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HIMAL

HIMALAYAN MAGAZINE



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HIMAL

Vol. 5 No. 3 May/June 1992

अस्त्युत्तरस्यां विशि देवतात्मा
हिमालयो नाम नगाधिराजः
पूर्वापरौ तोयनिधी वगाह्य
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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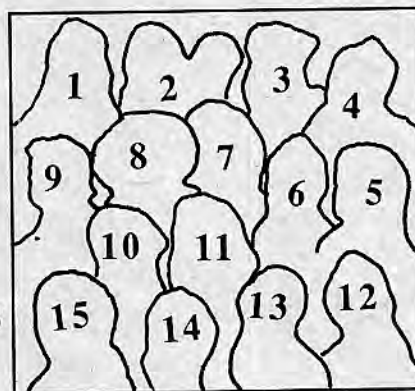
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MAIL

What's In It for You?

In "What's In It for Me?" (Mar/Apr 1992), Manisha Aryal tried to analyse the activities of different non-governmental organisations (NGOs) involved in women's development. As a trainee who participated in the Center for Women and Development's Communication Education and Gender Training Programme, Aryal deserves congratulations for her bold venture. Unfortunately, her article lacks in-depth study and maturity. It makes interesting reading but lacks objectivity and is biased. An accusing finger is pointed at almost every

started on a modest scale, with our own resources, as successful and worthy of support. The Centre's research programmes are continuing and will continue; research, after all, forms the knowledge base for action.

The immature and hasty accusations made by Aryal that all women and development NGOs are donor-driven, or are patronised by donors, have no foundation. Regarding NGOs which tend to resemble family enterprises, no doubt this seems to be a lucrative trend. However, without a thorough investigation into the social service approach versus the commercial consultant approach of NGOs, it is premature to pass judgement.

The writer should also have been better informed about the Women, Water and Energy series, which is not a research study undertaken by one institution as she seems to think. It is the result of a training workshop in which writers from various institutions presented their own perspectives and analysis.

We would suggest that *Himal*, in its enthusiasm to present alternative views and generate innovative ideas, be aware of the social responsibilities of journalism. The borderline between analysis and bias may be thin, but the latter certainly shows in print, in your journal. Furthermore, is *Himal* exclusively free from the all-engulfing donor syndrome which overwhelms the whole country today? Self-assessment and introspection may be worthwhile.

*Board of Directors
Centre for Women and Development
Kamaladi, Kathmandu*

Out of the Dark

I found the issue on foreign aid (Mar/Apr 1992) extremely informative. Your journal has played an important journalistic role by providing unbiased, well-investigated information. The issue has brought a vital subject out of hallowed seminar halls and discussion among "aid practitioners", into the public forum. In the spirit of democracy, it represents an important step towards forming public opinion on what we, the people of Nepal, need and what we do not. It is high

time we stopped paying for the mistakes of decisions-makers and the greed of "significant others" in the aid game.

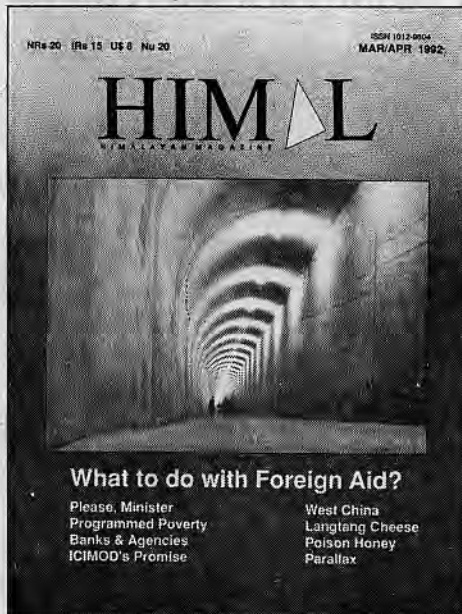
*Arzu Rana
Lalitpur*

ICIMOD's India Problem

It is sadly an occupational disease of so many journalists the world over to describe situations in terms of personalities as a substitute for serious thought and analysis. As is clear from his article on ICIMOD (Mar/Apr 1992), Bijaya Lal Shrestha too is afflicted by this malady. His personal attacks on me as the Centre's first Director are both grossly unfair and inaccurate.

There is no truth whatsoever in the scurrilous statement that India's alleged apprehensions at my appointment (at age 57 not 62) arose because I had "been asked to leave India in the 1960s while working in Calcutta as a Ford Foundation employee." Whatever its malicious origin, this is a complete fabrication. And ironic in that, just two years ago, I was honoured to be invited back to Calcutta to participate in the Tercentenary of this great city, and to receive an award from the Mayor for my "personal contribution to Calcutta's planning and development." Shrestha's absurd allegation could be ignored (though damaging to my reputation as it is) but he uses it in this article to justify a much greater fabrication: "that Rosser's role was greatly undermined by his 'Indian problem' which greatly hurt the organisation as a whole". This is superficial nonsense.

To the extent that ICIMOD (and therefore myself as Director - not the other way round) had an "Indian problem", it arose from much more serious issues than those linked to the personalities involved. Apparently Shrestha's analysis cannot rise to the level of geopolitics. Perhaps he should reflect a little on his own country's complex relations over the last few years with its giant neighbours to the north and south (doubtless he will recall the reasons for the recent 'trade boycott' of Nepal) and then transfer some of this thinking to seek some minimal



NGO working in the area of women and development. The findings, based as they are on sweeping and hurried interviews, do not do justice to organisations that have worked with commitment in this area for a long time. Also, does the question in the title of the article apply only to women-oriented NGOs?

It is not necessarily true that NGOs go "where the money is," as our Centre's work demonstrates. Our action programme grew out of our research findings. The decision to extend work into training and action was certainly not donor-inspired, as the writer implies. In fact, donors view the work we

understanding of the politics of ICIMOD in the framework of the whole region.

This letter is not the place for a discussion of ICIMOD's problems or indeed achievements whilst I was its Director. (I am currently preparing a lengthy memoir on ICIMOD's foundation as an instructive example of the inescapable conflicts between 'soft' environmental idealism and the 'hard' realities of international power politics.) But I must say it seems hardly possible that one obvious problem, the very basis of India's concerns about this new Centre, should have completely escaped Shrestha's attention. The inclusion of China.

Shrestha notes the early history of ICIMOD's foundation, but omits the absolute key fact that the Centre's validity as an international institution had its basis in a resolution at the General Assembly of UNESCO in Paris in 1981 (three years before I had even heard of ICIMOD). This resolution, passed unanimously, defined the "countries of the Hindu Kush-Himalaya" to including eight countries including the People's Republic of China. Given the Centre's fundamental non-political objectives, the inclusion of China made excellent sense in terms of the genuine, if naive, idealism of this new Centre's sponsors. The inclusion of China apparently passed unnoticed (at least without recorded objection) by the Indian delegation at the UNESCO General Assembly in 1981. It was several years, it seems, before the Ministry of External Affairs in Delhi woke up to the geopolitical implications of China's active participation in a regional institute to be based in Kathmandu with the whole of the Hindu Kush Himalaya within its mandate. As a senior Indian diplomat said to me in an unguarded moment, "The Indian delegation at this UNESCO General Assembly must have been asleep to let ICIMOD include China."

Thereafter, it was South Block (Joint Secretary North) in Delhi that 'controlled' ICIMOD affairs, not the Secretary, Department of Environment, Government of India. The Indian Foreign Service, that is, not the Indian Administrative Service. Clearly, the inherent international structure of this new Centre conflicted (unwittingly for its European sponsors and staff) with a fundamental tenet of India's foreign policy with regard to its highly sensitive northern border along the whole of the Himalayan range. The inclusion of China, for whatever reason, in a regional Centre based in Kathmandu appeared, *ipso facto*, to legitimise Chinese interests in the southern face of the Himalaya. And thus offer a challenge, however minor it might seem in ICIMOD's case, to Indian hegemony in this whole complex region. It was as if China had somehow been invited to join SAARC! Add Pakistan (over Gilgit and Kashmir),

Bangladesh (over Farakka and the Brahmaputra), and Nepal and Bhutan *re* their relations with China — and clearly ICIMOD had emerged in the middle of a political minefield. In India's South Block view, its very existence was 'a mischief' — one of the commonest nouns of Indian diplomacy!

There is much more to be said (on another occasion) about this, of course, and about its implications for the structure and functions (and frustrations) of the ICIMOD Board of Governors whilst I was the Director. But this one fact of the inclusion of China was the cause and essence of "ICIMOD's India problem." The cast of players in this particular minor *chukka* of the Great Game was largely irrelevant; the basic problem was intractable. If Indian harassment focused on me

personally, this was quite understandable; as Director I was a suitably visible, neutral and 'easy' target in essentially 'coded' political exchanges. The board and my senior colleagues understood only too well. Not difficult to understand, surely? Difficult to change, certainly.

In making this single point, I do not intend any criticism of India. Every country must, of course, be the sole judge of its national interest. As director, I unexpectedly found myself in an impossible situation in political terms. And with much sadness, because a deep affection for India has been the center of my personal and professional life for almost five decades.

Colin Rosser
West Malvern, England

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Back Issues of Himal:

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0	0	Green	May/1987	The Valley Chokes
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
5	1	Red	Jan/Feb 1992	Weakening Spirit of Kathmandu Valley
5	2	Purple	Mar/Apr 1992	What to do with Foreign Aid?

Out of Sight, Not Out of Mind

I strongly disagree with Umesh Malla's statement in the item "Urban Voices" (Jan/Feb 1992) that "polluting industries must be located outside the Valley, in Hetauda or Bharatpur". I am amazed that such a statement could have been uttered by an "urban planner". The problems created by polluting industries are not solved by moving industries to places where they can continue to pollute out of sight.

Firstly, the products of these industries would still have to be brought to the main markets of Kathmandu, need more trucks and more fuel consumption, and creating more air pollution. Secondly, other towns and rivers of Nepal should not have to shoulder the pollution that Kathmandu is fed up with. The Panchayat era is dead; with the new democratic norms we fought for, the inhabitants of other towns cannot be made to accept what has been deemed unfit for Kathmandu. They too are Nepali and have the same rights as the people of Kathmandu.

Moreover, shifting polluting factories out of the Valley does not even guarantee an end to their harmful effects on Kathmandu. Wool-dyeing factories banned within the Ring Road periphery show us clearly that smoke does not remain within the boundaries that the factories are relegated to. The mighty Narayani river at Bharatpur, or its tributary at Hetauda, are "easy" dumping sites. But will all that we dump into these watercourses conveniently flow across the border — not to mention the effect on India? There is a dam across the Narayani at Tribenighat which diverts water to irrigate fields in Nepal's districts of Parsa and Bara. Since these districts provide food to Kathmandu, the pollution dumped on the Narayani ultimately travels back to the plates of Kathmandu citizens.

Environmental problems are not solved by moving them around. The solution is, simply, to force polluting industries to stop polluting.

Arnico Kumar Panday
Lalitpur

American Shangri La

We encountered *Himal* shortly after arriving in Nepal. We are leaving with all the back issues we could find. Your journal contributed in a major way to whatever partial understanding of Himalayan issues we are carrying home with us.

As visitors to Nepal, we were particularly interested in the Jan/Feb 1990 issue on Himalayan mythologising. Few honest western visitors can deny participating in this process in some way. We found the perspectives presented instructive and thought-provoking.

Now, though, we are wondering where the promised corollary issue on the "American Shangri La" is? We have encountered enough

Nepali mythologising of America and Americans to be convinced that this process can also use a healthy examination.

Ultimately, unbalanced Nepali views of developed countries may prove to be as troublesome to the Himalayan region as the imposition of romanticised Western visions.
Mark Shapley, Lynda Saul
Helena, Montana; United States

Editors - We intend to get around to it soon. Please keep your subscription current.

Take Heart from the Doctrine of Odious Debts

One vital aspect, briefly touched upon by Bihari Krishna Shrestha but not dealt with in depth by *Himal's* foreign aid issue (Mar/Apr 1992) was the ethical dimension of development financed through someone else's wallet (the taxed poor in the rich countries paying the rich Marcoses and Mobotus in poor countries). This is what Patricia Adams deals with in her book *Odious Debts*.

Your abstract of her book, however, missed the main point. Its central theme is the doctrine by that name which, the author argues, must be considered in any serious attempt to solve the South's debt crisis and the related environmental degradation. In calling for the shut-down of the World Bank, one of the secondary conclusions of the book, which you did mark, Adams is not as motivated by the pathology of its projects or the plight of the South as was Devendra Raj Upadhyaya in his article. Her starting premise is the failure of the taxpayers of the rich countries to come to terms with the issue of lender accountability.

The doctrine of "odious debts" was first propounded by the United States in 1898, when it took over Cuba from Spain. The latter argued that, in taking over, the United States assumed formal responsibility for Cuba's debts. The United States countered that the debts were incurred by an undemocratic regime and not the Cuban nation. It was a burden "imposed upon the people of Cuba without their consent and by force of arms, which was one of the principal wrongs for the termination of which the struggles for Cuban independence were undertaken."

The doctrine of odious debts was given its strong, legal shape 25 years later by Alexander Nahum Sack, a professor of law in Paris and a former cabinet minister in Czarist Russia. Sack held that if a despotic power incurs a debt, not to further the interests of the state but to strengthen its despotic regime, to repress the population that fights against it, to aggrandise and enrich itself with vanity projects and their attendant corruption, then the debt is not an obligation for the nation but is a regime's personal debt which falls with the demise of the regime. Such debts are *odious*

for the population of the state (*dettes odieuses*).

In Sack's formulation, creditors should not expect protection for loans to foreign states if they are unable to prove that those loans have been properly used for the just needs and reasonable interests of the state. Adams applies this doctrine to current Southern aid maladies. According to her, besides loans financing the arming or enrichment of despotic rulers, odious loans also include those extended to an electric utility or for balance of payments support (structural adjustment). "When government officials, treat state investments as vehicles for political favours, graft, and capital flight, and are prepared to turn a blind eye to the technical and economic viability of such projects, foreign bank loans become grease in wheels that turn against state interests. Foreign bankers who fail to recognize or act upon pricing irregularities, slipshod plans, and suspect contracts soon become parties to hostile acts against a populace." In short, Adams argues that some debts can be immoral and the burden of such an immoral act must also be shouldered by those doing the lending.

This issue of lender-accountability is also examined by Cheryl Payer's just published *Lent and Lost: Foreign Credit and South Development* (Zed Books, 1991). Payer comes from the *Monthly Review* school of neo-Marxists who also gave us the groundbreaking book *Nepal in Crisis*. In her work, Payer makes mincemeat of the structural adjustment programme so religiously subscribed to by aid agencies in recent years. As the debt burden of developing countries rose with borrowings for unviable projects — reaching the point where these countries became net exporters of capital — it was imperative to prevent a repudiation of loans. According to Payer, the structural adjustment program, known as the "Baker Plan", was the bankers' response. It is Reaganomics exported to the South, an attempt to solve the debt crisis by forcing the borrower to assume yet more loans to pay its debt under the direction of a creditor's cartel. The situation is similar to the story of the extravagant prince and the money-lender: the former has no credit elsewhere and so needs the old creditor, and the latter is in danger of seeing his investments collapse and so keeps transfusing credit to keep the fiction of solvency alive.

Payer suggests a public registry of debt exposure to prevent over-borrowing by corrupt regimes and to penalise lenders responsible for such over-borrowing. Creditors whose loans are not publicly registered would have no legal claim on a country's foreign exchange earnings. No secret deals could then be made, pledging future public revenues, and new creditors would have an accurate picture of

other claims on a country's future earnings. Finally, when debt service due on registered debts exceeds the legal limits payable, the registry would establish automatic priorities for debt service.

Because of the donor/recipient nature of foreign aid, in the form of whether grants or soft loans, the high moral pedestal is usually assumed to be occupied by the one who gives. Not often has the analytical spotlight been focused on the more pervasive reality which is the other way around, especially when the debt-burdened South has been a *net exporter* of capital to the North. This occurs even in grant projects when subsequent imports of spare parts can bleed a poor country white as your abominable snowperson seemed to understand regarding the case of the steel trussed paddy terraces in the village of Kuh ("Abominably Yours"), and as the holy Father Grueber, S.J. warned about alpine water pipes in your "Mail" section.

What Adams and Payer are saying to taxpayers of the North (and their governments which underwrite their bankers' loans) is that Southern nations are not morally obliged to carry the burden of odious debts incurred by undemocratic regimes *even for public works projects* — unless these have undergone a process of public hearing and the sovereign loans have been democratically accepted after a transparent debate (as is the case in the North where loans then do not become odious). Nepal's electricity consumers, infuriated by outrageous tariff hikes used to cover the costs of the poorly executed and overpriced Mar-syangdi and Kulekhani hydroelectric projects, should take heart that theirs is a just cause supported by the doctrine of odious debts.

Dipak Gyawali
Chabel, Kathmandu

Camel Trophy

Unfortunately you never followed up — in genuine Nepali style — on our successful campaign against Reyonold Tobacco's Camel Trophy (Sept/Oct 1990). We did not succeed in stopping it for good, however. The rally was shifted from the Indian Himalaya to Tanzania in East Africa, and this year the rally will be held in Guyana, South America.

Be alert, they might try again to come to the Himalayan region! The Camel Trophy rally fits very well into the new Indian tourism policy, which is based on "adventures" of all sorts.

Ludmilla Tuting
Working Group "Tourism with Insight"
Berlin

Is Pahari Being Defensive?

Anup Pahari's review of Dor Bahadur Bista's book, *Fatalism and Development* (Jan/Feb 1992) misses the forest for the trees, and is a one-sided, negative statement. The "politics" of Pahari's language appear designed to devalue the author and the book. Although Pahari acknowledges, "the book is a remarkable collection of valuable insights, pointed and accurate criticism" every positive comment is subsequently retracted or devalued. What is most disturbing are the many unanalysable, unsubstantiated, highly evaluative comments which regularly attempt to reduce Bista and his work to an inferior position. Pahari even suggests that the book is dangerous. Bista's book, which is concerned with the problem of persistence and change, provides hope and a challenge to transform Nepali society for more positive development. Is Pahari's statement a living example of Bista's concern with the power of culture, and the difficulty some members of the dominant high caste group may have with his observations?

For example, Pahari says: "Bista

provides a highly simplistic, biased and untenable framework for the study of the relationship between society, culture and economic development in the Nepali context." The reviewer, however, does not tell the reader what is simplistic, or untenable about Bista's framework. How can one then assess Pahari's assertion? In related statements Pahari appears upset that Bista does not use what is commonly referred to as a "cause and effect," "logical-positivist" approach to the topic, but he never directly challenges Bista's use of "inductive and ethnographic" social science methodology. With this methodology Bista does not set out to test hypotheses (or alternative hypotheses), nor to examine cause and effect relationships. If this is not his goal, how can Pahari criticise him for not pursuing it? Rather, Bista sets out to present the Nepali perception of social processes, to critically analyse these perceptions, and to search for general laws. To realise these goals, an inductive-ethnographic approach is the appropriate method. In this instance, the hypothesis testing method preferred by Pahari is inappropriate, equivalent to the value of measuring an elephant's ass with a micrometer.

Using the inductive-ethnographic approach, Bista's sociological imagination follows the tradition of other great scholars such as C. Wright Mills. Bista uses the most effective research instrument, his human intelligence, and ethnographic skill to sort out and to focus 30 years of observations he has made on Nepal's attempt to develop and respond to change. Nepali society is rewarded by meaningful ideas and insights which can be of help in its struggle with development, and with persistence and change.

In the introduction to *Fatalism and Development*, Bista advises the reader of the difference between universal and exceptional observations, and of his concern that the reader may disregard the valid "public issues" or "universal" concerns in Nepali society because they differ from their own experiences. This critical conceptual concern is widely acknowledged in research literature and has helped to focus many problem areas. (See, for example, William Ryan's book, *Blaming the Victim*.) And the definition and redefinition of social problems is critical to their solution. (See E. Seidman and J. Rappaport, *Redefining Social Problems*.)

Pahari twists and misrepresents Bista's warnings: "Bista is well aware of the charges he will face and has taken great pains to defend himself *a priori*. First, he urges that detailed counter examples not

The Day Kathmandu Disappeared

His expectations betrayed, the pilot,
Amazed,
Pulls up the nose of his jet.

It was there yesterday.

Miles of haze fills the Valley.

The lower he goes, the thicker it gets.

There is no bottom.

Where his instruments demand a city,

He can find only miasma.

He banks, dipping a wing into the murk,
and flies his puzzled passengers back to Calcutta.

Beneath, invisible, the city goes about its business

Brick is slapped upon orange brick.

The diminished Bagmati struggles through silt.

An army of tempos roars staggering from Ratna Park,

And buses lurch belching up Lazimpat.

It is a day like any other.

But there are no airplanes.

The inverted bowl of the sky reveals no mountains,
No outline of forested hills.

The city has become what it is,

Poisoned and inviolate.

Radio Nepal reports:

Fair throughout the Kingdom.

Steven Jervis
Fullbright Scholar
Visiting Professor of English
Tribhuvan University

be used against his fatalistic model, as otherwise generalisations cannot ever be made." In fact, what Bista says (using Leach, 1966; and Burghard, 1983, as authoritative support) is: "Generalisation is inductive, it consists in perceiving possible general laws...an intracultural approach to the study of Hindu society permits valid levels of generalisation ... some readers may find fault with the generalisations as they will have had their own personal experience and will be aware of exceptions that do not conform to the picture I have presented here. But to insist on exceptions to prove the generalisations wrong would suggest that Nepali society is beyond the reach of a systematic study under any discipline in the social sciences; and by inference, beyond the possibility of guided correction, change, and development." Is Pahari being defensive?

Bista's thesis is that Nepal's main problems follow from the importation of caste principles from India with the ensuing hierarchisation of ethnic peoples. He argues that this alien culture devalues the concept of productivity, has a fatalistic orientation which inherently conflicts with development and retards and diminishes the many cultural groups and the positive social elements which can generate and sustain development. He asserts that, although a minority in a

"hetronomous" society with a complex ethnic mix, the values and institutions of the alien culture are ascending because this minority is well-educated and has political power — 76 per cent of all the members of the Rastriya Panchayat from 1963 to 1988 were from the high caste groups. The danger he points out is "the productive sector of the society is increasingly getting discouraged in the proportion that the fatalistic culture is being encouraged and propagated." Bista effectively supports and illustrates these assertions with many convincing examples and insights. The book presents hope and challenge to Nepali society. The hope emerges from the insights which help to identify and illuminate the social and cultural problems. The challenge is to transform the self-defeating structures and behaviours, particularly those which encourage Nepali society to internalise a fatalistic worldview. The ideology of fatalism and and hierarchisation of Nepal's ethnic peoples, by definition, depreciate human life and the ability of society to control and to influence change and development. Because Bista's book sheds light on these problems, it would be foolish and unfortunate to ignore it.

Pahari's statement is a living example of Bista's concern with the power of culture and the difficulty some members of the dominant high caste groups may have with his

observations. Pahari's pillorying of Bista and his book will not increase Nepal's understanding of the problems Bista struggled to identify, nor help in solving them.

Edward M. Bennett
 Professor of Psychology
 Wilfrid Laurier University
 Ontario, Canada



This picture in *Himal*'s last issue should have been credited to Stella Snead - Editors

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.

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COVER

How to Tend This Garden?

Prithvi Narayan bequeathed a "garden" of "four caste division and thirty-six tribes." Why not pull down the hedges and let a hundred wildflowers bloom?

by Prayag Raj Sharma



Some 200 years ago, the Gorkha king politically unified Nepal through conquest. While the political entity called Nepal has existed all these years, however, the nation state of Nepal has not yet stood the test of national integration. Having been propped up for two centuries by feudal and authoritarian rule, the country is now asked to hold together under a multi-party democracy.

Today, whether they fully realise it or not, those who would rule Nepal are weighed down by the responsibility of managing multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic and multi-tribal divisions. Like elsewhere in the young and emergent states of Asia and Africa, the search is on for a single cultural identity that would make Nepal a "nation-state" rather than merely a "state".

A "state" requires only a central government, people, territory and political sovereignty. In the slightly more abstract notion of "nation-state", a people see a common destiny of remaining together, despite differences in language, culture, religion and political ideology.

Nepal's transformation from a feudal state to a democratic state, without an intervening period of tutelage under colonial rule, has been abrupt. The feudal authoritarian rule of the past two centuries sought to maintain and promulgate national integration in one way. Under the new dawn of multi-party democracy, national integration will be achieved in a different way.

A Notion of Nation-State

If the inter-ethnic relationships are still relatively stable in Nepal, the credit should go to the country's unique history. What kept Nepal "integrated" was the so-called harmonic model of feudal, pre-modern government. The values within this model were decreed by the ruling classes.

Prithvi Narayan Shah, and those after him, based the country's unification on four key ideas: the unquestioning power and authority of the Hindu King of Gorkha; the supremacy of the

Hindu ethos in national life; social integration through the Hindu social system based on caste division; and recognition of Nepali as the language of government, administration and, in more recent times, education.

Prithvi Narayan did recognise the cultural plurality of his conquered lands. His *Dibya Upadesh*, in which this remarkable conquerer and statesman described his policies of governance, likens Nepal to "a garden bedecked with four *varnas* and thirty-six *jats*". Despite this recognition of diversity, however, the cultural rights of the different communities were not recognised by the old state. Neither did the communities themselves have opportunity to articulate their demands.

Historically, the Hindu ruling class dealt with other ethnic groups (the *jatis*) not as "foreign" or "alien", but as part of the Hindu social and cultural order. The hill tribes were taken as equivalent of "castes" within the Hindu four-fold social division known as *varna*. And the traditional caste divisions cast people in rigid socio-economic and political roles, providing a minimum of social and economic security, but precluding competition and role changes.

The old *Muluki Ain* of 1854, promulgated by Jung Bahadur, specified and categorised the schedule of social offences punishable by law. Punishment for an offence was determined by taking into account the caste of the offender and that of the victim. The new *Muluki Ain*, promulgated in 1963 by King Mahendra, while it did not do away with the idea of caste altogether, did make it illegal to discriminate on the basis of caste in the courts, in education, and in employment.

Modern states are based on the newer values of democracy, human rights, minority rights, equality and social justice. These novel and external notions of governance entered Nepal during the 1951 anti-Rana revolution. Even the Panchayat system, which did everything to retard the political process from the 1960s to the 1980s,

was forced to pay lip service to these new values.

The new Nepali Constitution of November 1990 represents a final break from the historical model of national integration. In no uncertain terms, it acknowledges the cultural pluralism of Nepal and guarantees the right of every community "to conserve and promote its language, script and culture."

While the new Constitution rejects the earlier basis for national integration, it is now up to the government and the people to develop a new model. Are we up to it? The lukewarm attitude in official circles towards the minority languages indicates that, perhaps, we are not. The Nepali language already has an unchallenged predominance in Nepal, and the need of the times is to accord other languages a meaningful place in national life.

From the administrative tardiness in recognising the aspirations of Nepal's multi-ethnic groups, it seems that the outlook of many Nepali Hindus, even today, is dominated by an outdated view of caste distinctions. They would rather see ethnic aspirations subordinated by the more overriding concern of national integration. The legacy of the 1950s — that of ignoring a person's ethnic or caste membership in census-taking — was continued even in the 1991 census. The census sheets recognise merely the existence of linguistic minorities and, even then, there are many flaws in the counting. The rather ingenuous assumption is that ethnic problems can be circumvented by simply not counting. It is perhaps not too much to hope that by the time the next census comes around in 2001, the administrators will have doffed their cultural blinders.

We do not know the exact number of the languages spoken in Nepal and how many speak them. But linguists estimate that there are about 40 principal minority languages, most of them of the Tibeto-Burman tongues. Some of the smaller languages have died over the past 50 years and their few remaining speakers absorbed into the closest majority language. Nonetheless, the more

prominent linguistic groups have managed to survive and their ethnic awareness has today been revived in the fresh air of democracy. Some of the still-extant linguistic groups are the Gurung, Magar, Tamang, Rai, Limbu, Thakali, Sherpa, Tharu, Raji and Raute. Even today, the ethnic awareness of these groups is largely of a cultural rather than political nature.

Nepal's minorities do not merely consist of the Tibeto-Burman linguistic groups, however. Hindus themselves are part of several regional and linguistic groups. First, there are the Nepali-speaking Hindus of the hills who have controlled Nepali politics for at least two centuries. Unlike the many ethnic groups mentioned above, they are not tied to a specific region but are settled everywhere barring the High Himal. The Bahuns migrated from the hills of western Nepal in the 12th to 14th century.

Then there are the Newar Hindus, who make up about half the population of the Newars — the "heroes and builders of Nepal". Next, there are the Hindus of the Tarai whose history in Nepal is more recent. They are further divisible into three groups according to language: Maithili, Bhojpuri and Awadhi. Although the Tarai Hindus have been less involved in the process that created the state of Nepal, they can hardly be excluded from the rights and privileges of being Nepali nationals.

The modernisation and development of Nepal's economy have produced significant social changes: new economic classes have been formed; there are more middle class professionals and some new trading classes are emerging. However, these changes have made no dent on ethnic self-identification. If anything, ethnic consciousness is strengthening day by day. Take, for example, the Newars who, as inhabitants of Kathmandu, have benefited the most from the development of the Valley over the past four decades. This has not diminished their ethnic consciousness — if anything, it has been reinforced, as is obvious from their demands for greater recognition of the Newari language.

Bahun Ethnicity

An interesting current trend is that the Hindu caste groups are also beginning to get "communalised", that is, gaining an ethnic identity all their own. Earlier, the Bahuns — the Brahmins of the Nepali hills — had formed part of the ruling class. Hence they had little reason to develop a communal psychology as did the under-privileged, discriminated groups. But in the anthropological works on Nepal, written mostly by Westerners, the Bahuns are being depicted more and more as a class of exploiters in relation to other ethnic groups, and held responsible for imposing certain "fatalistic" ideologies.

Bahuns reaped advantage of their caste privilege in the past by acquiring land from

the rulers. Their social status and access to education and economic resources gave them an advantage of joining professional and government service. As a result, Bahuns presently make up the most politically articulate group in the country. Bahuns, now as well as in the past, have contributed most in nurturing the idea of a Nepali state.

The Bahun's predominance in national political life is being labelled *bahunbad*, or *brahmanbad*, by some and is increasingly a subject of attack. Since it is only the hill Brahmins that are being made the target of attack — and not the Brahmins in other Hindu ethnic groups — in the process the Bahuns could be slowly developing an "ethnic" consciousness all their own. This consciousness is still incipient and can only grow if "Bahunbad" remains a rallying cry of those opposing them.

The Thakuri and Chhetri castes of the hills, too, are beginning to show a tendency to look upon themselves as distinct cultural groups with separate roots and origin. The untouchable castes of the pre-1963 *Muluki Ain*, actually, have even more justification — as an exploited and still-exploited class — to forge a new identity of their own. The trend, thus, is that even the so-called culturally homogenous groups are beginning to seek to build their new political and economic security under the spell of "ethnicisation". The process of cultural atomisation seems to have begun.

Better education, increased communication, transport networks and — the final ingredient — democracy, might be expected to nudge the ethnic groups, fuelled by distinctions of race, region, culture, language and so on, to a new level of political consciousness. Cultural and ethnic minorities, and erstwhile subject groups, are bound to demand a share of power and the recognition of their cultural and linguistic rights. Today, diverse cultural and regional groups are trying to come to terms with the political change and to find their niche in the new State.

Like many ideas which have come to influence Nepal from the outside, today the stress is on divisions rather than on similarities. Obviously, this is because the notion of a single "Nepaliness" has in the past been used as a tool for control by the dominant classes. The fear among some, however, is that this stress on divisions will ultimately undermine the very foundations of the Nepali state. Is this questioning of societal structure only part of an ongoing and more lively process or will it lead to the moie



sinister development of national disintegration in the name of ethnic differentiation and subnationalism?

Those with divisive tendencies have never been in a better position to foment tension. Some highly ambitious spokesmen are striving to bring the minority groups together on racial rather than ethnic grounds. Distinctions are being made between the "indigenous" people of Nepal and all Hindus, who are dubbed "outsiders". The Mongol and the Janajati parties — banned from contesting in the June 1991 general election for raising communal slogans — are attempting to give a racial twist to their politics. Because individually the minority Tibeto-Burman-speaking groups have significantly reduced clout in a democracy, the attempt is to try to rally a political force based on the racial distinction of being "Mongoloid". The outsider-versus-insider schism that is being propagated contains, in essence, the same elements as the *bhumiputra* agitations in some Southeast Asian states, directed against the Indian and Chinese population there.

Another distinct ethnic as well as regional fault line lies between the *Pahade* and *Madhesiya*, the hillman and the plainsman. "Regional ethnicity" is what seems to come into play. That these generic terms have even acquired some pejorative sense indicates the direction of this confrontation. Today, the relationship between the two groups is marked by deep suspicion. The *Pahades* regard the *Madhesiyas* as Indian in their cultural orientation and political loyalties. For the *Pahade*, the Tarai-based *Sadbhavana Party's* championing of Hindi is proof enough of this.

The *Madhesiyas*, for their part, regard the *Pahades* as colonisers and exploiters of the Tarai who treat them as second class citizens. The *Madhesiyas* protest their under-representation in the political decision-making process, in government employment, and resent the resettlement policies which favour the hill migrants. The unsettled question of citizenship rights rankles the political leaders of the Tarai.

The rigid attitudes which divide the *Pahades* and *Madhesiyas* indicates an ethnic conflict of explosive potential which could well engulf Nepal in the future. And the fear lurks in the mind of many — could there be a Sri Lanka-in-making here, including the possibilities of Indian involvement in the aftermath?

Short-sighted Desperados

Why is national integration a desirable goal in the first place? Even in the aftermath of the disintegration of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, the concept of national integration remains relevant. Some short-sighted political desperados, in Nepal as elsewhere, will always try to stir up ethnic turmoil in complete disregard

to the advantages of national integration. But what, indeed, will happen in the wake of a disintegrated state? Are there to be separate political states along ethnic lines? Is there an ethnic group in Nepal which can claim to be a completely homogeneous group? There are all kinds of divisions — including hierarchical ones — within every group in Nepal, and there are economic inequalities to be found among them all. It would be short-sighted folly to try to achieve economic survival as atomised entities.

The emergent ethnic states in Europe are all looking to the European Economic Community as the saviour, and they are justified in pinning their hopes on the EEC, given the evolution of economic cooperation in the Continent. But what would be the price to pay for emergence of mini-states in Nepal's stead? Without a doubt, such disintegration would only spell further poverty for the population of the mini-states, which would



be that much more vulnerable to internal and external threats. There is little likelihood of a strong confederated organisation such as the EEC emerging in South Asia. There would come anarchy and instability first.

One would hope that ethnic problems would never reach such a pitch as to threaten Nepal's prevailing social harmony, even though that harmony has been maintained largely through the social order laid down by the Hindus. Certainly, this historical legacy needs readjusting and re-appreciating in a more modern context.

An ethnically and culturally diverse population is seeking to redefine its role and its place, and to make new adjustments within the State. Like India, the State of Nepal needs to formulate policies relating to minority languages and culture, secure them their new rights in these respects, and lay down a democratic and equitable basis for political power-sharing by ethnic

minorities. All conflict-prone situations would be resolved by taking recourse to dialogue between the contending parties, without sacrificing the long-term interests of national integration.

The world in recent years has been witnessing an increasing violence in the management of group relationships between so-called "majorities" and "minorities". The majority is seen by the minority to be the personification of brute domineering State, and the minority by the majority as harbouring secessionist tendencies. Only a restrained, tolerant and democratic approach on both sides will see Nepal through the adjustment period that she is now experiencing. Rightly or wrongly, Nepal has had the good fortune of enjoying relative ethnic harmony thus far. If we can bring to bear a new outlook on group relationships, making necessary accommodation and adjustments in it, the future ethnic problems might be more manageable.

What are the interests of a state's majority and those of its minorities? What are the obligations of Nepalis towards each other? What gives a State the right to protect its integrity? By the same token, what moral right has an ethnic minority to demand secession and independence? In claiming this right for itself, does it recognise the rights of other, smaller minorities within its borders to do the same in the future? For there is no accepted political theory, nor any provision in international law, on how large or small a state should be. Is the break-up of States sought on an enlightened basis of positive philosophy of anarchy, or the idea of the dissolution of the State? Indeed, the formation and breakup of States seem to depend on the sheer force of events, and rationalisations come later.

To Prithvi Narayan goes the credit of establishing the enlarged Nepali state and, at the same time, being the first to recognise the cultural plurality of the Nepal he had created. But his times were guided by a different feudal ethos, and hence the values he used in nation-building and in laying down group-relationships. Today's is a different world. How would Prithvi Narayan have acted or reacted to the modern challenges of ethnic relationship? True visionary and statesman that he was, with the ability to be decisive when necessary but also with the ability to correct himself when proven wrong, he might just have stood the test of the times and given Nepal a leadership that it so desperately needs now, in forging a new basis for group relationship, different from the one which he established two centuries earlier.

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"Otherness" and the Modern Tibetan Identity

Tibetans were once content to identify themselves by region and sect. Post-1959, the Chinese presence has stimulated a pan-Tibetan identity.

by Dawa Norbu

Tibetans have multiple identities. This is true of them as it is for the members of all other traditional, complex societies. Under some conditions, however, a pan-Tibetan identity prevails and, under others, sub-national identities emerge among Tibetans.

Before 1950, sub-national identities based on sect or region prevailed. The former category included the Nyingma, Kargyu, Sakya, Gelukpa,

Before the politicisation of Tibetan ethnicity, "we" and "they", or Tibetan and non-Tibetan, was a Buddhist differentiation between believers, and non-believers, *phyipa* and *hangpa*. However, since the Chinese takeover in 1959, there has been a growing consciousness, particularly among "urban" Tibetans, about a pan-Tibetan identity that sharply differentiates itself from *rgya-rigs* or *rgya-mi* — the Chinese/

Although hardly articulated or politicised before 1959, most of the ingredients of a pan-Tibetan identity are inherent in the structure of Tibetan civilisation. As we know, most ethnic identities in the non-Western world are nothing but politicised cultural identities.

Geography defined Tibet's boundaries and separated it from its neighbours, including China. Elite consciousness of Tibetan territoriality was

evident as early as 8th Century AD, when a Sino-Tibetan treaty declared, "Tibetans are happy in Tibet and Chinese in China; and neither should trespass the other's territory..."

Confucian and Lamaist social structures and civic cultures differ vastly, just as Chinese and Tibeto-Burman languages and literature are distinct from each other. Traditional economic activities in China and Tibet are also very different. If the Chinese peasantry has essentially a rice-growing economy, the lifestyle of Tibetans is shaped by a nomadic and barley-growing economy. Two separate ways of life emerged over the centuries.

But to the soul-searching sections of the Tibetan populace, the defining

characteristic and the core of Tibetan identity appears to be the lamaist culture which is so radically different from the culture of the "dominant generalised other" — the Chinese. This appears so as the Tibetans glance through the significant aspects of Tibetan historical achievement as a distinct race. They are inevitably driven to the various Tibetan traditions of Buddhism as the ultimate source of their pan-Tibetan identity, reinforced by other shared commonalities such as written language, territoriality and lifestyle.

If the secular-minded reader thinks the lamaist dimension of Tibetan cultural identity is being exaggerated, let me explain. Tibetan as a classical language suitable today for serious academic study in major Western universities is largely a creation of lama-scholars going back to



KEVIN BUBRSKI

Off-duty Chinese soldiers watch Khampa monks at the Jokhang Temple, Lhasa.

and Bonpo. Regionally, Tibetans identified themselves as Khampa, Topa, Tsangpa and Amdo-wa of Kham, Toi, Tsang (Shigatse) and Amdo regions. Sectarian identity is rooted in the different traditions of Tibetan Buddhism and is particularly powerful among the lamas. Regional identities and attachments to homelands (*phayul*) are more popular among the laity.

In practice, of course, sectarian and territorial identities may overlap and reinforce each other. In such cases, sub-national identities can be quite powerful. This combination of sectarian and territorial identity was the motive force of the Geluk and Sakya domination in Tibetan history.

But how do Tibetans differentiate themselves from non-Tibetans? Do Tibetans have an encompassing pan-Tibetan identity?

Han. The "in-group" is increasingly identified as *bodpa* or *bog-rigs*.

Feeling 'Tibetan'

Perhaps because "ethnic" politics is practically banned in Tibet, this writer has seen no comprehensive description of the sectarian or regional identities being articulated within Tibet. But there seems to be considerable evidence of "we" and "they" differentiation vis-a-vis the Chinese/Han at all levels of society, as is immediately apparent to Western and Asian visitors. This is corroborated by the post-1959 ethnic tensions in Tibet that have cut across ethnic lines. It is not too difficult to construct the major sociological components of Tibetan identity, with a comparative knowledge of Chinese and Tibetan cultures.

the 8th century AD. Similarly, classical Tibetan literature worthy of academic pursuit and world recognition was possible only through the serious and important contributions by lamas. Consequently, apart from some early Tibetan kings, most of the Tibetan culture-heroes are lama-scholars such as Milarepa, Sakya Pandita, Longchen Rabjampa, Tsongkhapa, and others. In short, the history of Tibetan civilisation is a history of lamas before whom the other actors appear mundane and insignificant.

Such a cultural perception of Tibetan identity is borne out by the post-Mao developments in Tibet. The Dalai Lama's fact-finding delegations to Tibet in the early 1980s brought out film footage which show Tibetan youth, born after 1959, prostrating in a traditional religious manner before religious objects brought by the Dharamsala party. Tourists have witnessed enthusiastic participation by Tibetan youth in the renovation of monasteries and temples across Tibet.

Because the post-1959 generation was totally deprived of religious upbringing and socialisation, its religious behaviour must be interpreted in terms of affirmation of identity. Tibetan youth exhibit religious behaviour not because they are pious, like their parents, but because they believe that is the authentic way of being "Tibetan" and being different from the Chinese. In this regard, the leading role played by monks and nuns in the 1987 and 1988 pro-independence demonstrations in Lhasa is also noteworthy.

There is truth in the psychological definition of identity. The assertion of identity is made possible by the presence of a "generalised other". That is, there can be no self-conscious projection

of ethnic or any other kind of identity without the generalised other. For Tibetans, the Chinese have assumed this function. Their "otherness" in Tibet provokes the assertion of Tibetan identity and the we/they differentiation.

Whatever may be the veracity of Chinese historical and legal claims over Tibet, it is a fact that any Chinese presence, before 1950, was confined to Lhasa. Ordinary Tibetans would never have seen the Han people. Their influx into Tibet since 1950, and especially after 1959, has been unprecedented.

The otherness of the Han in Tibet is accentuated by their domination of Tibet's political, economic and cultural life. The Han monopolise the state power structure behind the scene, have greater access to education and job opportunities within Tibet, control the country's natural resources, and so on. The new city of Lhasa is occupied by Chinese, while Tibetans are confined to the old quarter. A Western teacher at Tibet University recalls how in her classroom Tibetan students used to sit in one row and Chinese students in the "other" row. That there is ethnic polarisation is clear.

Beijing's policy of national integration and assimilation has engendered polarisation against the Chinese and the politicisation of Tibetan ethnicity. In particular, during radical phases such as the Cultural Revolution, Chinese policy sought not only to communise, but Han-ise Tibetans through force-feeding of Chinese language, education and culture. Even communism is propagated in Tibet via Maoist interpretation and Chinese idiom.

The Chinese or Han dimension of the exported Communist Revolution in Tibet cannot be denied. Chinese culture and language

are forced upon Tibetans under the auspices of Marxism. This Han-isation belittles and questions Tibetan ethnic identity, thereby engendering an identity crisis among the Tibetans. They ask themselves: Are we Chinese as the Han cadres claim? Or are we different? If we are different, then how do we assert our identity?

The 1987 and 1988 demonstrations in Lhasa may be seen as the early manifestations of this assertion of ethnic identity by politically conscious Tibetans. At the same time, such events also reveal a legitimisation crisis faced by the Chinese rulers in Tibet.

With the appearance of the generalised "other" since 1950, sectarian and regional identities have assumed a passive, secondary role in Tibet. In their place, a vaguely-felt pan-Tibetan identity has arisen, particularly in the main towns.

Ethnic identity must be understood functionally, and its primary function is to achieve the greatest degree of differentiation from the generalised "other". In this sense, ethnic identity is an aggregation of ethnic variables such as tradition, culture, language and race. Which of these variables may be emphasised more than the others depends on the nature of the group against whom the differentiation has to be drawn and ethnic boundaries erected. In Tibet, the accent so far has been on lamaist culture, language and race — and in that order.

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A Face for All Regions

It was in 1975 that I travelled up the Raj Path in the local bus from Birgunj. During a stop at a teashop, I was struck by the beauty and variety of faces around me.

That same beauty had impressed me during a brief visit to Nepal in 1968, when I worked at Boris Lissanevitch's famous Royal Hotel. A vague urge had pulled me back to Nepal to illustrate her beauty. At that teashop on the Raj Path into Kathmandu, I knew what I wanted to do — draw the faces of Nepal's people.

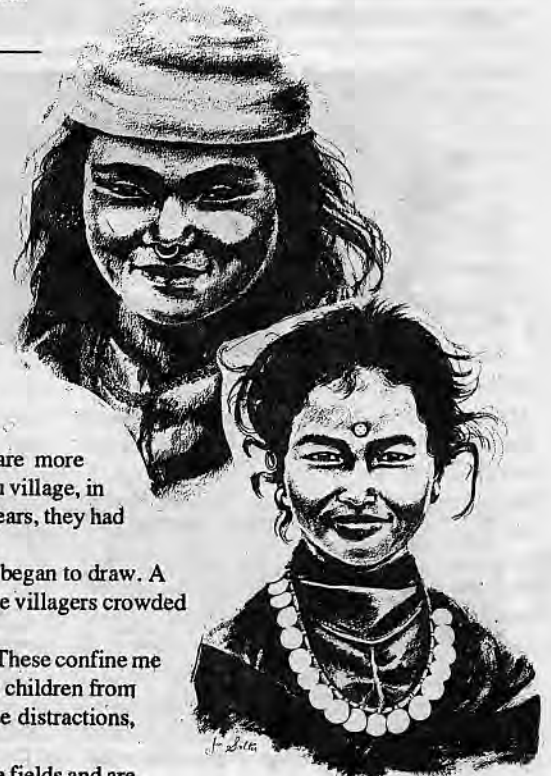
My materials were simple; plain paper and pencil. The first portrait was of a small, cheeky, Newar boy. In the process of capturing him on paper, he captured my heart. I became involved in his life. Today he is my adult Nepali son.

Drawing the faces of the many ethnic groups of Nepal meant travelling north, south, east, west, all over the country. Being a woman has been a definite advantage. Villagers are more forthcoming, and there is much laughter and interest as they watch a picture emerge. In one Tharu village, in Dang, some Western friends who lived there cautioned me that the people would be shy. In two years, they had never succeeded in photographing even a single villager.

Sure enough, as I entered the village, everyone disappeared into their houses. So I sat and began to draw. A little girl, unable to resist her curiosity, cautiously peered over my shoulder. Then, one by one, the villagers crowded around me. I was able to draw many of their faces. It was great entertainment for us all.

I have drawn perhaps 450 portraits. Recently, I taught myself the techniques of oil painting. These confine me to the studio when I do portraits, because I have not yet solved the problem of preventing curious children from fingering the irresistible goeey colours, or from squeezing tubes of precious paints. With these distractions, painting from life in a village has been difficult.

I do miss that personal contact with the villagers — hardy, friendly people who work in the fields and are the backbone of this country.



- Jan Salter

Pointed Noses, Stubby Noses, and Local Elections

by Raghu Pant

It is not a crime nor is it a virtue to be born with a pointed nose. Likewise, it is neither a curse nor attraction to be born with a flat nose. When a Nepali hums a tune, he does not select only one that was put to music by one from his own caste or tribe. It might be a melody given to us by Ambar Gurung or Aruna Lama. Bhupi Serchan is no more, but his poetry is still alive in the minds of countless Nepalis. The Tarai has countless stalwart Nepalis. Just because Harka Gurung's nose is shaped differently from my Bahun's nose, why should I be prevented from taking pride as a Nepali in his erudition and learning?

Nepal is not a country of Bahuns, nor of Chhetris or Thakuris. Nor can this Nepal be divided into a Mongol Nation, a Limbuan or a Magaraat. True, there once were a Liglig, a Gorkha, a Lamjung and a Tanahun. But that is history. The past. If yesterday's reality has not survived till today, it cannot be revived tomorrow. In the future lies an "improved Nepal", which should be the common property of all.

Today, there are all kinds of political forces at play here. Gajendra Narayan Singh of the Sadhbhavana Party warns of domination of the Tarai-basis. Gopal Gurung of the Mongol National Organisation, M.S.Thapa and Goray Bahadur Khapangi of the Jana Mukti Morcha, and Bir Nembang of the Limbuan Mukti Morcha

rail against Bahun-Chhetri domination of the hill tribal. Certainly, these are not "mainstream" politicians, and much of the politics they espouse is negative and ultimately anti-development.

But you cannot ignore them. Rather than relegate them to a corner, we must sift through their demands and search for positive elements. Otherwise, we go the way of the countries of South Asia which did not heed the danger signals in time.

If Goray Bahadur Khapangi has the abilities to serve as Prime Minister, I have no problem with that. If he wants to be a leader of the Magars, I have nothing to say. It is communalism of the meanest kind to think that Bir Nembang cannot be a leader of Bahuns just because his nose is flat.

Nepal was not created only by Prithvi Narayan's decree. Nepalis of all caste, creed and ethnicity have played a role. So if hill ethnics or Tarai-wallas say they have too little say in governance or in administration, how can we ignore them? It will no longer do to sing paeans to the glory of the Gorkhali conquest. We must strive to provide an all-encompassing environment in which the Gurung, Magar, Rai, Limbu, Tharu, Bahun, Chhetri, Newar, Muslim and all the Tarai peoples will feel equally Nepali. And if the State hesitates, the people will try to grab their rights for themselves.



At the chautari, clockwise from top left, Ganesh Bikram Thapa, Man Bahadur Magar, Ganesh Shrestha, Gajendra Nath Regmi, Ramasish Sharma, Dambar Bahadur Limbu, Jagat Bahadur Maharjan, Mahi Narayan Chaudhari, Man Bahadur Gurung and Jas Bahadur Tamang.

Local Elections

An occasion had presented itself to address the dissatisfaction among the hill tribal and Tarai leadership — but the Government let it pass. If only the process leading up to the local elections (in late May) had been tackled properly, we might have been going somewhere. The Government should have been daring enough to give autonomy to the local elected bodies. Instead, it dragged its feet and wasted an opportunity.

District, town and village level organisations are the ones to ensure equity and decentralised development. With autonomy and control over resources, they would have developed as the foundations of democracy. Why, after all, does a tiny developing country like Nepal need a huge centralised structure of government? Why tend and feed this white elephant? Strong, autonomous, elected bodies at the local level would actually make the center stronger. And in no other way can that old dictum, unity in diversity, come true for Nepal.

So the opportunity came and went without politicians and parliamentarians on both sides of the bench showing too much concern. The Government rushed the legislation on local government through Parliament towards the fag end of its session and prevented debate from taking place. What it has done, and the ostrich-like attitude of the intelligentsia, will only delay genuine social and economic progress in Nepal.

R. Pant is a columnist with the *Bimarsa* and *Dristi* weeklies of Kathmandu. A longer version of this article appeared in *Bimarsa*.



Ram Bahadur Tamang, Birman Maharjan, and the Gorkhapatra.

Jharkhand Will Have its State...

While Jharkhand will have its states, self-determination based on ethnicity may not be the answer to underlying class inequality.

by Subhachari Dasgupta

There are more than 400 communities designated as tribes in the Indian Subcontinent. For every tribe so named, there are several others whose distinctive cultures have not been recognised. Their struggle has been hampered by their small numbers and their thin spread. In order to overcome this obstacle, a nationalistic tribal identity is sometimes forged from the many tribes to make a viable "demand group". The Jharkhand movement is one such demand group, which brings together different communities of the contiguous tribal areas of Bihar, West Bengal, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh.

The movement is not new — the demand for a separate tribal state known as Jharkhand ("forest areas") was mooted even before Indian Independence in 1947. Recent years have, however, seen increased activism and the state of "Jharkhand" is closer than ever.

But what lies ahead for the people in Jharkhand once they achieve statehood? Can "Jharkhand" be any different from every other state in the country? Will the "Jharkhand" state live up to expectations of the movement?

Elite Leaders

"Jharkhand" will be quite different from the predominantly tribal states of the Indian north-east. This is because the Santhal tribe, which today leads the political agitation for statehood, will be a minority in the future state. At the same time, some of the other tribes within the proposed state area are also demanding separate statehood. The Kolhans, for example, want a state within the very heart of the proposed Jharkhand state.

The Jharkhand movement is also presently weakened by factionalism and party rivalries. Not

to mention the ideological division between Maoist groups based in forest areas who espouse armed struggle and a democratic movement relying on mass participation which is backed by the other parties.

The doyen of the movement was Sri Jaipal Singh, a highly educated tribal married to an aristocratic Bengali. Singh delivered the leadership of the tribal struggles to the community elites. The elitist bent of the Jharkhand leadership is strengthened with their English-medium, Church-run schools, which turn out young, tribal graduates who are alienated from their own families and communities. The Government's decades-long support for education of tribals has further encouraged the estrangement of the educated from their communities. In the name of "reforming" the tribals, their cultural practices have been denigrated as superstitious and harmful. Extremely valuable tribal knowledge has been belittled. A feeling of inferiority developed among tribal populations and even among their elites, who today go as far as discouraging the traditional community dances and ceremonies.

The tribal leadership of the Jharkhand movement has been dubbed as the most corrupt by its opponents, not without justification. As is well known, the leaders of the tribal communities enjoy luxurious lifestyles untouched by the poverty and deprivation of their people. Indeed, there is little difference between the tribal and non-tribal political leadership.

Apart from the problems with its leadership, inter-ethnic competition is bound to mark the state of "Jharkhand". As a result, the trump card will be played by the non-tribals who are wielding power in the area even now, by dint of their economic power and trade and commerce acumen.

"Jharkhand" is likely to become a reality. This alone will satisfy the yearnings for tribal identity, however fallacious or made-up that identity may be. But this process of "forging" or creating tribalism is likely to lead, ultimately, to an

identity crisis. The process of forging a tribal identity, as is happening in Jharkhand, is synthetic and will not satisfy the need for ethnic individuality.

Ethnic contradictions are likely to surface as a divisive force within "Jharkhand", and they will be accentuated by the dominance of the educated tribals. Many of them are Christians and exist at the outer periphery of the tribes. Thus, the very force that has united the communities and shaped the state of Jharkhand may leave that new tribal identity splintered into ethnic sub-nationalism.

Because the issue of tribal identity fills the horizons of the proponents of the Jharkhand movement, and they have tended to ignore issues such as rights of the poor and equality of opportunity. They assume that the socialistic nature of the tribal communities will spontaneously be restored in a tribal state. But the experience of the tribal states of the Indian North-East does not bear this out. Those states, too, have turned out to be no different than non-tribal states. They are led by elitist forces who have suppressed minority ethnic groups with little hesitation.

A Misnomer

"Jharkhand" is already a misnomer — it is no more a pristine habitat peopled by forest-dwellers. The woodlands have disappeared, and have been partially replaced by commercial plantations. Old occupations and traditions are dead or dying. Tribal worship of trees has become nominal and ritualistic. Gone also is the spirit of equality that pervaded the traditional tribal culture. "Jharkhand" is set to be one of the more advanced mining and industrial states of India, one with a high concentration of industrial labour where the ethnic concept of equality will be a casualty.

In "Jharkhand", individual cultural identities will be submerged in the course of modernisation. The relationship between the non-tribals and the various communities classified as tribes will be changed radically. The community organisation of the ethnic groups will lose significance, as indeed many already have under the different state governments that presently rule over them.

It is clear that the socialistic pattern of tribal ethnic groups will not be achieved without addressing questions of economic privilege and class. But it seems all too certain that the tribal state of Jharkhand will be achieved by playing the political game in the same manner that the non-tribals do. But in doing so, the most desirable characteristics of tribal societies will fall by the wayside on the way to "Jharkhand".

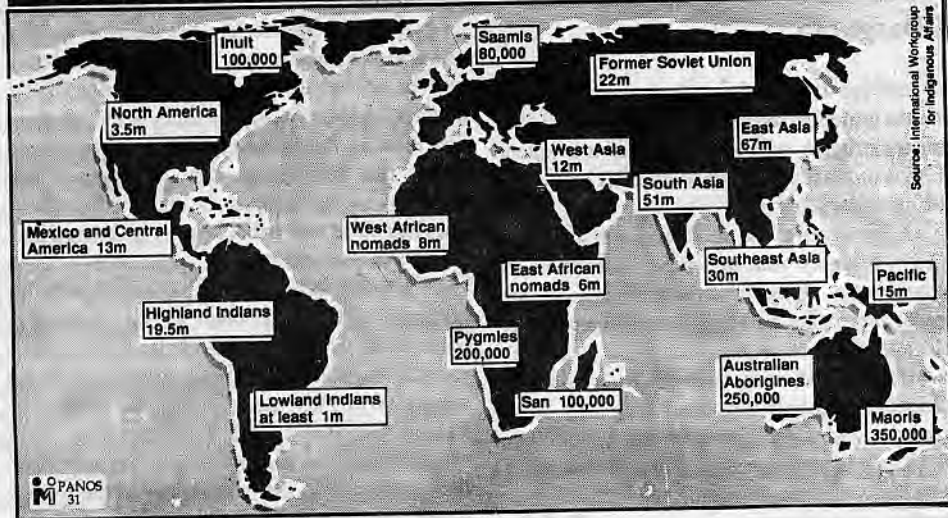
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Santhal women of Chotanagpur.

Cultural Diversity Biological Diversity

Indigenous peoples



Indigenous peoples everywhere are under threat today. One indicator of the loss of human cultural diversity is the loss of language. Linguists predict that almost half the world's 6000 languages will die out in the next century. When they do, these cultures will also take with them traditional knowledge that is invaluable.

The world's 250 million indigenous peoples live in about 70 countries and are marginalised wherever they are. They are also known as First Peoples, Indians, Natives, Aborigines, Nomads, Tribals, First Nations, Minority Nationalities (China) and Small Peoples (Russia). But they are not just the first-comers to a land. The term is usually used more broadly, to include other marginalised groups such as the nomadic peoples of Africa. British anthropologist Andrew Gray says that, compared with the number of national state cultures, indigenous peoples constitute 90 to 95 per cent of global cultural diversity and "therefore represent the diversity of human existence, even though they constitute a numerical minority".

Previously, the main threat to human cultural diversity was extermination, which led, for example, to a fall in the Aboriginal population of Australia from 500 000 to 100 000 in the century after the arrival of Europeans. Since 1900, in Brazil alone, more than 90 indigenous groups have disappeared; 26 of those tribes were killed or scattered in the past decade. The rate of extinction has accelerated as a result of forest destruction. Today, assimilation is the main threat to cultural diversity.

Examples abound of the value of indigenous knowledge to modern agriculture and medicine. Forest dwellers in Papua New Guinea have for years cultivated the hardy and protein-rich winged bean (*Psychocarpus tetragonolobus*) which also

enriches the soil by its ability to fix nitrogen. Virtually unknown outside the region 20 years ago, the plant is now grown in more than 50 countries and is set to improve the diets of hundreds of millions of people in the countries of the South. Of the 121 plant-based drugs in the modern medicine chest, three-quarters were discovered through ethno-pharmacology, which draws on indigenous knowledge to help pinpoint useful plants.

"Native people have been stewards of 99 per cent of the world's genetic resources, and there is an inextricable link between cultural and biological diversity," stated the International Society of Ethnobiology (ISE) at its first congress in Brazil, in 1988. The Congress called sought ways of compensating native peoples for the use of their knowledge and their biological resources. "Recognition of the value of indigenous knowledge by our civilisation would permit Indians to be seen as major intellectual contributors to humanity rather than exotic footnotes to the pages of history books," says ISE president, Darrell Posey.

Increasingly indigenous peoples are devising their own strategies for conservation and development, founded on their rights to ancestral lands, control of their resources and self-determination. Brazil's Union of Indigenous Nations (UNI) has set up a research and training center to preserve traditional knowledge about the rainforest and apply it to sustainable development. It is compiling an inventory of natural resources on Indian land to determine the products available for sustainable use and to identify areas in need of regeneration. A Forest People's Charter is being drafted by representatives of the 50 million forest dwellers worldwide.

— Panos Institute

Ethnicities, More Ethnicities

The following "Indicative List of Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in the Himalayan Region" is taken from the chapter "Himalaya Status Report", written by J. Bandyopadhyay and included in the just-published book *State of the World's Mountains: A Global Report* (Peter Stone, ed. Zed Books, London, 1992 — see forthcoming issue of *Himal* for review.) Please note that the list is "indicative", not "exhaustive", and refers to the "Himalayan" areas of countries listed.

AFGANISTAN

Baluch, Brahui, Gujar, Hazara, Kirghiz, Kohistani, Moghol, Nuristani, Pariswan, Pushtun, Pamiri, Qizilbash, Tajik, Turkoman, Uzbek etc.

BANGLADESH

Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Mro, Bawn, Khumi, Khyang, Chaak, Thangxhangyas, Murung, Riang, Pemkhu, Lushai, Moghe, Kuki, Saka, Shandhu, Bonjugia, Pankhas etc.

BHUTAN

Ngalung, Sarchop, Nepali speakers etc.

CHINA

Yi Bai, Hani, Lisu, Lahu, Jiangpo, Achang, Nu, Pumi, Derung, Miao, Dai, Naxi, Benglong, Tibetan (Zang), Sherpa, Loban, Hui, Han, Qiang, Wa, Menba etc.

INDIA

Adi, Angami, Ao, Batti, Bhotia, Chang, Dimasa, Dogri, Garhwali, Garo, Gorkhali/Nepali speakers, Hmar, Himachali, Kabui, Kashmiri, Khasi, Khenzha, Khiemnungan, Konyak, Kumaori, Kuki, Ladakhi, Lahauli, Lushai, Lepcha, Bhotia, Tibetan, Vaiphei, Wanchoo, Yimchungre etc.

MYANMAR

Mao, Shan, Kachin, Burmese, Wa, Lisu, Lakhu, han, Karen, Jingphaw, Atsi, Lashi, Maru, Kadu, Kanan, Naga, Pao, Palaung, Dhanu, Kaw, Lahu, Intha, Myaungi, Maingtha, Yinga etc.

NEPAL

Maithili, Bhojpuri, Tamang, Awadhi, Tharu, Newar, Magar, Rai, Gurung, Limbu, Bhoti, Hindi speakers, Rajbansi, Satar, Sunuwar, Sherpa, Danuwar, Chepang, Dhangar, Thanri, Dhimai, Majhi, Thakali, Jirel, Urdu, Dorai, Bodo etc.

PAKISTAN

Afridi, Khattak, Orakzai, Wazir, Mashud, Turi, Sinwari, Daur, Yusufzai, Kohistani, Kalash, Baltistani, Pathan, Baluch, Makrani, Boorishki, Brahui etc.

Escaping the trap of cultural diversity

Variety is the spice of all life and ethnicity its human expression. But stripped of tolerance and respect, ethnic feelings degenerate into communal hatred and conflict. We must flee the prison we have made of our cultural diversity.

by Rajni Kothari

A new threat hangs over the power elites of our time. It is the threat posed by ethnicity, variously expressed as the assertion of culture, the upsurge of communalism, the revival of religion and the voice and movements of marginalised peoples, regions and nationalities. It is the affirmation of diversity, of indigenous identity, of organic rather than televised or museumised cultures. But ethnicity has a rather sinister alter ego, too. In its defiance of the modern nation-state and Northern technology, ethnicity can assume a homogeneity. Militarised, it can tear down the walls that separate identities and preach revenge and martyrdom in its drive for victory. Alas, in so doing, it loses its finer qualities of the sacred and the mystical and emphasises fundamentalist notions of religiosity and culture.

Ethnicity is a response to the excesses of the modern project to shape the whole of humanity around the three pivots of global capitalism, the State system and a global culture. That global culture is based on modern technology, pervasive communications and information systems and a universalising educational system. Most societies of the South, prior to political independence, were described as "ethnic patchworks". These, they were told, should be replaced by homogeneous and centralised nation-states that would "integrate" all diversities and cultures. Ethnicity is a powerful rebuttal to this drive for modernisation which, fashioned after the Northern idea of how the world should be, almost succeeded in subjugating the immense diversity and richness of human experience. It is an affirmation of all "the others" who might have been brought under, colonised and eventually dispensed with.

This rebuttal to the drive for modernisation directed from the North is perhaps the most potent source of ethnicity. But there is a second source, which is located within the South. This second source of ethnicity is a response to the homogenising forces of capitalism, the nation-state and technology imported from the North and promulgated by the Southern powers.

Paranoia, chauvinism and insecurity

Among the many negative transfers from the North to post-colonial South are the notions of "majority" and "minority" and the idea that both legality and legitimacy are based on majority rule. These notions have been particularly harmful for plural societies which have, for centuries, survived without them. They survived because they fostered respect for cultural diversity and coexistence. These notions were by no means easy to live with, however. Social tension and even violent outbreaks were not infrequent. There were structural inadequacies and many forms of domination and exploitation by the powerful, clever and deceitful. But such groups were small and, in any case, there was no attempt to foist the will of the majority on the whole society. Nor did the poorer or oppressed strata suffer from any minority "complex".

Even today, the "rights of a majority" are hardly ever upheld by large masses of people belonging to the so-called majority community.

They are more often invoked by a few people who claim to speak for the masses, seeking their sanction from imported ideas of majority and minority. The "threat" to the unity of the country, that all too common bogey, is raised by a small section of upper class and upper caste peoples. They locate the source of the threat in minority communities which, they claim, have been given too much licence or have done better economically while their community, the majority, has suffered because of its remaining disunited and unmindful of its "natural" rights. This preoccupation with the rights of the majority has emerged as the creed of some paranoid individuals who try to poison the minds of entire communities, despite the fact that those communities are composed of different castes, occupational groups, linguistic groups, even groups having diverse religious symbols and community-based godheads. They are nonetheless asked to stand together and face the "threat" from the "minorities". Perhaps not surprisingly, most people do not want this.

The paranoia of the majority is matched by the paranoia of the minorities. They are pushed to the wall by the growing accent on numbers in a democracy. They feel betrayed by the State that began by promising them security in return for loyalty and ended by discriminating against them and pushing them around. They are eventually diagnosed as suffering from a "minority complex". This mental state is characterised by a sense of inferiority; fear and insecurity give rise to a deep sense of alienation from the "system" — the State and the nation. Fanatics and fundamentalists emerge, calling for the closing of ranks and sowing seeds of separatism: "we're not needed here, so let's get the hell out!" The small groups that continue to struggle against such tendencies, and "dare to belong", in Baljit Malik's ringing assertion after the November 1984 carnage of the Sikhs in India, are branded as timid and compromising the integrity and honour of the community.

Such minority paranoia begins a chain reaction, reinforcing the paranoia of the majority. The result is an insecure majority that somehow feels beleaguered by minorities which it views as economically more prosperous with access to arms, foreign support, constitutional guarantees and so on. This gives rise not only to the majority chauvinism that is everywhere in evidence but to a new kind of fundamentalism of the majority. It is fundamentalism that breeds on, and takes its cue from, the fundamentalism of the minorities. Communication channels choke, the parties become estranged from each other. Polarisation feeds the fundamentalist appeal and its call for "standing together" finds earnest listeners. It is in this context, of a growing sense of alienation from "the other", that all calls for "unity" in effect become calls for disunity with respect to the larger nation or the State.

Large communities are everywhere diffuse, plural and tolerant of ambiguity. But reversal is now sought. Hindus, for instance, are called upon to close ranks, adopt a unified theology and a common doctrine, a clergy that is ordained and a common "book". A far cry indeed from the highly plural and decentralised landscape of traditional Hinduism. There is a similar trend among Sinhala Buddhists and Islamic Malays and Indonesians. With all this, the regenerative and holistic dimensions of "ethnicity" or "community" are transformed into negative and exclusive ones, giving rise to the virus of communalism.

Communalism can have two meanings. In a positive sense it refers to the conscious identity shared by a group of people, based on their cultural heritage as expressed in language, religion, caste, homeland and so on. In plural societies, ethnic identities were positively experienced and expressed. Positive communalism has been associated, by and large, with mutual respect for other identities in an environment where diversity is celebrated as the essential parts of a whole. This is what "unity" has meant in our mixed villages, *mohallas* and inner

cities — the possibility of diversity in the context of a positively felt identity that offers stability and security.

In contrast, the negative sense of communalism is based on an exclusive identity that denies respect for other identities and views unity as something that is achieved by subjugating others. Secularism, too, has opposing meanings; a typically Asian one that we began with and a typically Northern one towards which we seem to be moving. The former entertains no rejection of religious or cultural identities but respects them equally. The more homogenising and pervading Northern concept pushes religion and culture out of the domain of the State and leaves society to find its unity by surrendering its diverse cultural heritage to the modern State and its modernising mission. The latter version of secularism aims to remove diversity and what it perceives as undermining allegiances to religion, language or culture. It views its model of development as creating the conditions for modernising the minds of the people, moving them towards a post-ethnic consciousness.

But, paradoxically, instead of helping religious, linguistic and cultural identities to wither away, modernisation has hardened them and provoked ethnic conflict and communal violence. Worse still, it has transformed positively experienced identity into negative identity. Identities have not withered away - what have withered away are the conditions under which diverse identities can together share a social space. Cultural survival has been reduced to meaning the removal of the other, the exclusion of the other, the death of the other.

Modernisation creates social and economic vulnerability and insecurity as it homogenises cultures, conditions whose management the State assumes responsibility for. When governments proclaim equality as a social ideal yet persist in development and modernisation programmes that result in inequality, each individual and group interprets its loss as someone else's gain, and interprets the other's gain as a result of its being well organised as a group — whether linguistic, religious, caste or regional. Ethnic groupings have helped people to bargain with the State.

Economic survival becomes the issue, as it was for the upper class doctors and lawyers in Gujarat fighting against the reservation system earmarking educational seats for the depressed castes and tribes, or for the Malays resenting the upward mobility of their fellow Chinese citizens. Because electoral politics and government intervention respond to ethnic groupings, economic issues become issues of cultural survival. If "they" get jobs "we" will be unemployed. If "they" prosper, "we" will be deprived. And the struggle for economic and cultural survival is experienced by all communities, not just the minorities or the marginalised. In India, Hindus see Muslims and backward classes being pampered for votes. Muslims see Hindus excluding them in new ways, and see the State encouraging such exclusion. The same is the case with the Sinhala and the Tamils in Sri Lanka. It is this disease, nourished by cultural decay, growing inequality and the employment of ethnicity as the exclusive basis for gain and protection, that turns communal feelings violent and destroys society. This is why communal violence is epidemic.

The increasing alienation of community from the State is, in some respects, a more far-reaching development than even the growth of violence and terrorism which, of course, thrive on alienation. Alienation is the slow but growing withdrawal of the citizen from the

constitutional apparatus called the State, as well as from the larger entity that envelops all smaller affiliations and identities, called the Nation. People increasingly feel indifference, apathy and alienation from the State. There is an equal if not greater withdrawal from "nationalist" commitments. While terrorist killings upset and disgust people, they fail to make them feel any closer to the government. The awe and respect for the army declines precipitously. What grows instead is identification with one's own caste or linguistic or religious community and often a withdrawal into still narrower shells of primary and secondary loyalties — of peer groups and family — and often into just one's own lonely and miserable self. Communalism thrives on this larger canvas of societal breakdown. It thrives on the destruction and decay of institutions and the erosion of legitimate authority. It flourishes as society declines and the democratic state collapses.

But, while the "poison" of communalism spreads under the pressure of insecurity and the power of chauvinist and fundamentalist doctrines, it is well to remember that it is spread by a minority in all communities. Thus, so-called majority communities, are born of a minority's interpretation of a dominant or hegemonic culture that is proclaimed to be dominant or hegemonic. That powerful minority demands that the State accept its culture as dominant and that the other "minorities" be forced to do likewise. The State is asked to confer special status on those belonging to the "majority" and inferior status on the others. Of course, such privileges are conferred on a small group who in any case are privileged and have access to resources and opportunities provided by a modernising State and a capitalist economy.

Predictably, the reaction this produces in the minority communities

also plays into the hands of small, privileged groups. Thus, in the state of Kerala, known for long for the amicable coexistence of its Hindus, Muslims and Christians, the communal virus has begun to spread and now affects each of them, thanks largely to the political compulsion of narrowly conceived electoral calculations. The result is Hindu communalism exploited by the privileged among the dominant castes; Muslim communalism exploited by the rich and privileged strata known as the "timber mafia" that has benefitted from "Gulf money" (and



against which the Hindu communalists direct their ire); and Christian communalism in which the Catholic clergy, with massive Church and other resources, plays a major role.

Where will it all end? In the recovery of the conditions of diversity as the condition of survival for all, or in the annihilation of all? Those Hindus and Muslims who think that religious uniformity is a condition for peace need only remember the Karachi riots where, in spite of a common religion and an Islamic State, the Mohajirs fight the Pathans and Punjabis. If we do not divide ourselves up by religion, we will do it by language, by caste, or by race. Divisiveness and fragmentation is infinitely regressive. For every Hindu who thinks that Indian Muslims should be sent to Pakistan, there is a Pakistani Punjabi waiting for the Mohajirs to be sent back to India. And for every Indian who thinks that the Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka should be sent back, there is a Sinhala who believes that all the Tamils should go to India. We seem to be trapped in our cultural diversity. ▽

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Grasping the Tarai Identity

How can the Tarai unite against perceived highlander domination, with its peoples divided by ethnicity, caste, religion and region?

by Dilli Ram Dahal

Some senior Nepali politicians, who should know better, like to claim that there is no "ethnic problem" in Nepal. Because of Nepal's ethnic and regional diversity, the potential for conflict and crisis is ever-present, just below the surface. All that is required for conflagration is a few power-thirsty individuals who think nothing of setting a match to the ethnic sensibility of communities. Nowhere in Nepal is this more true than in the Tarai, the strip of tropical flatlands that runs contiguous to the east-west foothills of the Himalaya. An attempt is on today to draw a sharp dividing line between the Tarai and the hills, based on regionalism and ethnicity.

The regionalism has to do with the distinct geographical position of the Tarai. The 34,019 square kilometres of the Tarai makes up 23 per cent of the country's total area, and it is inhabited by 46 per cent of Nepal's population. The Tarai has seen a three-fold increase in population over the past four decades, from about 2.9 million in 1952 to about 8.6 million today.

Historically, the Tarai strip was thinly settled by malaria-immune "indigenous" groups such as the Tharu, Dhimal, Rajbansi, as well as some caste groups from the south. At the turn of the century, the Rana regime in Kathmandu encouraged migration from India in an effort to develop the Tarai. This is why some of the Tarai districts today comprise a significant number of people who are of "Indian origin". It was impossible to entice hill groups to settle in an area considered fit only for exile or penal settlement, so-called *Kala Pani* (black waters.)

After 1960, with the eradication of malaria, the wild lands of the Tarai became the destination of the dispossessed from the hills of Nepal and those known as *prabasi* — Nepali-speakers from Burma, Bhutan and the northeastern states of India. With the opening up of forests by highways, the spread of agriculture, and the establishment of a timber industry, the Tarai soon emerged as the economic backbone of the country.

If there is one area of the Himalaya that is simmering with ethnic discontent, it is the Tarai. All three main groups that reside within the region — the original inhabitants, the people of "Indian origin" and the Nepali highlanders — nurse negative feelings towards the Kathmandu government. And on top of the everyday push and tug amongst these groups, there is the influence of politics from across the border, in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

The Tarai, divided by major rivers that

flow out of the Himalaya, is also a demographic mosaic that hardly presents the uniformity that some would like to see in it. A quick run from west to east proves the point (please refer to the map on page 19). The western districts of Kanchanpur, Kailali, Bardiya, Banke and Dang-Deokhuri are 30 to 50 per cent Tharu; hill people make up the second largest group. Hill people account for a similar proportion in Banke District, but here Muslims and Tarai caste Hindus make up 50 to 60 percent of the population.

Moving further east into Rupandehi, 70 to 80 per cent of the population are highlanders. Kapilbastu has a high concentration of Tarai caste Hindus, while almost half the population of neighbouring Nawalparasi are highlanders. In Chitwan district, nearly 80 per cent of the population is of hill origin, and 15 to 20 per cent are Tharu. The Tarai caste Hindu groups dominate in Dhanusa, Mahotari, Siraha, Saptari, Bara, Parsa, Sarlahi, Rautahat and Kapilbastu.

In the eastern-most Tarai district of Jhapa, the indigenous groups of Dhimal, Rajbansi and Satar comprise up to 20 per cent of the population, while highlanders make up the rest. In Morang District, we have a mixture of Tarai caste Hindus, hill people and Tharus. Neighbouring Sunsari, on the other hand, is dominated by highlanders.

The influx of the hill population is a significant demographic event of the past few decades, and several towns have developed where hill meets plain with hill-majorities. These include, west to east, towns like Mahendranagar, Tribhuvan Nagar, Butwal, Bharatpur, Hetauda, Dharan and Damak.

Thus, there are three main ethnic divides in the Tarai deserving consideration. The first is between the *Pahade*, or hillman, and the *Madhesiya*, or plainsman. The second is the split between the Hindu caste groups and the "original" ethnic groups such as the Tharu, and the third is the divide between Tarai high-caste Hindu groups and the Tarai low-caste Hindu group.

Hillman, Plainsman

Neglect of the plains people by the hill-dominated government in Kathmandu encourages the first divide. The hill people, for their part, tend to deride the affinity that many Tarai dwellers feel for their kinsfolk across the border in India.

Some Tarai leaders, particularly those representing the Hindu caste groups in the Sadhbhavana Party, have started a *Pahadia Hatao* campaign to physically remove the hill peoples

from the plains — which might be considered a disturbing trend in national politics. These leaders also advocate the use of Hindi as a link language among Tarai groups, much as Nepali tends to link the hill groups. However, only nine of the 20 districts of Nepal's Tarai have predominantly Tarai Hindu caste groups, who are most likely to speak Hindi. These include Dhanusa, Mahotari, Siraha and Saptari districts — where the mother tongue is Maithili. Bhojpuri is spoken in Bara and Parsa districts, whereas Bajjika (a mixture of Maithili and Bhojpuri) is spoken in Sarlahi and Rautahat districts. Thus, even in the "Hindi belt" of Nepal, Hindi is hard to come by other than at political rallies. West of the Narayani River, in Kapilbastu, Banke and Bardiya districts, Awadhi is spoken by Tarai caste groups.

It is not that Hindi comes easier to the tongues of Bhojpuri and Maithili speakers than Nepali. Linguistically, both Nepali and Hindi are Indo-Aryan tongues. In fact, Hindi is just as foreign to speakers of Bhojpuri and Maithili as it is to the Nepali speakers of the hills. Hindi is not the mother tongue of the majority of even high caste Hindu groups of the Tarai, and it is certainly not the first language of the substantial tribal population nor of the now significant hill population of the Tarai. Why, then, do Tarai-based politicians tilt towards Hindi?

The Hindi preference is a reaction against perceived hill chauvinism. It is an attempt by Tarai elites to close ranks in a bid to strengthen bargaining power with "the north". The demands for Hindi are of strategic importance to those who presently feel outside the Nepali mainstream. The solution seems to lie with the Kathmandu government. And the onus is on Kathmandu's tripartite Bahun-Chhetri-Newar establishment heeding demands for ethnic representation and linguistic rights of all the communities of the country, whether Tarai or non-Tarai. With more recognition of the mother tongues of the Tarai in education, in the media and in other culture-related and state-supported activities, the pro-Hindi agitation — which comes so unnaturally — might well be diffused.

The divisions between hill people and plains people also seem linked to the uncontrolled flow of Indian migrants crossing the border to settle in Nepal. Because so many of the groups on either side of the border are culturally identical, it is difficult to differentiate the Nepali "Tarain" from the Indian settler. Daily familial, cultural and commercial interactions which take place

between these groups, as if the border does not exist, further complicates matters. That a problem of national identity should arise among the Tarai people, and that hill Nepalis should thus question their allegiance, seems natural.

One aspect of the Tarai-hill divide is resentment of the hill-dominated administration and the culture it represents. The other aspect is the conflict between the plains people and the Nepali-speaking settlers who have moved into the Tarai, homesteading on cleared forest lands with government blessing. From perhaps less than five per cent at the turn of the century, the highland Nepalis today make up 35 to 40 per cent of the population of the Tarai. ('Tarai' also refers to *Bhīri Madhes*, the Inner Tarai.)

While there are a few landlords of hill origin, who received their holdings from the Rana overlords, the majority of the hill migrants have little land and today make up part of the poorer segment of the Tarai population. With the advent of party politics, this group of poor highlanders has tended to support the mainstream left (CPN/UML) or the far-left Ekata Kendra (United Center). At a recent rally of the Ekata Kendra in Janakpur, it was noteworthy that many poor Tarai low-caste groups also participated. Needless to say, very few Tarai-dwelling highlanders who support the Sadhbhavana Party.

High Caste, Low Caste, Tribal

Poverty and landlessness are the major problems of Tarai society. The landless and the exploited tend to be from the low-caste Hindu or the tribal groups. For example, in the villages of Laxminiya, Belgachhi and Dharampur in Mahotari district, nearly 30 of 100 peasants interviewed were landless — low caste groups such as the Chamar, Batar, Mushahar and Dushad.

The exploitation in the Tharu areas of Kanchanpur, Kailali, Bardiya, Banke, Dang-Deokhuri and Surkhet districts in the western Tarai extends beyond landlessness to bonded labour — known as the *kamaiya* system. A Tharu man's debt passes on to his sons and, before long, generations are bonded to the landlord or money-lender's estate. In West Nepal, these landlords are not only Bahuns and Chhetris, but also Tharus.

If the talk these days is of human rights, then the Tharus deserve special treatment among all the Tarai groups. So far, however, special treatment has meant tokenism, even though the Tharu is the largest single ethnic group in the Tarai. Tharu elites were wooed during the Panchayat system with representation in the Rastriya Panchayat and in national cabinets. Even today, political parties have sought to use Tharu frustration for their own ends. Their feeble cries of "Freedom from Bonded Labour" are being drowned out in the tumult of democracy where the more vociferous communities get heard.

Preferring to identify their communities as distinct from Tarai caste groups, some Tharu and Dhimal leaders insist that they have more in common with the hill-ethnicities of Nepal. The

Dhimal of the eastern Tarai, for example, regard themselves as kin of the Limbu of the hills.

While they might want to be regarded as closer to hill communities than to Hindu caste groups of the plains, the Tarai ethnic groups are frustrated that their integration into the political-economy of the country has been so slow. At the same time, they do not take kindly to state policy that encourages their integration into the Hindu caste model. A mild cultural backlash is thus taking place in which the Tharu and other ethnic groups such as the Dhimal, Gagain, Satar and Rajbansi are coalescing into one force, setting themselves apart from both the Tarai caste groups and the *Pahades*.

The complex pattern of Tarai politics does not end with the tussle between ethnic groups, hill communities and Tarai caste groups, however. Conflicts within castes is emerging rapidly, in close coordination with caste politics of neighbouring Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. The most significant demands are being made by the Yadav community — with high concentration in the districts of Mahotari, Siraha, Saptari, Morang and Sarlahi.

Yadavs have developed considerable political muscle in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar over the past decades. Relying upon their numerical strength, they have challenged the hold of Rajputs

and other groups over state politics. Lalloo Prasad Yadav's controversial chief ministership in Bihar is the best example of this newfound strength.

Since their numbers are quite significant in Nepal as well, the Yadavs are now able to use the democratic process to their advantage. A new acronymic political slogan has emerged in the central Tarai: "*BHURA BAL hatao*," aimed against the (high caste) Bhumihar, Rajput, Brahmin and Lala (Kayastha). The main proponents of this campaign are not the low castes and ethnic groups, but the Yadavs.

Ethnic expediency

Ethnic politics in the Tarai — like politics anywhere, to be sure — is one of expediency. The elites use community-identification as a tool for their own ends. Moreover, as a strategy, they are trying to foist a pan-Tarai identity on a geographical region which is divided in more ways than one. But this strategy might give out as the presurred sense of commonality does not exist among the people of the Tarai. Merely harbouring and promoting animosity against the hill people might not work.

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Representing An Ethnic Mosaic

The social composition of Nepal's House of Representatives is the outcome of the people's choice ...

by Harka Gurung

Nepal has been aptly described as Asia's ethnic turn-table. It is the land of interface between the oriental Kirant (Mongoloid) and occidental Khasa (Caucasoid) people. The former migrated from the east and north while the latter came from the west. The Khasa were, in turn, supplemented by high-caste Hindus from the south — a fallout of the battle of Tarain (1192 AD) in which Muhammad of Ghur defeated the Rajputs. Once the plains of Hindustan were lost, the martial Rajputs and their Brahmin consultants headed for the hills. It is significant that Garhwal and Kumaon — source of the Khasa migration to Nepal — has 49 to 59.6 per cent Rajput and 21.6 to 23.7 per cent Brahmin as the predominant population. Their migration eastward was to greatly transform the polity and society of the then Nepal. This was epitomised in Prithvi Narayan Shah's claim of Nepal as "*Yo asil Hindustana ho,*" (This is the genuine Hindustan)

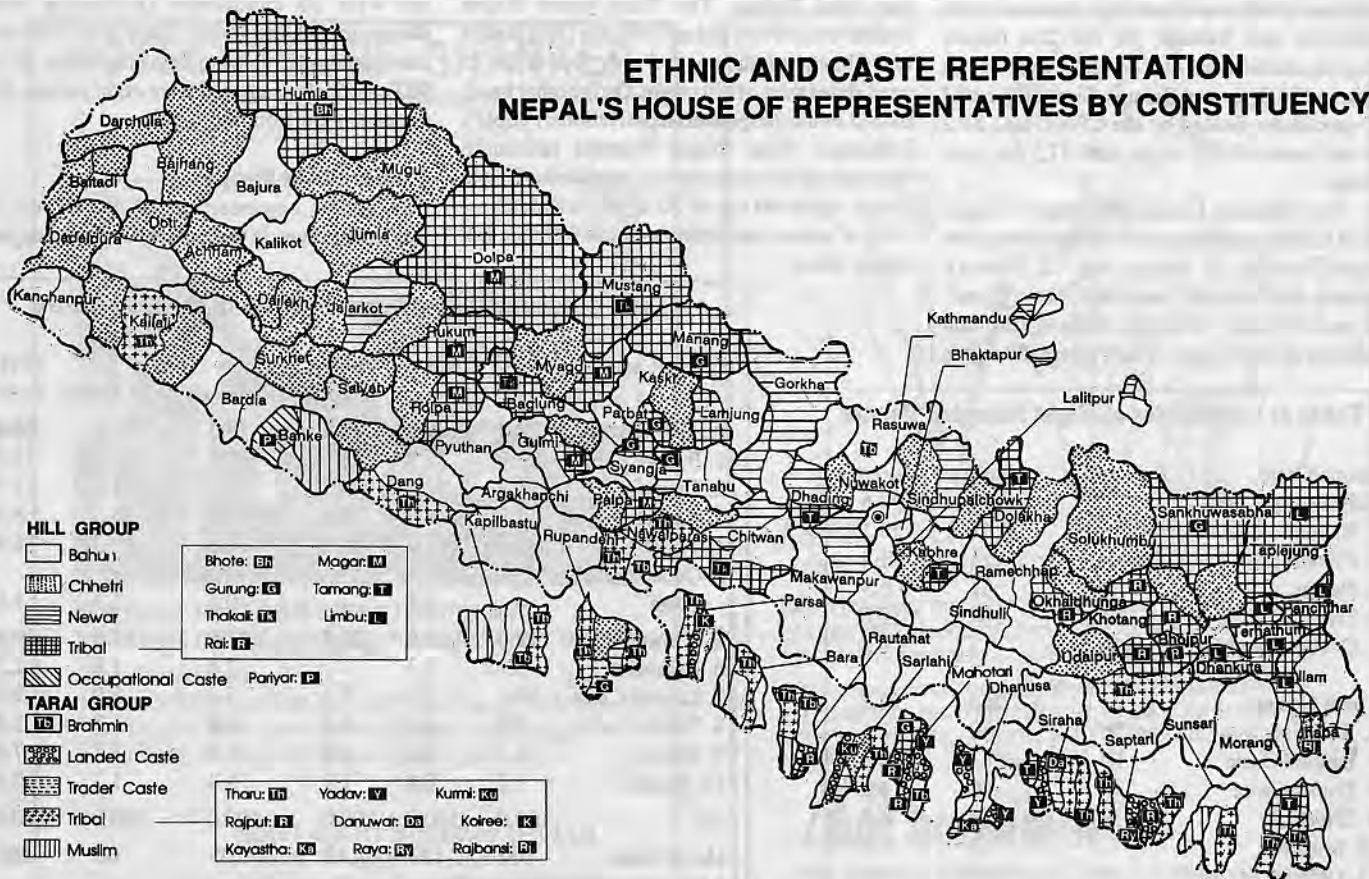
and in the imposition of the *Muluki Ain* (1854) Hindu caste code on a multi-ethnic society. Of the 212 signatories of the *Ain*, over 70 per cent were *tagadhari* Brahmin, Thakuri and Chhetri.

The Hindu kingdom of Nepal still considers discussion on ethnicity as anathema and therefore no official data are available on ethnicity and caste. However, some broad cultural areas can be recognised, based on linguistic evidence. The simplified schema is as follows:

The Khasa, including the priestly upper and occupational lower strata, predominate in the West, or the old Baisi. The Central or old Chaubisi, is home to numerous tribal groups and Khasa migrants. (The terms Baisi and Chaubisi refer to the 22 and 24 principalities west of Gorkha before the consolidation of Nepal in the late 18th century). Upper Bagmati, or proto-Nepal, has Newar at the core and Tamang on the periphery. The east, or early Kirant land, has

Zone	West (Karnali)	Central (Gandaki)	Central (Upper Bagmati)	East (Kosi)
Mountain	Khasa, Bhote	Thakali, Bhote	Tamang	Bhote, Snerpa
Hill	Khasa	Magar, Gurung, Chepang	Newar	Sunuwar, Rai, Limbu
Inner Tarai	Raji, Tharu	Danuwar, Tharu, Darai		Majhi, Danuwar
Tarai	Tharu, Awadhi castes	Tharu, Bhojpuri castes		Yadav, Rajbansi, Maithil castes

ETHNIC AND CASTE REPRESENTATION NEPAL'S HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES BY CONSTITUENCY



Map by Harka Gurung; Drafting: Nabin Shrestha

more tribal groups both in the hill and plain. A distinctive distribution pattern is the "horizontal" diversity of ethnic groups in the hills and the proliferation of "vertical" caste groups in the Tarai.

Since there are no ethnicity data for the country, land-ownership records available for the Central Development Region provide a sample framework for analyses. The total population recorded for the above region (comprising of Bagmati, Narayani, Janakpur zones) was 3,488,825 during the mid-1960s, as against 3,865,753 enumerated in the 1971 census (Table 1). Thus, ethnic groups slightly outnumber the caste groups, while the hill group is more than double of the Tarai group.

Political Participation

The ethnicity/caste of the party leaders may influence their cadre composition. The two largest parties, the Nepali Congress and the Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist-Leninist), headed by Bahuns of hill origin had large numbers of hill candidates and Bahuns. Of the 204 Nepali Congress candidates, 79.9 per cent were of hill origin and 36.8 per cent Bahuns. Similarly, out of 177 candidates fielded by the CPN/UML, 84.2 per cent were of hill origin and 47.5 per cent Bahuns.

The National Democratic Party (Thapa) had 38 Chhetri candidates (of whom seven were Thapa-Chhetri), 23 Bahun and 12 Thakuri. Similarly, the National Democratic Party (Chand) had more Thakuri (36) than Chhetri (26) and Brahmin (21) candidates. The Western hill region

Table 1: Ethnicity/Caste of Central Development Region

Social Group	Ethnic	Caste	Population	Per cent
1. Mountain & Hill			2,327,924	66.7
Ethnic	17		1,292,361	37.0
Caste		13	1,035,563	29.7
2. Inner Terai			156,388	4.5
Ethnic	8		794,369	22.8
3. Tarai			261,922	7.5
Ethnic	3		532,447	15.3
Caste		48	130,994	3.8
4. Religious Group			128,226	3.7
Muslim			2,768	0.1
Jain			79,150	2.3
5. Others/Unstated			3,488,825	100.0
Total	28	61	1,710,671	49.0
Total Ethnic			1,568,010	44.9
Total Caste			210,144	6.0
Religious Group/Others/Unstated				

Source: District Land Reform Records.

is supposed to be the stronghold of the Thakuris, but NDP (Chand) fielded Thakuris for three seats in Kathmandu Valley, five in the Inner Terai and nine in the Tarai, all of whom lost.

The Communist Party of Nepal (Democratic), led by a Newar, had eight Newar candidates in eight districts. The far left United People's Front (Samyukta Jana Morcha) had nearly 90 per cent candidates of hill origin and one-third Bahun. The Tarai-based Nepal Sadhbhavana Party did not field any [hill] Bahun and Chhetri candidate, and only five of its 75 candidates were of hill origin. On the other hand, the hill-ethnic proponent Nepal National People's Liberation Front (Nepal Rastriya Janamukti Morcha) did not sponsor any candidate of Tarai origin, while 40 out of 50 of its candidates — none of whom succeeded — were from six hill ethnic tribes.

Bahun. Chhetri candidates made up one-fifth of the total, closely followed by hill ethnics. Among the latter, a sizeable number of candidates were from the Gurung (39), Tamang (35), Rai (34), Magar (33) and Limbu (26). Among the candidates of Tarai origin, landed castes made up 8.6 per cent, the highest representation being that of Yadav (46), followed by Chaudhary (25) and Rajput (15). Within the Tarai tribals, the Tharu led with 30 candidates (excluding those designated as Chaudhary). There were 18 Muslim candidates and all were from the Tarai. Of the 967 candidates sampled from eight parties, 27.2 per cent were from the Tarai.

Choice of the People

The social composition of the House of Representatives is the outcome of the people's

Table 2: Candidates of Eight Sampled Parties

Ethnic/Caste	Sub-group	Number	Per cent
Hill Group		202	72.6
1. Bahun		243	25.1
2. Chhetri		211	21.8
3. Newar		61	6.3
4. Tribal	10	184	19.0
5. Occupational Caste	2	3	0.3
Tarai Group		263	27.2
6. Brahmin	9	30	3.1
7. Landed Caste	10	83	8.6
8. Trader Caste	8	60	6.2
9. Tribal	5	45	4.7
10. Muslim		18	1.9
11. Others		29	3.0
Total		967	100.0

Table 3: Ethnic/Caste Representation in the Legislature

Ethnic/Caste	1959	1978	1981*	1991		1991 Both
				Lo. House	Up. House	
A. Hill Group	78.0	85.0	79.5	79.0	85.0	80.4
1. Bahun	27.5	21.3	12.5	36.6	40.0	37.4
2. Chhetri	31.2	36.2	36.6	18.5	15.0	17.7
3. Newar	3.7	7.9	8.0	6.8	13.3	8.3
4. Tribal	15.6	18.9	22.3	16.6	13.3	15.8
5. Occupational Caste	-	0.8	-	0.5	3.3	1.1
B. Tarai Group	22.0	15.0	20.5	21.0	15.0	19.6
6. Brahmins	3.7	2.3	-	2.4	1.6	2.3
7. Landed Caste	10.1	7.0	7.1	5.4	5.0	5.3
8. Trader Caste	2.8	1.6	1.8	2.0	3.3	2.3
9. Tribal	3.7	3.2	9.8	8.8	3.3	7.5
10. Muslim	1.8	0.8	1.8	2.4	1.7	2.3
All	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
No. of Seats	109	127	112	205	60	265

* Excludes nominated members.

Source: Gurung, Asian Survey, Vol XXII, No. 3, March 1982, p. 313.

choice. The House represents eight ethnic and three caste groups from the hill, and three ethnic, eight caste, and one religious group from the Tarai. These can be regrouped into 10 broad categories (Table 3). Hill Brahmins constitute the largest group with 75 members out of 205. In other words, more than a third of the House members are Bahuns. The second most numerous are Chhetris, with 18.5 per cent. Hill tribals come next with 16.6 per cent. Tarai tribals rank fourth with 8.8 per cent members.

Compared to the social composition of the 1959 general election, Bahuns have gained in 1991, while Chhetris lost their share considerably. Other social groups with a lower share than 32 years ago are caste groups of the Tarai, particularly the landed castes. On the other hand, the Tarai tribals have made considerable headway. The representation of the Tarai group has changed only slightly: 22 per cent in 1959 to 21 per cent in 1991. The Tarai representation was lowest (under the Panchayat election system) in 1978, but improved in 1981. Even during the 1991 election, more than half of the Tarai's 67 constituencies were won by candidates of hill origin. These include 25 hill Bahuns, five Chhetris, two Newars, two Tamangs, one Pariyar (Damai), and one Gurung.



Choice of Party and Palace

The Upper House is composed of 60 members, of which 50 are nominated by prominent parties on a proportional basis, and 10 by the King. Compared to 36.6 per cent in the Lower House, the Upper House has 40 per cent Bahuns (Table 3). Out of 31 Congress nominees, 13 are Bahun. One-third of the CPN/UML nominees, both the nominees of the United People's Front and four out of the 10 royal nominees are Bahuns. Chhetris are second in preference. Nominees of the Tarai social groups are nine, and those of Newar eight. Four hill tribal groups are represented with eight

nominees. Two are of hill occupational castes.

The combined strength of the lower and upper houses is 265 members. The share of the members of hill origin comes to 80.4 per cent. Hill Brahmins are predominant, with 37.4 per cent of all members (Table 3). Chhetris come next with 17.7 per cent, closely followed by Hill tribals, 15.8 per cent. Tarai Brahmins and Tarai trader castes have a lower representation along with the Muslims.

Who Represents Whom ?

Some social groups have a higher propensity for political participation than others. This can be exemplified in the case of the Central Development Region. This region represents all varieties of ecological zones, including the metropolitan region of Kathmandu, and has 64 election constituencies, or 31.4 per cent of the total.

Of the 19 districts in the Central Region, seven have a Tamang majority (Table 4). The Tamang constitute the largest ethnic group with 15.4 per cent of the total regional population. However, the region has only three Tamangs elected members out of the 64 constituencies. The second largest group in the region is Newar with 13.9 per cent of the total regional population. They have nine representatives from the region.

Newar representatives come from three Tamang majority districts and one Yadav majority district, including three from Kathmandu Valley.

Chhetris constitute 12.1 per cent of the regional population. They are in majority in only two districts (Dolakha, Ramechhap). Chhetris have six members in the lower house from the region. They do not represent Ramechhap, where they are the most numerous, but have seats in three Tamang-majority districts, and one Yadav-majority district.

Hill Brahmins constitute 11.7 per cent of the regional population but 41 per cent of the regional constituency, with 26 elected representatives. They are in majority only in Chitwan District, but represent 7 hill, 6 Kathmandu Valley, 6 inner Tarai and 6 Tarai constituencies in the region. This includes Rasuwa, which has 88.9 per cent Tamang population.

Among the Tarai social groups, the largest is Yadav, with 5.6 per cent of regional population with majority in five Tarai districts. However, there are only three Yadav representatives out of 27 Tarai constituencies. On the other hand, eight Tarai constituencies are held by representatives of hill origin.

Overall, the literate Brahmins and the bazaar-based Newars seem the most conscious and cosmopolitan in political culture in Nepal. But the former also carry a burden of an Indian wisdom: "Before the Brahmin is in want, the kings's larder will be empty."

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Table 4: Social Groups & Representation in Central Region

District (No. of Constituency)	Most Numerous Group	Population Percent	Current Representatives (Their population percent in district)
A. Mountain (3)			
1. Rasuwa (1)	Tamang	88.9	Bahun (3.5)
2. Dolakha (2)	Chhetri	34.9	<u>Chhetri</u> (34.9), Tamang (16.6)
B. Hill (15)			
3. Dhading (3)	Tamang	21.8	<u>Tamang</u> (21.8), Bahun (19.3), Newar (11.0)
4. Nuwakot (3)	Tamang	39.2	2 Bahun (21.7), Chhetri (14.0)
5. Sindhu Palchok (3)	Tamang	36.5	2 Chhetri (15.7), Newar (10.5)
6. Kabhre Palanchok (4)	Tamang	33.1	2 Bahun (24.3), <u>Tamang</u> (33.1), Chhetri (13.6)
7. Ramechhap (2)	Chhetri	25.4	2 Bahun (8.3)
C. Kathmandu Valley (10)			
8. Kathmandu (5)	Newar	46.7	3 Bahun (16.1), 2 <u>Newar</u> (46.7)
9. Lalitpur (3)	Newar	50.7	2 Bahun (10.1), <u>Newar</u> (50.7)
10. Bhaktapur (2)	Newar	55.2	<u>Newar</u> (55.2), Bahun (10.0)
D. Inner Tarai (9)			
11. Chitwan (3)	Bahun	28.7	<u>Bahun</u> (28.7), Newar (6.4), Thakali (0.0)
12. Makwanpur (3)	Tamang	37.6	2 Bahun (10.0), Newar (17.5)
13. Sindhuli (3)	Tamang	19.4	3 Bahun (11.1)
E. Tarai (27)			
14. Parsa (4)	Kurmi	9.4	2 Bahun (3.6), Tharu (8.5), Koiri (3.8)
15. Bara (4)	Yadav	15.0	2 Bahun (3.3), Tharu (12.1), Muslim (11.4)
16. Rautahat (4)	Yadav	14.6	Muslim (11.7), Tharu (4.5), Rajput (2.3), Brahmin (0.3)
17. Sarlahi (5)	Yadav	20.6	Tharu (7.1), Mahato (2.5), Chhetri (3.2), Newar (0.9), Brahmin (0.4)
18. Mahotari (5)	Yadav	21.4	<u>Yadav</u> (21.4), Brahmin (9.5), 2 Rajput (1.2), Gurung (0.0)
19. Dhanusa (5)	Yadav	21.4	2 <u>Yadav</u> (21.4), 2 Bahun (2.5), Kayastha (0.6)

Note: Ethnic/Caste name of representatives underlined conform with the most numerous in respective districts.

Bāhunvāda: Myth or Reality ?

by Kamal P. Malla

After 25 years of persevering belligerence, Prithvi Narayan Shah conquered the three cities of the Kathmandu Valley in 1769. One year later, on 23 March, he shifted his capital to newly occupied Kathmandu. With his court came his kinsmen, retinue, priests and soldiers — the new aristocracy of the hill region — to settle permanently in Kathmandu. They symbolised what Nepal's leading economic historian Mahesh C. Regmi calls "a shift of political and economic power". Among them were the *thar-ghar*, the chosen and select families of hill brahmins such as Aryal, Khanal, Pandey and Panta who were rewarded with the best lands and houses in the Valley as their *jagirs* in return for their services to the Gorkhali court in war and peace. Thus begins the success story of the *parbate* Bahuns, the brahmins from the hills.

The Sanskrit word *brahmana* has more than one meaning and is therefore potentially ambiguous. Without the contextual clue it might mean any of these four: supernatural power or the absolute world-spirit; a Vedic text of the brahmanic class; the god Brahma; or a member of the priestly order in the Hindu society. Relatively speaking, the native term Bahun is decidedly preferable for it is starkly unambiguous

in its social and cultural reference. Manu, the Hindu law-giver, prescribed six main functions to a brahmin: study and make others study, sacrifice and make others sacrifice, give and receive gifts (*Manusmriti* X: 75). However, Manu nearly forgot the central political or ideological function of the brahmana, that is to legitimise the political power, no matter who holds it, for which he receives the munificence of the powers that be. It may not be instantly possible to verify if all the known clans of *parbate* Bahuns, listed for example in Shikharnatha Subedi's *Tharagotra Pravaravali*, perform all these ritual functions. Perhaps, they don't. Nor is it possible to chronologise and substantiate the claim of these clans to have migrated from the heartland of Aryavarta into the laps of the rugged hills of Nepal. Perhaps, it is even silly to expect them to observe Manu's prescriptions in the cold Himalaya at the high noon of the Kali Yuga. But a number of these clans and lineages with *gotras* and *pravaras* allegedly drawn from eponymic Vedic and Upanishadic rishis claim nothing if not pristine purity of blood and Aryan descent. However, only a few families have published their authentic genealogies, going back eight to ten generations, and fewer have bare lists of dead manes. Those who migrated to the Kathmandu Valley came with their *jajaman* families such as the Chhetri families of the Thapas, Pande, Basnet, Bohara and Kunwars — who later on staked a claim to have descended from the Ranas of Chitor. Both the *purohits* as well as the *jajamans* speak *khas kura* (or *Nepali* as it is known today) and are known as *khasa* — a people originally classified by Manu as *vratyas* or "those who have abandoned sacred rites and lost their caste" (*Manusmriti* X: 22).

Not only the Gorkhali army but also their civil administration did not recruit the Newars — the inhabitants of the conquered Valley because of the deeply ingrained distrust and contempt for them in the Gorkhali psyche — graphically expressed in such sayings as *Newar ista ra babu dusta kahilai hundaina*: a Newar is never a friend just as a father is never an enemy. Only since October 1804 were some Newars admitted in the revenue administration, then only because the Gorkhali *sardars* didn't comprehend the Valley's land administration system.

After Jang Bahadur Kunwar came to power in September 1846, following the Kot Massacre, he reorganised the judicial, civil, and revenue administration along seemingly institutional models. His *Muluki Ain*, or Civil Code of 1854, tried to codify Hindu caste orthodoxy as a State ideology with the Bahuns and Thakuris-Chhetris

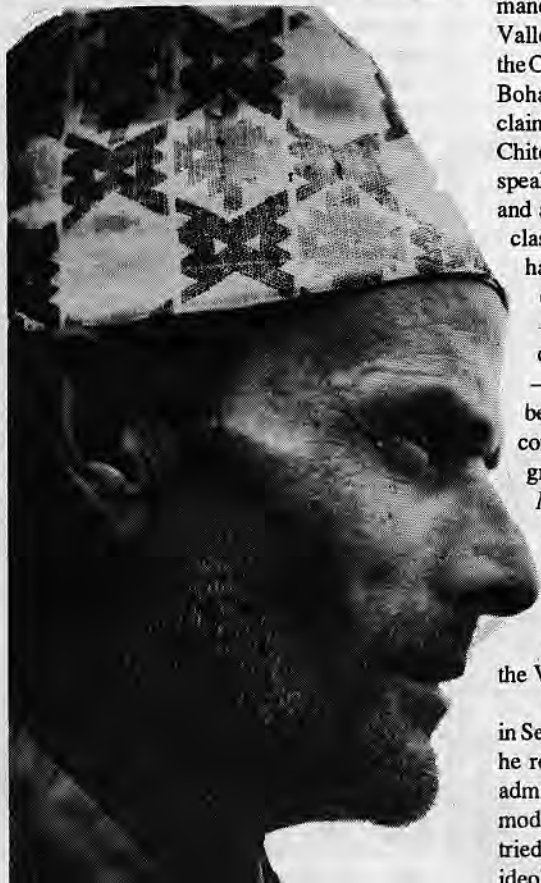
topping the social hierarchy, and lumping a large segment of other Nepalis, including the Newars, as enslavable *matawali*s. Although Jung Bahadur's *Muluki Ain*, which gave the highest ritual status to Bahuns, was officially abolished 110 years later in 1964, it had by then ensured the Bahun's *secular status* as well by putting them at the top of the social pyramid. The Newars were "upgraded" as "un-enslavable" in 1863, when Jung Bahadur was visibly pleased with their services in the 1854/55 war with Tibet and the 1857 Lucknow operation.

Among Jang Bahadur's client families staffing the Rana administration, most came from the Khas Thakuris, Chhetri and Bahun families. Of the 230 *bhardars* (council members) signing the 1854 *Ain* there were only seven Newars — three *subbas* from the family of Siddhi Man Rajbhandari, two *kharidars*, and one *dittha*, and one other. Because of their knowledge of Persian-Urdu, Tibetan and English, the Jaishi Kotha and the Munshi Khana — which dealt with all foreign affairs — were staffed by a few select Newar families. Thus, the Newars seemed to have made a small dent into the early Rana administration. Their administrative skills and accomplishments must have been no small assets, enabling them to survive the conspiratorial court politics which lingered on till the rise of Chandra Shumshere in 1901.

A classic instance of the Rana court ethos is narrated by Sukra Raj Shastri, the martyr hanged in 1941, in a biography of his distinguished father Madhav Raj Joshi entitled, *Sahidke Kalam Se* ("From the Martyr's Pen," posthumously published in 1958). In July 1905, in the presence of Chandra Shumshere, Madhav Raj was brutally beaten by the pandits of his court for asserting that true Hinduism is enshrined in the Vedas and the Upanishads, not in worshipping the stone image of Pashupatinath. Madhav Raj was paraded through the streets of Kathmandu with a bleeding head and a blood-stained body. In many ways, as Bhuvan Lal Joshi and Leo E. Rose put it, Madhav Raj Joshi was the first rebel in Nepal who revolted against brahmanic orthodoxy by inaugurating the social and political awakening which led to the movement for democracy in the 1940s and the overthrow of the Ranas in 1950.

The extent and proportion of the Bahun and Newar inroad into the Rana administration can be judged from the list of *bhardars* who assembled on 7 November 1950 to depose King Tribhuvan after he sought asylum in the Indian Embassy. Among the 258 highest officials signing the document, there were 23 Newars in all — two *kazis*, four *sardars*, 16 *mir subbas*, and one engineer. From the Bahun community there were 36, out of which 13 were from the families of *Badaguruju*, *Rajaguruju* and *Gurupurohit*, four pandits, nine *Mir Subbas*, five *Sardars*, four professors and one doctor (see Grishma Bahadur Devkota's *Nepalko Rajanaitik Darpan* Part I, 2016 pp. 28-33 for the full list).

With the exception of the Bahuns, the



Newars were the earliest to realise the importance of modern education and training for the professions. They were among the first to make use of education, as soon as the Durbar School was made accessible to the public in the 1890s. They were also among the first to send their youth to attend Tri-Chandra College when it opened in 1890. During Rana times, Newars not only made use of these limited opportunities at home, but also sent their offspring to India and as far afield as Japan.

Rivalry and competition for patronage by the Ranas took the form of that typical Nepali institution called *chakari*, or visible demonstration of personal or familial loyalty. Bitter rivalry was an invariable part of the social history of powerful and influential *Bahun* and Newar families during the Rana century. One notable rivalry between *Bahun* lineages, for example, was the feud between the Kumais and the Purbiyas, those with origins in Kumaon and those who had settled further east. This was reflected in the personal conflicts between Badaguruju Hem Raj Pandey and Ram Mani Acharya Dixit during Chandra Shumshere's reign.

The social and political competition between the *Bahuns* and the *Newars* has deep historical roots as these two communities were the first to enjoy the fruits of Rana patronage, access to civil service and opportunities for modern education and training abroad for learned professions. With their higher literacy rates, *Bahuns*, *Chhetris* and *Newars*, make up more than 70 to 80 per cent of Nepal's trained manpower — excepting the army and police. Twenty-eight years after the overthrow of the Ranas, when a survey on the social and ethnic composition of higher education enrollment was conducted by Tribhuvan University it was found that out of its total enrollment in 1979, 45 per cent were *Brahmins*, 20 per cent *Chhetris*, and 19 per cent *Newars*.

Now that democracy has arrived once again in Nepal, this hold of the three communities on the strategic roles and elite functions in society is unlikely to stay where it was. And education as much as politics probably holds the harmless key to social change, particularly education for the socially and economically disadvantaged communities of Nepal, such as the *Tharus*, the *Tamangs* and other *Tibeto-Burman*-speaking communities.

The recent outbursts against *brahmanism* are not, therefore, too unexpected. When the Nepali Congress supreme leader Ganesh Man Singh voiced his discontent at the political appointments made by the elected government, which went mostly to *Bahuns*, he launched what some local papers called "a crusade against *brahmanbad*." Unfortunately, the term "*brahmanbad*" is a total misnomer here because historically speaking "*brahmanbad*" — *brahminism* — is a religious outlook which gives a crucial place to sacrifice and rituals characteristic of the *Vedas* and the *Upanisads*. It has nothing to

do with *Bahuns* pushing *Bahuns* to the top of diplomatic service, for example.

Nor does "*brahmanbad*" have anything to do with fatalism, allegedly a typical outlook of *Bahuns* and inimical to Western-style development. Both Ganesh Man Singh and Dor Bahadur Bista, through ideas introduced in his recent book *Fatalism and Development*, have done a great disservice to the *Brahmins'* love for learning, their intellectualism and application — not to speak of their traditional role in Hindu society as ritual specialists with near monopolistic knowledge of the scriptural texts.

The inborn instinct for survival, particularly political and economic survival, is too strong a propelling force among the *Bahun* community. If survival is the surest test of fitness, the *Bahuns* have done remarkably well under every political regime — the *Shah-Rana*, and the partyless as well as multiparty ones. All the ruling monarchs, not to speak of the princelings of doubtful descent, roughly from Manadeva (464-505 AD) to King Birendra (1945-) may have been led to believe by their counsellors that Nepal is *asil Hindustan*: and they — and they alone — are the true Defenders of the Faith, the true *Hindupati*. This illusory pedigree and cultural legitimacy is enshrined just as much in the modern democratic Nepali constitution with sovereignty vested on the people of Nepal as in Manadeva's inscription at Changu, installed in 464 AD.

The fatalistic outlook could not have been the propelling force behind the *Brahmin* success story. A propensity for fatalism does not explain the political successes of today's *Marxists-Leninists-Maoists* with their unending rival claims to political caste purity and the monopoly over revolutionary wisdom; neither does it explain the political success of so many others who are not as enthusiastic about the classless millennium. They may recite the *Gita* in private or preach selfless action in public, but *Bahuns* are anything but "*fatalists*" in social and political practice. If any section of Nepali society has perfectly internalised "the Protestant capitalist work ethic" and its accompanying cult of acquisitive success, it is the *Bahuns*. Without relentlessly pursuing success, how could they have dominated every field of Nepali public life just in a matter of a few generations since the creation of the Nepali nation-state? You name it — rightist, centrist or leftist politics, the media, literature, diplomacy, civil service — you will invariably find *Bahuns* at the top, if not dangerously close to it. Fatalism certainly didn't carry them so close to the peak.

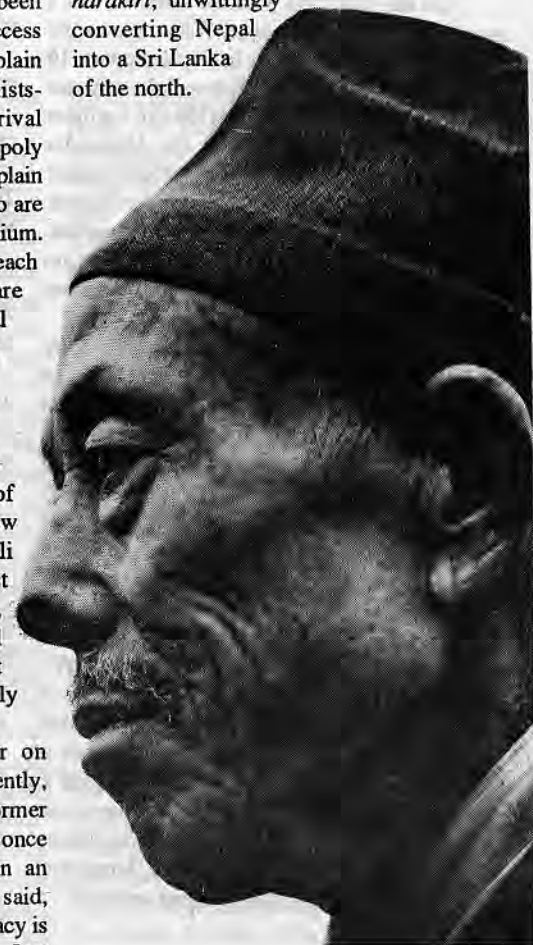
On his return from the seminar on democracy and ethnicity in England recently, Nepali Congress Party President and former Prime Minister Krishna Prasad Bhattarai once again broadcast his sanguinity when, in an interview given to Nepal Television he said, though not in so many words, that democracy is the ultimate solution to all ethnic problems. Just

look at the voter behaviour in the *Tarai*, he said. *Sadbhavana* could have swept the polls. And the *Mongol* candidates would have swept the east. Just see what happened. Both were rejected and swept aside by the well-behaved *Nepali* voters.

One so much wishes that "*Kishunji's*" optimism and his confidence in the healing capacity of democracy were a shared experience in South Asia. Forty-five years of democracy, punctuated once in a while by Pandit Nehru's Linguistic States solution or Mandal Commission's Report, have left ethnic nerves in Punjab, Assam and Kashmir as raw as ever before.

The aggrieved sentiments of the *Tarai*, the *Janajatis*, the *Matawalis* of the Hills, and the *Newars* of the Valley may be fake political gimmicks, but the two millennia of *Brahmin* domination in the social and cultural life of Nepal's recorded history is not. So far these sentiments have been expressed in psychological metaphors, often confined to *Janajati* get-togethers, newspaper columns, or *Sadbhavana* public meetings, and rarely if ever in organised political activities of any damaging value.

But if these sentiments, as expressed by Ganesh Man Singh, Gajendra Narayan Singh, Gopal Gurung, Sitaram Tamang, Suresh Ale, M.S. Thapa and Padma Ratna Tuladhar are translated into organised political movements, then into military action, Nepal will never remain the same. We will all be committing national *harakiri*, unwittingly converting Nepal into a *Sri Lanka* of the north.



Cauldron of Assam

The demographic transitions that the Indian Northeast has endured, and the resulting rise of "political ethnicity", should be instructive for other areas where such transitions are more recent.

by Bhupinder Singh

The periodic outbursts of these leaders have, therefore, a cathartic value because now and then they let the steam out of the ethnic pressure cooker or the melting pot, if you like. What might ultimately be damaging to the political prospects of the leading parties is the "Kishunji"-style overconfidence in democracy as the ultimate solution because such complacency is likely to sweep the brewing storm under cheerful carpets.

One shouldn't, for instance, be surprised if the Newars, one of these days, rally round a "sons-of-the-soil" style movement in sharp reaction against the swarming inroads by *madhesiyas*, *parbates* and *bhotias* (thanks to the construction, car-pet and garment industries) whose influx has displaced Newars from their lands and real estates. With his social and cultural fabric of life slowly being destroyed, the average middle-class Newar of Kathmandu today feels like a displaced Nawab of Lucknow after the Loot. He feels like an alien in his own home, pushed too hard against the wall by ever-stiffer social and economic competition with some 20,000 in-migrants every year. The headlong rush is not only robbing Newars of their jobs, open space, and unpolluted civic life, but also destroying their culture and treating them as a dwindling specimen of aborigines deserving to be confined to the slum areas of Asan and the vegetable markets of Kathmandu.

Let me conclude with the latest so that I need not elaborate any more. With a per capita income of US\$ 170, the State in Nepal supports 16 years' free education for the Bahuns who cultivate the Sanskrit language. It spends NRs 32.1 million annually for 690 students at the Mahendra Sanskrit University — at NRs 45,000 per student per year. Recently, 77 members of Parliament, representing all the five leading political parties, submitted a memorandum to the Education Minister for making Sanskrit "compulsory from Grade 1 through 10" in public schools.

Astonishingly, this appeal is signed by leading Marxist-Leninist leaders such as Jhalanath Khanal, Radha Krishna Mainali and Lilamani Pokharel. With all their commitment to the slogans of social justice and equality, do these leaders know that the State is already spending NRs 45,000 per Sanskrit student out of the taxpayer's pockets, whereas it has been refusing to spend anything on 25,000 students studying Science, Management, Medicine, Education and the Humanities in the so-called "private campuses" of Tribhuvan University?

When one delves deep into the recesses of the political manoeuvre for making Sanskrit compulsory to 3.4 million Nepali children at school, for many of whom not even Nepali is their first language, one unwittingly bumps into naked bahunvada and medieval feudalism running amok under the garb of New Democracy or infant democracy. *Viva l'enfant terrible!*

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If there is one "melting pot" in the Himalayan region, it is the north-eastern region of India, particularly the "mother state" of Assam. Here, six different demographic strands are identifiable. The indigenous tribes, whose origins are lost in time. The Ahom, who invaded the area from the southeast in 1228 and ruled for nearly 600 years. The caste Hindus who arrived two or three centuries later from today's Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. The remnants of Muslim contingents of Mughal power. East Bengalis, whose influx began with the British occupation of 1826 and continues to this day. The tea-garden tribal labour with origins in Bihar, Bengal, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh. And lastly, migrant Nepalis and others from as far afield as Rajasthan, attracted by economic opportunities of the Indian Northeast.

About a million people inhabited the northeastern region as a whole when the British annexed Assam in 1826. At the turn of the century, the number was up to about 3.3 million and the region as a whole still sparsely populated. The last 90 years, however, has seen a phenomenal jump in population — to more than 31 million today.

Immigration has had a profound effect on the region — first and foremost on the psychology of the indigenous people and locals, as successive alien groups arrive to dispossess them of land and forests. The impact of immigration, is evident everywhere — in the culture, the economy, administration and politics of the region.

When long-nursed grievances are not addressed by ruling majorities, these blossom into full-blown movements. The most potent fuels for such movements are the dispossession of land and forests, discrimination in education and employment, indifference and even contempt for cultural and linguistic aspirations, lack of respect for equality before law, and unfair administration. The right of indigenous people over common property resources — land, water, forests — based on the doctrine of historical prerogative have received scant respect. Unfair psycho-social treatment has caused anguish and deep discontent.

The clash of cultures led to the rise of political ethnicity in Assam. This powerful force sometimes manifests in movements for autonomy

or separate statehood. Thus it is that today the Bodo, the largest tribe of Assam's northern plain, is demanding a separate state of Bodoland. A smaller tribe of the eastern part of the northern plain, the Mishing, have also demanded an autonomous state under Article 244-A of the Indian Constitution. Similar demands are being made in Karbi Anglong and North Cachar, the two hill districts of Assam which already enjoy considerable self-management under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. Scheduled tribes south of the river Brahmaputra, meanwhile, are demanding Sixth Schedule status for two proposed districts.

At the time of Indian Independence in 1947, with the exception of Manipur and Tripura, the northeastern region was one unit going by the name of Assam. Today, the Northeast comprises of seven states: a truncated Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Manipur, Tripura and Mizoram. The hive-off in the post-independence era is comparable to departure of children from parents upon attaining maturity. The children may enjoy their new-found independence, but the parents may not relish the separation.

Nagaland, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh acquired statehood during the course of the past three decades. Statehood appears to have benefitted the people — they derive satisfaction from their identity, dignity and status, and as equal partners in the Indian Union. Further, because these states are small both geographically and population-wise, the inhabitants feel much closer to the political, legislative, administrative and development apparatus than do the people of large states such as Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Though there are some negative features also, this is no mean democratic achievement.

It is this perspective on the break-up of the former "Assam" that should inform and illumine the process of dealing with ethnic issues in the rest of the Himalaya. A just and equitable social order, built on the rigorous profession and practice of the rule of law, is the best guarantee of peace and progress in the region.

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Turn-of-century picture shows "pipas" carrying palanquin.

Tamangs Under the Shadow

Historically discriminated because of their proximity to Kathmandu Valley, Tamangs demand alternative development models and a political structure that provides hope.

by Parshuram Tamang

What do you say of a community that is everywhere, yet nowhere? Every one who arrives or leaves Kathmandu Valley by road or on foot has to pass through Tamang territory. This largest of ethnic groups among the Tibeto-Burman speaking peoples of the Himalayan region is especially concentrated around the Valley. The Bagmati Zone, made up of Bhaktapur, Kathmandu and Lalitpur districts, has more than 51 per cent Tamang speakers.

More than half of the mountain areas of Nepal is covered by the Tamang nation, which has inhabited these hills for longer than any other group. Tamangs have their own language, their unique lifestyle and religious beliefs. Though Tamang history has been largely ignored and therefore lost, it must have been significant. According to one Tibetan inscription, the fort at Lo Manthang (Mustang) was built back in the 13th century AD as protection against the "Se Mon Tamang" of the south.

Yet, it was not until late in the present century that the world outside Nepal had even heard of the existence of the Tamang nation. Western visitors, guests of Rana Prime Ministers, who walked up the foot-trail from Bhimphedi had Tamangs carry their baggage without ever knowing it. To some, it would seem that Tamangs gained an identity only in 1932 after King Tribhuvan and Prime Minister Bhim Shumshere allowed them to write "Tamang" after their name in civil service and military rolls.

The low profile of the Tamangs and the poverty that marks their villages are the result of concerted exploitation over the centuries. Two hundred years ago, English traveller Francis B. Hamilton had occasion to remark that "Murmis" (Tamangs, as they were also known) were prohibited from entering the Valley. Because Tamangs ate carrion, they were known to the Newars of the Valley as *Siyena Bhotya*. Wrote Hamilton, "They never seem to have had any share in the government, nor to have been addicted to arms, but always followed the profession of agriculture, or carried loads for the Newars, being a people uncommonly robust." Portering was a function of vital economic importance to the three principalities of the Valley, which relied on the trade links through the rugged terrain of the north and south. The Tamangs, residing in the periphery, provided just the required brawn.

According to Hamilton, the Lama Buddhism of the Tamangs was not acceptable to the Gorkhali conquerors of the Valley. A list of groups that may not be recruited as soldiers, prepared in 1896 by another Englishman E. Varsittart, reads as follows: "*Chyame, Damai, Drai, Gainey, Kamara, Kami (Lohar), Kasai, Kumal, Majhi, Pipa, Poday and Sarki*." Among these "Pipa", unlike the others, is not the name of a tribe or ethnic group. It was the term for "porter", which was the occupation reserved by the Ranas for Tamangs. The pipas were used to carry loads, pitch tents, and provide other menial

physical labour for the military, but were excluded from the military hierarchy. They were administered through the depot known as the "Pipa Goswara", which still exists near the outside gate of the Singha Durbar Secretariat in Kathmandu. Tamangs were forbidden to join other occupations.

The attitude towards the Tamangs was quite in accordance with the upper-caste Hindu blueprint for governance rule according to the *Manusmriti* and Hindu texts. The main aim of the *Muluki Ain* of 1854 was, of course, to induct the hill ethnic people of Nepal under the four-tier Hindu hierarchy. The non-Hindu communities were pegged as "*pani chalney*" Sudras, as differentiated from the "*pani na-chalney*" Sudras. This division was carried one step further. Based on loyalty and need for labour, particular groups were declared either *masiney matwali* (who could be enslaved) and *na-masiney matwali* (those who could not be enslaved). The more the *masiney matwali* accepted the Hindu ethos, the more easily they were assigned higher status.

While the Tamangs were thus not categorised as *pani na-chalney Sudras*, their position was lowest among the hill ethnics who were *pani chalney*. There was some attraction therefore to jettison one's traditions and religion, and Tamangs who did so were declared Gurungs. In Gorkha District, even today, there are many *Bahra Saley Gurung* — Tamangs who became "Gurung" in the year 2012 (Vikram Era).

Following the Gorkhali conquest, the *Kipat* community land of the Tamangs was wrested and distributed among the Bahun and Chhetri courtier-class in the form of *birta*, *jagir* and *guthi* property. Tamangs were retained as bonded labour (*kamaiya*) and near-slaves to work these very lands. Even as bonded labourers, however, they had to pay *jhara* (a corvée like system).

During the Rana years, Tamangs were used as menial labour by the rulers and the courtier class — as construction labour for the durbars, for cutting trails, portering, carrying palanquins (*dola bokney*), running mail, delivering forest-based products such as *duna* and *tapari* (containers made from *sal* leaves), weaving *doko* baskets and *nanglo* trays, keeping palaces clean (*leep-pot garney*), maintaining the indoors (*baithakey*), doing gardening, providing agricultural labour, keeping herds, making *lokta* paper, holding umbrellas (*chatey*), maintaining hookahs, carrying goods (*dolay*), and serving as *dhai-ama*, or surrogate mothers for high-born offspring. The system of *keti hasne* (or *nani susarey*) imported women from the Tamang hills for all kinds of chores in Rana palaces. The maintenance of scores of female retainers, some of whom served as concubines, is said to have started the trend towards prostitution among poverty-stricken Tamang communities.

Tamangs provided a ready labour reserve pool for the rulers of Kathmandu. And it was in order to maintain this pool that they prohibited the Tamangs from joining the British regiments in India, even though the Gurung and Magar west of the Trisuli river and the Rai and Limbu east of the Dudh Kosi were permitted. Tamangs were prevented from joining even Nepal's own government administration and the military.

It was written in a handbook on Gurkha soldiers that "...the Tamang make an excellent soldier", but because he will eat beef, "the more orthodox Gurkha officer is prejudiced against the enlistment of Tamangs." However, the treatment of Tamangs was based on something more than the mere eating of beef. More significant was that historically the Tamang nation came to occupy the strategically important region surrounding Kathmandu Valley. Feeling threatened by this "encirclement", Kathmandu's rulers thought best to bring them forcibly under central rule and exploit them enough that the community could never rise — as it has not been able to until this day.

The Mallas were overtaken by the Gorkhalis. The Ranas ousted the Shahs. Then democracy arrived, briefly. The Shah rule returned under the Panchayat. And now here is democracy again. But the Tamangs of Nepal have remained where they always were. According to a survey done east of the Valley in the Ramechhap/Sindhuli

region, more than 50 per cent of the porters (*bhariyas*) are Tamang. Generations of Tamangs have worked as porters in Kathmandu town, in recent decades as *thela gada* cart-pushers. Practically all rickshaw pullers and the majority of three-wheeler tempo drivers today are Tamang.

The lowest rungs of the trekking trade are manned by Tamangs. They have proven themselves to be adept climbers, but mountaineering expeditions rarely allow Tamangs above base camp. Tamangs make up more than 90 per cent of *thangka* labourers, as contract artists hired by Tibetan and Newar businessmen, who reap the real profits. Above 75 per cent of the carpet weaving labour is Tamang — mostly women and children prized for their deft fingers. The restaurant *kanchas* of Kathmandu are overwhelmingly Tamang, and Tamangs more than any other hill community are engaged in the flesh trade in Indian metropolis and Nepali towns. The women have their origin in the economically deprived areas in the northern neighbourhood of the Valley. The tragic distinction of being the first recorded Nepali to die of AIDS has fallen on a Tamang woman.

Late into the 1970s, many Tamangs of the Valley's periphery ensured economic survival by providing firewood and charcoal to the urban dwellers. It was hard work, but provided cash income for these subsistence farmers. These Tamang peasants have been targeted by some environmental experts as responsible for the de-greening of the Valley rim, quite forgetting that it is the urban demand that drives the trade. As woodcutters, meanwhile, the peasants have to face corrupt forest guards and constrained access even for their own needs. The increasing demand has led to depleting woodlands and drastically reduced income for the peasants. Meanwhile, the closing off of large tracts of woodlands, in particular the Shivapuri watershed area, has hit the surrounding villages very hard. The economic

deprivation has merely increased the influx of indigent peasants to the job markets of polluted, expensive, uncaring Kathmandu.

Tamangs also have the distinction of providing the foot-soldiers for the "Hongkong trade", regularly riding Royal Nepal's Boeings as carriers of contraband. While the enormous profits of smuggling are made by others, it is the Tamang and other "*bhariyas*" that are caught, and sometimes paraded in front of Nepal Television cameras. Prison surveys have shown, that a disproportionate number of Tamangs are behind bars for criminal offenses. The psychological impact of economic depression is severe, although Nepali social scientists have not had occasion to study this problem so far.

Poonam Thapa, a Nepali geographer, speaking at a 1990 SAARC symposium on the girl child, informed participants of the large number of women and girls from among the *matwali* groups who were in the flesh trade: "A family whose daughter is a prostitute in Bombay will have a corrugated roof over its head. A family whose daughter is a madam will have a spacious bungalow." But Thapa chose not to delve into the historical reasons which force Tamang women to enter this most despised of professions in the remote cities of India.

A young Tamang woman who weaves carpets in Kathmandu had this to say, "This country is ours, but we are only labourers. The Tibetan refugees have no country, but look at them..."

Perhaps Tamangs are inherently witless and uncreative, and deserving of their lowly position in Nepali society? This is most unlikely. Their position has nothing to do with heredity and everything to do with focused historical discrimination. One need only glance across the border to the achievements of Tamangs in India to see how they have flowered when presented with fairness and opportunity. In Darjeeling, for example, descendants of Tamang migrants are today at the forefront of culture, the arts, education, government and politics. The few Tamangs who have achieved fame and recognition in Nepal in these fields, too, mostly have their origins in the Darjeeling hills.

The founding fathers of the Indian Republic made arrangements to provide constitutional security for the development of "backward" tribes and castes. Many tribes and Harijans took advantage of the facilities extended to "Scheduled Tribes" and "Scheduled Castes", but the Tamangs of India did not. So self-confident were they of their abilities — and this was as early as the 1950s — that they preferred not to take the offer. They did not consider themselves "backward" or weak in any way.

Today, a Gorkha Hill Council runs the affairs of the hills of Darjeeling.



Thela-gada pushers of Kathmandu.

It is the only government agency in which there is adequate representation of Tamangs in policy-making roles. Subhas Ghisingh, the leader of the Gorkha National Liberation Front is a Tamang.

The names Ghisingh, Yonzon, Waiba and Pakhrin are only some of the clan names that Tamangs use as their surnames in India. As there is adequate recognition of tribal and caste rights in India, Tamangs there have felt free to use the clan surnames. In Nepal, however, Tamangs still feel a need to assert their group identity and solidarity by retaining "Tamang" as their surname.

Psychological subjugation is the worst form of defeat, and the Tamangs carry this load like perhaps no other Nepali community. Not content to merely ignore the Tamangs, the rulers of Kathmandu tried, consciously and unconsciously, to quash their self-image. While Tamangs were prevented from eating beef, for example, nothing was done to discourage alcoholism among Tamangs — after all they're *matwalis*; it was said. And so today the Tamang community as a whole has been severely weakened by generations of liberal drinking. Many men and women of the deprived hinterland drown themselves in *jaand* and *rakshi* from dawn to dusk. Even children are not spared.

When a few sons and daughters of the Kathmandu elites take to drugs, there is hue and cry. It is declared a national problem and crash programmes are started to counter the "drug menace". But there is little concern for entire communities that are facing relentless decline through drugs and drink?

The psychology of the Tamang thus took a beating over centuries of economic deprivation, political discrimination, and social marginalisation. As a result, they have developed a culture of silence, accepting their lot as defined without challenge. So much so that many thought nothing of jettisoning their Tamang identity and joining foreign armies as Gurung, Ghaley, Magars, Rai or Limbu. Even today, quite a few "Gurungs" in the British and Indian Gurkhas, and even in Nepal's own army, are actually Tamangs. These Tamangs and their families are having great difficulty making citizenship papers due to service and pension records which have them as Gurungs or some other ethnicity.

Today, the consumerism that has conquered the Valley towns is spreading its tentacles into the Tamang heartland. The draw of Kathmandu's cash economy and the bright city lights has emptied the Tamang hamlets of all but the infants, the aged and the infirm. Strength, intelligence,



skill and initiative have seeped out of Tamang hillsides. The migrants arrive in Kathmandu to serve as the underclass, as domestics, and as carpet weavers living in dilapidated shanties, unhygienic rooming houses, and working rickshaws and push-carts.

In the Tamang areas of southern Lalitpur today, there are schools but no Tamang pupils. Little boys and girls who should be at school and at play are hunched over carpet *taans* in Patan's inner city, in Jorpati and Baudha, concentrating on complicated "hand-made" knots so much in demand among European consumers.

There is no Tamang in the present cabinet. Why? In Parliament they make up a bare 1.8 per cent of the membership. Why? There is not a single Tamang in a leadership position in any political party. The proportion of Tamangs is minuscule in the Government and Tribhuvan University services, the court system, the professions, education, and in non-governmental organisations. In the military and police, Tamangs man the barricades but have little role in the upper hierarchy.

In other words, while they make up perhaps 18 to 20 per cent of Nepal's 19 million population, Tamangs as a nation are practically unrepresented in the country's national affairs. The proportion of Tamang is the proportion of the three elite communities — Bahun, Chhetri and Newar — combined. Yet these three groups make up the following percentages: 92.8 per cent of the civil service's Deputy Secretary posts and above, 93.9 per cent in the court system, 93.7 per cent in the national administration, 83.4 per cent in senior technical posts like doctors and engineers, 87 per cent of all army officers, 62 per cent of the members of the Lower House of Parliament, and 70 per cent of the Upper House.

The process of development has been co-opted by the Kathmandu's elites, made up mostly

of Bahuns, Chhetris and Newars. The "development agencies" are investing huge amounts, but most of it is diverted to the elite classes and rarely get down to communities such as the Tamang. Because the development mechanism as determined by the state is quite inadequate, development funds do not get to the intended beneficiaries and instead benefit Kathmandu-based contractors, bureaucrats and professionals. If under the new-found democracy, political commitment remains lukewarm and the structures of delivery remain the same, there is going to be no development

of the hill communities. The result will be no better than during the Panchayat years. A new model of "alternative development" is required, and the political system under the present constitution must be adjusted to reflect the country's reality.

Local political units must be structured according to communities. "Local development" would then mean the development and implementation of work programmes by autonomous community-based institutions. There is, certainly, a need for central planning and programming which has to be overseen by a national-level unit. For this, the existing House of Representatives is appropriate, but the Upper House as it exists is superfluous.

Most members of the Upper House are chosen by political parties in proportion to their victory in the general elections. This merely duplicates the political representation which already exists in the Lower House and has no function. What should be done is this: the Upper House must be called the House of Nationalities, in which all nations that make up Nepal should be represented on the basis of equality, irrespective of numbers. Such a significant improvement of the existing political system can be done without changing its basic structure.

Only a system which allows representation of all communities large and small, weak and powerful, will work in the Nepal of the future. Only then will there be genuine self-determination, which will bring all communities into the mainstream and ultimately strengthen the unity and sovereignty of Nepal as a multi-national state. To be multi-national is not a danger, and ruling elites must recognise this. The Tamangs, meanwhile, wait for the day.

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Bangladeshi Adivasi and Other Minorities

Because most Bengalis belong to one ethnic and linguistic group and share one religious faith, the large number of minorities of Bangladesh tend to be relegated to the shadows.

by Father R.W.Timm

According to official figures, about 98 per cent of the 110 million people of Bangladesh are Bengalis — part of the larger Bengali population in the Indian states of West Bengal, Tripura, Assam and elsewhere. Most Bangladesh Bengalis are Sunni Muslims (whereas in West Bengal the majority are Hindus). According to the 1981 census, Muslims comprise 86.6 per cent of the population, Hindus 12.1 per cent, and others 1.2 per cent. Many experts contest these figures, maintaining that the proportion of non-Muslims could be as high as 25 per cent. The “other” religious minorities comprise of Christians, Buddhists or animists; many are also ethnic tribal minorities.

Though Bangladesh began in 1971 as a secular state, Islam was made the state religion by constitutional amendment in 1988. Other religions are, however, recognised by provisions in the constitution. Despite the Constitution’s acceptance of the principle of non-discrimination, many activists allege indirect discrimination as well as direct persecution of those outside the “Bangladeshi mainstream”. The late 1980s saw increased fundamentalist agitation directed against Hindus and other religious minorities. Using the recent Babri-Masjid and Ram Mandir controversy in India, the communal repression and violence in Bangladesh has assumed a deadly new dimension. Feelings of anxiety and insecurity have increased.

Hindus and Biharis

The Hindus are the largest religious minority. They used to make up a considerably larger proportion of the population, but many left during Partition in 1947, and still more after Independence in 1971. Most Hindus are Bengalis by ethnic origin and language, although some tribal groups also follow beliefs and customs which have some affinity to Hinduism.

During Partition, there was a mass migration between India and Pakistan. Of the 1.3 million who moved from India into what was then East Pakistan, about one million were the Muslims from Bihar. These came to be known collectively as “Biharis” — Urdu speakers who are also Sunni Muslims like the Bengali population. Because they were seen to be favoured by the West Pakistani authorities in professional and administrative work, Biharis became increasingly unpopular among Bengalis and came to be seen

as symbols of West Pakistani domination.

In such a climate of hostility, the disturbances preceding and following independence in 1971 saw waves of retaliatory killings against Biharis. Thousands were arrested as alleged collaborators. Most lost homes, shops and property. While Pakistani army and civilians were evacuated, the 839,000 Biharis were left behind, most in enclaves protected by the Indian Army. The majority of Biharis expressed the wish to be repatriated to Pakistan, and 163,000 had been transferred by 1981. Political developments in Pakistan have made further mass repatriations unlikely.

The past allegiance of Biharis has not been

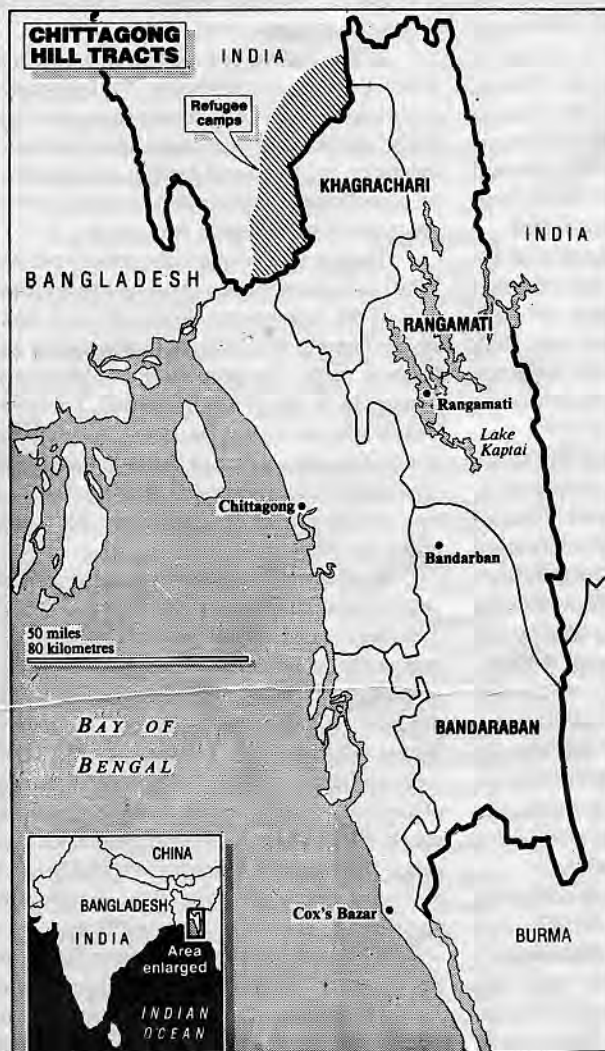
forgotten. Most are afraid of trying to integrate into the Bengali community, even though cultural and economic ties are closer here than in Pakistan. Without determination from the Biharis and goodwill on the part of the Bengalis, it will be a long time before Biharis join Bangladesh’s mainstream.

The Adivasi

While in India, seven per cent of the population (51 million), are classified as members of “Scheduled Tribes”, in Bangladesh the proportion of the adivasi (“original inhabitants”) is much smaller, perhaps one per cent. In this respect they are similar to the indigenous tribal peoples of North America and Australia.

The government deliberately has not attempted to take a census of the tribal people on the basis of language and religion — it is said, in order to emphasise their marginality. The adivasi were officially estimated 623,216 in 1981, although today they certainly number over a million. Of these, about 44 per cent are estimated to be Buddhist, 24 per cent Hindu and 13 per cent Christian, and 19 per cent “other”. The largest tribes in Bangladesh are the Santhal (200,000), Chakma (194,949), Marma (65,889) and Mandi (60,000).

The plains adivasi of Bangladesh have their origins in the Himalayan foothills. Some migrated centuries ago from Meghalaya at a time when the plains were lightly populated. These adivasi are now settled agriculturists, having long since abandoned slash-and-burn cultivation. They have long been cut off from their extensions in India, and divisions imposed by the great river systems of Bangladesh further divide the Bangladeshi plains adivasi communities from each other. The Mandi, also known as the



Garo, live in the north-central Bangladesh, east of the Ganges and the Brahmaputra. Other tribes, such as the Santhal, live in the north-west.

All tribals have in common their readily apparent differences from the majority Bengalis — ethnic, cultural, religions, linguistic. The communal spirit remains strong, and the tribal people live close to land and nature, and to the spirits they believe in. While the tribes of the south-east hills and the Mandi tend to be well-educated, literacy among the plains tribal people is very low.

Chittagong Hills

The main problem of the adivasi all over the country is land-grabbing by the Bengalis, and nowhere is this more true than in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), where an insurgency has been in progress for decades. These hill tracts, which cover fully 10 per cent of Bangladesh's total land area, are the home to 13 different peoples, with the Chakma, Marma and Tripura (Tippera) making up the majority.

Most of the CHT peoples migrated into the area from what is today Myanmar between the 16th and 19th centuries. They retreated to the hills starting in the 17th century when the Bengalis arrived to settle the coastal areas. However, the tribal hinterland remained largely undisturbed under British rule. After Partition, the Pakistani Government allowed Bengali Muslims to move

into the CHT, causing resentment among the hill people, many of whom sought refuge in India.

The huge Kaptai Dam, built in the 1960s, submerged 40 per cent of the cultivable land in the CHT and displaced one-sixth of the population. Perhaps 40,000 environmental refugees fled to Arunachal Pradesh, where they continue to live in limbo.

A delegation of hill people petitioned the new Government of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman for restoration of autonomy for the CHT (which had existed from 1958 to 1964). The Government considered this secessionist and launched raids into the CHT. The tribals resisted through the United Peoples' Party and its military wing, the Shanti Bahini. The Shanti Bahini has conducted a guerrilla war against the Bengali settlers and Government troops throughout the 1970s and into the 1990s. Dhaka's counter-insurgency campaigns created fresh waves of refugees.

The Government continues to look on the CHT as an "empty" land on which to resettle landless Bengali peasants. Between 1977 and 1987 about 300,000 ethnic Bengalis were moved into the area and today they constitute at least one-third if not half of the CHT population.

The CHT as well as the north-east of India are remote strategic areas which are normally closed to foreigners. Independent information on the continuing war within the CHT is therefore hard to obtain. Even Bangladeshi investigators

have difficulty in penetrating the military net which engulfs the area. Nevertheless, over the past decade there have been well-attested accounts of human rights violations against the adivasi by both military and government personnel, as well as Bengali settlers. The most complete accounts come from the Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission, an international non-governmental body established to investigate human rights abuses. The Commission has collected many first-hand accounts of ill-treatment and torture, threats and killings, along with destruction of houses and temples.

Since 1988, many adivasi have been moved into so-called "cluster-villages" (similar to those used by the US in Vietnam and the Marcos regime in the Philippines), to isolate them from contacts with the Shanti Bahini. In education, there have been attempts to impose the Bengali language on the adivasi, in order, it is said, to bring them into "national mainstream". Ironically, the tribal people of the CHT are more advanced in formal education than the Bengalis of the plains — 60 per cent literacy compared to 23 per cent for the rest of Bangladesh.

Father R.W. Timm, who has lived and worked in Bangladesh for over 35 years, is a human rights activist. This article is excerpted from his report, *The Adivasis of Bangladesh*, published by the Minority Rights Group, London (1991).

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To Be or Not To Be "Nepali"

*Blurry definitions needlessly target the Nepalis of India.
Terminology must come to the rescue.*

by Tanka Subba

A 'nomenclative crisis' today confronts all Nepali speakers in India. What to call oneself?

Some would argue, "What's in a name?" But India being what it is, the name given to a language or people does matter. Morarji Desai, when he was Prime Minister, declared that Nepali was a "foreign language". The next step is to label all those who speak this "foreign language" foreigners, as does happen all over India, and especially in the Northeast.

It matters little to the people of Nepal, secure in their citizenship, whether they are called Gorkhali of Nepali. But for the Nepalis of India, the search for a term which indicates their Indian nationality and does not confuse them with the Nepalese of Nepal has is urgent.

Besides Nepal, sizeable concentrations of Nepalis exist in Bhutan, West Bengal, Sikkim, Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Manipur in the Northeast. Nepalis are also found in parts of Himachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, and diffused throughout the Subcontinent.

Though the crisis of identity affects Nepalis of India wherever they are, there are regional nuances.

West Bengal: The history of Nepalis in West Bengal is in complex. Since they have the numbers in the three hill subdivisions of West Bengal's northern-most district, Nepalis were able to create a viable pressure-group, even though their voice tends to be feeble in the State Assembly in Calcutta. Since 1907, there have been efforts to carve out a separate political and administrative unit for Nepalis. These efforts were unsuccessful because of opposition by Lepcha and Bhutia tribes of the northern valleys and due to sharp ideological divisions among the Nepalis. Though the All India Gorkha League and the undivided Communist Party of India shared the same platform in the beginning, for example, they were soon to separate.

The recognition of the Nepali language in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution has been another major Nepali demand. After achieving the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council in August 1988, however, President of the Gorkha National Liberation Front Subhas Ghisingh has been harping on the 'Gorkha' identity, and condemning the term 'Nepali'.

Ghisingh may be ignored, but we must address the issue, whether the Nepalis of India should forever cling to 'Nepali' and all that it connotes. Those in favour of 'Nepali' point out

that the term is accepted by national institutions like the Sahitya Akademi. The Calcutta Doordarshan broadcasts in 'Nepali'. They mention resolutions which have been passed in the legislative assemblies of West Bengal, Sikkim, Tripura and Himachal Pradesh for constitutional recognition of 'Nepali'. In themselves, such references are a weak basis to retain the term 'Nepali', although Ghisingh for his part has yet to explain how use of 'Gorkha' or 'Gorkhali' will resolve the main problem, which is that Indian Nepalis continue to be regarded as foreigners. There is also the question whether a word, no matter how appropriate, can be imposed by an individual leader on people spread out over the length and breadth of India.

Sikkim: There were many supporters of the Gorkhaland movement in Sikkim, but there is no inclination here towards the word 'Gorkha'. Chief Minister Nar Bahadur Bhandari has, in fact, emerged as the champion and propagator of 'Nepali'. To him, 'Gorkha' merely refers to an occupational category, or those who are in the Gorkha regiments. This conflict between Bhandari and Ghisingh, this battle between the two heavyweights of Darjeeling and Sikkim, has merely strengthened the position of the Union Government in Delhi vis-a-vis the language issue.

Due to historical reasons, one finds that 'Nepali' often is not extended to include the Chongs or Limbus of Sikkim. They are regarded as a distinct community like the Lepcha and Bhutia. There was reservation of seats for the Chongs in the Sikkim State Assembly up till 1978. The Chong language and script is taught in school up to Class XII, and this language is recognised as one of Sikkim's four state languages (the others being Lepcha, Bhutia and Nepali).

North-East India: Nepalis are found all over the seven states of north-eastern India and they all suffer from common social and political problems, primarily deriving from their identity. Nepali numbers are most significant in Assam, Meghalaya and Manipur. Most local tribes and communities, as well as the administration of the Northeast understand all 'Nepalis' to be the

'people of Nepal', that is, foreigners. The mockery of the 1950 Indo-Nepal Friendship Treaty is nowhere as glaring as it is here in the Northeast, where thousands of Nepalis have been evicted, most recently from Meghalaya.

Nepalis are discriminated and exploited in the Northeast even though they have shown an inclination to assimilate more than other groups. In fact, their assimilation into the local cultures is sometimes so successful that it is difficult to call them 'Nepali'. They have embraced the local languages and inter-married with local tribes. In some parts of Assam, Nepalis are reported to have rejected their surnames and adopted Assamese ones. In Meghalaya, the children of Nepali fathers and tribal mothers have taken the surnames of their mothers. Children cannot manage even a simple sentence in Nepali, and adults hesitate to divulge their Nepali identity.

It is easy to pass judgement from the distance of Darjeeling and Kathmandu. On the ground in the Northeast, Nepalis do what they have to do to survive in a hostile cultural milieu.

Conceptual Lag

The gradual shaping of a "common identity" as a strong binding force among Nepalis of India has been splintered by factionalism or recent years, which finds expression in the tilt towards 'Nepali', 'Gorkha' or 'Gorkhali'. The understanding of these terms has not changed with evolving reality. This conceptual lag has allowed primordial values to find nourishment.

One major hurdle in any effort to rename a people is created by 'other' people whose interests may lie in perpetuating the old terminology. A new name might threaten the existing control of resources and privileges. But this does not mean that there should be no effort to change the boundaries of a concept — which a name is — along with changing times. Time has probably come to look for a multiplicity of mutually compatible symbols rather than a single symbol.

T. Subba is Reader of Anthropology at the North-Eastern Hill University in Shillong. His book *Ethnicity, State and Development* is reviewed on page 44.



On The Way Up

In these times of political flux all over the Himalayan region, it is essential

to be sensitive to assertions of identity. Such sensitivity is especially important in Nepal, whose people have only just gained the right to speak out and to demand.

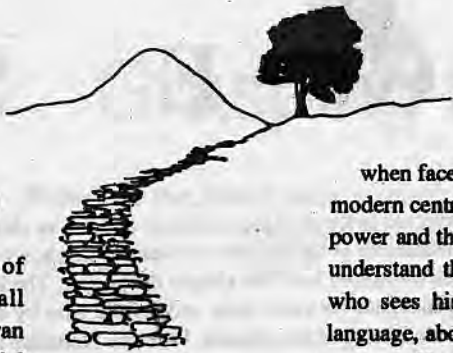
In the past, it was enough to pay cursory tribute to Nepal's cultural diversity through ineptly-produced 'phulbari' programmes on Nepal Television or Radio Nepal. This will no longer suffice. While the Nepali speakers of India have long struggled with dual identities and confusing cultural markers, their kin in Nepal are only now having to confront issues that India tackled in the early 1950s.

Are the political chieftains of Kathmandu sufficiently sensitive to the new ethnic demands? Indications are they are not. Otherwise, why should scores of Members of Parliament from across the political spectrum sign petitions seeking compulsory Sanskrit education in high school, as if the debate over inclusion of "Hindu rastra" in the Nepali Constitution had never taken place. Do they appreciate that many Nepalis are Tibeto-Burman, who might speak Nepali but perceive Sanskrit as the vehicle for a Hinduised State?

There is a tendency to regard the newfound self-assertion among the tribes as an irritant on the rough hide of the nation-state. But if Bahuns and Chhetris have a pan-Nepali identity to fall back upon, a Rai or a Magar, depending upon how distant he is from his roots, has an ethnic identity in addition to that 'Nepali' identity. Without doubt, more and more "hill ethnics" will be inevitably drawn into the pan-Nepali culture -- pushed and pulled by market forces, politics and self-desire.

As 'unifying' culture spreads through a country that is being linked by highways, radio and television, Nepali will take on added roles as the language of discourse, of study, of media, of advertising, and of entertainment. Other than in pockets of the Tarai, the one medium to access an integrated national market by educators, entrepreneurs, media-persons and politicians alike will be, increasingly, Nepali.

As long as it has something to offer, Nepali will remain ascendant. At the same time, however, can we deny the urge of culturally



unique groups to try and preserve some of their own distinctiveness

when faced with the great leveler that is the modern centralised State? Those who hold the power and the purse-strings at the center must understand the concern that grips the person who sees his identity and ego, signified by language, about to disappear.

If one can decry the insensitivity of majority representatives, then one may also criticise the opportunism of minority leadership. For there are no simple answers.

True, ethnic disgruntlement needs an outlet, and Bahuns, as the theoreticians of the Hinduised Nepali State, are available. Of the two other groups that make up the Nepali power elites, the Chhetri/Thakuri are perceived to have had their comeuppance with the demise of the Panchayat, and the Newars are seen as minorities in their own right. Whom, indeed, to blame other than the Bahuns? Such strategy might provide only temporary relief, though.

Tanka Prasad Acharya, lifelong political activist and former Prime Minister, died on 28 April 1992 of natural causes associated with old age. Had he not been a Bahun, Brahmin of the Nepali hills, he would in all likelihood have been martyred a half century earlier, on January 1941, under orders of Prime Minister Juddha Shumshere. But this rather extreme advantage of caste did not last long in a modernising Nepal. Barely a decade later, there was no such clemency for Sunder Raj Chalise, who escaped death row only because of the political upheaval of 1951. A caste barrier had fallen.

Harka Gurung's map on page 19 indicating caste and ethnic representation in the Lower House of the Nepali Parliament shows white (for Bahun) all over. This political edge is based not so much on overwhelming feudal or economic power, nor on control over the army and police, but on access to education and learning. In all likelihood, as has happened in India, upper-caste representation will dip as democracy progresses, and there will be less white on the map in the decades ahead. Bahuns do not constitute a monolithic block of privilege -- there are large numbers in poverty -- and their political clout as a group can only wane from today's zenith.

While emphasising the rights of individual communities, one might also mull over the cultural attributes of being 'Nepali'. Along the southern slopes of the central Himalaya, certain geographic, economic, social and political factors created conditions for 'Nepaliness' to

break through the various distinctions. This phenomenon cannot be explained merely as a result of Gorkhali conquest and subjugation. For whatever reason, the Nepali *topi* found acceptance within just the Nepali segment of the Himalaya. This 'feel' of Nepaliness is not strong enough to make a Nepali nation -- which is why the dream of "Greater Nepal" is a mirage. But there is something there, elusive but real.

The one segment that did not participate in this evolving Nepaliness, which was the result of interaction among the hill groups, is the Madhesiya community. Culturally more a part of the systems of north Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, and traditionally regarded as alien by the hill elites, the Madhesiyas are now being requested to feel 'Nepali'. Such integration, however, can only come over a period of decades, at the very least.

The cultural mellowness highlighted in the tourists brochures of Nepal is not all make-believe. There are also some built-in safeguards against communal turmoil. The multiplicity of ethnicities in Nepal will not allow a two-community fight-to-the-death such as in Sri Lanka. Equally, an Assam-like situation of instability brought by in-migrating hordes is unlikely because, other than a sprinkling of Bahuns and Chhetris, the heartland of the major hill communities remain exclusive.

Speaking of which, the so-called Bahun-Newar confrontation of the past year might be mis-read as the start of the unravelling process. Indeed, if this divide were deep-rooted, Nepal would be in the midst of inter-ethnic conflagration. But the rest of the country perceives this much-ballyhooed battle as a fight for the spoils by elite groups within the Newar and Bahun communities. So, despite the banner headlines, life goes on.

Once ethnic sensitivity is aroused, the next step is to do something about it. So should Nepal go in for quotas and reservations? Or should a non-interventionist course be charted? Asks an exasperated Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, President of the Nepali Congress Party: "How can a Government with so little resources try to fulfil the demands of each of the country's 1200 communities?"

A way must be found, and as leader of a pan-Nepali party spanning ethnicities, Bhattarai, among others, has the responsibility to weave the fabric respecting all the strands. Smugness can only ruin the Himalayan idyll. In the presence of visionary statesmanship and in the absence of political brinkmanship or extreme insensitivity, Nepalis of Nepal will probably find a way.

- Kanak Mani Dixit

V O I C E S

BARBERS REMOVE SOCIAL EVILS, was the general view of the special invitees at the two-day convention of the Nepal Barbers' Association, held in Kathmandu on 28 April, as reported by the Rastriya Samachar Samiti (RSS) news service.

In his opening remarks, former Prime Minister Krishna Prasad Bhattarai said that barbers, whose service is essential for a man from birth to death, have an important role to play in society. Their role is equally important in keeping the society healthy, he said, and underlined the need for them to cooperate in the country's development.

MP Sindu Nath Pyakuryal spoke about the importance of professional organisations in establishing political and economic traditions of respecting each other's professions.

CPN (UML) representative, Chandra Deve Joshi, said that apart from helping people to remain neat and clean, barbers should also give attention to removing social evils.

General Secretary of the Nepal Labour Union, Ganesh Shaha, said that the barbers inspire all to move on the path of self-reliance, starting a profession with small capital.

On behalf of the CPN (15 September), Sharan Bikram Malla expressed the view that the problems relating to professional rights cannot be resolved unless and until democracy and civic rights are preserved.

MARTYDOM is discussed by Martin Gaenzle and Richard Burghart in an article in the *The European Bulletin of Himalayan Research*. The authors review five publications ("witness literature") which deal with the Spring 1990 political movement in Nepal.

...Sivakoti's brief, and all too conventional hagiography, is short on details, but stresses a major theme in the rhetoric of the movement: that the victims of police firings were martyrs who had sacrificed their souls for democracy. In fact, many of those who died seem not to have been "political activists" at all. They were people, who like everyone in Nepal, were caught up in the events but who unfortunately found themselves at the wrong place at the wrong time. (One martyr mentioned by Sivakoti is "Richard Henari Jon Wiliyam," an Englishman caught up in police firing on Durbar Marg). The theme of sacrifice was critical, however, for the rhetorical construction of events. The Nepalese-authored texts under review stress the idea that their countrymen offered their blood in sacrifice to the motherland for which democracy was received in return. By extension, even those citizens who donated bloods so that doctors might save the lives of their fellow countrymen found their blood donation (*rakta dan*) transformed into sacrifice (*bali dan*). Sacrifice, of course, is a willed act. By making the victims of state oppression into martyrs, the movement appropriated not their deaths by the gesture of their dying which symbolised the truth of the life that they had led. Dying, however, has nothing to do with death. Death, for Janki Devi, was senseless, and it probably remains so for her relatives as well. Her dying, however, extended its power over the living...

In the rituals of Nepalese political culture the martyrs of 1990 joined those at Martyrs Gate, who two generations earlier had given up their lives in the overthrow of the Ranas. Despite their deaths, the martyrs continued to play a decisive role in the negotiations concerning the new Constitution. The various proposals were never put to a popular test, neither by referendum nor by constituent assembly. It was understood, however, that the wishes of the martyrs had to be

respected in the new Constitution, and it was clear in the rhetorical construction of the people's movement that sovereignty had already been transferred from the king to the people. The king was no longer the mediator between deity and people who by sacrifice preserved the well-being of his subjects. From the Nepalese texts under review, it is clear that the martyrs had sacrificed their lives to the motherland for democracy which they, not the king, gave to the people. Power of legitimate agency had shifted within the kingdom. Sovereignty did not lie with the royal dynasty (the *panchayat* model) and could not lie with Parliament (the British model). Rather it lay with the people, who now have the burden of defending the martyrs' sacrifice in the future.

THE ENVIRONMENTALIST IMAGE takes a bit of a beating in this excerpt carried from *Vikalp* (Alternatives), the quarterly journal of the *Vikas Adhyayan Kendra*, Bombay.

Environmentalists are variously seen as:

1. A well-intentioned bunch of born-again do-gooders and romantic idealists with misconceived ideas, mistaken fears, misconstrued priorities, misplaced efforts and misdirected methods barking on the wrong trail.
2. A bored brigade of comfortably-off middle-classes and rich elite indulging in a temporary fad to pass their time and salve their conscience.
3. A selfish coterie of urban elite status-quoists who insidiously continue to indulge in their wasteful conspicuous consumption, rapacious lifestyles, while seeking to keep away the fruits of development from the rural masses by preaching moderation, austerity and self-sacrifice for others; even as they continue to corner a still larger slice of the development cake for themselves by depriving their already impoverished rural brother folks.
4. A psychotic breed of anachronistic obscurantists seeking to impose on society their own fundamental brand of anti-materialism and anti-development ideology as a throwback to the earlier, backward past.
5. A rabid band of conservation-minded recycled radicals on the lunatic fringe who resort to eco-terrorism, militancy and social disruption in order to achieve their aim of opposing all forms of nature-resource utilisation projects for industrial or commercial exploitation and development.
6. A pathological faction of foaming fanatics seeking to force on to society their own fundamentalist, anti-modernisation ethic by advocating a retrogression to the medieval way of life.
7. A manic mob of compulsive anti-technology, anti-development protesters, dissenters and obstructionists irrationally opposed to all forms of industrial progress, material growth and technological development, just for the sake of blindly opposing it.
8. A leftist clique of disillusioned, disaffected, discontented, disgruntled intellectuals seeking to set back the industrial progress and material development of the nation in the distorted belief that therein lies salvation.
9. A mercenary pack of status-seekers and cons artists out to make a big name and a quick buck by attaching onto the environment bandwagon to con the gullible masses.
10. A part of an international hippie-type back-to-nature pacifist movement rejecting the techno-materialistic way of life by advocating a futile return to the simplicity and nature-values of a feudal past.

11. A vested interest fifth-columnist conspiracy of a local group funded and floated by foreign governments and/or MNCs with the sole aim and explicit purpose of resisting, disrupting and subverting the establishment, development and emergence of a local industry and agriculture base that would effectively threaten their economy/profits, undermine their entrenched position and loosen their stranglehold on the huge international world-markets, thus endangering their very survival.
12. A pathetic group of pessimistic dooms-dayers projecting on to society their own personal fears and failures by crying out that the end is near.
13. A cracked flock of freaks, cranks, weirdos and queers with nothing better to do, wasting their time and society's meagre resources by getting unduly worked-up over non-issues.

Alternatively, one could view "environmentalists" as:

A sensitive like-minded nucleus of mystical visionary pioneering individuals who, coalesced as the creative minority, are the conscience of society heralding the dawn of a New Era of Man.

This nucleus of a creative minority on the cutting edge of social reform is destined to jolt mankind awake again and set civilisation on the move once more, to expand the frontiers of his/her spiritual, social and existential horizons, to encompass the emergence of a New Millennium of a more just New Social Order, a more equitable New Economic Order, and a more harmonious and sustainable New World Order.

SPONGE BATHS ARE BEST, according to Gary McCue, in the "Trekking Environmental and Cultural Code for Tibet," printed in the Spring 1992 issue of *Ecotrek*, the newsletter of *Himalayan Guides for Responsible Tourism*.

Dealing with beggars:

Please never give candy, food or gifts (balloons, pens etc) to begging children or adults. Donations of 20 fen to 1 yuan (US\$ 0.05 - \$1.00) to religious beggars on pilgrimage are appropriate.

Appropriate Attire for Trekkers and Travellers:

Men - No shorts! Always wear shirts.

- Women - No shorts! Mid-calf length trekking skirts or pants are appropriate.
- dress modestly; no revealing sleeveless tops. Be modest while bathing; no complete nudity. Sponge baths are best.

Visiting/Staying in a Tibetan home (or tent):

- If a family invites you into their home for tea, it's typically an act of hospitality.
- If staying with a family for the night, pay for meals and lodgings.
- Establish a price in the evening to avoid confusion in the morning. Please never leave without paying.

Visiting a Monastery:

No smoking in any temple.

Dress appropriately. No shorts, hats off.

Women - no revealing tops.

Shoes are usually OK.

- Walk clockwise inside Buddhist temples and around any religious sites or objects (pilgrimage circuits, prayer walls, etc)

- Always ask before taking pictures. Photo fees can be expensive — US\$ 1.00 - \$ 10.00 per photo and higher!!) or pictures may not be allowed at all.

Donations of 1 to 10 yuan (US\$ 0.20 to \$ 2.00) are appreciated and used for maintenance or filling butter lamps. Place on altar.

Has the time come to ABOLISH BIHAR? asks Arvind N. Das in an op-ed article in *The Times of India* of 29 April.

...In any event, Jharkhand of one sort or another will come into existence sooner rather than later. And with that Bihar will die.

After Jharkhand goes, Bihar will be left with flood-prone plains, an antiquated agrarian structure, overgrown villages masquerading as urban trading and bureaucratic centres, no industrial culture, acute poverty and abysmal productivity.

In such a situation, Bihar will have no option but to turn itself painfully into an agrarian Haryana if it has to survive at all. But that is obviously difficult. Haryana had land reform through involuntary transfer of population following Partition. It has a relatively homogenous peasantry, hardy in both mind and body. It has had a set of dynamic, if not always incorruptible, chief ministers. It developed a public infrastructure of roads, electricity, irrigation, agricultural marketing yards and input supply depots. Above all, its proximity to Delhi and its political counterpoise to Punjab helped Haryana.

Bihar bereft of Jharkhand will have none of these. Land reforms are a cruel joke there perpetrated from time to time with overblown rhetoric matched only by political impotence. The state's economic infrastructure is woeful. Its chief ministers have not been untainted by the charge or corruption even while they have been innocent of dynamism. Worst of all, its people have lost their self-identity as the proud inheritors of India's historic culture.

Under these conditions, the time may indeed have come for the abolition of Bihar altogether and thereby carry out another reorganization of Indian states. If that is not done speedily enough, the body politic of India itself may suffer the hardening of the arteries leading to Bihar, a state that John Houlton described as being "the heart of India." If Bihar dies unsung, can India live for long?

DAILY DEATHS OF TEN THOUSAND CHILDREN is unconscionable, said James P. Grant, Executive Director of UNICEF, at inauguration of his agency's South Asia regional office in Kathmandu on 28 April.

There are (challenges) to be met concurrently, from Sri Lanka to Nepal and across the vast Indo-Gangetic belt — challenges, for example, in basic nutrition and basic education for the physical and mental growth and development of the 450 million children under 15 years in this region. South Asia has the material, intellectual and moral resources to liberate the potential of each of these children for the common good. Yet some four to five million young children die before the age of five each year — a daily toll of well over ten thousand each day. To the human conscience, this is unacceptable. With the capabilities at our command, this is unnecessary. The irony is that this human tragedy can be avoided. Undoubtedly, its causes are rooted in the material conditions of poverty of large segments of people in village and town. But the greater irony is that the life and future of our children can be protected now — without waiting for the

end of poverty. And, in that process, we would have loosened the grip of poverty and enhanced people's capacity to cope with it and then overcome it. For it is the non-development of children which perpetuates poverty from one stage of life to another and from one generation to the next.

Will South Asia make it? The answer has to come in the form of action. Together we can do what we may not be able to singly. The alliance for children has to be strengthened at the level where the children are, in their own community. It has to embrace the relevant professions and voluntary organisations and express itself as a viable partnership between the government and the community, between those in power and those in poverty.

FOLLOWING MR. KOIRALA'S COW, a reporter from The Times of India daily stumbles upon a story involving smuggled dogs. The item was datelined Darbhanga, 22 April, which is nowhere near April 1.

The sensational tracing of a cow belonging to the prime minister of Nepal, Mr G.P.Koirala at Darbhanga, recently, has confirmed the rampant smuggling of cattle. As reported earlier, Mr Koirala's cow was stolen from his house at Biratnagar, a month back. A few days later, the stolen cattle was recovered here with the active cooperation of Nepal police.

Despite vigil on the smuggling of animals, particularly dogs and cattle at the Indo-Nepali border, illegal cattle trade with Nepal is flourishing in different parts of the state. According to sources,

approximately 300 to 500 cattle are being illegally brought into India through Jaynagar, Madhawapur and Loukaha in Madhubani district, Nirmali and Birpur in Saharsa, Raxaul and different parts of Sitamarhi districts daily.

Besides, dogs are smuggled with the connivance of police officials and supplied to pet dealers at Darbhanga, Muzaffarpur, Patna, Ranchi, Jamshedpur and other parts of the country.

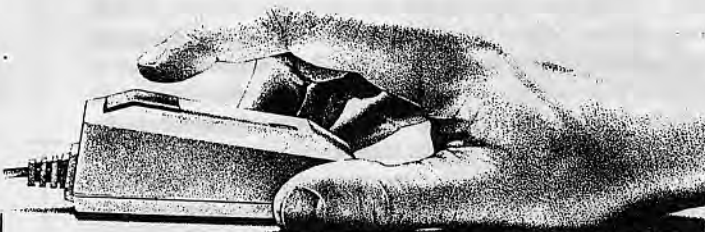
The animal trade is being operated with the help of poor villagers and selected groups of smugglers managing the entire business on the Indo-Nepal border.

Puppies and even full grown dogs are available in the villages of Nepal, prices depending upon the breed. A Nepali citizen told the Times of India News Service that the puppies are available in the interior areas for Rs 40 to 75 each which in Bihar are sold at five times the price. These dogs are normally brought in through fields on bullock carts and rickshaws, avoiding the regular routes, trains and buses.

As for cattle, farmers of villages on the Indian side prefer to purchase Nepali cattle due to their being more hardy, with higher resistance besides being relatively cheaper.

Smuggling of cattle has become so profitable that the traffickers have now begun supplying the Indian cattle markets. Sources said that the smuggled cattle are openly available at village "haats" (markets) and of course in fairs throughout including the famous Sonepur mela.

Meanwhile, following the recovery of Mr. Koirala's cow from Darbhanga, the Centre has taken serious note of the smuggling and directed stricter vigil. But the district administration as well as customs officials on the Indo-Nepal border are yet to gear up and clamp down on the cattle smugglers' activities, sources alleged.



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Wild Yaks of Kunlun

The diversity of species this little corner of the Tibetan plateau is impressive, but is under threat.

by Daniel J. Miller



Kyang, Tibetan wild ass, on the Changtang steppe.

A naturalist today would be hard pressed to name a truly wild paradise, yet the rugged mountains, isolated valleys and steppes of the Kunlun Mountains, on the Tibetan plateau, are exactly that. The accounts of 19th-century travellers speak of the fabulous wealth of wildlife on the plateau. On his first visit to Tibet in 1872, the Russian explorer Przewalski estimated that the southern slopes of the Kunlun Mountains may have supported millions of wild yak. After travelling across the Kunlun range in the 1880s, the American explorer Rockhill described the upper Yellow River as "the most wonderful hunting ground in Asia". Sadly, wildlife has since diminished drastically but for the most isolated areas on the plateau. Worse still, the survival of these few sanctuaries are threatened.

The Kunlun range, nearly as high and longer than the Himalaya, defines the northern edge of the Tibetan plateau as does the Himalaya its southern border. Stretching almost 2000 km, from the Pamirs in the west to Mount Amnye Machin in the east, the Kunlun Mountains separate the Tibetan plateau from the desert expanses of the Tarim and Qaidam Basins. This immense mountain landscape is one of Asia's largest wilderness and one of the plateau's last refuges for wildlife.

Today, the best refuges for the great herds of wild yak, wild ass, Tibetan antelope and argali are in the Kunlun Mountains, west of the Golmud-Lhasa highway. This is the highest, most remote and inaccessible part of the Tibetan plateau, the so-called Changtang, or "northern plains", of Tibet. The Changtang steppe is a cold, arid grassland with a backdrop of rugged mountain ranges. Most of the region is above 4000 metres. It is virtually impossible for the urban eye to

comprehend the magnitude and wildness of these grasslands. The Changtang covers some 600 000 sq. km, an area the size of France. There are no roads and habitation is limited to a few thousand herders living on the fringe of the wilderness.

There are Tibetan antelope, which can migrate hundreds of miles between their winter and summer ranges. There are lush meadows where herds of hundreds of wild yak graze and rolling grasslands that sustain large bands of wild ass, or *kyang*, and graceful Tibetan gazelle. Huge flocks of argali, the world's largest and rarest species of sheep, graze undisturbed in this pristine mountain landscape.

In Qinghai province, to the west of the Kunlun Pass and the Golmud-Lhasa highway, lies Wild Yak Valley, one of the most important refuges for wild yak on the plateau. The main valley is drained by the Kunlun River which flows northward for 150 km into the Qaidam Basin. Mountains to the south of the valley rise to 6000 m and are covered with glaciers whose melt-waters nourish extensive, lush, sedge meadows on the lower slopes. The valley floor, even at elevations of 3500 to 4200 metres, contains areas of productive grassland. Wildlife thrive on the diverse vegetation of Wild Yak Valley.

As part of a cooperative wildlife research project between the University of Montana, in the US, and the Northwest Plateau Institute of Biology at Xining, in Qinghai Province, I worked on wildlife surveys of Wild Yak Valley in 1990 and 1991. Given that even a few years ago people were unsure of whether wild yak still existed on the plateau, we were amazed to count more than 1000 wild yaks in an area of 500 sq km. We saw herds of up to 400 wild yaks. The Valley is an exceptional sanctuary for other wildlife, too. In

addition to wild ass, Tibetan gazelle, Tibetan antelope, blue sheep, and argali, there are white-lipped deer, lynx, wolves, marmots, pikas, Tibetan fox, red fox, snow leopard and brown bear. The diversity of species in this little corner of the Tibetan Plateau is truly impressive. But this remarkable refuge is under increasing threat.

Although unregulated hunting is now illegal in Tibet, poachers still take significant numbers of antelope, gazelle, and blue sheep. But wild yak are also being killed. The main threat is from meat hunters who, armed with high-powered rifles, penetrate hundreds of kilometres into remote areas. They kill large numbers of animals to supply the meat markets of outlying towns.

Tibetan antelope, prized for their cashmere-like wool, are also prime targets for hunters. There is a large market for animal products, which form a significant part of the Chinese traditional pharmacopoeia. Such unregulated hunting can destroy this precious resource and should be brought under strict control. Gold miners and petroleum geologists pose yet another threat to wildlife and habitat.

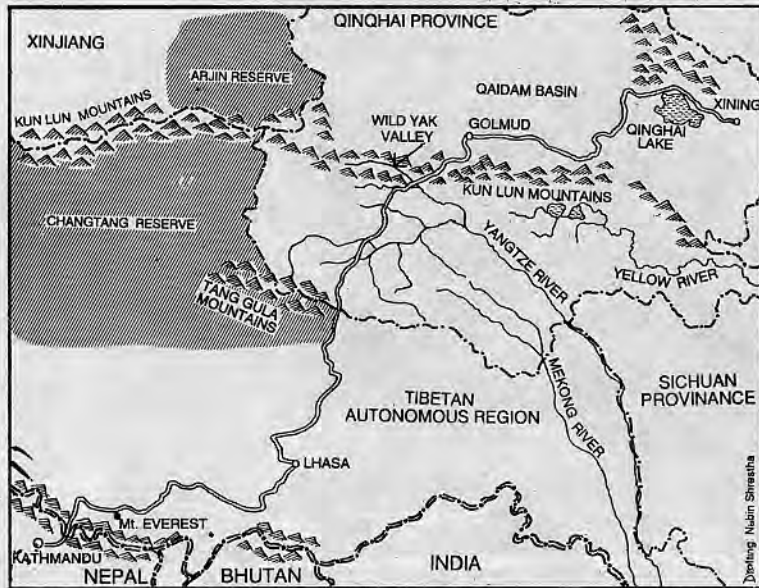
Nor is poaching the only problem in this unique landscape. Inappropriate management techniques have also damaged some rangelands. The steppes of northeast Tibet were long recognised as the best of Asia's grasslands, providing a livelihood from herding where the high elevation makes agriculture impossible. Nobody knows when pastoralism first established itself on the plateau but it was certainly widespread by the 6th century. Nomadic pastoralists have coexisted on these grasslands for thousands of years, moving their herds of yaks, horses and sheep across the landscape in a pre-set pattern that carefully prevented overgrazing the pastures.

Every three years the herders would take a livestock census, and reallocate grazing land to ensure that pastures could adequately recuperate. The fact that the rangelands of Tibet still support viable pastoral cultures and wildlife today bears witness to the remarkable diversity and resilience of these grasslands, as well as to the sustainability of wise use.

This important system of reallocating pasture ended when policies introduced in the early 1960s gave communes responsibility for rangeland management. By the early 1980s, China introduced a new system of management which viewed the household, rather than the commune, as the basic unit of production. Although households resumed responsibility for the production and marketing of livestock — as in the pre-commune era — the practice of pasture reallocation was not reinstated.

Population growth in the Qaidam basin, just north of the Kunlun Mountains, has been dramatic in the past 20 years. This, coupled with better communications and transport, has contributed to raising the demand for meat and livestock products. The introduction of consumer goods and services and an open market pricing structure has been accompanied by rapid increases in prices of livestock products such as wool and cashmere, the nomad's main livestock products. Although most pastoralists now enjoy a better life than two decades ago, does the new system provide any incentive to conserve the rangelands and their extraordinary productivity?

Pastoralism in Tibet was a survival strategy for life in a harsh environment. The components of the ecosystem — the people, livestock and



vegetation — have been subjected to selective pressures over, perhaps, two thousand years. Consequently, the ecological characteristics of all the actors on these rangelands are the result of centuries of complex interactions. The processes that formed the unique ecosystems of the Changtang demand much more study.

In northern Tibet, an area of 240 000 sq km was recently designated as the Changtang Reserve. This huge, largely uninhabited area is an important refuge for wildlife, especially for wild yak and Tibetan antelope. Recommendations have also been made to extend the Changtang Reserve 50,000 sq km further west, to include critical antelope lambing and Wild Yak habitat. Along with the Arjin Reserve to the north, in Xinjiang Province, the proposed addition and the Changtang Reserve itself, an area of almost 335,000 sq km would be set aside for wildlife.

There is presently no wildlife reserve in western Qinghai province despite the fact that the Kunlun Mountains were historically sacred to the Chinese. The Changtang reserve could also be extended to include the area south of the northern limit of the Kunluns and west of the

Golmud-Lhasa Highway, in Qinghai Province. This area would include the Wild Yak Valley, which contains exceptional biological diversity, as well as the unexplored Kokoshili Mountains and the headwaters of the Yangtze River.

Inventories of the wildlife and surveys of habitats would identify areas demanding special protection. Although most wild animals are protected by law, wildlife protection officials have limited resources to combat poaching. Agencies responsible for managing wildlife need considerable assistance and training to effectively conserve the range and wildlife resources of the plateau.

Eco-tourism offers potential jobs for local people and would help them to realize the economic value of wildlife. Trophy-hunting, if strictly controlled, helps to maintain desirable populations of large ungulates and could provide additional income for local herders as well. Local people could be recruited for jobs in conservation, management, and sustainable use of natural resources. Such an environment would engender economic rationality, instill awareness, promote a sense of responsibility and encourage local participation in development.

The recent history of the plateau, particularly the negative impact of systems of management imposed from the outside, emphasize the folly of intervening without a clear understanding of the ecosystems. Modern systems of livestock production developed in the West for the Western prairies may be just as inappropriate for the Changtang as were the introduction of recent Chinese management systems. Detailed studies of the rangelands and investigations of pastoral production systems could identify those traditional practices that are useful and suggest which modern practices were most appropriate to complement them. It is certainly clear that conserving the biological diversity on the Tibetan Plateau depends on the cooperation and support of the local pastoralists. The social and economic needs of the herders must be reconciled with management of the rangelands and conservation of wildlife.

The grasslands of Tibet need not lose their wealth of flora and fauna nor their unique pastoral cultures. Their futures lie in the hands of conservationists and development planners willing and able to devise programmes that are sensitive to this unique ecosystem.

D. J. MILLER

D. J. Miller is a range ecologist who conducted investigations on rangelands and wild yaks on the Tibetan Plateau from 1988 to 1991.



What Price Khaptad's Riches ?

National parks and protected areas are meant to conserve biological wealth for all humanity. But poorer countries end up paying. For now, Nepal's network of protected areas are a burden rather than a benefit, including Khaptad.

by Devendra S. Rana

The villagers of Khaptad first saw the surveyors in 1980. The outsiders arrived and started drawing maps of the area. In reply to their friendly queries, the outsiders advised them "*chinta nagarnus*" (don't worry). But it was bad advice. The surveyors were defining the boundaries of Khaptad National Park, which was officially in 1984.

People from about 300 surrounding villages have lived with, and from, Khaptad Lekh, in far-western Nepal, for centuries. They have collected fuel wood, fodder, small timber, compost, and *nigalo*, a bamboo, from which they made baskets and containers. Those with insufficient agricultural land of their own have cleared small patches of forests for crops when times are hard.

Kathmandu's politicians and bureaucrats, in contrast, know Khaptad Lekh only as the place where a well-known ascetic, the Khaptad Baba, resides. So it was not difficult for them to order that the area, which they considered "wilderness" anyway, be demarcated as protected.

Overnight, the villagers' access to the resources of Khaptad Lekh was severely restricted. As elsewhere, the Royal Nepal Army were given the task of policing the area and keeping people out. The villagers are now allowed to collect products at fixed times during the year, but have to apply for permits for everything from collecting fuelwood and fodder to the right to graze their animals.

Conflicts with Guards

In trying to conserve the biological wealth of the area, the Government abolished the traditional rights of local people to use the resources of Khaptad Lekh. Not surprisingly, "poaching" and "encroachment" became common. This, in turn, led to sometimes heavy-handed behaviour from soldiers. The villagers still bitterly recall conflicts with the guards, *sipahis*, and will point to spots where soldiers seized their baskets and sickles, the pond where villagers were dunked in mid-winter and where the soldiers burned the fuelwood and fodder they had collected.

His Majesty's Government of Nepal (HMG) appears not to have benefitted significantly, either. Unlike the Annapurna Conservation Area and the national parks of Sagarmatha and Chitwan,



Looking towards Khaptad Plateau from the fields of Gabise.

Khaptad is not a major tourist destination. In 1991, the Annapurna area saw over 36,000 visitors, but just over ten visited Khaptad.

The history of Khaptad Lekh's formation has important lessons and raises questions about future conservation practices in Nepal and, indeed, in other Southern countries in a similar position. First must be the question: whom is conservation for? Once that is answered, it is easier to identify who should foot the bill.

Few, today, would question the appropriateness of conserving wilderness, particularly in Nepal, where the dramatic variations of altitude and climate have given rise to an enormous range of ecological niches that support a wealth of biological diversity. There are excellent reasons, of importance both locally and globally, for such efforts. Good conservation programmes can protect the watershed, maintain the microclimate, control soil erosion, conserve the flora and fauna and save for local people all the elements that make the area unique or distinctive. But there are even larger concerns. We have belatedly recognised the crucial importance of conserving genetic resources.

Though plant scientists have screened only a small fraction of the earth's plant species, genes discovered from this tiny fraction of the planet's biodiversity have yielded some of the most important commodities world -- and about 40 per cent of the medicines normally found on the pharmacy shelves? But most important of all is our reliance on plants for food.

All our food comes directly or indirectly from plants. In order to breed more productive crops, scientists need different varieties of plants. Variety, for example, in a plant's productivity, tolerance to drought, resistance to pests and diseases is genetic. Each plant variety is recognisably distinct because a particular combination of genes work together to produce that plant variety. Yet this very base is threatened. As we put more and more wilderness under the plough, we lose more and more of the wild flora and fauna that once inhabited it. And with each extinction is lost a unique collection of genes and -- nobody knows how many -- unique single genes as well. What is true for

our plant genetic resources is also true for our animal genetic resources. Everything that is bred for commerce is subject to the same dangers of genetic erosion.

As the science of biotechnology matures, it increases the scientist's and breeder's ability to manipulate specific genes, and therefore particular characteristics, in crop plants or livestock. The value of genetic resources is thereby increased.

His Majesty's Government of Nepal (HMG) has pursued conservation with a single-mindedness that has resulted in the protection of 10.8 per cent of the country's land area. Such zeal in establishing national parks, hunting reserves, wildlife reserves and conservation areas has earned Nepal the respect of international organisations such as the World Conservation Union and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). On the whole, however, the current conservation practices of the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) are inappropriate to the needs of Nepal's people. The parks do not even pay for themselves. Tourism within the protected

areas, including fees charged for entry, mountaineering and trekking, raised only US 0.76 million in 1988 while the operational cost of the DNPWC runs to about US 3 millions annually. Out of that, the Royal Nepal Army is paid US 2.1 million to guard parks all over Nepal.

To date, there has been no serious study to identify the pros and cons of protecting an area such as Khaptad. Who are the beneficiaries? If they are the local people, a cursory analysis suggests that costs far outweigh benefits. The environment may have benefitted from the protection of Khaptad: the watershed may be better protected, ground water recharge may have improved, soil may have been conserved and so forth. But what of the negative social and economic impacts of the conservation programme on the local population?

The Park Doesn't Pay

The current state of knowledge dictates that protected areas should be divided into zones for different levels of human interaction and utilisation. A "buffer zone" would allow surrounding communities access to forest products for their daily needs while providing full protection to the inner sanctuary. Thus, the recently established Makalu-Barun park does incorporate a conservation area as part and parcel of the overall plan. It is neither politically feasible, nor ethically justifiable, to exclude poor people from Parks and protected areas. The Government must decentralise and democratise its institutional framework. Decisions governing the use of resources must be made at the local level.

But, unfortunately for Khaptad, even such enlightened management policies are unlikely to adequately pay people to protect the area. The development of nature tourism around the unique habitat of Khaptad, even if successful, will not attract the numbers that the high Himalayan valleys do. The farming of medicinal plants holds some promise, but the experience so far has not been encouraging. Few other options present themselves in the immediate future. The infusion of development aid to indirectly compensate the villagers for their loss of access can only have limited success.

If tourism at Khaptad cannot pay for its protection, and if the forest products are insufficient to pay local people to protect the area, why is Khaptad worthy of protection? If what is being protected at Khaptad is biodiversity, the shared heritage of all humankind, then a mechanism must be found by which humankind will pay the local inhabitants — who have lost access to resources that were traditionally their own — in order to save that biodiversity.

How could Khaptad's biological wealth be realised as an economic asset? Nepal could follow the lead of countries such as Costa Rica, which has recently created a new quasi governmental "resources centre" to act as broker for the country's biological wealth. The founder of the

centre has capitalised on people's native interest in natural history and has offered volunteers free training in taxonomy. An "army" of new taxonomists identified and listed hundreds of thousands of entries of floral and faunal species in the first year alone. The database, kept at the headquarters of the centre, includes information not only on taxonomy but also on local medical, culinary and other uses. If, for example, a pharmaceutical company is interested in Costa Rican plants with particular properties, it must go through the new centre. The centre will have carried out chemical screening of the plants and will sell the information, or biological materials. Once active compounds are discovered Costa Rica will be in a strong position to negotiate royalties from foreign companies or be able to licence the material to national firms.

The issue of ownership and rights over resources is presently under heated debate in several international forums. Increasingly, it is seen to be opening old wounds of exploitation of rich countries over poor ones. Much of the wealth of the diversity in food plants lies in the countries of the South. The world's most biologically diverse areas are in the South, in its tropical forests and its coral reefs, for example. During discussions in the Committee on Plant Genetic Resources, within the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), or in the UNEP's international convention on biological diversity, delegates from Northern countries always refer to biological wealth as the "common heritage of humankind". Yet plant varieties bred by Northern scientists from Southern materials are protected by legal frameworks such as "Plant Breeders' Rights" or other intellectual property rights. The advent of biotechnology heralds ever more stringent laws to protect innovation.

But is fair? The North has, for a long time, viewed the biological wealth of Southern countries as "raw materials" with which it can produce improved varieties that can then be sold on the world market. But the most useful materials are not just lying on the ground in Southern countries, waiting to be plucked and exploited by enlightened Northerners. They are in or around farmers' fields. Landraces, varieties of plants that have adapted to, for example, the specific conditions of climate, moisture, aspect and so on in a particular mountain valley, exist because generations of farmers have selected seeds that, through experience, they know will survive. Landraces, needless to say, are of great interest to plant breeders. For example, in 1973, scientists at Purdue University in Indiana, United States began to hunt for varieties of sorghum containing genes for high protein content. They examined more than 9000 varieties from all over the world before they discovered, in the fields of Ethiopian peasants, two obscure strains with the qualities they sought. The patent for developing the high-protein sorghum lies with the scientists. How have the Southern farmers benefitted?

The existing legal systems protecting innovation are seen as unfair both by the North and the South. The North says its researchers and industries have spent billions of dollars in the research and development of new varieties and they must be assured profits from such investment. The biotechnology industry argues that Plant Breeders' Rights and Intellectual Property Rights are useless in protecting innovation, and that it is impossible to recoup its investment if farmers are allowed to use the engineered variety with no obligation to return a royalty to the innovator. If new, and more stringent, laws are not introduced, companies will increasingly question the benefits of developing new varieties of crops. The South says patents are unfair because they have protected only a tiny fraction of genetic resource innovation taking place in the world. The millions in the South who have developed and conserved landraces have been ignored.

Until now, the North has benefitted more from the resources of the South. The FAO has been pushing for a more equitable exchange of resources: the genes of the South for the expertise of the North. It has established an International Fund for Plant Genetic Resources, to which the North can contribute for the use of the South's biological resources. But that is as yet only voluntary and only concerns plant genetic resources. What of animal genetic resources? What of areas of special scientific interest but of no commercial value?

The benefits of conservation accrue to all humanity, yet it is mostly the poorer, South that bears the costs. It is the Southerners who forego immediate economic returns, who carry the burden of policing protected areas and who must provide alternative livelihoods for rural populations affected by such protection. Yet Southerners do not enjoy any of the benefits of preserving the planet's biodiversity. There are missing elements in our present cost-benefit equations. We need to identify them and to find ways of ensuring that those who benefit from conservation pay their fair share for it.

For Nepal, this could mean the introduction of a two-track policy. In the specific case of Khaptad, it could mean handing back control to the local inhabitants and the simultaneous establishment of national gene banks and research institutes. Even if such strategies were impossible at this time, HMG must attempt to ensure that collectors of Nepal's biological resources pay royalties for collection rights. While this may go to the local communities, the ownership of any genetic resource must belong to the country. Once local people see the potential economic and social benefits of conserving biodiversity they are more likely to participate in and cooperate with government efforts. Only then will conservation have any chance of succeeding.

D. S. Rana is currently undertaking action-research in Bajhang District, adjacent to Khaptad, on behalf of the group, Udaya-Himalaya Network.

One Flood Report and Some Muddy Reviews

by Jayanta Bandyopadhyay

The *Third Citizens' Report on the State of India's Environment*, which looks into the causes and effect of the annual floods on the lower plains of the Ganga-Brahmaputra basin, has attracted some decidedly hostile reviews. But the criticisms therein are disturbing more for what they reveal about the health of the Indian environment movement than for the considered analysis provided by the authors of the report.

The *Third Citizens' Report* represents a step ahead for CSE in many ways. Researchers concerned with upland-plains ecological linkages have long understood the correlation between various types of floods and deforestation in specific areas of the Himalaya. Unfortunately, the confused correlation put forward by Erik Eckholm, an American researcher and journalist, fired popular imagination and seriously set back public understanding of the ecological processes at work. Eckholm arrived two decades ago and in 1976 published a simplistic treatment of Himalayan soil loss which related all lowland floods with Himalayan deforestation.

What Eckholm had to say was of course a distortion of Himalayan ecological studies. It was a bad joke on the Himalayan population, yet his doomsday predictions in articles and in his book, *Losing Ground* (Worldwatch, 1976), encouraged the growth of know-all environmentalists in all the Himalayan countries. Truth and seriousness lost out to reductionist treatment and sensationalism. The report is a courageous attempt to marshal available research to fight such sensationalism. Is it any wonder that the active champions of reductionist environmentalism in India are alarmed? There is need for holistic thinking about floods in the Ganga-Brahmaputra plains, and the CSE has produced a useful document which will encourage the earnest peruser to read further.

Were the authors, in preparing this report, aware of the fundamentalist thinking among Indian environmentalists? Perhaps they were not, or they might have introduced the reader to the types of floods in the Ganga-Brahmaputra basin and described how changes in land-use in various parts of the Himalaya affect them. Perhaps they should have known better, because for many plains-based lovers of the environment, floods are of one kind and are caused solely by the cutting of trees in upper catchment areas. Those who do not find it necessary to read, would not know any better.

The most notable critics of the report are

**Floods, Flood Plains and Environmental Myths
State of India's Environment, A Citizens' Report (No 3)**
by Anil Agarwal, Neeraj Labh and V.A. Nambi, 1991
Centre for Science and Environment (CSE)
New Delhi, 1991.



Bangladesh floods, 1988.

N.D. Jayal (*India Today*, 24 February 1992), B. Sahgal (*Illustrated Weekly of India*, 27 October) and V. Shiva (*Sunday Observer*, 8 March; *National Herald*, 20 January). Had these renowned Indian environmentalists-turned-critics paid attention to recent publications on the subject of Himalayan deforestation and floods, they might have been less surprised by what the CSE team had to say, and their self-righteous anger might have been blunted somewhat. For the ideas presented in the report have had currency among serious students of Himalayan environment, witnessed in a number of books including *Himalayan Dilemma* (Routledge, 1989) and in journals such as *Mountain Research and Development*. *Himal*, too, has carried several articles on the subject, including one by D. Gyawali and this writer in Sept/Oct 1989 which analysed the ecology of the Ganga-Brahmaputra floods with respect to upstream deforestation.

In a nutshell, deforestation on hill slopes that receive rain undoubtedly causes flash floods in the respective foothills. But the hydrological behaviour of the entire Himalayan region

— 3000 km in length, with diverse forest cover and fantastic climatic differences — cannot be extrapolated from the performance of a single micro-watershed. To do so would be folly.

Floods can be caused by several factors during the various stages of a Himalayan river's journey to the sea: the outburst of glacial lakes; opening up of landslide dams; natural spreading of the rivers at the foothills due to sharp declines in slope, and so on. Towards the lower reaches, rivers flood mainly due to heavy local rainfall, high-tides, and the simultaneous peaking of tributaries. Human activities which are not ecologically informed, such as the construction of embankments, help back up water, causing water-logging.

Shiva's claim that the 1978 Uttarkashi blockage of the Kanodiagad, a small tributary of the Bhagirathi, which is a tributary of the Ganga, led to "flooding of the Ganges basin all the way to Calcutta" — more than 1000 km downstream on a distributary known as the Hooghly — is laughable. This is only among the more egregious examples of the "evidence" brought to bear in criticisms of the CSE report.

Among the so-called experts of India, why is there so little self-control in making public display of one's ignorance? And do these persons who find it so easy to hold a heroic stance not realise that their fantastic rhetoric serves only to divert attention from the unscientific and pathetic record of water-management in the Ganga-Brahmaputra basin?

The main contribution of the report are the holistic insights it offers on the processes of flood creation, thereby aiding the search for solutions. The report also provides much data on

flood damage and protection works. One major criticism is that, for all its data, the report does not provide a series of annual hydrographs of the various rivers. All superficial talk on deforestation in the Himalaya causing floods would have been dismissed right there.

The report also provides a detailed description of the orogeny and geology of the Himalaya, which is useful general information. The reader is forced to consider



FRONTIER TO BOUNDARY

by Harka Gurung

Ethnicity, State and Development
A Case Study of the Gorkhaland Movement in Darjeeling

by Tanka B. Subba
 Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1992.

the Himalaya as a source of mountainous volumes of sediments throughout geological time which helped to form much of what is today's Bangladesh. Thus, the new islands forming on the Bay of Bengal did not begin to do so after Independence. Just because satellites now give us pictures of some ecological processes, it does not mean that soil loss, siltation or flooding are new phenomena.

Undoubtedly, deforestation on slopes of the Himalaya increases soil loss, but this is insignificant compared to the debris created by the natural uplift of five to ten millimeters a year. This is why reforestation in the Himalaya is unlikely to reduce appreciably the heavy sediment load of Himalayan rivers. Certainly, rain-receiving slopes must be protected by full-canopy forest cover to reduce the power of flash floods. But only a fraction of the total Himalayan catchment, say between five to seven per cent, receive heavy and intense rainfall and need such protection. The forests in the Himalaya are vitally important to the agri-pastoral economies of the mountains. And this alone is reason enough for reforesting the Himalaya.

It is a pity that such well-known actors in India's environmentalism missed the main point of the report, that is, the need for a holistic understanding of floods in the plains. With their naive outbursts, the reviewers have merely exposed their own ignorance about up-to-date scientific information and their proclivity for sensationalism. Two reviewers (Jayal and Shiva) virtually condemn Agarwal and co-authors of being anti-national in referring to the work of an American scientist, Larry Hamilton, of the East-West Center in Hawaii. They little realise that Hamilton is among the best ecologists to have set eyes on the Himalaya.

As such, there is no serious challenge to the CSE report from Sahgal, Jayal or Shiva. Sahgal and Jayal, being ardent lovers of forests and wildlife, have over-reacted to the reduced importance of forests in the scheme of things described by the researchers. Shiva goes a step further. "Maybe it is time to investigate why so much international money is coming the way of CSE. The Dutch, the Swedes, the Danes, the Norwegians, the Canadians are all (reportedly) sending funds to CSE, an organisation which seems to exist only for the sole purpose of pleasing those in political power," Shiva wrote in *Sunday Observer*, 8 March. This incredible charge, linking foreign donors and alleged motives of CSE in trying to divide the ranks of Indian environmentalism, represents a trend that is slightly sickening. The time has come to stop slinging mud and to start getting a bit more serious about treating their vocation as a science. If not, environmental movements in India stand to lose much of their credibility. ▽

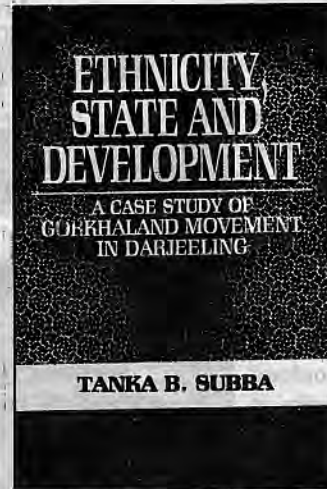
J. Bandyopadhyay is one of the authors of the newly released *State of the World's Mountains* (Zed Books, 1992).

The book *Ethnicity, State and Development* by Tanka Subba, an anthropologist at the North Eastern Hill University in Shillong, is about political conflict in an Indian hill territory that has common borders with three (four until 1975) other countries.

Political geography defines boundary as a demarcated territorial limit which is more specific than fuzzy frontiers. In fact, boundaries evolve out of frontiers. Boundaries are also malleable, tending to shift with changes in power dynamics. For example, the Darjeeling area, with which this book is concerned, originally belonged to Sikkim, until annexed by Nepal in 1783. The latter was ejected by the East India Company in 1816 and the territory returned to Sikkim. In 1835, part of Darjeeling area was "granted" away by the Raja of Sikkim to the British. Adjoining divisions of Kalimpong and Dooars were annexed in 1865, from Bhutan and Sikkim, respectively. All these territories became part of Bengal during the imperial heyday. Neither did Bengal's own boundaries remain sacrosanct. The most traumatic was the partition of 1905. Until then one provincial unit encompassed Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. Dacca, Chittagong and Rajshahi divisions were transferred to Assam in order to reduce the Bengali majority. Bengal regained these divisions in 1912 but 35 years later came the historic partition of 1947.

Bounded territories, whether national or sub-national, also refer to the people that inhabit it and provide the substance. Subba's book is all about a people's endeavors for political space. He presents a lucid account of the Gorkhaland movement. It is the usual story of highland-lowland interaction, expressed in the political struggle of a martial people (Gorkhali) against a highly cultured host society (Bengali).

The Bengali people have been the pioneers of modernisation in India, be it in social reform, arts, literature or revolutionary politics. Of the last category, two Bengalis whose reference is pertinent are Subash Chandra Bose and Charu Majumdar. Some of Bose's most prominent followers were Gorkhali (see Subba, p. 59), and



Majumdar's heritage is alive in the main opposition party in the Nepal's House of Representatives. In comparison to the Bengali, the Gorkhali of the Darjeeling area, as well as their neighbours the Lepcha and Bhotia, are rustic highlanders. Thus, what transpired in the Darjeeling hills during 1986-88 was a clash of divergent values of societies at different levels of development and sophistication. The confrontation was, in a way, predicted in

the title of the book *Baas Salki Rahe Cha* ("The house is on the fire") by Bhagirath Rawat on the life and times of Ari Bahadur Gurung along with Gorkha League history (Kalimpong, 1981).

Subba's book commences with a survey of conceptual sources on ethnic politics (pp 17-22) and the author describes ethnicity, state and development as forming a vicious triangle from which it is difficult to isolate any one of the three. There is also a lengthy discussion of the so-called macro-theories and micro-theories on ethnic movements, with reference to Gorkhaland (Chapter 5). Incidentally, there is a clear cleavage in the theories cited: the nine macro ones are all Western and the seven micro ones mostly Bengali.

But what Subba describes is based on a thorough understanding of the ground realities. The political, ethnic and economic history of the Darjeeling area provides an appropriate backdrop to his political analysis. Particularly well-researched is the chapter on the history of ethnic movement in the area, spanning over eight decades. Initially, these were polite initiatives for a separate administrative set-up: demands made by an informal hill group (1907), the Hillmen's Association (1917), and the All India Gorkha League (1943). When these pleas went unheeded, the demands became more strident: calls for Gorkhastan (1947), Uttarakhand (1949), and separate statehood. The proponents of statehood were the Pranta Prishad (established April 1980), the Gorkha National Liberal Front (July 1980) and Swatantra Manch (May 1985). There was also a parallel movement for the recognition of the Nepali language in India since 1924.

Subba provides a vivid description of the days, months and years of confrontation, of violence which he calls a "nightmare". Similar to the author's evocation of three inter-linked themes (ethnicity, state and development), GNLFF's confrontation was also triangular. One was directly against the State of West Bengal that was represented by the police. The second was against the Union government that deployed paramilitary and armed forces. The third was against the Communist Party of India (Marxist), the main political contender in the area.

The triangular negotiation is described as a process of three steps forward and two steps backwards. Finally, conciliation between GNLFF, the West Bengal Government, and the Centre was agreed upon on 22 August 1988. The demand for a separate state of Gorkhaland was dropped and the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council was created instead, empowered with 19 schedules of local self-government contained in a "Memorandum of Settlement." (*Annex I*)

The author considers the agreement as political expediency on the part of all involved parties. The overall impact of the movement was mostly negative, particularly in the economic front, he states. A chapter is devoted to media coverage of the movement wherein it is revealed that journalistic objectivity was a myth as far as Gorkhaland was concerned: the closer to the scene, the higher the propensity for bias. Subba rightly ignores Nepal's press, which was conspicuously silent on the violence in neighbouring Darjeeling while covering at length diarrhoea deaths in Bihar.

Frontiers can be changed and boundaries redrawn. But the basic question is one of political — not ethnic — identity of the people within the borders. Subba has attempted to deal with this issue in the chapter on evolution of Gorkha identity. His diagnosis seems somehow incomplete. He is also in error, incidentally, while discussing the roots of the term Gorkha to link it with Gorakhnath, derived from 'go-raksha' (protector of cow). The more plausible explanation can be credited to Surya Bikram Gyawali, who suggested that Gorkha was a variation of the Khasa word 'garkha', that means revenue area. Subba subscribes to the distinction

between 'Nepalese' (of Nepal) and 'Nepali' (of India) for the people. On linguistic terminology, he is in favour of 'Nepali' (Bhandari version) as against 'Gorkha' (Ghising version). Therefore, he suggests 'Nepali' as the common designation for the people and their language in India. (See Subba's article on page 30 - editors)

An example of confusion due to such synonymous ascription is the terms 'ethnic Nepali' or 'Nepali ethnics' that have been widely misused. Take for example the sentence, "Many ethnic Nepalis were expelled from Meghalaya and Bhutan". As a matter of fact, 'ethnic Nepali' (*Nepali jati*) does not exist, but rather different ethnic groups that live within political Nepal (as citizens) or are of "Nepalese" origin but live outside (aliens). The above statement in quotes actually refers to a language group that use Nepali as *lingua franca*, not necessarily as a mother tongue. Tribals, whether within or outside Nepal, use Nepali to communicate with each other. Those outside Nepal may use the Nepali language but are not necessarily "Nepalese" in the political sense.

The nomenclature of the language we today call 'Nepali' has undergone numerous transformations, involving an extensive longitudinal traverse. It actually belongs to the family of 'Pahari' languages (Central Pahari in Kumaon and Eastern Pahari in west Nepal). Eastern Pahari in turn became 'Khas-kura' or the language of the Khasa. Its third incarnation was as 'Parbate', probably derived with reference to the powerful principality of Parbat or Malbum in today's central Nepal. When Parbate arrived in the Gandaki region, the powerful house of Gorkha usurped it as 'Gorkhali' and it spread eastwards along with the expansion of Gorkha territory. It was as late as 1932, after 163 years of Gorkha rule in Kathmandu Valley, that the term 'Gorkhali' was officially changed to 'Nepali'. This was a clear case of cultural annexation, since etymologically Nepali was the language of the Newar, who in turn, now call their language 'Nepal Bhasa'.

The fifth incarnation of the eastern Pahari language that has been widely adopted as Nepali may, therefore, better suit the political unit in which it is predominant, that is Nepal. For the

sake of distinction and identification, there is no harm if those outside this territory co-opt 'Nepali's' synonym, 'Gorkhali', as their language. Following the same logic, some hair-splitting can be done to clarify other related terms. Thus, those people using Gorkhali language outside Nepal, and claiming origin in Nepal (but alien) could be called 'Gorkha'. Within political Nepal, the people would be 'Nepalese' and their language 'Nepali'.

But the crux of the matter regarding the identity of the Gorkhas in India is regarding their political status. This refers to their citizenship. The constitutions of both Nepal and India confuse 'nativism' with 'political identity'. The constitutional terms 'Nepali origin' and 'Indian origin' have connotation of cultural affinity (basically language) rather than political identity. Such a provision is contrary to the concept of a modern State, narrow in national context, discriminatory on geographic and ethnic basis, and ambiguous in operation. This has been further confounded by Article VII of the Indo-Nepal Friendship Treaty of 1950, which makes the boundary between the two countries not only a 'porous border' but 'open' for human movement. The main contributing factor to the problem of citizenship, indeed, is the unrestricted entry and exit between the two countries. Nativist policies that are weak (non-existent in the case of Nepal and India) in immigration control but restrictive in naturalisation have all the making of a larger socio-political conflict. The implication of such anomaly is clear: that the political identity of the Gorkhas, or for that matter problems of political demography between India and Nepal, cannot be resolved without the regulation of the boundary.

Tanka Subba enlightens readers with a comprehensive account of an important issue. He believes ethno-development contributes to national integration. Recent ethnic conflagrations in eastern Europe suggest that Marxists have failed in minority group management. The Darjeeling area is not a 'no man's land' as claimed by GNLFF leader Subhash Ghising — it is very much Indian. The resolution of political problems that generate separatist movements such as Gorkhaland is through more regional autonomy.



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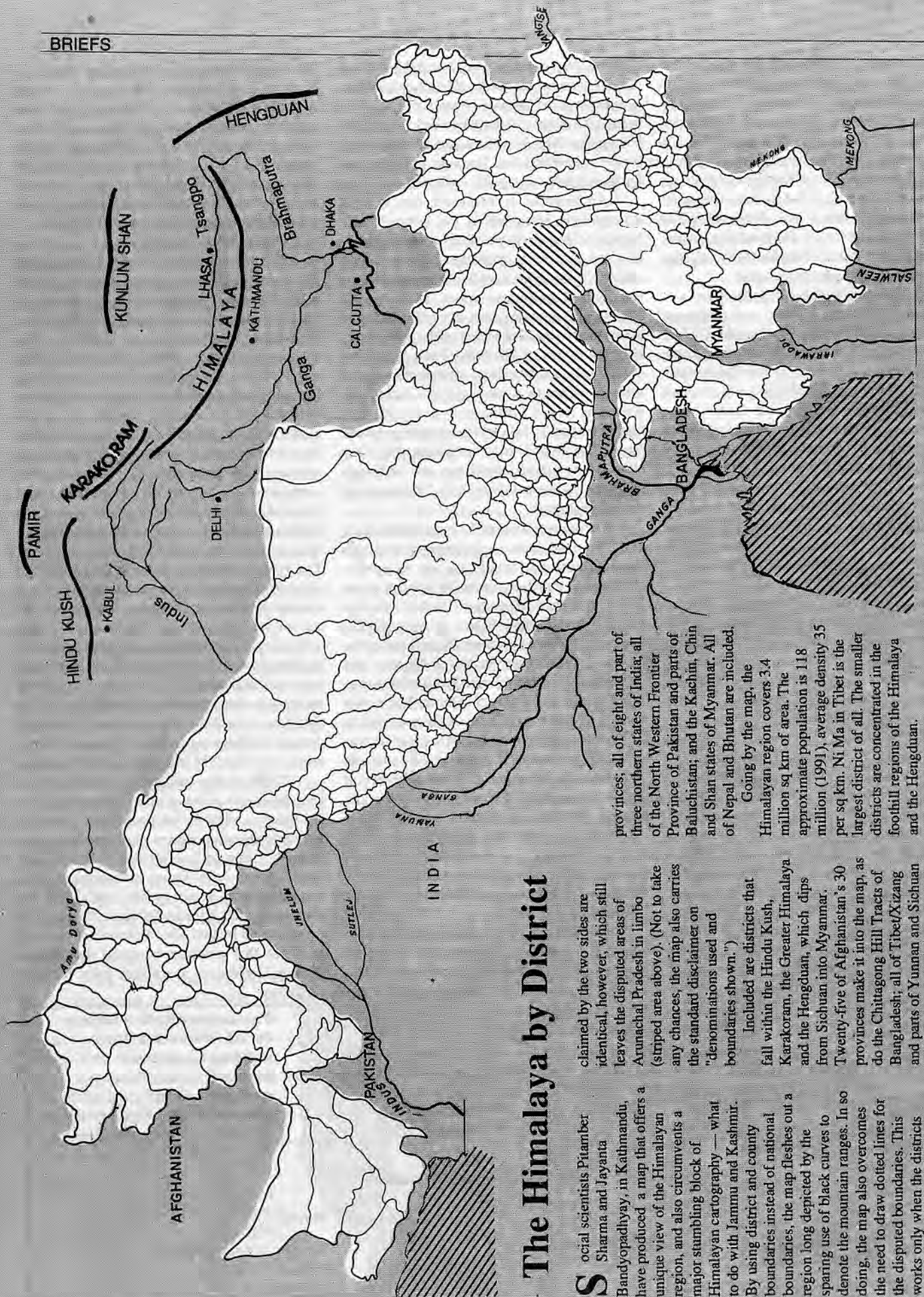
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The Himalaya by District

Social scientists Pitamber Sharma and Jayanta Bandyopadhyay, in Kathmandu, have produced a map that offers a unique view of the Himalayan region, and also circumvents a major stumbling block of Himalayan cartography — what to do with Jammu and Kashmir. By using district and county boundaries instead of national boundaries, the map fleshes out a region long depicted by the sparing use of black curves to denote the mountain ranges. In so doing, the map also overcomes the need to draw dotted lines for the disputed boundaries. This works only when the districts

claimed by the two sides are identical, however, which still leaves the disputed areas of Arunachal Pradesh in limbo (striped area above). (Not to take any chances, the map also carries the standard disclaimer on "denominations used and boundaries shown.")

Included are districts that fall within the Hindu Kush, Karakoram, the Greater Himalaya and the Hengduan, which dips from Sichuan into Myanmar. Twenty-five of Afghanistan's 30 provinces make it into the map, as do the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh; all of Tibet/Xizang and parts of Yunnan and Sichuan

provinces; all of eight and part of three northern states of India, all of the North Western Frontier Province of Pakistan and parts of Baluchistan; and the Kachin, Chin and Shan states of Myanmar. All of Nepal and Bhutan are included.

Going by the map, the Himalayan region covers 3.4 million sq km of area. The approximate population is 118 million (1991), average density 35 per sq km. Ni Ma in Tibet is the largest district of all. The smaller districts are concentrated in the foothill regions of the Himalaya and the Hengduan.

Hard Data

Kathmandu Valley environmentalism tends to proceed on the basis of seminar grandstanding, adopting copycat concerns — and guesswork. In the absence of hard data, soft ecology prevails, particularly with regard to air quality.

Surendra Raj Devkota, an environmental engineer at the Asian Institute of Technology (Bangkok), has now tabulated some hard figures on the Valley's air quality. An air pollution "inventory" Devkota undertook in August and September 1991 indicates the following.

The daily exhaust of public transportation (bus, minibus, three-wheelers) contains about 60 kilograms of CO, 36 kg of NOx, 4 kg of SOx and 7 kg of particulates. 57 per cent of all fossil fuel emissions (diesel, kerosene, gasoline) in Nepal occurs in the Valley. Annually, this amounts to 311,300 tonnes of CO₂, 5000 t of NO₂, and 7300 t of SO₂. (Figures have been rounded.)

The annual emissions from the brick and tile factory at Harisiddhi is estimated at 13 t of CO, 6 t of NOx, 5 t of SOx, 4 t of HC, 2 t of particulates, 27 kg of fluorine and 2 kg of lead. There are some 5000 traditional updraft kilns in the Valley, each of which produces about 3 t of CO annually, as well as 460 kg of hydrocarbons and 420 kg of particulate. Devkota estimates that the brick factories and kilns together consume at least 443,800 t of Kathmandu soil.

Devkota found that the Himal Cement Company's annual contribution was 3680 t of CO₂, 40 t of NOx, 20 t of SOx, 3720 t of particulates, 1.22 kg of cadmium, 49 kg of chromium, and 55 kg of lead.

The Timber Corporation of Nepal alone supplies 25,200 t of fuelwood to Kathmandu. The total annual emissions from fuelwood burning is estimated at 1510 t of CO, 43 t of NOx, 19 t of SOx, 252 t of HC, and 1110 t of particulates.

Cows, buffalos, and other livestock produce 6,900 t of

Black Buck: One Farmers: Nil

A classic population versus wildlife row is under way in the periphery of Bardiya National Park in Nepal's western Tarai. Not content with the protection and forage offered within Bardiya sanctuary herds of Black Buck have taken a liking to the *rahar*, a pulse, and pepper available in the fields of Guleriya beyond the Park boundary, much to the dismay of local farmers who tend them. At the moment, the exasperated farmers chase the Black Buck south of the border, into India, where they are freely hunted. But exasperation is turning into anger. Khadka Nanda Kanel, Sita Ram Kusbanda, Khem Narayan Khanal and Ganga Bahadur Thapa collected 500 signatures and submitted a petition to the District Forest Office. "Do something about the hundreds of Black Buck that invade our fields, or we will take the matter into our own hands," they warned. Meaning that they might start shooting.

"The people are right", admits the local forest officer, P. Budathoki, throwing up his

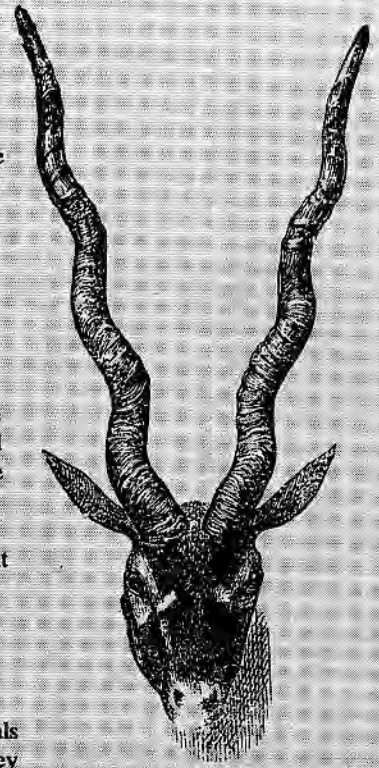
hands, "but the Black Buck have rights too." He nods towards the window. Outside, incredibly, 50 or more Black Buck are grazing with goats and cattle. A little further on, four Black Buck are making a meal of succulent, newly sown wheat.

The four peasant activists are not impressed. They lead the way to a large field of *rahar* and start hooting and clapping. More than a hundred Black Buck emerged from the field and quickly disappeared into the next patch.

The DFO has referred the matter to the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC). The DNPWC says moving the animals is no solution and it has no money to fence the area.

Fencing, in any case, seems to be of no use. The farmers erected a five-foot high fence to protect one field but it served only to highlight how agile the buck are. They simply skip over the fence to their next meal.

Most of the farmers of Khairepur (Ward 5) settled in



Guleriya after 1979 along Hulaki Road. The villagers are both from the hills and from India, just a few kilometres south.

The beasts clearly have better claim to the land. They were here first. But bring this up with the villagers and they act as if they would rather shoot you than the Black Buck.

- Anil Chitrakar

While Nepal is busy flinging open new trekking areas, the authorities in Tibet are going all-out opening mountain peaks for climbing. According to the Tibet Mountaineering Association, 22 peaks are being unlocked, including 13 in Tingri county in the Everest area.

Some high summits that have long been open from the Nepali side, and now may be attempted from the north, include Lhotse (8516m), Makalu (8463m) and Tashe Tseringma (7134m, Gauri Shanker).

methane per year, while rice paddies produce 102 Gg per year. After cows, can airplanes be far behind. According to Devkota, emission of air pollutants by annual landing and take-off at the airport in Kathmandu produces 119 t CO, 88 t NOx, 5 t SOx, 36 t hydrocarbon and 4 t particulate.

New North Faces

Peak	Height	County
Lhotse	8516m	Tingri
Makalu	8463m	Tingri
Li Xin	7071m	Tingri
Tashe Tseringma	7134m	Tingri
Khadhaphu	7227m	Tingri
Si Guang	7308m	Tingri
Qiao Geru	7021m	Tingri
Chowusha	7022m	Tingri
Balung	7013m	Tingri
Namtsori	6536m	Tingri
Xiang Dong	7018m	Tingri
Donakposang	6587m	Tingri
Nobugangri	7095m	Tsongba
Nadhangri	7205m	Nyalam
Khadhajopfo	6112m	Nimu
Shiemakuo	6140m	Nimu
Luktse	6154m	Damshung
Khitsi	6206m	Damshung
Lakuekangri	6457m	Lhatse
Xiakangjian	6822m	Tsoqin
Samdinggangsar	6590m	Nagqu

Pesticides Bury Badly and Burn Worse

In a godown belonging to Nepal's Agricultural Inputs Corporation (AIC), near Amlekgunj, sits a chemical time bomb. Almost 24 tonnes of date-expired pesticides await their fate but Nepal has neither funds nor facilities to ensure their safe disposal. No one knows how many similar godowns are scattered throughout the Himalaya, prone to unsafe disposal, theft, inappropriate re-use and all the attendant risks of poisoning and pollution. Their history raises serious ethical questions about the sale, use, distribution and disposal of highly toxic chemicals from one country to another, and particularly from the countries of the North to the South.

The 24 tonnes of pesticide at the AIC warehouse are of the highly toxic organochlorine class and can be safely destroyed only by incineration at high temperatures. A plan, devised in 1991 by the AIC, Asian Development Bank (ADB), United Nations Development Programme and ANZDEC Ltd in New Zealand, sought to burn the pesticides in the kiln at the nearby Hetauda Cement Industries Limited (HCI). It was aborted when environmentalist Shree Shah alerted ADB to the dangers of incineration.

Incineration demands special equipment to feed the pesticides — a little at a time — into the hottest part of the kiln. Strict monitoring of effluent gases, to ensure that there is no blow-back into the factory and no unburnt pesticides released to the atmosphere, is essential. A stable temperature within the kiln is crucial if the pesticides are to be completely burnt. Partially burnt pesticides can produce substances more toxic than the starting material.

"It was very alarming", said Dr Shah, "organochlorines such as aldrin and endrin are worse than DDT. They produce phosgene and hydrogen chloride gases which are highly toxic. They would have had to clear an area of five kilometres surrounding the cement plant for an unspecified time - which would be impossible to carry out".

To its credit, ADB's environment division responded immediately and ditched the plan. The organochlorines were gathered together and placed in a store near Amlekgunj. Not so the remaining 96 tonnes of out-of-date pesticides that the AIC discovered in its stores. Of this 96 tonnes, 24 tonnes were categorised as suitable for reformulation and resale, and 72 tonnes were suitable for

"spreading" or burial. The first burials were carried out in 1991.

Responding to the fears of environmentalists such as Shah, ADB called in another expert, this time from the US, to check that the 1991 burials of the pesticides were conducted properly and posed no significant environmental risks. Earlier this year the dumping sites were reinvestigated. The findings not only justify the fears of local non-government groups about the competence of local personnel in the techniques of pesticide disposal but also reveal alarming double standards between what is deemed acceptable in the North and the South.

The pesticides were buried at four sites: Birgunj, Sidarthanagar, Janakpur and Nepalgunj. The team investigated the burials at Sidarthanagar and Amlekgunj. The Sidarthanagar site posed no risk but the Amlekgunj burial was a public health hazard. There was evidence of two burials of which the more recent, in October 1991, had been irresponsibly conducted. There were unopened containers of liquid organophosphates; intact and ruptured packets of fungicide and mercury-containing seed treatments. Fifteen pits had been opened and there was evidence of scavenging and grazing.

Since then, the site has been cleaned, unopened containers returned to the Amlekgunj store but, again, the clean-up appears to have been less stringent only because it was conducted in Nepal. A report by the American consultant reveals that "labourers were provided with Tyvek protective suits and plastic disposable gloves" but "protective footwear was not available so labourers were instructed to keep feet away from exposed product and required to wash their feet after the task was completed." It is difficult to imagine American or New Zealand pesticide disposal teams going barefoot because of unavailability of protective footwear.

The mercury-containing pesticides and the 24 tonnes of organochlorine pesticides are now all in one store at Amlekgunj and awaiting safe disposal. The American consultant is due to return to Nepal before the monsoon primarily to investigate the Nepalgunj site. An ADB representative says the agency feels morally obliged to deal with the 24 tonnes of date-expired pesticides but is still unsure of how to do so. Shah fears the worst: "When the dust settles, those pesticides may just be dumped", he said.

Tibetan Tiger in Making?

Apparently undeterred by geographical isolation and the barrier imposed by the Himalaya, Beijing is to create a special economic zone in Tibet. According to the *China Daily*, an economic zone could attract investment from inland provinces and foreign countries to Tibet.

But the visions of a Himalayan Guangdong — China's economic zone *par excellence* inland from Hong Kong — might be premature, and officials recognised that there was more than geography to overcome. Violent winter storms,

rudimentary transport, energy shortages and limited markets are significant barriers in themselves. Tibet's regional government is now adjusting land rents and taxation to lure investors, the paper said.

Several new border trading posts are to be opened, including Burang in Ngari prefecture. India and China have ended 30 years of closure of the Sino-Indian border to allow pilgrims and tourists to visit Burang every year between 1 June and 30 September.

Meanwhile, Tibetans in exiles are viewing the whole affair

with a jaundiced eye. In their view, Beijing's is using the economic zone idea just as a pretext to bring in more Han migrants into Tibet.

Upcoming...

The annual South Asia Conference at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (United States), which has always paid special attention to the Himalayan region, is scheduled this year for 6-8 November. The Conference provides a forum for the presentation of a broad range of scholarly papers, which are chosen by a programme committee from among a large number of proposals submitted. According to a handout

just received, the committee gives "priority to new and innovative research papers; and new participants in the Conference." This year, it is learnt, a panel is being organised "to make research done in the Tarai more visible in the field of Nepal studies; the increasing importance of the Tarai to Nepal should be reflected in academic fora on Nepal." The panel organisers are seeking papers that explore the nature of ethnicity, identity formation and consciousness among the people of the Tarai. Contact: Dept. of Anthropology, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 5000 Lincoln Drive, Madison, Wisconsin 53706, United States. Fax: 608-262-6123

Ray of Kanchenjunga

Bombay's film producers and directors have long vulgarised breath-taking locales in Shimla, Mussoorie, Kashmir and Darjeeling for melodramatic song-and-dance sequences. Nepali filmmakers have blindly followed suit, exploiting the grandeur of Manang, Kakani or Pokhara for escapist absurdity — desecrating nature's gift of mountains.

Satyajit Ray, who passed away in Calcutta on 23 April, would have none of it. He could not bear to see nature shorn of magnificence through crass cinematic treatment.

And among all of nature, Ray had a soft corner for mountains. The pristine snows, wooded slopes, rugged hills, gushing streams, cascades — they all fed his aesthetic appetite and he used them well.

It was Ray's affinity with the mountains that moved him to make his banned film, *Sikkim*. And to shoot on location for a sequence that was barely a minute long in *Goopi Gyne Bagha Byne*.



in which the minstrel heroes are magically transported to the mountains in Tibetan *bakkhus*, fur caps and embroidered boots.

Kanchenjunga, Ray's first original scenario in colour, shot on location in Darjeeling in 1961, is full of the master's empathy for the highlands. Yet, as always, he was careful not to use the terrain's beauty for its own sake.

Something human had to happen, and did. Ray used the landscape to bring out the conflicts and attitudes of the people involved — in this case a Calcutta family out on a tense vacation. The solemn fir trees of Jalpahar Road above Darjeeling town, the 'now sun, now mist, now cloud' atmosphere, all stand witness to the

"Multipurpose Shrub"

It is known as Armalito, Ashuk and Taro in Nepal; Bhurchuck and Tarwachuck in Garhwal; Chug and Swak in Kashmir; Tarru and Tabru in Ladakh; Lhala and Surch in the Sikkim hills.

It is probably the plant with the most aliases in the Himalaya. The English name is Seabuckthorn, a shrub-tree that could be of enormous value if the excitement of scientists who have studied it is justified.

The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), in Kathmandu, has just published a report on the "multipurpose" shrub (*Hippophae Linn*) by Chinese expert Lu Rongsen. ICIMOD is trying to get regional governments to take the shrub seriously — with some success. The Pakistanis are said to

be interested, and Indian scientists at the Himachal Pradesh Science and Technology Council have already started work on the shrub. A Nepali forester working for ICIMOD has started experimental plantation in Jomosom in the upper Kali Gandaki.

A deciduous plant of temperate regions, Seabuckthorn bears clusters of juicy orange fruits — a hectare can produce up to 1,500 kg of berries. Its well-developed root system not only helps hold soil, but also fixes nitrogen at a rate almost double that of a soyabean plant. The shrub is hardy and can withstand extreme temperatures and drought. A six-year old forest can produce 18 tons of firewood per hectare. The fruit's Vitamin C content of is 'higher than for



practically every other fruit,' said N.S. Jodha, another scientist at ICIMOD.

Will the Seabuckthorn live up to all this hardsell? Or is this just another much-touted miracle plant that will wilt after the spotlight is off? Time will tell, but it is true that in Russia and China, the shrub provides products ranging from wines to cosmetics to pharmaceuticals. The Chinese alone have 300,000 hectares under cultivation, which produced Seabuckthorn products worth over US\$ 21 million in 1990 alone.

- Binod Bhattacharjya

Carrying Capacity

The South Col route up to Chomolongma/Sagarmatha/Everest has become an easy staircase, and the summit, a mountaineer's picnic spot. This spring, there was not even elbow room at the top of the world (8848m). On 12 May alone, 32 climbers from four expeditions, from seven countries, made it up, but all of them took the one easy and well-trodden "tourist route". There was, however, no environmental sleuth among them to keep track of debris left on Chomolongma.

It was quite appropriate, then, that the Mountain Protection Commission of the International Union of Alpinist Associations

psychological drama being played out between a tyrannical father, a subjugated mother and their daughters, and other characters.

Kanchenjunga, the mountain, makes an appearance only at the very end of the film, shrouded in mist until the final sequence. Understatement was the essence of the craft of Satyajit Ray — who was a man of the mountains more than any of us.

- Reita Raj Gurung

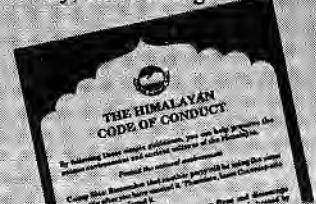
(UIAA) had pollution on the agenda on 8 May, when it met in Kathmandu. Participants approved a programme to reduce litter on mountains and trails, and to clean up areas that have been especially soiled. The "carrying capacity" of each mountain region should be urgently studied, and tougher sanctions must be applied against individuals and organisations that break existing environmental regulations, the Commission decided. It also expressed concern that the "small is beautiful" principle was being ignored by government authorities, and that "Peak fees are being raised in such a manner that large expeditions are now being favoured over small expeditions."

Indian mountaineer Mohan S. Kohli, a Commission member, argued that over-publicised one-time "clean-up expeditions" favoured by many Northern groups were of little use. "It has become a fashion to go clean up Everest. This is nonsense. Much better that the same money be used by local communities to set up permanent systems."

Kohli is Chairman of the

Himalayan Environment Trust which has just come out with "The Himalayan Code of Conduct," a set of 10 simple guidelines for trekkers and mountaineers to "help preserve the unique environment and ancient cultures of the Himalayas."

Kohli hopes to ensure compliance with the Code by individual travellers as well as the approximately 500 adventure tourism operators around the world. (There are 120 in Nepal alone, and about 30 in India, he says.) "We will get commitment of travel operators and then use different methods to monitor compliance with the Code. For those that show a disregard for the mountain environment, we will suggest issuance of warnings and, finally, black-listing."



For copies of the Code, write to: The Himalayan Environment Trust at 82 Sainik Farms, New Delhi 110 062.

"Flying High"

by Arnico Kumar Panday

Since its inauguration in 1968, RA 100, the "daily" Mountain Flight of Royal Nepal Airlines, has been a major Himalayan tourist attraction. For US\$ 99 you can fly along and above the eastern Nepal Himalaya for a bird's eye view of the Chomolongma/ Everest/ Sagarmatha.

The typical flight departs from Tribhuvan International Airport at 7 am. It flies a right-turn climbing loop over Khumaltar, Chobar, Kalimati, Kupandol and Patan in the Kathmandu Valley, and heads eastwards over Dhulikhel towards Charikot and Jiri. The Himalaya unfurl on the plane's left: from Langtang and Shishapangma (8016m) to Jugal Himal, Lapchi Kang, Rolwaling Himal, and the Khumbu Himal. Passengers are invited to visit the cockpit, where the windows are cleanest and visibility is best. Everest can already be seen from over 100 km away, rising above all other peaks.

After exactly half the flight time, the plane reaches the Dudh Kosi Valley. It starts a wide left U-turn flying northwards, bringing into close-up view the four 8000m peaks of Makalu, Lhotse, Everest and Cho Oyu. Around Namche Bazar it begins to head west, skirting closely past Karyolung (6511m) and passing the prominent Solu peak of Numbur (6957m) at a distance of less than two kilometers. It then turns towards Gauri Shanker, flying past its twinpeak. By then the plane is already descending back towards Kathmandu. Chaduk Bhir/ Chhoba Bamare, the Tingsang Pass and the ridge-top town of Chautara pass by the window.

It makes a difference whether you get to sit on right or the left side of the plane. On the left, the mountains are visible during the out-bound trip. Excitement mounts as they draw nearer. Though Royal Nepal maintains that there is no difference, the right side, facing the mountains on the way back, ultimately offers the better

view. When visibility is good, Kanchen-junga (8586m), on the Sikkim border, can be seen from the right side as the plane banks northward during the U-turn. Because the aircraft flies 20 km further north during the return trip, those on the right get more close-ups while flying over Dudhkunda Glacier and the southern edge of the Rolwaling Valley. Karyolung, Numbur, Menlungtse and Gauri Shanker loom particularly close. Khumbu Himal is a special attraction: instead of a linear chain, the passenger is presented with an intertwined mass of mountains, ridges and valleys. Right side passengers also get a glimpse of the glaciers and plains of Tibet.

Though very impressive, the passenger's close-up experience with the individual peaks is brief. Numbur's south face fills the window for barely 30 seconds; the two peaks of Gauri Shanker switch places in very little time. The U-turn above the Dudh Kosi takes less than three minutes. So much is seen during so little time.

Depending on the number of passengers, the Mountain Flight is carried out with either the 44-seater turbo-prop HS 748 "Avro", the larger Boeing 727 jet, or the even larger and more modern Boeing 757. The route is the same; the Avro takes one hour and climbs up to 19,500 ft (6000m), while the jets fly it within forty minutes at 25,000 ft (7600m). On the Avro, the bulbous turbo-prop engines tend to obscure some of the view for seat-rows Two through Six.

Royal Nepal has kept RA 100 on its schedule for nearly a quarter of a century now. One winter a few years back, an Annapurna Mountain Flight was introduced out of Pokhara, but it did not attract enough passengers and was discontinued.



Pilot's view of Gauri Shanker during RA100's return leg.

AK PANDAY

Plans for a one-and-a-half hour jet flight from Kathmandu, to take in the Himalaya from Annapurna to Everest, never got off the ground.

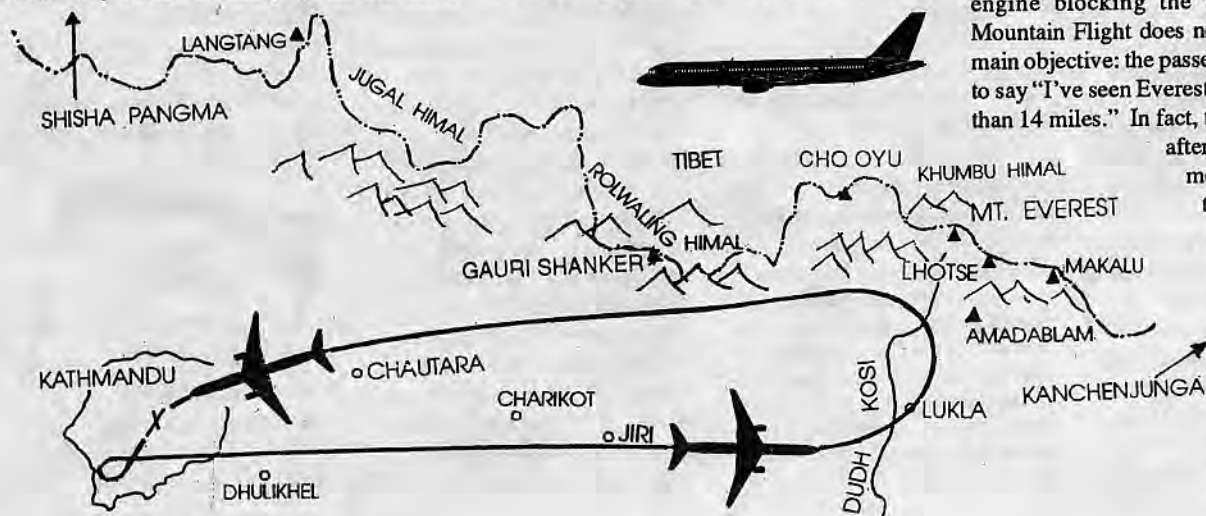
Only Royal Nepal's "classic" flight to Everest has endured. Now since mid-May 1992, it has had private-sector competition. Nepal Air Charter, a new company, flies its German-made Dornier aircraft on a mountain-viewing flight up the Imja Valley over Tengboche to Dingboche. In India, too, a private airline is operating sight-seeing flights in the Himalaya.

"The Himalayan should not become another Grand Canyon," cautioned an American in Kathmandu upon learning that mountain flights might proliferate. He was referring to the congestion of sight-seeing aircraft around the Canyon, in Arizona, which creates considerably noise and air pollution.

Royal Nepal's Mountain Flight provides a unique experience to see the snow peaks of Nepal. Except for the engine noise and occasional air-pockets, it resembles watching a short documentary movie of the high Himalaya: purely visual. It is flown by travellers in a hurry, mostly Europeans, Americans and East Asians. On one recent flight, half the passengers were Indians — incidentally they were all given boarding cards for seats on the left side of the plane.

But no matter the swiftness with which it is all over, and no matter that one may have a big engine blocking the view, Royal Nepal's Mountain Flight does not fail to fulfill its one main objective: the passenger returns home able to say "I've seen Everest from a distance of less than 14 miles." In fact, the plane takes off only

after confirmation that the mountain is visible. At the end of the flight each passenger is given a certificate stating: "This certifies that _____ is a friend of Mount Everest (Sagarmatha) by virtue of participating in the daily mountain flight of Royal Nepal Airlines." ▽



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Abominably Yours,

What would you do if Blockheads arrived at your gate bearing a petition? It happened to me. Disregard for a moment why they preferred to call on me rather than on the King, the Prime Minister, the Chief Justice, or the Chief Conservator of Forests. There they were at my cave entrance, shivering in the premonsoon gale. Ten thousand or more saw I at a glance. Blockheads, as far as the eye could see. Such a monotony of shapes and expression as you have never seen.

The petition contained a plea for action against a strange new pestilence called Affirmative Action that was spreading its tentacles across the "homogenous Nation-State of Blockland." Apparently, some of the lesser blocks had been carried away with visions of one block one vote. Crushed for too long under the weight of the heavier blocks, they wanted some wriggling space, and the freedom to take on attributes of spheres, coneheads, cylinders or just lumps. The Affirmative Action virus was responsible for these awful ideas, said the petitioners. How to maintain the plian that is so prized in Blockland?

Clearly, the Blockheads were a bit disoriented, what with every expert they interviewed sighing knowingly and saying, "Ah, just like in Eastern Europe." Buckwash! All that my cuboid visitors needed was some political priming, so I gave them a dose of my "Nature is Unfair and Inequitous and That's All There Is to That" speech that I had prepared for a seminar that never took place because the country of venue had disappeared due to ethnic strife.

Nature, science and the Brahmanda itself are in favour of pecking orders and hierarchies, I began. It has been survival of the fittest from the start. If there were affirmative action, reservations or quotas in Gondwanaland, someone forgot to tell me about it. When the Neanderthal lost out to the Homo Sapien, there was no civil rights panel to deliberate on the matter and demand special outreach programmes for the Neanderthal, which is how, following the Law of Nature, they extingted themselves.

Vegetable, mineral, animal, spiritual – all have hierarchies and all have discrimination. A big cauliflower will soak up so much water that the next one, of the same *gotra*, will be shrivled with thirst – too weak and intimidated even to tattle to the gardener. And yet the seasons come and go...

A millionth of a second after the Big Bang, sub-atomic particles were already arranging themselves into a hierarchy of energy levels. Some quarks were more equal than others. Favoured electrons got a choice of

nuclei to orbit around. There was a disgruntled proton here and some neurotic neutrons there who tried to fight for equal rights, but Brahma's goons took them away and turned them into microwave background radiation. And there was no Amnesty International around to investigate the rights violation and issue a sharply critical report against Brahma.

Much later, man made gods in his image. The Hindu pantheon of 330 million deities did their best to emulate the anti-social human characteristics of the time. Some gods had high standing despite consistently showing a cruel, autocratic side to themselves. They even had hugely popular temples with *char dham* status dedicated to themselves. Other gods (and I do not want to name names here for fear of being denied entrance at the Pearly Gates when the time comes) have become upwardly mobile, as mirrored in the economic status of their devotees.

Then there is the large divine underclass of lesser gods. The meek and acquiescent, who do the dirty work around heaven. Once in a while a god comes along to try to unionise the heavenly proletariat, but the Big Gods buy off the bosses and it fizzles out. Nothing is going to change in heaven until humans get their act together and learn to set a good example.

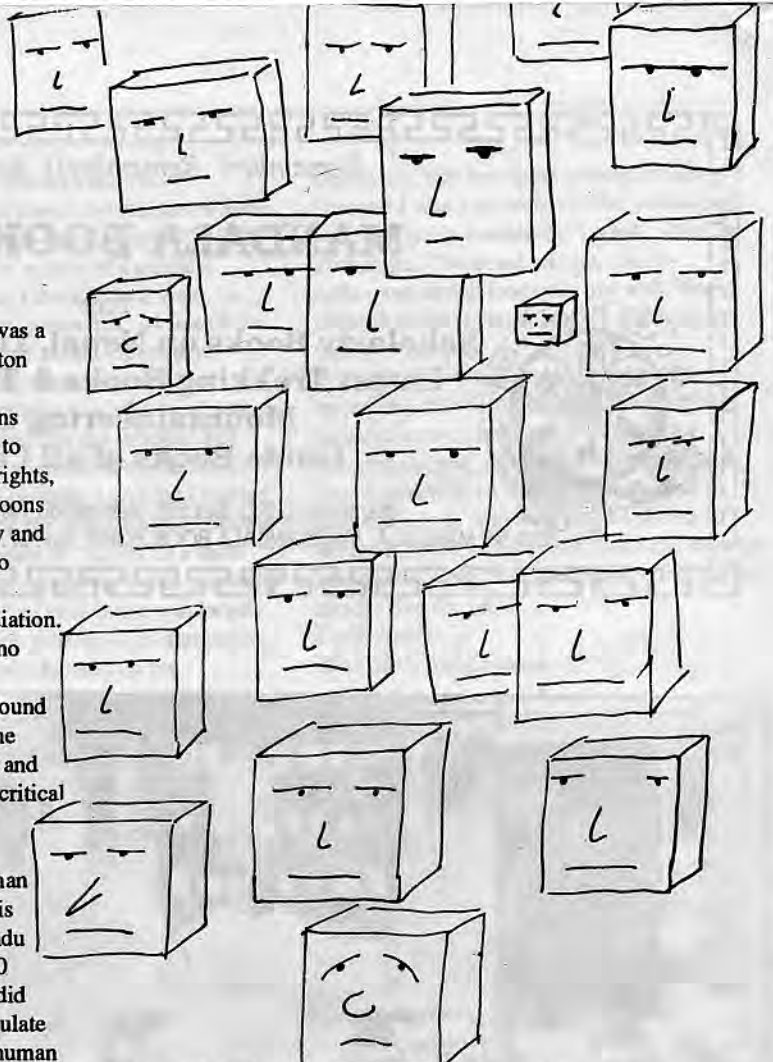
Take a day or two off and observe any beehive. There is the Queen Bee, doing nothing but laying eggs all day. In return she gets the respect of her citizens, the choicest rhododendron nectar, and is allowed to make the speech on the opening day of Parliament. And not much else. You may say the Queen Bee is a bit of a Constitutional Monarch.

A rung below the Her Majesty are the Brahmin Drones. You should see these guys, lounging around all day in their holy thread and humming and fussing over the Queen when she is not laying eggs. Then there are the Kshetriya Bees, forever sharpening their stings and keeping them aerodynamically trim. Hives

rarely go to war, and rumour has it that the soldiers are actually used for internal security and peacekeeping operations. The Vaisya is the Trader Bee who flies back and forth tirelessly between Hong Kong and Beehive, bringing back golden pollen.

Despite the deep caste divisions, the hive is a harmonious place. Nothing like the Los Angeles riots ever happens here. A Kshetriya might accidentally sting a Sudra, but it gets hushed up before you can say honeybee twice. Once in a while, a bunch of politically frustrated citizen-bees may try to question the reigning order and set fire to the combs, but the guards soon take care of them. This sometimes forces dissident bees to swarm and flee to neighbouring hives and seek asylum. But by and large, the beehive has settled to a kind of social equilibrium from which Vedic designers of the Caste Society probably got their inspiration.

So Nature is firmly on your side, I told the delegation from Blockland. Ignore those upstarts who want to be coneheads. If they shout Affirmative Action, feign ignorance. If they insist, change the subject. If worse comes to worse, promise a study tour that is followed by action-research.





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