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Jan/Feb 1993

# HIMAL

HIMALAYAN MAGAZINE



## DIVERTED WEALTH

### THE TRADE IN HIMALAYAN HERBS

American Shangri-la • Four Fountains of Tibet

Reviews • Abstracts • Voices • Briefs

Abominably Yours

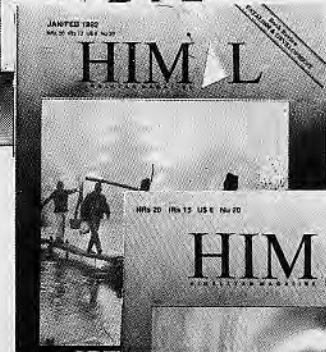
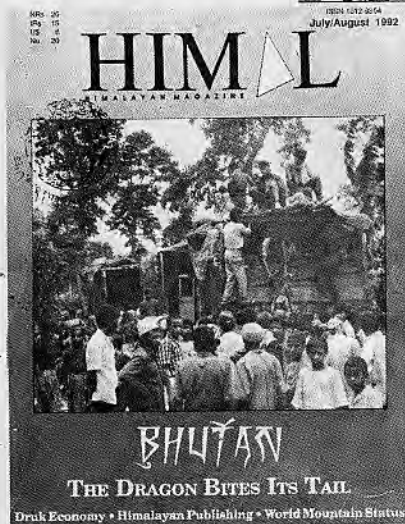
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Cover: Shop assistant at Katara Tambaku in Khari Bauli, Old Delhi, surrounded by sackfuls of Himalayan riches. He displays samples of *Paanch aunley* (*Orchis latifolia* linn), smuggled out of Nepal and headed for West Asia, where the herb commands a high price as sex stimulant.

Picture by Bikas Rauniar

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## MAIL

### Killer Smoke

I believe that Manisha Aryal could have used even better imagery to castigate the peddlers of smoke in Nepal (Nov/Dec 1992). There is a Shikhar Cigarette advertisement of Surya Tobacco Company in which a wife gifts a woodworked cigarette box to her yuppie husband. The subliminal message here, crafted by the ad agency (which is actually in league with the anti-smoking folks), is as follows: the husband is a wife-beater and the wife herself has a lover. This is her motive for wanting the husband dead. But so deep is her resentment that she wants him to have a lingering death – cancer. The next time you watch the commercial, mark the glint of des-perate steel in her eyes.

I would also like to know if the Nepali Congress-wallas had any twinge of conscience when they saw Janakpur Cigarette Factory using "B.P" on its promotional calendar, and whether they have felt the urge to do anything about it.

While the dangers to smokers from smoking is obvious to everyone except cigarette producers and bureaucrats, few, including your writer, seem to think seriously about passive smoking. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has just released a comprehensive report which concludes that smoking is indeed a serious and substantial health risk for non-smokers, particularly children. According to one report, "The agency marshals an enormous array of evidence to build an overwhelming case that tobacco smoke is hazardous to innocent bystanders...The inhaled smoke is known to cause cancer; it would be

astonishing if the environmental smoke were not carcinogenic as well."

As far as calculating the cost of smoking to the Nepali nation is concerned, kindly allow me to excerpt a report from the latest issue of the environmental magazine *WorldWatch*:

"The cost of smoking to state governments in the United States in 1985, the most recent year for which data has been calculated, was more than \$52 billion, or \$221 per person, according to the Center for Disease Control. The draft of another study, by the U.S. Office of Technology Assessment, put the total cost of smoking-related health care and lost productivity in the United States at \$65 billion a year, or \$2.17 per pack.

"Those amounts do not include the non-economic values attributable to loss of life. If the disruption of families and tragedy of unnecessary death due to smoking-related illnesses could somehow be added into the calculations, along with the lost skills and contributions to communities of those who died, then the measured costs would be much higher."

Sir, who will do the calculations for Nepal?

Pratima Tamang  
Tin Kuney, Kathmandu

### Socially Correct

Blinded by smoke curling up from the cigarette ads, Manisha Aryal failed to see the subtle and positive images in two TV





# HIMAL

Vol. 6 No. 1 Jan/Feb 1993

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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commercials of the Surya Tobacco Company. Take for example the "symbol of success" cigarette commercial. When our Durbar Marg MBA gallantly offers beautiful saris to his wife, all he gets in return is a wooden box stuffed with Shikhar. Now, what could prompt such an aware Kathmandu housewife to give her husband cigarettes? Obviously, she wants him to have cancer. Hence, STC's message to the Nepali wife: If you want to end your listless (and perhaps lustless) marriage, convert your husband into a chain-smoker. Leave the rest to the carcinogens.

And why does the old, non-smoking flute-seller, squatting uncomfortably on the Durbar parapet, smile at the end of that "drive-to-Nuwakot" commercial? If you peer closely, you will notice that his is not a smile of approval, but of pity. He is disappointed that the lungs of his long-lost disciple, now a Europe-trotting, Surya-smoking Kathmandu nouveau riche, can no longer hold enough air to coax a fluid tune out of the bansuri. Before fading away, the speechless guru merely opens his lips, to wonder what health hazards await thousands of other Nepalis with lungs blacker than Surya's profit figures.

Aryal and other critics should compliment, not attack, Surya Tobacco, for such "socially correct" commercials. And *Himal* should note that a copy of *Himal* sells for less than a pack of Surya !!

Ashutosh Tiwari  
Massachusetts, United States

## Himalayan Solutions for Himalayan Pollution

Lhakpa Norbu Sherpa's article (Nov/Dec 1992) is a timely acknowledgement of the absurdity of people who devote their own time and money to fly halfway around the world to pick up someone else's trash in the Himalaya. These well-meaning people have convinced many Nepalis that environmental protection in Nepal is synonymous with cleaning up garbage. Numerous self-satisfied trekking agents and government officials are proudly announcing that they are preserving Nepal's environment by ensuring that all mountaineering and trekking litter is packed out of the hills.

Like Lhakpa Norbu Sherpa, I do not see trash collecting in the hills as a national priority. The mountains are just as spectacular whether there is trash afoot or not, and there are far more pressing

environmental problems in Nepal — the exploding national population and the toxic pollution in Kathmandu Valley.

Since tourism is a national priority, it is sensible to provide tourists with a pleasant, garbage-free environment for their travels. But let us do this garbage cleanup in a way that makes use of Nepal's unique resources, not just mimic the ways of other countries.

Well-intentioned foreigners have created a situation where Nepal is attempting to solve the garbage problem in the hills using Western tactics. The concept of "pack it out" works fine in the Western wilderness where there are no villages. In the American national parks there are sophisticated rubbish collection facilities at roadheads to dispose of what is carried out of the back country. In Nepal, there are no suitable disposal facilities at Pokhara or Lukla, where most treks end. Packing it out therefore means lugging the trash to Kathmandu where it should hopefully end up in one of the yellow bins. We all know what happens then. It gets picked over by street urchins and other scavenger trying to make a living by salvaging something saleable from the refuse of others. In the meantime it ends up strewn around the street, blowing around and offending the tourists in whose honour the garbage was carried back to Kathmandu in the first place.

The new expedition regulations require that certain items — specifically oxygen bottles and batteries — be re-exported by the expedition to the home country. This seemingly sensible regulation has already resulted in some exceptional deviousness. I understand that the Tribhuvan Airport departure lounge has become the new dumping ground for batteries as expeditions members unload their junk after having 'fulfilled' the regulations and collected their cleaning deposit. The airport cleaners sell these used batteries to shops that in turn resell them to expeditions which have lost or misplaced their batteries. The expeditions can show them off to the environment police in order to reclaim their own deposits. This is recycling at its best.

Nepal has also now inspired the flying garbage barge. At least one expedition packed up its garbage and shipped it home by air — freight collect. Won't the airline be surprised when they try to auction off the unclaimed goods?

Accidents, avalanches, heavy snowfall





or exhaustion often make it impossible for expedition members to climb back to higher camps to clean. The regulations do not acknowledge and insist that what is imported be exported. Expeditions are therefore buying used oxygen bottles in Kathmandu in order to fulfil their 'export quota'. This has created a shortage of oxygen bottles and their price has shot up. Trekking companies and the Himalayan Rescue Association have relied for years on the availability of reasonably priced oxygen equipment to use for emergencies. As the shortage of emergency oxygen increases, trekkers might die as the result of the cleanup campaign.

Nepal is a nation of entrepreneurs and with very little imagination we can develop a situation that will allow garbage collection and recycling to become profitable. Recyclable glass bottles are already being sold to villagers or *khali shishi* collectors. A surprising number of these plains people wander the hills. As for the tin can situation, one need only remember the flattened biscuit tin roofs in villages like Thosé. Surely, in remote villages where there is a shortage of manufactured goods there is a better use for empty tins than crushing and burying, as is advised. In the past, products used to be packaged with recycling in mind. Nescafe was once packed in containers that could be reused as drinking glasses and peanut butter and porridge once came in tins with resealable lids. Let us resurrect some of these simple techniques.

Garbage is a municipal problem. In Nepali villages, the refuse gets swept daily out of homes and shops unto the trail and eventually down to the entrance of the village. Virtually every Nepali neighbourhood is strewn with cigarette packs, old shoes, broken glass and bottles, cracked plastic jerrycans and khaini tins. On the trekking trail, the village has in addition

empty mineral water bottles, tuna fish and fruit tins.

If every trekker asked for the village dump, and used it, the message might get through. Many villagers already charge a camping fee. Perhaps they could also levy a hotel tax to support the development and

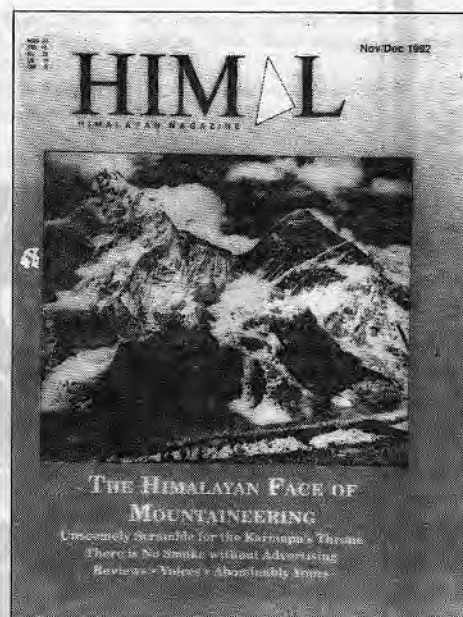
maintenance of a dump. In the Annapurna area, villagers have already learned that hotels with clean toilets make more money. A similar effort could be made to show villagers that trekkers will stop in those villages with proper waste disposal facilities.

Oxygen cylinders have been recycled since the 1950s. Many empty cylinders ended their days as school bells or village clocks. Now that oxygen refilling facilities are available in Nepal, all that is required is a facility for high-pressure refilling, and Nepali industry would begin providing crucial support for expeditions.

A glacial crevasse is the world's best recycling plant. It may offend the purists, but if trash, particularly cans and bottles



Dear editors of *Vogue*:  
Permit us to draw attention to the cover of your December 1992 issue, where you seem to have mistakenly inverted the picture of Chomolongma and Lhotse behind the Dalai Lama's portrait. Please note that we in *Himal* have done the same with our Nov/Dec cover (above right), but deliberately.  
*Vous travaillez à Paris et nous à Kathmandu, ça se voit!*



were dumped in a deep crevasse on the Khumbu Glacier near Base Camp, it would be pulverised beyond recognition by the time it emerged near Dhughla perhaps 20 years later. Think about this in comparison to the alternatives before you reject the concept.

Instead of requiring that expeditions take used batteries home, encourage the use of rechargeable batteries which would use solar power. The volume of battery use in villages to play radios and power torches is already astronomical and with trekkers and expeditions showing the way, this consumption could also be reduced.

Human waste is both an aesthetic and health problem. Probably the worst situation exists in Lobju, right at the center of the Sagarmatha National Park. Some lodges have toilets but restrict use and trekking groups dig pits all over the campsites. In an area of such heavy use, the National Park authorities must provide and maintain basic facilities including toilets. When I suggested this to an official of the Department of Forests, he suggested that an NGO be established to develop such facilities. This is a travesty of the National Park concept and seems to indicate that Nepal's commitment to environmental protection — even the limited concept of collecting garbage — is limited to policing the tourists.

More than 10,000 trekkers pay NRs 650 each to enter Sagarmatha, yet little of the more than NRs 65 lakhs thus generated is ever earmarked for park development. The money that trekkers pay is already high,





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but if proper park standards were followed and facilities developed, few would complain as they do today. Ideally, the Army too would be moved out of the national parks, at least the mountain parks, and a professional park service could be developed with trained rangers who would do more than sit around wood fires pretending they are protecting the forests.

Stan Armington  
Kathmandu

### Climbing Journalism

Your issue provided some new perspective on mountaineering. In general, climbing literature — books, magazines and journals — rarely looks at mountains and mountaineering from the point of view of the Himalayan societies. This is because coverage is defined by the readership, mostly Western climbers or mountain enthusiasts. Reporting always concentrates on climbing season highlights.

Sherpas, Baltis and others are mostly absent from climbing journalism because that is not its job. Even magazines like the recently revived *Summit* from the United States, whose promise was to go deeper and wider than the regular mountaineering glossies, do not quite get around to taking an insider's focus on the Himalaya. Only occasionally will the writings of a Doug Scott (*Himalayan Climber*) delve into the questions of fairness and equity, and the writings about Edmund Hillary will discuss his concern for development in the Khumbu.

While Himalayan society is ignored, there is of course more than ample coverage of Himalayan climbing. Till its unexpected demise a couple of months ago, *Mountain* magazine always began its pages with news from the Greater Himalaya before moving on to the lesser ranges around of the globe. The *American Alpine Journal*, the (European) *Alpine Journal* and the (Indian) *Himalayan Journal* all provide wide coverage of Himalayan mountaineering, presenting detailed expedition reports, 'climbing literature', and presenting debates on technique, history, ethics, and so on.

And then there are the travel/adventure books ad nauseum. Anyone who comes within smelling distance of base camp on any mountain feels it his duty to write a book, and so the flood of Himalayan travelogues continues — ritual visits to the abbot of Tengboche monastery, description of

physical labour at high altitude, distant glorification of the mountain folk, and so on.

The one subject that has received inordinate publicity beyond The Climb is that of pollution on the mountain. But, as several of your writers have indicated, much of this concern is fake or misguided. Trash on Everest is horrifying, but much, much worse is when a Sherpa, Tamang or Gurung dies without insurance and the family does not know enough to make demands from the trek agency or client.

Sungdare Sherpa, that tragic figure of Himalayan mountaineering and seven-time Everest summitteer, got five column inches in *Mountain* magazine when he died.

Hameed Sharief  
Aligash

### "Preventive Rescue"

*Himal* raises important questions on mountaineering in its Nov/Dec 1992 issue. To add to what you have written about mountain rescue in the Himalaya, over the years the Himalayan Rescue Association (HRA) has been providing services to mountaineers, trekkers, support staff, as well as the local population through its two aid posts in Manang (central Nepal) and Pheriche (Khumbu) and its Kathmandu office. As numerous travelers and HRA's own volunteer doctor's will testify, the prevention and treatment of altitude sick-

ness that the organisation has been involved with have been truly state-of-the-art.

In fall 1992, the Pheriche aid post on the way to Everest Base Camp saw about 400 patients for various causes. About 100 had altitude sickness and were treated with descent, oxygen, as well as different modern medications. Twelve persons had to be put in the hyperbaric bag ("Gamow Bag"), which simulates lower altitude air pressure. Some patients were also monitored with pulse oximeters which gives an estimate of the amount of oxygen in the blood. Four patients were evacuated to Kathmandu.

The Autumn of 1992 was typical of the fall season activity that the HRA has been engaged with at Pheriche for over 15 years. Many lives have been saved through intervention, but prevention is still our thrust. Acquiring a helicopter dedicated to rescue as you suggest is substantially more than what this non-profit organisation with its limited resources and voluntary personnel can envision for now.

Interested travelers or others can visit us at Tridevi Marg, Thamel, or call us at 412964.

Buddha Basnyat, MD  
Medical Director HRA  
Kathmandu

### Well-Meaning but Careless

The short piece in your Nov/Dec 1992 issue entitled "Speaking up for the Nyimba (*sic*)" contained an excerpt taken from the *Cultural Survival Quarterly* (Spring 1992). While presented as a sympathetic account of economic and social changes experienced by these people, the excerpt is composed of a mixture of half-truths and fanciful misconceptions superimposed on a base of straightforward factual statements. As no author is listed, the sources of the information are uncertain. Nonetheless, it becomes important to set the record straight because certain statements are more than inaccurate, they also seem damaging to the group concerned.

To illustrate the mixtures of truth and fancy, the piece correctly cites economic problems Nyimba face due to declining profits from ageold salt/wool/grain trade and then states that this has led them to take up "illicit trading" to sustain their standard of living. In fact, profits from trade have decreased steadily throughout the twentieth century, as my book, *The Dynamics of Polyandry* (1988) has documented.

### What a Moment

A moment is  
A genesis  
A life  
And an end in itself  
What a moment!  
When millions of creations  
Take place  
When violence with guns  
Explosives of every kind  
Burst in the heart of this earth  
What a moment!  
When a ray of hope  
Is shrouded by  
A veil of darkness  
Which is the judgement  
In its ruins  
Homo sapiens thus exhibit  
Their true faces  
To the rest of the world  
What a moment!

Megh R. Shakya, Lalitpur



The primary response has been an intensification and expansion of traditional trade, coupled, more recently, with innovative attempts to meet changing demands of diverse markets in the Middle Hills of Nepal, India and Tibet – but with such items as manufactured



goods, pashmina wool, and dyestuffs. Moreover, it seems a distortion to describe generic “Nepalis” presently treating Nyinba as “polluted” and “scorn(ing) their culture”, although, like other peoples speaking Tibetan dialects and following Tibetan Buddhism, they certainly suffered disabilities associated with caste ideologies in the past.

Nor is it correct that Nyinba feel compelled to “deny their ethnicity” or change their eating habits in order to gain political power. It is true that some individuals took on Nepali names when the first modern schools were established in Humla, but most school children nowadays keep their own names. Finally, three-and-a-half years’ residence in Humla and association of nearly 20 years may have given me a slightly better perspective on “threats to Nyinba culture”. Among them I would not include succumbing to “Western notions of love”, which even cosmopolitan Nyinba disparage, or rising rates of household partition, which, according to available evidence, are no higher now than they were one hundred years ago.

Several points can be made about the sorts of problems I have detailed and their broader implications. First, the excerpt illustrates how seemingly well-meaning but careless statements can create a false image of a little-known population, with potentially far-reaching effects on the lives of individuals who are trying to establish themselves in the larger, multi-cultural environment of Nepal.

Second, one must question exactly why outsiders need to “speak up for the Nyinba”. They are not a disenfranchised people facing threats to cultural or physical continuity, as the urgent tone of the excerpt

seems to suggest. The organisation Cultural Survival may have adopted this style of writing to support urgent action on behalf of indigenous peoples around the world. But even in such cases, the idealised image of a pure culture irretrievably lost to change in encounters with industrialised societies may be unrealistic and

overlooks the complex choices that members of such societies must make for themselves.

*Nancy E. Levine  
University of California  
Los Angeles*

#### **Shed that Serious Look**

While thanking you for your extensive and well-researched issue on the plight of the Nepali-speakers of Bhutan, which was a relief from the extremely biased reporting on events in Bhutan by the media here, I would like to suggest a few things regarding

#### **Neither Yak nor Goat**

Is it a goat or a yak, muses the learned editor (*Briefs Nov/Dec 1992*) on the occasion of a drawing of an animal, unknown to him, attempting to keep Thimphu clean and green.

The answer to the question is that there is in Bhutan an animal called ‘Takin’ (*Budorcas taxicolor*), almost but not quite as elusive as the yeti. For an untrained eye — and your editor seems to possess such one — it may look a bit like a yak



*Real takin.*

*Himal's* production.

I do not think your magazine is intended only for the academically inclined. It would be in the interest of the Himalayan region (and naturally for you also) if *Himal* were to be read by more and more people. For this to happen you must make the presentation more attractive (possibly with colour pages) and include more variety of articles. There’s really no benefit in maintaining the serious look of the magazine. I think it will be better to avoid giving excerpts from other magazines and newspapers just for the sake of cosmetic coverage of other regions (with reference to “Darjeeling Beneath the Cosmetics”). You should either have a reporter from that place or send your own reporter to file reports. I also think you are giving undue importance to foreign writers. We must not forget that nobody understands the Himalayan region better than the Himalayan people themselves. By the way, will *Himal* at least become a monthly in the near future?

*N. Bhurtel  
Malviya Nagar, Jaipur*

As long as writers have new information and original opinion to share, their place of origin is of no concern to *Himal*. Editors.

with a goat’s head.

Since we in Bhutan accept *Himal's* use of the yeti’s abominable footprint, please accept our use of Bhutan’s national animal for a public campaign.

*Tandi Dorji  
National Environmental Commission  
Thimphu*

Well we never. Now is the said biped satisfied with *Kuensel's* attempted portrait? Eds.



*Kuensel's takin.*



### Tree Loss No Joke

I do not think that I am quite the humourless dolt that Anmole Prasad's recent letter (Jul/Aug 1992) suggests. I admit I did not notice that the "advertisement" for a five-second buzz-saw was meant as a joke. Considering what has happened to the forests in Nepal in the 25 years I have been visiting the country, nothing concerning the loss of trees strikes me as very funny.

I am at a loss as to poor Prasad's reaction to my pleasure in the written English in the guidebook I quote. I do not mind when Nepalis make fun of my hopeless attempts to speak Nepali. I have lived in many countries and am used to people finding my assorted accents amusing. I am sure Prasad's English is faultless and I salute him for it.

As for *Himal*, I am a charter subscriber to the magazine and I have read and saved every issue. It is a wonderful magazine and I wish you every future success.

Jeremy Bernstein  
Fifth Avenue  
New York

### Anthropology and Rural Warfare

As the debate on applied and theoretical anthropology now enters the pages of *Himal*, (Sep/Oct and Nov/Dec 1992) I reflect back on the meetings of the (north) American Applied Anthropology Association, which I attended at the university campus in Merida, Mexico in 1977. I remember the ample feasting and speeches by such heavies as the well-fed Governor of Yucatan, who spoke of all the contributions applied anthropologists could make to the 'development' of the region. There were tours to the beautifully preserved ruins of Mayan civilisation and to living Mayan villages, in poverty and ruin, yet with people making immense effort in the face of gigantic odds. Most striking was the boycott of the meetings by the angry young students of the university.

The students, it seems, had doubts about exactly who applied anthropologists were serving: the people who had

generously shared their lives and cultural knowledge with the anthropologists for so many generations, or the oppressors who engage anthropologists for their projects in the people's neighbourhoods and villages? Perhaps Mexican students were overly sensitised, due to the situation of open war against villagers and slum dwellers and the terrible atrocities then being committed against them in the name of 'democracy', the United Fruit Company, five star hotels of the coast and so forth.

However, in Nepal too, the depopulation of a hundred thousand young girls and women from Nepali villages to Bombay and

Calcutta brothels stinks heavily to me of a war against the villagers. Romantised or not, the villages, people and environment are terribly embattled: with contractors, land speculators, industrialists, sex and other labour traffickers, bureaucrats, experts, agencies, NGOs, 'development' projects, the World and Asian Development Banks, and a

collusion of police and officials — if not helicopter gunships and M-16 rifles (nevertheless waiting in the wings). "Democracy" is being "defended" here too.

The point is that the debate over 'applying' knowledge, like the whole theoretical development of the anthropology of Nepal, is notable for the absence of the active participation of or benefit to the villagers and other oppressed groups. When people talk of applying anthropology, no one can tell me that the villagers are engaging the anthropologists, setting the agenda, being encouraged to enter into a two-way communication, or benefitting from the projects and all the research.

Knowledge is always engaged in practice: you cannot reflect upon an object or turn a woman into a sex worker without a subject, even if this subject's reflection upon itself comes in the form of the methodological sleight of hand known as 'scientific objectivity' or some other mystification. The question is not whether anthropology makes itself available, a

debate I have thought is contrived from the start; but to whom, how, and for what purpose. Are we on the side of the oppressed or against them?

Stephen L. Mikesell  
PO Box 380, Kathmandu

### The Dismantling of Kathmandu

Hridaya Bdr. Limbu's letter (Sep/Oct 1992) responding to Kamal P. Malla's article on "Bahuvada" contains the usual grouse against Newars. I cannot figure out why everybody sees Kathmandu Valley as a pie that was not cut up properly. The luxury and prosperity that 18 million Nepalis claim to have been cheated out of did not come down from heaven. It is the fruit of centuries of toil and sacrifice of the people of the Valley.

Somebody who takes a piece of wood and carves it into an artistic window would naturally be more productive than another who only knows how to chop it up for firewood. You cannot hold the Newars responsible for the misfortune of every ethnic group in the country.

The Newars who live up in Asan did not always live on the most valuable real estate in the whole of Nepal. They made it so by their hard work. Moreover, you do not go to Calcutta and say how come all the houses are owned by Bengalis. It was the skill and religious fervour of the Newars that produced the Valley's fine urban system that was totally in harmony with nature — and one that has proved too enticing to invaders throughout history. Kathmandu's beauty has been the cause of its own undoing.

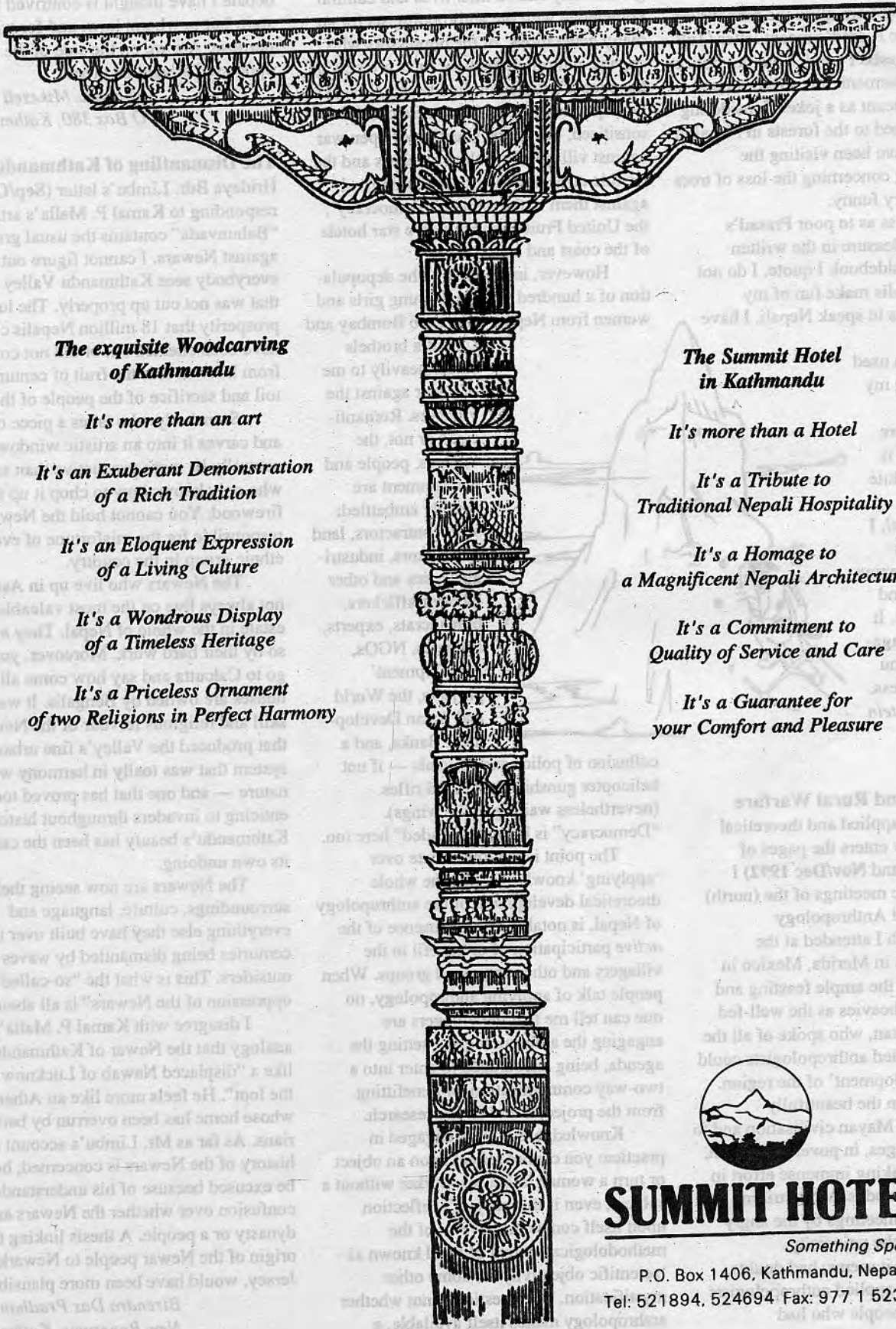
The Newars are now seeing their surroundings, culture, language and everything else they have built over the centuries being dismantled by waves of outsiders. This is what the "so-called oppression of the Newars" is all about.

I disagree with Kamal P. Malla's analogy that the Newar of Kathmandu feels like a "displaced Nawab of Lucknow after the loot". He feels more like an Athenian whose home has been overrun by barbarians. As far as Mr. Limbu's account of the history of the Newars is concerned, he must be excused because of his understandable confusion over whether the Newars are a dynasty or a people. A thesis linking the origin of the Newar people to Newark, New Jersey, would have been more plausible.

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# Diverted Wealth



A load of Chiraita (*Swertia chirata*) travels down to Hiley, East Nepal.

HERBS PRODUCTION & PROCESSING CO. LTD.

## The Trade in Himalayan Herbs

*Medicinal plants make up the largest economic resource being tapped across the Himalayan region, but mountain peasants get to see only a tiny fraction of the profits. It is a historically secretive trade and little is known about who collects, who trades, who profits and whether there is over-harvesting. Clearly, though, the economic future seems to lie not in timber, but in "minor forest products", including herbs.*

by Manisha Aryal

**I**n early January, while inaugurating a private herb processing and oil extraction factory at Jawabhari near Nepalganj in the western Tarai, Nepal's Minister of State for Forests and Soil Conservation Bir Mani Dhakal had this to say:

*...Our country is rich in plants of medicinal value...there is a huge demand for our herbs in India as well as European countries... It is not in our advantage to export our jadibuti in crude form; not only do we lose foreign exchange but also, the poor collector in the hills does not gain anything from this. I am extremely positive that this factory (Natural Product Industries) will encourage primary processing in Nepal, provide employment opportunities to Nepalis and play a role in helping to uplift the economic status of the villagers in mountain districts...*

Everything the Minister said was, of course, correct. The value of the trade in medicinal plants of the Himalaya has never been quantified but runs to tens of millions of dollars annually. Processed exports would definitely help the Himalayan region retain more of this wealth, which is presently diverted to business firms in Indian cities and pharmaceutical companies in the West. As far as equity is concerned, the mountain peasants who are the primary collectors are getting just the crumbs that fall from a sumptuous table.

The audience gathered at Jawabhari for the inauguration knew full well that Minister Dhakal's Office was powerless against the forces at play in the herbal trade, a business that thrives in secrecy even while the harvesting and transport of herbs is one of the most openly conducted economic activities in the Himalaya.

The region, from the rainforests of the



Brahmaputra Valley to the further reaches of Kashmir, is a treasure chest of medicinal plants, a cornucopia of herbs that are harvested off isolated mountain flanks to be carried across continents and oceans to make some of the world's foremost drugs to combat cancer, arrhythmia, diabetes, blood disorders and scores of other maladies.

The herbal trade has financial muscle. Corruption at all levels of authority has oiled the business for decades. As for Nepal, its porous border allows easy passage for floral contraband. Hundreds of varieties of herbs in all incarnations — leaves, roots, stems, extracts — continue their journeys from remote crags to staging posts in the hills and then to the Tarai. Through a time-tested network of legal and illegal routes, the bundles and sacks are heaved onto trucks, they hop on international flights, board trains and find berths in cargo vessels. Some are bought up by the ayurvedic giants in India like Baidyanath, Jhandu and Dabur, others are acquired by cosmetic firms abroad, while perhaps the highest value usage is by pharmaceutical multinationals and their research laboratories in Europe and America.

While the herbal commerce has never been busier, next to nothing is known about its particulars: what is the volume and breakdown of the trade; how many are involved from collection to trade to final processing; how equitable is the whole business? And so on.

### Plants of the East

From prehistoric times, humans have used the healing powers of plants to cure illness and disease. Some of the strengths of traditional medicine lay in the psychological succour brought by medicine men who mixed potions and powders, and chanted mysterious verses. A single plant could have different healing properties. Sometimes the medicine man would ask his patient to chew the leaf of a plant, at other times he would burn the root and ask his patient to inhale the smoke; or he might just leave the bark of the plant next to the patient to provide spiritual strength. But apart from myth, the vast pool of traditional knowledge about plants contained proven preparations that helped blunt the edge of sickness and pain. And it was to the mountains, with its abundance of wild flora, that the doctors of the East turned for their raw material. Even today, vaidyas, hakims, aamchis, tonsas and other traditional practitioners of medicine use age-old formulae to treat tens of millions of patients in the Subcontinent, China and Southeast Asia.

While the bulk of Nepal's herbal harvest flows down to the plains, in Kathmandu the local vaidyas continue to rely on traditional suppliers that bring selected substances from the surrounding hillsides. Elsewhere in the Himalaya, in Leh, Thimphu, Lhasa and Gangtok, and in practically every town and hamlet, medicine men continue to use traditional herbs for cure. It is in the plains, though, that traditional healing is a mega-business serviced by an army of vaidyas and hakims.

Today, the commercialisation of traditional medical knowledge is almost complete. In India alone, there are said to be 7000 licensed manufacturing units and more than 400,000 registered practitioners of traditional medicine. According to one conservative estimate, the value of annual



Herb traders from North Gorkha at Thahity, Kathmandu.

production of herbal medicine in India is more than IRs 8 billion. In 1990, the annual sales of Dabur India Ltd, the largest ayurvedic products company, was reported to be IRs. 1.5 billion, and, said one report, "...growing 25 percent every year, its turnover doubling every three years."

While traditional medicine relies primarily on formulae and preparations as handed down, Western pharmaceutical companies have the scientific ability to delve into the molecular structures of plant extracts, to conduct epidemiological studies, and to experiment. While Eastern medicine can at best guarantee that a certain ailment could be cured through a preparation of such and such plants, modern science is in a position to examine why this happens. For example, researchers may collect anecdotal traditional information on the use of a particular plant;

screening and research can show that the plant produces bitter toxins as defence against predators. These toxins, when used in milder concentrations, can have medicinal effects on humans. While in traditional medicine, such a discovery might result from scores of years of observation, in the science laboratory, under controlled conditions, the properties of plant extracts are more quickly known. This power of scientific probing and advanced observation has allowed allopathic drugs to expand the scope of herb-based healing far beyond that of traditional medicine.

For a while, it had seemed that the possibilities of synthesising (and manufacturing non-plant based chemicals) would significantly cut the demand for natural plants. While raw plant extracts had been used extensively for drugs till the 1940s, the rapid development of organic chemistry helped chemists unravel and isolate the chemical structure of compounds and to synthesise the actual substances in plant extracts which were responsible for medicinal action. These substances could then be produced independently, in the form of patented products, and a whole new industry was born. Commercial interests of pharmaceutical barons started to dominate the development of the pharmaceutical industry; plants became interesting only if the chemicals of medical value were cheaply extractable and easily synthesised.

In time, however, it became apparent that these laboratory-cloned wonder-chemicals had some drawbacks. Many micro-organisms, for example, became resistant to artificial drugs, and quite a few synthetic medicines had harmful side-effects. As a result, research on plant extracts once again gained momentum. By 1990, some 223 major companies



Hakims and vaidyas of Lucknow.





In the time that was, Shri Hanuman flew up to the Himalaya in search of Sanjeevani Buti for a grievously injured Laxman. Confused by the choices of herbs on offer, he brought down the whole hill of Dronachal. Modern-day hanumans use fax and telex to trade the Himalayan gene pool for hard currency.

worldwide (of which about half were in the United States) were reportedly screening plants for new leads; the figure had been zero in 1980.

Further advances in science and technology have helped to speed the research on plants. A molecule that used to take a decade to isolate can today be isolated in less than four weeks. This increased screening capacity of laboratories, combined with additional demand for aggressively marketed herbal cosmetics, has meant that the non-traditional demand for plant products will continue to rise in the years ahead.

According to a recent report in *Newsweek*, pharmaceutical companies such as Merck & Company are "feeding labs as many species as possible, often regardless of known medical uses, and mass screening them for any possible biological activity." Unbeknownst to the people of the Himalaya, at this very moment, multinational interests are screening plants from the region, searching for molecular compounds that can be utilised for healing and for profit.

The National Cancer Institute in the United States is said to analyse 4500 plants a year from 25 countries, including bacteria, fungi and marine organisms. Promising plants are farmed out to drug companies. The NCI is

presently studying 130 plants in detail, yet only one in 10,000 samples may yield a drug. Development of the drug can take ten or more years and research laboratories require continuous supply.

Taxol, an extract from the bark of the Pacific Yew (*Taxus brevifolia*) is currently being screened for ovarian cancer-combatting capacity. The short supply of *Taxus brevifolia*, however, is leading scientists to turn to the needles of *Taxus baccata* plant. The demand for *Taxus baccata*, known to Nepalis as *Talis Patra*, has led to indiscriminate harvesting in Nepal, Uttarakhand and Himachal.

The Department of Forest in Kathmandu has two proposals before it, for collection of *Taxus baccata* leaves. Dabur Nepal, a branch of Dabur India Limited wants to harvest 1500 metric tons per year, to process and sell the extract to Europe and United States. INDENA SPA, an Italian firm, however, proposes to collect "...300 tons of *Taxus baccata* from the forests of Nepal in an environmental friendly way. This quantity is to be shipped to Italy for testing purposes (to establish best collecting methods, regions and seasons) as

well as to start up the production..."

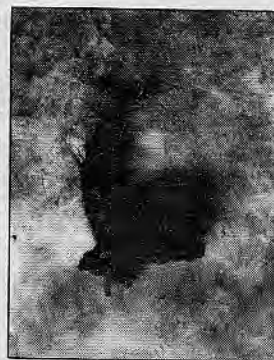
It has been reported that only one percent of the world's known plants have been screened by Western pharmaceutical labs thus far and the figure for Himalayan plants is probably about the same. The rush to unearth the secrets of Himalayan herbs will continue.

### Jatamasi

Less than ten minutes' drive away from where Minister Dhakal stood making his speech in Jawabhari, only a week earlier a local trader's

godown had been raided by the police to reveal seven tones of *Nardostachys jatamansi*. This valuable herb, known as *Bhutle* in the hills (for its furriness), *Baalchad* in Tarai, and *Jatamasi* across the border in India, grows between 3500m and 5000m in the middle hills of West Nepal and Uttarakhand. *Jatamasi*'s roots yield a high-value essential oil, used both in ayurvedic and allopathic preparations (as tonic, antiseptic, sedative, antidote, aromatic, and for epilepsy, hysteria, and intestinal colic).

More than 25 species of plants are traded



*Jatamasi*



# Old Genes and New Generations

## Herbs, Himalaya and Biodiversity

by Jayanta Bandyopadhyay

Ever since life began on Earth, one thing that has been most intrinsic to it has been the growth of biodiversity in plants, animals and micro-organisms. The question of mutation, evolution and adaptation of gene varieties has constituted the exclusive domain of millions of years of ongoing experimentation, and one of the most productive laboratories has been the Himalaya.

In this experimentation there are no donors, no multinational sponsors and no directors of research. And yet it has yielded tens of millions of varieties of species of living organism. With the entry of the human race into the picture, human economic activities led to a considerable loss of the world's total biodiversity. Over the last half-century, human scientific activity has created a parallel laboratory to undertake genetic engineering — which makes it possible to transfer genes artificially between species, create new species of plants, animals or micro-organisms. This laboratory does have donors, multinationals and directors of research who have access to and claims over the new gene varieties through what has come to be known as Intellectual Property Rights (IPR).

One of the most remarkable uses of plant and animal-based biodiversity has been in medicine. The Ayurvedic school of medicine uses about 1400 medicinal plants, mostly from Himalayan forests and meadows. More than 5100 species of plants are used in the Chinese medical system. Modern science and technology has also depended upon this bounty of nature and "one-fourth of all prescriptions dispensed in the USA contain active ingredients from plants and 3000 antibiotics are derived from micro-organisms." All the twenty best-selling drugs in the United States contain compounds extracted from plants, microbes and animals.

The combined sale of these, according to an estimate, is in the order of US \$ 10 billion. The potential of the use of biodiversity in world health is clear from the fact that 75 percent of the world population still depends on natural biodiversity for health care through indigenous systems of medicine. Himalayan medicinal plants play a central role in global health care not only by providing the resource base for Ayurvedic, Tibetan and Chinese medicines, but also through the widespread export of natural plant materials from the nooks and crannies of this great mountain system to the industrially advanced countries. The growing demand and profit-maximising ways of exploitation has pushed many important medicinal plants of the Himalaya to the brink of extinction.

The Convention on Biodiversity, signed in Rio during the Earth Summit by about 150 heads of government (excluding US President George Bush) is a major global instrument to ensure future use, preservation and conservation of the rich gift of biodiversity through human efforts. The Convention has direct implications for Himalayan medicinal plants and their uses in the global pharmaceutical industry.

It is because of the extremely quick changes in the micro-



climate due to altitude and aspect that the Himalaya has provided the ecological niche for such rich biodiversity. The spatial closeness of diverse micro-climatic patterns has led to quicker diversification in the gene pool. And biodiversity has the prospects of providing the single resource through which global food and drug production can be largely dominated. Technologies like the recombinant DNA method are mainly available to the few countries of the North identified as the G-7. The most important raw materials on which these technologies can be profitably applied are mostly available in the G-77 states of the South, including all Himalayan countries.

At the centre of the biodiversity negotiations is the question of how much of modern technology will be shared between the G-7 and the G-77, and how much of the gene pool will the G-7 be given access to by the countries of the South. The inability of President Bush to sign the Biodiversity Convention cannot be delinked from the financial interests of the American pharmaceutical industry.

While the North was hesitant to share the technologies in its hands, the South, led by India and China, successfully negotiated to ensure national rights over biodiversity. The North tried its best to get biodiversity declared as a global heritage, while the South bargained for higher control over any genetic engineering product made by the North with the help of the gene pool of the South. However, the South has a problem. In order to get full advantage of the Biodiversity Convention, it must have full knowledge of the gene pool and protect it from illegal extraction. The increased Northern interest in research on biodiversity and funding of protected areas in the South cannot be taken merely as an expression of altruism.

There is 'gold' in the thick undergrowth of the natural forests of the Himalaya. The Convention gives exclusive rights to the regional countries for the use of this 'gold'. There is a chance that research and action on biodiversity will be reexamined, especially because a great deal of interest is rooted in the industrially advanced countries. The US, not having signed the treaty but having sponsored a great deal of research and protection of biodiversity, is obviously at the centre of public criticism. It is now time that the Biodiversity Convention be used as a guide to examine and monitor the conservation and research projects on biodiversity of the South which are being supported by the funds of the North. This would go a long way to protect the poor farmers and villagers of the Himalayan region from being robbed of their great gene bank.

J. Bandyopadhyay is a mountain ecologist.



in high volume. Among these are five rare plants, jatamasi among them, whose collection is not banned, but which may not be exported without processing. The other four plants are *Sugandhakokila* (*Cinnamomum glaucescens*), *Sugandhawaal* (*Valeriana wallichii*), *Sarpagandha* (*Rauwolfia serpentina*), *Jhyau* (tree moss, *Parmelia nepalensis*) and the asphalt *Shilajeet*. Strictly speaking, shilajeet is not a plant but is regarded as such by traders and forestry department alike. They are in high demand for their properties, among others, as sedatives, expectorants, and laxatives. Even collection, however, has been banned in Nepal for two plants — *Paanch aunley* (*Orchis latifolia* linn) and *Yarsa gumba* (*Cordyceps sinensis*), which are considered aphrodisiacs and are in high demand in West Asia. Last year, the Ministry of Forests banned the collection of *Taxus baccata*, after news arrived of its indiscriminate exploitation.

Collection of jatamasi in the Jumla hills of far-west Nepal is a time-tested business. The collecting agent deposits a nominal amount (NRs 7 per kilogram) as royalty with the District Forest Office, a much larger amount under the table, and gets a *purji* (permit). He then employs local villagers to start digging and pays them NRs 4 to 10 per kilogram of root. Once the plants are brought to the airport at Khalanga, Jumla's headquarters, there is another round of largesse distribution. Besides the air freight that has to be paid, the agent coughs up NRs 15 gratuity per kg, which is shared by the airport staff and pilots.

Everyone knows that *jadibuti* (herbs) spell big bucks, the *only* export of value from these hills of the Karnali region, and no one is about to forego his share. Traders say that even the loader who operates the weighing machine will refuse to move a muscle unless he is handed a hundred rupee note. The standard refrain is, "We just want a share in your profits. *Jadibutis* are contraband."

Pilots of Royal Nepal are known to fly up from Nepalganj with empty Twin Otters when they hear that a load of herbs is waiting at Jumla. Since autumn 1992, the entry of private airlines has significantly increased the volume of herb extraction from Far Western forests. The new carrier, Nepal Airways, in particular, does brisk trade with its Chinese-built Herbin "flying jeeps". So important is the load factor, in fact, that according to one recent report, passengers are being ticketed according to their weight to make space for *jadibuti* in the cargo hold. Inquiries at the Ministry of Forests indicated that authorities have yet to look at the question of what increased air access might be doing to the sustainable exploitation of the herbal wealth of the hills.

Due to all the cost add-ons, by the time a jatamasi consignment emerges from Nepalganj's Ranjha airport, its per kg value is up to about NRs 65. Now, the Government's Herbs Production and Processing Company pays only NRs 67 per kg of jatamasi, with the trader having to bear the cost of transportation to the factory in Kathmandu. The newly opened plant in Jawabhari will pay no more than NRs 60 per kg. No wonder, then, that practically all the hundreds of tons of jatamasi that are harvested every year, as well as every other herb that is collected in quantity, hops the frontier to the more lucrative markets of India.

Just across the border, the going rate for jatamasi is nearly 20 percent higher than in Nepalganj. In the Khari Bauli trading mart in Old Delhi, the price of a kilo of jatamasi hovers around IRs 85. From less than 10 Nepali Rupees per kg in village Nepal to 85 Indian Rupees (equivalent to NRs 140) in the Indian metropolis, the price of jatamasi jumps 14-fold.

Beyond the entrepots of India, it is no longer possible to monitor the price that jatamasi commands. For certain, it rises even more dramatically than in the Jumla-to-Delhi stretch, as consignments pass through the hands of merchants in Hong Kong, Amsterdam, Hamburg or London (the main collection points for Himalayan herbs internationally). And, of course, value is added manifold when the *jadibuti* is processed by companies and brought to market as drugs, cosmetic products, or spurious but expensive elixirs.

## The Jadibuti Trail

Early Spring, around this time of the year, is when *jadibuti* across the Himalayan range begin to move down the mountains, on porter-back, mule trains, STOL aircraft and trucks. To feed the voracious appetites of pharmaceutical and cosmetic enterprises that are continents away, the villagers of Jumla start to dig into the thawing ground for roots, collect seeds, and cut whole trees for the moss on their trunks.

Heightening demand or a slump due to a glut at some point along the market chain is immediately passed on up the line to the collectors in Jumla. The price of banned items is extra-sensitive, and rises as one travels closer to Jumla's airstrip. Villagers of the remoter hamlets, ignorant of the value of their collections, trade in their stocks for food and calico at small wayside shops. The shopkeepers lend money to villagers in times of need and exploit their labour during the collecting season.

These days, airstrips in all the Nepali far-West — Humla, Dolpa, Bajhang, Doti and Jumla — serve as parts of the herbal lifeline. Large stacks of herbs can be seen drying in the sun on the runaway, waiting for the plane ride to Nepalganj or Dhangadi.

All across the Himalaya, the *jadibuti* trade runs north-south. Just as herbs from far West head down to Surkhet and Nepalganj, in central Nepal, material from Mustang is gathered at Pokhara and departs via Butwal and Bhairawa. The riches of the Langtang National Park and adjoining areas are gathered



*Herbs deplane at Nepalganj.*



## The Government Cannot Promote Herbs

There are a string of offices under the Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation to look after medicinal plants: a botanical garden, a herbarium and botanical laboratory, a laboratory for drug research, herbal farms in several parts of the country and a Herbs Production and Processing Company. In theory, everything exists to make sure that medicinal plants are well researched and their full potential utilised. The National Herbarium and Botanical Laboratory would conduct ethno-botanic studies, and pass on promising plants to be studied in the Royal Drug Research Laboratory. If the plant revealed promising compounds, large-scale processing (extraction of essential oil, etc) could be done at the Herbs Production and Processing Company. The oils and compounds could then be sent over to the Government's Royal Drugs Limited to be made into quality drugs. Cultivation of these medicinal plants would be done in Herbal Farms.

But the Government is not even utilising its existing institutional setup. The Royal Drugs Limited is limited to being an allopathic outfit. The ethno-botanic studies conducted at the Herbarium are limited to collecting plants and sticking them in paper. The drug research laboratory operates with a meagre budget, uses outdated equipment, and takes ages to analyse even the primary chemical constituents in a plant. The herbal farms exist in quiet desolation. The Processing Company struggles on but from its production you would not know that this plant has a near-monopoly on herbs that are legally required to be processed within Nepal. It would rather let the machines rust than rent them out to interested businesses; and access to their zealously protected list of buyers is denied even to merchants interested in establishing small processing factories. Indian traders, certainly, are not going to wait around for the government-run factory to deliver on an order. Says Praveen Agarwal, a New Delhi importer of Nepali herbal plants, "They are just not able to keep up with the market. You place an order and the thing does not arrive for four months. Who has that kind of time?"

So much for the Nepali Government's efforts at promoting Himalayan herbs.

in Trisuli and are sent down to Birgunj, as are the herbs from Tibet which also make their way down via Trisuli (from Keyrung), or Khasa and Kathmandu. Another route for Tibetan herbs is down from north Gorkha through the Pokhara-Mugling highway to Narayanghat. The small settlement of Hiley, above Dhankuta, has developed over the last decade as the collection point for the hills of East Nepal.

All across the rest of the mountains, in similar fashion, the herbal conveyer belt continues to disgorge floral wealth. In Nepal's Tarai, the in-transit herbs are common sights along the highways and all the border roadheads, from Kakarbhitta in the east to Tanakpur in the west. Truckfuls of herbs and spices can be seen going hither and yon, being

loaded, unloaded, waiting for customs clearance, and being whisked across. Once the jadibuti leave the Nepali borders, it is impossible to trace their origin. They ride the Grand Trunk Road eastward to Calcutta or westwards to Delhi. Besides these, Kanpur, Lucknow and Bombay are the other major centres for trans-shipment.

### Living the Lie

Regulations within Nepal have it that the harvested jadibuti may be transported to anywhere within the country, including to any point on the long and porous southern border. The situation is absurd. Everyone in Government and in the business understands that all but a tiny fraction of Nepali herbs lands up in Indian marts. Structures for spiriting the floral contraband have evolved and institutionalised over decades. There are layers of middlemen involved, and the herbs from Western Nepal that end up in Old Delhi will have changed hands seven or eight times.

What is remarkable about the so-called smuggling of herbal wealth ("so-called" because it is so commonplace) is that nobody seems to be too bothered. Government officials, whose responsibility it is to ensure that this resource is exploited for the benefit of the Himalayan population, are able to take the easy way out by pointing out that there is a ban on collecting this, a ban on exporting that, and so on. But these officials

know full well that the ban and restrictions are ineffective. Besides, Nepal does not have the facilities to process the massive amounts of herbs that are traded — before the newly open Natural Product Industries came along, the only processing plant was the Government-run Herbs Production and Processing Company in Kathmandu.

A stockist in Nepalganj had just completed the sale to an Indian merchant of six tons of jatamasi, four tons of jhyau, and two tons of shilajeet. This was his normal monthly transaction volume, he said, and he was waiting for a 'carrier' to send his herbs through. Three carriers are said to operate in the town, who, for six percent of total consignment-value, will guarantee passage over the border. These are specialised navigators who know the border bureaucracy well and maintain extensive contacts with customs and police officials on both sides.

Even when an occasional raid is conducted (either because a minister is visiting, or because a rival trader instigates the police), the trader merely has to bide his time before buying his way out. The trader whose godown was raided in Krishnanagar got off easily enough. He was asked to sign a piece of paper stating that he would sell his jatamasi only to Nepali citizens or to Nepali companies (the two factories mentioned above). For his emancipation, according to reliable information, the trader paid NRs 30,000 to the Chief District Officer, NRs 12,000 to the police, and NRs 10,000 to the Customs Officer. Most likely, the herbs have already crossed the border.

"It all goes out openly," concedes a trader in Krishnanagar. "Customs people pocket the *gaidas* and *hattis* (Nepali hundred- and thousand-rupee notes) and look the other way as the trucks pass."

About six months ago, 1875 kg of shilajeet, valued at IRs 55,000 went out by Nepalganj border, with the knowledge of the



Krishnanagar border: a heave, and three seconds to India.



Customs Officials. The trader had a permit from Department of Mines and Geological Survey to export 25 tons of "Carbolic Acid Stone". Again on 3 February, another consignment of shilajeet went out by Nepalganj, this time as "Black Stone", exported by the same trader.

Contraband herbs might also get past customs through no malfeasance on the part of the border officials. Jadibuti are hidden under bags of spices as trucks cross the border. The Government has "jadibuti checkposts" on the main roadheads, but often these are manned by individuals who cannot distinguish between banned and non-banned items.

Sukbir Majhi is in charge of the Jadibuti Checkpost, a makeshift straw and bamboo structure, in Chandrauta, on the way to Krishnanagar near Nepalganj. He says that traders tend to load the upper half of trucks with dried ginger and the lower half with contraband herbs. Majhi comes from Sindhuli in East Nepal, and says he has received no training in identifying herbs.

In Krishnanagar, smuggling is easy. One heave, and the gunny sack and jadibuti arrive in India within three seconds. Elsewhere, other methods are used. The Mahakali and Karnali rivers are said to be regular 'carriers'. Jute bags are thrown into the river at night and the current carries them through, to be fished out in India without customs formalities.

### Khari Bauli

Khari Bauli, a locality deep inside the walled city and adjacent to the Old Delhi Railway Station, developed over the last two centuries as a trading centre for Himalayan herbs. Such herbal marts exist in other Indian towns as well.

Khari Bauli hosts two types of merchants, wholesale businessmen and commission agents. The former buy large quantities and stock them in their godowns to supply on demand. The commission agents, on the other hand, take jadibuti from the stockists in, say, Nepalganj, and look for potential buyers. On an average, the agents keep six to eight percent of the sale proceeds as their cut.

The narrow galleys and *katargas* of Khari Bauli present an improbable sight of immaculately dressed suit-tie-and-briefcase international speculators rubbing shoulders with hakims and vaidyas who have come in search of choice herbs and mixtures. Occasionally, a peasant with a bedraggled Nepali cap can be spotted trying earnestly to make a deal. Each shop permanently employs



Aushadhalaya billboards beckon.

three or four labourers, who transport gunny sacks full of jadibuti from one bhandar to another, off push-carts, and up onto trucks. The air is heavy with the assorted aromas of dried herbs.

Three categories of high-volume buyers come to Khari Bauli: wholesale merchants from all over India who serve commercial ayurvedic or unani *aushadhalayas* and hundreds and thousands of vaidyas and hakims all over; agents of big Indian cosmetic and pharmaceutical companies; and representatives of Indian export houses that sell to the West.

Herbs, either banned or legal, can be bought over the counter at Khari Bauli. Paanch aunley from Nepal ("*salaam panja*" in Hindi), so named because it looks like an open palm, sells in Katara Tambaku for IRs 650 per kg. One merchant assured this writer that he could supply five quintals of "genuine Nepali paanch aunley" from stock. A larger order would require two or three days, for his agents in Nepalganj and Dhangadi to send a truck over. If they didn't have it, he could always ask his

brother in Kanpur to send word to his agent in Bhutan for some more.

Subas Chandra Kasera of Baburam Harichand Commission Agents insists that he gets all his herbs from Nepal, but legally. "Only the people who live in Ghositole (in Nepalganj) are involved in smuggling," he says confidentially. Meanwhile, how does he get his stocks? "We get all our herbs from 'Mirindawale' Madanlal Chirinjibilal [big industrialists in Nepal who also produce the soft drink Mirinda]; we don't trust anybody else." When asked to identify his Nepali wares, Kasera points to sackfuls of jatamasi, sugandhwaal and sugandhakokila stacked along the side of his shop. All of which are banned in Nepal.

While the centuries-old trade was mainly to feed the demand for traditional medicine, over the decades of the 20th century, the traders of Khari Bauli have seen the vast Western market open up. While it is impossible to quantify the volume, it is safe to say that at least half of the income from the herbal trade in India is from Western pharmaceutical companies and laboratories. The Western market is lucrative, not only because it pays in hard currency but also because the Indian Government does not tax businessmen on export profits. But to maintain a West-oriented business is difficult turf, say the businessmen of Khari Bauli. The West-oriented businesses sport air-conditioned offices, subscribe to Western trade journals such as the *Chemical Marketing Reporter*, keep track of world market trends, and produce glossy brochures of their wares.

Indo-World Trading Corporation, one such company, in its brochure boasts of "well-



Pharmaceutical company representative inspects lot, Khari Bauli.

established and reliable arrangements for cultivation, collection and supply of all botanicals growing in India, Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim." The brochure gives a list of products available and adds, "Of course, there are many other products within our reach and capacity..."

The family of Praveen Agrawal has been in the jadibuti business for generations and has offices in Galli Batasha. To reach Agarwal's firm, International Traders, one passes through over-crowded lanes full of gunny-sack heaving humanity. Up a dark and narrow staircase and one enters a climate-controlled office where the cacophony of the marketplace is suddenly relegated to the background. Agarwal's office is equipped with four different telephone lines, a desk-top computer and photocopy and telex machines. From this location, Agarwal exports Himalayan herbs to importers all over the world. He regularly hops to West Asia, where there has historically been a large demand, while his brother shuttles between a branch office in Calcutta, where herbs from the Eastern Himalaya collect, and Japan and the West.

According to another trader, Western buyers are very demanding. "It takes a long time to build credibility. If the herbs do not meet the importers' standards, they are returned. We have to guarantee supply volume and quality, which means that there is constant

pressure. They demand Latin names of the plants, and sometimes the exact percentage of essential oil content of herb. If a buyer's lab decides that a sample is not good enough, the entire lot may be rejected."

With such sophisticated market demands, the trade from Nepal itself to the West is negligible. Kathmandu businessmen who fancy exporting herbs tend to contact the Government's Trade Promotion Centre, which is overburdened with promoting carpets, woodwork and brassworks. The Centre refers interested exporters to traders with links in India, which then leads straight into the underground market.

### Impossible Quantification

Once herbs travel across the border, the herbs lose their Nepali 'identity' and become India-sourced. Says Agrawal, "When the jadibutis are exported from India, they all go out as Indian jadibutis." The importing countries demand certificate of origin, which are easily made in India as most Nepali herbs are also found in the adjacent Indian Himalaya, such as in Uttarakhand.

No one, including individuals in the business, has an inkling of the size of the herbal trade. For commerce that has flourished since ancient times, and one in which hundreds and thousands are today engaged for profit or

survival, there is *no* source which describes the market holistically.

To begin with, in given trade statistics, which are themselves suspect, it is difficult to differentiate between a spice and a herb, as the distinction is often blurred. And even what little transaction data is available on the movement is of little use because consignments are invariably under-invoiced.

As far as the volume of exports from Nepal (almost exclusively to India) is concerned, the figures mean nothing because of smuggling. The ledgers of the border customs posts was dismissed by one Customs Department official as "not a reliable source of information". Besides, all items on which there is a 0.5 percent service charge (and this includes the allowable herbs and spices) are grouped under one generic category. In the customs post ledger at Pashupatinagar in Nepal's eastern hills, there is *no* record of any herb having been exported over the past year.

An ex-District Forest Officer cautions against believing *any* figure made available in Nepal. He describes how a collector might actually collect 50 tons of a herb, but the Forest Department official might register only 30 tons, pocketing the royalty for the 20 extra tons. The trader then takes the lot through customs, bribing the customs people to charge him for only 15 tons, which is what

## Who Takes All That Chiraita ?

**S**o little information is available about the international trade in Himalayan herbs once they leave Indian shores, that any study, however inadequate, is still better than nothing at all. Some information can be gleaned from a 1982 study prepared by The International Trade Centre (UNCTAD/GATT) and entitled *Markets for Selected Medicinal Plants and Their Derivatives*.

The report estimates that the total import in 1980 of "vegetable materials used in pharmacy" by the European Economic Community was 80,738 tons. Topping the list of exporters was India, with 10,055 tons of plants and 14 tons of vegetable alkaloids and their derivatives. India's export of "crude plant materials" to West Germany alone was 6929 tons. Plant and plant parts imported from India by Switzerland for perfumery and pharmacy was 465 tons in 1981. (A significant proportion of exports which are said to be from India have their origins in the Himalayan region, including Nepal, Bhutan and Tibet).

The report cautions the reader that "European trade may be very unrepresentative of the trade in other areas." Take for example the plant known in Nepal as *chiraita* (*Swertia chirata*), which is indigenous to the Himalaya. It is estimated that some 150 tons of chiraita passes through Calcutta every year, but less than one ton was imported by West Germany and the United Kingdom, two major importing countries. So where does the rest of the chiraita end up? No one knows.

The study refers to the extreme difficulty of collecting any kind of data on the herbal trade and warns researchers not to be misled by

what trade statistics exist. "While hundreds of medicinal plants are items of commerce, details of the volumes traded in most of these will only be obtained from individual traders and users; details of trade in the majority of individual medicinal plants do not appear in any published statistics. The same applies to many plants traded in developing countries and any local production or export figures that do exist rarely give a full picture."

A draft report, *Importation of Medicinal Plants And Plant Extracts Into Europe: Conservation And Recommendation For Action* prepared by Anna Lewington for Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF/International) in May 1992, found that in the absence of detailed official statistics, interviews with traders was "the best avenue to pursue".

Lewington writes that "...the complexity of trading network and levels of secrecy (or confidentiality) were such that very little can be ascertained...". The study found "a general reticence and nervousness amongst those dealing in any way with medicinal plants (either using, buying or brokering) to reveal the names, numbers and quantities of those involved, and most significantly the precise source of these plants." Lewington, too, found that trade catalogues were of little use.

Lewington ends her study with the following: "The strength of Western economies has largely depended on the successive plundering of natural resources, often plants from other people's lands..."





Villagers from Jumla huddle in Nepalganj's Ghositole, waiting for a good price on their loads.

departmental data will show.

When a sale agreement is clinched in Khari Bauli, customarily only 25 percent of the transaction is registered, so that there is less income tax to pay; exporters cooperate with the local merchants, and pay cash. The exporters of plants or crude drugs, meanwhile, do not have to pay tax on export profits. While this policy was introduced to encourage exports from India, it also means that there is no obligation for exporters to share any information with the authorities and so, again, there is no knowledge of how large the export market really is.

H.C. Jain, a Delhi-based government scientist who helps publish the *Wealth of India* series, which provides detailed information on the medicinal plants of the Subcontinent, says, "Commercial people come here all the time, looking for scientific details on plants; but nobody wants to reveal their trade information — what they deal in, how much profit is made, etc."

Ashok Kumar, of Traffic India, a watchdog organisation that monitors illegal trade in flora and fauna, refers the neglect of herbal plants with reference to the "pussycat principle" — there is always more study of exotic plants and animals. Public imagination is inspired by exotic species such as snow leopards, rhinoceri and orchids — not 'run-of-the-mill' herbal plants.

One rare study on trade in medicinal plants and their development potential was by M.B. Burbage for the Tropical Products Institute. The study, which was done 12 years

ago, concentrated on the Kosi Hill Development Area of East Nepal and has not been followed up. A 1972 study done for the Indian Government by Ayurved Ramesh Bedi, entitled *The Herbal Wealth of Bhutan*, named 26 drugs that could be exported from Bhutan to the Indian market. Also identified were around 58 Indian herb dealers who were interested in Bhutanese herbs. Today, Bedi is retired and lives in Delhi. To his knowledge, his report, too, has not been followed up.

It is possible to err on the side of exaggeration when trying to quantify the volume of herbal trade. Perhaps the bounty just does not exist to the extent presumed, caution some. The Economic Counsellor Shanta Ram Bhandari, who handles Nepal-India trade in the Royal Nepali Embassy in New Delhi, too, is doubtful that the market is as large as some make it out to be. Says Bhandari: "In my dealings with businessmen in Nepal, when I was with the Trade Promotion Centre, and in my four years here in Delhi, I have not come across many people looking for information on Nepali herbs. I would tend to believe that the trade is not all that large."

Given the illegal status of the jadibuti trade, however, it is perhaps not surprising that traders would hesitate to visit the Nepali Embassy, or go through other official channels. For them, the less the world knows, the longer an oligopoly trade of high profit would remain secure.

The paucity of data is therefore complete: from the amounts collected, to the volume traded, and the value of the industry and

exports. This lack of information does not help researchers to analyse, government to make policy, nor activists to act.

### Time to Wake Up

Government authorities have been able to hide behind the fig leaf of "no information" and let the business of herbs continue in an exploitative, clandestine way. But now, to ensure sustainable yield and more equitable distribution of profits, they must act.

There is presently a spurt in the exploitation of the herbal wealth of the Himalaya. Western pharmaceuticals are returning to conduct aggressive laboratory research on Himalayan herbs, and the high-volume demands of the allopathic industry for raw material will continue to rise. There has also been a dramatic rise in the Subcontinental demand for traditional herbal medications as well as new-fangled products targeted to India's growing middle class.

Acceleration in herbal exploitation is also evident from reports of indiscriminate exploitation all over, such as in the Himachal Pradesh forests, which are said to be the source of 80 percent of all ayurvedic, 46 percent of unani, and 33 percent of allopathic drugs produced in India. According to *India Today* fortnightly, some 32 species of medicinal plants are endangered in Himachal, including Belladonna dioscorea, a wild plant used in steroidal drugs. After 15 years of unchecked exploitation, this plant no longer grows in harvestable quantities. Sarpagandha, which grew in abundance on the Paonta range, is

similarly "extinct in Himachal", while the discovery of Taxol meant that the plant *Taxus baccata* is in sharp decline in the state's Mandi and Sirmaur districts.

From Himachal Pradesh eastward all the way to Arunachal Pradesh, unsustainable exploitation has picked up. *Mishmi tita* (*Coptis tita*, Ranunculaceae) is a bitter root that grows between 2000 m and 3000 m in the Dibang and Lohit Districts of Arunachal. Over the last decade, the locals have been zealously uprooting the species, which sells at IRs 1000 per kg locally and about IRs 1700 per kg in Dibrugarh, from where it is sent to Calcutta for export to Japan and Switzerland. Mishmi tribals have traditionally used the plant for fever and stomach troubles (it contains the alkaloid berberine), but today they have shifted to opium as substitute drug. All the tita is exported.

Such are the trends elsewhere in the Himalaya as well. And yet, "minor forest products", including medicinal plants continue to receive contemptuous treatment in the Forestry Master Plans. The governmental agencies, be it in Himachal, Uttarakhand, Nepal, or the Indian Northeast, are not geared in mindset or facilities to deal with the surge of demand that is leading to accelerating and indiscriminate exploitation.

A glaring example of this neglect of medicinal plants in forestry's scheme of things is to be found in the Indian Government's forestry regulations. While the Forest Policy asks that minor forest products "be made available through conveniently located depots at reasonable prices", the Forestry Conservation Act actually prohibits plantation of medicinal plants on forest lands. One gives, and the other takes away.

Herbal myopia is fully entrenched in Nepal's forestry sector as well. Concedes Minister for Forests Dhakal, "As far as minor forest products are concerned, we still need to figure out what they are, which have economic potential, and how they can be exploited so that the villagers benefit." But officials in Dhakal's Ministry confess that they really do not know where to start looking for solutions. On the whole, the focus of policy-makers and park rangers alike is still on timber, and this is a hurdle if the herbal plant is to be treated as a major economic resource.

Only recently, due to better communications and exposure, are some villagers beginning to understand the possibilities of the trade, and no thanks to the authorities. Some, like Shri Bahadur Hamal of Bahrekote village in Jumla, have even started to take things into their own hands. Hamal had just flown down with his first planeload of jatamasi in January, and was trying to find a

buyer/stockist in Nepalganj. Because of the recent raids in the Krishnanagar and Nepalganj godowns, however, the price of jatamasi had hit bottom and Hamal was in a fix.

### Activist Agenda

What Hamal and his peasant counterparts in the Himalayan chain require now is help to understand and take advantage of a trade that has long fed and clothed plains-folk.

Medicinal plants should receive major attention of NGOs because they constitute the major source of mountain income. While NGOs have been casting about for alternative sources of income for Nepali hill peasants, for example, they have ironically neglected a resource that is already delivering vast earnings — for others. Donor-aided projects have been into "integrated hill development" for decades, but other than a couple of studies that have been funded, there has been no programme to divert income from middlemen to villagers. And, most importantly, there have been precious few activist efforts to alert villagers of the wealth that passes through their fingers every day.

This, certainly, is a politically volatile arena, and one can understand the reluctance of many development agencies with lightweight agendas to jump in to change given economic relations. Any attempt to snatch the purse away from entrenched interests that have never before been confronted, requires political gumption. This was evident a few years ago when some development workers tried to organise the peasants of Gorkha so that they could bypass local middlemen and get fair prices. The reaction to this organisational activity was vicious and it drew fire, perhaps expectedly, from the highest quarters in Kathmandu's political circles. The experiences of Chipko activists in their efforts to ban plains-based lumber merchants from invading the hills of Kumaun and Garhwal are perhaps the best signposts of the hurdles that activists will face when they finally decide to take on the herbal interests on behalf of mountain peasants.

With Government forever acting like a lame duck, activism is the only way that villagers will be sensitised. Mountain inhabitants need to be told not only the value of the roots, leaves and stems they collect, but also how to negotiate, and about collective bargaining. Depending upon region and plants collected, they need to be made aware of preservation techniques, primary processing, and of the little tricks that the agents use to cheat them.

There is indeed much that activists can do and Nepali NGOs are just awakening to the

enormous tasks ahead. In the hills of Kumaun, Garhwal and Himachal, with their longer tradition of social action, voluntary organisations are already into medicinal plants. In Himachal, for example, where there is reckless exploitation of the herb *Termentilla chebula*, the Society for Protection of Wasteland Development is working with a local NGO, Environmental Action Research, to sensitise local *mahila mandals* (women's groups) to the importance of sustainable harvesting of the herb and how to get remunerative prices. Past experience has shown that it is these women's groups that are most effective in confronting the contractors with information and organisation.

Elsewhere, NGOs of Uttarakhand are well into spreading public information about the value and use of medicinal plants. One recent publication, of Uttarakhand Seva Nidhi written in simple Hindi, succinctly describes Kumaon's medicinal plants, giving both their identification and uses. Herbal cooperatives and marketing societies have also been established in the Uttar Pradesh hills, under the aegis of the U. P. Cooperative Department. Unfortunately, the responsibility of sale, purchase and collection of medicinal herbs has been given to the Government-run Kumaon Bikas Mandal Nigam, which has become more concerned about royalties than the conservation and development of Uttarakhand's forest wealth.

Even though the herbal market is of interest to all the states of the Himalayan rimland and Tibet, there is negligible contact amongst the Himalayan states of India, and none whatsoever between the different national governments of the region. At the very least, some information-sharing and coordination at the regional level, including among active NGOs, would be useful. In particular, because Far West Nepal and the adjacent Uttarakhand areas have so much in common in terms of medicinal plants, some cross-border interaction among officials, NGOs, activists and peasant groups is imperative. For the moment, the vested interests of the herb trade continue to set the agenda. △





# Iodised Salt for the Nation's Health

Goitre and cretinism have always been a curse on the Himalayan region, but only recently have we to do anything about it.

It is a curse that came guaranteed with geography. Normally, humans get their supply of iodine, which is an essential 'micronutrient', from foodcrops. In the Himalayan belt, however, natural iodine in the soil gets washed away easily. As a result, foodcrops are low on iodine and the population does not receive the required dose.

It is iodine deficiency that causes goitre. If the deficiency is severe, cretinism results, characterised by mental retardation, deaf-mutism, and lack of muscular coordination. About 40 percent of the Nepali population is said to be afflicted with some degree of goitre. And it is estimated that four out of every thousand citizen shows symptoms of cretinism. Controlling the Iodine Deficiency Disorders (IDD) is therefore one of the Nepal's gravest public health challenges.

Since 1973, a unique collaboration of private business and government has been actively engaged in battling the age-old endemic. His Majesty's Government, the Government of India, and the Salt Trading Corporation have been involved in iodising and distributing salt throughout Nepal's high himal, hill and tarai districts.

Salt is one condiment that *everyone* uses. And salt that is iodised is considered to be the most efficient way to get the iodine micronutrient into the diets of the country's far-flung communities. It has been Salt Trading's responsibility to ensure that all the salt distributed in Nepal is iodised.

And it has been working. Studies have shown that the incidence of goitre in Nepal has gone down considerably. Whereas 55 percent of the population

was afflicted in the 1960s, one study showed that the incidence was down to about 40 percent by 1985-86.

Because iodine tends to evaporate from salt that is in storage for too long, with the help of the Indian Government, Salt Trading has set up three iodisation plants, in Bhairawa, Birgunj and Biratnagar, so as to reduce the time gap between iodisation and consumption: These plants presently iodise up to a quarter of the salt that is distributed in the country, while the rest of the salt comes iodised from India.

Since the last three years, polythene packaging has been used, which eliminates the evaporation of iodine. The Ayo Nun is powdered iodised salt. Since the communities of the high himal prefer to use salt crystals rather than powder, Salt Trading recently introduced Bhanu Nun. This new brand uses iodised crystals of granular size.

We at Salt Trading are committed to ensuring even better delivery of iodised salt to Nepal's population and the introduction of Bhanu Nun is just one demonstration of this commitment. We are presently engaged in adding three more iodisation plants in the Western Tarai, and by 1994 Salt Trading expects to be iodising all the salt in Nepal itself.

In so doing, we will also proudly continue to be part of this unique experiment in bilateral cooperation between Nepal and India, whose goal is to eliminate IDD in Nepal by the year 2000. This is a programme which is directly helping to raise the standards of public health in Nepal, and saving hundreds of thousands from the curse of goitre and cretinism.

Together with the nation, we look forward to the day when goitre is virtually eliminated from these hills and plains.

Iodised salt is distributed by the Salt Trading Corporation Ltd. both in loose form and in one kg packets. Packet salt is available under the brand names Ayo Nun and Bhanu Nun. An Ayo Nun packet costs four and a half rupees. Bhanu Nun is distributed only in the remote areas at subsidised prices.

GOITRE CONTROL PROJECT  
MINISTRY OF HEALTH  
(HMG/NEPAL AND GOVERNMENT OF INDIA  
COOPERATION)

Programme Implementing Agency:

**Salt Trading Corporation Ltd. Kalimati, Kathmandu. Tel: 271593, 271014 Fax: 271704**



# Himalayan Flowers, Anyone?

*Nepali businessmen are trying to develop an international market in Himalayan flowers and plants, but are finding that it is easier said than done.*



*Coelogyne ochracea, a strictly Himalayan orchid.*

BOTANICAL ENTERPRISES

by Bijaya Lal Shrestha

**T**he annual trade in cut flowers worldwide, including orchids and foliage, is estimated at over three billion dollars. Of late, entrepreneurs have been working to utilise the advantages of Nepal's midhill climate and cheap labour to penetrate the world market, mostly in Europe and Japan, with flowers and plants which have their origins in the 'exotic' Himalaya.

"There is great potential for business if we can exploit our diverse climatic conditions and especially if we can develop the orchid industry," says Bijaya Bajracharya, who with a Japanese partner has invested heavily in Orchid Land, an enterprise which has started developing orchid hybrids for export.

Indeed, as Bajracharya says, there is a great deal of interest and curiosity about Himalayan plants and flowers in Western countries, but while producers based in Kalimpong and Sikkim have long dabbled in the trade, Nepali entrepreneurs are only now making their first furrows. However, they are stymied by a host of factors which range from lack of market access to absence of technology.

## Only Orchids

The bulk of the international trade in flowers is in mass produced species like Carnations, Roses and Chrysanthemums. Together, these constitute about 60 per cent of the international trade in cut flowers. Next come the bulbiferous flowers such as Irises, Freesia, Narcissus and Tulips. Orchids have a market niche all their own, although it is not big. And it is in orchids that Nepali entrepreneurs see their future. For it is here, it seems, that Nepal will be best able to exploit its comparative advantages of soil, climate and cheap labour. Indeed, it is in

orchids that growers in the Darjeeling hills and Sikkim have specialised for decades.

Nepal is home to some 90 genera and over 350 species of orchids. The species which have high export potential, both as cut flowers and as plants are *Cymbidiums*, *Dendrobiums*, *Calanthes*, and *Coelogyne*s. These species and their hybrids thrive in the temperate Himalayan climate and are not found in tropical orchid-growing countries such as Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia.

Among these plants, the *Cymbidiums* are a much sought after variety. These plants have what flower consumers in the West love: long stems (for bouquets), many spikes, large numbers of flowers, and a long shelf life. Among its nine species, the *Cymbidium giganteum*, which flowers from autumn to early winter, is considered extra-exotic.

The *Dendrobium* is an 'aerial' orchid which is found commonly in Nepal, hanging from branches and rock ledges. Among its eight species, *D. densiflorum* (locally known as Sungava) is popular because of its golden flowers. The *Calanthe*, a ground orchid of ten species, has a good market in Japan. The *Coelogyne* is another epiphytic plant with ten species which has great marketing potential because of its silvery white flowers (known to Nepalis as Chandigava).

A 1989 study conducted by the Trade Promotion Centre in Kathmandu showed that these four species have a better market potential than other orchid species. Today, these are the four species that are exported to Japan, albeit in low volume.

Apart from orchids, the promising cut flower species with export potential from Nepal are the Carnation, Rose (such as New

Dawn, Royal Highness and Blue Moon developed at the Royal Botanical Gardens at Godavari, Kathmandu Valley), Gladiolus, Iris, Narcissus and Chrysanthemum. Harvesting of these flowers has already begun, while other potentially exportable plants, such as Tulipa, Freesia and Gysophyllia have yet to be tried in Nepal.

A Japanese horticulturist-turned-entrepreneur, Tor Kondo, has successfully grown tulips in the dry climate of the upper Kali Gandaki Valley. He says all 54 varieties of tulip seeds he brought from Japan have done well in experimental plots, and he believes that Mustang's dry climate holds the promise of growing tulip seeds cheaply for export to the West. Experiments at the Royal Botanical Garden in Kathmandu's more humid conditions, however, have not been as encouraging for large scale production of tulip flowers.

Today, even though the high value exports are to Japan and Europe, the bulk of Nepali flower and plant exports actually are to India. However, this demand for orchids in particular, is for their medicinal rather than decorative value.

## Problems

There is cut-throat competition in the international market, and some say high volume trade is impossible without a direct tie-up with an established importer. Flowers and orchids will have to be mass-produced, and this is where Nepal falls behind established exporters like Thailand or Sri Lanka.

Price, quality and delivery are the three important factors in international trade in floral products. The economies of scale being on the



adverse side for Nepal, it is hard for Nepali producers to compete on the general flowers market. In addition, even though Nepal now has direct air links with Europe, the problems with unreliability and low frequency of flights mean that exporting flowers, one of the most fragile and perishable of cargo, is a problem.

The air freight charges out of Kathmandu are very high, making it difficult to compete with neighbouring countries like Sri Lanka and India which have long been exporting low-market flowers to Europe. While freight charges above 45 kg from Kathmandu is US\$ 4.22 per kg, out of India and Sri Lanka it is only US\$ 1.50 per kg. "Sri Lankan and Indian exporters are paying less than half as much for air freight, and that already is a great drawback," says Rajiv Pradhan, Managing Director of Botanical Enterprises, a company that exports orchid plants to Japan.

The fact that Tribhuvan International Airport does not have pre-export warehousing for perishables, particularly cold-storage facilities, is an additional problem for flower exporters. Also, airlines are reluctant to accept fragile and low density packages such as plants and flowers because of the associated problems of transport. In Thailand, incidentally, the government has directed Thai International to facilitate the growth of flower exports.

The problems of continuity of supply and reliability of transport are compounded in Nepal with the problem of consistency in product quality. The consumer demand is for flowers with long shelf life, which often requires pre-treating of flowers before packaging. Nepali producers are just beginning to realise this type of market demand.

One way of producing high quality,

uniform and disease-resistant plants — and that too quickly — is to grow them through tissue culture, a method of propagation which has long been used abroad. Conventional methods of growing plants from seeds and bulbs is

outdated, and orchids, which have tiny seeds and are hard to grow, take better to tissue culture propagation. Although tissue culture is considered high tech, it is not beyond the reach of local producers. Tissue culture experiments have long been conducted by botanists at the Godavari herbarium. There are also five private tissue culture laboratories, but they have not been very productive so far.

Nurseries have yet to fill the demand for Himalayan plants and a significant part of the exported flora comes from the wild. There is in fact an illegal free-for-all on wild orchids, particularly in the forests around Kathmandu. This non-sustainable exploitation of wild orchids has already led to a dip in the export charts. Some unscrupulous exporters even pass off wild orchids as grown in nurseries, getting the necessary papers for customs clearance from Godavari. The CITES convention does impose restrictions on the trade of wild orchid species, but there are loopholes which allow such export to continue.

### The Future

Today, the flower and orchid industry is concentrated in Kathmandu valley due to



Tissue culture orchids.

favourable natural conditions, access to local consumers, and presence of the international airport. But, with the scarcity of land becoming a limiting factor, entrepreneurs are eyeing the adjoining districts of Dhading, Nuwakot and Sindhupalchok.

The need for foreign collaboration seems to be essential if the floral trade is to develop, particularly in terms of technology and securing markets. The Nepal Investment Forum, a jamboree held in Kathmandu in early December to attract foreign businesses ended with a handful of Nepali flower people entering into tentative agreements with foreign partners. However, the NRs 20 million set by the government on joint ventures is too high, says Botanical Enterprises' Pradhan. Although capital is certainly necessary to set up a nursery, "for a fixed capital investment of four million rupees, you can have an annual turnover of 20 million."

The plant and cut flower industry thus has the potential of providing a high cost, low volume industry which is labour intensive and brings income to a rural populace. After garments and carpets, flowers and plants could be the next frontier for Nepali exporters. Eyeing the potential world market, Nepal's small band of flower businessmen recently formed the Nepal Floriculture Association with plans to develop the floral industry through Government support and development of indigenous capabilities.

The flower people, more than anyone else, are aware that a monopoly trade in Himalayan orchids holds promise of huge profits. But they also know that the returns will not come overnight. Like every other activity, the growing of flowers needs acculturation — one reason Sikkim and Darjeeling are ahead is that they have a long tradition of flower growing from the British Raj days. While research and experimentation can produce the finest quality of flowers commanding high prices, the long lead times can be frustrating in a country where businesses are attuned to quick (and small) profits. It can take up to two decades to come up with a viable range of flowers and plants for exports. But that is how, today, Colombia exports altogether 3 billion stems of Chrysanthemums to the West, at 25 cents apiece. △

B.L. Shrestha is a reporter for *The Rising Nepal*.



Westward ho! with tissue culture.

B. RAJNIAH

# Raiders of the Park

*Villagers and merchants may derive short-term benefit from the herbal trade, but Langtang's biological wealth could well prove to be its downfall.*

by Pralad Yonzon

**T**he ecological integrity of Langtang National Park, only 32 km north of Kathmandu, is under enormous stress. Some 19,000 inhabitants, and another 58,000 people living around the park, rely on the food, fodder and fuelwood it provides, and those populations are steadily growing. As if that were not enough, commercial exploitation of the park's plant resources now threatens to tip the balance. Ironically, Langtang's protected status hinders rather than helps its continued survival.

The upper reaches of the Tandi, Melamchi, Larkey and Balephi rivers meet the southern perimeter of Langtang National Park at an elevation of 1000 m. The park is bounded to east, and to the north at more than 7000 m, by the Nepal-Tibet border and, to the west, by the Bhoite Kosi river. This great range of elevation has given rise to an astonishing diversity of flora, from the upper tropical forest to regions of alpine shrub and perennial ice. As many as 32 different mammals and 283 species of birds make their homes among these diverse plant communities. Small communities of local peoples, including Tamangs, Sherpas and Tibetans, have survived on the wildlife and plant resources of Langtang's forest for centuries. Over that time they have probably gathered more knowledge on their use than anybody else.

These people have no choice but to rely on the forest. Barren wilderness accounts for more than half of the park's 1710 sq km. Some 27 percent of the park area is under forest cover and 5 percent under shrub. Agriculture accounts for just 1.6 percent. It is estimated that at least 0.2 hectare of land is required to sustain a human life in Nepal's hills but the per capita land holding in Langtang averages 0.006 ha — enough only to produce a quarter of the annual food requirement. Thus, grazing livestock and harvesting forest resources become necessary for survival.

Some 15 percent of the park area provides pasture while forests offer food, medicines, fodder, fuelwood and the raw materials to make handicrafts and tools. Of 172 useful plants, 22.7 percent are used as food (32 of them are edible mushroom). More than half have medicinal value and nearly six percent

are sources of fodder. Thirteen percent provide fuelwood and 3.5 percent are used for religious purposes.

## Commercial Value

The population is beginning to understand the commercial value of medicinal and other plants found within the park. Some of the plant resources have not been through even cursory scientific analysis, yet growing demand for herbal medicines from Nepali and foreign cities has generated a thriving trade in flora that could even spell extinction for entire species. To give one example of the scale of exploitation, in 1990, 70 kg of roots of *Picrorhiza* species, 68 kg of *Nardostachys jatamansi* roots, 40 kg of *Rhododendron anthopogan* leaves and 60 kg of *J. recurva* leaves were confiscated from a truck in transit

to Kathmandu. These species of herb are found at high altitude, where growth and seed germination are extremely poor. Collection of 238 kg of rhizomes must have extensively damaged any rhizomes remaining at the collection sites.

Of 91 medicinal plant species used locally, 47.5 percent are traditionally collected for their fruits, flowers, leaves, and shoots. Sixteen percent are wanted for their bark and 30 percent for their roots. Six percent of the 91 species are used in their entirety. Thus, collection of more than half the species of medical interest from Langtang require that the plant be destroyed. On a commercial scale, the impact of harvesting could be colossal on species that are popular, rare, slow-growing or fussy about their habitats (habitat specialists). This is not to mention the risk of losing species





before we have even had a chance to study their medicinal or other values in detail. Add to this the estimate that less than 5 percent of smuggled plants is detected and the problem falls depressingly into perspective.

Everybody stands to lose. Science risks losing the opportunity to study rare and unique plants that may contain substances of medical or other values. Collectors and merchants will lose if their mining turns out to be unsustainable. And, of course, indigenous people lose because, without fertile land, alternative livelihoods and access to modern health care, they need forest plants for food, fodder, fuel and medicine.

### Legal Loopholes

How can this happen in Langtang, ostensibly a protected area? First is a regulation relating to the sale and distribution of forest minor products, including medicinal plants promulgated in 1970 (Nepal Gazette, Vol. 20, No. 36, Poush 13, 2027). This regulation allows collectors to harvest and sell medicinal plants growing in the mountains north of the Mahabharat Range without permit or license. All they are required to do prior to exporting their caches is to pay absurdly small fees — described in Notice No. 2, Section 40 of the Nepal Gazette, Chaitra 11, 2047 (1991) — that range from Rs 0.14 to Rs 30.00 per kg. The one exception is for Cordyceps, a fungal growth found on certain arthropods, known locally as *yarsagumba*. This alleged floral gem costs the collector a Rs 263.50 per kg simply because it may pose some aphrodisiac properties.

As many as 30 persons at a time, from both within and outside the region, come into the park to raid its medicinal wealth. Collectors harvest unlimited quantities of herbs and sell them to merchants who are usually temporary residents there at harvest time. Neither collector, nor broker, nor merchant is disturbed by the park management. Having transported their loads of Himalayan flora to the depot at Syabrubesi, they need only to report the origins of the cache as outside the park — either from beyond the Bhote Kosi at the western border or from Keyrung, across the border in Tibet — and they are waved through.

All that remains is to pay the insignificant royalties on reaching the customs posts on the southern borders. The only casualties among smugglers are those that try to sell the goods themselves, to Indian merchants in Trisuli or in other nearby markets. Since the Rasuwa District Office governs the forest areas that

## A Few Leaves from Langtang's Pharmacopoeia

(Of the Illegally Exported Medicinal Plant Species)

Aconitum spicatus:	Toxic
Ephedra gerdiana:	Antiasthmatic
Juniperus indica:	Incense
J. recurva:	Incense
J. squamata:	Incense
Lyonia ovalifolia:	scabies
Nardostachys jatamansi:	Sedative, antidote
Picrorhiza spp.:	Antipyretic, cattle wound ointment
Rheum emodi:	Rheumatic pain, appetizer
Rhododendron anthopogan:	Flowers as tea leaves
Rumex nepalensis:	Pain reliever
Swertia angustifolia:	Antipyretic
Taraxacum himalaicum:	Diuretic

border the Park and the National Park office manages the park area, their management differences have effectively tied their own hands by protecting the park area but not those forest areas that surround the park, giving the merchants an easy escape. Even park officials cannot clearly explain how it is that the merchants have managed to set up a depot within the park boundary.

### Choice to Make

The Rasuwa District Forest Office at Dhunche, which lies inside the park, is the sole authority regulating the collection of medicinal plants. It is responsible for monitoring collection, checking claims for the origin of the plants and working closely with the park management. But none of this is happening. The trade is difficult to control even with strong legislation and patrolling. Stern rules and regulations may prevent the gross harvesting of truckloads of plants but it will not stop smuggling. More people will simply harvest smaller quantities and take to the mountain paths to smuggle them out, making enforcement more difficult.

There is a desperate need for an inventory of species and research to monitor their resilience and to determine critical population sizes. We need to know the prevalence of threatened plant species. In addition, economic dependence of villages inside the park on medicinal plants has to be determined. Armed with such vital information, the district forest office may prepare local policy development on trading medicinal plants without injuring seeds of sanctuary, as well as the indigenous societies that survive on it.

Many mountain areas that are now denuded may once have resembled today's Langtang. The natural resources of many have succumbed to the ravages of population pressure and commercial exploitation. Protecting Langtang legally is meaningless

unless the law is enforced with the blessing of local people content in the knowledge that they are to benefit now and in the future. Having lived for some years among the people of Langtang, whose lives are intertwined around those of the park's natural resources, I realise that we have as much to learn as we have to teach while attempting to reconcile the split between dependency on land and our sense of responsibility for its stewardship. A growing human population and consequent food shortages force people to rely on livestock

to provide them with cash income. Thus, the park today has to support fodder and pasture for 29,575 head of livestock. The additional pressure from mining of natural resources may be a short-term solution to the problems of local people but it cannot maintain the ecological integrity of Langtang.

Alternatives are few but topping the list must be empowerment of indigenous people to enjoy rights and responsibilities for managing forest resources. Participatory land management programs do not weaken land ownership and park management but promote rights to use the productivity of the land in exchange for protection. The proposition is a logical one but delicate, too. It demands lifetime monitoring, step-wise tuning of both ecological and socio-economic processes and sensitivity to local land conflicts. Unfortunately, such steps are yet to be demonstrated as successful examples in Nepal.

P. Yonzon is a member of Environment Protection Council, Nepal and a resource biologist.

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# Development Projects in Tibet

Were Tibet a developing country rather than a sullen Autonomous Region (U-Tsang and a truncated Kham), the prevailing mantras in seminars and *gostis* in Lhasa in 1992 would all be about integrated hill (and high plains) development, the girl child, or the the myriads of other development cliches that are externally attached. Land Cruisers bearing foreigners bearing gifts would jostle each other on the way to the Potala to discuss sustainable development programmes. The area around the Jokhang would probably be the preserve of the local super-elites living off real estate values and commission-agenting. The area might also have hosted the expatriate colony — Lhasa's own Dhanmondi.

Instead, the talk in Lhasa and among friends of Tibet worldwide is not of development. It is almost entirely political, centered around issues of refugees, the Great Return, the Han stranglehold. While each of these issues is important, too little attention has been given to the economic issues that are of concerns to the six million Tibetans who remain inside Tibet. (There are about 1.2 lakhs in exile.) The economic issues that need to be discussed include those of trade (with the south), the free trade zones, and of development focus.

This book by Ann Forbes and Carole McGranahan, while clear on the unfair treatment meted out to Tibet by the Chinese, is low on polemics as it goes about its main concern, which is to describe the work of the major foreign-funded development projects in Tibet, particularly in the Tibetan Autonomous Region. They take up bilateral, multilateral and NGO projects in Tibet and provide project descriptions, objectives, funding and other information.

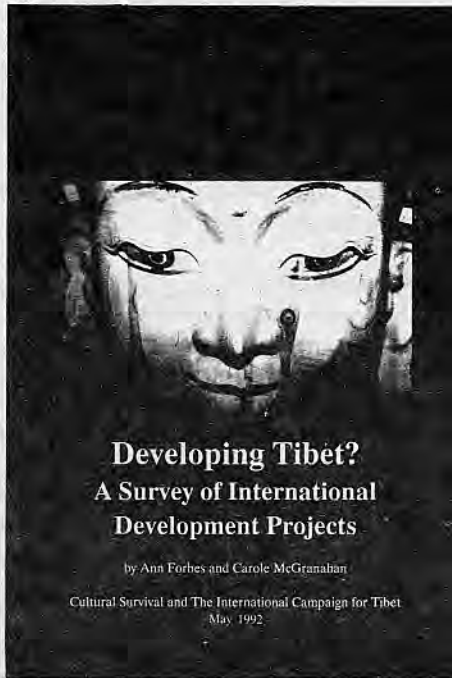
This book is probably one of the first available to a general audience outside China that takes up questions of development in Tibet. And surprisingly we find a large number and variety of international development agencies (multilateral, bilateral and NGOs) already working within Tibet.

The "largest and longest project in Tibetan history", it turns out, is the five-year World Food Programme plan which goes under the rubric "One River, Two Stream". The plan is to spend US\$ 17.7 million (US\$ 6.7 million WFP contribution, the rest Beijing's) to develop the Lhasa River Valley with enhanced

## Developing Tibet? A Survey of International Development Projects

by Ann Forbes and Carole McGranahan  
*Cultural Survival, Cambridge*  
*The International Campaign for Tibet,*  
*Washington D.C.*  
May 1992, US\$ 8.95  
ISBN 0 939521 47 4

by Kanak Mani Dixit



agriculture, animal husbandry and forestry. UNFPA and UNICEF are engaged in a US\$ 2.2 million project aimed at maternal child care/family planning, while UNDP and the Italian Government are helping a geothermal project get started with US\$ 13 million.

The authors report of serious environmental and cultural concern in Lhasa with the Yamdrok Yumtso hydropower station that uses waters from a lake 120 km to the south. Apparently, the Panchen Lama was an outspoken opponent of the project, but with his death the main obstacle is gone and lack of information hampers further activism.

Also described are the Woodlands Mountain Institute's assistance for the establishment of the Chomolongma Nature Preserve in Tibet, which lies adjacent to the

Nepali frontier from the Sishapangma area to the Arun River. On the south is the Makalu-Barun Conservation Area which was inaugurated by the Nepali Prime Minister last November. Meanwhile, Wildlife Conservation International, headed by zoologist George Schaller, is working on the Changthang plateau in the northwest to establish the world's second largest nature preserve. "The vastness of the reserve will encompass its animals' migrations," says Schaller.

We also learn of the Boulder-Lhasa Sister City Project, mired from the start with controversy over doing business with the Chinese. The authors, scrupulously reportorial in their writings, nevertheless imply that the project promoters were "Tibetan Buddhist entrepreneurs" out to make a fast buck. At present, it seems, the Boulder (Colorado) City Council has withdrawn endorsement of the project.

The report provides information on "Chinese/Tibetan Initiatives" whose goals even those following Tibetan affairs might not have been clear about. For example, the International Fund for the Development of Tibet, which cooperates with the China National Research Institute for the Development of Ethnic Areas in raising funds for development projects in Tibet, particularly to accelerate "the transformation of abundant indigenous natural resources into an economic advantage for ethnic minorities who live in the ethnic autonomous areas." Apparently run with a lot Western public relations savvy, the Fund lists research and consulting services, introduction of capital and technology, and "undertaking exchanges" as its goals. It has recently received a US\$ 25,000 grant from the National Endowment for Democracy of the United States.

On the ethical front, Forbes and McGranahan discuss the old question of whether to work from within or from without. And, rightly, they concede that the choice as to whether to work in Tibet is complex and "there is no 'right' answer." But their position is clear: "Unless people living in the developing areas are allowed to have say in that development, their resistance to such projects will also eventually undermine the projects' success." And, "In a situation like Tibet, the question of who is in control of the country always looms in the background... Though the



# Forest Myths Exploded

There is much more to a tree than wood, fruit and leaves. An Indian scientist estimates the worth of environmental services rendered by a tree over a 50 year lifespan to be IRs 1.57 million – four times the average Indian's income over a similar period. Calculated into the figure is oxygen production worth IRs 2,50,000, soil conservation and fertility maintenance worth the same, water recycling and humidity control (IRs 300,000), and air pollution control (IRs 500,000).

These figures, contained and analysed in the latest publication of the New Delhi-based CSE may be fanciful, but nevertheless represent an attempt to design an environmental cost-benefit analysis which will help national planners decide "whether it (economic growth) is not being obtained today at the cost of discounting our future."

A compilation of the proceedings of a seminar on the economics of the sustainable use of forest resources, the book is fittingly dedicated "to the firewood pickers of the world who have to contend with the long and short term everyday."

*Sustainable development* is often defined as meeting "the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs", but in the poor and mainly rural developing world, environmental damage hurts this generation itself, as, for example, villagers are forced to walk ever longer distances for their survival needs of fodder, fuel and timber.

The contributors discuss the methodology, data and policy implications involved in putting a price on nature. A significant finding is that not enough is known about the state of India's natural resources,

## Price of Forests

Anil Agarwal, Editor

Centre for Science and Environment

New Delhi, 1993

IRs 50 individual, IRs 140 institutional

## by Mahesh Uniyal

even in the supposedly well-researched field of forestry. R. V. Singh of the Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education, Dehradun, points out the widely varying estimates of timber demand in the country, ranging from 19.52 million cubic metres (MCUM) by the Ministry of Agriculture, to 30.03 MCUM by the National Commission on Agriculture.

C.N. Krishnakutty of the Kerala Forest Research Institute explodes the myth of the disappearing forests in that state. The enormous gap in firewood demand and supply from state forests had made foresters and economists argue that there is largescale pilfering from Kerala forests. But Krishnakutty shows in his paper that forests supply just five per cent of domestic fuelwood in the state and 80 per cent comes from homestead trees.

It is necessary to make users pay for their consumption of natural resources, hitherto treated as free. While this is primarily a political question, a good natural resource accounting system would be vital in efforts to make growth sustainable both at the macro and micro levels. Thus, J.B. Lal of the Forest Survey of India, Dehradun, assesses the value of goods and environmental services provided by Indian forests at IRs 795.55 billion, more than a quarter of the national gross domestic product. Official figures, however, have it that forests add just 1.2 per cent to the GDP.

A paper on the rural ecology of the Central Himalayan agroecosystems falling within the altituderange of 1000-2000m examines aspects of the highly natural resource-intensive rural farming. If forests resources and village vegetation used in hill farming is not valued, then every rupee spent is seen to yield six rupees. This is why, say the contributors, hill farming continues to be considered economically viable despite extensive degradation of forests and croplands. However, the output-input ratio plummets to 0.54 if a price is put on natural resource use. "Since about 12 energy units are exploited to support one energy unit of agricultural production, forest resources are far less valued than crops in term of money."

The book also refutes the well-established notion that shifting (jhum) cultivation practiced by over half a million tribals in the north-east of India is ecologically and economically unsound. While large amounts are being spent by the government to wean the tribals away from the practice and towards terraced farming, says one paper, shifting agriculture may actually be much more energy efficient and ecologically sound. This is one more of the several unconventional and interesting ideas thrown up by this useful publication from the CSE, which for the first time attempts to make ecologists and economists look at each other rather than past each other. The book's use is especially important with reference to sustainability of Himalayan forests, which are distinct from forests in the rest of the Subcontinent due to inaccessibility, fragility and diversity. △

M. Uniyal is a Delhi-based correspondent for Inter Press Service (IPS).

Chinese Government has given the Tibetans more economic freedoms, the Chinese Communist Party...continues to have the final say in all major social, cultural, political and economic decisions."

In the discussion that follows the project descriptions, the authors identify the Chinese Government's proclivity for large-scale, top-down projects premised on increased productivity. The 1980 visit of Hu Yaobang to Tibet did mark a turning point in the Chinese Government's policies, they write, and there

has been an effort at the policy level to improve social, cultural and economic conditions on the Plateau, but these policies have not been effectively implemented by officials.

The authors suggest that foreign projects hire Tibetan-speakers, conduct ethnographic research on a grassroots level, and strive to get a clearer sense of "the exact relationship between exiled Tibetans, the Tibetans living in the village, and government officials in the community and in Lhasa and how this relationship changes over time."

The book successfully demonstrates "the complexities of international development in Tibet". It also help remind us that, were it not for 1950 and 1959, Tibet would be a developing country, a member of UNCTAD, the World Bank, the IMF, making the same mistakes that the poor of the world are making the world over. This issues that the authors highlight are those that affect the people the world over. But the Chinese factor, in the end, is the biggest question as far as the development of Tibet is concerned. △

Some **KEY DEFINITIONS** as given in the United Nations' Development Programme's 1990 report for Nepal.

**Beneficiary institution** — the institution which is intended to benefit from a particular development activity. There may be several such beneficiary institutions for any one project. A recipient government department or ministry may be a beneficiary institution. The beneficiary institution should not be confused with the responsible ministry.

**Donor** — The origin of funds for development assistance (multilateral, bilateral and non-governmental organizations).

**Expert** — A long-term (12 months or more) expatriate resident of the recipient country filling a position created and/or funded by an external donor.

**Target beneficiaries** — are those population groups who are intended ultimately to benefit from the outputs of the project. They should, therefore, not be confused with the recipients of the output of the project, such as trainees.

*The HOUBARA BUSTARD continues to generate sleepless nights for Pakistani environmentalists, and The Muslim of Islamabad takes aim with a 17 January editorial titled "What are a few birds among friends?"*

Just when our Foreign Office had demarcated some fourteen hunting zones in parts of Sindh and Punjab to enable overworked rulers and princes from neighbouring Arab countries to do a bit of houbara bursting, come these conservationists to spoil the fun. Some crazy persons start a mindless campaign for the protection of the bustards, a species already on the verge of extinction, and an organisation called World Wildlife Fund, having nothing better to do, threatens to organise a 'long march' on Islamabad in support of the bustards regardless of its effects on our relations with our Arab benefactors. The government refused to be cowed down, and issued permits to the lively princes regardless of the requirements of the law prohibiting the hunting or shooting of endangered species. Birds and beasts are important but not more important than our friendship with the Arabs, who build us our mosques and hospitals, and allow us access to their land. If we stop issuing permits to Arab princes to hunt in Cholistan (where the last bustards are to be found) they might refuse us visas to the holy places. Fortunately, the tangled issue has been resolved through what is known as *mukmuka* in Punjabi (the UN and the International Court of Justice should adopt *mukmuka* as a doctrine to resolve international disputes). We will forget our laws, and our Arab friends will exercise some restraint in their pursuit of pleasures. There will be no long march and Wildlife Fund, under the meddlesome Babar Ali, will keep our of any further mischief.

The press has been duly disciplined and will abjure the mention of deportees' or the killing fields of Bosnia. The four hundred odd Palestinians freezing on an inhospitable hilltop in Southern Lebanon will be put under wraps for the hunting season, and the starving Muslims in Somalia will be left to the tender care of American marines. For the next eight weeks there will be no mention of irritants like Kashmir or the Babri mosque. So, Arab ambassadors in Islamabad, who were miffed by unfriendly press criticism, can report success to their governments and assure the princes that there will be no interruption in their hunting programmes and our rulers can start rolling out the red carpet in the desert. Happy hunting!

**VALUE OF ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES** provided by a medium-sized tree over a period of 50 years, with biomass yield of 50 tonnes, as calculated by T.M.Das, using "surrogate market techniques" in the new book, Price of Forests (CSE, New Delhi 1992, see page 25).

Benefits	Value in Indian rupees
Production of oxygen	2,50,000
Conversion to animal protein	20,000
Soil conservation and maintenance of soil fertility	2,50,000
Recycling of water and control of humidity	3,00,000
Sheltering of birds	2,50,000
Control of air pollution	5,00,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>15,70,000</b>

**MOTHER INDIA WELCOMES BABIES**, writes Karen Trollope Kumar in The British Medical Journal of 19-26 December 1992. Dr. Kumar, a Canadian, is a physician at the Bhuaneshwari Mahila Ashram, Pauri, Garhwal.

Why is the birth rate so much higher in India than in Great Britain? Much has been written about variables such as female literacy, socio-economic status, and stages of demographic transition. Yet a deeply significant fact is overlooked in the debate on why Indians have so many children: it is because they actually like children. Bawling babies, terrible twos, fussy four year olds — they're all welcome in the warm lap of Mother India.

In India having a child is the focus and meaning of married life. Without a child life loses its colour and joy.



Insecurity looms before the childless couple, too, for the child represents the parents' insurance for care in their old age. Children in India grow up with responsibility: in the early years responsibility to contribute to the work of the family, and later to care for older family members. These responsibilities are no longer a part of the role of children in the West. Perhaps, as a result, children in Western countries have lost a little status. They are no longer perceived as a vital part of every family. The child has become an option. Couples in Western countries consider carefully whether they can afford and can cope with a child.

How alien these concepts would seem to Ammaji, our beloved grandmother-next-door in rural India. Perhaps, as we seek to understand the complexities of the population problem, we should try to listen to the views of the Ammajis of this world. For them the child can never be seen as a tiny contributor to an alarming growth curve. The birth of a child is an occasion to be celebrated, and there always seems to be room for one more in Ammaji's lap.

*A TUNE FOR BOSNIA*, title of a work in *The New York Times* by Joseph Brodsky, the Russian poet who received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1987. Alternate title: "A Tune for the Subcontinent, December-January."

As you pour yourself a scotch, crush a roach,  
or check your watch,  
as your hand adjusts your tie, people die.

In the towns with funny names, hit by bullets, caught in flames,  
by and large not knowing why, people die.

In small places you don't know of, yet big for having no chance  
to scream or say good-bye, people die.

People die as you elect new apostles of neglect,  
self-restraint, etc. — whereby people die.

Too far off to practice love for thy neighbour/brother Slav,  
where your Cherubs dread to fly, people die.

While the statues disagree, Cain's version, history for its fuel  
tends to buy those who die.

As you watch the athletes score, check your latest statement,  
or sing your child a lullaby, people die.

Time, whose sharp bloodthirsty quill parts the killed  
from those who kill,  
will pronounce the latter tribe as your type.

*HILLARY SONG*, title of this possibly unpublished (or maybe published) work by Marlin Spike Werner (copyright 1981), which arrived one day in our mail.

Sir Edmund HILLARY dropped from view  
In the Customs warehouse at Kathmandu.  
Put me in the rack.  
Put me in the pillory.  
But don't let me go like Sir Edmund HILLARY.

The yak is a cow with hairy hips  
Who nibbles grass on the edge of cliffs.  
You can talk about a billy goat standing on a rock  
But never knock the yak, the yak  
No, never knock the yak!

A cow in the house is quite in place  
For almost half of the human race.  
Now you may have a cat or a little white mouse,  
But how about a cow in the house, in the house?  
Now how about a cow in the house?

*INVADE MOUNT KAILAS*, suggests M.N. Buch in *The Sunday Statesman* of 3 January, if the Vishwa Hindu Parishad is really keen to be the "thekedar" of religion.

Don Quixote, mounted on a scrawny nag, accompanied by his clown of a squire, Sancho Panza, and wearing a barber's shaving bowl as his helmet, tilted at windmills. Obviously, the Don Quixotes of the VHP took Babari Masjid for their windmill. But why are they restricting themselves to mosques and temples in India? The one deity who is worshipped universally throughout this country is Shiva, whose abode is Mount Kailash on the banks of Lake Mansarovar.

Not only is Kailash the pivot of the universe for the Hindus; it is equally so for the Buddhists. To quote Skand Puran, "As the dew is dried up by the morning sun, so are the sins of man dried up by the sight of the Himalayas, where Shiva lived and where the Ganga falls from the foot of Vishnu like the slender thread of a lotus flower. There are not mountains like the Himalayas, for in them are Kailash and Mansarovar."

It so happens that Kailash and Mansarovar are both in Tibet, ruled by the Chinese, that ungodly people. Why is the VHP not mounting an expedition to liberate Kailash and Mansarovar and build there a temple of Shiva which would have not rival in the world? The reason is that, like the bullies they are, the VHP can terrorize the Muslim minority in India but dare not set foot in Tibet to challenge the Chinese. The abode of Shiva will forever remain in foreign hands.

## Dam News

# Tehri, Earthquakes and Bureaucracy

If you were India's seniormost bureaucrat on water resources, would you look kindly on a workshop meant to study "Earthquake Hazard and Large Dams in the Himalaya", one that happened to be the first of a series on Science and Public Policy aimed at "enhancing transparency and public visibility of the critical issues involved in important matters of public policy"?

Not C.D. Thatte, Secretary of India's Ministry of Water Resources. Knowing that the discussions in the Delhi meeting (15-16 January) would inevitably focus on the proposed Tehri Dam in Garhwal, Thatte sent a letter around to all Government participants advising them that all matters connected with Tehri were "sub judice" (two environmentalists had filed a petition in the Supreme Court). If Thatte's intent was to restrict official participation, he did well.

Official displeasure notwithstanding, the meeting, organised by the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH), the Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology and a few other organisations, did provide a forum for over a hundred Indian and Western academics, earthquake engineers, civil servants and politicians to hear each other out and share experiences.

The workshop format was interesting: experts in relevant disciplines delivered their opinions to an eminent panel of MPs and (mostly retired) bureaucrats, which was chaired by Justice Ranganath Mishra, former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. This panel then weighed the evidence and made its recommendations.

In his introductory remarks

on Himalayan geology, K.S. Valdiya of Kumaon University raised the question whether high dams were advisable at all in the geodynamically active terrain of the Himalaya. Vinod Gaur, possibly India's most distinguished seismologist, provided background on the seismic gap in the Garhwal/Kumaon/West Nepal region, and ventured that a great earthquake (+8 on the Richter



scale) is likely during the life of the proposed dam at Tehri due to the accumulation of tectonic stresses.

What would happen to the dam if such a quake were to strike was a question for the formidable array of earthquake engineers present. Noting that all structures involve a degree of risk, Bruce Bolt of the University of California at Berkeley (whose work has been used by Indian engineers in calculating the likely "peak

ground accelerations" at Tehri) said that the essential issue was the degree of risk involved, and whether such risk is acceptable.

Various other worthies, serving and retired, weighed in with comments on balancing environment with development, though unfortunately not one from among the Tehri Dam's designers thought it prudent to attend. In sum, the workshop provided additional insights into the many complexities and uncertainties in current scientific knowledge of the behaviour of large structures during major earthquakes. All the specialists present seemed to agree that the Himalaya is the only area on earth where dams are being built in the most precarious of seismic conditions which also have densely populated downstream areas.

Speaking obliquely in defence of dam-building at Tehri was Liam Finn, a professor of engineering from British Columbia University of Canada. Finn believed that the present design (basically a Canadian one) was quite safe but required more thorough testing than had been conducted so far. He advised that the dam model be shaken with increasing amount of acceleration till it failed, so that the design's outer limits of stability could be known.

It is not only dam models that require shaking, however. Powerful civil servants, not only in India but all over the Himalayan rimland, must be shaken roughly so that they emerge from their bureaucratic stupor and begin to visualise the havoc of the day when a Himalayan high dam collapses and when a prior warning would be useless.

## On the Way Up

- Kanak Mani Dixit

In the headlong rush from producing one *Himal* to preparing another, this column (meant to communicate with readers) tends to receive short shrift. So hello again, after a lengthy hiatus.

Firstly, we say thank you and bid goodbye to **Kesang Tseten**, who has stood by *Himal* steadfastly since Mar/Apr 1989, as Associate Editor and then as Consulting Editor. Welcome to **Sanjeev Prakash**, with whose help we hope to make *Himal* even more a Himalayan magazine in terms of editorial depth, geographical breadth, and readership.

Before quite realising it, 23 issues have slipped by. The need for an indexing system has been felt for long. Earlier, it was possible to call the editor on the phone and ask about such-and-such an article. No more. He's information overloaded. Hence our *Himal* Index, for which we thank computer experts **Tara Mani Dahal** and **Piush Mani Dahal**.

Another bit of good news. The New York Public Library, that hallowed repository, just sent us an order for *all* back issues and *all* future issues. So if you're lost and friendless in America (see article on page 36), you can now travel to Fifth Avenue and 42nd Street, New York, New York, and snuggle up with a *Himal* in that marvelous reading room of the NYPL.

Advance warning on bad news: This magazine has sold in Nepal for five years at a constant NRs 20 per copy and NRs 110 per year's subscription since 1987. If a benevolent godmother or donor agency does not come along soon enough to rescue us, be forewarned of a drastic price hike. And we are also toying with the idea of going in for newsprint.

Meanwhile, have you noticed that with this issue *Himal* is more reader-friendly? That's because we have made the type bigger.



## Replicating Success in Pakistan

What do you do when a development programme is perceived by all to be 'successful'? You clone it, expand it, replicate it. That is what Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif obviously wants to do with the much-praised Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP) of Gilgit-Hunza-Baltistan fame.

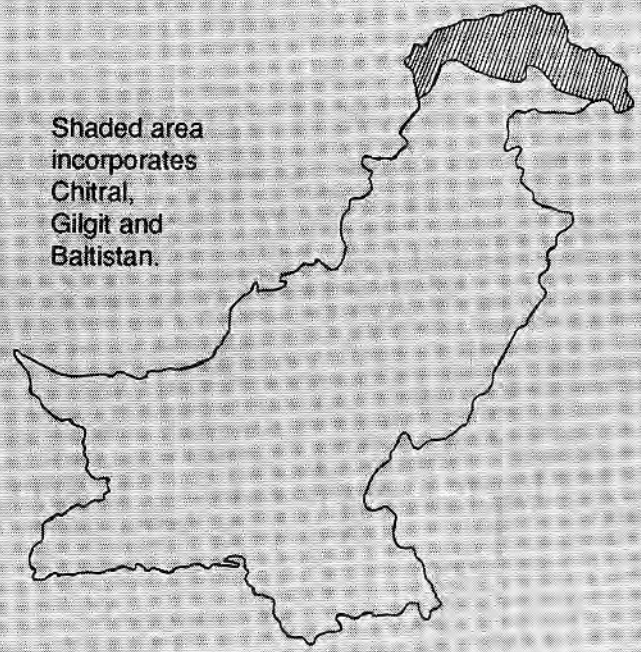
In early 1991, the Prime Minister called AKRSP's prime mover, Magsasay Awardee Shoaib Sultan Khan and asked him to set up the NRSP, the National Rural Support Programme, with a mandate to replicate the AKRSP's success in other underdeveloped areas of Pakistan based on its formula of social action programmes and community participation. The NRSP was registered with the Government in November 1991 and two months ago, with Khan as advisor, NRSP began work from a room at the AKRSP's Islamabad office.

There were immediately questions raised, particularly by NGOs active in the Punjabi and

Sindhi regions of "mainland Pakistan", about whether this taking of AKRSP "to scale" was possible or even advisable. The AKRSP's community-based programmes in the Northern Areas were good, they said, but were dependent upon certain factors that would not be forthcoming elsewhere in the country, such as the unquestioning acquiescence of the Ismaili community of Gilgit has towards the development dictates of the Aga Khan. Besides, say the nay-sayers, the AKRSP is resource-rich and is able to provide intensive expertise and material support (it owns two helicopters) in a way that the government can never do country-wide.

An independent World Bank review team which studied AKRSP in mid-1987, had pointed to local features and management characteristics which made the programme unique. They were, among others, "... pent-up development potential of a formerly isolated area; lack of institutional

Shaded area incorporates Chitral, Gilgit and Baltistan.



competitors due to the partial political and social vacuum; easy contacts and working relationships due to AKRSP's affiliation with the Aga Khan; the unusual government support and attention due to the area's strategic and political significance," and so on.

However, the review was positive about the overall achievements of the AKRSP. It concluded that it was the project's effective institution-

building at the village level that had led to the success achieved, and the changed attitudes towards development in the Northern Areas could be termed a "solid achievement."

Najma Siddiqi, Director of the NRSP, was well-prepared to respond to criticism about taking AKRSP to scale.

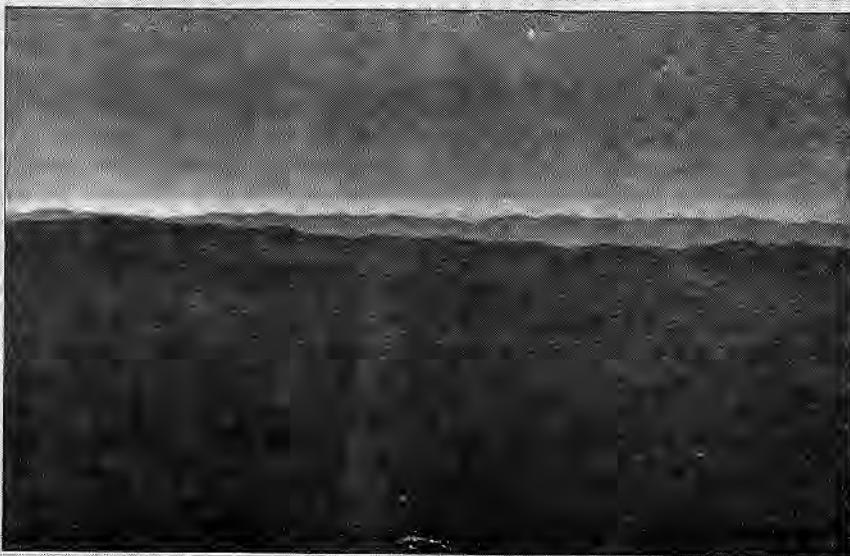
In a hurriedly arranged phone interview in Islamabad, she

said. "Certainly we cannot go to the rest of Pakistan using the same formula that was applied by the AKRSP," Siddiqi said. "You do not replicate a model, especially when there are different cultures and different geographies. But the basic principle remains the same everywhere, that you need a grassroots structure and the community must participate if there is to be development."

Three basic factors that are applicable everywhere from AKRSP's experience, says Siddiqi, are "the need to organise, encourage savings, capital formation, and skill development."

"Obviously the NRSP is not expecting to replicate the entire package of programmes, and we are aware that things are much more complicated in the plains."

The AKRSP is already a must-see for mountain developmentologists from all over. Perhaps the success or failure of the NRSP to take off from AKRSP will provide even more knowledge on the replication of so-called successful projects elsewhere in the region. What remains is to wish NRSP well and to wait and see.



Nepali photographers seem to have 'arrived' with this collection of superb (but unfortunately poorly reproduced) black-and-white pictures, recently released under the title Contemporary Images. The collection has this shot by Shambhu Manandhar, taken en route to Pyuthan from Tulsipur, Dang, Central Nepal.



## Bhutan Update

The latest on Bhutan: His Majesty King Jigme flies down to New Delhi to show solidarity with the people of India; Bhutan signs an agreement with India on the preparation of the 1825 megawatt Sankosh hydropower project; reliable updated figures put the number of Lhotshampa refugees in the Jhapa camps at 77,000 by late January. In Thimphu, basic services in hospitals, schools and offices are said to have been curtailed due to lack of manpower.

Meanwhile, Amnesty International released its long-awaited report on "Human Rights Violations against the Nepali-speaking Population of the South", based on a visit to Bhutan back in January 1992. The document describes Amnesty's concern at reports of human rights violations occurring in Southern Bhutan since late 1990; welcomes some Bhutanese measures such as the decision to invite the International Committee of the Red Cross to visit the country; and urges the Government to immediately release all prisoners of conscience, bring to trial those held on recognizable criminal offences, and take measures to prevent torture and ill-treatment. The report does not deal specifically with the question of refugees. (Incidentally, an editorial note in *The Times of India* which claims that the Amnesty report gives Thimphu "a virtual clean chit" should be read with a pinch of rock salt.)

The ICRC team did visit, and according to Drukpa tradition, was lavishly treated. It interviewed some Lhotshampa detainees and many officials.

The United States' Department of State released a "Country Report on Human

Rights" on Bhutan, which was prepared for presentation to Congress. Unable to go beyond secondary information in most cases (the United States does not have diplomatic relations with Thimphu), the report banks on what it considers reliable information. It goes beyond non-committal Amnesty phrasology, however, to say, for example, that corroborating information "lends credence" to claims by Lhotsampa refugees of disappearance, torture, etc.

Much of the report is descriptive and non-accusatory, but the State Department

summarises its findings as follows: "In recent years assimilation has given way to Bhutanization... The (1985) citizenship law retroactively stripped citizenship from Nepalese immigrants who could not document their presence in Bhutan prior to 1958 and ethnic Nepalese born in Bhutan who could not prove that both their parents satisfied the requirements for citizenship under the 1985 law. These are nearly impossible requirements in a country with widespread illiteracy, which only recently adopted administrative procedures. Tens of thousands were declared to be illegal immigrants and were forcibly

evicted from the country. Still more fled the country voluntarily in the face of officially sanctioned pressure, reportedly including arbitrary arrests, beatings, rape, robberies, and other forms of intimidation by police and army."

Foggy Bottom apparently prefers to believe that its estimated 100,000 refugees (in Nepali camps and those living with relatives in India) are Bhutanese and not Nepali-speakers from the Indian Northeast as Thimphu would have it. Says the report, "In a Bhutan population of less than 700,000, the departure of over 100,000 people constitutes a major demographic change."

## His Majesty Overkills

The interviews King Jigme Singye Wangchuk gave some Delhi papers on 7 January were surprising and revealing. Apparently, a calculated decision had been taken back in Thimphu to make the most of the failure of Nepali diplomacy on the refugee issue, and the Indian Government's vulnerability following Ayodhya. Following is a quick rundown of what His Majesty had to say.

Surprisingly for the Head of State of a SAARC member which stands to gain perhaps the most from a one-country-one-vote membership in the organisation, the King told Kamaljeet Rattan of *The Economic Times* (who sacreligiously insists on addressing the Druk Gyalpo as "Mr. Wangchuk") that SAARC could not play a meaningful role in resolving disputes among member nations. He went a step further to state categorically that he did not see much future in regional cooperation among South Asian nations.

On Ayodhya Kanda of 6 Dec. "India is our closest friend and ally and Bhutan would never be found wanting in its friendship towards India even during the most difficult times."

On the issue of "illegal Nepali migrants who were driven out of Bhutan", His Majesty called upon the Nepali Government to clarify its position. Asserting that his Government had "no intention of allowing non-Bhutanese to settle in Bhutan", he said, however, that Nepal had not yet made known its "intentions" over the contentious issue. "The issue has to be resolved on a bilateral

level. We have to first know what Nepal wants." ("A return of refugees, perhaps, King?" Nepali Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala might have asked, if the SAARC Summit ever were to be held for the two's long-postponed one-on-one.)

The King is obviously peeved with Nepal for hosting refugees from his land, but some have wondered if it was necessary for a Head of State of a till-recently-friendly-neighbour to rake up the Tarai question. King Wangchuk wondered aloud whether "Nepal wants to create a Nepali state in India because it has eight million Biharis in its Terai region." Ooops.

Next was that Greater Nepal matter. On the one hand, the King was fearful that the areas "dominated by Nepalis", Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Sikkim and the Dooars, were "fast becoming a Nepali entity". Bhutan's greater fear, however, was that it could be reduced to a "satellite state".

Fear of the red star over Druk Yul apparently runs deep. The King told the Indian media that all the refugees were joining the Communists in eastern Nepal, a known Communist stronghold, he said. "So if all the refugees are thrown back into Bhutan, we will for the first time in our history have a pro-Communist lobby."

A transcript would be useful, to check if this reported conversation really did take place. Thus far, there has been no denial from Thimphu.



# Can Bangladesh's Rivers be Tamed?

A fresh look at the historical course of the Subcontinent's powerful Himalayan rivers casts doubt on the appropriateness of the multi-billion dollar World Bank-backed Flood Action Plan for Bangladesh.

A major part of the Plan involves the embanking of the Ganga, Brahmaputra and Meghna rivers. But these rivers carry such enormous energy and sediment that they may rapidly shift their courses, as Jayanta Bandyopadhyay and Dipak Gyawali illustrate in a forthcoming study of Himalayan river management (*"Some Basic Issues in the Management of Himalayan Water Resources"*). The two Kathmandu-based

ecologists question whether embankments are feasible and recall that due to "interventions made without adequate knowledge of the natural ecological factors," flooding has actually been compounded in the past in similar cases.

Flooding, insists the study, is common throughout the flat plains around the Himalaya. It is "an important natural process which has shaped the land from the Yangtze basin in the East to the Indus basin in the West." Intense periods of high rainfall, such as when on 5 August 1969 the upper Teesta basin experienced 3000 mm of rain in 72 hours, are a meteorological inevitability just as floods in the plains are "an ecological inevitability", it states.

But there are other factors also peculiar to Himalayan rivers. They carry much more than water — huge quantities of solids eroded from the geologically weak uplands. Also, floods tend to be more destructive if they reach the confluences simultaneously, as was the case in 1988, when the Ganga and Brahmaputra peak flows coincided and Bangladesh's Flood Action Plan was born in the hand-wringing that followed.

High energy, high sediment and high volume give Himalayan rivers extraordinary mobility, strikingly visible in the eastern Himalayan foot-hill rivers. Bandyopadhyay and Gyawali have studied old records and the maps of early British explorers which clearly show this unusual mobility. The adjoining map, adapted from an

article (in Bengali) by Aminur Rahman (*"Bangladesher Bonya — Bangladeshi Motamat"*), shows shifting courses between 1736 and today of major rivers such as the Brahmaputra, Teesta and Kosi.

The Kosi has moved more than 115 km westwards, while the Teesta, "one of the most

map dating from 1789.

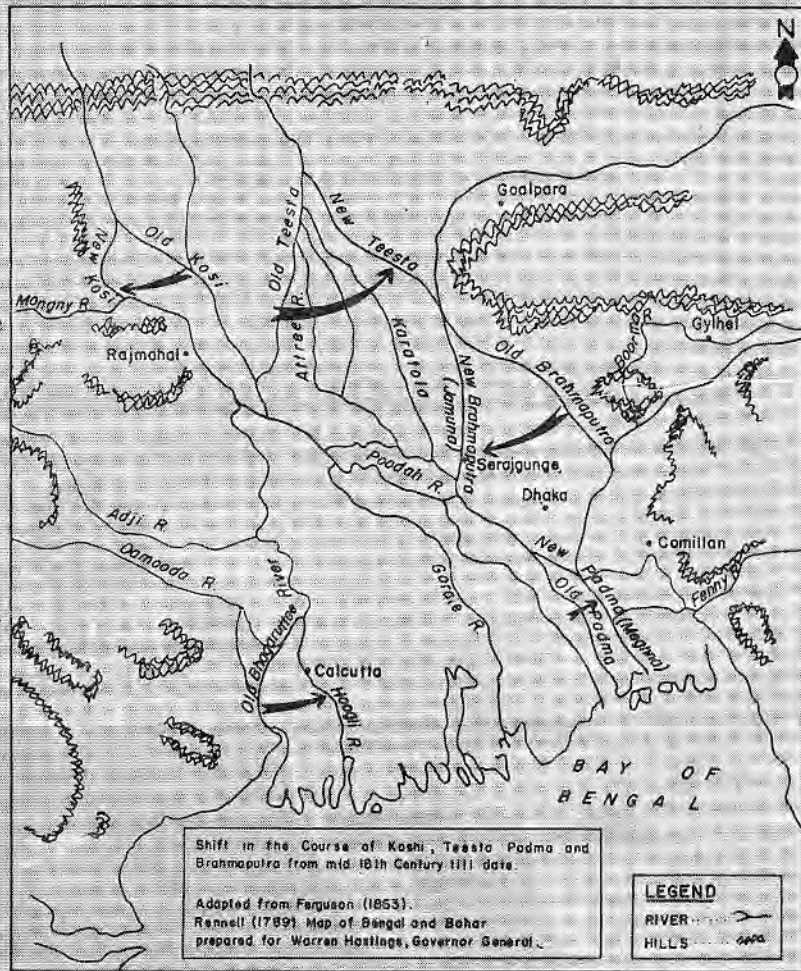
Why would the Brahmaputra join up with the Ganga? The two ecologists maintain that due to several floods and as a result of the Teesta joining it, over time the Brahmaputra decided to use the river bed of an old river, the Jenai, and move over into the

## Upcoming...

East Asia-Pacific Mountains Symposium  
2-8 May 1993

Lincoln University, Canterbury, New Zealand

While no one in the Himalayan region has yet got around to organising a regional follow-up to the mountain-related actions contemplated by Chapter 13 of Agenda 21 (adopted at the UNCED conference in June in Rio de Janeiro), the Pacific is off and running. A symposium and one-day workshop on 'Follow-up of Agenda 21 for Mountains of East Asia and the Pacific' is being organised. Six themes are suggested: people in protected areas, climate change, sustainability of present resource use, biological introductions and invasions, "system stability of natural and cultural systems", and energy related problems and prospects. Contact: Lawrence Hamilton, Program on Environment, East-West Center, 1777 East-West Road, Honolulu, Hawaii 96848.



flash-flood prone rivers of the eastern Himalaya", deflected from the Ganga basin to the Brahmaputra basin during the last 250 years. Even the Brahmaputra, the largest river of the Himalaya, has shifted westwards and today joins the Ganga instead of the Meghna, into which it used to flow about 200 years ago, as shown by a

Ganga's flow."

Could embanking then prove worthwhile?

As early as in 1964 the Dutch hydrologist, Thijsee, had warned against embankments: "The danger would be very real that an improvement of conditions in one place [with embankments] would result in a catastrophe somewhere else".

Opening from March 1, 1993

## HIMALAYAN INTERNATIONAL



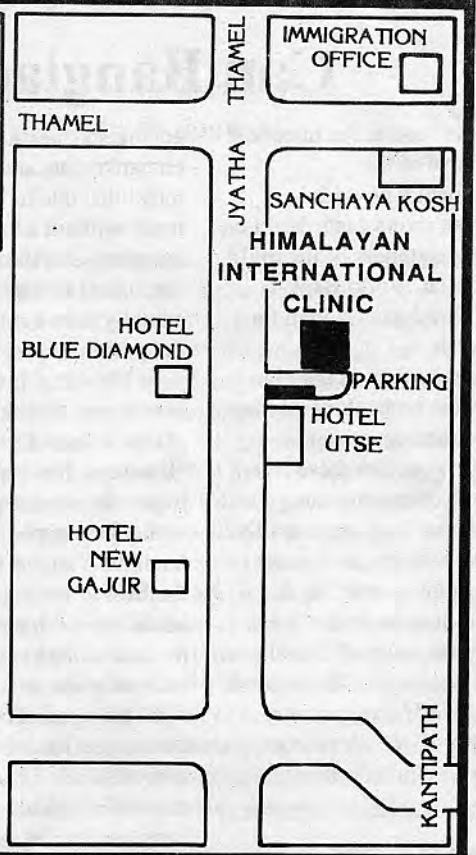
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What was the Dalai Lama doing on the cover of the Christmas issue of the French fashion magazine *Vogue's* Christmas issue (see page 3)? He was the editor! Taking a step up from the newspaper columnist he already is (for *The Times of India*), the Dalai Lama decided to go chic. He apparently wrote some of the text and "helped caption the photographs".

The Indian Northeast is little better than **Kalapani** for Indian civil servants and journalists alike, according to Prasun Sonwalkar in the *TOI*. He reports that an unnamed "national" English daily treats its Shillong office "as the punishment posting for errant correspondents". (We had always thought that Kathmandu was reserved for that.) As for IAS officers, Sonwalkar writes that the cadre in the Northeast is generally manned by reluctant and disgruntled officers, many of whom "have no interest in the hills and find the tribals tiresome." The assignments are made without taking into account a particular officer's "aptitude, willingness or suitability to a particular state." Apparently, career prospects for those serving in the Northeast are considered dim, as they are considered to lack "sufficient exposure and experience to deal with 'all India' matters." Oh really?

Indian Himalayans finally seem to be getting over the fear of flying. STOL-fever, which Nepal has long been afflicted with, is finally catching on in the Uttar Pradesh hills, perhaps egged on by private "air-taxis" keen to carry rich plainsfolk who want quick access to exotic valleys. The UNI agency reports that three new airstrips are to be commissioned over the course of the year in Kumaon and Garhwal — in Uttarkashi, Pithoragarh and Chamoli districts. The Chamoli airstrip will be at Gauchar ("cow pasture"), which was also the original name for Kathmandu's international airport until it became Tribhuvan. So Gauchar lives!

The 17 December issue of *Nature*, the science magazine, carries an article (page 647-651) with some complicated scientific mumbo jumbo on how the monsoons developed as the Himalaya arose from the sea of Tethys. Since this columnist could not follow the drift, if you know what I mean, reproduced here is the printed

summary for your edification: "General-circulation-model simulations used to estimate the sensitivity of the Indian monsoon to changes in orbital parameters, the orography of Tibet-Himalaya, atmospheric carbon dioxide concentration and the extent of glacial-age surface boundary conditions show that increased elevations and increased summer solar radiation are most effective in strengthening the monsoon. Strong monsoons (similar to today's) can be induced by strong solar forcing only when the elevation is at least half that of today. These conditions may have been attained in the late Miocene." In simple English all this seems to be saying is that monsoon clouds deliver rain because the Himalaya block their path.

The Inter Press Service (IPS) news agency reports that the Governments of Peru, Ecuador, Colombia and Bolivia are devoting much time and money in research to revive old crops. Can the same be said for the states of the Himalaya? The Incas are said to have cultivated 70 species of crops (as many as the farmers of Europe and Asia combined), and a recent report lists 31 "lost crops of the Incas" that can be revived in developing countries and in the West. These crops, says IPS, are exotic, colourful, hardy and full of flavour, as well as highly nutritious. According to one scientist, quinoa grains have been tested in the hills of Kenya, China and Nepal. "Quinoa would be great for the Tibetan highlands but there has not been any communication from the Chinese side," he said. Try Dharamsala.

The thaw in Indo-Chinese relations is so catching that it may begin to melt Himalayan glaciers. Jigme N. Kazi, reports from Sikkim in *The Independent* of Kathmandu that Gangtok is abuzz with excitement following news of the likely reopening of trade with Tibet over the **Nathu La** pass. Even as Indian and Chinese troops continue their faceoff on the 14,500 ft pass, Gantokites have started having visions of millions to be made from trade with the north. For, truth be told, the Chumbi Valley route that goes up the Tista is the closest to Tibet's populated Lhasa region (through Phari and Gyantse), compared to the other traditional trade routes up from Leh, Kinnaur (Himachal Pradesh), Taklakot

(recently opened in U.P.) and Kodari, northeast of Kathmandu. The Gangtokites might be gungho on Nathu La, but the Kalimpongs are not about to take things lying down, according to some reports. Kalimpong, which thrived on Tibetan trade after Younghusband forced through the Chumbi Valley route, is laying claim to the Tibet trade as well, which if its had its way, would be conducted through the Jelepala pass instead of Nathu La. Who will win in this tussle, powerful Gangtok or a dying town of historical has-beens?

There is a doctorate in communications theory waiting to be done on the baffling coverage of Bhutan that continues to receive in the international media. One reporter blows hot and another blows cold. Take the most recent sampling of two British magazines. The 6 December issue of *The Independent* of London's Sunday Magazine had a four-page spread by Tim McGirk which was of the breathless **Crisis in Peaceful Shangri La** variety. The piece, which refers to Southern Nepal generically as "Gurkhas" begins thus: "In a faraway land there lives a handsome king married to four beautiful sisters. In his kingdom are snow leopards, unexplored mountains that rise higher than the clouds, and a woman in the east who says she has made love to the yeti." Selected points to ponder on this very first para: "faraway" from whom...is Australia faraway from London? Handsomeness is a subjective and culture-specific concept. "Rising above the clouds" is not at all hard to do for Bhutan's Himalayan mountains (see **Nov/Dec 1992 Himal**, page 22). Snow leopards are found from Bhutan eastwards to the Hengduan and westwards all the way to Turkmenistan. And as far as the subject is on making love to the yeti, you have crazier folks in Kew claiming to have done much worse to non-anthropoids.

A 180 degree turnaround from McGirk's tall tales was to be had in the *Geographical's* January issue. The editors of the magazine, published jointly by the Royal Geographical Society and the BBC, decided to run Druk Yul on the cover, titling the story: "Behind the Mask: Ethnic Cleansing in Bhutan". Runs the summary, "Bhutan has assiduously promoted itself as a culturally intact

Buddhist utopia. But there is a darker aspect to this mountain kingdom, one it has so far succeeded in hiding. For the last two years, the Government has been conducting an increasingly violent campaign of persecution against the country's largest ethnic group." Harsh words by writer Carol Hobson, who one suspects was not allowed a visa by Thimphu and diverted instead to the refugee camps and there got to interview Bhutan Peoples Party representatives. Thimphu had better reassess its visa policy, whose increasingly selective use even against Western journalists can only lead to diminishing returns as far as 'spin control' is concerned.

Reuters, the international news agency, have come around; it seems. When the discussion turns to adjectification, the editors of *Himal* have always maintained that if Bengal can be Bengali, Israel, Israeli, and Himal, Himali, why should Nepal be 'Nepalese', especially if the vernacular adjective is also 'Nepali'? *A Handbook for Reuters Journalists*, the news agency's guide for its hackers now sees it *Himal's* way. *The Handbook* one-liner is terse but to the point: "Nepali: Not *Nepalese* as adjective."

A *TOI* report from Dehra Dun has a tabloid-like headline that would have done Lady Di proud: "Valley of Flowers may lose bloom". The Doon-based Forestry Research Institute says that the total grazing ban which was imposed back in 1982 might actually be responsible for "the extinction of scores of species of rare flowers" in the well-known Valley, which is in Chamoli District. The flowers, which used to bloom respendently during the summer months, apparently do not do so with as much enthusiasm now because they have been "suppressed by some fast-growing, taller and aggressive species." The grazing ban has actually altered the eco-system of the area. *Polygonum Polystachum*, a nasty plant that used once to be eaten up by goats and sheep during the summer when it was still small and succulent, these days has reared up to retard the growth of other herbaceous species. Conservation might, after all these years, not be such a smart idea if it leads to deflowering of the Himalaya.

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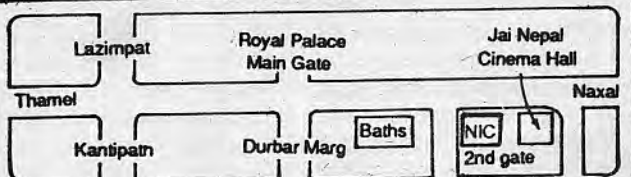
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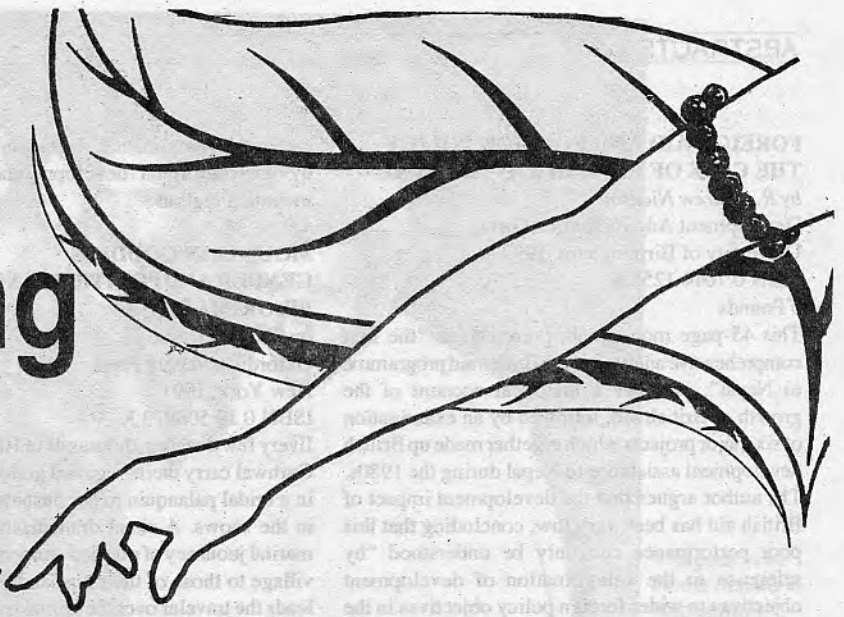
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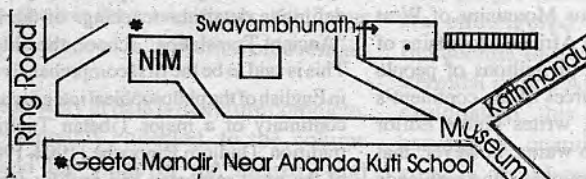
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**FOREIGN AID AND FOREIGN POLICY  
THE CASE OF BRITISH AID TO NEPAL**

by *R. Andrew Nickson*

Development Administration Group

University of Birmingham, 1992

ISBN 0 7044 1258 6

6 Pounds

This 45-page monograph, presented as "the first comprehensive analysis of the British aid programme to Nepal", provides a historical account of the growth of British aid, followed by an examination of six major projects which together made up British development assistance to Nepal during the 1980s. The author argues that the development impact of British aid has been very low, concluding that this poor performance can only be understood "by reference to the subordination of development objectives to wider foreign policy objectives in the British aid programme, namely support for monarchical autocracy in exchange for access to Gurkha recruitment". Even when commercial and industrial considerations have been of minimal importance, as in the case of Nepal, the developmental impact of foreign aid can still be limited by a wider political objective of generating "goodwill".

**rites of passage:  
AN ASPECT OF RAI CULTURE.**

by *Sueyoshi Toba*

Royal Nepal Academy, Kathmandu

1992

This slim volume by Toba, a linguist, is the result of fieldwork done in and around a Khaling Rai village in East Nepal. Toba describes stages of birth, marriage and death rites and observes that old and typical Rai rites are being replaced by new ones under the influence of Hindu culture. Certain ritual elements, however, remain strong. Toba believes that rituals are helpful in easing people, the Rais in this instance, through traumatic transitions in a 'modernising' Nepal. The book comes with what seems to be a grudging foreword by the Vice-Chancellor of the Royal Nepal Academy, the publisher.

**MOUNTAIN RESEARCH  
AND DEVELOPMENT**

Vol 12, No.4, November 1992

*J & P Ives, editors*

University of California Press

This issue of *MRD* contains papers presented at the Conference of the African Mountains Association, held in Rabat, Morocco in September 1990. The eleven contributions provide wide-ranging information on the different mountain systems of Africa, including the Rif and Tell mountains of North Africa, the Babnouts Mountains of West Cameroon, and the Eastern African Mountains of Ethiopia and Kenya. Tens of millions of people subsist on the natural resources of the continent's mountains and highlands, writes Guest Editor Abdellatif Bencherifa, who warns, however, that the resources base of the mountains and highlands is increasingly being marginalised through over-

use and environmental degradation, exacerbated by the traditional developmental disregard of mountain regions.

**MOUNTAIN GODDESS  
GENDER AND POLITICS IN A HIMALAYAN  
PILGRIMAGE**

by *William S. Sax*

Oxford University Press

New York, 1991

ISBN 0 19 506979 X

Every few decades, thousands of Hindu villagers of Garhwal carry their "regional goddess" Nandadevi in a bridal palanquin to her husband Shiva's home in the snows. A ritual dramatisation of the post-marital journey of married women from their natal village to those of their husbands, this pilgrimage leads the traveler over the Himalayan icefields past a snowbound lake surrounded by human bones. Sax offers an account of this arduous journey, focusing on the importance of the cult of Nandadevi in the lives of local women. He shows that Nandadevi's appeal stems from the fact that her mythology parallels the life-courses of Central Himalayan peasant women, "just as her ritual processions imitate their periodic journeys between their natal and marital homes."

**CONSTITUTIONAL LAW OF NEPAL**

*Bharat Upreti, Kanak B. Thapa, editors*

FREEDAL, Kathmandu

1992

This is the first book to be published on the Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal 2047 (1990). Distinguished judges, senior advocates and academics, writing in Nepali, discuss a variety of issues relating to the new Constitution, including constitutionalism, rule of law, parliamentary democracy, separation of powers, and constitutional monarchy. Issues are discussed under several heads, including the Executive, the Legislature, and the Judiciary. There is detailed treatment of fundamental rights and remedies under the Constitution, and the last section discusses emergency powers, the Preamble, political parties, citizenship, and amendments.

**THE NYINGMA SCHOOL OF  
TIBETAN BUDDHISM**

by *Dudjom Rinpoche*

*Translated and edited by*

*Matthew Kapstein and Gyurme Dorje*

Wisdom Publications

Boston, 1991

This two-volume encyclopedic publication contributes to an overall understanding of a complex system of thought and practice by presenting in definitive detail the teachings of the Nyingma or "Ancient Translation" school, the oldest in Tibet. This is said to be the first comprehensive exposition in English of the philosophical integrity and historical continuity of a major Tibetan Tantric Buddhist tradition. Dudjom Rinpoche (1904-1987) was one of the most respected and prolific scholars of his time, a lineage master who held all the transmissions

of the Nyingma school, of which he was the supreme head. Book One was originally intended as a work which would preserve Nyingma teachings for Tibetan practitioners and hence is written in the terse and highly structured philosophical style of Tibetan 'grubmtha' literature. (Source of abstract: Newsletter of the South Asian Institute, Columbia University).

**NEPAL**

**WORLD BIBLIOGRAPHICAL SERIES**

Vol 38

*Compiled by John Whelpton with assistance of Lucette Bondnois, David Gellner, Michael Hutt, Abhi Subedi and Carol Tingey*

Clio Press, Oxford

1990,

US \$ 75

This is part of a series of country-wise annotated bibliographies, each volume of which, it is claimed, "seeks to achieve, by use of careful selectivity and critical assessment of the literature, an expression of the country and an appreciation of its nature and national inspirations, to guide the reader towards an understanding of its importance." The 33 subject-headings, over which 917 entries are divided, is prefaced with a short introduction to Nepali history and society by John Whelpton. The monographs and articles annotated are mostly those written in the English language. A 34-page index of authors, titles of publications and subjects makes this volume very usable. At US \$ 75 (as of 1991), only the richest of libraries should be able to afford it.

**INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON SNOW  
AND GLACIER HYDROLOGY  
VOLUME OF ABSTRACTS**

*Department of Hydrology*

*and Meteorology, Kathmandu*

November 1992

This volume of abstracts was readied for the above symposium (Kathmandu 16-21 November 1992) and contains summaries of 59 papers that were presented by an international cross-section of scholars on the following themes: Snow and Glacier Hydrology, Data Bases and their Management for Water Resources Management, Climatic Change and Snow, Glaciers and the Hydrological Cycle, Processes and Models in Snow and Glacier Hydrology, Floods, Debris Flow and Avalanches, and "Glacio-Chemical Studies".

**ENERGY, ENVIRONMENT  
AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT  
IN THE HIMALAYAS**

*Pradeep Monga and P. Venkata Ramana*

Indus Publishing Company, New Delhi

1992,

IRs 350

This book brings together papers presented at the National Workshop on Energy and Environment Issues in Mountain Development, held at Shimla in September 1991. The focus of the book is on the crisis said to be threatening the ecological balance of the region.



# Is the Grass Greener in America?

*Nepalis romanticise 'America' because they have been bombarded with overglorified images. It is a feeling that is hard to shake off even when living a B-grade lifestyle in the United States.*

by Sanjay Manandhar

Every year, about January, YMCA recruiters interview a hundred or so young Nepalis, mostly boys. From among them, a select group of about 30 is chosen to go to the United States to serve as counselors in the many summer camps that are organised for school children in different parts of the country. The Nepali youths have to pay for their own air tickets, but are taken care of once they land at JFK airport by the YMCA's International Camp Counselor Program (ICCP).

There can be no quarrel with the programme, because it provides bright young Nepalis with exposure to American society — except that only a handful of these promising Nepali youth will ever return home. The rest are lost to the American dream machine, transported over by a programme that has created a significant drain on Nepal's future brain bank.

The selection process for the youth counselors is such that the best and the brightest produced by Nepal's elite schools, primarily St. Xavier's, St. Mary's and Budanilkantha, are chosen — whoever has not already got scholarships in an American college, that is. From a country where the quality of schooling is abysmal even by South Asian standards, the ICCP makes off with the select top layer on

whom the country has spent enormous amounts of scarce resources.

The selected youths are provided an Exchange Visitor Visa and their agreement with ICCP stipulates that they will "work only in camp, and return home at the expiration date of the visa." When the ICCP programme started in 1984, out of 34 boys who traveled West, only one returned. The following year there were 56 who went and two returned. Last year, three returned out of 26 who left for the United States. On average only about 20 percent return to Nepal, the rest being sucked into the heady world of independent living in the United States, some striking it lucky with school and scholarships, others making just making do in menial jobs and wasting their time and education.

The departure of 30-odd boys and girls every year for Dreamland USA is, of course, only symptomatic of a contagion that runs rife through not only Nepal, but all of South Asia and the rest of the Third World. Nepalis form but a tiny drop in the ocean of humanity that looks to the United States green card as the ultimate reward. However, in terms of 'brain drain' Nepal's loss is perhaps greater than that of other South Asian countries because its pool of the properly educated is so much smaller.

Today, every other Nepali college-going student with some English background is actively seeking to go to the United States. Everyone else who has half an opening will attempt to make it through: a Fulbright scholarship that can (with difficulty) be converted to a more permanent stay; relatives that can be expected to pull one over; visa sponsorships that may be true or false. Upon overstaying a visa period, if societal ambitions are not high, one can always disappear into American metropolis safe in knowledge that the hopelessly overworked Immigration and Naturalisation Services (INS) will never be able to track you down unless someone tattles.

The United States is Shangri La in reverse. Unlike the tourists who visit the Himalaya, however, most Nepalis who make it to over there rarely use their return tickets.

## About 13,000

Time and again, all over South Asia, one finds that persons who have visited the United States, no matter how briefly, command automatic respect. Among parents, siblings, relatives, friends and neighbours, this reverence is not so much for the individual as for the land that they have touched. And more often than not, the America-returned prefers to keep quiet about the reality of Eldorado: of long hours

...serving behind fast-food counters, of loneliness in a fast-paced alien urban culture, of the relative deprivation that can be countered only with a continuous comparison with the home country ("Here I have a fridge and a car, but in Nepal...")

Howsoever ill-equipped they may be to confront America, the number of Nepalis who forsake their society and head West is on a dramatic rise. Although by Third World standards their arrival is late and small in numbers, figures show a recent surge in both the immigrant as well as non-immigrant Nepali population.

Some old-time residents remember when they used to long for anything 'Nepali' to come along — visitors, a packet of *masala*, a phone call from the next state. Today, these needs are considerably satiated, particularly in the major cities which now have good-sized Nepali communities. Ten years ago, Boston had no more than a handful of Nepali students in residence. Today, about 150 Nepalis work or study in this East Coast city. The numbers are much higher in Washington DC, New York, Chicago and Los Angeles. A Nepali New Yorker who arrived in 1971 estimates that there are about 500 in his city, the majority having arrived in the last five years.

According to the INS, a total of 1930 Nepalis had immigrated to the United States by 1991. Assuming that each immigrant has a spouse and at least two children and adding the approximately 840 students from Nepal, the total would have been a little over 8000, which was also the estimate of the New York-based American-Nepal Friendship Society. There are, however, probably a few thousand more who overstay their tourist (B) or business visa. And many enter as students and then stay on. Taking all this into account, as well as the number of F (student), J (exchange visitor), H (business), M (vocational student) visas and green cards given to Nepalis over the last two years, there are probably about 13,000 persons of Nepali origin in the United States today — immigrants, non-immigrants, and illegal aliens.

always been dignity in going to faraway place to make a better living. For instance, if a village could not support more than one bahun, the extra bahun moved on."

*Lahur janey*, traveling to the Gurkha recruitment centers in the plains, is the best example of this historical migratory proclivity, says Mishra. In centuries past, Lahur was as close as the plains of the Tarai or as far as Burma or Singapore. In the 1950s, England was where everyone wanted to be. "The United States is the latest lahur, having left England far behind in the global cultural hierarchy."

Push as well as pull factors turn mere desire for the United States into reality. The push factors include financial problems and family difficulties. While the hope to earn a better living in *muglan* has always been the rationale for historical migration, it is surprising to note the large number of Nepalis in the United States who cite "family problems" as the reason for immigrating — bickering over dwindling family assets, family feuds, and pressure to marry. Rather than be trapped in marriage, one young woman with a Bachelor's degree willingly joined first year in college in the United States.

Among the pull factors, opportunity for higher education is one very strong one. The depressing state of Nepal's higher education helps sustain the exodus to American institutions. Till a decade ago, Nepalis were mostly enrolled in Masters or doctoral programmes. Today, however, a majority (64 percent in 1991/92) come for undergraduate studies, which runs counter to both South Asian as well as world trends.

There are hundreds of well-endowed universities and colleges which will pick up the tuition tab for strong candidates. The availability of scholarships and soft loans are dwindling, however, mainly because the Federal funds have been cut drastically. In the past, students went abroad for study only if tuition and board were paid by institutional or university scholarships. Today, however, a large proportion of Nepalis today actually pay

their own way through two-year or four-year courses in American state universities and so-called 'community colleges' (a category under which Nepali enrollment has more than tripled in the last decade). Tuition in these institutions range between US\$1000-2000 a term.

A large number of Nepali students pay for tuition by working part-time (about 20 hours a week), while others make do by working fulltime during alternate terms. Newfound affluence in Kathmandu (and cash-in-hand from sale of real estate) has meant that some parents are able to afford even Ivy League education for their children in the larger and most expensive private universities, where term fees range between US\$5000-10,000. A few years ago, a Nepali undergraduate arrived at a small town in Georgia and deposited US\$ 30,000 at the local bank. For a long time, he was the talk of the whole town.

Professional curiosity is a also big draw on mid-career Nepalis. Many successful and not-so-successful doctors, economists, engineers and others in technical fields arrive and get hooked. A research or development job in a high technology firm is considered the end-goal, for instance, although only a few Nepalis can claim to have 'made it' that far. For others who have set their sights lower, even a few months' training and cursory exposure to the United States becomes a marketable asset back home.

The allure of a supposedly independent and freewheeling American lifestyle is among the stronger pull factor for Nepalis of all castes and classes. This, more than anything else, is what has Nepalis desperately seeking visas at the American Embassy at Panipokhari, Kathmandu. Coming from a traditional-minded society in which family or group behaviour tends to overpower individualism, married and unmarried Nepalis alike are attracted to a country where social relations are more relaxed. For those who feel smothered by societal strictures, a ticket to America is the ultimate escape. Wrote one correspondent, "I greatly value this (American) society's ability

to let a person be what he or she wants to be. Eastern societies can be caring but there are always strings attached." While its never openly cited, the desire for class mobility also is a reason why so many travel to the United States, where reward for hard work are thought to be more

## Modern-Day Lahur

What is the motivation behind this undying America craze? Chaitanya Mishra, well known Nepali sociologist, says the phenomenon of wanting to leave Nepal itself is nothing new. "There has

Table 1. South Asian Immigrants admitted to the US

Country	1991	1990	1989	1988	1987	1981	1985	1984	1983	1982
B'Desh	10676	4252	2180	1325	1649	634	1146	823	787	639
Bhutan	?	1	1	?	0	1	0	0	10	14
China	33025	31815	32272	28717	25841	25106	24787	23363	25777	27100
India	45064	30667	31175	26268	27803	26227	26026	24964	25451	21738
Nepal	174	184	134	106	78	86	63	75	105	97
Pakistan	20355	9729	8000	5438	6319	5994	5744	5509	4807	4536
Sri Lanka	1377	976	757	634	630	596	553	554	472	505

Source: Statistics Division, US Immigration and Naturalization Service



**Table 2. History of Nepali Immigrants to the US**

1956	1	1968	19	1980	95
1957	5	1969	32	1981	83
1958	0	1970	25	1982	97
1959	4	1971	40	1983	105
1960	4	1972	39	1984	75
1961	5	1973	46	1985	63
1962	5	1974	43	1986	86
1963	3	1975	56	1987	78
1964	7	1976	68	1988	106
1965	4	1977	80	1989	134
1966	8	1978	68	1990	184
1967	9	1979	79	1991	174
<b>Total:</b>	<b>1,930</b>				

Source: Statistics Division, US Immigration and Naturalization Service

direct, and where one evades the existing class structures of the home country altogether.

### The Myth Shatters

Some of the classic stereotypes about America quickly crumble as the traveler alights at New York, Washington DC or Los Angeles. The collision with reality often comes right at the terminal when the Nepali looking for gleaming chrome and glass finds dirty plastic and cardboard instead.

The Fantasia of their imaginings does exist, but is not immediately apparent nor available to the most first generation immigrants. "Heaven on earth, that is what I expected," says a Nepali woman now working in Washington DC. "Through books, movies and magazines I imagined a free, wonderful, rich society where I could experiment with self-expression. I imagined a friendly, mostly white people, and sophistication in food, in people, in information and in technology."

The visions of a great democracy and bedrock of social justice, too, dissipate over time. The reality of underlying racism is immediately apparent and is reinforced over a longer timeframe. The quality of life of the inner cities, in whose proximity many Nepalis live, becomes a window to the America of incredible poverty amidst unimaginable wealth.

The cliché of 'melting pot' begins to appear tenuous. A graduate student in California: "I no longer think of the United States as a great melting pot. It is homogeneous — culturally Eurocentric, racially more than 65 per cent white, religion-wise Christian, language-wise English."

A lady doctor who has lived in Boston for 12 years: "What has struck me most is the violence that pervades society. The social

isolation of the elderly is pervasive. The poor do not have money for medicine or food — they are no better off than the poor of the Third World."

The high prevalence of violent crimes, loneliness in a rushed society, and the treatment of the elderly were, in fact, the three social ills that South Asians this writer interviewed found most striking in America.

It turns out that except for the most adaptable among the young immigrants (or those who are raised in the United States since childhood), complete assimilation is practically impossible. "The bottom line is that even after years of living, I do not feel at home here," wrote a professional woman who had started studies in the United States as an undergraduate. "Americans cherish freedom and rights for Americans, but are only superficially supportive of the rights of non-Americans here."

Meeta Saiju, a sociologist who studied Nepali domestic workers in the Washington DC metropolitan area, says that Nepali women are especially hardpressed, "being both women and foreigners in a social setting that is not native to them."

For some Nepalis, the rude awakening comes not from evaluating the truths of American society, but from having to work hard in the land of milk and honey — either in the classroom or the shop floor. Wrote one graduate student, "I still believe that it is easier for talented people to succeed in the United States, but one has to be able to tolerate merciless exploitation of talent, make a niche for oneself, and perpetuate the exploitation."

Many Nepalis interviewed admitted that had they known life would be such a struggle in America they would not have come. After the thrill over the dollar paycheck subsidies, reality sinks in: the cost of living is much too close to what one brings in, and the savings account is always at minima. Even though the pace of economic progress is excruciatingly slow, however, Nepalis persevere. They have burnt their bridges, and a return home with nothing to show for America would be embarrassing. The hardships of the present are also ameliorated by the hopes for a better

future, particularly the expectation of retiring to Nepal with United States social security benefits.

### Return

The myth of return to the homeland, as with every other immigrating community, resides with Nepalis also. Very often, people want to stay long enough to enjoy comforts and benefits, but by the time that stage is achieved, many other factors will have cropped up — seniority at work, children's education, pensions requirements, etc. Many married graduate students with children are torn between wanting to return for self and also wanting an American education for their children.

Understandably, many want to make some money before returning home, but the longer they stay the harder it becomes to return. Ashok Raj Pandey, who has lived more than a dozen years in Boston and plans to return to Kathmandu in 1993, calls this a "moving target". Pandey, a Harvard Business School graduate and businessman, describes the predicament of the typical Nepali immigrant thus: "First you want to make a few hundred dollars, then a few thousand, then tens of thousands. But as you move up the ladder, the savings are soaked up by inflation, demands of a growing family, a better car, eating out, entertainment. In the end, after so many years you have saved so little. Then

there is no courage to go home. And your kids still have to go to college."

Says a social worker, "Some Nepalis end up nicely. But most don't and for them the humiliation of return is hard to bear."

Those who arrived in the 1960s now have children in their mid-twenties. Although the parents continue to feel strong pulls back to Nepal, the children obviously feel Americans first.

As adolescents, many even react to parental suggestions by rejecting Nepali language, culture and ethnic heritage. When confronted with this estrangement with all that they hold dear, the parents' reaction is to put their children's interests first. The plans to return recede further.

There are, certainly, many who have

**Table 3. Analysis of students in the US**

	Undergrad	Grad	Other
<b>1991/92</b>			
Nepal	64.1	33.9	2.0
S. Asia	31.6	65.5	2.9
World	47.0	45.6	7.4
<b>1987/88</b>			
Nepal	45.5	53.1	1.4
S. Asia	36.5	61.0	2.5
World	54.5	41.3	4.2

Source: Open Doors; Report on International Education, Marianthi Zikopoulos, editor. Institute of International Education, New York

given up prospects of a successful career in the United States and returned to Nepal of their own volition. What do they have to say? Kamal Prakash Malla, linguist and observer of Nepali culture, agrees that the ambitious might not find full satisfaction in the United States. "You can carve yourself a role here (in Nepal). It is hard to create an impact in the US." Madhav Gautam, who has a PhD in health and nutrition from Cornell University, professes to see no essential difference between life in Kathmandu and in Ithaca, the upstate New York town where the University is located. "The only difference I notice is that the cars are a little fancier over there. I have a classmate who stayed back, but I do not think he is all that happy." Says [sociologist] Mishra, who received his PhD from the University of Florida, Gainesville, "The United States is good to visit, not to live in. The material needs are fulfilled, but not the cultural and social needs."

### Long Haul Ahead

Among those Nepalis who have decided to make the tradeoff and stick it out in pursuit of 'America', there is a sense of a community

slowly building. In fits and starts, and not without a bit of infighting and unhealthy politicking, they have built up institutions that will help Nepalis in the United States to cope with the long haul ahead. Associations of Nepalis have sprung up all over the United States and Canada. The major cities and suburbs have groups that usually organise gatherings at least for the Nepali New Year and Dasain, if not more often. There are also groups that have formed along ethnic lines, age group, marital status, or income level.

Pratima Upadhyay, in her PhD dissertation on the assimilation of Nepali immigrants in the United States, delves into why Nepalis congregate. She writes that while Nepalis maintain "secondary contact" with Americans, "primary contacts or intimate relationships...are rare." Nepali immigrants, writes Upadhyay, prefer to withdraw from the social and cultural organisations of the host society "for the comfort of self-identity and sense of peoplehood".

In the end, though, Nepalis do tend to assimilate more than some other immigrant communities, perhaps because there are still so few of them. Writes Upadhyay,

"Considering that they are the first generation immigrants and have lived in this country for relatively short periods of time, the Nepalese have acculturated considerably. They appear to possess an enormous potential for rapid assimilation into American society."

But at what cost? Obviously the one's who willingly suffer the burden of alienness are the first generation immigrants who travel to the United States to study, work and taste the dream. They might not use the word, but many are then 'trapped' by their occupations, by perceived familial obligations, and the conviction of having 'made it' in the Western Land of Milk and Honey. The triumphs and travails of Nepali immigrants are really no different than that of any other community in this land of immigrants. The travails are reserved for the first generation, the triumphs for the descendants that follow.

S. Manandhar, a graduate of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, is Chairman of the Greater Boston Nepali Community and publisher of *Samachar Bichar*, a newsletter on issues of interest to Nepali students and scholars in the United States.

## Nepal Forum of Environmental Journalists GEF/Small Grants Programme Invites Proposals

Global Environmental Facility/Small Grants Programme (GEF/SGP) is a pilot programme established by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to provide grants for small-scale non-governmental organisation (NGO) activities in areas of environmental protection in selected developing countries.

As the host NGO implementing the GEF/SGP in Nepal, Nepal Forum of Environmental Journalists invites proposals from registered community groups, NGOs and NGO networks interested in small-scale investment projects, conservation education programmes, and conservation research programmes addressing the following problems:

- 1. Global Warming :** Projects should aim at reducing greenhouse gas emissions resulting from the use of fossil fuels and the destruction of carbon-absorbing forests.
- 2. Destruction of Biological Diversity:** Programmes that control degradation of natural habitats and depletion of natural resources.
- 3. Pollution of Water Systems:** Programmes that aim to reduce the pollution and degradation of local water ecosystems.
- 4. Depletion of Stratospheric Ozone Layer:** Programmes that seek to reduce/eliminate emissions of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), halons and other such gases.

NGOs which are undertaking community-based activities utilising local resources and programme that directly help women and rural backward communities in environmentally sensitive areas are encouraged to apply.

Award decisions will be made by the GEF/SGP Steering Committee, which consists of representatives of His Majesty's Government, UNDP and local NGOs.

For more information:  
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# Quest for the Four Fountains of Tibet

*The confusion between sacred and actual geographies may be baffling to the scientist and the explorer, but they are the spiritual food of pilgrims.*

text and pictures by John Vincent Bellezza



Dungdung Chu Glacier, "alternative source" of the Horse River, Brahmaputra.

**M**ount Kailas, in the southwestern corner of Tibet, is regarded as the centre of the universe by millions of people. It is identified as the physical manifestation of the mythical Mount Meru, the *axis mundi* of the Indic religions. From Mount Kailas, or Kang Rimpoche as it is called in Tibetan, spring four great rivers, the Brahmaputra, Sutlej, Karnali and Indus. Like Mount Kailas, each of the rivers is heavily steeped in legend. In the Indo-Tibetan Chakravala cosmology, the universe is divided into four quarters or continents. Each quarter is fed by a lifeline or river which links it with Mount Kailas, the primordial fountainhead of creation. Through long mythological association, the quartet of lifelines has been identified as these four great river systems.

Having travelled and researched in the Himalaya for many years, I felt that a trek to the sources of the four rivers would be a perfect recapitulation of my peregrinations. It was an extremely rewarding journey, but the logistics, distances and paucity of detailed maps made it a challenging one. Since I could afford only the expenses of transporting myself

across the wilds of Tibet, I could not rely on hired motor vehicles, guides, staff or support facilities of any kind. I had to be fully self-reliant and be prepared to travel a couple of thousand kilometres on foot over the course of many months. There was also a lack of detailed information on the sources of the rivers. The annals of Sven Hedin and Swami Pranavananda's landmark book *Kailas Mansarovar* helped but are incomplete and ambiguous in terms of precisely how to reach the sources. Moreover, the best topographical maps I could procure in the United States were the 1:500,000 technical aeronautical charts and the 1:1,000,000 Operational Navigational Charts of the relevant areas which are rife with erroneous and inconsistent data.

## The Way of the Pilgrim

These obstacles could have dispelled my long-standing dream had I not adopted the method of the pilgrim. A pilgrim travels to a place of spiritual power for purification, sanctification, discipline, or knowledge. The pilgrim's vital support is his or her deep abiding respect and faith in the object of the pilgrimage. The code

of conduct for the pilgrim is modest, temperate and dignified behaviour—a behaviour worthy of the spiritual quest. Most crucially, the constant companion of the pilgrim is prayer. Fortunately, the latter-day pilgrim has many examples throughout the history of Himalayan pilgrimage of people worthy of emulation.

The practical realities of pilgrimage are of as much concern as its philosophical basis. I understood the vital importance of striking a balance with the forces of Nature by trying to live in harmony with them. The hallmark of such harmony is that no discernible trace of the struggle is left on the land. This, in short, is the environmental ethic of nonviolence.

Once I had achieved a working resonance with Nature, the next most important step of my journey was to attune myself to the cultural beliefs regarding the sources of the rivers. My elementary understanding of the Tibetan languages, religion, customs and traditions greatly increased my chance of success. I assumed that people living near Mount Kailas, or one of the river sources, would be imbued with some of their qualities, and that trying to become part of the cultural landscape would

help me benefit from the qualities and power of the pilgrimage places.

### Cultural Landscape

Together, the holy mountain and the four rivers that spring from it form a vast, geographical mandala that has profoundly affected the cultural universe of Himalayan peoples. This fact is demonstrated by the wide, non-sectarian appeal that the region holds for Himalayan peoples. Although the mythological and intellectual import of Mount Kailas varies from religion to religion, its central focus is undisputed. It is as if at the nexus of the spiritual world disparities and differences lose their significance and are absorbed by a greater unity. Seen from this perspective, Mount Kailas, Mansarovar and the four springs become the totem of universal understanding. I believe this to be the foundation for the irresistible attraction Mount Kailas holds for people.

The four great rivers and their tributaries drain two-thirds of the total area of the Great Himalaya. Their catchment areas include Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, most of Nepal west of the Kali Gandaki drainage, parts of Sikkim, Bhutan, Arunachal Pradesh and Tibet. What is more remarkable is that the sources of these rivers lie within a 100 km radius, nowhere else on earth are the fountainheads of so many great river systems in such close proximity. In keeping with this geocentrism are the cultural and ecological diversity of the region. The four springs all fall under the jurisdiction of the Ngari prefecture and are contained in the Burang and Gar counties. At various times in history, the region was known as Nagri Kor Sum, Zhang Zhung, and perhaps Drushal and Uttarkhand.

### The Lion's Crib

The Indus, called the *Senge Tsangpo* or Lion River in Tibetan, arises from the Lion Spring (*Senge Kabab*), 45 km north of Mount Kailas which was the first source I visited in September 1986. I reached it by following the circumambulatory trail around Mount Kailas as far as Diraphuk Gompa. I then diverged from the main pilgrim trail and continued up the Lha Chu valley to eventually cross the flat-topped Tshesti Lachen La. Continuing north, I descended the Tshesti Lachen valley past a number of cobalt-blue tarns and drokpa encampments to the Indus river valley. I followed the Indus eastward until I came to a bifurcation in the river.

I pressed on up the left fork, or Munjam Chu, which generally flows in a S.W.S. direction. Eventually, three days on from Diraphuk Gompa, I made it to the source of the

Munjam Chu, one of many rivulets flowing off the steep slopes of the Kailas range. This is the actual source of the Indus, as are the headwaters of the Longdhep and Bokhar rivers. Together, the Bokhar, Longdhep and Munjam produce the infant Indus. Each effluent in terms of volume and character seems as important as the others.

Above the rivulets and myriad springs forming the Munjam Chu lies a pass giving access to a freshwater lake, almost 15 km long and to the south, one ridge away from the source of the Indus. Over the next couple of days, I followed the lake around to its eastern edge. I traversed an extremely high pass back to the Tsheti Chu drainage. To this day I can only wonder why Swami Pranavananda, in his description of an alternative route to the sources of the Indus via the Topchenla and Longdhep Chu, did not mention this huge lake whose perimeter I traced. The lake basin was totally uninhabited when I arrived. The drokpas must have already vacated it if it is a summer resource.

When I encountered the bifurcation in the nascent Indus, I opted to explore the Munjam Chu. Had I followed the northwest fork, the Bokhar Chu, I would have discovered *Senge Kabab*, the ritual source of the Indus, a sacred spring heralded by Mani stones. Having missed this sacred water source, I resolved to visit the ritual as well as the geographic sources of the other three rivers.

### Whence the Sutlej?

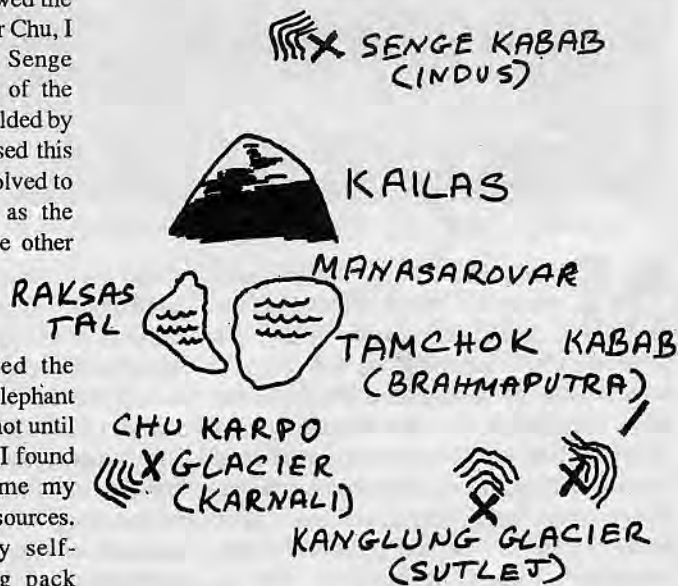
The Sutlej is designated the Langchen Tsangpo, or Elephant River, in Tibetan. It was not until the summer of 1992 that I found the opportunity to resume my exploration of the four sources. Again I travelled fully self-sufficient with a 40 kg pack containing Tibetan precious medicines and sacramental substances to offer local Drokpas.

This time Bikas Giri, a young Nepali sadhu, accompanied me. We began our trek on 29 July, from Darchen at the foot of the holy mountain. We hiked over the Barga plain the first day, and then clockwise around the pristine Mansarovar, the lake which pilgrims believe is the emanation of pure mind or substrate of creation. On reaching Seralung Gompa on the western shores of the lake, a lama called Konchok Shiva kindly informed us of the route to complete the trek.

Bikas and I decided to go up the Tag Tsangpo

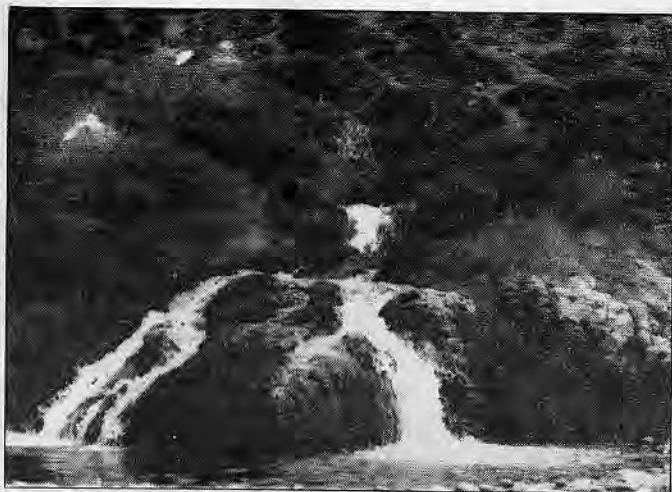
river, the largest of Mansarovar's tributaries, from its mouth rather than try a short cut from Seralung Gompa. After two days of hard walking, blown by squalls, we reached two sacred springs. One was Chumik Thongtroll, associated with Ling Gesar Gyalbo, the epic hero of Tibet. According to the Nyingma lama, Chimchol Dorje, and other native drokpas of the region, Chimik Thangtroll was born of the tears shed at that spot by Ling Gesar Gyalbo's horse. According to the legend, the horse wept in weariness after a long chase to destroy the black yak demon, *Ayakawa*. There are three koras or circumambulations around Chumik Thongtroll, the Nangkor, Zekor, and Barkor. Each kora bestows a different empowerment on pilgrims and is marked by different sacred signs. The Zekor imbues the pilgrim with the grace of Tamin/Hevajra, the horse-headed tantric god.

The Ganga Chumik is the companion spring of Chumik Thongtroll. Mani stones and prayer flags similarly herald its source. Confusingly, the Ganga Chumik is sometimes referred to as Langchen Kabab, the Elephant spring, ritual source of the Sutlej. Konchok



Shiva, the abbot of Seralung Gompa says Ganga Chumik and Langchen Kabab are one and the same, while the eminent Ngari scholar, Kangriva Choying Dorje, says they are different. He takes the view that Langchen Kabab should be identified as the sacred springs located near the recently rebuilt Dulchu Gompa. The springs of Dulchu lie halfway between Uarchen and Moiner on the banks of the Sutlej, more than 75 km from Chumik Ganga. Swami Pranavananda compounds the confusion by stating in table XXV of his itineraries that the spring at Dulchu is Langchen Kabab while designating Chumik Ganga as





Mapcha Chu Ko, "ritual source" of Karnali, the Peacock River.

Langchen Kabab on his map of the region. Evidently there was a question in the mind of the late Swami as to what actually comprises the ritual source of the Sutlej. Perhaps Chimchok Dorje, an important local Ngakpa, is correct when he says that the ritual source of the Sutlej is neither spring. Geographic incongruencies in Tibet are common and sometimes unresolvable. At this time one can only conclude that the Sutlej has various ritual sources.

The geographical sources of the Sutlej should be far more straightforward. Yet, even here, discrimination is required. The Rakas Tal and Mansarovar are alternatively chosen as the source of the Sutlej. Nevertheless, its genetic or ultimate source is far to the east of Mansarovar, at the headwaters of the Tag Tsangpo river. Approximately 35 km upstream from the twin sacred springs, the Tag Tsangpo issues out of the snout of the Kangling Glacier resting on the lap of the Tsangla (Sanskritised to Changla) Himal. Below the glacial moraines of the Kangling is a summer camp site occupied by drokpas between June and early September. Slightly west of the Kangling, also in the Tsangla Himal, is Lalung, a less important glacial source for the Tag Tsangpo, and by logical extension the Sutlej river.

### The Horse's Ears

In Tibetan mythology, the Brahmaputra is referred to as the *Tamchok Tsangpo*, or Horse River. Just east of Kangling is the Tag La, a series of ridges dividing the Sutlej drainage basin from that of the Brahmaputra. There are three possible sources of this great river. The least important, in terms of volume, is a lake called *Tamalung Tso*. It is located just north of the Tag La. Tamalung Tso is really a string of

smaller lakes which drain into the Brahmaputra.

The second larger source of the Brahmaputra is a glacier at the head of the Dungdung Chu valley. In his book, Swami Pranavananda calls the valley *Angsi Chu*, yet I found no local reference to the use of this name. Undoubtedly, the largest and most important source of the Brahmaputra is the Tamchok Kabab Kangri glaciers, the Horse Spring. Incidentally, this is the only case where the actual and

ritual sources match. Tamchok Kabab is located 35 km due southeast of Tamalung Tso in the Tsangla Himal. Swami Pranavananda in *Kailas Mansarovar* states it derives its name from the Tamchok Kangri and the nearby Chimayungrung glaciers, which are likened to the ears of a giant horse. The etymology of Tamchok leaves little doubt that it is derived from the Tibetan words for horse and ear. However, the interpretation of the information I had at hand differs with the Swami's interpretation. According to a local drokpa, the pyramidal mountains flanking the Tamchok Kangri Glacier are the ears of the horse and not



Bonpo gumpa at Tamchok Kabab.

the glaciers themselves. Furthermore, the plains in front of the glacier form the nose of the mythological horse. Perhaps Swami Pranavananda's interpretation and the one I received are both correct? Is sacred geography as much a dimension of the landscape as it is of the mind?

On a more mundane level, the joining of the watercourse originating from both the Tamchok Kangri and Chimayungrung glaciers lead to the Chimayungrung Chu.

Chimayungrung is composed of two Tibetan words meaning sand and swastika. The drokpas of this place told me the name represents a swastika manifested from earth, self-formed and primordial. The confluence of the Chimayungrung Chu and Dungdung Chu creates a lake called Rabgye Tso. Rabgye Tso was known as Brahma Kund to Bhotia traders according to Swami Pranavananda. The river below Rabgye Tso is referred to as the Martsang or Yarlung Tsangpo, or the Brahmaputra proper. Two years ago, Chimchok Dorje, the Ngakpa, rebuilt a chorten at the edge of Rabgye Tso to mark the beginning of one of the world's longest rivers.

One of the most interesting cultural landmarks found at any of the four sources is at Tamchok Kabab. It consists of a series of cubicles built around black boulders the size of houses. The structure is flanked by cairns topped by white stones. This monument is called Bonpo Gumpa. The drokpas say it is the ancient place where the semi-mythic founder of Bon, Miwo Shenrab, practised religion.

### The Peacock River

The Karnali is the *Mapcha Tsangpo* or Peacock River. The source of the Karnali lies 85 km south of Mount Kailas. Until the 19th century, the Western world was led to believe that the fourth river originating from near Mt Kailas was the Ganga. However, although the Ganga begins only 225 km from Mount Kailas, its source, Gomukh, is on the south side of the Himalaya. The Mapcha or Karnali and its tributaries drain all of Nepal west of the Kali Gandaki with the exception of the Mahakali catchment area. I began the trek to the source of the Karnali on 17 August 1992, from Burang Dzong, the entrepot bazaar near the point where Tibet, Nepal and India meet.

I hiked to the source up the Mapcha Tsangpo valley via the village of Kardung and the pastoral encampments of Krekopar, Nama Korkor and Tarachen. There is also an alternative route to Tarachen via Harkang and the Ur la. I returned to Burang via this alternative route. Upstream of the Tarachen on the edge of a shelf above the Karnali river is Mapcha Chu Ko, the ritual source of the Karnali. It is a beautiful, full spring with exceptionally sweet-tasting water. The water running down from the springs represents the peacock's mouth. The gully above the spring is likened to its long neck, and the ridges rising above the shelf are said to resemble its wings. The best way to visualise the sacred geography is to imagine a colossal peacock swooping down from the heavens

with its head nearly touching the Karnali valley.

The geographical or actual source of the Karnali is two more days' walk from Mapcha Chu Ko. This disparity goes virtually unrecorded in most of the literature, religious and exploratory, pertinent to the region. This indeed is an important key in unravelling the riddles of Tibetan geography, and is crucial in delineating physical geography from sacred geography. Beyond Mapcha Chu Ko, there are two main tributaries originating off the flanks of the Central Himalaya.

In the first of these tributaries against the ramparts of the Himalaya are the ruins of Namkha Khyung Dzong, the celestial Eagle Fort. Namkha Khyung Dzong was the second largest gumpa in Ngari before the Cultural Revolution (the largest was Simbaling Gumpa, in Burang). The Nyingma establishment belonged to the Degel Rimpoche subsect, which practices Ati yoga. Namkha Khyung Dzong was only in existence for 50 years, but during that time represented a significant new element in the sociopolitical makeup of the Nyingma sect. The current head of the Namkha Khyung Dzong is Shiva Lodoe Rimpoche who resides at Bansbari, Kathmandu.

#### Where Black Meets White

Passing the sacred main Himalayan tributary after Mapcha Chu Ko, the Karnali splits into two branches of equal size. Which one led to the source? The easterly fork is called Chu Napko, or the Black River. Chu Napko has a non-glacial trans-Himalayan origin. The



*Kang Rimpoche, Kailas Parbat.*

northerly flowing fork is called Chu Karpo, the White River. It issues from a glacier on the north side of the main axis of the Himalaya. This glacier is about 35 km from the confluence of the Black and White rivers.

I opted to pursue the Chu Karpo to its headwaters. Its glacial origin and longer length led me to determine that it, and not the Chu Nakpo, is the actual source of the Karnali. Is the Chu Karpo glacier the one with Lampiya Pass surmounting it, an old Bhotia trade route? I had no way of knowing, and there was not another human being for many miles around from whom I might have inquired.

From my explorations of the Fabled Four Mountains of Tibet I conclude that a number of cultural and geographical questions pertaining to them are as yet unanswered. There is much ground work to build on the findings of Sven Hedin and Swami Pranavananda. Maybe too hastily have

cartographers filled in this area, one of the last *terra incognitas* on the planet. Briefly, subsequent explorations to the region should attempt to clarify or answer the questions given below.

#### Unanswered Questions

1. What is the exact geographic configuration of the three uppermost feeders of the Indus, the Bokhar, the Longdhep, and the Munjam rivers, and how do adjacent areas interconnect with them?
2. What and where is Langchen Kabab?
3. What is the name of the glacier at the head of the Karnali?
4. What is the relationship between the uppermost tributaries

of the Karnali and which should be attributed as the actual source of the river?

5. What are the Nagri drokpa oral traditions relating to the Fabled Four Mountains? This is nearly untouched cultural ground.

6. Can any light be shed on the historical ritual significance of the Tamchok Kabab Bonpo Gumpa?

7. What more can be learned about Namkha Khyung Dzong?

8. Do the sacred sources of the four rivers have medicinal properties as the Tibetans claim?

9. Why is Chumik Thongtrot one of Ngari's only Ling Gesar Gyalbo sites when many exist in nearby Ladakh and Baltistan?

J.V. Bellezza does environmental consultations for the Himachal Pradesh state government and for the North West Frontier Province in Pakistan. He also leads treks.

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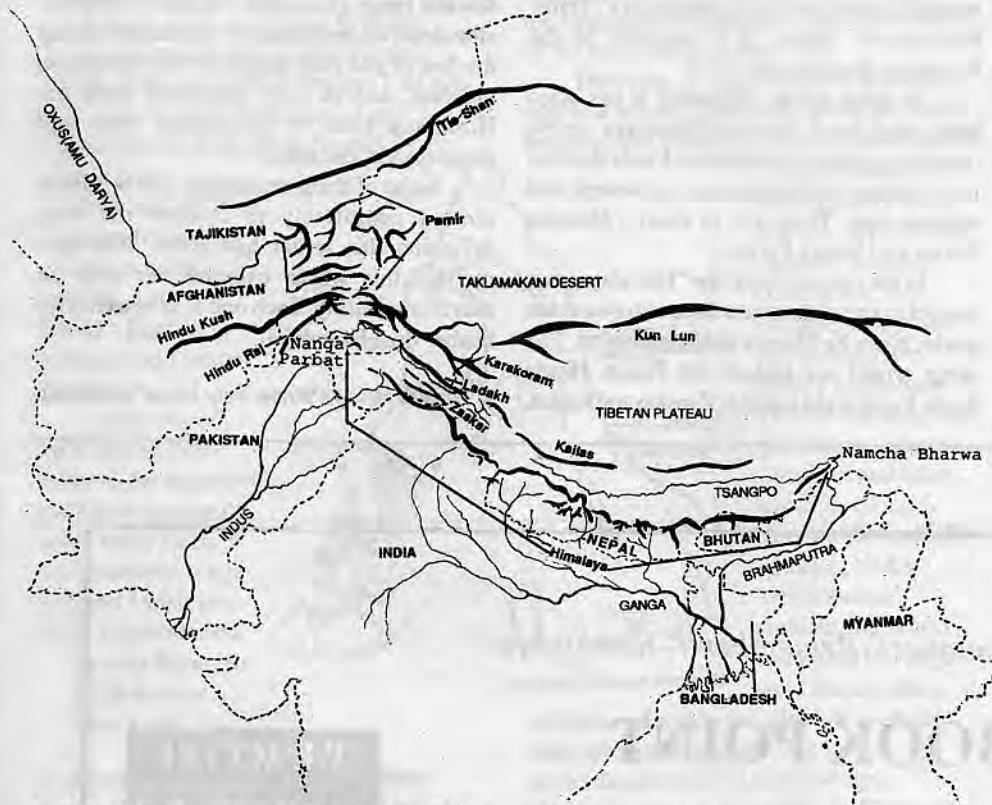
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# Defining 'Himalaya'

*It is necessary to delienate the scope of 'Himalaya'.  
It turns out, however, that this is a subjective exercise.*

by Dipesh Risal



**T**he Himalaya does not stand alone in the northern reaches of South Asia. As the Indian plate was subducted into the Asiatic plate some 200 million years ago, many roughly parallel ranges arose from the Tethys seabed and surrounding landmass.

So today, there is the main Himalayan crest, often called the Great Himalaya. To its north are the parallel and lesser ranges of Ladakh, Zaskar and Kailas. From northern Kashmir, the Karakoram stretches out over the disputed borders of India with Pakistan and China. It is home to four of the 14 peaks over 8,000m. Southwest from the frontiers of India, Pakistan and Afghanistan spring the Hindu Kush and Hindu Raj, often grouped together as one range. Northwest of the main Himalayan body is the Pamir knot, mostly lying in Tadjikistan. Besides these ranges, there are the two poor cousins of the Himalaya, Kun Lun and Tien Shan, stretching out into China.

## Ad Hoc Himalaya

The question of which of these mountain chains to include under 'Himalaya' has never been answered to satisfaction. Confusion reigns supreme over the nomenclature of this profusion of ranges, which boasts of all but one of the world's 179 peaks over 7,000m (the odd one out being being Ancohumá (7014m.) in Bolivia). Moreover, these formidable Asian belts wind through frontiers (sometimes disputed) and more often than not there are different names for the same range (Kailas is Nyenchen Tang La in Tibetan). In fact, the question of which mountains fall within a particular country's borders attracts much more attention than the question of which mountains fall in or out of the 'Himalaya'.

Regional blinders have been responsible, in part, for creating this confusion. Some Indian mountaineering literature would leave us in the belief that the Himalaya is limited to sections falling in Punjab, Kumaun, Sikkim

and Assam — with the black hole of Nepal and Bhutan in between. Nepalis, for the most part, believe the Himalaya stretches from Kanchenjunga (8598m) on the east to the Api-Saipal range on the west.

The fuzziness is not limited to the Great Himalayan Ridgeline only. There is also the question of whether or not to include the southern contiguous systems of the Lesser or Middle Himalaya — Mahabharat Lekh and Siwalik (Churey).

The traditional, imperial description of the Himalaya usually begins with the following generic statement: "From the Pamir knot, many different ranges fan out into several directions..." After that, what to include in the Himalaya is mostly up to the individual authorities.

Some describe the Himalaya as extending between the Indus and Brahmaputra (Tsangpo) rivers. But this definition would also rope in the Zaskar range, which means we would then have to include the parallel Ladakh range across the Indus as well, but then why not the Karakoram itself, which lies further north?

The case of the Punjab Himalaya serves to further highlight the Himalayan confusion. Louis Baume, in his *Sivalaya* (the *Veda* of mountaineering), maintains that the Punjab Himalaya comprises the main Himalayan chain, plus several other ranges to its north: Ladakh, Karakoram and Aghil; although he then mentions ambiguously that doing so is "neither geographically nor geologically necessarily correct". Others, like John Cleare in the *Collins Guide to Mountains and Mountaineering*, define the Punjab Himalaya as stretching from the Sutlej river to Nanga Parbat in the west, and comprising the main Himalayan watershed only.

One way of clearing the confusion has been to name the entire geosyncline (belt) as Hindu Kush-Himalaya, which nicely incorporates most of the ranges in question. But this solution tends towards simplism and does not take into account the many topographical, geological and climatic variations.

One must also distinguish between the actual ridgeline and the region surrounding it. Social scientists, obviously, prefer to look beyond pure geography to factors such as population, politics, climate, economy and administration. As much can be seen from the map of the Himalayan region published in *Himal May/June 1992* ('Briefs' section), which, because it takes the administrative unit as its basis, includes remote parts of Afghanistan,

Bangladesh and Myanmar, some of which do not even contain montane elevations.

Even when we get down to the continuous body of the main Himalaya, confusion persists. Purists would have it that the Himalaya extends from Namcha Barwa (just beyond the bend of the Tsangpo) to Garhwal in the west. Thus, Adams Carter, Editor of the *Alpine Journal*, completely ignores the Punjab Himalaya, and Nanga Parbat along with it, in his *Classification of the Himalaya*.

One suggestion might be to look at how the ranges in question were formed and also at major watersheds. Geographers generally agree that the Pamir, Hindu Kush, Karakoram and the main Himalayan watershed were all formed at around the same geological time. The Tien Shan and Kun Lun ranges, however, were acted upon by other geological forces and so can easily be excluded. The Pamir knot, too, can be excluded because it does not follow the Himalayan contour and also because it is separated from the main Himalayan body by

the Oxus (Amu Darya) river.

As for the Karakorum and Hindu Kush, they too would fall on the outside because the great Indus watershed separates these ranges from what we may call the 'uninterrupted Himalaya'. Besides, the rolling mountains of Hindu Kush and the jagged peaks of Karakoram also do not share a lot of topographic features with the Himalaya. Kailas, along with the smaller Ladakh and Zaskar ranges, is a "Trans-Himalayan" range. It is parallel to the Himalaya, but not a part of it.

So what are we left with? It has often been mentioned that the Himalaya sports (almost by design, according to Louis Baume) two isolated high peaks on its eastern and western ends. These are, of course, Namcha Barwa and Nanga Parbat.

In the final analysis, the "Himalaya" can be said to stretch between these two guardians peaks, Namcha Barwa to Nanga Parbat. The range would *not* include the Pamir, Hindu Kush, Karakoram, Ladakh, Zaskar and Kailas.

The northern boundary would more or less follow the frontiers of Assam, Bhutan, Sikkim, Nepal, Uttar Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh, where it would leave the frontier to reach up to Nanga Parbat. To the south, the range would end where the mountains give way to the hills (at 4600m), and the Lesser (Middle) Himalaya would be more properly be called the Himalayan foothills. It is best to omit the Siwalik range altogether, because, besides its altitudinal insignificance, it was formed during the last of the four stages of the Himalayan buildup, and is thus separated from the Himalaya both in geological time and geographical distance.

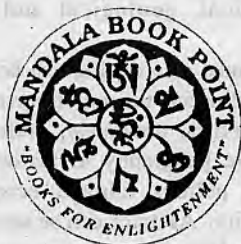
Some of these arguments *can* be turned around completely to counter the very definition this writer has given. But then, perhaps this whole exercise has been an exercise in futility. Each one of us searches for his/her own Himalaya.

D. Risal is *Himal's* "Know Your Himal" columnist.

*Remember! Remember!! Remember!!!*

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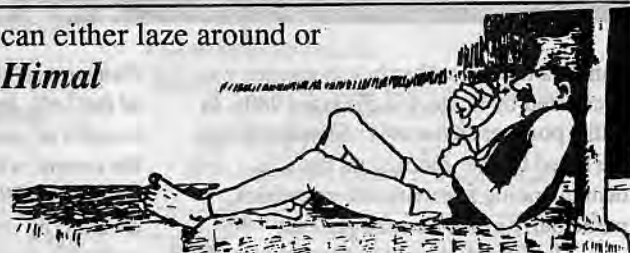
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# Abominably Yours,

The history of Communism in the Himalaya is rather like the history of the potato. Just like the Andean tuber took well to the local soil and climate when it was introduced 250 years ago, so has another underground import: Sendero Luminoso. This, at least, is what I gather from recent frenzied pamphleteering along the shining paths of East Nepal.

Hopping down to Tumlingtar recently from my Upper Barun cave, to stock up on video cassettes for the winter tuck-in, I came across slogans extolling the virtues of Comrade Abimael Guzman and demanding his immediate release from prison in Lima.

The rocks on which the red-paint slogans were smeared could have been graffiti in Espaniol on the houses of Ayacucho. The peasants of the Arun, including some indigenous groups resident there, could have been Peru's Warri. This roadless and historically aloof neck of Nepal could be the Andean *altiplano*, although the Tingri plain just to the north is a better geographical likeness.

When the Peruvian police finally caught Comrade Gonzalo and led him down to the basement to tame his wild ways, the world lost one of its last free-ranging Maoists. Wild populations of this dying breed are shrinking dangerously. Remnants of the once-vast herds that roamed across the Yangtse Basin can still be found in isolated jungle pockets of the Sierra Madre mountains in Philippines. In southern Sri

committed to preserving biodiversity and protecting endangered species and so is doing its utmost to rescue the common red-crested Maoist.

Vast protected areas have been created where there shall be no reshuffling of class and caste relations; education has carefully been modulated to remain below the quality threshold; any murmur of affirmative action is quickly smothered with insecticide.

These and other strong interventions by successive conservative conservation-minded governments of Nepal has ensured the objective conditions which will ensure an undisturbed habitat for the endangered species to flourish in the decades ahead. In fact, satellite trackings show that the movements of Jhपालिस in Naxal and Naxalites in Jhapa has already picked up, which is a good sign for all who cherish political diversity in words and deeds.

Speaking of biodiversity, the centrist genera of the Nepali Congress and the United Marxist Leninists are in danger of losing their special genetic traits due to ideological inbreeding. With both genera professing socialist plumage, soon it is only the dominant males with the flashiest colours that will head the individual packs.

Watching the leftist pragmatists "grandly success" their recent national convention in Kathmandu, I wondered whether Maosism in Nepal would suffer a setback if, Shiva-forbid, the Hindu Rastra came to be on the Plains of

Gangamata. How would these earthly Gods of the Left, depicted on the temporary temples of convention halls, compete with the cosmic whirlwind of the Chakra unleashed? Wouldn't class struggle be dwarfed by central governments that can make the oceans churn, continents heave



and skies open?

The canvas portraits of hirsute alien males seem sadly transient in the presence of Kathmandu's granite garudas. But, in these pragmatic times, nobody thought of painting over the adverts of transnational colas. Pepsi was there, exhorting Marx and Lenin to cool it.

A checklist of the majoritarian shadow cabinet down South, purportedly authentic, has just been shown to me. It gives in decreasing order of priority some immediate steps to be taken to restore the glory of Ramrajya:

1. Launch a commando operation to capture and secure Mt. Kailas and Manasarovar, the fountainheads of all life.
2. Raze mosques in the island of Bali.
3. Raze wats in Ayutthaya in Thailand.
4. Renovate Pashupati for free, and divert Melamchi water to flush the Bagmati and make it holy again.
5. Market Gangotri water in tetrapacks in the cow belt and raise money to flush the Ganga and make it holy again.
6. Construct a cyclotron in Mathura for research into particle physics and the development of the Hindu Bomb.
7. Declare the Hindu Rastra as the world's only vegetarian republic.
8. Shift capital from New Delhi to Mathura.
9. Send search and destroy party to Himalayan heights to tackle abominable anthropoid who doth speaketh more than doesth him goodeth.



Lanka, a fierce and hardy sub-species was decimated by hunters in the late 1980s. In India, poachers have over the years driven the breed to near-extinction, but it is demonstrating a remarkable comeback, particularly in the Deccan plateau.

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