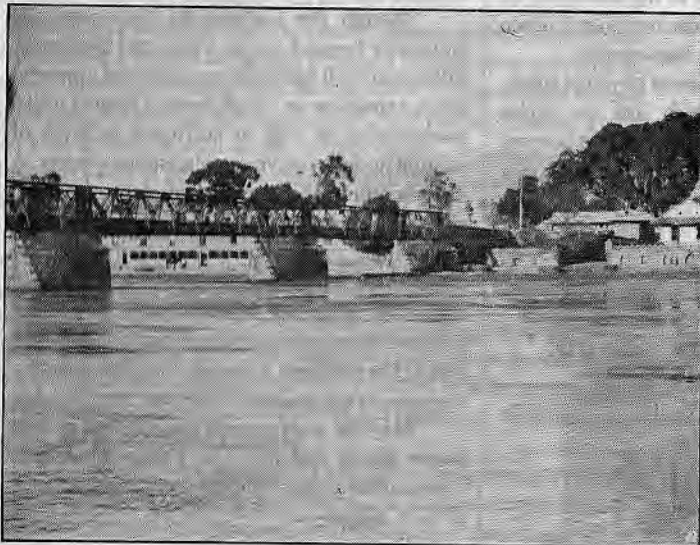
city became unsustainable exercises marked by negligence and the dominance of big money. To take just one example, out of the 34 tube wells planned to be installed by the end of the third project in 1985, while how many were actually sunk could not be ascertained, only eight are operational today.

WATER QUALITY AND WASTE

There are physical limitations to what the Corporation can do in trying to provide potable water; it has only two treatment plants, one at Sundarijal and the other at Maharajganj, while water is collected from a variety of physically separate sources. The problem is compounded by the leaking sewers laid along the water mains. To improve the quality, NWSC relies on simple chlorination, using both bleaching powder and gaseous chlorine at selected points, but this has limited use in treating Kathmandu water. Says microbiologist Achyut P. Sharma, "In the presence of high organic contaminants in the water, the microbial activity of these compounds is lowered by almost 80 per cent." The bleaching powder used to disinfect the water is often so adulterated that the low chlorine content is not enough for purification.

In many areas, residents would be happy just to receive water in their taps, whether clean or dirty. Illegal connections and leaky old pipes account for as much as 70 per cent of water loss from some neighbourhood taps, according to a 1988 report by an Austrian consultancy firm. The Corporation, when pressed, will maintain that leakage is only 40 per cent, but the figure is highly suspect. Binnie and Partners, UK consultants who have been associated with Nepali water for 16 years, recently reported leakage at about 65 per cent.

Besides being diverted illegally for household purposes, Kathmandu's "treated



Half a century apart: the old Bagmati bridge at Thapathali circa 1940, and the view today. A diversion has been made due to collapse of the 1970 Bagmati bridge in September 1991. The old bridge still stands.

water" is also used for non-consumptive uses such as washing wool and carpets, and even to irrigate fields. One of the goals of the recently sanctioned IDA loan is to rehabilitate the urban water network by the year 2000 and to ensure that leakage is brought down to 35 per cent.

The IDA is not the Corporation's only benefactor. The governments of Norway and Austria have agreed to provide grants and "commodity assistance" in the form of pipes and fittings. In addition, the Japanese are set to augment the surface water supplies and to improve quality. Given the Corporation's past record, it is not clear whether this infusion of foreign aid will be well utilised.

ASK THE USER

The water supply programmes as a whole have failed because the intended beneficiaries were never consulted. Decisions have all been made in Government board rooms. As the Government's 1991 Drinking Water Sector Review and Development Plan states, "Sustainable improvements are seldom achieved through a top-down approach where governments or project teams plan and implement projects and beneficiaries have no role in planning, construction or financing."

Proper management of the drinking water supply must involve the users, but as yet there is no procedure to ensure this involvement. The Corporation Board consists exclusively of Government bureaucrats. A beginning could be made by including in the Board, representatives of the city council, the chambers of commerce, hotel, management and medical associations, as well as consumer activists. As things stand, there is little public confidence in the Corporation and even less willingness to believe its assertions that things will turn rosy after 2000.

To make life a little harder for the Corporation, Bal Bahadur Rai, the new Minister for Housing and Physical Planning asked it to present a concrete plan for supply improvement by early 1992. However, an effective plan for the supply improvement is unlikely within such short deadline since the NWSC management does not even have a mandate to exercise its legal authority.

The Water Supply Corporation Act of 2046 empowers the NWSC to prosecute illegal connections in municipalities within its jurisdiction, but it still does not have the legislative wherewithal to do so. Even the rights to some water sources have not been secured by the Corporation and conflicts with local farmers continue. One senior Corporation official laments, "We spend the day plugging the holes in the transmission, at night they are all broken."

Certainly, no amount of foreign credit and grants is going to change the fact that the problem of Kathmandu's water supply is essentially managerial and political. The

Corporation's habit of hiring foreign experts for every task under the advice of donors will lead it further up the wrong creek. Expatriate consultants are best used in technical areas where they have expertise that the Nepalis lack.

In order to improve water supply, the Corporation must: a) strengthen operation and maintenance capability through better supervision, b) enhance revenue collection and proper cash accounting, and c) institute administrative reforms. An effective management must be developed to meticulously monitor the proposed US\$ 60 million rehabilitation programme.

Unfortunately, the tendency of the Corporation and its advisors has been to shirk basic groundwork in favour of pompous promises of high-visibility water-treatment plants and other grandiose quick-fixes — such as the gigantic Melamchi Project, which holds the Corporation in thrall. No one in the Corporation is asking crucial questions, such as whether entire Nepali population should be made to pay for the privilege of supplying Kathmandu's urban residents with snow-fed water. That, in essence, is what would happen if Nepal decides to go in for the US\$ 400

million Melamchi, which would be paid not out of Kathmandu Valley's metropolitan budget but from the national treasury. Incidentally, Melamchi would take away one-fourth of the investment costs which would be required to extend water supply facilities to the rest of the country.

"Kathmandu needs water, but not to be turned into a major industrial city," says Suresh Raj Chalisey, a Nepali environmental scientist. Kathmandu does not need to be deluged with water, from remote Melamchi or anywhere else. Instead, it would suffice if the Valley learned to conserve its own resources. It does not make sense to bring a gigantic project to "flush" the Bagmati — a claim that is actually made for Melamchi — when proper waste management would be more effective. Similarly, savings made by plugging leakage and ending water theft could bring significant improvement.

In the end, should Kathmandu be pampered with expensive showcase water projects and programmes when it has not even seriously tried to save and conserve what it has? Δ

A. Dixit is a water engineer who edits the journal *Water Nepal*.

MELAMCHI BOONDOGGLE

The Melamchi Project has the capacity to sink the country's economy under a reservoir of expensive water. It slams all notions of sustainability, equity — and serious hydrology. It is being pursued purely for its "sex appeal"

To cure Kathmandu Valley's self-induced drought, planners have often looked to fresh-water sources beyond the Valley rim. A "pre-feasibility study" of out-of-Valley water projects was completed by Binnie and Partners, a British consultancy firm, in 1988. The study recommended the Melamchi Khola of Helambu, north-east of Kathmandu, as the best source from among 20 possible alternatives. In 1989, the recommended project options were ranked in terms of their environmental impact. The Melamchi scheme was considered to have the least impact among the selected alternatives.

The proposal is to divert the flow of the Melamchi to the Valley through a 27 km long tunnel of 2.5 m diameter. Upon entering the Valley, Melamchi water would fall into a 5 million cubic meter-capacity storage reservoir at Sundarjal. A later "Modified Melamchi" proposal would enlarge the reservoir at Sundarjal to store the Bagmati's flow as well.

The search is on for financing the project. Confesses an editorial in the newsletter brought

out by the Nepal Water Supply Corporation, "We at NWSC are still on the lookout for donors with 400 million dollars for this very ambitious, sure-to-come-one-day mega-project!"

According to preliminary estimates, the Project would cost about NRs 10,000 per resident of Greater Kathmandu (Kathmandu and Patan). The calculation is projected to 2021 AD, when the project is expected to be completed, and when the targeted urban population of the Valley will be a little over 1.6 million. Most other water projects in Nepal have far lower investment costs — in the inaccessible villages of the far west hills, the average investment cost is about NRs 1,600 per capita at the 1990 price level. The national average for "mechanised urban water supply systems" is a about NRs 4,500.

As is always the case with projects such as Melamchi, the preliminary estimate is bound to be revised upwards as and when construction begins and as the work struggles towards completion. One economist refers to Melamchi

as a "vanity project" of the variety which allows governments to mislead the public into the belief that there is action where there is none.

The most significant problem with the Project as proposed, is the level of hydrological uncertainty. The Snowy Mountain Engineering Corporation, an Australian consultancy which is now conducting the feasibility study for the project, has identified severe deficiencies in the quality of Melamchi River's flow data. A flow-measurement station was installed in the river in 1976 at about the point where the tunnel intake would be.

It is incredible, but true, that only eight meter gaugings were taken in the 15 intervening years. It seems that the gauge-reader up in Helambu was not provided with wading overalls, and who could blame him from his unwillingness to venture into the rushing glacial waters of the Melamchi? That one minor bureaucratic oversight has had immense implications, for the Melamchi data is not complete — and cannot justify for such an expensive scheme.

Some experts argue that the lack of Melamchi-specific data need not stop the work, as river-flow readings of other watersheds with similar characteristics can be used. However, hydrologists know that, in the Himalaya at least, such an exercise would be unrepresentative and inappropriate. According to Kiran Shanker, Chief Hydrologist at the Department of Hydrology, "To get statistically significant stream flow data, you have to have at least 15 years worth of readings."

Continuous flow-monitoring of the Melamchi was initiated only after the 1991 Monsoon. Observes a Western hydrologist who wishes to remain anonymous, "In Australia, United States or Germany, a project of this magnitude with less than three months of flow data would not be considered even for initial scrutiny."

There are, indeed, arguments against Melamchi which are based on questions of equity, economics, finance, geology and simple logic, but using them would be moot because the underlying hydrological factor itself has not been adequately studied. In other words, there is no guarantee that the Melamchi Khola can provide continuous flow in the volume contemplated by the Project.

The Melamchi Project represents nothing more than a child's grasping for a lollipop held out by an indulgent international banker. Certainly, it has not been the product of responsible planning for the Valley's, or the country's, future. Rather than being the result of a long-term, rigorous planning process, it is a quick-fix response to Kathmandu Valley's perceived water supply problems.

- Ajaya Dixit

Inversion Explained

by Madan Basnyet

In general, temperature drops with altitude. The rate of decrease, known as the Environmental Lapse Rate (ELR), depends on atmospheric conditions and the composition of air (water vapour, carbon dioxide, dust). On average, the atmosphere cools by 6°C every 1000 m.

A parcel of warm air which is forced upwards by the normal process of convection cools as it gains altitude. If the rate of cooling of that parcel is lower than the prevailing ELR, the air rises even higher. Such a phenomenon is common in summer and helps air pollution from metropolitan areas to rise and dissipate. The air either gets diluted or is blown away by winds of the upper atmosphere.

In the winter months, temperatures can sometimes rise (rather than decrease) with altitude. This phenomenon is known as "temperature inversion". Among the many causes of inversion is "back radiation" combined with the strong cooling of the ground during winter nights. The heat of the day is radiated back into the atmosphere during the early part of the night, creating a layer of warm air over the surface. Subsequent parcels of air that rise are not as warm as this layer and hence tend to sink back. Such a layer of air, in essence, acts like a lid and puts an end to all vertical motion. Instead of rising and dispersing, pollutants produced by



S. RANJIT

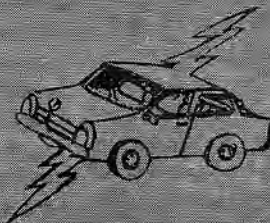
urban centers tend to hug the ground and become highly concentrated.

Bowl-shaped valleys like Kathmandu are specially affected by inversion because low-level winds which might otherwise drive away the polluted air are prevented from entering by the wall of surrounding hills. While the flow of Valley air is thus sealed from all sides, there is no letup in the production of polluting agents such as smoke and dust.

The early morning fog so characteristic of Kathmandu Valley is the result of inversion in its most natural form. The fog lifts and rapidly disappears as the morning sun's radiation warms the cold layer of air at the Valley floor. The presence of pollutants in the air adds a new but undesirable dimension to the process of inversion.

M. Basnyet is a senior Meteorologist in HMG's Department of Hydrology and Meteorology.

Himali Bijuli Gadi



Himal Association, *Himal's* publisher, is seeking funds to build an electric vehicle to use as a delivery van in Kathmandu Valley. The electric vehicle (*bijuli gadi*) constitutes a proven technology that can easily be adapted to the Valley's requirements. The Valley's escalating air pollution, its relatively slow traffic, and limited driving radius, are special features which make electric vehicles especially attractive here.

Electric vehicles are not readily available today because they are not mass-produced. We believe that a high visibility delivery van that

is constantly on Kathmandu streets on a commercial, non-experimental basis, will act as a catalyst for future acceptance of electric vehicles as a genuine alternative to conventional vehicles for transport and haulage. A group of professional Nepali electric vehicle enthusiasts are supporting Himal Association in the project. The necessary design work and research has already been completed.

For more information on the Himali Bijuli Gadi Project and our funding needs, contact Bikas Pandey, Project Coordinator, Himal Association, PO Box 42, Lalitpur, Nepal.

The Lessons of Bhaktapur

Development and conservation are fundamentally different: the former can wait while the latter cannot.

by Yogeswar K. Parajuli

There is a finality behind the fast-paced alterations and destruction of the squares, streets and facades of the Valley towns. While the process of urban degradation started later in Bhaktapur than in Patan and Kathmandu towns, by the early 1970s it too was experiencing accelerating change that ignored the town's character.

The German-aided Bhaktapur Urban Development and Conservation Project, initiated in October 1974, sought to tackle the problem before it became unmanageable. Bhaktapur was considered ripe for an integrated town-wide conservation effort, and a comprehensive Town Development Plan was unveiled in 1977.

The Plan's approach was to preserve and restore the historic environment of Bhaktapur without ignoring the need for urban renewal and economic development. The idea was not to stop growth and development, but to channel them so that the town's character did not see drastic change. Conserving the architectural heritage of Bhaktapur was seen as part of the overall goal of improving the living conditions of the inhabitants.

The planners were aware that in their efforts to maintain the urban character, they could not avoid encroaching upon the house- or property-owner's "freedom to construct". The restrictions brought about by zoning and development regulations were bound to be perceived as "imposed" or "authoritarian", especially by a community which has historically and culturally remained outside the influence of "national" institutions and administration.

Sensitive to these and other issues, the Plan sought to achieve "conservation through development", emphasising control and positive action rather than blanket prohibition on any change.

THE THIRD CITY

Bhaktapur is the smallest among the three historic royal towns of Kathmandu Valley. The most ancient inscriptions date from the 12th century only, but the town is believed to have been founded in the 9th century. It became a seat of cultural, economic and political power due to a number of favourable factors, particularly its location on the former trade route between India and Tibet and the extremely fertile agricultural belt around it. The town's splendid temples, palaces and private homes date from the 14th to 18th centuries.

Bhaktapur's decline started with its amalgamation into the emerging state of modern Nepal in 1769 by Prithvi Narayan. Kathmandu town became the administrative and political power center, and Bhaktapur, being further removed than Patan, suffered the most. The opening up of new trade routes which bypassed Bhaktapur further affected its economy. The consequent urban impoverishment, combined with disasters like the great earthquake of 1934, led to a great deterioration of Bhaktapur's urban infrastructure.

Today's Bhaktapur, perhaps because of its depressed economy, remains more "homogeneous" than its companion towns. For example, in 1971, it was ethnically 99 per cent Newar, the comparable figure being 85 per cent for Patan. Eighty-five per cent of Bhaktapur residents are Hindu compared to 42 per cent for Patan. Architecturally, according to a 1976 survey, only seven per cent of the houses in the town were in the "modern style" that clashed with the traditional urban environment.

Bhaktapur has a population of about 40,000 within an urban area of 153 hectares. Patan and Kathmandu have 60,000 and 150,000 residents within an area of 254 hectares and 450 hectares, respectively.

A TOWN OF CHARACTER

While it might have suffered more deprivation than Kathmandu and Patan, Bhaktapur still retained all the appearances of a traditional Newar town when the Project began. The organisation of space within the town and the relationship between the streets and squares remained true to history. The town's distinctive skyline was unique and virtually unchanged, and the various urban

forms maintained much of their integrity: private dwellings, the Durbar Square, and the many *maths* (priestly dwellings), inns, cremation grounds, ponds, and *hithis* (sunken water spouts).

But it was clear to the observer that Bhaktapur, too, was going the way of its two sister towns. By the mid-1970s, some major problems were becoming apparent: old houses were being replaced by new structures which departed from traditional designs and the use of building materials. Even Government-sponsored construction showed scant respect for historic appearance of the streets and squares. A survey carried out among all the 5,500 houses of Bhaktapur showed that as many as 700 were so-called "modern" buildings which cluttered the traditional townscape.

A survey of building authorisations granted by the town authorities in the year 2034 B.S. showed that 48.5 per cent of all permits was for building new houses, and 35 per cent for rebuilding front facades. All the alterations and rebuilding was, of course, carried out without architectural sensitivity to tradition. The Project's surveys showed that the construction of "anti-context" buildings was accelerating. Only two per cent of the permits was for rebuilding old houses, presumably with traditional designs.

THE COMMON GOOD

The Project worked out control measures to check the uneven and haphazard growth of the town and to preserve its historical character. It emphasised the welfare of the community and asked the individual house-owners to compromise their personal interests for the sake of the common good. The Project developed land-use regulations which divided areas into residential, general-use and other zones. The goal was to control population density by limiting the habitable space in buildings, providing a good microclimate within the town, and maintaining Bhaktapur's traditional panorama. The aim was also to reduce urban sprawl by concentrating building activity in the already built-up areas.

The design standards set by the Project sought to guide the development of roofs, windows, balconies, terraces, and sanitation units.



The standards applied to all the town precincts and to all new building activity. The Project managers stressed multifaceted long-term benefits that would accrue from the zoning proposals and sought to convince the people that conservation of the existing urban landscape did not imply continuing backwardness. Selected members of the town assembly and top policy makers for the Project were even taken on a tour of historic towns of Europe to help them understand how modern developed countries preserved their historic towns.

The Project also tried to sensitise house builders, skilled masons, carpenters and craftsmen. When those wanting to build new houses came to file their applications, Project-trained technicians who worked for the Bhaktapur Municipality were there to try to interpret and apply the land-use plan and design standards.

Because it would be unfair to expect house-owners to bear the additional costs of preservation measures, the Project also provided financial and technical assistance so that architectural features which required additional financial burden could be more easily retained. Technical and financial assistance was provided to owners of traditional houses in the "monumental zone" at the historic city core. Unfortunately, this subsidy scheme was never extended to other areas of the town.

The land-use plans and design standards were meant to help preserve Bhaktapur's character as a Newar town, but the results were not encouraging. The citizenry did not respond with the kind of enthusiasm that had been expected, as could be seen from the number of violations of the land-use and design standards.

Even some of the most important private buildings underwent significant changes during the Project years. A hundred and twenty of the most valuable buildings were photographed in 1976 and re-examined in 1985 with respect to change. It was found that key features such as clay tile roofing, wood carvings, heights — all were undergoing changes. There was negligible restoration taking place.

WHY DIDN'T IT WORK?

Any measure which seeks to restrict the individual's freedom for the long-term good of the community obviously meets with resistance. The citizens of Bhaktapur did not see the various actions proposed by the Project from the same platform as the planners and preservationists. Many, in fact, found it absurd when asked to integrate traditional features into their contemporary constructions.

Control measures were the key in the plan to retain Bhaktapur's historic character. The unfortunate assumption was that untrained administrative staff members, many of whom could not even read the building maps correctly, would be able to isolate, identify and analyse false signals in an environment as complex as

that of Bhaktapur's. When confronted with a decision, the site inspectors preferred to look the other way, either out of embarrassment or for personal gain.

While the Town Planning Implementation Office looked quite powerful on paper, it was a paper tiger in front of higher authorities. Additionally, the Town Controller and his supervisors, as well as high-level bureaucrats in the national Government, were highly susceptible to the influence of vested interests. Finally, at the apex of the power pyramid, the Minister of Works and Transport was arbitrarily able to reduce or cancel the fines and penalties recommended at the municipal level.

Even the legal validity of the introduced regulatory measures was subject to challenge in the courts since they did not have the authority of duly enacted laws. With weak implementing machinery and with ineffective legal instruments, the task of preserving the architectural integrity of Bhaktapur town ended as a failure.

In fact, things went from bad to worse when the full responsibility for implementation of the Plan was transferred from the Town Planning Implementing Office to the Municipality (Nagar Panchayat). The members of the Municipality proved reluctant to impose control measures against constituents. The Municipality has never had the qualified manpower, the awareness, and the political will to guide the continual development of Bhaktapur.

As for the subsidy scheme worked out by the Project, it discriminated against house-owners who did not live in the historic city core. The amount of subsidy was small and the bureaucratic procedures for approval were lengthy. Besides, subsidy schemes represented a whole new approach to housing that was alien to policy-makers.

According to one senior Project manager, the problem was not with the citizens of Bhaktapur, but with the planners who lacked the understanding of the social consequences of a subsidy scheme designed on the criteria which were not understandable. The public, for its part, saw the preferential treatment of city core residents merely as a distribution of favour to influential individuals.

After five or six years of experimentation with subsidies, the Project dropped the scheme altogether, at about the same time that the focus had shifted from preservation to infrastructural works. This shift resulted due to a change in the supervising authority — from the Ministry of Education and Culture to the Ministry of Works and Transport. The Project was now considered a local development project rather than a national-level preservation and restoration effort. Local socio-political and short-term economic dimensions now came to determine priorities. Because the benefit of overall urban preservation can only be felt in the long-term, and that too

indirectly, it was natural for economically deprived inhabitants of a historic town like Bhaktapur to focus on infrastructural projects which held out the promise of immediate benefits.

CONCLUSION

The Bhaktapur Project emphasised a bottom-up approach, which incorporated awareness-raising and voluntary participation. That such an approach might not work in communities such as Bhaktapur's, where the traditional social and cultural values were changing, was not realised until it was too late.

The solution might seem overly harsh to some, but there is no denying the fact that strict and rigid regulations should be designed and imposed from the top if the continuity and survival of traditional townscapes of Kathmandu are to be guaranteed. The town-people must be made to accept the zoning and building regulations as they would be of any other civil regulations. They must be persuaded to accept these regulations as an integral part of their duties as citizens. In parallel, the measures must take full account of the genuine aspirations of the residents to benefit from modern facilities.

If urban conservation endeavours are to be more than experiments — and the Bhaktapur Project was an experiment, albeit a large one — a better way must be developed. Every urban service and infrastructure development project, whether funded nationally or internationally, must have a conservation component built into it. A portion of every urban-based project's cost must be reserved for preservation work.

The institutional base required to implement conservation measures must be strengthened, particularly at the town level, and conservation regulations must be given legal validity. All efforts to control building activity, or to provide information or assistance, must be sustained and backed by political will.

Lastly, every conservationist must understand that urban preservation efforts will require restricting individual freedom to build and to alter, which will never be popular. Impractical philosophies that are fashioned to cater to the uninformed public can never lead to successful conservation. There must be firm enforcement of regulations that are considered necessary. National politicians as well as those active in the town must rise above the political interest and understand the long-term vision of the preservationist. Only with their support can efforts like those of the Bhaktapur Project ever hope to maintain and restore the old glory of Bhaktapur.

Y. K. Parajuli is an architect who worked for the Bhaktapur Development Project from 1977 to 1988. He is author of "Bhaktapur: Experiences in Preservation and Restoration in a Medieval Town".

Villagers of the Valley

Kathmandu Valley's rural residents, who number more than the urban population, are facing an unequal battle with the rapidly expanding city. As villagers lose their land to urban sprawl, the city people gain cheap labour

by Anup Pahari

When Prime Minister Chandra Shumshere was planning to set up Kathmandu's first college in 1918, he looked for open space. The site he selected for the Tri Chandra College was among vegetable patches to the east of the Rani Pokhari water tank, then well outside the city limits.

Today, the college sits in the middle of metropolitan Kathmandu. The quest for land for private and public construction has taken developers further and further from the immediate outskirts of the old city. The Rana aristocracy began the trend by choosing the isolation of the more distant sites like Sanepa, Maharajganj, Jawalakhel and Min Bhawan to indulge in their penchant for sprawling European estates.

And so it has continued, with government complexes, new army barracks and private homes vying with each other in a race to 'cover' more ground. For all the space that Greater Kathmandu requires for its expansion, there has always been one way to get it — convert agricultural lands into urban use. Gauchar Airport usurped pasture lands traditionally under the jurisdiction of the Pashupati Nath temple. In the late 1950s, Tribhuvan University was built on prime agricultural land below the town of Kirtipur.

By the end of the 1960s, much of the low-lying lands on either side of the Tukucha and Dhobikhola streams, and the western shores of the Bagmati and Bishnumati were converted to non-agricultural use. By the early 1970s, areas formerly considered rural were colonised —

Bansbari, Chabahil, Sinamangal, Teku/Kalimati, Baneswor, Bishalnagar, Samakhushi and Lagankhel.

The completion of the Ring Road helped the late-comers to push out farther into the countryside: Jorpati and Thimi, the Kalanki-Thankot strip, Saibu/Bhaisepati, Sat Dobato/Khumaltar, the Sunakothi to Thecho strip, the region south of Swayambhu stupa (Ichangu, Sitapaila and Seuchatar), and the semi-circle defined by Balaju-Gongabu-Dhapasi-Bhadragaon-Mahankal.

Today, the search for an "outside" location for a sizeable facility would lead to the last remaining farmlands on the valley fringe. In the early 1970s, the founders of Budhanilkantha School marched all the way north to the base of Shivapuri ridge before they could find a good location. Today, given the way the Budhanilkantha area has been developed, they would probably have had to head out of the Valley altogether. In fact, that is exactly what the newly chartered Kathmandu University has done. "Kathmandu" only in name, the trustees have bought land in Dhulikhel, the adjacent valley to the east.

The takeover of village lands has been unrelenting. A 1986 urban development study, known as the Padco Report, estimated that the price of land in the Valley had increased by 633 per cent between 1964 and 1978. The same study concluded that the built-up area in the Valley would have to increase by 41 per cent by the year 2001 in order to accommodate the growing population's demand for housing.

UNIQUE URBANISATION

There are three factors that make urbanisation of the Valley unique and potentially disruptive. Before the 1950s, Kathmandu was already one of the most urbanised pockets of the Himalayan region as well as the contiguous plains of north India. The urbanisation of the last five decades, therefore, occurred in what was historically the most densely populated pocket of the entire region.

Kathmandu's urban development does not convert wastelands or forests into city blocks. It takes away land which has been tilled for centuries. It competes for land use with a productive, highly labour-intensive and sophisticated agricultural ecology. The Valley's rice yield per acre has been one of the highest in the world.

Historically, culturally, architecturally, and in terms of population density, it would be far more accurate to speak of 're-urbanisation' of the Valley than simply 'urbanisation'. Many urban civilizations "die" before newer urban forms replace them. But Kathmandu Valley's civilisation never died; its mixture of town and country and their respective populations never disappeared. This unique legacy of a living social mosaic makes urbanisation of the Valley one of the most challenging and disruptive processes in the ongoing saga of global urbanisation.

While it is evident that urban development has dramatically altered the face and environment of the 209 sq mile Valley, the attention has always been focused on the process of



Settlement Pattern in the rural Valley. From left to right: Motitar, Chapagaon, Bungamati.

urbanisation and not on rural space that is up for conversion. We forget too easily that urbanisation has two sides. There is *placement*, but there is also *displacement*. As new, badly-planned settlements emerge, villagers who are being displaced are ignored or taken for granted.

In the discourse of planners, bureaucrats, developers and speculators, it would seem as if the new urban settlements were being built on vacant and 'marginal' lands. You would not know that this rural space is made up of densely settled villages and agro-towns, exceptionally fertile lands, and a complex network of social and economic relationships that sustain a multi-ethnic population.

If a sustainable, long-term solution to the question of limited space is to be found, it cannot be done by ignoring the people, land, settlements and economy of rural Kathmandu Valley. And at some point, we must say to the urban developers, "This far and no further."

SETTLEMENT PATTERNS

Of the nearly one million residents of Kathmandu Valley, close to half live in one of the 107 "gaon bikas samitis", or GBS (the administrative units formerly known as village panchayats). These 107 samitis are dispersed among the three districts of Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur. The southern portion of Lalitpur lies outside the Valley perimeter and is largely unaffected by urbanisation.

Since at least the time of Prithvi Narayan Shah's takeover of the Valley in 1769, these rural areas have been characterised by three types of settlements. Firstly, there are the compact and densely populated agro-towns, which are inhabited by Newar cultivators, artisans and petty merchants. Of the 107 samitis, 25 fall under this category. Among them are the historic settlements of Tokha, Sankhu, Kirtipur (Kathmandu), Khokana, Harisiddhi, Bungamati, Lubhu (Lalitpur), Thimi and Bode (Bhaktapur). These Newar mini-towns are invariably built on high ground, called *tars*, so that the adjacent valley-bottom lands, dols, could be intensively cultivated. The bulk of the rural Newar population belongs to the *Jyapu* sub-caste.

A second type of rural settlement is the mixed-GBS, where Newars and non-Newars live side-by-side. There are 36 such communities, inhabited by Chhetris, Bahuns, Tamangs, Newars and others: Manamajju, Dharmathali, Naya Naikap, Thankot Mahadev (all in Kathmandu District), Chapagaon, Dhapakhel (Lalitpur), Dadhikot, Gundu (Bhaktapur), and others.

The third and most common type of rural settlement is the 'parbatey GBS', where non-Newars constitute at least two-thirds of the population. There are 46 samitis under this category. Typically, like parbatey communities outside the Valley, these settlements are widely spread out over the GBS area. Examples of

parbatey communities are Budanilkantha, Chaimale, Dahachowk, Mulpani, Seuchatar (all in Kathmandu), Badikhel, Jharuwarasi (Lalitpur), Nagarkot and Sirutar (Bhaktapur).

The ethnic makeup of the Valley's rural population, based on estimates, is as follows: 38 per cent Newar; 39.5 per cent Bahun and Chhetri; 13.8 per cent Tamang; and 9 per cent 'other'. In the Bahun-Chhetri group, there is a Valley-wide predominance of Chhetris (26.1 per cent) over Bahuns (13.4 per cent). One explanation for this might be that the Chhetris, as soldiers, were given preference in settling down in the Valley by the erstwhile rulers. There is evidence that Malla kings in the 16th and 17th centuries employed Chhetris in their armies before the advent of Prithvi Narayan.

PEASANT LABOUR

The rural areas of the Valley have been referred to as *kanth*, and the people are known as *kanthays*. Classically, a *kanthay* is a person with one foot in the city and one in the village. The term aptly captures the predicament of present-day residents of the rural communities of Kathmandu Valley. The majority continues to live in villages but depends overwhelmingly on the city for employment, consumer goods, labour and a market for produce. The need for off-farm work to supplement agricultural income is vital. Eighty per cent of rural households have at least one member working in the off-farm sector.

Not all ethnic groups, obviously, are engaged in the same type of off-farm work. By far the most common form of employment is *jagir* — salaried employment in the lower levels of government or the private sector. *Jagir* requires some education and fluency in Nepali, which has made such work a natural preserve for rural Chhetris and Bahuns. However, all individuals irrespective of caste are potential *jagir*-holders if they have a middle school or higher education. Very few women are part of

this pool of workers. According to a survey by this writer, at least 34 per cent of the rural households of Kathmandu have at least one member in *jagir*.

Jyala-dari labour on a daily wage basis is another form of work available to villagers. This also includes agricultural work. Until recently, the bulk of the building construction labour for the cities was drawn from the surrounding villages. Newars mostly worked as artisans and skilled labourers (*dakarmi* masons, *sikarmi* carpenters, *nakarmi* blacksmiths), while Tamangs from more distant villages took up a variety of unskilled work in construction, as did many persons of the occupational castes such as *damai*, *kami* and *sarki*. Except among Tamangs, the majority of women working for wages were hired as farm hands. Peasant labour was what helped construct not only the historical sites of the Valley, but also the Shah and Rana palaces, government buildings, roads, schools, hospitals and private homes — right up to modern times.

Trade (*byapar*), mostly in the form of small retailing businesses and tea shops, is the third most common source of income for Valley villagers. In a survey of over 600 households by this writer, 23 per cent had at least one member engaged in *byapar*. Newars are more likely than other groups to engage in *byapar*, although there are parbatey traders in non-Newar villages.

Production of cottage items for home and market is widespread, typically among Newar, Tamang and the occupational castes. Some specialised products of the Valley include the pottery of Thimi, cloth of Lubhu and Kirtipur and straw mats (*sukkul*) of Sanagaon. However, home cloth production recently suffered severe setbacks due to the price-hike in Indian yarn coupled with the declining cost of machine-made Chinese cloth, both induced in part by changes in Government policies. Recently, many rural Kathmandu women have taken to carding and spinning wool on contract for rug producers



Trend in development: the traditional settlement pattern, in harmony with the Valley environment loses ground to the "urban octopus" (right). Source: Kathmandu Valley — UNESCO

of the Valley. In the past two decades, the villagers have also taken up non-traditional activities like poultry farming, modern dairying and commercial production of vegetable seeds.

All rural production is affected by changing city demands and the supply of modern raw materials as well as by competition from industry, both domestic and international. The occupational castes like metal workers, cobblers, tailors and cloth dyers, have virtually lost their rural clientele to mass-produced substitutes. Traditional Valley specialties like mustard oil from Khokana and cane sugar extract (*chaku*) from Tokha are no longer produced on the scale of just 50 years ago.

A significant amount of de-industrialisation has thus occurred in the rural areas, which can no longer produce in the same volume, much less improve upon, the commodities they once supplied the urban population. In their place, carpet and consumer goods factories (soap, toothpaste, carbonated beverages, convenience foods) and countless brick kilns have mushroomed and spread out over the fertile fields of Kathmandu Valley.

TENURE, AGRICULTURE

If the land tenure system of Nepal as a whole is problematic, in the case of the Valley it can only be termed as disastrous. At the turn of the century, much of the Valley land was carved up between

birta and *jagir* owners (feudal grantees) who collected rent from a subject peasantry. The remaining area was cultivated on the basis of *raikar* tenure, with the State acting as the direct landlord. As the right to collect rent was a saleable commodity, it was common for Valley merchants to purchase these from the original feudal grantees. Large areas came to be controlled by non-resident investors under this system. A significant portion of the cultivated area was also assigned to religious trusts (*guthis*), with the tenants paying a fixed annual rent called *kut*.

As a result of this legacy of feudal land tenure, tenancy has been widespread. Even today, 47 per cent of the rural households rent some or all of the land they cultivate, while 13 per cent of the households do not own any land of their own. In many villages of rural Kathmandu, non-resident landlords own the major share of the prime rice lands. A "big" farmer is one who owns more than 50 ropanis (2.6 ha).

The Valley lands yield two crops a year, usually rice and wheat. The best rice lands can produce up to 12 *muris* (588 kg) of unhusked rice per ropani. Usually, though, yields are between five and 10 *muris*. On the best lands, a tenant pays up to 22 *pathis* (50 kg) of unhusked rice per year to the landlord.

Kathmandu Valley sees the highest use of chemical fertiliser in the country. Commercial vegetable farming is widespread, and is the Valley's chief cash crop. Only a select group of areas, however, account for the bulk of the Valley's commercial vegetable supply, notably Thimi, Nagades, Imadol and Kirtipur. *Jyapus*, in particular, are exceptional horticulturists and the Valley's impressive fresh vegetable output owes much to their painstaking labour. A recurring problem that farmers face is the shortage and rising cost of chemical fertilisers. Also, the State has not been able to devise agricultural programmes with the Valley specifically in mind.

The primary aim of most Valley farmers has been to try to produce sufficient grain for the family's annual needs. Even so, 68 per cent of the households have to buy rice in the market. A family of six needs about 10 *ropanis* of decent quality land to live securely on farm output, and there is simply not enough land to make this possible. Besides, whatever acreage is available is distributed unevenly. In consequence, there are few full-

time farming households left in the Valley; most rural males work part- or full-time outside agriculture. This had led to increased agricultural burden for women and increased dependence on hired labour.

A PREDATORY RELATIONSHIP

Cities do produce some benefits for their outlying areas, and in some respects the villagers of the Valley lead better lives today than they did three decades ago. Many rural areas now have access to roads, transport, electricity, schools and health facilities. On the whole, however, the relationship of the Valley's major towns to the periphery can only be described as predatory.

Walking down the extremely dirty alleys of many agro-towns, or inside the unlit, smoke-filled thatched huts of Valley peasants, it is difficult to visualise that these villagers live next door to the Himalayan region's most metropolitan, affluent and populated city. The quality of life in some of the agro-towns like Khokana and Tokha can only be described as appalling.

Both the young and the old in the villages are confronted by a metropolis that is expanding, fast-paced, expensive and culturally and economically inaccessible. The villagers have had to contend with the city's inflationary economy without significant increase in their own income. There are items to consume but fewer resources with which to buy them. While this is a nationwide problem, its scale and effect are especially heightened in rural Kathmandu because of the proximity to the city lights.

Most villagers want to adopt at least some of the ways of the city — electronic gadgets, modern clothes, education, new foods, furniture, and new housing styles. These habits cannot be supported by farming alone. There are only two things that the *kanth* possesses that have cash value — land and labour. Labour has been marketed for generations, which leaves only land. Among a certain section of the rural population, therefore, the sale of land represents the only way to shore up the household economy, both in dealing with inflation as well as in obtaining cash liquidity to buy in the city shops. Those who do not own much land have to either "sell out" or continue with subsistence farming, supplemented by low-paying off-farm work. In either case, the prospects for steady increase in living standards are not good.

One thing is certain: as more Valley lands are sold to non-farmers, there will be a progressively larger pool of poor, landless, under-employed, under-educated, ex-farmers and their families. These families will be in great need of stable sources of cash income. The quicker the authorities become aware of this looming problem the better they will be able to plan for the economic rehabilitation of displaced peasants.



Kirtipur skyline

UN

RURAL TO REAL ESTATE

The urbanisation process of the Valley has neither sought the participation of the villagers it is displacing nor provided them with long-term benefits. Villagers have always been regarded as a large pool of cheap labour, and their farm-lands, one large pool of real estate for expansion.

The national dream since the late 1950s, and, indeed, the measure of social success, has been to own a house in the Valley. Every time there is an economic windfall for a community in Nepal, its first act is to purchase real-estate in Kathmandu. Successful, educated and ambitious migrants have always been on the lookout for a plot, large or small, here. Marwaris, ex-Gurkha soldiers, and the successful business-people from Manang are only the most recent groups of property-buyers. As the country becomes more physically integrated and with development remaining Kathmandu-centric, it is not clear how successive generations of migrants are going to be able to own homes in the Valley. Kathmandu will continue to act as a national magnet, but there are limits to its physical growth.

Why is there land for sale at all? First, the sale of land has become a necessary evil for farmers caught in the city-driven inflationary spiral. Second, and equally important, since much of the Valley lands are owned by non-cultivator landlords (*talsing*), the real-estate value of land clearly outweighs the rent value paid by the tenants (*mohi*).

Thousands of tenants have been pauperised through the conversion of rural farms into real estate. Landlords are not beneath using nefarious tactics to evict tenants in order to realise the real-estate value of the land. By law, tenants must receive 25 per cent of the price of the land, but in practice they often receive little or nothing.

The incredibly rapid rate of land sales currently ongoing in the *gaon bikas samitis* of Kathmandu Valley reflects the economic helplessness of the villagers. Poverty, and a pre-existing inequality in land-ownership, has meant that villagers do not have the deciding voice. Much of the proceeds from land transactions accrue to selected village elites and middlemen rather than to the petty-owners and to tenants. The price of real estate might be astronomical, but in many cases the tenants and owner-cultivators get only a fraction of the sale price. Continuing poverty in the villages is subsidising real-estate costs to urban dwellers.

THE MIDAS TOUCH

Given the inability of the economically weakened villages to fight back, the full urbanisation of Kathmandu Valley is inevitable. Things might have been different had the rural areas of the Valley had a bigger share of development funds, which would have led to more services and facilities. Had the process of the Valley's

development been more under the control of the rural residents, there might have been a possibility of the Valley hamlets and agro-towns evolving into larger and more viable inter-connected towns and cities themselves. At the moment, on their own, the villagers have no capacity to become anything other than villagers; they collectively await the Midas touch of the city.

Instead of trying to energise the rural settlements, just the opposite has happened. Take the case of Kirtipur. This hilltop town south-east of Patan had a viable, developed and differentiated urban structure until it was strangled by governmental machinations. Kirtipur, a single city, was sub-divided into four panchayats (Layaku, Chitu-Bihar, Paliphal, and Bahiri Gaon), just so that the total population of divided Kirtipur would remain under the 10,000 threshold that would have given it a metropolitan status. The same applies to several other dense urban and quasi-urban settlements in the Valley. By not defining these areas as "urban", politicians and planners have been able to ignore the responsibility of improving and upgrading the housing, basic utilities and other services.

BUDDHIST PILGRIMAGE

Perhaps the urban residents of Kathmandu, in their cosmopolitan and westward-looking straitjacket, would be more willing to preserve some of what they still have if they stopped and considered the sanctity that permeates their Valley's past and present, its soil, rocks and rivers. While most educated Nepalis are conversant with Kathmandu Valley's artistic heritage, the legacy of the Lichhavi and Malla periods, they have yet to fully comprehend that the Valley is valued as a spiritual centre by believers across the Himalayan region.

There is ample scriptural reference to show that the Valley occupies an all-important place in the traditions and myths of Mahayana Buddhist culture, which encompasses Tibet and the high Bhotia valleys from Ladakh eastwards through Nepal, Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh. Lumbini was where the Sakyamuni Buddha was born, and the sites associated with his life are scattered around Bihar. But numerous "intermediary Buddhas" have links to the Valley, including the most-revered Padma Sambhava.

Known to the faithful as Guru Rimpoche, Padma Sambhava was responsible for establishing the *dharma* in Tibet during the 7th century A.D. When the sage first journeyed to Tibet, he is said to have passed through Kathmandu. On subsequent visits, we are told,

Despite the Valley's long tradition of having dispersed agro-urban settlements, community leaders and planners must ask themselves why the State has never initiated systematic plans to revitalise and restore these native urban forms. One thing is certain: the issue has never purely been one of lack of funds.

In order to provide new dynamism to the rural areas, the importance of re-classifying large agro-towns as 'cities' and investing in the infrastructure of rural Kathmandu must be emphasised. Only with renewed prosperity in the villages through an expansion of local employment, suitable land reform, and genuine local self government will some form of controlled growth continue. If today's unchecked and unfair takeover of rural land continues, Kathmandu Valley will undoubtedly become the most polluted, unsightly, and economically and environmentally unstable pockets of urban living in the entire Himalayan region.

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he meditated in many caves in and around the Valley. A cave at Pharping in the Valley's south is considered especially important. A temple was recently constructed at this site by Jagdrol Rimpoche.



Baudha by telephoto.

The Baudha stupa, once far removed from the Valley towns, but now swallowed by the city's expansion, is among the holiest shrines of Tibetan Buddhists. Most of the important lineage holders of the Buddhist faith have either a monument or a monastery built within the spiritual sphere of the stupa. Durbod Rimpoche, the principle lineage holder of the Nyingma-pa tradition lies in state in his monastery near the stupa.

Most residents of Kathmandu would not know it, but every year thousands of pilgrims from Sikkim, Bhutan and Ladakh visit the Valley every year to pray at Baudha and other revered holy sites both large and small.

Whether the Kathmandu residents recognise it or not, therefore, the wide expanse of their Valley plays an important part in the spiritual cosmos of the Tibetan Buddhists of the entire Himalayan region. That is one more reason not to let the Valley die.



Primeval Kathmandu at Gokarna

B. RAUNYAR

How Green is My Valley

Forests on the Valley rim have a heavy burden: they must help maintain bio-diversity, sustain the rural population, and prepare for the recreational needs of an urbanising Valley floor.

by Mahendra Shrestha

The woods in and around Kathmandu Valley have always fulfilled the rural and urban demand for firewood, charcoal, fodder and timber. While the rural population has remained steady, a fast expansion in the city population has led to an increase in the demand for forest products.

The area under forest cover has declined rapidly, making up only 18 per cent (7,616 ha) of Valley area, according to 1990 figures. Overuse of the woodlands led to a loss of 1,360 ha of forest cover between 1972 and 1986. About 1,840 ha has been converted to grasslands, some of it from forests, during the same period. Agricultural land decreased 17 per cent to 20,320 ha, primarily due to takeover by urban sprawl.

While the green cover has disappeared over much of the Valley floor, some of the original flora and fauna are still to be found in the forests on the four main ridge-tops on the Valley rim, namely, Phulchoki, the highest at 2,765 m, Shivapuri (2732 m), Nagarjun (2188 m) and Chandragiri (2432 m).

TREES AND DAMSELFLIES

Wildlife specialists know the Valley as one of the larger inter-montane basins in the "Lesser Himalayan Midland Zone". The sub-tropical broad-leaved forest of Schima and Castanopsis (*Chilauney* and *Katus* in Nepali) are dense. Floral diversity is particularly marked in Phulchoki, which harbours 571 angiosperms, two gymnosperms and 80 species of ferns and related species. Over 100 species of mushroom sprout on Shivapuri hill, including a species known as *Lactarius pleurotoideus*, which was not known to be found in the Himalayan region until very recently.

Although their numbers are dwindling, some of the undisturbed forest pockets still contain typical mid-land mammals like the rhesus macaque (which also frequent religious sites like Pashupati and Swayambhu), Himalayan black bear, wild dog, jungle cat, leopard, barking deer, civet, marten, squirrel, mongoose, common otter, wild boar, and the pangolin ant-eater.

Nearly 300 species of birds have been observed in the Valley. The Phulchoki area, a veritable ornithologist's Eden, hosts at least 259

permanent and migratory species. The forests of Shivapuri, Nagarjun and Phulchoki also support about 325 species of butterfly. Only Shivapuri, however, harbours the *Ephiophlebia laidlawi*, which is one of the two living species of damselflies in the world.

The responsibility of managing the forest areas is divided among three District Forest Offices of Bhaktapur, Kathmandu and Lalitpur. However, while these offices have tried, the problem of deforestation is much bigger for their financial resources or political clout to tackle. The main problem is the demand for firewood, charcoal, and timber by the growing urban population. There is also clearing of land for settlement, the invasion of forests for harmful recreation such as uncontrolled picnicking, and many other "negative interventions", including the quarrying of stones, especially marked on Chandragiri hill.

Lack of proper monitoring and the absence of public participation in forest management have led to the failure of afforestation. To circumvent this problem, user groups were formed to manage areas designated as community forests, but these, too, saw little success as true participation by villagers was limited. The ridges of Shivapuri and Nagarjun and the Valley-floor enclave of Gokarna, encompassing an area of 162 sq km of prime forest, are today protected in the traditional sense, with extremely limited admission for the locals.

FORESTS FOR RECREATION

As Kathmandu becomes more and more a Valley of city people, and as the urban economy takes root, and concepts of leisure-time activity emerge, the outlying forests are bound to be increasingly used as recreational spots rather than as suppliers of forest products. For this reason, it has become imperative to maintain and manage existing forest areas in and around the Valley.

Presently, locations like Godavari, Surjebainyak, Nagarkot, Dakshinkali, Nagarjun, Balaju, Gokarna and Thankot have developed as



Chandragiri, nearly shorn of trees, above Chobar's cement haze.

KUNDA

recreational grounds, but the majority of visitors picnic and a very small minority hike. This is bound to change as the city youths are introduced to, the physical and psychological rewards of hiking, camping and other means of communing with nature. It would be unfortunate to find, when that time arrives and the Valley's youths turn to nature, that the forests have all disappeared.

For these reasons, it is important to preserve the quality of the Valley's forest cover—not just for "love of nature", but with the urbanising trends in mind. The future urban quality of life will only be enhanced if the city-dwellers have easy access to well-preserved natural areas. Phulchoki, because of the accessibility provided by the major road to Godavari at its base, will be the first forested area that will have to respond to this new need of city-dwellers. It is therefore urgent to develop and implement a plan for Phulchoki's renewal, one which would also bring benefits to surrounding rural population.

In fact, the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation does have plans to protect Phulchoki, which has seen a grievous loss of plant and animal species over the course of four decades. Due to past experience with walled-in sanctuaries elsewhere, villagers on all sides of Phulchoki have come to view protected areas as threats to livelihood. With past experience in mind, the objective is to try to preserve Phulchoki's unique habitat while maintaining the villagers' link to the forest as a resource base. Perhaps it will be a unique effort in which the villagers and city people both benefit from the protection of a green Valley habitat. ▽

M. Shrestha is Conservation Officer for the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation and is involved with Phulchoki plans.

Vanishing Wetlands

The original habitat of Kathmandu Valley included not only forests, which were abundant, but wetlands along the slow-moving streams and rivers on the Valley floor. These wetlands provided riparian habitats to resident wild fowl and served as stops for migratory species. Today, many wetlands along the Bagmati and Bishnumati rivers have been destroyed by diversion of water for irrigation and industry, pollution, land development and sand excavation from river-beds. The monsoonal flood-waters which used to help maintain the riparian habitat do not attain their former levels due to the lowering of the riverbed.

The lowering of groundwater levels has also played a significant role in the destruction of wetlands. Bar-headed geese, a migrating species, used to be a common sight along the flood-plain of the Bishnumati, adjacent to where the Balaju Industrial Estate is today. They do not fly in anymore. — M. Shrestha

Opinion

By the Rich, for the Rich

by Ramesh Manandhar

I am a Nepali who has lived abroad for the past ten years, and have visited Kathmandu about once a year during the period. The annual visits have provided me with the opportunity to gauge the accelerating urbanisation of the Valley and to compare it to other cities of the developing world. In each of my visits, I have had reason for yet more alarm: where is this Valley heading?

Returning home after a day in the city in early January this year, I noticed, for the first time, black soot in my sneeze. It is unnerving to think that Kathmandu is exhibiting the same symptoms as Bombay, which is 40 times larger in terms of population, and Mexico City, 80 times larger and the biggest city in the world. It took these two metropolises more than a hundred years to attain the level of pollution which Kathmandu has picked up within all of three decades.

Like the tourist, I notice the number of new buildings, cars, level of noise, and dust pollution. But I am a Newar, and therefore also have the opportunity to observe close at hand the degeneration of the central city core.

The decline is both physical and cultural. There is hardly any debate as beautiful old buildings are demolished to be replaced by monstrous concrete structures. By bulldozing over the old, we are trying to eradicate the traces of our past.

I am reminded of a remark by one of my teachers, who came as a tourist: "If one of your traditional buildings is placed in New York or in any major city of a developed country, it will be a museum on its own. Here you have a whole city..."

One can say without hesitation that Kathmandu Valley's problems will increasingly be that of the poor. As the mounting air pollution aggravates health problems in the city, the rich can pay for medical bills and hospitalisation costs. The poor have little choice but to inhale the exhaust of cars, trucks and buses and the dust of the roads. Their lungs will be destroyed and life expectancy reduced. And each year, new pharmacies sprout up in Valley.

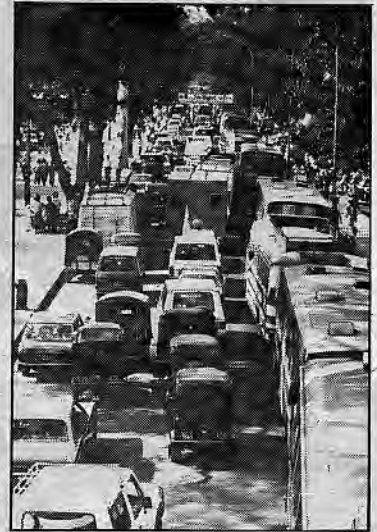
Much of the mal-development is carried out by the rich for the rich, at the cost of the community. Developers are not bothered to house the poor, and neither, it seems, are the authorities. Governments everywhere have acted with cruelty in demolishing squatter camps, the self-help settlements of the very poor. In the first days of January, the new popular Government of Nepal also moved to bulldoze squatter huts in Kathmandu. No one asked why the rich are not being penalised for their unplanned expansion into the Valley's space. And no one is demanding governmental accountability for showing no spine on matters of urban development.

The high value of real estate in Patan and Kathmandu is shocking. How is it that the price of land in the capital of one of the world's poorest countries compares (in absolute terms) with values in downtown Bombay or Melbourne, Australia? I have an overseas dollar income, but cannot even think of purchasing a plot in Kathmandu town. And yet, Kathmandu land continues to be bought and sold. The property values have reached these incredible levels due to land speculation, and it is time that the Nepali Government acted decisively to stop the land price spiral, otherwise the poor will have no choice but to begin to grab urban land for sheer survival.

There is no doubt that Kathmandu will continue to urbanise rapidly in the days to come, barring a man-made or natural catastrophe. No amount of force or regulation will stop the process. And urbanisation does have its advantages. It ushers in innovations and allows the rapid development of the informal sector and economy. The better-informed urban residents act as a trigger for social change and hold Governments accountable to the people. The recent political change in Nepal was in large part a product of urban struggle, and thus of urbanisation.

The question is not whether we need or do not need urbanisation. The challenge is to manage urbanisation and reduce its extreme negative impacts. Growth is inevitable, as is change. But a handful of elites must not be allowed to direct growth for their own ends, as is happening today in Kathmandu Valley. Because no one is going to give it to them, the urban poor—old residents and new—must develop the capacity to exercise their right to participate in the urban development of the Valley.

R. Manandhar is presently on leave from the Papua Guinea University, where he is Senior Lecturer. He is member of the Habitat International Coalition and the Asian Coalition for Housing.



Valley Tourism

The Shine is Off

As the Valley loses its lustre, there is less that attracts the tourist. Environmental and cultural erosion is akin to economic suicide for a nation so dependent on Valley-based tourism.

by **Bijaya Lal Shrestha**

When Simo Milojevic, the chief of the World Esperanto Association, returned to Kathmandu in September 1991 after 30-years, he was sorely disappointed with the noise and filth that had overtaken the Valley. Kathmandu was beginning to look like any chaotic Third World city, whereas it had emerged in the mid-1950s with its centuries-old atmosphere intact — a prize destination for international travelers.

Milojevic, a Serb, arrived in 1961 for a few months to teach Esperanto, an "experimental" Indo-European language. At that time, he remembers, there were only two good budget restaurants in Kathmandu, the Uttam and Aroma. "I could not afford the outrageously expensive Royal Hotel or Hotel Coronation." There were no tourist coaches. When a handful of tourists could be gotten together, guides borrowed friends' cars and made do.

"But if you ask me which Kathmandu I prefer, as a foreigner I prefer the quiet, simple, laid back Valley of the early 1960s."

Milojevic is not alone in his harking back to earlier, more innocent, times. The Valley's old-world charm is rapidly eroding. Today, major parts of Kathmandu and Patan towns are indistinguishable from the congested, built-up quarters of other South Asian cities. The changes are readily obvious to the traveler who visits after a long hiatus, much more so than to the resident who lived through them.

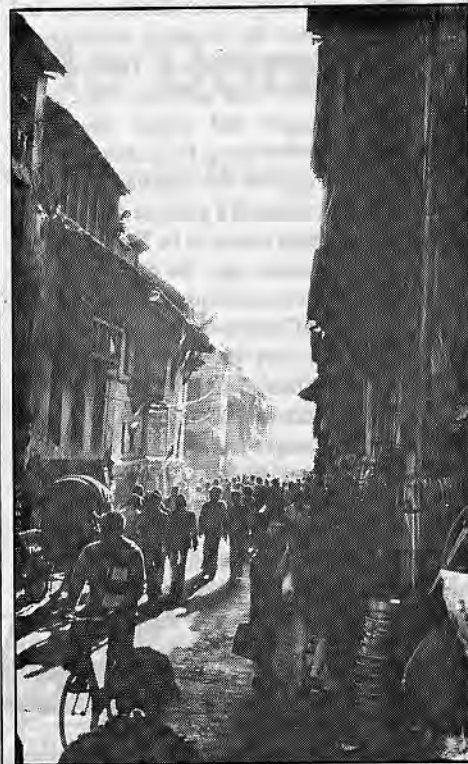
Tourists in their hundreds of thousands collectively contribute their share to changing the cultural facade of Kathmandu Valley. The development aid business and the inherent tilt towards "westernisation" among urbanites are the other major factors that have helped change the urban face of Kathmandu.

TOURISM MAINSTAY

For the tourist, Nepal's charms may be divided into three categories: the scenic beauty of the High Himalaya (accessed through trekking and RNAC's mountain flights), the attraction of the hill ethnic culture (of the Sherpas, Thakalis, and others), and the cultural allure of the Kathmandu Valley. More than 180,000 of the 255,000 tourists arriving every year have the Valley as their primary destination. Since the Nepal excursion is often an add-on to package tours of India, tourists have only three or four days to spend here, for which the Kathmandu sights are sufficient.

Kathmandu Valley is the mainstay of Nepal's tourism industry, which nationally brings in about US\$ 70 million annually and provides direct employment to more than 15,000. There are numerous ancillary benefits: tourism spawns everything from laundry services to poultry farms. Elsewhere, towns and cities which rely on their ancient architectural and cultural heritage to attract tourists strive to maintain their traditional

urban character. The strict zoning codes of the old quarters of European towns are meant to do just that. The Valley's major assets in terms of tourism are its Malla-period houses, its three durbar squares, its *bahal* courtyards, and sunken water spouts. If tourism is to continue, it is essential to keep those houses standing, the squares clean, the *bahals* intact and the water spouts running.



Old Ason, winter afternoon.

KMD

Preservation and conservation are not merely products of an emotional attachment to the past, but rather are critical to the economic health of the Valley. Maintain the character of Machindra Bahal of Patan, or prohibit non-traditional architecture from dominating the circle of houses around the Baudha stupa, and the tourists will keep coming. It is better that a 15th century *bahal* earns income by charging entrance fees to tourists than it be razed to provide space for a concrete structure which serves as a garment factory.

Tragically, Kathmandu and Patan towns, in particular, are fast losing their holistic historical unity and ambience — and hence their touristic allure. While their durbar squares survive as museum pieces bereft of context, the flavour of the by-lanes and *bahals* is fast disappearing. While it may be partially true that the lives of the inhabitants have changed enough that the old quarters are no longer viable entities, it is important to "keep up appearances", otherwise why should the tourists bother to come at all? If Venice, in northern Italy, can still sell itself as a Renaissance city (when in fact practically every economic activity derives sustenance from tourism), the towns of Kathmandu Valley have a much easier task. What is "sold" to tourists remains, at least today, by and large, the truth.

FACTS OF KATHMANDU

The very first tourist-eye view of the Valley from an airplane window used to be of the Patan city core surrounded by expanses of softly terraced fields of green gold or grey, depending upon the



Pilot-eye view of Valley smog.

ARNICO K. PANDEY

time of the year. Today, ribbon development and urban sprawl strikes the incoming passenger — and smoking brick kiln chimneys. The sparkling ice cliffs of Ganesh Himal lose their shine as the plane loses height and enters layers of Kathmandu-generated smog. For an instant before the plane lands, right by the runaway threshold, the air traveler can catch a glimpse of a shantytown that was never meant to be Kathmandu.

Just a few years ago, the drive from the airport into town was an unique experience as the broad curve of the Chinese-built highway took in terraced paddies and the lazily meandering Bagmati. Today, this section of the highway is lined with haphazard housing, an ice-cream factory, repair garages and welding shops, and trucks extracting sand from the Bagmati riverbed. The paddy patches are nearly gone with housing overflow from New Baneshwor.

The Valley's air pollution is not merely a concern of environmentalists and public health

officials. It has become a dollars and cents problem for travel agents and hoteliers. "November used to be the month for mountain-watching, once the morning fog lifted," recalls Brian Whyte, a long-time observer of Nepali tourism. "This past November, there was not a day when the mountains were absolutely clear."

As the air gets dirty, so does the rest of the Valley. The tourist still experiences the flavour of the past in the bylanes, but intermingled with that flavour is the odour of uncollected garbage at temple sites, dust and diesel smoke, traffic congestion, and political graffiti. All this, added to the Hong Kong-style pseudo-westernisation of Kathmandu society will soon be enough to kill any notion of the Valley as a tourists' haven.

It speaks to the incredible cultural strength of the Valley towns that visitors are willing to disregard all the bother for a glimpse of old Kathmandu. But the threshold of disgust will soon be reached, after which the number of

tourists will start to decline. An American tourist, a landscape architect, who arrived in early January said later that she was glad to have arrived at night. This spared her the initial shock of seeing the Valley of her dreams turn out to be like any other unsightly Third World urban space.

"The wildest dreams of Kew, are but facts of Katmandu," wrote Rudyard Kipling. The line has been quoted in travel brochures *ad nauseam*, but today it might be gaining a slightly different connotation. Certainly, the decline of the Valley these past decades has been beyond the wildest of dreams.

The sordid facts of Kathmandu are items that will never get into tourist brochures, nor should they. But it is important for the planners and public alike to realise that the days are over when Kathmandu Valley's ancient charms alone would be enough to bring tourists over. Kathmandu was once unique. Today's international travelers have many other choices, in South Asia, Central Asia and elsewhere.

Nepal's mountain tourism is on a solid geological foundations: the mountains themselves will not self-destruct. But Kathmandu's attractions are cultural, and fragile. While congestion, pollution and environmental degradation are the bane of every Third World city, Kathmandu can hardly afford to go the way of Calcutta, Karachi or Patna — they do not depend on tourists.

Valley residents, as well as tourists, deserve a cleaner, nicer Kathmandu. Who knows, perhaps Simo Milojevic will be surprised when he visits the Valley a decade from now. Perhaps we will surprise ourselves. △

B.L. Shrestha reports for the *Rising Nepal* daily.



Directions at Thamel.

B. Rauniar

International Rendezvous

Twenty years ago, Thamel was just a semi-suburb to the north of Kathmandu town, where houses were scattered among fields and vegetable patches. Five ropanis of land did not fetch even NRs 10,000 and people did not venture out of their homes for fear of the spirits or robbers. "It seemed that this place had no future," recalls Karna Shakya, the proprietor of Kathmandu Guest House, who as a student used to pass through Thamel on his way to the Public Science College, which lay to the north of Thamel.

Today, the fields and vegetable patches are gone. Every available square foot has been used up by hotels, restaurants, bookshops, pie shops, travel agencies and other services for tourists. Thamel has become the budget travelers' mecca.

The catalyst for Thamel's transformation was Shakya's Kathmandu Guest House, which opened in 1973 and initially housed Peace Corps volunteers. Soon, budget travelers began to arrive holding little chits with the Thamel address of Shakya. The travel writers, too, discovered Kathmandu Guest House and the rooms have not been empty since. Shakya, a forester by training, encouraged his next door friends to convert their homes into lodges and restaurants. The transformation of Thamel had begun.

Thamel picked up where Jhochhen left off. Located at the shadow of Kathmandu's old durbar, Jhochhen earned brief notoriety as a hippie haven in the early 1970s. It was known as "Freak Street". Of a different breed, today's budget travelers prefer Thamel.

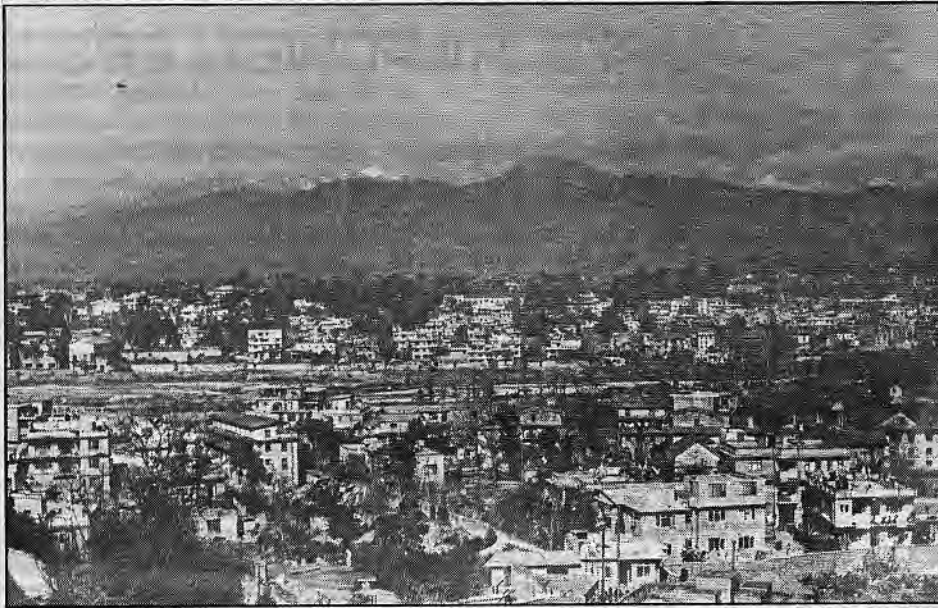
Today, Thamel is an international rendezvous. They come from all over, professors, doctors, writers and students, all in casual attire, to browse at Pilgrim's Book House or dine at K.C.'s. And Jimmy Carter tried the ices at Rum Doodle.

—B.L. Shrestha

Getting Around

Kathmandu Valley has approximately 680 km of motorable roads. Of these, 41 km is classified as highways, 891 km as feeder roads, 254 km as district roads, and 304 km as urban roads. Minibus services are the mainstay of public transport, and over 500 operate daily, carrying more than 150,000 passengers. Three-wheel "tempos" exceed 1,800 in number and carry about 55,000 passengers daily. There are 1,900 regular taxis. 150 long-distance buses depart daily, 105 to the west via Thankot, 34 east via Dhulikhel and 11 to Trisuli to the north-west. Almost 60 percent of journeys taken every day by Valley residents are on foot. Nine per cent travel by bicycle. Five per cent use motorcycles, four per cent use cars, one percent use taxis. The remaining 21 per cent use buses and mini-buses.

(Source: *Kathmandu Valley Urban Development Plans & Programmes*)



Kathmandu Sprawl : Shivapuri in background.

B. RAUNIAR

which supplies the city. Of course, Sundarijal has electricity.

Despite their relative good fortune, however, Sundarijal residents too have lost homes, highland fields and livestock sheds to SWWRP's eviction programme. During the past three years, they and their neighbours in Mulkharka have had new visitors — army patrols enforcing Project regulations. Households, unable to get wood from the forest, have had to resort to burning residues of rice, wheat, corn and millet, which earlier went into fertiliser or fodder.

Almost all the households in Mulkharka and Sundarijal, however, have been unable to do without collecting *some* firewood — which they collect from Shivapuri forest itself. Some send children on forays because they can evade the soldiers more easily. At other times, adults sneak into the forest before dawn or after dark. One Sundarijal resident commented that, by closing the forest, SWWRP had actually negated the traditional conservation practices which had existed in his village. While he and his neighbours once took only dead branches and were concerned about the longevity of the forest, people now greedily took whatever they could get.

Fodder and grazing land have become scarce, and the villagers are forced to stall-feed because seasonal grazing is limited to their own land. By and large, they have been forced to keep fewer cows, buffaloes and goats. Reduced crop residue and cow dung has hurt crop productivity. One Guring woman estimates that the yield of her fields is down by half, and more than half of households surveyed in Sundarijal said that they were being forced to buy chemical fertiliser.

As if this were not enough, wild boars pose further problems. Boars which arrived as gifts from the Russian Government to King Birendra, were released in Shivapuri during the early phase of the Project. Since hunting is prohibited, the

boars have multiplied and become a menace to the villagers and their crops. Crop yields have declined dramatically as the boars raid fields all over the area. Responding to complaints from Mulkharka residents, the Project officials determined that farmers could kill boars caught on their own land. But the real problem lies within the forest, where there must be better control of the boar population.

The combination of these hardships have made it difficult for the villagers to maintain family farms. Some villagers feel that the Project objectives would not be affected if there were a permit system allowing them to collect from the forest at designated times. In fact, Larry Tennyson, the Project's Chief Technical Advisor Officer (FAO) agreed that this was the only viable option. The villagers will never be able to overcome the fuel and fodder deficit unless they are allowed to use part of the protected resources, he says.

Among the people of Mulkharka, however, there is a sense of hopelessness. Such is their desperation that many express a desire to be evicted by the Project, even though they have not received official notice of eviction. "If the Project would give us 25,000 rupees per *ropani* (0.05 hectare), everyone in this village would move," said the school teacher.

It is clear that the Mulkharka families cannot exist much longer under present circumstances. Many have no clear vision of where to go, what to do, or how their lives will change; they are simply responding to immediate pressures.

FATE OF THE EVICTED

Even though some households in Mulkharka might want to take compensation and move to escape their present travails, the experience of those who have been evicted is not very heartening. Shilmati had been a small settlement

just west of Mulkharka. Its residents were evicted in 1983-84 with compensation of NRs 5,000 per *ropani* of unirrigated *bari* land. At that time, one *ropani* of land around Sundarijal, where most Shilmati households resettled, was NRs 20,000 per *ropani*. One Brahmin family which had owned a house, a livestock shed and ten *ropanis* now owns a single *ropani* of land and shares a house with a relative. A family that settled in the Kathmandu suburbs fared much worse, losing eight *ropanis* of land for a rented house and no land.

The women of the two villages are particularly skeptical about the benefit of the Shivapuri Project. Almost unanimously they claim that the Project benefits the *sarkar*. A few women had planted new vegetables obtained from the Project, and one had received training in vegetable cultivation, but most had never personally been met by the local extension worker. The women's clearest images of SWWRP were linked to the difficulties it had brought into their lives: fewer livestock, more wild boars, and the scarcity of once-plentiful fuelwood, fodder and fertiliser.

When interviewed, the women of Mulkharka seemed to be more knowledgeable than their husbands or sons about which local tree species yielded the best fuel, fodder and timber. Despite their expertise, almost all the women of Mulkharka today consider forest management the responsibility of the Government. SWWRP has, ironically, succeeded in ensuring that local women, the forest's heaviest users, are not committed to meeting the Project's objectives.

WASTED EFFORT

While the FAO project has tried to alleviate some of these pressures, the condition of the villagers has not changed. Recently, Mulkharka villagers proposed to abandon current cropping and to concentrate entirely on fruit tree cultivation. They asked the Project for saplings and a commitment to provide food rations until the trees matured.

The agency provided 350,000 seedlings for community forests (known earlier as Panchayat Forests) within and around the Shivapuri boundaries. Although these forests had developed restrictions against indiscriminate use, only a few villagers — and no women — were involved in their management. The context was hardly conducive to collective planning, with even the forest guard stealing fuelwood. One Mulkharka resident complained, "In fact, since the Army began patrolling, many families have begun to collect exclusively from the community forest, where the guards will not catch them."

FAO also introduced vegetable cultivation, mushroom farming, beekeeping, fruit tree plantations, smokeless *chulo* (cooking-stoves)



Kathmandu Sprawl : Shivapuri in background.

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and wage labour in SWWRP works. But the problems remain unresolved, say the villagers. Mushroom cultivators could not turn a profit due to the low level of production. Those who had tried fruit had a similar story to tell. Said a Tamang farmer who was considered one of the more successful fruit-growers, "Those who tried to sell fruit would have made more money working as wage labourers." The "improved" *chulos* were not useful for preparing cooking *dhindo*, the grain paste consumed by poorer households, nor could they prepare rice for more than six persons.

As for the promised income from wage labour, Mulkharka residents who tried contracting for construction of the motorable road within the Shivapuri watershed said the outside contractors, who had contacts within the SWWRP, always brought in labour from elsewhere.

All these programmes share another weakness. They inevitably favour those residents who are relatively more educated, innovative and rich enough to take some risk — usually of

Bahun and Chhetri landholders in Sundarijal. Only those with surplus land, for example, have the margin to experiment with fuelwood and fodder plantations. "We have to plant our crops," exclaimed one woman from Sundarijal, "how can we plant trees that will make shade and ruin the crops?"

WHAT NEXT?

The Shivapuri Project's rules, extension programmes and community forests are but a series of disassociated, if sometimes well-intended, efforts that have no meaning to the people for whom they were intended. In the end, little has been done to alleviate the pain of those who have lost so much due to the zoning off of Shivapuri.

Management of the natural resources of the Valley rim *must* include and benefit local people. Efforts at controlling forest degradation simply cannot succeed without the commitment of the locals. *Ad hoc* measures, such as the introduction of improved *chulos*, vegetable cultivation and

tree plantation, do not address the fundamental insecurities that farmers in and around Shivapuri face every day. They cannot sustain farming practices but are unable to move because of the high price of land elsewhere. And yet they expect that they will ultimately meet the fate of neighbours who have been evicted. They understand the finiteness of forest resources, yet present circumstances require them to take whatever they can now in order to survive.

These are the levels of concern to which the Shivapuri Project and its partners must respond even as they try to meet the original goal of protecting Kathmandu's drinking water supply. That water will taste bitter, unless the villagers of Shivapuri are taken care of first. △

M. Shrestha Joshi is enrolled in a rural planning programme at the Asian Institute of Technology, Bangkok. K.N. Rankin is a student of city and regional planning at Cornell University, United States. The research for this article was sponsored by the Center for Women and Development, Kathmandu, and the Center for International Studies, Cornell University.



"Communion with the Infinite"

by Carl Pruscha

"The care and veneration shown by the Valley's inhabitants for their settlements and towns, their temples and holy places, are closely matched by their concern for the natural environment, in the sowing and harvesting of the rice which is their staple diet.

Thus, farming becomes an artistic creation. Over the centuries, the face of the land has been shaped by this process. Thousands of terraces have been constructed and landscape veined by countless canals to irrigate the growing rice. This great task of landscaping has been carried out with no other tools but simple hoes.

Now the valley has hardly an acre of land which has not been pressed into use. Here man has genuinely conquered the earth — but without destroying it. In close creative interplay, man and nature have developed together. When the dry winter etches the grey tones of the terraces against

the white backdrop of mountain peaks, the handiwork of man is most clearly seen for a few short weeks. Soon the heavy monsoon rains turn the picture into a waterscape, with hundreds of small lakes rising in tiers. Then, very soon, the rice begins to grow — looking from a distance like light moss — and fills the landscape with innumerable shades of green. Finally comes the ripening, and the rice takes on a burning brightness ranging from yellow to orange.

The settlements themselves, built of the same material and the same earth, also change with the seasons, always maintaining their essential relationship with the soil on which they stand.

Until now this people has preserved intact its environment, maintained its traditional way of life based on its system of the extended family and continued undisturbed its communion with the spiritual and the infinite.

But today the people of Kathmandu Valley face a critical choice: whether to build their future quietly on the foundations of their past, and go on living in their paradise, or to opt for a 20th-century way of life so often beset with commercialism and the errors of misapplied technology."

The writer, an Austrian town planner, worked as a United Nations expert in Nepal from 1965 till the mid-1970s. He helped direct a monument survey of the Valley. This excerpt is from a longer piece printed in the December 1974 issue of the *UNESCO Courier*.



Banepa as a Satellite

To counteract the growth of large cities, urban planners suggest promoting the growth of small outlying towns.

by Bishnananda Bajracharya

Banepa, an old market town of 15,000, situated along a long and narrow vale just outside the eastern rim of Kathmandu Valley, is ideally located to serve as a satellite to metropolitan Kathmandu. It is already a trade and transportation hub to be reckoned with, and could help absorb the unchecked expansion that is presently underway in the Kathmandu towns.

Under its resident traders, Banepa has developed as the most dynamic township on the Arniko Highway, linking Kathmandu with Lhasa through the border post of Kodari. Today, Banepa serves as a staging point for the hills east of Kathmandu, in particular the districts of Kavre Palanchok, Sindhupalchok, Dolakha and Ramechhap. The opening of the Lamosangu-Jiri road in 1984 enhanced the town's reach, and there was a spurt of investment in buses and mini-buses by the business community here.

Banepa can be developed to provide off-farm employment to the people of the surrounding region and beyond, and it can serve as a distribution center for consumer goods and collection point for local produce. It can be the hub for the agricultural, educational and social services for which people might otherwise have to travel to Kathmandu.

For all its potential, however, Banepa has a long way to go. It does not yet have the required services and commercial base to serve Kathmandu as a satellite town. Today, it plays only a limited role as a collection center for rural produce such as potatoes, beans and milk. There is little processing of local products for added value, except the rudimentary processing of rice, mustard oil and beaten rice, *chiura*. The town's role is limited to acting as a distribution center for urban consumer goods such as biscuits, cigarettes, sugar, "Mansuli" rice and imported cloth.

With the limited employment opportunities it has to offer, the town has failed to attract migrants from the outlying hill areas who travel instead to Kathmandu, Tarai and India. Due to the good transport link with the capital city, many Banepa residents and nearby villagers commute daily to work in Kathmandu. (The town is 26 kilometers away from Kathmandu's main bus park, or an hour's bus ride away.)

COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGES

What are the barriers to realising Banepa's potential? One major problem is the lack of local government's decision-making power. At the

town level, the resources and technical expertise required to encourage the formation of a larger and more diversified economic base simply do not exist.

All in all, the national Government's policy to concentrate investment in the towns of Kathmandu Valley and in the Tarai has had an adverse impact on hill towns, like Banepa, which have been historically viable urban centers and must have a role to play in the future. The Government needs to change its policy and help develop Banepa by first identifying its comparative advantages.

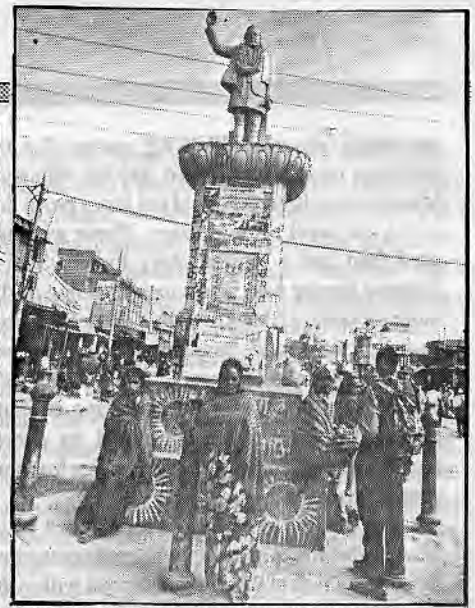
The town's advantages are, of course, its proximity to Kathmandu; its excellent transport access; its historical role as entry point to the eastern hills; its central location vis-a-vis the hinterland settlements like Sanga, Nala, Panauti and Rabiopi; the existence of a local entrepreneurial class; low land and rental prices; and the abundance of cheap labour. These benefits can be judiciously exploited to promote local area development and, by extension, for managing the growth of Kathmandu.

Off-farm employment opportunities have to be expanded if the potential migrants from the eastern hills are to be redirected to Banepa. An encouraging start has already been made by starting a woolen sweater-knitting industry. Other export-oriented industries such as carpet- and garment-making can easily be added. For this, the municipal authorities must organise training for locals in production and marketing, and provide the necessary incentives.

Considering the agricultural surplus of the hinterland, Banepa's agro-processing industries could be diversified to include potato-chips, fruit processing and dairy products. Also, rather than be limited to Banepa, it will be worthwhile to develop the Banepa-Panchkhal valley corridor, which may attract even major industries away from the Valley.

WAITING FOR THE ROAD

Banepa's easy access to the eastern hills, and to Tibet, could easily convert it into a wholesale center for urban consumer goods as well as a major collection center for local produce. For this to happen, it is important to establish a wholesale market in Banepa with parking facilities for trucks, storage godowns and weighing and packing facilities.



Banepa: King Tribhuvan looks west to Kathmandu.

BR

Banepa will come into its own when the Kathmandu-Banepa-Janakpur highway is finally built and links the central hill-Nepal with the eastern Tarai. At that point, Banepa will emerge as the major transportation hub and service center for the eastern region of the country as a whole. The road was first proposed about 30 years ago by what was then known as the Road Transport Organisation (RTO), but it was forgotten in the intervening years. Recently, the plan has received renewed attention and the Japanese Government is reported to be interested in conducting survey and design work. Besides boosting Banepa's status, this highway would considerably lessen the vehicular traffic congestion at the Thankot entry point into Kathmandu and give rise to altered spatial development within the Valley.

It is not necessary, or even desirable, that all future facilities, industrial plants and social services be set up in Banepa alone. The other townships outside of Kathmandu, such as Dhunibesi to the west and Trisuli to the north-west, could be developed to take up roles as satellite towns. The growth of small and intermediate towns in the Tarai and inner-Tarai will also indirectly help put a brake on the rapid growth of Kathmandu.

Kathmandu will continue to grow in the foreseeable future as the political, financial and cultural hub of the country. The development of a small town like Banepa would constitute an effort to better manage Kathmandu's growth rather than to create an alternative to it. At the same time, looking ahead to Banepa's development also means planning for the day when Banepa's own growth might become unmanageable, its neighbourhood congested, and its environment spoiled. Banepa, too, must look to its future and plan, which Kathmandu Valley has failed to do thus far. ▽

B. Bajracharya is an architect and planner presently doing doctoral studies at the University of Hawaii. He is a reader at the Institute of Engineering in Lalitpur.

Himal Discussion: "Limits to growth"

On 13 October 1991, *Himal* organised a panel discussion to cover a limited range of issues on the present and future of Kathmandu Valley. Three themes on the deteriorating social, economic and physical environment of the Valley were addressed. A presentation on each theme was followed by discussion, which were moderated by Ajaya Dixit. Rapporteurs: Manisha Aryal, Bijaya Lal Shrestha. Thanks to Hans Bjoness.

THEME ONE

What are the prerequisites for planning and implementing functions to reverse a situation of deteriorating social economic and physical environment?

PRESENTATION:

Padam Chhetri: The deterioration in social, economic and physical environment occurred given the following: a highly centralised system of decision-making and extraneous factors

influencing decisions; ineffectiveness of local government systems, municipalities and town development committees and investment decisions (in the industrial sector) made outside the planning framework by individuals and even government agencies; the sudden rise of export trade based on air-cargo; no revision of old land-use plans; a very individualistic social behaviour where only personal benefit was considered; highly subsidised infrastructure services for people who could afford it; unwillingness to participate in provisional infrastructure; and services being focused on selected areas, while others were neglected.

Given this background the prerequisites are: willingness to do something at the governmental, institutional and personal level; political commitment, formulation of conceptual framework for physical development of the Valley, which must include land-use and environmental strategy, mobilisation of resources, and an overall guiding vision which incorporates strategies.

DISCUSSION

Hans Schild: Willingness to do something is necessary, a precondition for which is awareness-generation. Strategies, not plans, are needed.

Prafulla Man Pradhan: We have to have an achievable and desirable vision, and infrastructure has to be worked out accordingly. We have to know our goal: where we are at the present and what the gap is. Only then can practical pre-requisites and solutions be worked out.

Bhishnananda Bajracharya: Decentralised urban development and promotion of satellite towns which can re-direct peoples' focus away from the Valley are essential. Industries that depend on raw materials found in the Tarai can be located near the source, with Kathmandu only having specialised services such

as banking. Perhaps it is time to talk about incentives and disincentives, and the social impact of industries, Government policies and development actions on the people of the Valley.

Shivaji Upadhaya: Prevention of Government from holding land would be the most important step for the growth of the Valley. The plans have been coming from technical wings or central headquarters, and people have not been involved. Resources, including manpower, have to be mobilised and peoples' participation sought at all levels.

Indra Bahadur Shrestha: Rapid population growth has not been accompanied by expansion and extension of the urban infrastructure. There are acts and laws which are not practical in the present context and, aided by weak enforcement agencies, have given rise to haphazard growth in the Valley. Minimal budgets are allocated for the poor urban areas and programmes are carried out independently by different agencies. Proper balanced development through conservation might be the best technique to maintain a healthy environment and cultural heritage.

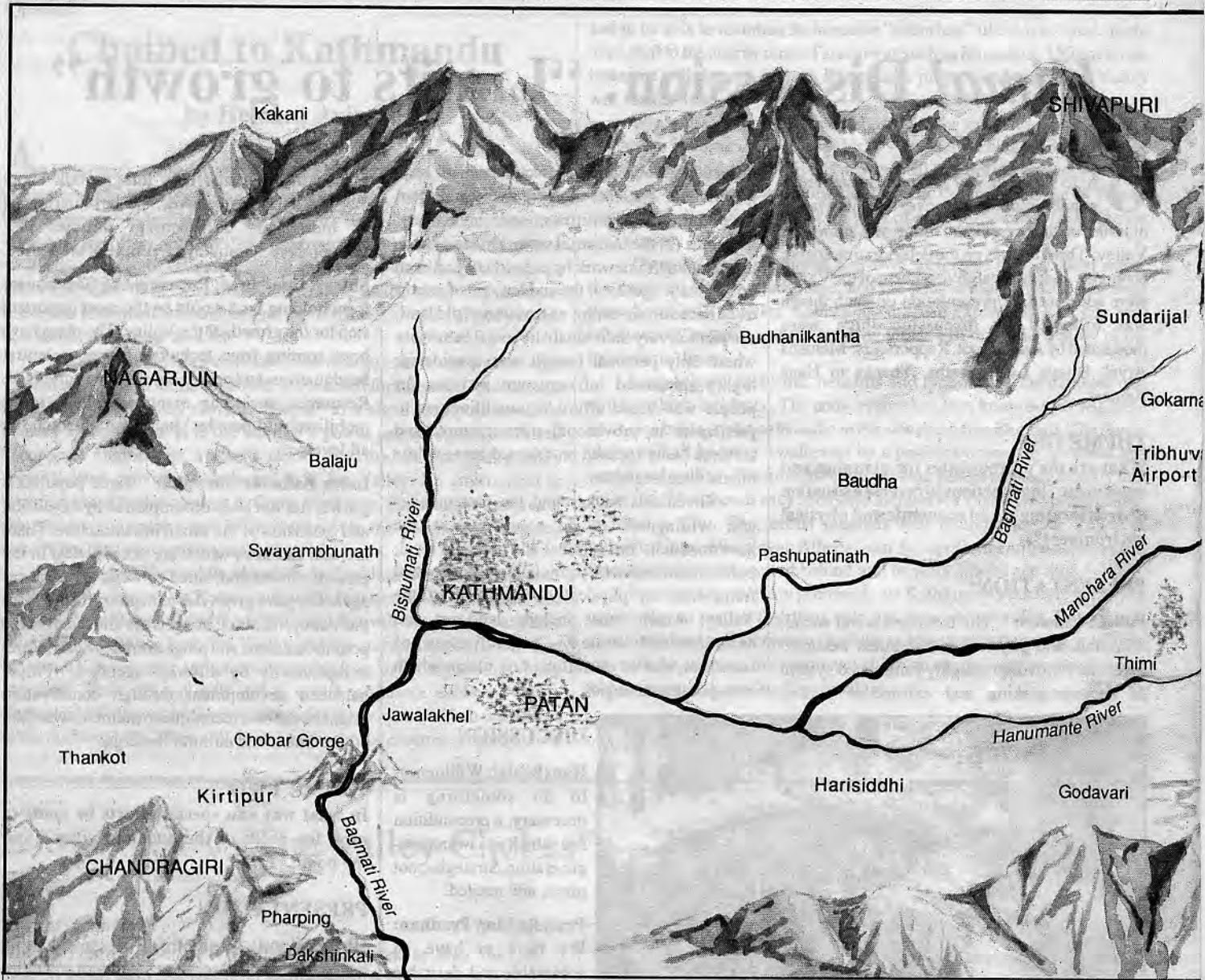
THEME TWO

In what way can special efforts be made to meet the needs of the under-privileged and the poor?

PRESENTATION

Hisila Yami: Centralised planning, with concentration of all resources (modern amenities and facilities) is making Kathmandu Valley a centre of refuge for people (including the have-nots) and making land investment attractive. Land has to be treated as a special asset because it has incremental value and cannot be expanded outside its rigid pocket. Planned urbanisation is possible only when land is under public authority, otherwise it will result in mushrooming of squatters' camps. A by-product of the unplanned urbanisation process, the in-migration and "squatting" can be checked when planning is done in a decentralised manner, hinterlands are developed, satellite towns are created, the gap between urban and rural is minimised and organisations created to distribute land as per need. The problem of squatters must be included in any development process and a special programme set up for the urban poor, with special concentration on women. A strong political will and good organisation is needed to protect the planners' interests from the politicians'.





DISCUSSION:

Sujata Rana: Who are the poor, who are the underprivileged and what are their needs? Instead of spiralling land prices, it might be the unregulated rent which is forcing some of the poor to become squatters.

Indra Bahadur Shrestha: The government should define the real poor first, after which, it must launch some real programmes to increase job productivity, improve access to government services and create earning opportunities in the informal sector. For the real poor, land might be the least of priorities, with food health, education, and so on, coming first.

Prafulla Man Pradhan: Because private land is well looked-after, it is much easier for squatters to squat on public lands. To provide basic needs, the independent sector must be activated.

Bhisnananda Bajracharya: Ultimately, public organisations are manipulated by the politicians.

A more practical idea would be guided land development, with management aspects strengthened.

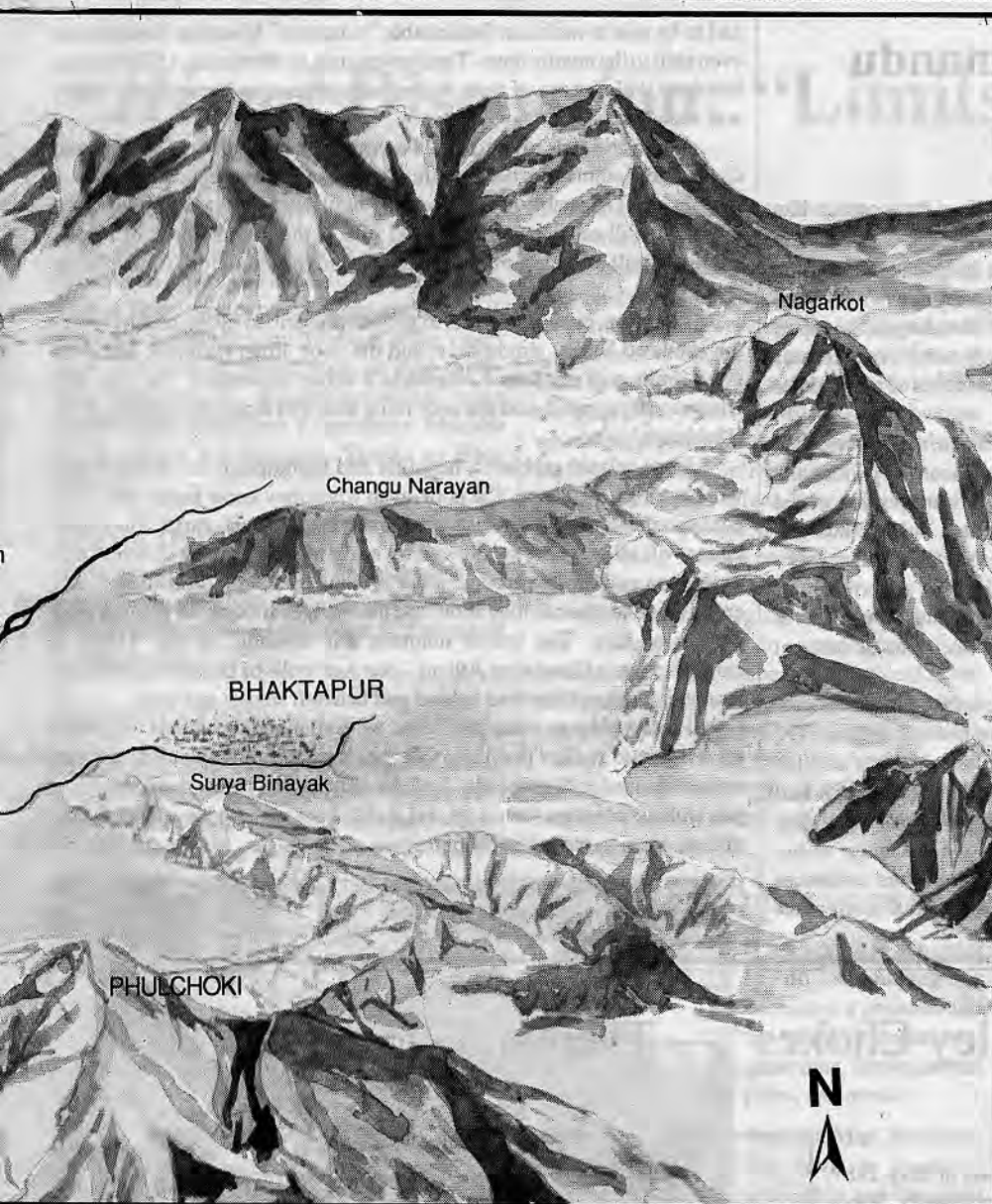
Padam Chhetri: The squatters seem more privileged than under-privileged; they have found a place to stay and seem to be utilising the existing infrastructure and services. Squatters are not problems in Kathmandu. Only because it was unheard of before is it receiving so much attention at present. Migration cannot be checked, because Kathmandu is a magnet and will continue to attract people. We cannot look at urban development strategy as removed from the rural development strategies. A total development strategy which emphasises urban-rural linkages and poverty alleviation at all levels is necessary.

Shivaji Upadhaya: There are people who are even more under-privileged than those who are classified as the poor or as squatters. Services are crucial for these under-privileged. We should

also look into appropriate technologies to meet the demands for various services in any urban setup.

Hans Schild: The Government could initiate a process to acquire land and make it accessible to economically weaker sections. The squatter settlements are not being upgraded because the Government is afraid of "replicability". Homelessness, though, should be taken seriously and if the Government is not able to open up any housing schemes, we must look into improving the settlements they occupy.

Jibgar Joshi: The various political forces in any urban setting must be understood in order to implement plans. Kathmandu is a dynamic and changing city. Rural and urban areas should be simultaneously developed and strong land use regulations and a responsive planning system be set up to accommodate the underprivileged and the poor. Development will go on irrespective of



Courtesy: NEPAL TRAVELLER

what is said, and, for this the forces of change have to be understood.

Padma Ranta Tuladhar: Squatting is a human problem. A revolutionary kind of land reform is needed to redistribute land among the needy.

THEME THREE

What should be done to conserve the cultural and urban physical heritage of Kathmandu Valley?

PRESENTATION

Yogeswor Parajuli: Once the monuments collapse, they cannot be reconstructed. As regards conservation, the decisions have to be forthcoming from both the policy-making and the people's level. Competent bodies like the Department of Archaeology, which is responsible for supervising works in the monument preservation zones, must be made more powerful.

But there should also be a check and balance system to supervise the work of the Department. While carrying out conservation works, it must adhere to specific conservation ethics, especially the Venice Charter. For example they must use the original materials that were used to build the old monuments.

The activities of different sectoral agencies such as the Post Office Services and Electricity Authority must also be co-ordinated. So that post boxes and electric transformers are not placed in sensitive areas. In order to create awareness at the political level, data on the cultural and built environment is necessary. While carrying out conservation and preservation activities, "priorities" must be defined. For instance, the money spent on reconstructing the Chyasil in Deval in Bhaktapur Durbar Square could have helped preserve hundreds of other monuments. A compatible use of the monuments

must be found. Regular inspection should be carried out and the monuments' condition documented.

DISCUSSION

Bhisnananda Bajracharya: In order to preserve old buildings, the building skills also need to be preserved. Therefore, vocational schools to train students should be established. The Department of Archaeology does not have enough architects. At the same time architects do not have much say in how old buildings must be preserved. Some down-to-earth non-governmental organisations are necessary to conserve the monuments, as one can't depend too much on donor agencies.

Hans Bjones: Since we are talking of a living city, in addition to keeping the historical identity, a city must also be economically viable and be a proper place to live in. The Department of Archaeology is facing financial constraints. So what about activating the *guthis*? The areas right next to the monument zones also need to be preserved, as they influence the overall atmosphere.

Sujata Rana: If the local people don't want to preserve, it could be said, why make the effort?

Hans Schild: Democracy is bottom-up process, but one cannot always rely on the people when it comes to conservation. It is not just the people at Durbar Square for whom the square is of interest. It is important to people of Bhaktapur, the country, and beyond, for entire humankind.

Indra Bahadur Shrestha: There is need for a Raj Patra which provides provision for protecting the monuments. At all the temples, monuments and historically important areas, small signboards must be placed which highlight the history of these places. Approval must be required for any kind of development activity in the city centre. At present, the Department of housing asks only private builders for House designs, and government buildings do not need approval. There should be clear-cut scientific delineation of monumental conservation zones.

Hisila Yami: Preservation cannot wait for donor agencies. We should try to generate income on our own. One way would be to rent out some old buildings at nominal rents. Encroachment has taken place in those *patis* which were uninhabited or do not come into regular use. These can, therefore, be converted into community-based libraries, health clinics, and so on.

Padma Ratna Tuladhar: How can we tell the people living in old houses to live there forever, devoid of modern amenities? Our ancestors had made arrangements for preservation of monuments through *guthis*. But land earnings today are very low. So why not sell them and deposit the money in the bank? The interest can help meet the preservation costs.

Chained to Kathmandu

by Hemant Arjyal

As politicians, planners and administrators continue their ostrich-like response to the Valley's ills and woes, one might well ask where all this "development" is leading. As we bury our heads in Kathmandu's filth, what does the future hold? Will the urban sprawl fill the entire Valley floor within the decade and start creeping up the flanks of Chandragiri, Shivapuri and Phulchoki? Will "Greater Kathmandu", which today encompasses Patan and Kathmandu towns, extend eastward across miles of rice paddies and annex Bhaktapur as well?

The Kathmandu environment will have to get much, much worse than it is today before its limits to growth are reached for reasons of politics and economics. The Valley remains "Nepal" to a significant portion of the country's population. It is the country's power center, cultural hub and "economic engine", as a recent report described it. Practically every national-level activity is conducted from the Valley. No government or business can afford to neglect it. Come what may, Kathmandu's grip over the country's economy and its influence over the decisions of national import are likely to remain paramount.

Every upwardly mobile Nepali from Sankhuasabha to Baitadi sees a *dera* (rental premise) in Kathmandu as the first step towards success. The migrant influx from hill and Tarai is a trend that will not dissipate anytime soon. The rural poor from the Valley and the surrounding hills will find more work as seasonal and permanent labourers in the expanding Valley economy. The affluent will either create exclusive enclaves within Kathmandu Valley or, as the road network improves, move their residences to the outlying hills. They will do this to escape the deteriorating city cores

and to be able to maintain fashionable "suburban" lifestyles. Some might even shift to the nearby inner-Tarai towns such as Bharatpur, 150 km away, but none will dispose of their Kathmandu properties because the Valley will remain vital.

While the rich might flee, the rest of the population will remain chained to Kathmandu, because this is where Government sits and where the jobs are. The quality of life, however, will deteriorate year by year. The inner city will cease its centuries-old role as the fountainhead of Nepali culture. It will provide *dera* for the poor of mixed ethnicities from all over the country.

There are, certainly, limits to growth prescribed by the lack of water, the insulated Valley atmosphere, and the poor urban facilities. But even these limits will not stop Kathmandu's urban expansion. The city will continuously expand, and the only thing that will dip is the quality of the inhabitants' lives.

Lung-related problems, hepatitis and typhoid are the diseases that will have high incidence. The poor, even when they know better, will have no choice but to continue to bathe in the sewage-laden Bagmati. The floodplains will all be gone, swallowed by a jumble of runaway concrete and unplanned gullies. The ground-water is being mined so thoughtlessly that entire neighbourhoods may soon find themselves sinking, as is happening in Mexico City. The tourist numbers will dwindle as our Valley is converted into a Himalayan Athens—our Acropolis of Durbar Squares and mountain views obliterated behind and beneath smoke and dust.

Pressured by so many problems, we Kathmandu residents will wake up one day to realize that their vale has become unlivable. But we will remain chained to Kathmandu. And the saddest part is that there is no one, yet, with the courage, the vision and ability to organise a way out of the pit that we seem to have dug for ourselves.

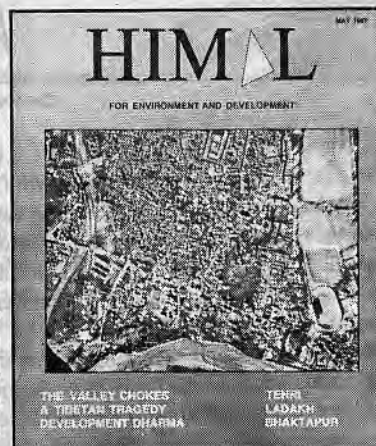
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"The Valley Chokes" — Then and Now

THEN

Himal's prototype issue ("Vol 0/No 0"), published in May 1987, dealt in detail with the pollution problems of Kathmandu. It was entitled, "The Valley Chokes". Among other things, the issue raised the following points:

Stagnant sewers, mounds of solid wastes, open-air latrines and drinking water swarming with bacteria are a part of the Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur ecosystem. There are few specific laws to control pollution. Air quality is not monitored. A United Nations official says, "The first impression of foreigners is that Nepal is beautiful but dirty," while a South Asian magazine viciously labels Kathmandu Valley "Toilet Bowl of Asia". Only 70 tons of the solid wastes generated daily by the city is by the German-aided Solid Waste Management. Untreated sewage is released directly into the Bagmati and Bishnumati rivers. The Bansbari Leather Factory soaks 400 buffalo hides a day, and its liquid wastes are released untreated into the Dhobi Khola. The management is contemplating primary treatment of its wastes. The water of Kathmandu, in some cases, contains 4800 E. coli bacteria per ml. of water. The Himal Cement factory produces 5 to 6 tons of dust in six hours. Its emissions are 4-5 mg per sq m, compared to 120 mg and 250 mg per sq m in West Germany and India. The Government has approved the installation of a 'wet scrubber' to reduce the dust emissions by 400 tons every year. 25,640 motorised vehicles are registered in the Valley, and badly maintained diesel engines create smog.



NOW

There has been practically no check on the escalating pollution. Himal Cement Factory continues to spew dust: a 'wet scrubber' is still to be installed and the only defence of the management is that the Government has yet to set a minimum air quality standard. The Bansbari Leather factory has yet to act on its intention to treat its effluent. The number of motorised vehicles is up to 60,000—among them 22,000 light vehicles, 6,300 heavy vehicles and 25,700 two-wheelers. Exhaust from about 30,000 vehicles alone amounts to 22,000 tonnes per year of carbon dioxide, 22,000

tonnes per year of carbon monoxide, 2,000 tonnes of nitrogen dioxide, 400 tonnes of hydrocarbon and 333 tonnes of sulphur dioxide. As yet there are no mandatory emission checks, even for decades-old diesel buses and mini-buses. Air quality is still not monitored. Carpet-washing plants have increased their work-volume 20-fold, channelling the acid wash directly into rivers and rivulets. In all, the Valley has 983 manufacturing units, 90 per cent of which are located within the towns. Population of the Valley is estimated at 950,000 and will probably top 1.4 million by 2005.

TAX THE LAND

In the growing urban landscape of Kathmandu Valley, land taxation has been neglected as a tool to achieve the public policy objectives of social justice and equity.

by P.B.Chhetri

City administrators all over the world use land taxation to generate revenue for day-to-day development activity and public works. Land taxation also helps in town planning by guiding certain land uses, controlling speculation, and promoting economic growth through efficient use of property.

The value of the land is an important portion of the total national wealth, especially in a country like Nepal with its poor capital base. The rationale for urban land taxation is that land as a resource should be subject to public control and managed properly in the interest of the nation. Public authorities must be able to recapture part of the landowner's 'unearned' income derived from the development of neighbourhoods through government investment programmes.

Different evaluation methods are used to levy property tax in different countries. The rates vary. For example, in Denmark it is 0.4 per cent of the property's market value while in the United Kingdom, tax is levied on the basis of rental value of the property. In Nepal, some form of urban property tax does exist and is known as the "Houses and Compound Tax" (*ghar-jagga kar*). This tax is applied on a house and the parcel of land surrounding it. Property lying idle or vacant are not subject to this tax.

The revenue generated through the *ghar-jagga kar* is extremely low, primarily because the administration of the tax is very weak. This weakness can be attributed, firstly, to the absence of up-to-date inventory of property in map form and the inadequacy of existing cadastral maps. In addition, the existing assessment system does not consider the real value of buildings in terms of their use and location. It merely considers construction costs of the house with allowances for depreciation.

There is assessment of land, which is made on the basis of its location and access to infrastructure and services. However, the assessment rates are quite low. Property with value of less than NRs 0.2 million is exempted. Above that figure, the tax rate is an additional NRs 100 per annum for each additional NRs 0.5 million. A progressive rate, from 0.15 per cent to 2 per cent, is levied on higher property values.

The insignificant contribution of the *ghar-jagga kar* to the national exchequer is clear from

the fact that in 1988-89 it generated only NRs 19 million nationally. This was a dismal 0.19 per cent of the Government's total revenue for that year. What elsewhere is known as the "land transfer tax" is known in Nepal as a "land registration tax" (*jagga darta kar*) and the tax rate under this category is high. In municipal areas, it is 12 per cent — buyers pay 5 per cent and sellers pay 7 per cent of the quoted value of the land in the registration deeds. In rural areas, the tax rate is 7 per cent of the quoted value and is paid by the buyer only.

In some countries, a form of tax is levied when development works and public investments enhance the quality of life in an area. The residents are made to pay more in taxes when roads, sewage, water supply, electricity, schools and recreational facilities are added. This tax is somewhat similar to the land profit tax, whose purpose is to return part of the increased property values resulting from development works back to public authorities. In some countries, profits made on the sale of land are taxed as income. Usually, the tax is imposed on the increased part of the value of land after necessary adjustment for inflation. No such tax exists in Nepal.

The use of the urban land tax in the different forms as a major source of finance for management and development of urban areas has not received serious attention in Nepal. Since the power of taxation (and collection) is vested in the central Government and since the local municipalities have little or no say on any land tax matter, the major source of revenue at the municipal level is the octroi tax (*chungi kar*) levied at the entry point of municipal areas on commercial goods. The amount of revenue raised through property tax at the municipal level is insignificant.

TEN BILLION RUPEES

The major problem of every town in the country is deficient infrastructure. Since the three big towns of Kathmandu Valley have the highest concentration of population, they are the hardest hit by their inability to raise revenue through taxation. The pace of urban expansion has outstripped all development programmes, and problems range from crowded streets to drinking water shortage, a polluted environment, poor

public health facilities, overloaded and non-functional sewerage, and strained public transport.

A recent study conducted with the assistance of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) has proposed a ten-year investment programme to meet the infrastructure needs of the Valley. The major areas for which investments are targeted are water supply, sanitation (including the sewerage system), drainage, solid waste disposal, street lighting, roads, and so on. The study's estimate for the investments required over the next decade is a mind-boggling NRs 10 billion.

As things stand, it is unlikely that anything more than a small fraction of this proposed amount can be generated through property taxes, and the bulk would have to be carried out through outside funding. An example: the Nepal Water Supply Corporation's total income for 1990-91 was about NRs 48 million, whereas its operating cost was about NRs 120 million. As such a scenario is true also in other sectors, the major portion of the proposed capital investment would have to come from international sources, either in the form of grant or loan. It is unlikely that revenue generated through property taxes will provide more than a small fraction of the required amount.

The revenue generated through property taxes (including land revenue tax, *ghar-jagga kar*, rooftop tax, house rent tax) during 1989-90 in Kathmandu Valley was only about NRs 9.3 million, whereas municipalities in the Valley collected about NRs 91.2 million through octroi tax. Not less than 50 per cent of the income is spent on regular administrative and operational activities of the towns. Capital investment programmes are limited. It is paradoxical that Kathmandu Valley, despite its being the major production center in the country, is paying so little to meet the minimum acceptable standards of urban living. It takes a jump of imagination to see how the one billion rupee a year that the ADB plan requires is going to be raised.

ONE WAY STREET

The major portion of the large funds required to improve upgrade urban infrastructure has to come from outside sources if the present tax structure remains unchanged. It is not politically feasible, or even advisable, to allocate large portions of internal financial resources for improving the urban infrastructure. The only course left is to gradually increase the revenue within the Valley itself such that some of the urgent improvement works can be done through local resources. It is because of the infrastructure and services made available by the Government over time at huge cost that people have been able to improve their productivity and skills. A vibrant economy has set the pace of growth almost everywhere in the Valley. Today, many residents of Kathmandu

have become enormously wealthy for the sole reason that the value of their land has appreciated as much as a hundred times over the past decade. For example, a ropani of land with an access to a road in Baneswor 20 years ago cost around NRs 10,000. Today, the plot would fetch NRs 1.5 million or more. Landowners have made little effort to improve their property, and the increment in land value is due solely to the soaring demand for serviced land for housing and other activities. Since the appreciation of the land value can be directly attributed to the public investments in the infrastructure and service, it is quite reasonable that part of this huge increase in land values should go back to the public authorities. The only way to do this is to tax the urban land at a comparably higher rate than agricultural lands. As discussed earlier, there are a number of options.

Public investment in roads, sewers, water pipes and electricity is what has played a vital role in raising the value of land. Unfortunately, this has been a one-way street in which no effort has been made to recapture even a small amount

of the wealth thus generated for the benefit of public works.

The time has arrived to review the country's overall strategy of resource mobilisation for development projects. Where return on investments can be obtained through taxation, pricing and tariffs, dependence on external financing should be gradually reduced. From this point of view, urban land taxation can be used as an important tool for mobilising financial resources to cater to the needs of different aspects of urban development.

The existing laws which deal with land are basically concerned with agricultural land, but they are made to cover both urban and rural areas. At a time when urban land use is rapidly and uncontrollably transforming the Valley's agricultural land and at the same time helping earn enormous new wealth to their owners, there is a need for a separate Urban Land Act. At the very least, urban land should be treated separately under existing laws. The new act or amendment to existing laws should include provisions which

allow different forms of public interventions, including the various types of taxation, such as property tax, transfer tax and profit tax.

In urging urban taxation measures, it is important not to ignore the question of equity and fairness. Any measure would be counter-productive if the additional burden of taxation fell not on the urban rich but on the poor — and the three towns of Kathmandu Valley house a majority low-income population. Without forgetting the question of equity as a policy concern, therefore, urban Kathmandu Valley must be made to pay its share of the cost of disproportionate development that it has benefitted from, which has led to improved quality of life vis-a-vis the rest of the country. ▽

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Like people, cities have phases of life: childhood, youth, old age. New York, for example, is an old man of a city: a dirty, cranky old man smelling of stale beer and cigars. Dhaka, on the other hand, wears its youth like a banner, unfurled for all to see. It is the ultimate, the quintessential adolescent city: awkward, insecure, lanky, with a breaking voice and a day's growth of beard.

Dhaka is a city full of reckless energy and vitality, a city of unbounded, planless growth. Most importantly, it is a city which is hardly a city at all, most of it having only just risen from the paddy fields a generation ago, and still carrying with it the raw provincial mindset of the village. We compare this with its erstwhile sister city, Calcutta. Though in the measure of years Calcutta is the younger, through the wear and tear of the colonial ages she has aged the greater. Now we see her bent under the weight of years like a poor beggar woman, and her womb, that once bore such a plentiful harvest of culture, hangs now between her hips like shriveled grapes on the vine.

The pure image of Dhaka bespeaks its youth: in the broad, bold avenues that cut through the city, impatiently outstripping its growth; in the signs of construction everywhere as buildings rise from the virgin earth like new teeth; and in the upward thrust of the steel pilings that bristle from the roof of every house, which seem to proclaim: "Another storey is yet to come!"

In Dhaka City we are confronted with startling visions of contradiction: high-tech computer stores beside ramshackle tea stalls,



The Adolescent City

By Catherine Masud

aging bureaucrats side-by-side with cordless telephones, rickshaws next to Honda Civics — visions of the strange co-existence of village and city, of old and new, which most pointedly recall the image of the awkward adolescent as he moves unsteadily through his new world, with his adult's body and his child's mind.

Beyond these descriptive elements of Dhaka City there is an overreaching, elemental sense of the spirit of youth. In the tea houses, in the student meetings and cultural festivals, the Ekushey melas and film screenings, we feel the pulsing vitality of that youth. It carries with it a sense of exuberance and limitless possibility, a sense that, at any moment, great things will be achieved. And indeed, at that age of vitality and conviction, great things are really possible.

Dhaka may be a place of the vitality of youth, but it is also full of the insecurity of youth,

and the crude, raw emotion which it breeds. Here there is the harsh simplicity of the village, not the bourgeois finesse of the aged city; here, friendship is fast and strong, but enmity is also quick to rise hot in the blood, and violence readily spurts forth like lava from a young volcano. Jealousy, one of the crudest emotions, is openly displayed and virulently avenged. Impartial appreciation is an impossibility here, and talent, however brilliant, quickly fades in misery, or dies in a tragic flash. Thus the potential fruit of the future is killed, recklessly and mercilessly. Furthermore, this youthful city, inflated with the brashness of its age, is remarkably shortsighted with regard to the past. It has no sense of history, and thus no compassion for the intrinsic value of the old. It is a city which constantly strives to create itself, trampling in the process whatever came before.

The adolescent city, then, has neither past nor future; here there is only the present, where all survive or perish in the crux of the moment.

But let us not forget the receding mother of the beast, Old Dhaka, at its core. From her vantage point on the banks of the Buriganga River, she watches the son she has spawned outstrip her in size and scope, stretching his long arms to the countryside, drawing all in voraciously, with his endless appetite for more people and more land. As night falls, she pulls her ragged garments close about her. And there, in her winding alleyways, in her darkened doorways, she shakes her weary head and whispers, "How soon they forget their mothers."

(Courtesy, *The Voice of Bangladesh*, New York)

Housing Lessons

The construction of public housing is critical for urban development anywhere, but Kathmandu Valley's limited experience in this area is not very encouraging.

by Nirmal Niraula

In 1977, the Nepali Government chose two sites west of the Bishnumati River to develop as housing projects. One was the locality of Kuleshwor near Kalimati, and the other was Dallu near the temple complex at Swayambhu.

The work at Kuleshwor, which was the first housing venture in the country to provide "site and services" proceeded as planned. The Kathmandu Valley Town Development Committee (KVTDC) acquired 521 ropanis (26.5 hectares) of land and prepared 810 housing plots with basic services like access roads, water drainage and electricity. All the plots were sold to civil servants and the scheme was declared completed in 1990.

Dallu was to be developed next, or so everyone thought. Without giving any explanation or warning, however, the KVTDC shifted its attention to a site 10 km to the north, in Golfutar, near Bansbari. "Vested interests" had apparently got interested.

An influential power broker holding a large chunk of real estate in Golfutar found KVTDC officials as willing allies in a plan to neutralise tenants with whom he had been engaged in legal wrangling for years. A Government-sponsored housing development boondoggle was the best way to get the tenants off his back, and he got what he wanted. The KVTDC authorities turned out to be only too eager, in the heyday of the Panchayat, to oblige. They shifted all the resources at their command to Golfutar.

The Government used the principle of eminent domain to acquire 213 ropanis (10.85 ha) of Golfutar land. Altogether 581 housing plots were created and sold on first-come first-served basis, as a result of which most plots landed in the hands of speculators rather than genuine householders. KVTDC also established, for the first time, a policy of exchanging developed land for undeveloped property, as a mode of compensation. This was done basically to please the Golfutar power broker, who reaped huge advantage. All the Golfutar plots were sold within a mere three days, and the project, financially in the red, was officially terminated in 1990. According to residents, the promised facilities such as proper roads have not been provided and, lately, commercial activity, including carpet

making, has begun in this exclusively residential zone.

Dallu's tale, on the other hand, has been replete with sorrow. Originally envisaged as a site and services project, the Government-imposed moratorium on the sale and construction of any sort is still in place in Dallu today. In 1977, when the KVTDC used its eminent domain prerogatives and acquired 352 ropanis (17.90 ha), the property owners had been offered official rates which were far below the prevailing market price, as is usually the case with Government compensation. The alienated landowners, who had not wanted the project in the first place, refused to accept any form of compensation for the expropriated land. Only about 20 per cent of them took compensation, much to their subsequent chagrin. The deadlock has continued. Successive administrations adopted a policy of wait-and-see over the ten years.

When the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning was established in 1988, the Government turned its attention once again to Dallu — "more out of compulsion than interest, as there were no other designated housing areas within the Valley," according to Hemant Arjyal, current Project Chief for Dallu housing. To make up with the residents, the Government tried to raise the acquisition rates fixed in 1977, but it was stymied by the regulations which state that the price of acquired land, once fixed, cannot be changed later. The Government decided to move ahead anyway, and awarded contracts to begin work. On 25 November 1989, there was a violent confrontation between the Dallu residents and labourers. A nervous and weakened Panchayat Government that was soon to fall immediately halted all construction activity.

Dallu residents held discussions with the Interim Government and reached agreement with the KVTDC on "land pooling" in the project area. The property owners have agreed to donate a part (40 per cent) of their holdings for building roads, open spaces and school areas. Under the deal, the remaining 60 per cent of land is returned back to the original owners in the form of prepared housing plots. The majority of the landowners were thus placated, but this leaves out in the cold those who had accepted compensation from the

Government back in the late 1970s. They claim to have been unjustly victimised by the Government's decision to return land only to those who had originally refused compensation.

With the first local election after the political change coming up, the question of "land policy" has now become an election issue in Dallu. The dispute for and against the project is bound to grow more heated as the date approaches. Either way, the future of this venture remains quite uncertain.

PRIVATE SECTOR, PUBLIC SECTOR

The Tashi Nepal Company, a Bhutanese group, initiated the first private sector housing project in the Valley. It acquired five ropanis (0.25 ha) of agricultural land near Baudha and proposed to build apartment blocks — 64 units of various sizes. Only a part of the project has been completed owing to land title disputes, unclear laws and regulations, lack of coordination among government departments and reluctance of the authorities to provide sanction for the necessary materials. Tashi Nepal's experience has proven to the private sector that the housing sector is still not ripe to invest in.

It is not that the Government is entirely without plans. A new approach was initiated by the newly-formed Ministry of Housing and Physical Planning in 1988 to make more land available for housing. The guided land development (GLD) programme sought the active involvement of the public at the ward level, from the planning phase to completion. GLD has been successful in opening large chunks of land in the urban fringe, which otherwise would have had no access at all.

The focus of GLD has been to widen existing access roads and to plan and provide new access where it is possible and desired. Voluntary contribution of land by owners is crucial to this programme, which creates its own limitations. In return for the cooperative gesture of residents of a locality, the Government undertakes to give priority in surfacing the road surface and providing drain sewers in the area.

Guided land development, for all its promise, has not been successful in curbing land speculation. It seems to work best in neighbourhoods where community leadership and a cooperative spirit exists. It could be seen as the middle way between the two extremes of rampant, unplanned development, and totally planned package projects, which have so far proved unworkable. There is clearly a need for the GLD process to spread — and quickly — throughout the Valley if housing development is not to continue in a haphazard and, ultimately, self-defeating manner.

N.Niraula is an urban planner.

Selling Dreams

Project Appraisal: The Kathmandu Valley Urban Development Plans and Programmes Study

by Bharat Sharma

This Project, the latest in a series of master plans that have been proposed for Kathmandu Valley over the past three decades, was funded by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and executed by a British consulting firm, Halcrow Fox and Associates. The study started in October 1990 and was over by September 1991.

The project's terms of reference was a detailed document that held much promise. The consultants' brief was to develop a comprehensive "Valley Structure Plan" incorporating development planning, infrastructural programmes (for transport, sewerage, drainage and water supply) and land-use, economic and population strategies, all projected to the year 2015. There was also to be a "Central Area Plan" for Kathmandu with proposals for land-use pattern, population densities, open spaces and public facilities, preservation of areas, and investment.

Halcrow Fox was also to propose the following: local area plans for suburban development, focusing on drainage, water supply and investment; land development proposals with a focus on public and private sector ventures, financing and cost recovery; a five year slum upgrading programme identifying sites and cost estimates; riverside protection plans; and programmes for environmental management with reference to air quality, water quality as well as an economic analysis. On top of all this, Halcrow Fox experts were asked to provide economic and financial justification for each proposed programme, including cost recovery mechanism such as land taxation, prepare recommendations for financing and to provide a schedule for planned investments. They were to review the existing organisational structure, propose institutional development, make a broad-based assessment of the housing sector, and make proposals.

WISHFUL THINKING

With the terms of reference making such specific demands and requiring such meticulous and long-term work, it was clear from the start that even the best consultants could not have been able to produce a useful report in less than a year. The

stated objectives were bound to be diluted in their delivery, as has now happened in Halcrow Fox's report.

The consultants divided their study package into four reports, dealing with a "Strategy Plan" in three volumes, a concept plan for the Kathmandu Historic Area, one for the "Bishnumati Corridor" and another on "small towns and valley development". The Strategy Plan provides an overall planning framework for urban development of the Valley and proposes a ten-year investment programme for infrastructural development.

Halcrow Fox's report is, generally speaking, big on recommendations and weak on instruction. For example, its proposal to curb low-density urban sprawl by optimising urban land-use with proper planning is worthy. But the consultants do not let on the secret of activating such a proposal, given the present land-ownership and sub-division regulations and the absence of supportive urban legislation. Wishful thinking and good intentions do not an urban development plan make.

The recommendation that infrastructure be developed before land development is a sound one, but there is no working strategy prescribed that is tailored to a Nepali context. Halcrow Fox proposes that the public transport system be developed with private sector involvement, and categorically suggests that fares must be increased on a self-financing basis. One wonders how such a statement can be made *a priori*, in the absence of fare structure studies, in the report or elsewhere.

The major proposal for institutional development is to do away with the present five-

tier system (from the municipality level to the national level), and to have a two-tier system with a Kathmandu Valley Development Council and three new municipal District Councils. It appears that this inherently political proposal was developed by Halcrow Fox in a vacuum, without consulting any of the target groups involved.

The investment strategy up to the year 2001 indicates the need to raise NRs 10,310 million under the various heads. While this figure might serve some purpose in starting a discussion, the consulting firm makes no effort to illuminate us as to where this money will come from, as the terms of reference required them to do. There is timid and unconvincing talk of resource mobilisation through taxes and external financial assistance, but nothing more.

Perhaps the major problem with the study is the assumption that Kathmandu Valley is a self-contained, self-sustaining entity, which is more reminiscent of a pre-1950s Valley than today's. For better or worse, contemporary Kathmandu Valley has deep economic, commercial and cultural ties with the rest of the country quite unlike what Halcrow Fox experts seem to think. Their Kathmandu-centricity makes the report needlessly lop-sided.

BISHNUMATI CORRIDOR

Among the programmes proposed by the study is a "local area plan" for the stretch of the Bishnumati which defines the western boundaries of Kathmandu's city core before the river joins the main Bagmati stream. This sector has suffered from much disregard and neglect on the part of planners. This has harmed not only the area's residents, but has hampered sound urban development of Kathmandu Valley as a whole.

Unfortunately, as with the rest of the present study, an ambitious plan to revive the area is flawed by inability to address the most difficult



A day's worth of buffalo limbs dumped by the Bishnumati.

B. RAUNIAR



elaborated the site-specific issues, nor have they taken a macro-look at the linkages with other open spaces for greater Kathmandu.

Development of a "Bishnumati Corridor"; by opening up a link road from Balaju along the river bank south to Teku was addressed in a proposal made 16 years ago by Michael Graham, a United Nations landscape expert, under the direction of G.N. Rimal in the Buildings Department. The 1974

issue of implementation. The proposal does not adequately take into account the questions of sustenance (management of food, shelter, energy, wastes), safety (safeguard against pollution, maintenance of water quality) and consonance (pragmatic interface between natural assets and the development strategy).

The consultants state candidly enough that, "In the absence of statutory controls on land use and a plan to effect them, there is little that can be

done..." And yet, they go on to dictate that "the land between the east bank and the city core should be designated as open space." The report's concern for the cultural heritage on the east bank (in the form of temples and *ghats*) is admirable, but the proposed landscaping treatment is cosmetic and does not consider the river-front's intrinsic relationship with the city core. The consultants have not

proposals, which this writer also helped draft, holistically addressed transport planning, waterfront works, revitalisation of the cultural heritage and other aspects as part of the corridor development. The idea was to energise a
Continued on next page

PLAN AFTER MASTER PLAN ...

Many master plans and other major documents have been prepared over the course of 30 years to devise considered growth of Kathmandu Valley. While there have been numerous sectoral plans, aimed at everything from cultural preservation to water supply, five plans have dealt with holistic development of the Valley. One thing in common with the first four plans was that none were implemented. The latest "ADB Plan" was presented to the Government in September 1991.

The concept of town planning in Nepal appears to have begun in 1962, with the establishment of a Town Planning Office in Kathmandu. As the basic information and data needed for planning, including base maps, were not available, the Government took the help of United Nations town planning expert P.O. Lefvert, a Swede, who prepared a map of the Valley towns based on aerial photographs taken by Toni Hagen, the Swiss geologist.

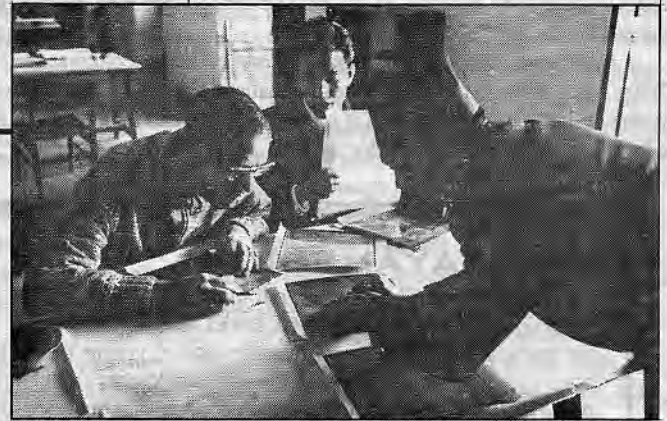
1963 - Kathmandu Valley Physical Development Plan: This plan had the "controlled and harmonious development" of the Valley as its goal. It analysed the existing land-use and proposed new patterns, which in retrospect are not supported by data. This was a pilot project meant to guide planners in subsequent exercises.

1969 - Physical Development Plan for the Kathmandu Valley: This was the first comprehensive plan for the Valley, and it introduced the concept of regional physical planning. Certain land-use patterns were proposed, as was the development of the "Kathmandu-Patan Urban Complex". Also suggested was the development of selected compact settlements, such as Katunje, Lubhu, Thecho, Sunakothi, Kirtipur and Thimi. A Valley transportation network was recommended.

1976 - Kathmandu Valley Town Development Plan: This plan was based on the 1969 plan and concentrated its efforts on developing zoning laws based on accurate mapping of zone boundaries. A major objective was to regulate building along the major roads. The Town Planning Implementation Committee attempted to strictly enforce the recommendation of the Plan, with limited results.

1984 - Nepal Urban Development Assessment: Funded by USAID and commonly known as the Padco Report (after the consultancy firm that prepared it), this Assessment was not strictly speaking a "plan". Instead, it was a report which analysed various factors associated with rapid urban expansion. It presented a general national overview of the urban sector till 1984 and offered broad recommendations.

1991 - Kathmandu Valley Urban Development Plans & Programmes Study: Funded by the ADB and prepared by Halcrow Fox Associates, a British firm with extensive experience in Bangladesh, this is the first plan to be presented in the post-Panchayat period. The plan provides a summary and synthesis of the large volume of information already available on Kathmandu Valley. One feature of this plan is the proposed development of a "Bishnumati Corridor" along the western edge of Kathmandu town (see above article).
- N. Niraula



UN housing and town planning expert P.O. Lefvert with Nepali officials working on aerial Valley photographs in 1962. UN

deteriorated sector of town. Unfortunately, the area remains "land-locked" to this day because the 1974 proposals were ignored due to indifference on the part of the Ministries of Transport and Finance.

Interestingly, the "local area plan" developed by Halcrow Fox is based on the same Bishnumati corridor concept, although it does not give even a nod to the 1974 report. Its own plan is weakened because, by the firm's own admittance, detailed site investigations were not carried out. This is interesting, because the project contract required the consultants to provide a complete "package" for the link road, including technical drawings and specifications. Instead, the report proposes yet another foreign-aided technical assistance project to work out the detailed area plan — as if we have not got wise to this tired formula of never-ending cycles of externally-funded and executed studies and reports. There is enough information available to propose concrete projects along the Bishnumati today, particularly because of the groundwork carried out by the 1974 study.

Grandiose plans are not difficult to make. What takes more effort is to propose realistic means to implement them, and it seems, in the case of the Bishnumati corridor as well as in

terms of the Kathmandu Valley study as a whole, that Halcrow Fox would rather leave the hard work to others and take credit for selling dreams.

The project falls short of the purported vision behind ADB's financing as detailed in the terms of reference. More importantly, it does not provide a practical guide on how to move ahead with the task of saving the Valley. As a rule, plans that are useful and future-oriented always raise some debate. It may indicate something that, in the three months since it was published, the Halcrow Fox study has not raised a ripple.

The time-frame was incredibly short for so ambitious a programme, and both the Bank and the Ministry of Housing and Physical Planning might have considered this aspect. They might also have done a more thorough job in selecting a consulting firm and monitored the involvement of "local hires" in the project, to ensure that Nepali consultants taken on by Halcrow Fox were a) competent, and b) recognised for their competence with appropriately high fees. The tendency, all too often, is to make extravagant promises while signing project documents, with the connivance or acquiescence of donor institution officials and host country bureaucrats, and then to make do with experts hired locally and "on the cheap", regardless of their abilities.

If more Kathmandu Valley development plans are not to gather dust, the Nepali Government must define a policy regarding projects of national importance. Where old plans can be studied and updated, are whole new exercises necessary, at such great cost? It might be less earth-shaking but cheaper to have a project that picks up an old plan and makes an honest effort to update it. We also need to ask whether the donor agency (in the present context the ADB) and the concerned Government department should participate as equals in selection of consultants. As far as high-priced international consultants are concerned — let us decide under what circumstances they are absolutely necessary. We must refrain from taking grants and assigning consultants just because they are there. The Nepali people are the ones who lose in the long run.

Unfortunately, because of the nature of the long-on-recommendations and short-on-practicality report they have presented, and because of the basic Nepali bureaucratic inertia, Halcrow Fox's recommendations for Kathmandu Valley seem destined to join its predecessors on the dusty racks. ▽

B. Sharma is an architect and environmental planner. He works in the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

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Do's and Don'ts from the Doon

*The lessons of other cityscapes might not always be relevant to Kathmandu planners.
But there is India's Doon Valley.*

by Colette Beaudry

Rapid introduction of modern transportation and growth of centralised economies has sparked uncontrolled urbanisation all over the Third World. The problems associated with urbanisation in mountain regions of developing countries are compounded by the high valleys' limitations of geography, ecology and economy.

Kathmandu, Thimphu, and other "urbanising valleys" of the Himalayan region are faced with the challenges of hosting large populations in resource-poor hillsides.

Fortunately, they stand to benefit from the experience of Doon Valley in Garhwal, which is unique for having actively sought to come to terms with expansion and development. While the activists of Doon do not have all the answers, they have shown that sustainable progress cannot come in the Himalayan valleys in the absence of dialogue, information, activism, legislation and litigation.

To understand the lessons of the Doon and to positively influence the current course of Kathmandu Valley's development, one needs to

understand the air and water patterns of Himalayan valleys, the economic importance of urbanising mountain regions, the need for public environmental awareness, and the need to enact new laws for change.

The conflict between urban expansion and resource scarcities is present both in the Doon and Kathmandu Valley,

says Jayanta Bandyopadhyay, an Indian ecologist who has worked and lived in both valleys. Both face all the problems of mountainous areas while simultaneously experiencing quick and unplanned urban-industrial growth, he says.

The bad news is that Kathmandu is not far behind the Doon in the problems of ravenous urban growth. The good news is that the government and people of the Doon were able to mobilise and address the threat, which leads one to hope that perhaps the citizens and planners of Kathmandu Valley will be able to avoid major mistakes.

BRITISH LEGACY

Certainly, it would be wrong to perceive Kathmandu and the Doon as twin valleys. Kathmandu Valley is a former lake-bed deep in the Mahabharat Lekh mountains, with its ancient city-States and long history of urban cultural achievement. Doon is a low-lying valley, 800 m to Kathmandu's 2,300 m, nestled behind the very first front of Himalayan foothills, the Shivalik. Both Valleys, however, receive abundant rainfall and have rich bio-diversity in their (remaining) forests.

Doon Valley is located 240 km north-east of New Delhi; its eastern and western reaches are demarcated by the rivers Ganga and Jamuna. Like Kathmandu Valley, the Doon has several towns within its expanse. There is the main town of Dehra Dun, as well as Vikasnagar and Rishikesh, the pilgrimage center on the Ganga. Mussoorie, the well-known hill station, is situated on a ridge nearly 2,000 m above Dehra Dun.

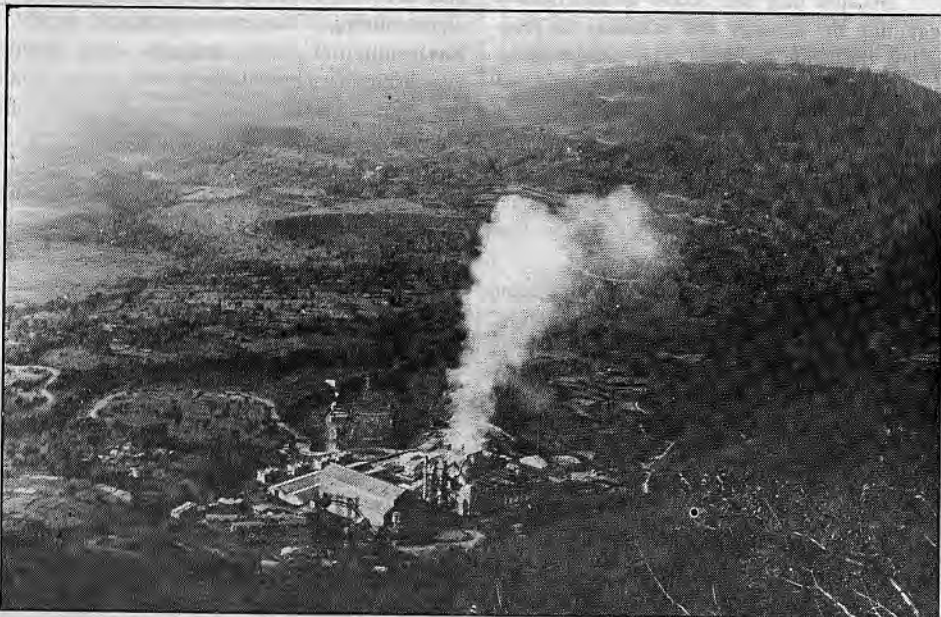
During their 150-year presence in the Doon, the British built up Dehra Dun as a cantonment town. They cleared the forests for settlement and agriculture, and brought about rapid economic change, introducing transportation and linking the valley to the economy of the plains. The recorded population of the valley rose from 20,000 in 1823 to 127,000 in 1901, an increase of nearly 650 per cent in fewer than 80 years.

While they were responsible for the conversion of a wild and forested valley into an urbanised one, the British did leave behind an exceptional record of natural resource management in the Doon. These controls began to unravel soon after Indian independence, when plainsmen and hill people, including a large



The Chobar cement plant of Kathmandu, and a calcium carbide plant in Doon Valley (below).

B. RAUNIAR
J. BANDYOPADHYAY



number of Nepalis, arrived in search of economic opportunities. By 1989, large chunks of the remaining Doon lands, strictly protected by the British, had been colonised by a population that had risen to 600,000.

WATER, TREES AND ACTIVISM

As the town of Dehra Dun grew, so did limestone quarrying activities in the northern flanks of the valley, which created serious problems of land degradation and water scarcity. Industries established with Government incentive spawned pollution, congestion and slums. The city's demand for timber and fuelwood threatened the remaining woodlands, which the British had left well-protected. Like densely populated valleys in other parts of the world, the Doon began to suffer the effects of air pollution and temperature inversion. The three largest sources of air pollution in the Doon today are industry, lime kilns and automobiles.

Like Kathmandu Valley, the Doon is simultaneously water-rich (during the monsoon) and water-starved. Lack of water is what will ultimately limit Doon Valley's growth potential. Though water management has been a major concern of the valley administrators since British times, there is as yet no system to deal with dry-season scarcity. The allocation of limited water is often left to political expediency.

Even when augmentation of water supply is considered, the proposed solution is to pipe in water from elsewhere instead of conservation of the heavy rainfall. A proposal to build a reservoir on the Jamuna met with such fierce criticism for its extravagance that it has now been abandoned and planners are finally examining prospects for recharging groundwater levels, reducing runoff during the rains, and improving water storage within the valley. It nevertheless seems likely that increasing demand for water will lead to over-exploitation of groundwater, with its attendant over-use and contamination.

Along with water scarcity, deforestation is also a problem common to Kathmandu Valley and the Doon. The Chipko tree-saving movement which started in the neighbouring areas of Garhwal in the early 1970s also had an impact on Doon Valley. Local citizens challenged the Government's forest management practices and were successful in stopping commercial tree felling in the Uttar Pradesh hills from 1982 to 1997. Though the tree-felling did not lead to environmental legislation, it started a process of environmental awareness and social activism.

Following the lead of the concerned villagers, additional conservation efforts have been successfully undertaken by government agencies, environmental groups and the people themselves. The Forest Department has in recent years created plantations along roadsides and on public wastelands. Elsewhere, the government has ceded management to local groups, supplying

support in the form of seedlings. This type of state-citizen cooperation has been the key to ecological stability of the Doon. "The identification of the people's interest with the safety of the forest was the only way to save the valley's natural resource base," recalls Bandyopadhyay.

THE COURT CASE

Whereas the Chipko movement represented the start of environmental activism in India, it was limestone quarrying which became the center of a classic conflict involving development, conservation and social equity in the Doon. Debris from the quarry sites covered large parts of the hill slopes, damaged agricultural and pasture land, choked river beds and canals, upset urban and rural water supplies and left ugly scars on the way up to the tourist town of Mussoorie.

For the first time in India activists were able to take a case on the environment all the way to the Supreme Court. The issue before the Court was concern about the Doon's environmental sustainability versus the granting of mining leases by the government. To give administrators a scientific basis upon which to form their opinion, the Department of Environment in New Delhi commissioned an ecosystem evaluation of Doon Valley. In the early 1980s, a group of investigative journalists exposed the hazards faced by villagers living near quarrying activities. Their reports fueled the public protests.

The key to the success of the anti-quarry activists were the issues of social equity and resource constraints rather than romantic notions of preservation of natural beauty. Could Doon Valley afford to turn away from economic prospects of cement factories and quarry contracts? On the other hand, could it deny the local inhabitants access to forest fuelwood and fodder "for the sake of conservation"?

Because they had access to information regarding the ecology and economy of their valley, the Doon residents grew competent in scientific debate. They refused to be intimidated by sophisticated corporate representatives and government officials. Non-violent sit-ins, blockading quarry sites and other such actions marked the case as it made its way to the Supreme Court, exploring the far reaches of the law regarding natural resource management.

The Supreme Court gave its judgement largely in favour of the citizens of the Doon. Its interpretation of urban environmental concerns referred to the living condition of the poor and their access to basic natural resources. It recognised not only the people's right to survival, but the right to life in a healthy environment free of avoidable hazards to themselves, their land, their cattle, their air and their water. It ordered certain quarries permanently closed, and ordered the environmental rehabilitation of quarry-damaged areas.

LESSON FOR KATHMANDU

In brief, the lesson of the Doon's experience in natural resource management thus far has been that scientific information on ecosystems, when competently used by public interest groups, administrators and lawyers, can successfully transform active and enlightened public interest into sound growth management plans. It is important that scientific issues and existing data reach the lay citizen in a form that he/she can relate to and act on.

Following the Supreme Court verdict, the Indian Government went on to take positive steps by declaring Doon Valley an "ecologically fragile zone". It ordered the valley's polluting industrial activities, such as mining, quarrying — and cement production — stopped. The authorities have also gone beyond set forest conservation areas to target additional areas for afforestation; they have regulated and planned urban growth and developed a system for monitoring and controlling new industries.

The Doon's development and conservation efforts are today monitored by the powerful Doon Valley Board, set up by the Department of Environment in New Delhi. For its part, the Uttar Pradesh Government in Lucknow has established the Doon Valley Special Area Development Authority.

Does all this governmental action mean that the public has lowered its guard? Not really. The valley's urbanisation and industrial growth continue to be characterised by protest and criticism. Recently, opposition to a proposed urban master plan prepared by the Town and Country Planning Organisation of the U.P. State Government led to the eventual closure of a cement factory near the town of Rajpur.

To meet the growing needs of its urban, agricultural and industrial sectors, Kathmandu Valley will have to develop policies and priorities that are based on a solid and researched understanding of the environment and society. Environmental policy-makers must have interdisciplinary knowledge which allows them to take informed decisions on urgent matters of natural resource management. Above all, governmental and independent sector institutions which claim to work on the environment must hone their scientific skills and prove their social commitment.

Is Kathmandu Valley ready to move beyond 'empty' environmental speech-making, as Doon Valley clearly has? Do the "experts" in Kathmandu have a full understanding of the ecology and the economics of the limits to the use of available air, water and land? Only when these limits are determined, publicised and understood can the public and the decision-makers set the course that Kathmandu Valley's future will take.

C. Beaudry is Associate Editor of *The Independent* weekly in Kathmandu.

Compact Development: Kathmandu Tried it First!

The best hope for making cities livable, and at the same time stopping the juggernaut of urban development that destroys the surrounding environment, is to promote "compact development" and contain future urban development within geographical "growth boundaries". This is the suggestion of Marcia D. Lowe, author of the just-released *Shaping Cities: The Environmental and Human Dimension*, published by the Worldwatch Institute in Washington DC (1991, ISBN 1-878071-06-8).

Kathmandu Valley might take the Lowe's proposal as its own, because the ancient planners of the Valley towns put into practice centuries ago what the paper terms "compact development" — by concentrating habitation in infertile high ground (*tars*) while leaving the surrounding land free for cultivation. What Lowe puts forward on the basis of detailed study of cities around the world, the ancient Mallas and their predecessors seemed to have understood as well.

That urban instinct has now been dulled, and the Valley's "new urbanisation" rejects the logic of the old town plans. The unrelenting and wasteful spread of concrete and tarmac over fertile plains, wetlands and woodlands continues. It might help to turn the pages of Lowe's *Shaping Cities* to relearn what has been lost.

PORTLAND AND CURITIBA

Citing examples from cities such as Portland (Oregon, United States) and Curitiba (Brazil), the author shows that compact development can solve a wide array of problems that plague urban areas in rich and poor countries alike. Higher densities, by reducing travel distances between homes and workplaces, reduce traffic congestion, dependence on fossil fuels, and the emission of greenhouse gases. Paris, says Lowe, has planned and regulated its land use since the Middle Ages, while in England Queen Elizabeth I in 1580 approved a far-sighted decree for green belts to protect farmland and prevent sprawl.

Third World countries have the least control over how their cities develop, writes Lowe. Local governments in Asia, Africa and Latin America often have neither the authority to guide land use nor the funds for basic services. Municipalities are fiscally dependent upon central governments, which themselves are financially insecure.

The Third World is burdened by several enormous, rapidly growing cities, including Sao Paulo, Shanghai and Mexico City. Calcutta and Bombay today have fewer than nine million inhabitants, but by 2000 will have over 15 million each. However, the explosive growth in the developing countries is not confined to such mega-cities, but is also occurring in intermediate-size cities such as Nairobi, Kenya, and Guauaquil (Ecuador).

Although the mega-cities' higher absolute numbers of added people usually attract more attention, the growth pains of the more numerous intermediate cities are equally serious, says Lowe.



Kathmandu's Ason core from the air.

These mid-sized cities can eventually become giant cities themselves — and in the absence of more vigilant planning, will surely end up with the same mega-city problems.

BAD ZONING

Unfortunately, says *Shaping Cities*, most developing countries have imported the industrial world's compartmentalised zoning laws. Among the most serious repercussions of this are excessive distances between homes and jobs. Many cities were more dynamic and had greater

internal variety before they adopted western-style zoning, which isolates activity and unduly burdens public transport by creating distances too long for a walk or bicycle-ride.

The key to making integrated zoning work well as a transport strategy is to encourage urban development that is dense enough to promote alternatives to cars. In compact communities, many activities can be concentrated within a distance easily covered on foot or bicycle. A general guideline for the degree of density needed for such compact communities is the concentration of people needed to make a public transport system viable, says Lowe.

Contrary to popular fears, population density is not, in itself, a cause of crime or blight, notes the report. Hong Kong, for example, is the most densely populated of the world's larger cities, yet it has the twelfth lowest murder rate. Cities such as Vienna and Stockholm are compactly developed, yet have healthy environments and high living standards.

Rather than continuing to degrade their surroundings with unchecked sprawl, the report suggests that cities accommodate growth needs by more effectively using the large quantities of undeveloped, abandoned or tax-delinquent properties already existing within their boundaries. "Many cities have so much underused space that they could develop for decades to come, without bulldozing another square meter of undisturbed land."

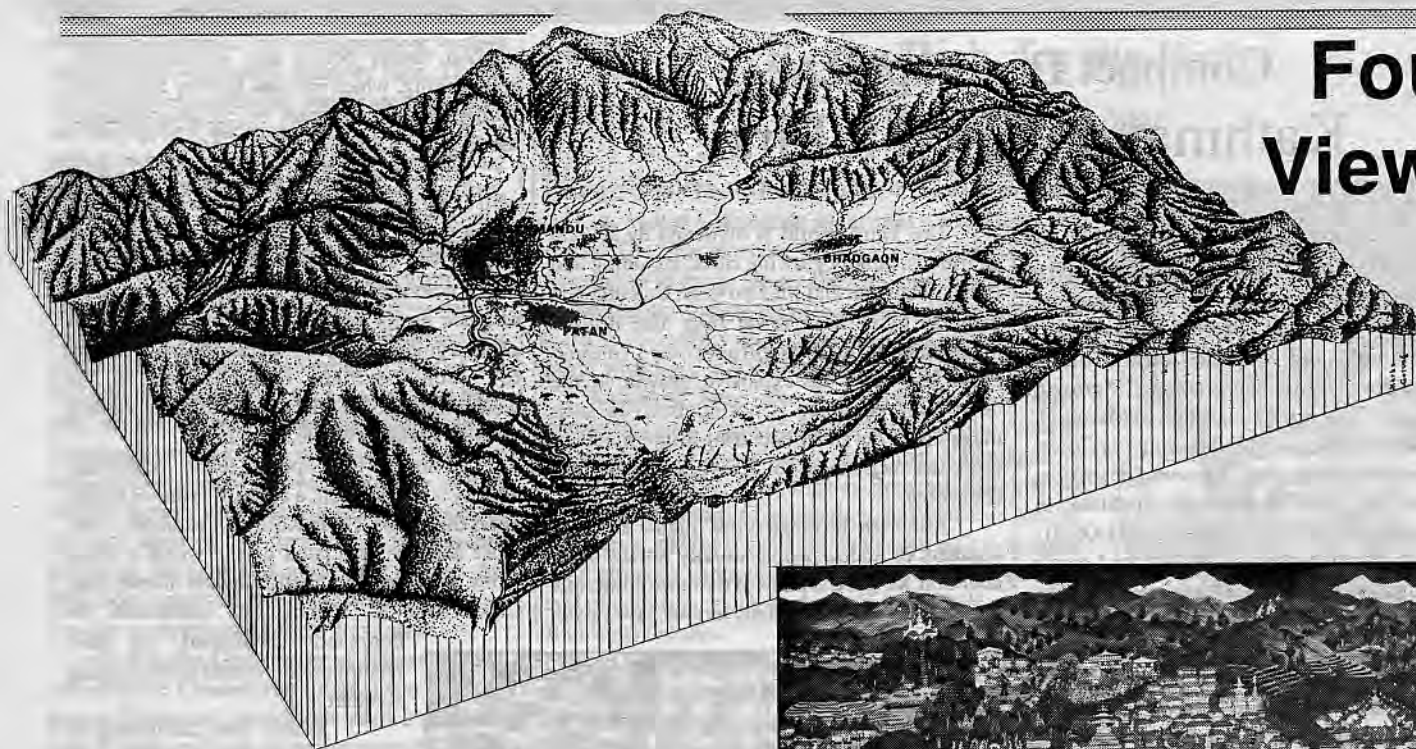
Paradoxically, says Lowe, local "no-growth" and "slow-growth" strategies to prevent sprawl often backfire; by shutting out growth, such measures merely push development outward, encouraging more sprawl. In order to encourage more compact development of cities, tax laws must be designed to accommodate more housing in existing urban spaces; land use plans must encourage mixed uses so that people can live, shop, work and seek social contact or entertainment

without dependence on cars.

Lowe concedes that adequate control will probably take some time to appear in the rapidly growing cities of the developing world, where governments exercise relatively little control over land use. However, planners as well as the general public could benefit from a fuller grasp of how land use controls work. "Although the ideal city will never be achieved, societies can take greater command of their fate by more consciously determining the use of land." ▽

- KMD

Four Views



There is more than one way to look at Kathmandu Valley. Clockwise from top, a three-dimensional "perspective diagram" that geographer Harka Gurung drew in 1968; a thangka-style depiction of the Valley by Patan-based artist B. B. Thapa; a survey map drafted by English surveyor Charles Crawford in 1802; and a snapshot from the U.S. space shuttle, 130 miles up.

On The Way Up

by Kanak Mani Dixit

The beauty, the cultural strengths, and the very many charms of Kathmandu Valley are all givens. Poets, essayists and travel writers have been extremely kind to our "Nepal Valley" over the years, and we felt no need here in the pages of *Himal* to further gild the lily. In this special issue on the Valley, we have chosen instead to take a long look at how it is run and what challenges it faces. And it is clear, to us, that the cauldron of Kathmandu is reaching boiling point, or is leaking badly. One of the two.

The rich Newar culture of the Valley towns, which all Nepal claims as its own with pride, is in peril. As Nepalis of different ethnic backgrounds move in from hill and Tarai, many Newar and non-Newar well-to-do are engaged in suburban flight. Towards the end of his lead article, Sudarshan Tiwari suggests that incoming migrants should have been able to fit into the existing cultural mould of Bhaktapur, Patan and Kathmandu — but this has not happened.

In the absence of political fail-safe mechanisms, such as decision-making powers vested in local communities, the voracious needs of the city pauperises the poor of the periphery. In the case of the Valley, this cruel fact of urban development finds recognition in the articles on the Valley's rural space and on the rim-dwellers of Shivapuri ridge. Inadequate response of government to obvious wrong turns in the Valley's development is clear from the write-ups on land taxation, housing and "master planning".

The powerful, democratically-elected Nepali Congress administration seems without

direction when it comes to tackling urban growth. It is business as usual in the ministries. Bureaucrats rule the roost because the politicians, for all their years spent in jail, in exile, or underground, seem unable to provide the required courage, vision and administrative prowess. From the numerous times the term "expatriate consultant" crops up in these pages, the reader will know whose advice we follow. The Government gets the quality of "expert" studies it deserves; it is too weak to direct and monitor donor-assigned

earthen bed? We have not learnt the significance of carcinogenic particles suspended in the air, chemical substances leaching into the land.

Where, in all of this, are the people? Slow to rise from the slumber of Panchayat, the public are not yet able to recognise, and organise against, obvious threats to health, environment, livelihood and culture. Sunderlal Bahuguna was in town recently, and preached the benefits of activism, but activism can never be jump-started. What seems like extreme public apathy is really the

lack of information and awareness. "Enlightened activism" and a well-informed public are essential for the Valley's future, says the article which analyses the experience of Doon Valley.

Such activism of course, must come from concerned communities and not be a result of political manipulation. We will be making headway when the Chobar villagers, rather than twice-removed urban environmentalists, stand up against Himal Cement; when the residents of the city core organise for cleaner water; and when the displaced dwellers of Shivapuri feel confident enough to march down to the Valley to demand fairness rather than quietly join the ranks of *thelagada* cart pushers.

Kathmandu Valley, the largest and most accomplished of urban centers in the Himalayan region, is well-placed geographically to become a hub for all of

South Asia. It is already the best-connected city for inter-regional travel — no other can boast of direct air links to Calcutta, Delhi, Dhaka, Karachi, Lhasa, Paro and (come March) Bombay. Telecommunications is arguably the best in South Asia. The Valley's role as the economic powerhouse of Nepal will continue to grow as the national economy becomes more "integrated".

Kathmandu Valley must mend its ways if it is to take advantage of the possibility of developing as a major regional and national center. Present trends, as highlighted by writers in this special issue on the Valley, do not inspire optimism. Perhaps, as Bijaya Lal Shrestha writes in his piece on tourism, we will surprise ourselves?



consultants. Basing itself on their reports, the Government continues to opt for externally-funded quick-fixes, such as the Melamchi Project.

Once, we thought our Valley was "different" and would somehow be spared the problems of Third World urbanisation. The past decade has proved otherwise, and our response is inadequate. Kathmandu lacks the strength of working political institutions and an aware, organised and united citizenry. Otherwise, how do you explain the fact that a cement factory, strategically placed at the Valley's atmospheric funnel, has continued to spew smoke and dust for 17 years without any pollution control in place. How did we allow sand mining to rob our only river down to its

ANSWERS TO "DO YOU KNOW YOUR HIMAL?" (Page 55)

- 1.B. Manlung Glacier, in Tibet, north of Nepal's Rolwaling Valley.
- 2.C. See *National Geographic* Nov. 1988, p. 680 for verification.
- 3.D. Annapurna on June 3, 1950 by Frenchmen Herzog and Lachenal; Shishapangma/Gosainthan on May 2, 1960 by a Chinese expedition.
- 4.A. The Naga people in Nagaland, India, have long communal houses.
- 5.C. Gasherbrum III and Gyachung Kang are both 7952 meters high.
- 6.D. Chomolongma is its longtime Tibetan name; Everest was the name given by the British in the 19th century, and the name Sagarmatha has been in use for just the past few decades.
- 7.C. The name was given by Swedish explorer Sven Hedin.
- 8.B. The flight took place in 1933, out of Calcutta, India.
- 9.D. Kula Kangri (7556 meters), on Bhutan's northern border.
- 10.D. Islamabad is the northernmost, Thimpu the southernmost.

- 11.B. Karnali-Chisapani project is expected to produce 10800 MW.
- 12.C. The town of Tehri, in Gahrwal, Uttar Pradesh, India.
- 13.A. Japanese Women summited Manaslu in spring 1974.
- 14.A. Kanchenjunga is the southernmost, K2/Chogori/Godwin Austen the northernmost.
- 15.D. It is Machhapuchhare in Nepal, seen from the Modi Khola gorge, 4 km due west of the peak.
- 16.A. Pik Pobeda/Tomur (7439m) in the Tianshan Range, on the Sino-Kirgiz border, is the northernmost "7000 meter peak", its northern neighbor Khan Tengri is only 6995 meters high.
- 17.C. Minya Konyā/ Gonga Shan stands in the Daxue Shan range in Sichuan, China.
- 18.A. The Kunluns form Tibet's northern border.
- 19.C. Siachen Glacier in the Karakoram is 75.6 km long.
- 20.D. Pabil is the name of Ganesh IV, 7052m.



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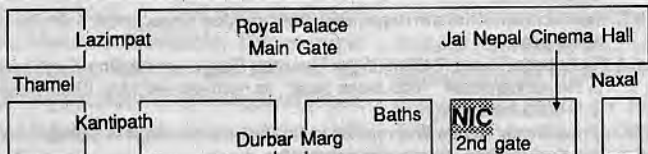
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A Return to Tibet?

The Tibetan government in exile at Dharamsala is more sophisticated in dealing with the western media than the Indian, Bangladeshi and Nepali officialdom combined. And so the setting was well set for a major announcement by the Dalai Lama: 9 October 1991, a wood-panelled auditorium of Yale University, with all the major wire services, newspapers, radio and television represented.

The Dalai Lama had two announcements to make. One, the Strasbourg Proposal (in which the Dalai Lama had indicated his willingness to accept autonomy and self-government rather than full independence from China) was now invalid. The Chinese had not even seen fit to acknowledge that "maximum concession" on his part and had instead "increased its negative attitude towards me and also repression inside Tibet."

Two, the Dalai Lama said he wanted to visit Tibet to meet

Tibetans inside and to make an on-the-spot assessment of how things are. He would go to Lhasa, Kham and Amdo, and would welcome the presence of high-level Chinese officials and foreign journalists and observers.

It sounded as if he was proposing to storm the barricades — produce an international embarrassment for the Chinese by turning up at the border. The journalists sat up, sensing a scoop. When was he going, where would he enter, could they come along, and had the Chinese been approached?

No, he had not informed the Chinese, because they were not prone to responding to proposals they disliked. He did not know when he was going, because that would depend on the Chinese, but he would like to go "as soon as possible". He would like to enter by surface, via Nepal. Yes, that would first require getting permission from the Nepali Government, which seemed



unlikely.

Everything, it seemed, depended upon the Chinese, so the journalists slouched back on their seats. By the Dalai Lama's own account, the Chinese had "only mouths expressing long lecture", and not the ears to listen to his and other viewpoints.

The announcement seemed to have more to do with the Tibetan exile government's wanting to attract focus on to itself at a time when international attention was riveted on the Baltic States, Eastern Europe, Mongolia, and the Koreans. Fresh from a highly "emotional" trip to

Mongolia, Bulgaria and the Baltics, the Dalai Lama and his advisors seemed to be saying, "What about us?!"

Also, the Dalai Lama's media advisors had counted without the Clarence Thomas senate hearings, which exploded into the American television screens in the days after the Yale press conference. The highly charged hearings swamped every carefully planned news event, and the Tibet-return announcement too never received the play that was expected.

There was a "bonus" though: at Columbia University on 11 October, prominent Chinese dissident Fang Lizhi concided that "Tibet had suffered during the last 40 years". Said Fang, "I would like to completely respect the choice of Tibet. That is the only answer if you insist on the principle of human rights."

- Kanak M. Dixit

Note: Starting with the March/April 1992 issue, *Himal* will carry a "Tibet Page", which will present writings, reports and essays on Tibet and Tibet-related issues.

Debunking Himalayan Myths

The "Himalayan Degradation Theory" has been getting a battering lately. The theory, which incorporates the accumulated wisdom of many expert and inexpert environmentalists, briefly, goes thus: the Himalayan

region is generally marked by over-population leading to high demand for natural resources, deforestation, topsoil run-off, and, finally, floods in the plains, including Bangladesh.

The latest to fire a salvo at HDT is the recently-released *State of the Indian Environment*

(*Three*), which departs from past practice to focus entirely on one area: "Floods, Flood Plains and Environmental Myths." (See next issue of *Himal* for review.)

In the report, environmentalists Anil Aggarwal and Sunita Narain marshal evidence to prove that the Himalaya is "dynamic", and has been prone to natural disasters through

history. They write, "To understand the problem of increasing floods in the Indo-Gangetic plains, it may be more instructive to study the ecological changes that have taken place in the flood plains themselves."

Two articles in the most recent issue of the scientific journal *Mountain Research and Development* deal with landslides and tree cover in Himalayan catchments. In one, scientists D.A. Gilmour and M.C. Nurse compared aerial photographs of a part of Kabhre Palanchok District east of Kathmandu. Analysing pictures taken in 1972 and 1989, they found that 17 years had brought no significant change in terms of land use. Even though the catchment they studied had seen a population increase of at least 50 per cent during the period, there was no significant reduction in the area of common land.

In the second article, the availability of a series of remotely-sensed images of the

Bagmati River Valley just south of Kathmandu made it possible for three European scientists (M.F. Buchroithner, J. Kolejka, R. Kostka) to make a detailed report on the process of erosion. The specific area of study was an "abrasion-prone" area around Katuwal Daha (see diagram), a large bend on the Bagmati River before it enters the Mahabharat Lekh. The study was based on LANDSAT satellite data and aerial photographs, taken in 1971, 1977, 1984 and 1986.

The authors conclude by saying that, "at least for the area investigated, there has been little change over the fifteen-year period in terms of total area undergoing impact from erosional processes. This conclusion would appear highly relevant in view of the ongoing debate about the supposed environmental catastrophe that is threatening Nepal and much of the neighbouring Himalaya."



"Abrasion-prone" areas of Katuwal Daha (in black), December 1971. MRD

Bhutan Opens to Tourists – Just a Crack



Druk Air in Kathmandu.

B. RAUNIAR

The number of tourist arrivals in Bhutan saw a dramatic drop in 1988, after all the major Buddhist centers were closed to foreigners. This action followed a debate between the clergy and tourist officials over the increasing number of international visitors — up to a peak of 2,524 by 1987.

But the dilemma posed by whether to open up, and to what degree, has continued to occupy planners, tour operators, monks and laymen. Today, the pressure is on. The fact remains that Bhutan aims for a transition from a subsistence farming society to an economically self-reliant one. Since the authorities are hesitant to rely overwhelmingly on foreign

aid, tourism potential to bring income cannot be ignored. Besides, Druk Air, which today flies to Bangkok, Kathmandu, Dhaka, New Delhi and Calcutta, relies on tourism to keep flying.

Add to this the fact that Thimphu's budding private sector has given birth to a generation of enthusiastic young entrepreneurs who see the tourism industry as a gold mine. The Ministry of Trade and Industry was flooded with license applications when it recently indicated the possibility of granting tourism licenses. And the fact remains that the Government has advocated "privatisation" as the key word in its industrialisation policy.

Late in 1991, Thimphu

officials appeared to have arrived at a compromise. The Government announced privatisation of tourism, but with rates and numbers to be controlled by an official organisation, the Tourism Authority of Bhutan (TAB). Tour companies may organise their own tours, but their income will be channeled through TAB. All visas will be processed by TAB, and the Government plans to maintain a ceiling of about 4,000 tourists a year, says a TAB official. More than 12 tour operators have been licenced in recent months.

The Minister for Tourism hopes that the new policy will lead to positive growth in the national economy and a strengthening of tourism-based

infrastructure like hotels and restaurants, all within the ambit of "controlled tourism". Tour operators from the United States, Japan and Europe who flew in during December to study the new policy and to plan future programmes seemed to be a happier lot.

Because the most important religious sites will remain closed under the new opening, the tours of Bhutan are expected to focus on the annual festivals that take place in the country. TAB expects that in next few years there will be significant growth in tourists coming for trekking, climbing and rafting. The Government will allow private companies to take up these expanding activities, with TAB as watchdog, says the official.

— Kinley Dorje

DAILY RATES FOR TOURISTS IN BHUTAN (in US\$)

	Hotels	Lodges	Tents	Treks
April & October (peak season)	220	150	130	120
March, May, July, August September, November	175	130	130	100
January, February, June December	130	100	90	80

Up-Coming

"Images of a City - Kathmandu Valley from 1910 to 1970"

A photo and map exhibition being organised tentatively in March jointly by the Nepal Heritage Society and the Urban Development through Local Effort office. The organisers are looking for possible images for exhibition. Contact: Mrs. Ambika Karki at UDLE. Tel: 225378, 217868.

International Conference on Environment and Law

6 - 8 March 1992, Kathmandu. Subtitled "Year 2000, The Challenges and Prospects for A New Environmental Order in the Asian Region," this conference seeks to identify emerging environmental problems and their

underlying causes, as well as to prepare action plans to meet future challenges. Contact: Surya P.S. Dhungel, LEADERS NEPAL, PO Box 4851, Kathmandu. Tel: (977-1) 419091; Fax: 419555

International Conference on Water and the Environment

26 - 31 January 1992, Dublin, Ireland.

The Conference will address critical freshwater issues and related development issues for the 21st century. It will also act as a "formal entry" for these issues into the UNCED Conference to be held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 1992. Contact: Gordon J. Young, 41 Giuseppe-Motta Case postale no. 2300, CH 1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland. Tel: (41-22) 730 8275; Fax: 734 2326

Race to be First

Reuters reports that Nanga Parbat (8,126 m) is gaining on Chomolongma/Sagarmatha/Everest (8,845 m) in the geological race to be first that began 30 million years ago (when the South Asian plate jabbed the Asian plate hard enough to raise a bump).

Nigel Harris, a Canadian geologist and professor at England's Open University, says a new measuring method known as fission-track dating has enabled scientists to determine the rate of growth of the Himalaya with more accuracy. The method also makes it possible to find out which peak is rising fastest. The new method is based on examining microscopic tracts left in minerals by

nuclear fission, which helps indicate the rate at which rocks reached the surface of the earth's crust.

"This method indicates that Nanga Parbat is being uplifted at about one centimeter a year, almost the double the uplift of the rest of the Himalaya," reports Harris.

Meanwhile, scientists from the University of Colorado have determined that Everest and other Himalayan peaks are rising by 1 to 4 mm a year — almost the width of a telephone cord, reports Reuters. The Himalaya has risen by half a meter since the first definitive survey was done in 1847.

Remote Nepal Now Open

On 6 October, Nepal's Minister for Home Affairs announced that 50 Village Development Committees in 10 high Himal districts would be opened to trekking groups. Provided that they seek special permission and abide by certain new regulations, tourists may now visit out-of-bound valleys like Olanchung Gola north of Taplejung in east Nepal, Kimathanka in Sankhuwasabha, south-east of Khumbu, and Upper Lo (Mustang).

Travel and trekking agents were pleased to have all these new Shangri-Las to offer to picky tourists, and Director General of Tourism Dipendra Purush Dhakal seemed to have no doubts. However, there were voices of concern, particularly about opening up Upper Lo. (See *Himal*, Nov/Dec 1990)

"Why open Mustang? Is it time? Will opening Mustang benefit the local people? Is it in the national interest? Who gains and who loses?" were the volley of questions raised by Hemanta Mishra, chief of the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation. "Mustang has no infrastructure to support outsiders at the moment," says Chandra Prasad Gurung, Director of the Annapurna Conservation Area Project.

A recent study of tourism in Lower Lo (the Jomosom-Muktinath area) revealed that only 20 cents of the US \$3 spent by the tourist daily remained in the local community. The rest went to pay for travel agent commissions, trekking agent fees, imported bottles of aerated drinks and beer, and so on.

There are other worries.

Bikas Pandey, an energy specialist who has worked in Mustang, thinks it is too early to take tourists to Lo Mantang, the capital of Mustang. "They will not have the energy needed to cater to the outsiders' needs," he says. According to geographer Harka Gurung, one trekking group consumes as much firewood over lunch as would a rural family over a week. Actually, there is still some time to put safeguards in place. While the areas have been declared open, for various administrative reasons the Government has yet to distribute permits. "We have temporarily not begun issuing permits for



Lo Mantang.

M. THAPA

trekking in Mustang," said Dhakal.

Even when the new regulations come into effect, it is not as if every Tom, Ricardo and Yashushi can pack his backpack and head for the walled township of Lo. Visitors must travel in groups, accompanied by liaison officers recruited from the police. The groups will have to carry their own fuel and take proper care to dispose of waste. They are discouraged from distributing "pencils and pens", "chocolate" and "one rupees" to children along the trails. - Binod Bhattarai

Required Reading

Here is a list of interesting and useful periodicals that have come to our attention over the past couple of months.

* *Agenda Survival*: a bimonthly newsletter of the Nepal Zoological Society which shows great concern for preserving biodiversity in the Himalayan region. The latest issue raises concern about the impact of tourism on the unique biotic systems of the Shey-Phoksundo region in Dolpo. Pralad Yonzon, Editor. GPO Box 2448, Kathmandu, Nepal.

* *Sanachar-Bichar*: an introspective journal brought out by students in Boston that deals with issues such as cultural identity, dislocation, coping in the United States, and the meaning of being "Nepali". Sanjay Manandhar, Editor. PO Box 391251, Cambridge, MA 02139, USA.

* *Sustainable Development*: a new international journal on global environmental

conservation and development which seeks to link scholars and practitioners in development the world over. It seeks to articulate the voice of the South. The premier issue, in 155 issues, carries articles, among others, by Ashok Khosla, Maurice Strong, T.N. Khoshoo, Bindu Lohani, Shekhar Singh, Ashish Kothari, Anil Agarwal and Sumita Narain. Hari Dang, Editor. 1 Factory Road, New Delhi 110 029.

* *Flatfile*: is a periodical launched at the end of 1989, with contributions coming initially from the Darjeeling area, but today from all over. Readers are charged the cost of publishing individual issues, which are unfettered by deadlines but emerge about once every three months. *Flatfile* has lately acquired a decidedly literary slant, carrying pieces by writers from all over the Himalayan foothills. Contact: Main Press, Keshe Road, Kalimpong 734 301, West Bengal.

One Old Corpse

Why should it interest the Himalayan reader that a dead body was found 10,500 ft up in the Tyrolian Alps, Austria, in late September? Because this death occurred more than 5000 years ago and emerged from its icy grave only because of a receding glacier. And because this indicates that probably there are similar victims of accident or circumstance of eons ago who might be encased in Himalayan ice as well. There must be quite a few late Neolithic hunter-gatherers, migrants crossing the high Himalayan passes, and assorted *rishis* and *munis* similarly entombed, waiting for *kali yug* and the great thaw of global warming.

The ancient Alp-man was sighted on Similaun glacier, in Austria, and is the oldest corpse in such a state of preservation found anywhere. The body was shrivelled but remarkably well-preserved. The man had died hunched over

on his knees on solid rock. Normally, the body of people who die on glaciers are carried along in the ice as it inches down the mountain. However, the man's body remained where he died, probably because he was in a trench and the ice around him did not move. Because the spot was vulnerable to wind, heavy glacial ice never accumulated in enough volume to crush the body.

Discovered besides the corpse were the bronze ax with a wooden shaft, a flintstone knife, flint lighter and kindling in a small pouch. The age of the man was determined by conducting radiocarbon tests on pieces of grass from a woven mat found with the man. The evidence suggests that the Alp-man was a shepherd who was caught in a snowstorm on his way over the mountains. He has no wounds and it appears from his position that he may have been seeking shelter when death overtook him.

Way to Baglung

There is a new "Chinese" highway being built from Pokhara north to Baglung. The day's walk up to the Naudanda ridge which overlooks Pokhara Valley is now down to an hour — for those who can afford it.

Durga Bahadur of Ward No. 2, Patale Kharka village in Kaski District is one person who cannot afford the NRs 50 one-way that the project truck drivers charge up to Naudanda. So he has carried his ailing father back from

Pokhara, while the trucks passing by. "Ke Garne, paisa tima sakdina," he says. Maybe when the buses run it will be cheaper.

Purna Gurung, a mule train driver like his fathers and brothers, drives his team from Pokhara up to Mustang along the Kali Gandaki gorge. He carries in rice, wheat, kerosene, cooking oil and maize, and brings back wool, apple brandy, *jimbu*, and apples. He sees the Pokhara-Baglung highway as a threat to livelihood

to the hundreds of other muleteer families like his.

"They say this road will go all the way up to Jomosom," says Gurung. "That will truly be the end of us." Some of his friends joke and advise him to buy a truck. While he might one day be forced to learn to drive, only the *sahus* of Pokhara and Thak Khola, he says, have the kind of money needed to buy trucks.

The lodge and *bhatti* owners also do not think too much of the highway. They have lost most of their customers to it. Earlier, travellers used to stop overnight. Now, well-known faces wave

"bye-bye" from the back of trucks. Harriet Fonda, an American trekking buff, throws her hand up and says, "There is less and less reason to keep coming back to Nepal."

Not everyone is unhappy. The extension workers, engineers, government officials and teachers, welcome the road. But that is because someone else pays. For the local people who cannot afford the fifty rupees up to Naudanda, the highway still has to prove its benefits. Hopefully, it will make more economic sense than so many other roads built in the Nepali Himalaya.



Durga Bahadur on the road. A. CHITRAKAR



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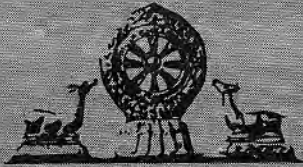
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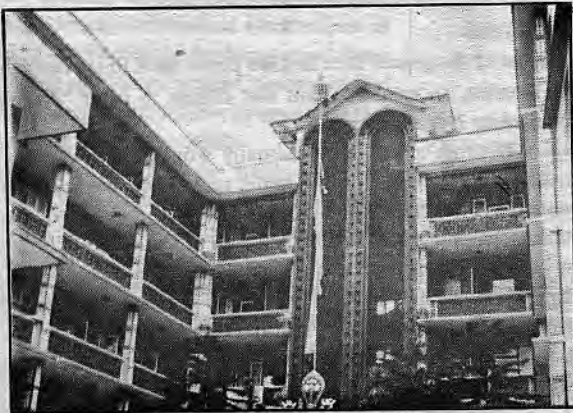
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THE HOPI AND THE LADAKHI

Peter Matthiessen, author of The Snow Leopard and other books, attempting to draw links between the people of Ladakh and the indigenous peoples of the Americas, in an introduction to Ancient Futures: Learning from Ladakh (Sierra Club Books, 1991) by Helena Norberg-Hodge. Matthiessen has not been to Ladakh.

Like the Hopi and other AmerIndian peoples (now thought to have come from the same regions near Lake Baikal and the Gobi Desert as the Tatar peoples who came later to this Himalayan region), the Ladakhis share the Tibetan perception of a circular reality, with life and death as "two aspects of an ever-returning process," and even in certain details of material culture, comparisons with AmerIndian ways are very interesting. The barley farina known in Ladakh as *ngampe* is called *tsampa* in Tibetan; a very similar corn farina made in America by Algonkian peoples is called *samp*. Even if *samp-tsampa* were mere coincidence, other parallels are not easily dismissed, such as the custom that a habitation should face east toward the sunrise, the prohibition against telling tales in winter, certain healing techniques mysterious to Westerners, and the profound respect for old people and children, who are welcomed to each activity of every day. In AmerIndian tribes of the Amazonian basin, one may be banished into the surrounding forest for displaying anger; *schon chan* (one who angers easily) is one of the worst insults in the Ladakhi language. Rather than fume when put upon, as Westerners might do, the Ladakhi says, *Chi choen* — What's the point? "Lack of pride" is a virtue, for pride, born of ego, has nothing to do with self-respect among these Buddhist people; I witnessed this repeatedly in Himalayan travels with Sherpas (in Tibetan, "easterners") and the folk of Dolpo, who like the Ladakhis live in a pure Tibetan Buddhist culture.

GEOLOGY AND BELIEFS

Excerpt from an article appearing in the Summer 1990 issue of Earth Science magazine, which purports to draw a link between the geology of the Himalaya and the spiritual beliefs of its peoples.

Just as the Hindu collection of dieties is mind-boggling, the number of legends where the Himalayas play an important role is vast. The Hindu immortals live on many Himalayan peaks and climb to various summits for various specific reasons. The bodies of some mountains themselves are used by the gods for other purposes. Mount Kailasa in Nepal is the principal home of Shiva, one of the major Hindu gods. The surprising thing is that Kailasa is not nearly the highest peak, but because of its connection in the Kathmandu Valley with the rivers Ganges and Bagmati, both extremely important to the area's inhabitants, it is given an important place in Hindu legends and religion. Along with Shiva, other deities, fairies and demons live on Kailasa.

Another peak, Himalaya, was actually a minor Hindu god. It, too, was a place where asceticism was practiced, and was the home of Gautama, a noble sage. Himalaya represented an animate place, throwing off the burning seed of Shiva into the Ganges when it could no longer bear the heat, and fathering Parvati, the goddess who became Shiva's wife.

The human significance of the Himalaya Mountains is clear from these few examples. They are places where immortals and

mortals alike go for meditation, asceticism and counsel. They bridge the gap between god and man and provide a tangible connection between their worlds. Since the home of the gods can be seen by people, it is therefore more accessible to them. In fact, one story tells of five heroes who "proceed to climb the heights of the Himalayas, evidently by way of ascending to their rightful places amongst the stars." The gods also use the mountains in times of need, as when the demons wreaked havoc in their three cities. But in all the stories there is the sense of quietude and peace associated with the peaks.

By studying the connection between the geology of the Hawaii and the Himalayas, and the myths that they have inspired, one can see the implications of geology on the spiritual side of human life. In Hawaii, the fiery volcanoes represent the dangers of violent anger, jealousy, and uncontrolled passion. The Himalayas in contrast represent the cool patience of the ascetic and are a place where the gods and their worshippers can almost reach each other. No doubt, had the geologic circumstance of each area been different, the cultures of those living there would have nurtured different traditions. Further investigation of the influence of the physical environment on the development of other cultural and religious traditions, such as that of the Aborigines of Australia, might provide additional insight into this aspect of geology. Geology is not a lifeless science related only to the physical world. On the contrary, it affects us personally and continues to shape aspects of our lives by which future generations will identify us.

SELLING THINGS IN BOULDER, COLORADO

From an article by Clifford D. May in the 3 November 1991 issue of the New York Times Magazine. The article describes the goings on in the American city of Boulder, Colorado.

One of the places the climbers come back to is Narayan's Nepal Restaurant, an establishment that claims to offer "Nepali cuisine cooked by Nepali Sherpa".

Whether any Sherpas actually work at Narayan's is open to question, but you won't find better momo (steamed dumpling filled with meat, vegetables and spices), thukpa (Tibetan style noodles) or tarkari (highly spiced vegetable stew) in the Rocky Mountain West.

The proprietor, Narayan Shrestha, came to the United States in 1977. For years, he lived in Dallas, but "I missed the mountains," he says. "A friend told me, 'You have to go to Boulder.' Actually I thought he said, 'You have to go to the border,' but eventually I figured it out.

"I took my first vacation in Boulder in 1979, and then I'd come here every year for vacation. It just reminded me of Nepal. It was like going home without traveling so far. I just felt good here."

One day, in 1986, Narayan quit his job as a bookkeeper, sold his house and moved north. "I had no job and nothing to do. I was totally broke and using my credit cards to get by. But there were these two guys from Tibet. They were selling Tibetan goods, art and jewelry, that sort of thing, from a store on Walnut Street. It wan't doing very well, and they wanted to sell. I said, 'Count your inventory.' They shut the doors right then and began counting. They told me they had \$35,000 worth of merchandise. I offered them \$25,000. They said, 'O.K., if you have the money.'"

Narayan did not have the money, of course. Nevertheless, he told them he'd meet them the next day to close the deal.

"I dreamt about it all night and eventually the answer came to me," Narayan remembers. "I called an American friend in Austin and asked him to lend me \$15,000. In three hours, he sent it to me, no i.o.u. or anything. So the next day I went down and said, 'Here's the down payment. I'll pay you the rest at \$1,000 a month.' 'Sold!' they said."

Before he took over, he says, the store had never made money, but "in the first week, I sold as much as they had in three months. How? People would come in and I'd talk about Nepal, about Everest and the Himalayas. I'd make things interesting. There was a rug on the wall for decoration. I sold that, too. I just kept telling stories and selling things."

"I put up a hand-written sign saying 'Native Nepali guide leads treks to Nepal. For information come inside.' Twenty-two people signed up to do a trek at \$3,000 apiece. I paid off my loan and took them."

There was one small problem. Narayan happened to be a city slicker with no experience in either trekking or climbing. "But I learned fast," he says. "I've actually become pretty good at it. I've taken 500 people. I now have five offices in Nepal."

Narayan finances a private school in Nepal as well. His home, however, remains in Boulder. "To me, it is a sort of Shangri-La," he says. "There's no way on earth I'd live anywhere else. I'll die here."

CHARADE OF DESILTATION AND REPAIR

An article in the 21 September 1991 issue of the Economic and Political Weekly, which says that the irrigation mafia in Bihar has over the years defrauded the state exchequer of hundreds of rupees in the construction, maintenance and repair of flood control embankments. (See related article in Himal Sept/Oct 1991, page 41.)

Every year, Rs 5 crore is paid to the contractors to carry out just the desiltation work and a few crores more for repair of embankments. But hardly any work is done. As a result, today the Kosi barrage stands threatened. If the water flow is increased the barrage is endangered and if it is decreased the siltation increases. The embankment had a capacity to sustain the pressure of 9 lakh cusecs of water, as was seen during the devastating floods of 1964-65. But as the recent case of breach showed, it could not sustain the pressure of 1.5 lakhs cusecs of water. The irrigation capacity of the Kosi project, which was supposed to revolutionise agriculture in north Bihar, has been reduced from 8 lakh hectares to 2.5 lakh hectares. And yet, year after year this sordid charade of desiltation and repairs goes on.

The irrigation mafia was nourished and institutionalised during the tenure of Jagannath Mishra. It was he who established the tradition of the Chief Minister retaining the portfolio of irrigation and flood control, which was then followed by all the Congress (I) chief ministers. The business of percentages and transfer/postings of engineers was perfected during his tenure.

Such is the racket of breaches that out of the Rs 250-300 crore spent annually by the Bihar government on construction and repair works, as much as 60 per cent used to be pocketed by the politician-contractors-engineers nexus. There is a perfect system of percentages in which there is a share for everyone that matters right from the minister to the junior engineer. The actual expenditure never exceeds 30 per cent of the budgeted cost and after doling out the fixed percentages, the contractors are able to pocket as much as 25 per cent of the sanctioned amount. A part of this they use to finance the political activities of their pet politicians and to get further projects sanctioned. Thus the cycle goes on. The contractors' bills are paid without verifying them.

The same lot of boulders and craters are shown as freshly purchased year after year and the government exchequer is duped of

crores. Many of the desiltation, repair and maintenance works shown to have been completed are never done at all and yet payments are made.

EXILE

Poem, dated 14 December 1991, by Samrat Upadhyay, a student of journalism in the United States.

I came here thinking the blind man has no chance.
He has no vision, and in this country
people watch traffic all day, the cows stare.

But the blind knows how to beg. It is I
who have lost that art of give and take;
My mother brings me tea, I am to consent
to arranged marriage the next day.

In this country I light cigarettes all day.
The smoke blurs my vision. I see Buddhas
glitter from curio shops. Their shapes are unclear,
but urchins stand in front and glare.

The shopkeeper watches his buyers all day.
At dusk he closes his shop, secures the lock.
He thinks of his wife and watches women on the way.

A woman traipses through the traffic,
a man hoists a load bigger than his ambition.
They know the art of give and take.

My mother brings me tea,
and I dream of the woman I am to marry:
her nose, her deft hands in the kitchen.

Her eyes, their need for recognition.

60 MILLION ASIAN WOMEN MISSING, FEARED DEAD

From an article in the New York Times newspaper of 5 November 1991, which deals with the traditional preference for boys in many developing countries, which translates into neglect and death for girls.

A stark statistic testifies to women's continuing unequal status: at least 60 million females in Asia are missing and feared dead, victims of nothing more than their sex.

Remarkably little research has been conducted on the plight of the missing women, and even their disappearance is discernible merely as a shadow on the census data and mortality statistics. "It's shocking that so little is known," said Amartya Sen, a Harvard economist who has tried to call attention to the issue. Professor Sen estimates that considerably more than 100 million females are missing around the world, and he asserts that the reason the shortfall is getting worse in some areas is that girls are not allowed to benefit as much as boys from the improvements in health care and nutrition that are lowering death rates in developing countries.

Any investigation into the case of the missing women begins with one fact: 5 or 6 per cent more boys are born than girls, but in normal circumstances males die at higher rates at every age thereafter. Typically in the West, where female infanticide is not considered an

issue, children are disproportionately male, the number of men and women evens out by the time people are in their 20's or 30's and the elderly are disproportionately female. In relatively advanced countries like the United States, Britain and Poland, there are about 105 females for every 100 males.

In India, however, a census this year found only 92.9 females per every 100 males, down from 93.4 in the 1981 census and 93.0 in the 1971 census. And in China, the 1990 census found just 93.8 females for every 100 males, compared to 94.1 at the time of the 1982 census. But a conservative calculation there are 30 million females missing in China, about 5 percent of the national total and more than are missing in any other country.

A United Nations report this summer, "The World's Women," found that other countries with very low ratios of females include Afghanistan, with 94.5 for every 100 males; Bangladesh, 94.1; Bhutan, 93.3; Nepal 94.8; Pakistan, 92.1; Papua New Guinea, 92.8, and Turkey, 94.8.

HUMAN RIGHTS IN BHUTAN

Excerpt from an article in the Law and Society Review (1 October 1991) by Clarence J. Dias, a lawyer from India who is also Secretary-General of the Asian Coalition of Human Rights Organizations.

Bhutan, as a member of the United Nations, is clearly bound to adhere to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, Bhutan has a poor record when it comes to signing, ratifying, and implementing the various international human rights covenants and conventions that have come into existence since the adoption of the Universal Declaration. Those covenants and conventions set the human rights standards for any civilized member of the world community of nations. Yet it is notable that of the 75 human rights instruments listed in the UNESCO Chart, as of March 31, 1990, Bhutan had signed only one (the Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women) and had failed to subscribe to any of the Red Cross Conventions.

Bhutan, as a member of the United Nations, the Non-aligned movement, and SAARC cannot evade its responsibilities. Moreover, what happens in Bhutan is of deep and abiding concern to the people of all the SAARC countries. At an urgent minimum, we the people of the SAARC region acting individually and collectively need to embark on a number of activities.

We need to contribute to and help facilitate immediate and effective relief and rehabilitation for the Bhutanese refugees in our countries. Our constitutional experts and human rights lawyers need to undertake a critical review of Bhutan's constitutions and laws in terms of their compliance with the standards of international human rights law. We need to mount a SAARC fact-finding mission which can visit Bhutan as well as the refugee camps. Access to Southern Bhutan is likely to prove to be very difficult if not impossible. But the effort must be made.

We need to organize in each of our countries, a series of public meetings to inform our people of the situation in Bhutan; generate public sympathy and support to raise the financial and human resources needed for effective relief and rehabilitation programmes for the Bhutanese refugees; petition our own governments to mediate and intervene in the most constructive way possible, or at the very least to refrain from providing encouragement and support to those violating human rights in Southern Bhutan.

We need to work together to evolve and implement concrete strategies aimed at: creating pressure on the Bhutanese authorities to halt human rights violations; securing the release of the detainees and the cessation of torture; protecting the properties of Bhutanese now in exile; securing the reopening of schools and hospitals and the resumption of supplies of health services and essential commodities

in Southern Bhutan; utilizing existing mechanisms within the UN human rights system to demand that the Bhutan government comply with all the standards of international human rights law and repeal all of its racial and ethnically discriminatory policies, laws and practices.

The future of Bhutan may well portend the future of all the peoples of SAARC. It therefore behooves us all to make common cause and "go not gently into the night — But rage, rage against the dying of the light."

"DUMPING GRANNY"

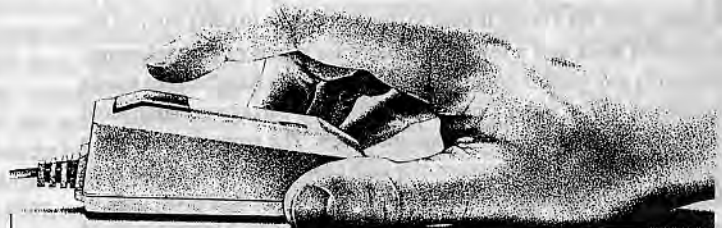
From an article in a recent issue of the Guardian Weekly.

Elderly and frail Americans are being abandoned at hospital emergency departments in a new phenomenon known as "granny dumping", according to the American Association for Retired Persons (AARP).

In its monthly bulletin, the AARP says numbers — "small but growing" — are not known because Medicare, the national health service for pensioners, keeps no statistics.

The old folk are usually left by relatives as "patients". By the time the staff realise the old person is not sick, the relatives have disappeared. Some just drop off the relative from a car and summon staff by sounding the horn, before driving away. In a typical case, an elderly woman in Florida, "suddenly materialised" in a wheelchair at the emergency reception desk of Tampa General Hospital. The old woman had a note pinned to her bag saying: "She's sick. Please take care of her." The hospital sees "two or three cases a week," Toni Mitchell, director of the emergency care centre, said.

"People are not necessarily callous," Dr. Mitchell added, "but feel overwhelmed. They have reached the point where they can no longer care for the old person."



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Fatal Myth: A Critique of *Fatalism and Development*

FATALISM AND DEVELOPMENT Nepal's Struggle for Modernization

by Dor Bahadur Bista
Orient Longman, New Delhi

IRs 150, 1991

ISBN 0 86311 245 5

Reviewed by Anup Pahari

FATALISM AND DEVELOPMENT

NEPAL'S STRUGGLE FOR MODERNIZATION

It attempts to diagnose Nepal's ills through the eyes of a sympathetic yet critical insider. It has something of the flavour of other such attempts: De Tocqueville's *Ancien Regime*, Weber's *Protestant Ethic*, Taine's *Notes Upon England*.

It is worth considering at some length because of its insights and because Bista, as an insider, can say things which no outsider could say.—Alan Macfarlane in *Cambridge Anthropology*.

DOR BAHADUR BISTA

Underdevelopment is a complex phenomenon. One of the promises of Dor Bahadur Bista's book is that some of this complexity with regard to Nepal may be understood from the point of view of a native anthropologist of proven sensitivity and understanding of Nepali society and culture. What one gets from *Fatalism and Development*, however, is truly a mixed bag.

The book is a remarkable collection of valuable insights, pointed and accurate criticism, sympathetic and liberal portrayal of the Nepali under-classes, jumbled together with common and unoriginal descriptions, faulty and often-spurious analyses, out-dated development theory, and, unfortunately, myriad stereotypes and clichés about non-Western societies. The book's virtues, as well as its failings, derive from this essentially schizophrenic mould.

In this book, Bista assumes the challenging task of demonstrating that the lack of rapid economic development in Nepal is caused largely by what he variously calls 'fatalism', 'Bahunism'

and the 'culture of fatalism'. In sociological terms, Bista wants to show that a particular configuration of cultural and ideological practices ('fatalistic hierarchy') has an identifiable and negative impact on Nepal's economic development. Readers are alerted early that the author is dissatisfied with previous attempts to explain Nepal's poor economic performance. He laments that "a great majority of the critics like to focus on politico-economic aspects of the society for every evil of Nepal. Rarely do they look into the socio-cultural and religious values."

Bista attempts to remedy this by proceeding to explain "every evil" of Nepali society in terms of "socio-cultural and religious values." At one level, he does advance some intuitive, appealing and even plausible hypotheses about why Nepal is poor, under-developed and ill-equipped to tackle the modern era. The answer, as Bista never tires of repeating, lies in the insidious 'culture of fatalism' that pervades the mind, spirit and actions of Nepalis who are "socially located to mediate relations between Nepal and the outside world".

Fatalism and Development is divided into seven chapters, an introduction, and a conclusion. The first two chapters deal with the social and cultural history of Nepal in which Bista attempts to outline the slow but certain spread of 'hierarchical fatalism' over a thousand-year period. Chapters Three to Seven are examinations of specific institutions and the 'fatalistic' contradictions within them — Family, Value Systems, Politics, Education and Foreign Aid. The bibliography is extensive, but readers should note that only 58 out of the 282 works listed here are actually cited in the text.

THE THESIS

Bista's attack on Nepali society is multi-pronged. Stripped to its barest essentials, however, the author seeks to establish the following set of related theses: economic development happens only when society as a whole, and particularly its leaders, believe in an "achievement-oriented" ethic. In Nepal, due to the pervasive influence of "hierarchical fatalism", society is "ascriptive" (the opposite of achievement-orientedness) and the dominant Hindus are unwilling to relinquish their undeserved hold over society. This results in the waste of productive energies of the majorities, the non-ruling castes. Development, therefore, can occur only when the Hindu caste system is thoroughly purged of its "fatalistic" tendencies.

Indeed, these are things that might seem self-evident to many, familiar with the workings of Nepali society. At times, they may have even

harboured identical suspicions about the reasons behind Nepal's current state. Fortunately, suspicion does not enjoy the status of explanation or theory in the social sciences. One of Bista's major flaws is that he, at times, seems to forget this. Not surprisingly, on a more systematic analysis; the entirety of his main thesis collapses. Not only is he unable to show any causal link between 'fatalism' and development, he is guilty of mis-specification, mis-interpretation and misrepresentation. In the guise of developing 'analytic generalisations', Bista provides a highly simplistic, biased and untenable framework for the study of the relationships between society, culture and economic development in the Nepali context. This is highly unfortunate since many in South Asia and in the West look up to Bista for insights into Nepali society. The thought that this work may be internalised by scholars and novices alike is worrisome, not the least because as a sociological study of under-development, *Fatalism and Development* is decades behind similar scholarship about many other developing countries.

Bista is well aware of the charges he will face and has taken pains to defend himself *a priori*. First, he urges that detailed counter-examples not be used against his 'fatalistic' model, as (he writes) otherwise generalisations cannot ever be made. Yet, his own generalisations are built on his impressions and the linkage of disconnected facts. Good generalisations should stand up to empirical and causal verification. Bista's other defence is to imply that those who do not agree with his thesis are themselves victims of the ideology of 'hierarchical fatalism'. This kind of intellectual intimidation is not worthy of a scholar of Bista's well-deserved reputation, and might have the unfortunate effect of inhibiting criticism of *Fatalism and Development*. Evaluation of a fellow social scientist's work should not make one vulnerable to such charges. In any case, Bista's work cannot go without challenge because it has the potential of creating serious rifts within communities in Nepal.

CHAKARI

There are at least two serious flaws in the book. First, Bista associates every negative or contradictory feature of Nepali society with 'fatalism'. He forgets a basic canon of logic — that something that explains everything, explains nothing! While Bista may very well be correct in arguing that the traditions of *chakari* and "*afno-manche*", discrimination against minorities, lack of systematic planning, and so on have a negative impact on economic development, it is by no

means clear that these are all caused by a 'culture of fatalism'. In fact, this is a spurious argument because a causal relationship is asserted but never demonstrated. When one explanation does not seem to work, the social scientist must search for alternative hypotheses. Bista, however, begins with a pre-conceived notion about the inverse relationship between 'fatalism' and development, and selectively uses social, cultural and historical material to 'prove' his 'theory'. Throughout the book he remains closed to any alternative explanation for the phenomena he highlights.

For example, the author repeatedly refers to *chakari* as a 'fatalistic' practice. But *chakari* is a highly purposeful, manipulative and conscious form of social action where the one who does *chakari* attempts to impress on the receiver of *chakari* that he is committed and loyal to the latter's cause, whatever that may be. In return for his labours, the *chakariwala* expects goods and services which under normal conditions would be out of his reach. Now, this might be highly undesirable, repugnant and may even retard economic progress. However, it is anything but fatalism, which by Bista's own account involves doing nothing about one's circumstances. *Chakari* may mean many things, but it certainly does not indicate passive acceptance of fate or *karma*.

The second major flaw of the book is the collection of general and loose statements about Nepali society made without any supportive evidence. These generalisations are then used as building blocks for the 'fatalism' thesis. I cite below only the most egregious examples of Bista's arbitrary, impressionistic and speculative methodology, together with brief rebuttals.

* *On religion and caste in historic Gorkha:*

"A primary difference between Gorkha and the other kingdoms of Nepal was that it had not been dissipated by fatalism and its negative influence. Instead of being a rigid, fatalistic society, Gorkhas still lived by ancient principles which allowed a large measure of egalitarianism and personal initiative for achievement." (p. 26)

There is no historical support for this statement. Gorkha kings, in fact, must have been far more Hinduistic than many Khas and Tibeto-Burman chieftains of the Baisi and Chaubisi states. They were certainly more Hindu than the Malla kings of Kathmandu Valley. It was, after all, Prithvi Narayan Shah who banned proselytising by Christian missionaries, which the Mallas had allowed.

It must also be recalled that some amount of flexibility on caste is a pre-requisite for successful war-making, and Prithvi Narayan was no stranger to this art form. To the extent that Bista's 'fatalism' assumes a belief in the Hindu caste system, the Gorkha kings were no more above it than most rulers of the period.

* *On the effect of Hindu domination over matwali castes:*

"Few ethnic Matwalis are successful, and even when this is so they often have frustrated, bitter and difficult personalities. Most turn their grievances into political activity of an essentially revolutionary kind." (p.57-58)

On what grounds does Bista make such patronising statements about *matwalis*? To say that ethnic minorities are disadvantaged is one thing. To offer pseudo-psychological theories about their "personalities" and political proclivities is another. Perhaps Bista knows a few *matwalis* to fit his theory, but there is certainly no shortage of people with 'difficult personalities' or radicals among *tagadhari*s.

* *On the status of women:*

"Women in Nepal generally have equal status except among the Bahun-Thakuri and some middle and upper class Chhetris. Since the population of such high caste people is not large the percentage of women who are underprivileged in comparison to men is relatively small."

Bista seems to think that legally sanctioned discrimination against women in matters such as inheritance, divorce and child-custody does not constitute gender inequality; or perhaps he believes that these apply only to *tagadhari* castes. One of the most consistent findings of social researchers in Nepal, particularly in the rural regions, is the significant inequality between men and women with regard to resources, power, work, leisure and so on. This is true across all caste groups.

* *On the socialisation of children:*

"There is no moral pressure or guilt feeling regarding immoral acts, because there is little sense of morality instilled in children: a sense of social responsibility is simply not internalized..."

No one can observe the children of Nepal at length - rural, urban, high caste, low caste - and still agree with this statement. In addition to universal moral principles, Nepali children are constantly made aware of *pap* (sin), and taught to have great respect for elders. The dense religious and ritualistic milieu in which most children grow up, particularly girls, cannot help but inculcate a deep moral sense in them. As for 'social responsibility', it is hard to imagine that children who often begin working by age six as anything but socially responsible, unless Bista has something entirely different in mind in his use of the phrase. However, even if the author is correct about children and morality, it is a dizzying Freudian leap from amoral socialisation to underdeveloped country!

Elsewhere, we are told that very few children are taught to compete or to try to achieve better than their fathers. Bista is obviously reporting what he *thinks* is the case. It may be true that Nepalis do not like to *claim* that they are

better than their fathers, but that is not the same as not *wanting* to do better than them.

* *On belief in karma:*

"Most Nepalis of the present generation, essentially from the Chhetri and Bahun castes, have been brought up according to a belief system that posits that one's circumstances have been determined by a supreme deity; that their lives have been fated. If one is happy and successful, it is because one must have earned this in a previous life. This is called karma." (p.77)

There is no method of either proving or disproving this statement. If one goes by behaviour, however, it is difficult to see how people who are supposedly so fatalistic (Chhetris and Bahuns), consistently managed to usurp the most lucrative jobs, to get their children highly educated, and to maneuver successfully in politics. It is not even necessary to believe that Chhetris and Bahuns are diligent in order to understand that, the theory of *karma* notwithstanding, people do all they can to live well in this life.

Bista writes elsewhere (p.81) that people in less privileged positions accept fate and choose not to "interfere with the divine order and dharmic purpose". Again, one can come to this conclusion only if one closes one's eyes. This contention was not true even in the age of the *Bhagvad Gita* when, for example, Buddhist monks preached against Brahminism, and millions of low caste individuals rebelled against oppressive Hinduism and became Buddhists. Mass conversions to Islam in late medieval India is further evidence that people in the Subcontinent have not always suffered quietly. Violent peasant revolts have always been a pervasive feature of rural South Asia. Most recently, the people of Nepal rose up against monarchical oppression.

The books and the Brahmins may say one thing; people, on the other hand, have always done what was possible to resist. It would be an insult to all those who have resisted in throughout history to think otherwise.

* *On planning:*

"As a rule Nepalis do not plan for the future. It is far easier to mentally speculate on the next life in an imaginary hell or heaven than to plan for one's own old age or for even later years." (p.85)

The biggest occupation in Nepal is farming. Agriculture is fundamentally about planning one's labour according to the growing seasons. Planting, weeding, harvesting, irrigating, saving seeds, fertilising, organising one's own and other's labour in time for critical agricultural tasks - none of these can be carried out without planning for the future. Planning for the future is a basic human urge and necessity, and all people, including Nepalis, plan.

Demographers agree that high fertility itself is a sort of 'plan' for old-age security. Contrary

to Bista's simplistic contention that Nepali parents prefer sons so that they can go to heaven, the real purpose behind male-preference is security in old age. As for savings, the poor (who make up the majority of the country's population) do not save because they have nothing to save.

* *On the 'poor but happy' people of Nepal:*

"Nepalis may be poor by international standards but the Nepali peasants are self-sufficient and largely content." (p.133)

It is hard to believe that this statement is not made by a 19th century English traveler recounting his short visit to Nepal to the folks back home. What we have here is only a slight reformulation of the classic Orientalist view of the 'poor but happy' people of Asia. I will leave it to the reader to decide whether 'content' is the word that best describes the state of mind of Nepali peasants, who are among the most marginal groups in Asia.

* *On the pace of progress in Nepal:*

"The Nepali rate of progress has been commensurate with the level of motivation and the amount of productive labour invested in it."

What is and what is not 'commensurate' with a given amount of labour is an ideological rather than an empirical question. Is the United States' standard of living commensurate with the 'motivation and productive labour' invested by its citizens? In what sense is a Nepali peasant who puts in ten hours of manual labour a day on her farm, any less motivated, or less hard-working, than a Wisconsin farmer? By Bista's logic, it would seem that each individual in the world is getting back only as much as he/she puts in — no more, no less. With such a premise, the next step is to say that the poor are poor because they do not work hard enough; the rich are rich because they are motivated and productive. In the Nepali context, by extension, we could argue that the Bahuns and Chhetris are collectively more wealthy because they are more motivated than the *matwali* castes. However, Bista should know better than anyone else that such a conclusion would be mistaken.

"MODERNISATION THEORY"

There are a number of other major inconsistencies in *Fatalism and Development* which render the book "simplistic, biased and scientifically untenable."

With the terms 'development' and 'modernisation' occurring in the title, one would expect a brief review of some theories of development. Bista undertakes no such task. Had he done so, he would have discovered that 30 years ago, under the rubric of 'modernisation theory', scholars such as Alex Inkles, David McClelland and Everett Hagen attempted to explain third world under-development by pointing to the absence of particular mental or personality traits in non-western societies and

individuals. They did so in much the same way that today Bista focuses on the absence among Nepalis of "competition", "achievement-drive", and "cause-effect outlook". The attempts of Inkles, McClelland and Hagen were characterised in their time as vulgar, simplistic, reductionist and even reactionary.

Today, scholars of development everywhere have rejected psychological 'theories' of change because it is agreed that the complex phenomena such as social change and economic development can never be explained in terms of a set of 'psycho-cultural' pseudo-variables such as 'guilt', 'achievement drive', and so on.

By Bista's reckoning, all countries that depend upon foreign aid and loans (which now includes the whole Eastern Bloc, China and India) and have made less than satisfactory economic progress, must be suffering from some form of 'fatalism'. If that is so, we must conclude that all of the presently under-developed world, as well as parts of Eastern Europe, have societies that are based on a 'fatalistic hierarchy'.

Bista's contention seems to be that fatalism is a quintessential Nepali trait. But since Nepal has no effective monopoly over poverty and slow economic growth, one would have to reach the conclusion that *there is something inherently faulty in the 'culture' of developing countries and in the minds and personalities of their individual citizens which is primarily responsible for the existence and reproduction of the condition of poverty.*

In fact, on page 150, Bista says exactly this. He suggests that "poor and backward" countries are in the state they are in because here social roles are 'ascriptive' rather than 'achieved'. Thus, a society's value system determines the pace of economic growth. By this logic, the most efficacious method of developing the third world is to replace native culture with 'successful cultures' such as Western and Japanese.

CASTE AND CLASS

Fatalism and Development is at its best precisely when it is not talking about 'fatalism'. Scattered throughout the text are telling criticisms of the nexus between class- and caste-inequality in Nepal. The *matwali* castes have been greatly marginalised in the course of the development of the Nepali political-economy. Critical resources such as land, political power, education and employment have been unavailable to a very large group of *matwalis*, whereas a section of the *tagadhari* castes have enjoyed privileged access to these. *It must never be ignored, however, that the majority of tagadhari people in Nepal do not share in the wealth and privilege of the ruling class, but are themselves marginal both socially and economically.* The dominant social group in Nepal is increasingly, therefore, not a *caste*, but a *class*.

Bista's real achievement is to recognise this inter-penetration of caste- and class-oppression in Nepal and to suggest that social inequality may be a real barrier to economic development. I am fully in agreement with Bista that when a significant proportion of the Nepali labour force is effectively outside the national mainstream and structurally barred from opportunities for productive activity, there cannot be rapid economic development. Gross social inequality has been shown to have a negative influence in many contexts on the capacity for economic growth. The structure of economic and social opportunities must be expanded and the large Nepali underclass given preferential access to these before there is a significant change in the living standards.

If Bista's main purpose was to make a plea for a fundamentally more egalitarian, pluralistic, secular, non-casteist and tolerant society in Nepal, then I believe these could, and need to be, made on their own merit. There is no question that the various ethnic groups have historically been discriminated against. He does not need to justify the call to redress this situation by trying to prove that these groups are better equipped to 'develop' Nepal because they are less 'fatalistic' than those of the presently dominant castes. Whether the under-privileged of Nepal are more or less fatalistic than any other group, their wider participation is a *sine qua non* for progressive change in Nepal. These groups need, at all cost, to have the same opportunities as others.

But Bista goes far beyond simply exposing the class and caste contradictions in Nepal. He has a theory about how these contradictions developed in the first place, and about how they are reproduced over time. He has a theory not only about why there is disparity within Nepal, but why the world is divided into rich and poor nations. Finally, there is an implicit theory about how this situation can be changed. When he begins to 'explain' the genesis and persistence of class inequality in Nepal by conjuring up the theory of 'fatalistic' conspiracy; when he justifies global inequalities by advancing the "ascription" versus "achievement" dichotomy; and finally when he suggests that development is a function of replacing one set of 'social values' by another, Bista is quite far off the mark.

'Fatalism' is ultimately about escapism — the desire to see and explain the world by resorting to simple theories rather than accepting the fact that the world is complex, 'messy', and always contradictory. By casting the complex social, political and economic history and experience of Nepal within the mould of 'caste', 'hierarchy' and 'fatalism', Bista partakes in the ultimate fatalistic exercise.

DO YOU KNOW YOUR HIMAL?

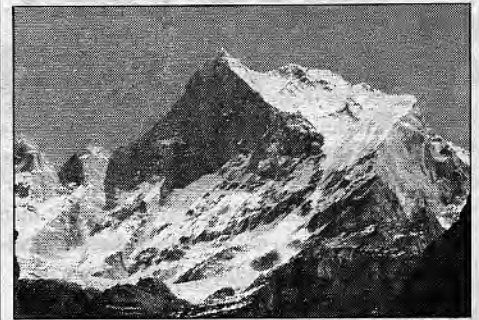
Arnico K. Panday

How much do you really know about the mountain world of South and Central Asia? Go through each multiple-choice question below, circling the answer you think is correct. Then turn to page 41 to see how you did.

- On what glacier did Eric Shipton supposedly find the first Yeti footprints in 1951?
A. Khumbu Glacier B. Manlung Glacier
C. Yalung Glacier D. Ngojumba Glacier
- What four major rivers do, according to ancient legends, spring from Mt. Kailash?
A. Salween, Mekong, Yangtse, Brahmaputra/Yarlung Zangpo
B. Brahmaputra, Tista, Meghna, Padma
C. Sultej, Brahmaputra/Yarlung Zangpo, Ganga, Indus
D. Godavari, Narmada, Krishna, Mahanadi
- The first 8000 meter peak to be summited was _____ and the last was _____.
A. Nanga Parvat; Dhaulagiri
B. Broad Peak; Dhaulagiri
C. K2/Godwin Austen/Chogori; Cho Oyu
D. Annapurna; Shisha Pangma/Gosainthan
- Which ethnic group is famous for its communal longhouses?
A. Naga B. Sherpa
C. Nuristani D. Dafla
- What are the highest two mountains of equal height?
A. Chomolhari and Sia Kangri
B. Phola Gangchen and Dhaulagiri IV
C. Gasherbrum III and Gyachung Kang
D. Gurja Himal and Tarke Kang
- In what order did Everest receive its name?
A. Everest - Chomolongma - Sagarmatha
B. Sagarmatha - Chomolongma - Everest
C. Sagarmatha - Everest - Chomolongma
D. Chomolongma - Everest - Sagarmatha

- Who named the mountain range north of Tibet's Yarlung Zangpo river "Transhimalaya"?
A. Nain Singh B. Eric Shipton
C. Sven Hedin D. Martin Conway
- In what year did the first fixed-wing aeroplane overflight of Everest take place?
A. 1931 B. 1933
C. 1953 D. 1987
- What is Bhutan's highest mountain?
A. Gangkar Puenzum B. Chomolhari
C. Jeje Kangphu D. Kula Kangri
- Rank the following capital cities from northernmost to southernmost:
A. Lhasa, Kathmandu, Thimpu, Delhi, Islamabad
B. Lhasa, Thimpu, Islamabad, Delhi, Kathmandu
C. Lhasa, Islamabad, Delhi, Thimpu, Kathmandu
D. Islamabad, Lhasa, Delhi, Kathmandu, Thimpu
- Which of the following hydropower projects, planned or under construction, is expected to produce the most electricity?
A. Arun III B. Karnali-Chisapani
C. Tehri D. Narmada
- What town is located at the confluence of the Bhagirathi and the Bhilangana rivers?
A. Almora B. Mugling
C. Tehri D. Waling
- Which 8000m peak was the first to be climbed by women? Where were they from?
A. Manaslu; Japan B. Lhotse; Switzerland
C. Everest; Japan D. Everest; Nepal
- What are the southernmost and northernmost 8000m peak?

- Kanchenjunga and K2/Godwin Austen/Chogori
- Makalu and Nanga Parvat
- Annapurna and Broad Peak
- Annapurna and Gasherbrum I



A. PANDEY

- What mountain is shown in the picture above?
A. Numbur B. Jannu
C. Kailash D. Machhapuchhare
- What is Asia's northernmost 7000m peak?
A. Pik Pobeda/ Mount Tomur
B. K2/Godwin Austen/Chogori
C. Mustagata D. Kongur
- Where is the 7556 meter high mountain Minya Konya, also known as Gongga Shan, located?
A. Assam, India B. Qinghai, China
C. Sichuan, China D. Afghanistan
- The Kunlun mountain range separates Tibet from:
A. Xinjiang and the Takla Makan Desert
B. Sichuan, China C. Nepal and Bhutan
D. Ladakh and Kashmir
- Which is the longest glacier in Asia?
A. Baltoro Glacier B. Khumbu Glacier
C. Siachen Glacier D. Rongbuk Glacier
- Which Ganesh Himal Peak is also called "Pabil"?
A. Ganesh I, 7429m B. Ganesh II, 7111m
C. Ganesh III, 7110m D. Ganesh IV, 7052m



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Among the many phenomena that evolution has handed down to us, going to the potty is one of them. It is an important physiological activity. From the fossilised prehistoric dung found in archaeological digs from Africa to Manchuria, we also know that dinosaurs did it. Birds do it and bees do it.

Unfortunately, trekkers and mountaineers do it as well. And all this loo-related activity is a source of major environmental concern. It is a question that has bothered greater minds than mine, only they do not want to address it head-on due to the socio-cultural thing known as "embarrassment" that humans are prone to.

The question is, what to do with all the non-local poo poo that has accumulated on our mountains since package tourism gave way to "adventure tourism". In the former instance, waste disposal was the five-star hotel's problem. In the latter case, the Himalayan environment gets it between the eyes. To confess, my sudden interest in Himalayan environmentalism stems not only from love of

that each expedition dig a pit toilet or trench latrine below the permanent snow line and lug down all human and other wastes to it. "If ways can be found to compost or otherwise decontaminate human waste at these elevations, it could be used to fertilize local fields lower in the Rongbuk Valley."

We'd have to check that one out with the Sherpas and the Tibetans, I guess. But the problem of toilet paper deserves special study. McConnell's party tried to burn toilet paper after each use, but found this impractical at high altitude.

I say that McConnell is barking up the wrong juniper. Rather than try to find ways to bury, burn or otherwise hide used toilet paper, we should question the very use of tee pee. It is unsightly, totally external to the local environment, degrades much slower than organic wastes, and introduces an alien method of doing things to the locals.

The hydro-dynamics preferred by the Orient, and the Occident's use of paper, both need analysis for the sake of the future of the Himalayan trails. Each regards the other's method as uncouth and barbarious, but the Occident is clearly gaining in influence.

On strictly environmental grounds, I believe no one would argue that the use of water is superior to paper. While the use of water in higher climes might raise certain problems related to quick ice-formation on exposed flanks, lower down, water should be the recommended method. The only hurdle is cultural. And on that one, if it is possible for a Nepali villager to overnight change habits upon arriving in New York City, is it asking too much for the reverse from the American or European, particularly when ample supplies of soap and warm water are made available?

I hear that in the Nepal Valley over and yonder, they are fighting over which self-proclaimed environmentalist should be chosen to go to Rio to attend United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. O Kathmandu Bretheren! Desist in your bickering and focus on the essentials! Unite in the face of the organic onslaught underway against your mountains. The West is not only to blame for producing chlorofluorocarbons that are eating up our atmospheric ozone, and the greenhouse gases that are warming our glaciers. The West is depositing foreign faecal matter on our pristine snows. At Rio, let us propose major changes in the way to go about business. We are told to do in Rome as the Romans do, and Italians use toilet paper. Whereas, in the Himalaya paper technology never got diversified enough. So, when in the Himalaya...

Once the decision is taken in Rio to make the major behavioural shift, we must look for the solution — and why not the Sulabh toilet?

Dr. Sudhinder Sharma, journalist and environmental scientist associated with the Energy and Environment Group in New Delhi, is impressed with the Sulabh. "It is an ordinary latrine to look at, but for the specially designed sloppy pan, which requires no more than two litres of water to flush the excreta, as against 12.5 litres for a normal flush toilet. What is often considered an uninteresting hole in the ground is indeed a technology which has stood the test of time."

Dr. Sharma writes that the Sulabh toilet has engineered a sanitary revolution in the Indo-Gangetic plains. Well, such a sanitary revolution is direly needed higher up. In all seriousness, let the Tourism Departments of all Himalayan nations place Sulabh toilets along the tourist routes. At the same time, they must not forget to put in a bulk-order for water jugs — and ban the importation of toilet paper.

There is a certain inhibition that overtakes journalists, planners and politicians when the talk turns to sanitation. Nobody wants to talk dirty. Dr. Sharma knows this



mother Himalaya, but also that lately I have been unable to enter my Barun cave without scraping yuk off my paws. This has got to stop, humans.

The Upper Rongbuk Valley on the north of Chomolongma/Sagarmatha/Everest is getting to be a very dirty place and it is not only I who is disquoted. Robert M. McConnell agrees in the November issue of *Mountain Research and Development*. Leading the 1990 Everest Environmental Expedition, McConnell found that, "no matter where you dig, you find either a pile of buried trash or a previously used toilet space." A three-foot deep pit toilet at a height of 5,200 m had been filled with human waste and toilet paper within three months. *Aachi* (to use the endearing Nepali term) from 1987 had not decomposed by 1990.

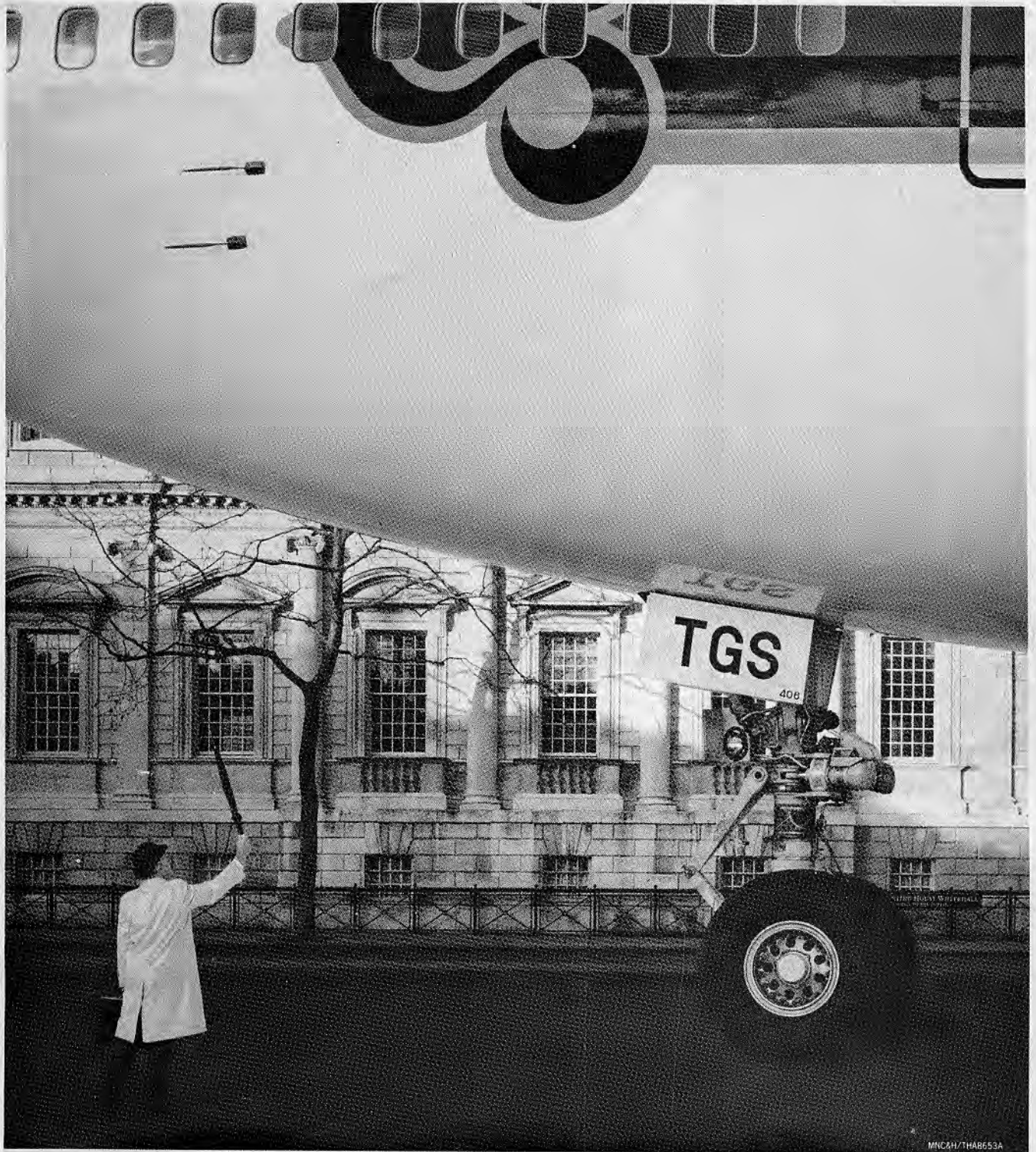
Given the volume of wastes that is being generated, one of McConnell's suggestions is



more than anyone else. He writes, "Talking about toilets is not glamorous, and to raise funds for toilets is even more daunting. To describe to an audience the significance of toilets, keeping it entertaining but avoiding an excess of lavatorial humour, is possibly the ultimate challenge development workers face today."

How true. I myself am able to strike this courageous pose and talk so engagingly about Himalayan human excreta only because I do not belong to the culprit species. For me, it is somewhat like a zoologist lecturing on snow leopard droppings. I can be intellectual about it. Were I human, what with my erudition and worldliness, I'd probably be using tissues.





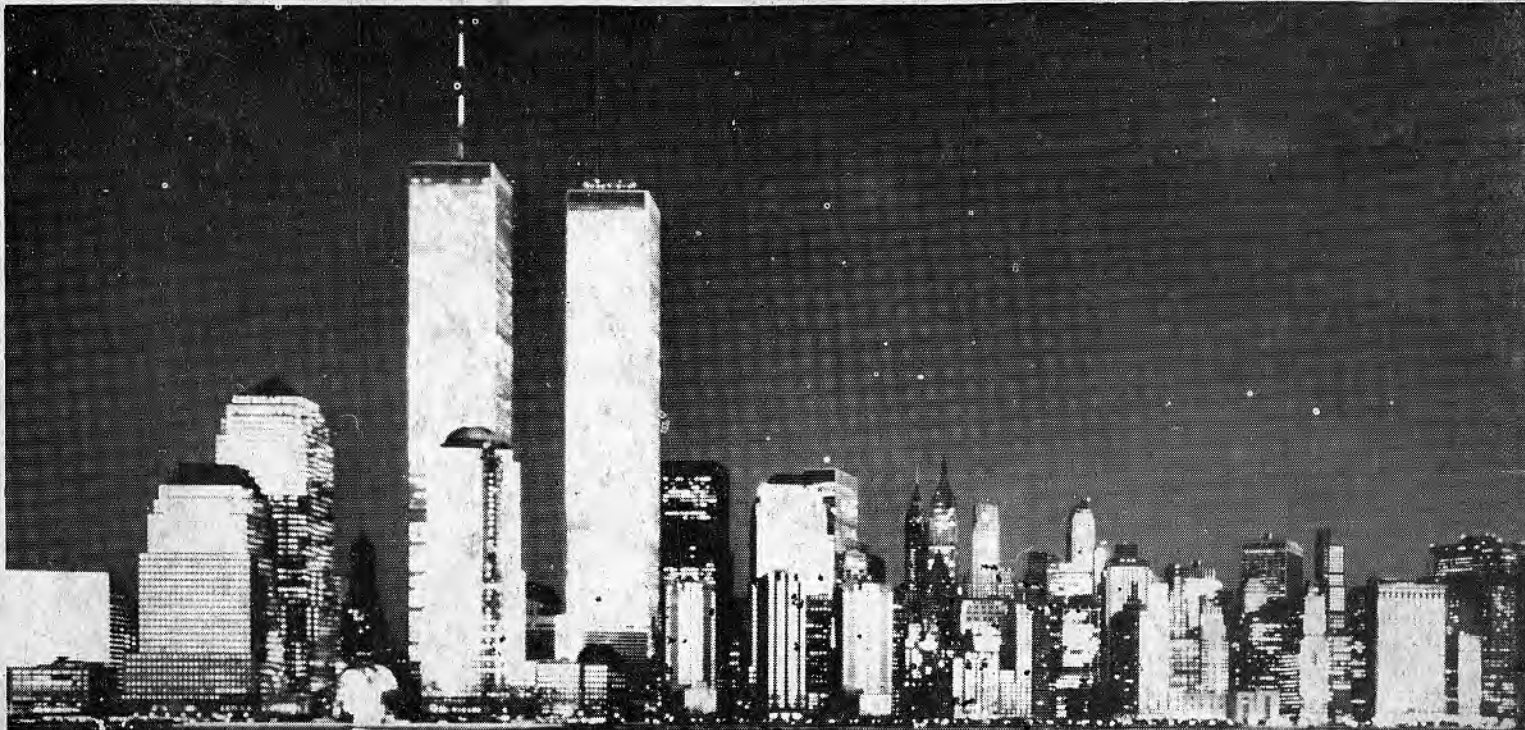
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