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May/June 1994

# HIMAL

HIMALAYAN MAGAZINE

## *Marginalised*



*old world under the new world order*

**The Next Great Earthquake**



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पूर्वापरी तोयनिधी बगाह्य  
स्थितः पृथिव्या इव मानदण्डः

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

*A northern yardstick  
To measure the Earth*

- Kalidasa (Kumara Sambhava)

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by Dipak Gyawali



*For Nepal's economy  
to prosper on behalf of  
the hill peasantry,  
the capitalists  
must become  
nationalist, the border  
must be regulated,  
the subsistence  
economy must be  
given due credit,  
the government must  
learn to bargain with  
India, and economists  
must learn political  
economics.*

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by Roger Bilham

*When the Big One arrives in the Himalaya, as it must in the coming decades somewhere between Katmandu and Dehradun, there will be much death and destruction. Even the little that could be done to confront such a frightening scenario, is not.*

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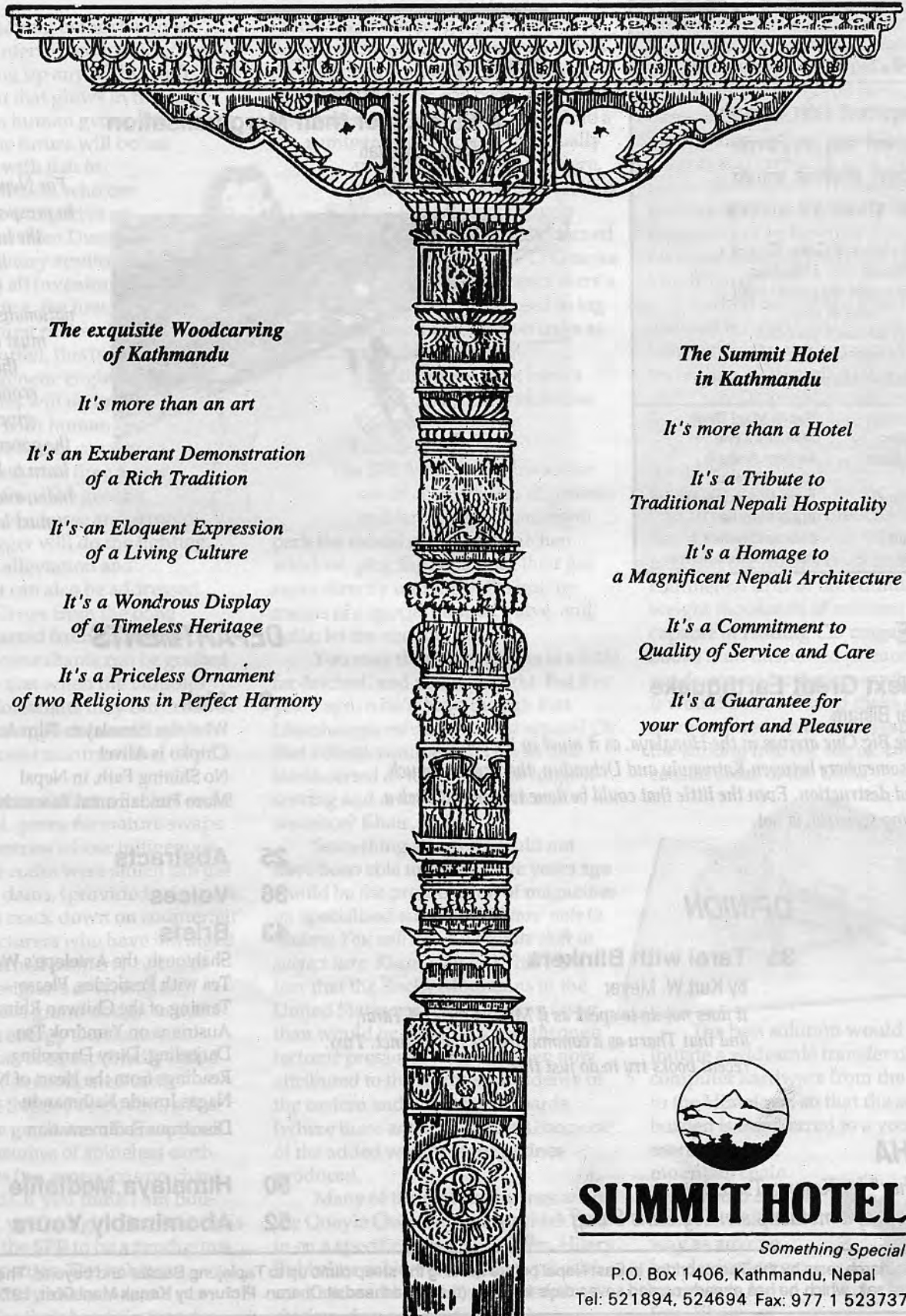
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**Cover:** Limbu patriarch rests by the Tamor bridge in East Nepal before tackling the steep climb up to Taplejung Bazaar and beyond. The doko holds a year's supply of salt, which he has already carried seven days from the (then) roadhead at Dharan. **Picture** by Kanak Mani Dixit, 1974.



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## Publisher's Ire

It is with great disappointment and disconcertation that we are writing regarding the "review" of *Building Bridges to the Third World* by Toni Hagen (Mar/Apr 1994). Our bookstore provided a free copy of this expensively produced book for a reviewer to read and present a proper review to your readers. The commentary reflected only what easily could be read on the cover and table of contents. Further, the credits page was misquoted stating "Pilgrims" as publisher when in fact the publishing house is Book Faith India, Delhi.

Again, we wish to express our dissatisfaction of this "review" in hopes that future journalism in Himal will be less political and more professional.

*Pushpa Tiwari, Proprietor  
Tiwari's Pilgrims Book House  
Thamel, Kathmandu*

Himal has not yet carried a review of Hagen's new book, only a news item - editors.

## Who's the Himalayan Audience?

I am perplexed as to why all three cover articles in the Mar/Apr 1994 issue of Himal chose to ignore the Nepali entries at Film Himalaya 1994 — *Panauti: Hamro Sampada* and *Lhwaka Yae Mwayana Haa*. While devoting a whole issue to a recap of the festival, it is quite sad that Himal either did not have the space, or worse still, did not think the Nepali documentaries worthy of comment.

Although it would be ridiculous to expect all 41 films to be reviewed, Himal might have done this small service to its own readers and to Nepali filmmakers. This is not to say that preferential treatment be given to Nepali filmmakers in your magazine;

just that *Himalayan* filmmakers get due credit, and one does not get more Himalayan than Nepalis born and bred in Nepal.

I agree with Sanjeev Verma ("...because they are there") when he writes that regardless of what subject a film may concern itself with, it must interest the viewer. No matter how exotic, novel or fascinating the topic, if the basic standards of film production are not met, the audience will tune out. A film must attempt to achieve the highest tenets of production, both conceptual and technical.

The two Nepali documentaries suffered from lack of this and much more. What perplexes me is that why, when worse films, both in terms of principle and quality, were chosen for review, the Nepali documentaries did not receive any mention whatsoever.

By treating them like they do not exist, by ignoring them totally, the organisers of the festival — who at the festival were "proud to show these films" — failed to bolster their own hopes that the festival would inspire and provoke latent filmmaking talents of Nepali documentarists. It would, perhaps, have been better if these films had been shredded to pieces; or, a few words of encouragement would have gone a long way.

Anmole Prasad in his "Notes from the Festival" writes that Film Himalaya 1994 was a festival of awareness. Now, one suddenly becomes aware that for a film to be noticed (or written about) it has to be either very good or very bad. The mediocre ones, like the Nepali documentaries, will have to suffer fates of deliberate apathy.

To present specimens of filmmaking on the Himalaya, all manner of films, regardless of whether

they were good or bad were screened at Film Himalaya 1994 "...because they were there." But it makes me uneasy to feel that after the festival, some films may not be considered as "being there" anymore.

Kanak Mani Dixit ("Delinquent Documentary") outlines a three-step strategy to promote documentaries that stay closer to actuality, but this is easier said than done. Making films available to the subject audience is not always mandatory to documentary filmmaking. Films are made for a particularly defined target audience. Even if a Nepali filmmaker were to make a film about his/her people, he has to think, who among the Nepalis is going to see the film. Change the audience and it will not work at all.

The term "Himalayan audience" is impossible to define due to the fact that the Himalayan people, apart from having the commonality of living under the Himalaya, are greatly diverse in culture, ethnicity and economy. To say that one should make a film for this audience would be noble but also foolish. In the West, because education is universal, because they all have TV, because they have a common level of understanding of Himalayan life, one can define the audience as a "Western" audience.

Film has its own language and it is open to each audience for interpretation. A film made for a Himalayan audience would not have the same



impact on a western audience just as a film for and about Tharu would not have the same impact if it were to be shown to Sherpa. Most documentaries in Nepal are made to be aired on Nepal Television, which is restricted to a largely urban, privileged mass. And this mass' reaction in many cases will be totally different from that of Sherpa and Tharu.

Unfortunately, in filmmaking the key question is still of finance. Apart from its intrinsic quality of art, is also business. It is also very expensive. Apart from some educational documentaries which are sponsored by development agencies, in Nepal one cannot afford to make films, and especially documentaries, for an audience that cannot pay. So a filmmaker has to choose his audience well. And if a filmmaker requires a lot of money and resources to produce, the Himalayan audience, in most cases, will keep on being just incidental and obligatory. The real audience for Himalayan documentaries will continue to be Western TV viewers who can pay for a brief insight into Himalayan life, be it skewed or actual.

*Deependra Gauchan  
Gyaneshwar, Kathmandu*

### Sleuth Librarian

In "Who Writes for the Himalaya" (May/June 1993) Michael Hutt made reference to the "little yellow idol to the north of Kathmandu". He ascribed authorship to Rudyard Kipling, but in a subsequent letter (Sep/Oct 1993) corrected this, stating it a music hall monologue by one J. Milton Hayes.

After my first visit to Kathmandu in early 1968, I wrote an enthusiastic letter to my parents in Dunedin, New Zealand, telling them all about my trip. In their reply, my father enquired whether I had seen the green eye of the yellow god during my stay. Never having encountered the poem, I queried the allusion. Sleuths in the Reference Department of the Dunedin Public Library ran the poem to ground in *The Best Loved Poems of the American People* selected by Hazel Felleman.

The book, first published in 1936, is still in print. Enclosed for your reference is a photocopy of the poem (see *Voices*, page 30). The work is, of course, not 'politically correct' for this

day and age, but it has rather a ring to it and seems to me to be very representative of its supposed time. I have not been able to find any biographical information about its author, so cannot date the work or confirm the origins.

As you may by now have guessed, I am a librarian.

*Felicity M. Shaw  
Discovery Bay, Hong Kong*

### Superior Race

Prayag Raj Sharma's "Bahuns in the Nepali State" (Mar/Apr 1994) was interesting. As an ethnic person, I would not advocate bahun bashing. But how is Sharma able to justify 9 percent of the country's population occupying all the principal positions in the bureaucracy (see *Statistical Year Book 1993*, HMG), and the fact that Bahuns enjoy most of the privileges in every sphere of the national scene, including in the media. Besides, can he convince his fellow bahuns that they are just humans, and not a superior race?

*Kiran Rai  
Budanilkantha, Kathmandu*

### Distorted Conclusions

I read with great interest "Axing Chipko" by Manisha Aryal (Jan/Feb 1994). Your magazine has certainly come of age, and your comprehensive coverage of various movements in the Himalaya are commendable. However, there are some distorted conclusions in the Chipko article to which, we felt, a response was necessary.

Vandana Shiva and I recently visited some of the villages in Tehri Garhwal. We came across spontaneous protests by Mahila Mangal Dals in remote villages against the continuing logging of pine trees. The details about this are contained in the enclosed piece, written by Shiva, which we would greatly appreciate your publishing (see below). This will serve to correct some of the distortions appearing in "Axing Chipko" suggesting that the movement is dead.

A movement is building up in Tehri Garhwal against construction of the Tehri

Dam, which was recently cleared by the Indian Government at the Cabinet level.

*Nalni D. Jayal  
Director General, INTACH  
Nizamuddin, New Delhi*

### Chipko is Alive!

It has become a kind of fashion these days to say that Chipko, the movement that inspired all other environment movements in India, is dead. This new controversy about the death of Chipko (Himal, Jan/Feb 1994) springs from the same mind-set that earlier encouraged two decades to be spent arguing about exactly when and how Chipko was 'born' and who gave 'birth' to it.

People who issue birth and death certificates to social movements fail to realise that when powerless people stand up in resistance, they do so by drawing on the inspiration of past actions, on the strength derived from the perennial springs of democracy and freedom carried by the collective memory of a society.

The values and human striving that infuse ordinary people with extraordinary strength and resilience to face brute force can go latent and underground for a while. They never die. That is why it is erroneous to talk of the death of social movements. People's movements are the expression of that latent energy in ordinary people, ready to burst forth whenever the conditions are ripe.

In the writing of history of social and political movements, the evolution is generally neglected and only the end result is highlighted. This creates two problems. First, future organisational work does not benefit from the lessons of perseverance and patience born of years of movement building; people start looking for instant solutions because it is the instant successes that have been sold through pseudo-history.

Second, while the historical evolution of movements involves small contributions from thousands of participants over extended periods, their climaxes are localised in space and time. Movements are major social and political processes, however, and they transcend individual actors. They are



significant precisely because they involve a multiplicity of people and events which contribute to a reinforcement of social change. The fact that the contribution of ordinary people as primary actors goes unrecorded does not reduce the significance of their role in shaping history.

Chipko did not die like it was not born. It had existed in the 1930s in the form of the forest *satyagraha*. It was resurrected in the 1970s as what we call Chipko. And it continues to get resurrected quietly and invisibly in region after region wherever exploitation of nature and people reaches levels where people are forced to act to defend their right to survival.

Such a resurrection was taking place in the small village of Jundiyana in Bhilangana Valley around the time women of the world were celebrating International Women's Day on 8 March. The Mahila Mangal Dal of the village started a *dharna* on 9 March to block the passage of trucks that were carrying illegally logged pines from their village forest.

In 1981, as a result of the Chipko movement, a logging ban had been implemented in the Uttarakhand hills. The *Van Nigam* (Forest Corporation) was however allowed to remove dead and fallen timber. Since the Chipko movement had been stirred by the scarcity of fuel and fodder and construction material created by deforestation and excessive logging, the local communities had demanded that

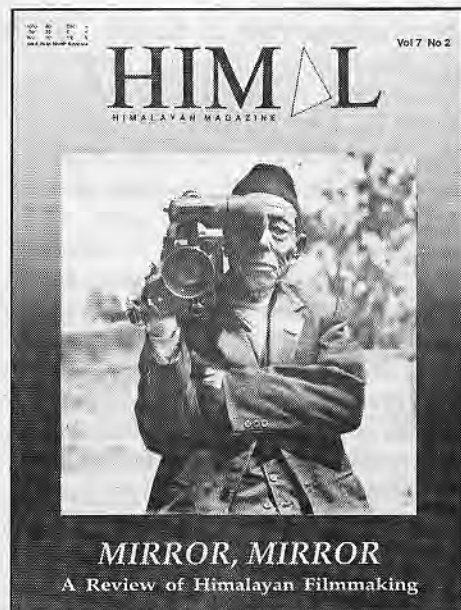
all dead and fallen wood should first be used to meet local needs of fodder, fuel, housing material. However, the forest officer did not treat meeting of local needs as a priority, and instead continued to export wood out of the region. The removal of dead and fallen timber became a convenient cover to illegal log green trees.

It was this theft that has troubled the women of Jundiyana village. When they saw their standing trees being cut unnecessarily under the excuse of removal of dead wood, they began the blockade on trucks.

We visited the village on 28 March to see what had motivated the woman to take such direct action.

The women's action in Bhilangana valley in 1994 is a resurgence of women power and ecological concern of which Mira Behn's work in Gopal Ashram had been an earlier expression. Mira Behn was one of Mahatma Gandhi's closest disciples who moved to the Himalayan region in the late 1940s. She undertook a community project in the valley of the Bhilangana, built the Gopal Ashram, and concentrated on the forest problem.

The self-organised protest of the women of Bhilangana ghati and its connection with the earlier mobilisation by Mira Behn prove false the artificial declaration of the birth and death of Chipko. Narayan Devi, Sona Devi, Kundan Devi of Jundiyana are ordinary peasant women of Garhwal. But they had the courage to resist the power of greed and corruption. As was clear



from their response to an incident when the forest contractor and his men attacked the women on dharna, the allegiance of the functionaries of the forest department and district administration is quite clearly to power and money, not to people and survival.

As commerce gets totally deregulated under the rhetoric of free trade, these corrupt bureaucratic structures will not disappear. They will act more and more one-sidedly on behalf of greed and violence.

The contest and conflict is between women fighting to protect nature and their survival, and men engaged in theft, corruption and violence. This conflict is not just taking place in Bhilangana valley. It is pervasive throughout society. And each one of us has to decide which side we are on. Each of us has a role in determining whether it will be the forces of good or forces of evil which will rule our lives.

Vandana Shiva  
New Delhi

Readers are invited to comment, criticise or add to information and opinions appearing in *Himal*. Letters should be to the point and may be edited. Letters which are unsigned and/or without addresses will not be entertained. Please include daytime contact telephone number, if available.

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## No Shining Path in Nepal

Stephen L. Mikesell's essays on the Shining Path movement and Nepal (Mar/Apr 1993 and Jan/Feb 1994) address the very interesting question of when a social-nationalist movement might become violent. Mikesell compares the Shining Path movement of Peru to the communist movement and the Janajati movement of Nepal. He maintains that "the conditions exist in the hills of Nepal for a Shining Path-like movement," and furthermore that factors of "masked violence including expropriation of lands, rural debt, rent servitude, high child mortality, misappropriation of resources, inflation, corruption in favour of a few, labour migration and trade of women for prostitution... may give rise to new forms of Janajati consciousness and nationalist movements (which again) ...could lead to sectarianism and violence."

I have worked for more than 15 years in Peru and the last four years in Nepal, studying indigenous groups (Tharu), the Janajati movement, and bonded labour issues in the Far West. With this background, I must say that I disagree with Mikesell and *I do not see Nepal as being on the brink of a violent future*. I find Mikesell's arguments to be so simplistic and disconcerting as to be potentially dangerous. Mikesell might end up stirring up a paranoid fear in certain conservative groups who may feel afraid of the "new era", whether good or bad. This in itself may lead to violence against such democratic forces as the Janajati leaders, as well as regularly elected politicians. With a recent past of mystical car crashes, I am apprehensive of arguments which may lead to paranoia.

**False causality.** Mikesell makes two general mistakes. One relates to a misunderstanding of the realities in Peru, and the other to oversimplification of facts as we find them in Nepal. Also, it is clearly necessary to distinguish between a *revolutionary group* and a *terrorist group*, and an *indigenous movement* and a *nationalist movement*. Mikesell must also be alerted to some very salient differences in the history of the two countries, Peru and Nepal. One important difference is in their recent past; Peru was a communist-socialist regime under President Velasco, while Nepal has a



totalitarian neo-feudal past with a God-king.

What indeed may the two countries have in common? According to Mikesell, "both countries straddle major mountain ranges...both have large rural indigenous populations subordinated to small elites..."

Both Peru and Nepal have experienced the sharp and growing divisions between the city and countryside, as well as the rise of new mercantile and bureaucratic classes. The development of these classes has been influenced and underwritten by outside industrial and financial interests and ideologies (multinational investment and Indian interests)... Finally both countries have strong communist movements."

Mikesell has connected superficial strands. Are we to believe that high mountains, ethnic differentiation and mercantile developments will always lead to strong communist movements and violence? Or is it only true in some cases (Peru, Nepal) and not in other cases (Argentina, Germany)? I do not see that there can be an *a priori* cause and effect relationship between the factors which Mikesell lists. If we are to postulate a relationship, for example, between poverty and violence, I would point out that most of the downtrodden often have no way of being politically active at all. The fact that Nepal has more than a million individuals working as "bonded labour" should make us analyse reality rather than postulate according to dogma. Recently, an author has concluded that poverty should be linked to *enforced passivity* in rural populations. Statistically, the poor seem to have maintained silence rather than violence.

Do the Nepalis identify with the state, the class or their ethnic group, or all of these? From a more detailed discussion, we may deduce whether there may be a path towards internal violence in Nepal or whether violence is rather more likely in relation to external threats. To begin the discussion, we must first agree on basic concepts.

While it has been said that one person's freedom fighter is another's terrorist, analytically there is a clear and crucial difference between the *revolutionary* and the *terrorist*. Most

experts will classify the Shining Path movement as terrorist, making that movement very different from anything we have seen in Nepal and also from revolutionary movements elsewhere.

**Potato proletariat.** In 1985, Abimael Guzman (Comrade Gonzalo) of Peru made the public vow of "moving the fight to the cities, by whatever means possible." Thus, no longer did he primarily seek to recruit followers and form a grassroots Maoist-oriented force. Rather, he adopted the strategy of making true proletarians out of the small independent subsistence farmers who had been unwilling to participate in revolutionary action — the so-called "potato proletariat" according to Marx. To assure peasant participation, Guzman's main idea was to force the peasant off the land and into the cities, basically using terrorist strategies, and then making the population into wage workers and proletarians. These proletarians could later be turned into revolutionaries. In this sense, Guzman became a terrorist rather than a revolutionary.

Terrorism is to be seen as an act of violence which is executed because of the effects it may have on others rather than on the victim himself. If a movement makes use of unwilling individuals to acquire concessions from the state, these individuals are not the goals but the means to reach the goal. If on the other hand the individuals are recruited in opposition to the state, we may have a revolutionary force of freedom fighters.

The key issue is how a political movement uses the individuals concerned. The revolutionary uses the individuals for mobilisation, while the terrorist uses him to gain leverage in relation to the state, i.e. by taking hostages and forcing people to perform fear-induced actions.

Terrorism and revolutionary movements are therefore at opposite poles. While revolutionaries aim at establishing positive support through a process of liberation, the terrorist does not care about popular support, as goals can be obtained by "negative" fear. Thus, ultimately they alienate the masses, as when (regardless of political affiliation) peasant leaders became terrorist targets after 1985. This, the Shining Path did to create a leaderless



peasantry. Similarly, fear-inducing strategies were employed when brains were bashed out with stones in "courts of justice" in rural Peru.

The Shining Path movement in Peru is of a fundamentally different nature than anything we have seen in Nepal, or are likely to see in the near future. Future movements in Nepal are more likely to be *revolutionary* in character in that they "seek to free the people from oppression through mobilisation".

A revolutionary movement is geared towards restructuring of the state. However, such movements are not necessarily communist or socialist. Usually, they are engaged in paramilitary operations, applying hit-and-run guerilla tactics. They are movements which base themselves on the establishment of popular support for their own actions. By a revolutionary movement we may accordingly mean something rather similar to Mao's idea of "those engaged in people's war".

Mao, the architect of revolution, was very much against terrorist acts. People were supposed to take a positive and active part in the struggle. They were not supposed to be terrorised or coerced into activity.

What relevance may this have for Nepal? Is it likely that we shall see a "recruitment of the forsaken", as Mike-sell foresees, and that all poverty leaves "just the kind of void" for a Shining Path-like sectarian movement to fill?

**Voting Patterns.** In spending time in some of the most remote parts of far western Nepal, I have seen very little political action geared towards making the peasants into revolutionaries, nor of making them into terrorist checkers. The voting pattern of the Far West shows that the Communist Party made a good show, coming in second after the Nepali Congress. However, while asking the peasants why they voted as they did, it became clear that the basic vote had gone along ethnic rather than class lines.

In the Far West Tarai, there exists a historical division between the Paharia people (generally high caste, who descended from the hills after malaria eradication) and the two Tharu groups,

Dangora Tharu and Rana Tharu. Even though these two groups are often seen as one in opposition to the land-hungry Paharia, they did not vote together.

One important difference between the two groups is that Dangora Tharu own land in joint family holdings, with the elder men administering, while Rana Tharu own property individually. Thus, the elders among Dangora Tharu seem to have wanted to maintain their own power by embracing communism, while the Rana Tharu group as a whole embraced the Nepali Congress Party to maintain the ethnic distance between them-selves at Dangora Tharu.

There seems to be little consciousness of class among the Tharu groups, but the old ethnic rivalry between Rana Tharu and Dangora Tharu once again became evident under democracy. Logic had become primordial. If Dangora chose communism, and the Paharia basically wanted a return to power of high caste groups represented in the Rastriya Prajatantra Party, then Rana Tharu had to choose the Nepali Congress. Since Rana Tharus make up the predominant group in Kailali, the result was that the Nepali Congress won.

Taking the ethnic voting factor in Kailali as an indication, one might expect a drive among Nepali parties towards mobilising the ethnic vote. So far, fortunately, this does not seem to have happened.

As I see it, there is only fragmentary class consciousness among the masses in rural Nepal, and the vote for communism must be understood on the basis of local factionalism rather than an understanding of Marx and Lenin. However, in Nepal, there is a clearly developed sense of "being one nation". There furthermore does not seem to exist in Nepal a movement which may become terrorist. Migration is high enough as it is, and the ethnic components seem more important than the class-based ones.

**Peru's divide.** In Peru, the cities are inhabited by the Spanish-speakers. However, the bulk of the country's population is made up of one highlander ethnic group, Quechua or Runa. Quechua have historically been in

opposition to the colonial and post-colonial regimes on the coast. There is thus a clearcut language divide (Quechua versus Spanish) and a clear-cut juxtapositioning of the Spanish-speakers and the Quechua-speakers of the enormous mountain territory which once formed the Inca highland state. It was in this kind of situation that the Shining Path tried to move and proletarianise the "potato proletariat".

This kind of process is not applicable to Nepal, where there is no clearcut dual society and instead exists a multiplicity of ethnic groups. Nor does there seem to be a need to employ strategies to encourage population movements. Nepal has some 36 ethnic groups with separate languages, all wanting to share power with the traditional power holders in Kathmandu. We should not confuse this situation with Peru's situation of forced proletarianisation. In Peru, basically class and ethnicity are overlapping categories, while in Nepal they are not.

Harald O.Skar  
Norwegian Inst. of Int. Affairs  
Oslo, Norway

## Ayo Ghurkali

At 57nd Street and Madison Avenue in New York City, there is a high-fashion shopfront that, too, uses a Himalayan motif for profit. If there are Sherpa pickup vans, Sherpa soaps (**Jul/Aug 1991**), and Sherpa life-vests (**Jan/Feb 1994**), then why not The Original Ghurka Collection? In the stratospheric reaches of mid-town Manhattan, you don't need to spell correctly — note that it is not 'Gorkha', not even 'Gurkha', but 'Ghurka'.

In keeping with the 'Ghurka' preference for cotton while fighting in the tropics, the focus of the shop is on khaki and other Banana Republic-type apparel and accessories. As an example, here is Market Bag No. 87, as advertised in the *New Yorker* "for a morning at the market or a weekend away. In khaki twill/tan leather trim." The price tag is US\$ 375, enough to supply perhaps 15,000 dokos to true Gorkhals in order to visit the local haat bazaar.

Mark McIntyre  
Hoboken, New Jersey



## More Pure Research

Pratyoush Onta ("Anthropology Still Finding its Feet" Sep/Oct 1992) has written a clear piece on the schism between pure and applied research in Nepal, between Nepali and foreign anthropologists and between Nepali anthropologists advocating more *applied research* and those advocating the opposite, more *fundamental research*. Re-reading Onta's article, it struck me that the argument for more fundamental research was phrased in ideological terms — focusing on the development of an indigenous emancipatory anthropology.

While not seeking to discourage discussion at this conceptual core level, I do think that one can defend the pressing need for more pressing fundamental research without going beyond the boundaries of established anthropological practice. Do we actually know enough about the social structure and social conflicts in various Nepali regions to be able to frame applied research results within their larger socio-cultural environment? One never knows enough, and of course all those applied village-level analyses of face-to-face interactions and individuals' decisions are a lot more down-to-earth than perspectives through the prism of macro-concepts, but let us agree that even the most concrete and descriptive problem-analysis will use abstract concepts like "jaat", "socio-economic class", etc. What do they *mean*?

Whatever neo-colonial attention Nepal might receive at present, absolutely lacking are bookshelves full of old ethnographies that India does have, authored by colonial bureaucrats and missionaries. Some might consider the variety of community-level studies on Nepali villages impressive, but given the diversity of Nepal I would disagree with this position. Besides, apart from the ethnographical works, the colonial anthropological tradition did include an analytical stream, distinguishing, classifying, and comparing regions, cultures, peoples, etc.

Without doubt, these analyses were often inspired by pragmatic policy concerns distorting reality in various ways (what about present-day pragmatic donor-concerns, be they foreign or Nepali...?). Without doubt, the fact that colonial administrators

have acted on this knowledge created new realities, the most famous regional case being the codification of castes. Without doubt, the effects of these activities on the colonial research-subjects have been less beneficial. The theoretical concepts these analyses have generated have become part of the present-day neo-colonial reality, precisely because of these effects.

**Use of Indian Concepts.** However critical an analysis might be, one will encounter at least some gate-keeping concepts, like caste. Analysts of Nepal (foreign and local) lacking a Nepal-based analytical anthropological tradition, have looked south of the border for concepts to work with. There is some work indicating that Nepal and India differ in crucial respects when one talks of caste, class, or other basic concepts: caste rules are different, class-consciousness is less developed... But all in all, data are very limited and apparently not convincing enough to entice the concerned disciplines as a whole to re-evaluate the need for more fundamental research in the traditional sense of the world.

If these concepts would only have academic value, this would be understandable, but this is not the case. The general politico-intellectual discussions are filled with statements on the importance of *jaat* in public life, "janajati politics", "bahunvada", etc., and given the strength of left parties, class-analyses also figure prominently in those debates. Even so, I do not encounter much eagerness *within Nepal* to underpin these debates with scientific data. This is strange to me, who, as a Northwest European, is accustomed to the ideological use of all sorts of social science products. I know "misuse" is often a better label for the role these data play, but at least they are an accepted and sought-after ingredient of social debate. Given that Nepali social structure of social conflict are, to a large extent, *terra incognita* in social science terms, I find the uncritical use of India-based gate-keeping concepts inapplicable.

I've recently completed the data-gathering phase of an attitudinal survey some results of which are definitely Nepal-only findings. My research topic was "ethnocentrism", preference of people of one's own background and

the rejection of people of other backgrounds. Four hundred and eighty male adult respondents were interviewed in Kathmandu and Patan, from the following jaats: Bahun, Damai, Sherpa and Tibetan.

I would like to elaborate a little on the results that strike me as being of relevance to the discussion of whether Nepali applied research can lean on non-Nepali based core-concepts. The most striking result of the survey was that not only do the poor prefer the poor, which should be obvious, but also that the rich prefer the poor. Across all eight respondent groups, poor "targets" were considered more similar to the self, more liked as partners to deal with, and more positively evaluated, even by rich respondents!

This applied to all target groups, i.e. poor Bahun were preferred over rich Bahun, poor Sherpa were preferred over rich Sherpa, etc. Most unexpected of all, it applied to the ingroup *jaat* also, i.e. rich Damai respondents would prefer poor Damai targets, in all respects, above rich Damais; rich Tibetan respondents would consistently prefer poor Tibetans over rich ones, etc. Now where in the dataset was there a statistically significant reversal of this trend.

While most cultures have conceptions like "money stinks", "the rich are exploiters", never have these been translated into a general preference of the rich for the poor above their own ingroups, as in this survey. A comparable survey by the writer in Benaras did not find this love for the poor (Hindus and Muslims were respondents and target groups). Geographically and socio-culturally so close together, but the meanings of "rich" do not seem comparable between Kathmandu and Benaras.

Unless one discounts these data as being methodological artifacts, they go to strengthen the point that Nepal is in need of more "pure" research, preferably by indigenous scholars who are in a better position to interpret results like this. I would look forward to reactions to the brief description of my findings here. I myself am very puzzled by my own data.

Roger Henke  
Amsterdam  
(Lived in Kathmandu  
from Sep 1989 to Dec 1993.)



*In a thousand ages of the Gods  
I could not tell thee  
of the glories of the Himalaya,  
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# A Fate Other than Marginality

*Are hill economies condemned to remain at the fringes, surviving as appendages to the plains? Or is there a path of development for them that is autonomous, different, creative? Unless economists and philosophers brave these questions and seek answers specific to the hill condition, the road to marginality is wide and welcoming at the economic periphery where highlanders reside.*

by Dipak Gyawali

**N**epal, together with the hill economies of all the Himalaya generally, is today stuck in a developmental blind alley. The myopia which has got us into this gully is linked to acceptance of an economic philosophy — the conceptual outlook for managing a country's household budget and resources — that is biased towards the market and the plains.

The history of how Nepal's human and water resources have met the market provides ample indication of how those who have ruled and continue to rule the hill kingdom have no

understanding of the hill economy. An inquiry into the record yields valuable insights on what not to do in future, and should be useful not only for Nepalis but for politicians, planners and philosophers of Tibet, Bhutan, Himachal and Uttarakhand as well.

Among all the states, provinces and nation-states of the region, by virtue of being the most-sovereign, Nepal should have been in a position to chart an independent course for its economy. Unfortunately, just the opposite has happened, and largely to blame is the intellectual milieu in

*New World impacts  
on Old World Jumla.*





BIKAS RAJUNJAR

*There is a political economy out there beyond Kathmandu Valley's rim.*

**By virtue of being the most-sovereign, Nepal should have been in a position to chart an independent course for its economy.**

Kathmandu, where the economic debate rages insipid and lifeless. Nepal has too few economic philosophers able to paint the broader canvas. It has too many econometricians, all of them pujaris of foreign aid who merely add details to someone else's canvas, who constantly massage hopelessly unreliable data seeking the formulae for hill development.

If they wish to improve upon the earthy wisdom of the subsistence hill farmer — whose lot it is there job to try and better — Nepali economist must try to traverse the distance from 'economy' to 'political economy' of the hills and bring the latter to centerstage. Without addressing issues such as control over terms of trade and risks of one-sided dependence (which the subsistence farmer understands), it will not be possible to move away from conceptual blind alleys such as the "mechanistic efficiency" route of neo-classical economics. Study of the political economy will also force planners to acknowledge the role of *values* which have thus far been ignored in the teaching, learning and practice of economics.

The hills of Nepal beyond Kathmandu's valley rim must gain the ability to use the state and the values of nationhood as an institutional resource, instead of themselves being used by a "rent-seeking state" as a place of surplus extraction. Only then may the hill population avoid ultimate marginalisation.

The boundaries of social science must be redefined to subsume politics and economics, and link all the elements that are forgotten by today's scholars and technocrats, students of the economy who see the trees and count them but forget the forest. Nationalism, role and power of the elites, resilience of the subsistence economy, the biases in technology, function of a national economy in an aggressive global capital market,

and a host of other issues make up the forgotten elements of statecraft in this day and age.

In the real Third World with its plethora of linguistic, religious, ethnic and other identities, decisions about the future are going to be made in a context of power and loyalties where financial gain is but one of many considerations, and perhaps not even the most important or overriding. This is even more true of the hills, where pluralism is in everything from ecology to culture.

Today, the plains and coastal zones are thriving economies while the hills of the hinterland stagnate, serving merely as reservoirs of migrant labour and natural resources. It is the role of the economists and planners to ensure that the hills begin to enjoy more than the vapid remittance economy of today. In fact, a post-Cold War world may see regional assertion of such forces as favour the plains — technologies with a plains bias and the maritime economy controlling trade in necessities. All this will only push the highlanders back further against the wall.

### **An Efficient State**

Historically, the fortunes of the hills began to take a downturn with the rise of capitalism and maritime trade in the 16th century. Before this global phenomenon, the hills were a place of security and strategic advantage. The highlander Gorkhalis capable of holding a stretch of the Ganga plains from Avadh to Tirhoot, Shivaji's Marathas from the Western Ghats able to subjugate for a time anything flat between Bombay



B. RAJUNJAR

*The way of all economy.*

and Delhi, the Hapsburgs from the Alps adept at controlling the Danube valley — all were highlanders using their locational advantage to impose political will through military power and reap economic largesse.

Such a privileged position collapsed with capitalism's ascendancy, which altered the temper of technology and its ability to harness nature. This new form of social relationship had characteristic features which previous ways of organising society did not. Even though preceding tributary or kinship societies did use money and did charge interest on its use, what changed under mercantile and industrial capitalism was that both money and technology acquired lives of their own. What was good for the growth of money and technology became good in and of itself. Money and competition for its acquisition, which is but one metric of value in a harmonious society, was elevated above all other human values.

To provide the intellectual justification for accumulating money in order to make more of itself, emerged the discipline known as economics, which took "efficiency" as its guiding moral creed. Previously, it used to be "statecraft" and "civics". (Civics as a course of study has disappeared from South Asian curricula over the last few decades.) This change in social outlook established the concept of scarcity, previously understood as a temporary aberration in the agricultural cycle, as a permanent feature of the economic landscape. Scarcity, indeed, has been elevated as a deity of the market, and a debilitating trade in necessities emerged to appease it.

This conceptual shift also converted many-splendoured humans into mere statistics, as a labour resource and as mass consumers. Once addition to market produce was assured, capital was safe in that its return was guaranteed in the form of interest or dividend. It could grow continuously, in the process relentlessly concentrating societal energy into political power, independent of the will of tribal heads or feudal chieftans. This is the social force that hill societies, which till mid-20th century were based on the tributary (eg, the Rana oligarchy) or kinship (the Rai/Limbu *kipat*) systems had to try to come to terms with.

### Objects Strange and Ingenious

The early Hindus, Chinese and Arabs had achieved no mean feats in science, but technology really did not find a suitable soil to grow in their midst. Akbar in India is said to have consigned a Gutenberg press presented him to a storage godown, and the Chinese Emperor Ch'ien-Lung wrote to King George the III that "I set no value on objects strange or ingenious, and have no use for your country's manufactures."

To appreciate the reason for this arrogant indifference to manufacturing, one has to

recognise that technology is nothing but science which has commercial value—science which can help money make more of itself, as opposed to science which provides aesthetic intellectual pleasure. Only a society organised around the guiding principle of commercial profit would be able to convert science into technology with money-making prowess.

Technology and the growth induced by it have been guided by certain inbuilt value assumptions. One of them is that of efficiency, which then leads on to technologies of mass production. The other is that of comparative advantage or the belief that one should only do that which one does better, faster, easier, cheaper than others in the global or regional market. This in turn promotes the idea of mutual dependency as opposed to self-reliance. It then converts the historical *trade in luxuries* which could be stopped or taken up at will into a worldwide *trade in necessities* which has a life of its own and cannot be stopped.

The idea of comparative advantage automatically pushes those who are latecomers to modernisation — those societies deep in the hinterlands and inaccessible hills — to that end of the efficiency spectrum where their assets, whether natural or social, are valued for the immediate business task at hand and not for the future potential they may contain. So it is first labour that is brought to the market mill, and hill people have always done so whether as Swiss guards to the Popes, Gurkha mercenaries to the British Raj, or watchmen, restaurant hands, or tea plantation workers to serve the big time commerce of the plains. The value of their social organisation, cultural assets and even natural resources finds itself assessed at zero.

Invariably, because of the nature of capital accumulation and development of technology, the natural resources of the hills are assessed

Scarcity was elevated as a deity of the market, and the trade in necessities emerged to appease it.

Ghirling over the Trisuli.



KUNDA DIXIT

Only a society organised around the guiding principle of commercial profit would be able to so convert science into technology with money-making prowess.

through the eyes of the plains. The Nepali hill population and its hydropower — the *jana shakti* and the *jula shakti* in popular political parlance — are the two best examples of such marginalisation by the global economic order of the past couple of centuries.

### Gandhi and Prithvi Narayan

The impact of ascendant technology-driven capitalism began to be felt in the Himalaya by the mid-18th century, prompting the Nepali nation-builder Prithvi Narayan Shah to opt for self-reliance in textiles and imposition of restrictions on imports. But lacking technology, this policy was bound to remain defensive. The Rana oligarchs who followed Prithvi Narayan tried to follow a similar policy of autarky (or total national self-sufficiency), but undercut their own position by applying it to the people but not to themselves.

Another South Asian nation-builder, Mahatma Gandhi, used autarky in textiles, through the home-spun khadi movement, as a potent political weapon two centuries later. Gandhi's campaign, too, like Prithvi Narayan's, was overtaken by technology and its attendant mass consumerism.

Nation-building under the Gorkha rulers of the hills thus began with a bang but quickly wound down to a whimper because of the imperative of mercantile and industrial capitalism. Hardly had the hill nation been militarily united

We had a discussion in the Council on 7th August about the industrialization of Nepal. The Nepal Government are anxious to develop industries in the Terai, and would like us to extend the free customs corridor, which is at present available for goods delivered at Kathmandu to the Terai. Their object is not of course to cater only for Nepal; there is no doubt that they would like to export manufactured goods to India as well. We have therefore to be cautious, but we would like to have the Nepal rivers, some of which do a good deal of damage in British India, controlled and developed for hydroelectric power, and we also have considerable obligations to Nepal for the help given us during the war. Council decided that we must undertake hydroelectric development; also that we should enlarge the free customs corridor so as to permit the import of goods -- especially capital plant -- into the Terai within reasonable limits. There was a good deal of discussions about what these limits should be, but a general view was that we should not give concessions much in excess of Nepal's own requirements, though the possibility of allowing the customs concession for selected industries of general importance might be considered.

INDIA OFFICE COLLECTION

[Extract from secret letter from Viceroy Lord Wavell to Lord Pethick-Lawrence, Secretary of State for India and Burma, dated 12 Aug 1945.]

when it came up against economic realities.

The decades of the 1600s had seen a sharp increase in hill population, thanks partly to New World imports such as maize and potato, (which provided much more calorific value per hectare

and less effort to grow than the indigenous foodgrains). The economic needs of this growing mass could not be met under the tributary system the feudals wished to maintain. To contain social pressure, therefore, they opened the doors to out-migration. Mercenary soldiers were allowed to join the imperial British Indian army, and mass migration of labourers began to the north Indian plains, the eastern Himalaya, and as far as the sugarcane fields of the Fiji islands. The only assets these mercenaries and migrants brought with them to the market mill were their hands, not the other economic potential of their land or their social assets (such as the *guthi* and *kipat* arrangements).

Meanwhile, the Nepali elites too fell victim to the new economic order. A tributary society, extracting surplus but unable to re-invest in profit-making technology because increasing productivity was not part of the Rana social philosophy, could only opt for conspicuous consumption. And what could be more salacious than "objects strange or ingenious" sold by the merchants from across the seas, especially if these goods were denied to one's own serfs. The history of Rana rule in Nepal is replete with stories of Belgian cut-glass chandeliers, cars dismantled at the foothills and portered to Kathmandu, and furniture and fashion from the best shops in London.

This failure to cope with the forces and processes of capitalism went on to de-legitimise Rana rule after World War II. Just before the start of the War, in the mid-1930's, there was belated recognition that a pauperised mass could rise in revolt; and a Rana potentate, Juddha Shumshere, did seek British help in 1940 to try to initiate industrialisation in Nepal.

However, lacking an austere Protestant work ethic which contributed to capitalism's flowering in Europe, the Rana efforts not only resulted in no industrialisation but inadvertently opened the eyes of the plains market to Nepal's water resource — which it promptly began to assess through its own criteria (see the accompanying extract of 1945 secret British Government communication, obtained from the British Library India Office and Records Collection, London).

Today, half a century later, Nepal still has not been able to shake off this pre-ordained track and re-define its water resource development primarily for its own needs, independent of the requirements of the plains.

### Watery Grave

While human resource stripped of its social assets and converted into labour for export is a recipe for political and cultural stagnation, a natural hill resource such as water, if valued primarily by non-residents, leads equally ominously to



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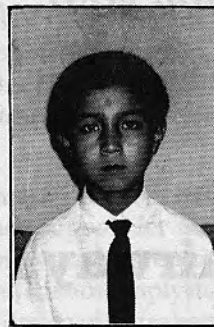
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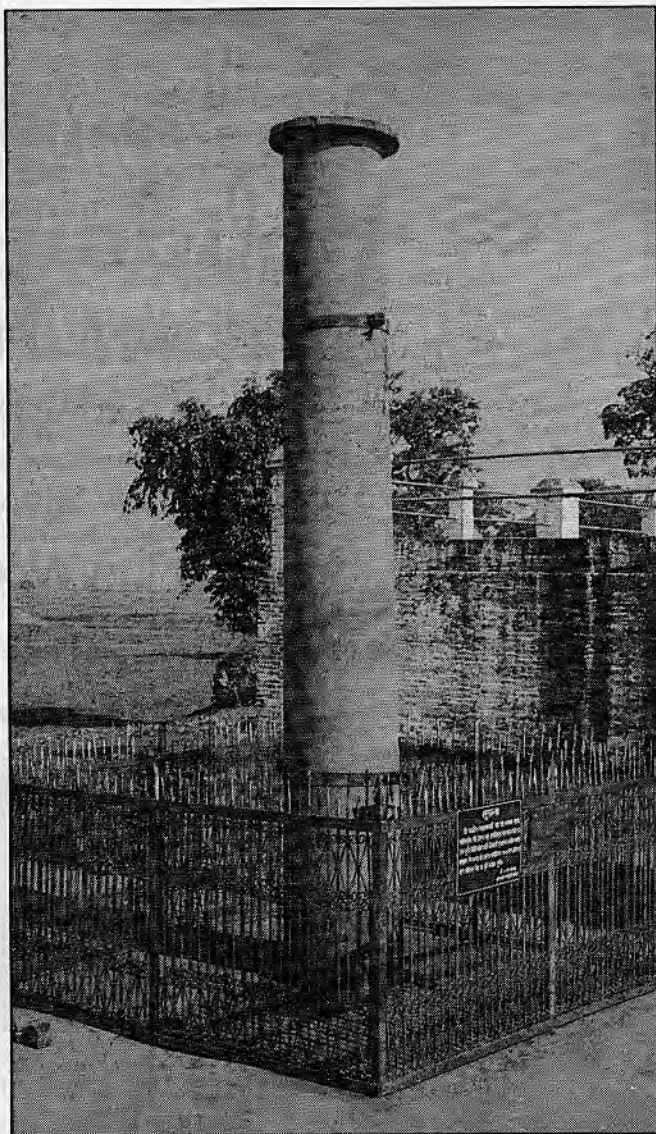
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wards the marginalisation of hill economies. Besides what grows on undulating terrain and is found under its surface, the hills have valuable assets generated by virtue of their position, such as tourism and water resources. The former is a volatile resource of fad and fancy, its value forever defined elsewhere unless there is local capacity to package and sell dreams. For too long, the water resources of the Himalaya, too, have been sold as a dream to the destitute population.

The waters of an international river, shared between a hill nation and a plains state, belong both to the upstream and the downstream riparians. Its flow cannot be stopped and the international river is thus truly "common". What is, however, not common but a purely hill property are the gorges where storage dams can be built and the river inclines which impart energy to the water. On the other hand, the market for energy has developed in the plains and is controlled by plains interests. Without a marriage of the two through mutual consent, no resource can be born.

When high dam technologies are proposed with a view to the plains' needs for irrigation and flood control, a plains bias occurs in the choice of technology. This is clear in the economic methodology and tools used to evaluate the "benefit-cost" of hydropower projects — all are designed to make larger (plains-friendly) projects more attractive.

If a path of sequential development could be adopted giving primacy to hill economic development (such as with small hydro from east to west), capital accumulation would occur in the hills. If, however, a path is adopted favouring the plains' needs for large high dams, barring a miracle of Kathmandu's rulers finding unknown strength in bargaining with a plains monopsony market, the hills will only receive some *baksheesh* — in the form of "cost-plus".

This economic approach, which has prevailed in Nepal through oligarchy, autocracy and now democracy undercuts hill bargaining power and transfers it to the plains. When a development philosophy of efficiency is pursued, it will automatically bias the case in favour of the large scale, and, without the constraints of enlightened nationalism from a hill elite committed to its home base and confident enough to embrace the best in the world in an ecumenical embrace, a plains-biased assessment will automatically follow, leading to a further marginalisation of the hill community from its own resource — such as a fabulous gorge.

### The Satanic Mill

How both labour and water resources of the hills can be jointly made to cater primarily to the needs of the economic machine in the plains — simply

His Excellency explained how much better it was for Nepal to have a capitalised present for internal development than an area of land. This attitude is especially significant when it is remembered that up to then the Nepalese have clung to the hope that their services to the British and Indian Governments would one day be recognised by further return to them of tracts of territory which at one time were part of Nepal by conquest but annexed by the British during the Nepalese War 1814-15. Thus it would appear that the last ghost of the Nepalese War has been finally laid to rest...

3% is a reasonable rate for long term calculations on the basis of present Indian market values. The question of the period to be assumed is, however, not free from difficulty. If the annual payment is to be properly regarded as a perpetual commitment, the present value at 3% is Rs. 10 lakhs multiplied by 100 divided by 3, equals Rs. 3.33 crores. If, however, something less than a perpetual commitment is to be assumed, questions of policy rather than finance are involved in fixing it. In short, it is really for you rather than me to decide whether the Nepalese will feel that they are being properly treated.

I wonder whether in any case it is wise to reveal to them the precise assumptions made in arriving at the amount. Why not offer them a nice round sum of, say, 2.5 crores? (This would actually represent Rs. 10 lakhs at 3% for 44 years.) I should have thought that with luck such an offer might avoid a good deal of argument, though I am not sufficiently acquainted with the Nepalese mentality to judge whether it would come off.

19.3.1946 \* the Bhardari Sabha, Singha Durbar, on 12 November 1945.

INDIA OFFICE COLLECTION

[Extract from secret notes exchanged in the British External Affairs Department in 1946 between Messrs. Falconer, Donaldson and Weightman.]

by the economic outlook espoused — is shown in the background maneuvering of the British Raj during World War II, when Nepal indicated its interest in industrialising. The British were concerned that allowing Nepal to assert autonomy in the production of goods would undercut the interests of Indian industries. At the same time, Britain was under moral obligation to double its annual "present" to the Kathmandu Durbar (given for the assured supply of mercenaries) due to the extraordinary service of Gurkha troops during the war against the Axis powers.

In what should have been to Nepal an early lesson in foreign aid but for omnipresent national amnesia, the British manipulated the negotiation process to assure that the increased annual present would be used for hydropower development so that the plains could benefit from irrigation and flood control as well. They played on the insecurity of the ruling Rana family which, unsure of its future when the British left India, wanted the "present" doubled and capitalised to present value and handed over.

The notes on how this deal was negotiated (see the 1946 secret communication, above, and information circular, overleaf) show that when elites lack confidence in themselves, their intellectual marginalisation is a foregone conclusion. When they are seen to falter in negotiations, the conse-

The rivers are "common", but the gorges where storage dams can be built and the river inclines which impart energy to the water, are purely hill resources.

Press Information Bureau  
Government of India

"Payment of Rs. 2.5 crores to Nepal  
Development of Industries."

The Government of India have made payment to the Nepal Government of a lump sum of Rs. 2.5 crores as capitalized value of Rs. 10 lakhs recently added to the standing yearly present to Nepal. This sum is expected to help the Government of Nepal in developing her industries, particularly through hydro-electric projects... This decision was warmly received by the Nepalese Government and by all classes of the Nepalese people. The capitalized value of the annual addition of Rs. 10 lakhs is calculated at Rs. 2.5 crores, and this sum was paid in July 1946 to the Nepal Government.

The standing Finance Committee, which met today (November 19) under the Chairmanship of the Hon'ble Mr. Liaquat Ali Khan particularly noted the point that the money was intended to be used for the development of Nepal which will benefit India also, and approved the payment.  
"280 -- 19.11.46"

INDIA OFFICE COLLECTION

A country with its nationalism under seige of voracious capital must use the state as a vital resource.

quences for the nation are grave. The Ranas, as late as 1946, seemed incapable of calculating the present value of a perpetual annuity, and, as the secret memos and the subsequent information circular, make clear, remained satisfied with Rs 2.5 crores when the British came prepared to part with Rs 3.3 crores.

The inability to understand the rudiments of market tools, profit, and resource assessment had cost the nation equally dearly some decades earlier during the conclusion of the 1918 Sarda River Treaty, when forest land was swapped by Chandra Shumshere for a much more valuable river bank in a border river. This, indeed, seems to have been but a prunon of the Tanakpur negotiations and the ongoing deadlock with India in which Nepal is seen incapable of assessing the value of a national resource (in this case a border river), bargaining a deal, and moving on to better and more productive ventures.

### Quid Pro Quo

The nature of the hill-plain interactions in the context of expanding capitalism is such that issues of market access, control of trade and natural resources and profit potential for the stronger party takes precedence over abstract friendship between nations. In Nepal, the current bugbear is the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship with India, signed by the last Rana Prime Minister even as a democratic upsurge was set to topple the dynasty a few months later.

Therefore, while valid, Nepali minds regard this Treaty with some distaste. Its provisions assure free movement of people between the two countries and allow for an independent path of development for Nepal, but only after taking due

consideration of Indian security and trade sensitivities. No such obligations towards Nepali concerns hamper India, however, which is why the 1950 instrument is regarded by many as unequal and unfair.

Recovering the lost pages of history from the limbo of national forgetfulness, one can conclude that even if white masters had not handed the Raj over to brown masters in 1947, the 1950 Treaty would have been essentially the same, since the imperatives of the political economy had not changed. The 1950 Treaty was born of the fundamental forces of global capital at work in mid-century, and merely changing the skin-colour of the driver of this economic machine would not have prevented it being what it is.

As long as Nepal was a feudal subsistence economy, it did not matter enough to formalise a treaty beyond what was agreed in 1816 and 1924; but the moment Nepal wanted modern amenities through industrialisation, and more importantly, when Nepal showed signs of staking a claim to a part of the market, a power born out of trade in necessities could not undercut its own base. The British were not willing to relinquish their control over Nepal's access to the sea, nor were they ready to give up what to them was a captive hill market. Allowing Nepali manufactures a share in that market — and worse, the larger Indian market — could not be done without a quid pro quo, such as the development of Nepali hydropower for the benefit of the plains (*see secret notes of 1-12-1944*).

The quid pro quo basically calls for an integration of the hill economy with that of the plains. The philosophy of neo-classical economics in vogue within the corridors of power, be it Singha Durbar or the World Bank, sees the complementarity as innocuous and even beneficial. But there are unanswered questions of equity.

At the theoretical macro-level, building a high dam in Nepal is seen to increase the size of the economic pie. This is seen as inherently beneficial, even if many hill villages get drowned by



The fabulous gorge as a resource:  
the Kosi near Chattara.

permanent flood (which is what a reservoir is) to prevent seasonal flooding in the plains. But increasing the size of the economic pie cannot be good in itself, unless one can prevent the marginalised population from receiving a smaller share of the benefits than they did before — which is what tends to happen.

### Privatise the Lot

There are other questions of who gets how much of the benefits that economics as practiced has been unable to address satisfactorily. The current fascination with privatisation in Nepal is case in point. While it is perhaps justifiable on grounds of economic efficiency, privatisation as being practiced gives "democracy" only to those who have capital — and where has capital accumulation occurred but in the plains? Money stashed in chests, stockings and even banks near and far — the predilection of all hill elites — is to passive to be capital. While the Nepali upper classes are, even today, amassing fortunes, by and large it is the plains elite that is generating capital.

Governments sensitive to these value considerations do not see money as the only criterion in decision-making. They tend to tread cautiously if they feel that the benefits from the expanding economic pie due to private efficiency are not being distributed equitably.

The current spate of privatisation of state-owned enterprises in Nepal, of course, has little to do with the initiatives of a Nepali Congress government that came to power in 1991 professing democratic socialism. They were planned in the mid-1980s, but could not be implemented because of the sensitivities involved.

(A World Bank assessment of Nepal's economic performance, under the Panchayat and at the height of the Indian blockade, notes in June 1989: "An action plan for public enterprise divestiture was prepared, but its subsequent implementation was side-tracked when the high-



MADAN PURASWAR PUSTAKALAYA

*The British took the Ranas for a ride.*

est bidders for certain public enterprises were non-Nepalese, some of whom had extensive holdings in Nepal, and the Government was not prepared to proceed further.")

In the 1990s, however, a democratically-elected government provided the legitimacy that was able to override such concerns.

From the perspective of a social science that is broader than neo-classical economics, it is clear that popular sensitivities can never be killed: they can only be painted over, to lie festering and waiting for an outbreak of fever years down the road. If the integrating of the hill economy with the global market (represented by the the plains) is not equitable enough, all the gains from efficiency can be brought to naught by such a fever.

The present approach to privatisation assumes a borderless world inhabited by atomised individuals with no group interests they hold valuable. But the world does, and should have, borders — not to prevent the flow of noble ideas or to stop international travel and interaction — but to give a people with a sense of shared history, security from being subjugated by a demeaning dependency on necessities controlled by outsiders through a biased terms-of-trade.

Only a well-regulated border will allow "national economic development". That is how Japan, the East Asian Tigers and, indeed, even the United States have made it as first-rung economies, free-market rhetoric notwithstanding. If Nepalis want Nepali "national development", they have to begin by defining the boundaries of that arena, the first prerequisite being a well-regulated frontier.

### Elite Fatigue

Nationalism is an attribute of a country's human resource, and A sense of shared history among a

**The principle of frugality with self-respect is in irreconcilable conflict with the consumerist ideology of opulence without dignity.**



*"Bahadur" from West Nepal guards a jewellery store, Connaught Circus, New Delhi.*

people giving rise to commonly shared elements of faith considered inalienable and self-evident shape the institutions of a country and define the nation. Global capitalism's need for labour in its raw form has no use for such an accessory. The collective identity that resists what the market is pushing and bargains as one is anathema.

Nationalism's collective identity sets up countervailing values, as was realised by the Russian czars after the Crimean War, and by the Japanese during the Meiji Restoration. The East Asian Tigers, too, grasped after 1945 that in the age of global capitalism, nationalism, as well as the values and institutions fostered by it, can only survive if it is in active partnership with national capital.

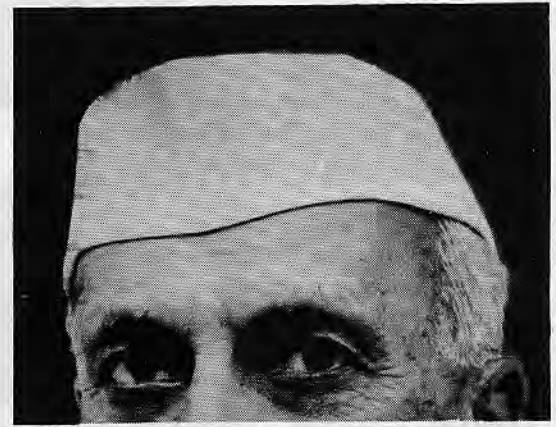
In hill societies undergoing unending marginalisation today, the elites have failed to realise this fundamental imperative — to use the state and nationalism as a resource. True to the adage that patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel, nationalism has often been used as a shield for further exploitation of one's very poor.

The commitment of the elites to their own society as well as a continuous demonstration of their faith in the structure which made them elites are important features of national capitalism. Participating in capital flight, whether through clandestine money transfers or out-migration of highly trained scions to the First World, is a statement of apprehension and doubt about the viability of nationalism.

The custodians of national interests have turned rapacious, wringing the surplus out of the citizens' misery.



Nationalism in name only: a bronze soldier guards the royal standard at the Tundikhel parade ground.



The 1950 Treaty would have been the same, Gandhi cap notwithstanding.

The state has remained "rent-seeking" under the Ranas, under the Panchas and, sadly, under the democratically elected Nepali Congress government as well. While the Rana rule is a memory, and the power of royalty has been severely curtailed, today it is the hefty commissions in making large purchases for development projects, or renting out state patronage through licenses and permits, that is driving the newly forming political elite away from hard but correct decisions on behalf of the people.

The net result? The masses are poorer because there is no defender of their social wealth expressed through their institutions. The custodians of national interests have turned rapacious, wringing the surplus out of their citizens' misery. Nepal's elites are the gods that have failed.

### In Praise of Subsistence

When the state has been weakened as a resource, partly through bad historical covenants but mostly due to poor elite commitment and misuse of the state apparatus, fortunately, the economy does not deteriorate into nothingness. The very resilience of the subsistence economy, which "development" seeks to replace, protects the population. The formal economy disintegrates and dissolves into the family- and kinship-based informal one, keeping the hill economy alive, with the state assuming a secondary or even hostile role.

The informal economy based on a rainbow pluralism of economic units is to the hills what biodiversity is to the world's gene pool: it is the most reliable means available for preserving socio-cultural diversity. In the face of the McDonaldisation of the economy, the homogenisation of culture, and a push towards the economy of large-scale efficiency, the informal economy preserves diverse social systems which are efficient and stable within their niches

K. M. DWIT

but may not look so to a global planner.

During the Indian blockade of 1989, Nepal's formal sector was as good as finished. Life in Kathmandu was paralysed and long queues were everywhere, for everything. In parts of rural Nepal not yet affected by the highway culture, however, the only scarcity that affected the inhabitants was that of kerosene for their *tukki* lamps. Their other necessities were met through linkages and transactions in the informal economy outside the ken of state-led structures. The virtues of self-reliance over economic efficiency was brought dramatically home to the Nepalis all across the nation as self-reliant pockets, including some villages with their own micro-hydro plants, survived without a missed beat.

The question of unilateral dependence and surrender of the control over terms of trade are the basic issues of domestic housekeeping in any national economy, and the lessons to be learnt are not to be found in seminar halls of big-name universities, but in the experience of the subsistence communities of the hills. Unfortunately, these 1989 lessons in self-reliance seem to have been quickly forgotten in the aftermath of democracy, even by those who benefited from the blockade's direct effect of weakening and delegitimising the Panchayat system.

Even if neo-classical economics sees it only as a constraint, there is intrinsic value in self-reliance, and mass-opting for austerity and against indecent consumerism. Such a movement can only be made fashionable by public figures in all

walks of life whom the masses look up to, not by those who slink abroad at first whiff of crisis to surreptitiously protect their investments.

The inability of the hill elites to adopt austerity at least till national development has taken place has encouraged a consumerist culture and placed before the masses the ideal of conspicuous consumption. The models of Prithvi Narayan or Mahatma Gandhi, with their philosophy of frugality with self-respect, is in irreconcilable conflict with the consumerist ideology of opulence without dignity, as espoused by the rulers from Rana times to this day.

A conflict such as this cannot be reconciled within the current economic thinking, and can only be resolved by a socio-political movement that can inculcate non-consumerist values. After all, followers of Gandhi did adopt frugality with dignity to defeat the mightiest empire of the day. It was basically a political victory of economic thinking which placed high value in having some form of self-control over the trade and consumption of necessities.

Until a time hill polity is strong enough to promulgate such an economic philosophy, the hills are condemned to remain at the fringes, mere places from where the water flows, the stones roll, and the impoverished trudge to the plains in search of menial wages.



D. Gyawali is a water engineer, resource economist, and chairman of Swabalamban, a grassroots organisation working with the marginalised communities of rural Nepal.

The pluralism of the informal economy is to the hills what biodiversity is to the world's gene pool.



*Peasants kept the hill economy alive.*

DAVID SASSOON

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- *India Today*, 15 March 1994

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- *Expeditions*, March 1994

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# ABSTRACTS

## **Tears of Blood: A Cry for Tibet**

by *Mary Craig*

HarperCollins Publishers, London, 1992

ISBN 0 00 627500 1

£ 17.95

Mary Craig's work tells the story of Tibetans in the occupied Tibet — where the Tibetans have wept "tears of blood since invasion." Interest, sympathy and support for the Tibetan cause are now widespread, says the author. The people, meanwhile, are convinced that they will return to Tibet, and that it will be "sooner rather than later." The book also has black and white illustrations — of a Dutch woman shot during the Lhasa demonstrations of 1988, of a PLA soldier with his machine gun trained towards the Jokhang temple in Lhasa, etc. The book is also available from HarperCollins India in paperback.

## **Building Bridges to the Third World**

Memories of Nepal 1950 - 1992

by *Toni Hagen (translated by Philip Pierce)*

Book Faith India, Delhi, 1994

ISBN 81 7303 029 4

NRs 2400

Originally written in German, this book is now available in English from Book Faith India. Building Bridges to the Third World is geologist Toni Hagen's memories and experiences of Nepal. The book is divided into 4 parts — Youthful Dreams and the First Mission to Nepal, 1948-1951; Activities and Experiences in Nepal, 1952-1960; The integration of Tibetan Refugees in Nepal; and Nepal 1962-1992, with part four rewritten for this English edition. Hagen also includes an essay, "Life of a Geologist's Family" by his wife, Gertrude, as well as some chapters on his personal views on the impact of 40 years of development aid in Nepal, comparing it with his experiences elsewhere in the Third World. "A valuable local expertise demands a new type of international development expert," says Hagen. That expert must be "...an entirely free and independent man, one who can take decisions and actions on the basis only of his own conscience." Hagen's journey through time provides valuable commentary for those engaged in Nepal's development process.

## **Nepal in the Nineties:**

Versions of the Past, Visions of the Future

*Michael Hutt, editor*

Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1994

ISBN 0 19 563441 1

IRs 240

Dedicated to Martin Hoftun, a Norwegian scholar who died in an air crash in July 1992 (see review of his book, *Spring Awakening: An Account of the 1990 revolution of Nepal Himal Mar/Apr 1993*), this book contains eight essays by seven well-known Western academics. Reflecting on changes that occurred in Nepal, the essayists look back at the politics of Nepal, "attempt to understand them, and draw lessons for the future of Nepal," writes editor Hutt, of the SOAS, London. The late Richard Burghart, discussing the political culture of Panchayat democracy, says that the 1962 constitution was "portrayed by Mahendra as a 'gift' to the Nepalese people, but with the unlikely proviso that the king could resume the gift and make amendments to it from time to time." Martin Hoftun writes that until strong democratic institutions and traditions are

not in place, the 1990 movement might "develop in any direction, including a political come-back by the palace". Hutt writes about the drafting of the 1990 Constitution and about the Nepali literature of the democracy movement in two separate essays; John Whelpton about the general elections of May 1991; Nigel Collett about the British Gurkha connection in the 1990s; and Alan Macfarlane on fatalism and development in Nepal. The book concludes with David Seddon's essay on democracy and development, where he asserts that "the role of outsiders — whether academics or aid agencies — must be to provide sharper and more critical analysis of the complex and changing situation." Hutt's second book, *Himalayan Voices*, is now available from Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi (ISBN 81 208 1156 9).

## **Journal of the Nepal Geological Society**

Vol 10, April 1994 (special Issue)

*C.K Sharma, Chief Editor*

Nepal Geological Society, Kathmandu

The volume contains 141 abstracts of papers presented at the 9th Himalaya-Karakorum-Tibet Workshop (1-4 April 1994) in Kathmandu. Participated by geoscientists from all over the world, the Kathmandu workshop sought to "encourage young scientists of the region to become part of the international and regional networking of geoscientists and foster international scientific cooperation."

## **Four Lamas of Dolpo**

Tibetan Biographies

*David L. Snellgrove, editor and translator*

Himalayan Book Seller

Kathmandu, 1993

NRs 480

Snellgrove first traveled to Dolpo in 1957. He returned in 1960 to discover copies of autobiographies of four 16th and 17th century Tibetan lamas. The first edition of this work was published in the United Kingdom in 1967. The *Four Lamas of Dolpo* helps readers understand the social conditions in Dolpo, the feuds between local chieftains, the quarrels between lamas, the villagers' persistence in hunting, "however often they promise their lamas that they will renounce their taking of life," their "simple fear of death combined with the trust in their lamas' power to save them from unhappy rebirth", and their "insatiable demands for consecrations and benedictions". The book also deals with Dolpo's relationships with the ruling families of Mustang and the kings of Jumla, and presents a unique account of Tibetan Buddhism as lived in an enclosed space.

## **European Bulletin of Himalayan Research**

Number 6, 1994

*Richard Burghart, et al editors*

Sudasan Institut, Heidelberg

ISSN 0943 8254

This volume of EBHR contains two reports — "Economic Development and Human Resources in the Kingdom of Bhutan" by Volker A. Hauck, and Wolf Donner's "Basic Problems of Economic Development in Nepal"; interviews of Kathmandu Mayor P.L. Singh by Susanne von der Heide and of Professor Lok Raj Baral by Martin Ganenszle; and two book reviews — Dhruva Kumar edited *Nepal's India Policy* by John Whelpton; and Gerard Toffin

edited *Nepal: Past and Present* by Prayag Raj Sharma. It also contains an obituary of anthropologist Richard Burghart, Editor-in-Chief of EBHR who died on 1 January.

## **Himalaya: Past and Present**

Volume 3, 1992-1993

Association of Studies on the Himalaya,

Publication Series No 5

*Maheshwar P. Joshi, editor*

Shree Almora Book Depot, Almora, 1993

ISBN 81 85865 22 1

IRs 500

Containing 10 articles, this ASH volume looks at the history, language, sociology, anthropology and economy of the Central Himalaya, Kashmir and Nepal. E.H.H. Edye writes about the Dom community of Kumaon; Klaus Seeland in his essay Sanskritisation and Environmental Perception Among Tibeto-Burman Speaking Groups writes, "The question of responsibility towards the environment has to be evaluated in the national Nepali context with the Hindu concepts of *karma* and *dharma* and must take into consideration the political legacy of Hinduism as a state power as well as the notion of socio-cultural identity of the ethnic groups of the respective areas." T.N Madan writes on "The Ideology of the Householder among the Kashmiri Pandits"; Bhuvana Rao on "Spirit Possession in the Social Context: Gender and Social Order in Tehri Garhwal"; C.W. Brown, in "Salt, Barley, Pashmina and Tincal — contexts of Being Bhotiya" writes that "The intricacy of Bhotiya culture, and the trade system can be traced as the results, not only of the environment, but of a complex process of social economic and cultural domains of forces." Allen C. Fanger looks at the marriage exchange among the Jimadaras of the Central Himalaya, and Maheshwar P. Joshi at the Silpakars (artisans) of the Central Himalaya.

## **Contribution to Nepalese Studies**

Vol 20 No 1, Jan 1993

*D.P. Bhandari, chief editor*

Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies,

Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu

This issue of Contribution to Nepalese Studies contains 9 articles and 2 book reviews — Bernard Pignede's *The Gurungs: A Himalayan Population of Nepal* by Prayag Raj Sharma, and Adrian Sever's *Nepal Under the Ranas* by Ananda P. Shrestha. Julia J. Thompson, writing on women's resistance within rituals, writes that "...public displays of resistance were not prevalent prior to the political changes in Nepal," concluding that with the change in the political setup, "the idea of the ability of the individuals to affect their own life situations... is beginning to be affirmed." Veronique Bouillier in "Nepali State and Gorakhnathi Yogis: The case of former Kingdoms of Dang Valley: 18-19th Centuries" writes that since the last period of the Dang autonomous rajya till now, its yogis have maintained their spiritual and political preeminence; Bernhard Kolver writes on Malla currencies and Sunil Kumar Jha on Maithili consonants. In "Nepalese Indigenous Labour Relations", Jana Fortier advocates "using an approach where development planners are cognizant of the role of indigenous labour relations and women's roles in agricultural development."

# The Next Great

*Great earthquakes are a permanent, if intermittent fixture of the Himalaya. A zone of high seismicity exists between Kathmandu and Dehradun. The most disastrous*

by Rog

**F**ive minutes is not a long time unless something really unpleasant is happening. Two million square miles of northern India and western Nepal shook violently for 5 minutes starting at 2:13 in the afternoon of 15 January 1934. The occasion was the Great Bihar Earthquake. It took a further 15 minutes for hanging lamps to stop swinging in Calcutta. It took many days for the dust to settle from landslides in the mountains of Nepal. It took many weeks for sand ejected from the ground to be removed from fields and villages in Bihar, and the roads and railways of Bihar to be brought into service. It took many years to reconstruct the tens of thousands of damaged buildings in hundreds of villages and cities. In the sixty years since this event, we have learned that such great earthquakes are necessary events in the building of the Himalaya. Some seismologists believe that the next great earthquake may be long overdue.

## Great Earthquakes Are Inevitable

The processes responsible for the collision between the Indian and Asian tectonic plates are found deep below the Earth's surface and because of this we know of them only indirectly. A gravitational depression of the Earth's shape near Tibet suggests that an almost vertical current of viscous rocks plunges deep into the Earth's mantle, dragging India and southern Tibet towards each other and both of them northward. The result is that each year India approaches Tibet by 2cm, causing the intervening rocks to be squeezed horizontally and upward. The Himalaya is the result of this collision.

The Great Bihar Earthquake was the most recent of three great earthquakes that have occurred in the Himalaya in the past 100 years. The other two involved similar intensities and duration of shaking:

the 4 April 1905 Kangra earthquake to the East and the 10 June 1897 Assam earthquake to the west. The 1934 earthquake destroyed buildings in hundreds of villages and dozens of cities, many of them in northern India, and hence became known as the "Bihar earthquake". But it equally well could have been called the Kathmandu Earthquake, or the Patna Earthquake, or named after any one of the many damaged cities. In fact, for several days after the Bihar earthquake it was thought that the epicentre was at Darjeeling.

The difference between a moderate earthquake such as the Uttar Kashi earthquake of 20 October 1991, and a great earthquake like the Bihar event, is that great earthquakes alone permit the Earth's tectonic plates to slip past each other. In the 1934 earthquake, the low mountains of eastern and southeastern Nepal sprung forward more than 5 metres over the plains of India. Great earthquakes are more effective in allowing slip than smaller events because the amount of displacement in an earthquake is proportional to the length of the zone over which rupture occurs. Although friction limits this slip, the slip is driven by the amount of convergence between India and Tibet since the time of the last earthquake.

If a great earthquake has not occurred on a specific segment in the Himalaya for 200 years, that segment will slip 4m because the convergence rate between India and Tibet is roughly 2cm each year. If it has not occurred for 500 years the segment would slip 10m, enough for an event that would measure  $M=8$ , or Magnitude Eight on the Richter Scale. The time interval between great earthquakes thus determines the amount of slip that will occur in the next one. Thus, if we know the time of the last earthquake, we can estimate the maximum size of the

next one. For example, if the Assam, Kangra and Bihar earthquakes were to recur again today they would slip 2m, 1.8m, and 1.2m respectively, sufficient to drive only  $M=7$  events. We are thus not too concerned about these regions because they have recently slipped. But what of regions in between? When did they last slip?

## West Nepal Disaster Area

A large segment of the Himalaya between Kathmandu and Dehradun has a record of several earthquakes but only two large ones: an event in 1803 and another in 1833. If these were great earthquakes then there is now roughly 3m of slip ready to go. However, if they were magnitude 7 earthquakes, then there may be more than 20m of slip still available for a future great earthquake.

History is patchy concerning great earthquakes in western Nepal near the



# at Earthquake

alaya. A major earthquake is due to occur in the "seismic gap" which event in history will be a pale shadow of the next great earthquake.

## r Bihar

seismic gap shown in the illustration. The earthquake history in even the past 200 years is incomplete. The 26 August 1833 earthquake was felt in Lhasa, Agra and Calcutta, but because fewer fatalities (414) were reported in Kathmandu compared to the Bihar event, it may have been not substantially larger than the Uttar Kashi event of 3 years ago.

We can certainly exclude the possibility of an earthquake having hit the entire region between Dehradun and Kathmandu. Its effects would have eclipsed the Bihar or Assam earthquakes and would surely have been entered into the records of the British administration. Repairs to buildings, wells, etc. indicative of a widespread destruction in 1833 are absent.

It is the tremendous size of the region that apparently remains still to fail that concerns most seismologists. Theoretical calculations indicate that a 500km long

segment could fail in a single event with a maximum slip of 50m. This maximum estimate would require that a great earthquake has not occurred in the region for 2500 years and would certainly explain why no historical event has been recorded. But by breaking the region up into smaller segments less extreme estimates can be obtained. A 300km long segment would slip 10m to 30m, allowing for some permanent deformation of the Himalaya, and would release about 1000 years of Indian movement.

Unfortunately it does not seem possible to replace a great earthquake with dozens of less damaging  $M=7$  earthquakes. Suppose a  $M=7$  event has a rupture area of 50km by 30km, it would require roughly 30 such events to completely rupture a 300km by 150km seismic gap. However, because an  $M=7$  event allows slip of only 2m, these 30

events must occur each century to keep pace with the 2cm/year convergence rate of India and Tibet. Thus we should expect earthquakes every 3 years. The actual rate in the region is more like one every 25 years. Great earthquakes are thus essential to catch up with the rate of convergence.

### Creep without Earthquakes

There is one tectonic process that could eliminate the possibility of a future great earthquake. Some plate boundaries slip by a process known as "creep". An unique blend of material properties and physical conditions exists on the rupture plane of these areas that prevents the fault surface sticking. Instead the fault slides slowly without earthquakes. The process is known as a seismic creep. Could the west Nepal seismic gap be creeping?

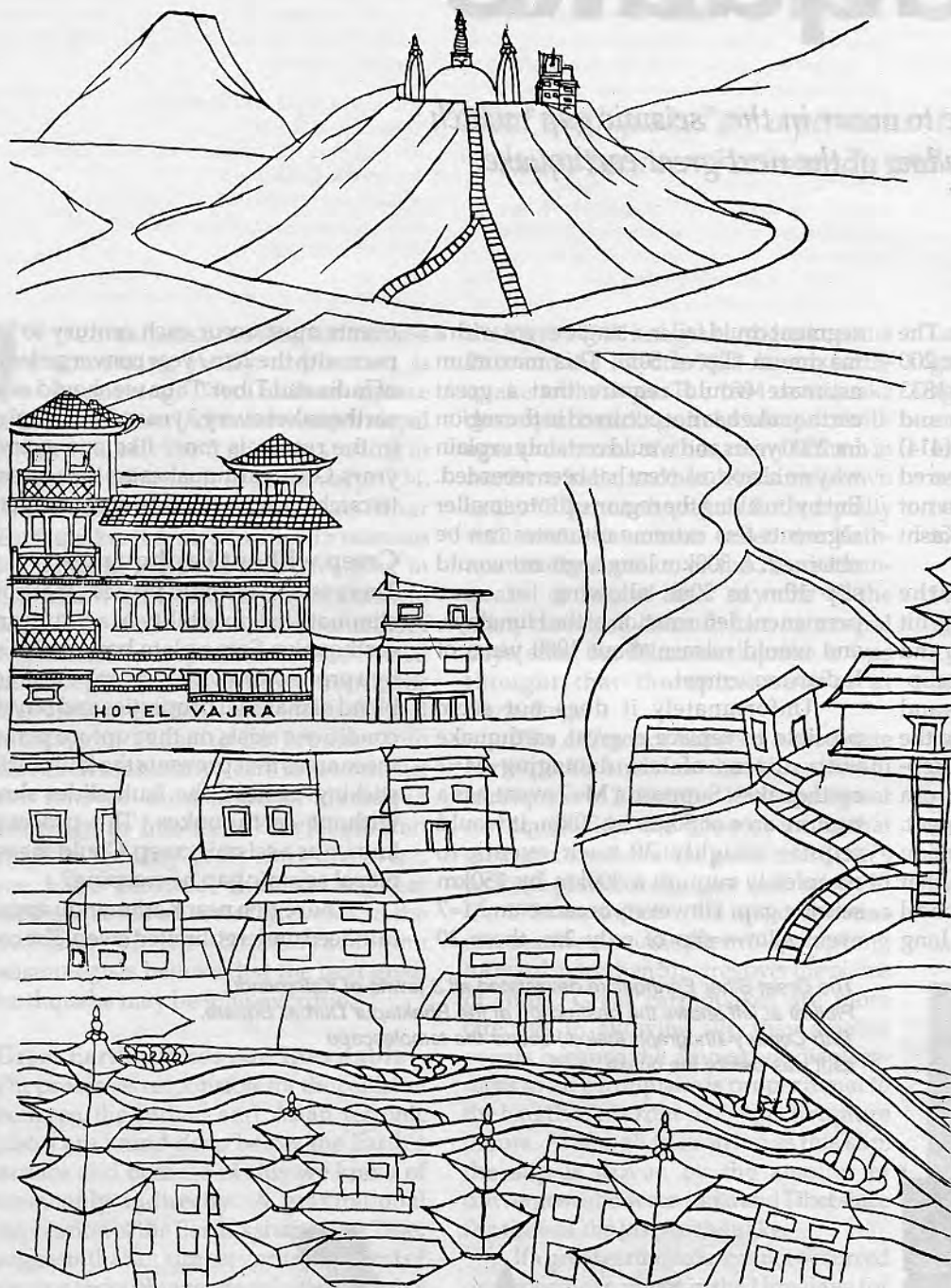
The region near Kathmandu appears to indeed undergo limited creep. The creep

*The Great Bihar Earthquake devastated all 3 towns of Kathmandu. Picture at left shows the destruction at the Bhaktapur Durbar Square. 19th Century lithograph (below) shows the templescape as it was before the quake.*



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causes buckling of the rocks in the Siwalik and the High Himalaya, causing them to rise a few millimetres each year. This evidence comes from very careful measurement of the height of roadside markers in the past 15 years along the road that passes through Nepal from the Indian border to the Tibetan border.

Calculations show, however, that no more than 30 percent of the convergence signal can be released in this way or the rate of rise would be much higher. If 70 percent of the 2cm per year convergence signal remains stored in the rocks as elastic strain then it would merely delay a future great earthquake. It would not prevent it. Because the existence or not of creep is crucial to seismic risks, we would like to know more about its contribution. Fortunately, an additional test of the effects of creep is possible.

An accurate survey to map India was conducted between 1800 and 1870. Each great earthquake subsequent to the completion of the survey has left an imprint on the Indian plate, and so has any creep that may have been released. That is, the Survey of India recorded the shape of northern India prior to these earthquakes and by re-measuring the positions of these original points we can ascertain whether, in addition to the deformation caused by the earthquakes there has been deformation from significant creep in western Nepal.

Although many of the original survey points have been lost, and some are now shrines and are thus unusable, sufficient points remain to search for patterns that can tell us whether creep in West Nepal is significant. This search is urgent from a seismic hazards viewpoint, but the Survey of India who were responsible for the original work have no interest in re-

measurements related to seismicity. Such re-measurements would need to be initiated by the seismological community. If no evidence for creep is apparent we would conclude that a great earthquake has yet to occur in the region of western Nepal.

### Confronting the Big One

Seismic engineers in Nepal and northern India are reluctant to admit the worst case possibility of an inevitable bigger than M=8 event. The size of historical earthquakes and the delaying effects of creep can be questioned. However, there is no doubt that great earthquakes are a permanent, if intermittent, fixture of the Himalaya. Thus, the hazardous nature of the northern plains of India is beyond dispute and it is certain that an M=8.5 earthquake, were it to occur in the next few decades, would constitute one of the worst disasters in history.

The reason for concern is that the population of the northern plains of India and Nepal is now at least ten times greater than it was during the last great earthquakes in the region. Aggravating the problem is that construction methods in the cities (where much of this increased population now reside) is inadequate to resist the highest accelerations anticipated from an earthquake.

In the Assam earthquake and in the Bihar earthquake there were reports of stones and buildings thrown into the air indicating vertical accelerations greater than 1g (the acceleration due to gravity,

1g equals 10 meters per second squared, and is used as a measure of acceleration). Typical design accelerations applied in the Himalaya are less than 0.5g and even for ongoing engineering projects (e.g. Tehri Dam), lower accelerations (0.3g) are considered acceptable. The recent M=6.4 earthquake in Los Angeles confirms that accelerations can exceed 1g. The application of such low design codes in a region where a bigger than M=8 earthquake is anticipated must be considered irresponsible.

As an example of the ambivalent acceptance of possible future seismicity, consider Kathmandu, the rapidly growing Nepali valley currently with a population exceeding one million. Seismic resistant building codes are applied to limit the height of construction in Kathmandu to about 15m, yet reinforcing rods protrude skyward above newly constructed roofs, clearly in expectation that height restrictions will be lifted.

Construction methods are weakly supervised by engineers and most of the construction is undertaken by contractors anxious to increase profit margins by using inexpensive materials: low quality bricks, weak cement and brittle steel. Lower stories of multi-storey buildings are constructed to maximise window space for commerce, resulting in a soft lower level that is the first to fail during seismic shaking. Electrification in the old parts of the town where narrow streets and wooden houses remain, now constitute a major fire hazard that did not exist during the Bihar event. The absence of an adequate piped water system means that fires may not be extinguished for days following an earthquake.

Finally, although liquefaction (when soil attains a 'liquid' state due to high pressure) of solid layers was not widespread in the Kathmandu valley in the 1934 earthquake, perhaps due to the absence of extensive sand layers in the lake sediments on which the city is built, it did occur along the banks of the rivers, and it is likely that bridges in the city will fail, in addition to extensive damage to approach roads and even the airport runway. Relief to the city will be hampered by the inevitable closure of all roads by

There is tremendous reluctance among those in office to believe that nightmare earthquakes are inevitable.

### Readings on Earthquakes

- The Indian Earthquake*, C.F. Andrews, George Allen and Unwin, 1935
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- Structure and Tectonics of the Himalaya: Constraints and Implications of Geophysical Data*, P. Molnar, *Ann. Rev. of Earth and Planetary Sciences*, 12, 1984
- Report on the Great Earthquake of 12 June 1897*, R.D. Oldham, Mem. Geol. Soc. of India, 29, 1899
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rockslides and avalanches. A consequence of the restricted access and water supplies following the earthquake is that it will probably be difficult to control epidemic diseases in the subsequent months.

### What Should be Done?

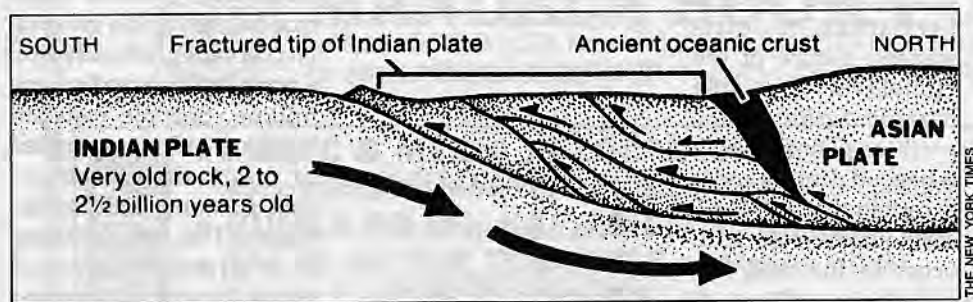
There has been much worldwide research on the possibility of predicting future earthquakes. The results of these investigations are disappointing in that no clear physical process has been found to precede seismicity. Although the work has thus far provided little hope for

the Himalayan foothills, it would thereby be possible to obtain up to 30 seconds of warning before the arrival of seismic waves from the focus of the earthquake. In 30 seconds, nuclear plants could be shifted to non-critical status, hospitals could be switched to emergency power, underground pipelines could be isolated. Seismic warning systems have been implemented in Japan and Mexico and are being discussed in California.

One of the most vexing aspects of research on disastrous earthquakes in the Himalaya, however, is that the

borders and cannot proceed without the precise re-measurement of a 19th century survey?

India's worst enemies are her natural disasters, and the sooner that politicians admit this, the sooner they will be working in the interests of her people. Realistic building codes should be implemented throughout northern India on all new construction. Critical structures (dams and nuclear power plants) must be retrofit or abandoned if they cannot be designed to survive levels of shaking associated with historic great earthquakes in the



*The Asian and continental plates collided about 45 million years ago. The Indian plate has been attempting to dive violently beneath the Eurasian plate ever since, producing multiple fractures around the area of collision.*

accurately predicting the time, location and magnitude of a future earthquake, the subject is still in its infancy and progress may yet occur.

Probabilistic forecasts of future seismicity are, however, improving in quality and would be of immense use in the Himalaya. The data on which to base these forecasts could be much improved with investigations of historic earthquakes. The written record in India exists for centuries and may contain entries of value to assessing the dates of previous earthquakes in the Himalaya. The colonial record must surely contain more complete records of 18th and 19th century events than those currently interpreted. There is much that can be done to extend the historic record backward by excavating the liquefaction features of historic earthquakes. An army of historians, language experts and geologists should be mobilised to attack these problems.

One important application of seismic research that is readily available is the use of instantaneous shut-down procedures in northern India. An array of seismometers in the Himalaya would constantly monitor seismic tremors and in the event of a large common signal a computer would radio a shut-down message to nearby critical facilities. Given that many of India's large urban populations live 100km to 200km from

Government of India restricts the activities of its scientists in acquiring data in the region. The reason given is that it is not in the interests of India's national security that raw data be obtained on the disposition and deformation of the Himalaya or regions within 100km of any national border. This is, of course, a bizarre manifestation of military thinking. Surely it is more important to reduce seismic risks to perhaps 200 million people in northern India, than to pretend that an invading army is hovering at India's



*The 1988 Udaipur earthquake, (M=6.3) destroyed villages and towns in East Nepal such as Dharan, shown here.*

Himalaya. Scientists should be encouraged to intensify their studies of the region, to test or refute the approach of a great earthquake in West Nepal.

There is no shortage of expertise in India and Nepal to investigate the real risks from earthquakes, to investigate the historic record with thoroughness, to excavate the geologic effects of pre-historic earthquakes, to monitor ongoing seismicity and deformation in real time, and to apply earthquake design to existing and future structures. There is a tremendous reluctance among those in public office, however, to believe that the continued recurrence of nightmare earthquakes is inevitable, or that due to changed building methods and increased populations, the most disastrous historic event will be a pale shadow of the next great earthquake. To admit that this is a possibility and to do nothing is surely a criminal act.

Mahatma Gandhi said of the Bihar earthquake, "Such calamities are not a mere caprice of the Deity, or Nature. They obey fixed laws as surely as the planets do. Only we do not know the laws governing them." He goes on to ask what sin can warrant such a calamity. It is becoming increasingly clear that the only sin on which a future disaster can be blamed is the sin of indifference. ▽

R. Bilham is with the Department of Geological Sciences of the University of Colorado, Boulder.



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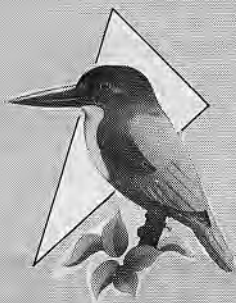
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# Tarai with Blinkers

*Two recent books on Nepal's Tarai over-emphasise Mithila and ignore Tharu culture.*

by Kurt W. Meyer

The vernacular art and architecture of many peoples from around the globe have been presented to the world in countless beautifully designed books. Painted houses, Indian vernacular, the art of Iran and many others can be studied in the world's libraries. But the folk art of Tharu of Nepal has blossomed in obscurity.

Only a few ethnologists have dealt with this civilisation, and *no one* has produced or published a visual record of Tharu life. My collaborator, Pamela Deuel, and I are exploring Tharu settlements and recording on film and tape the visual culture of these most ancient occupants of the Tarai. Our goal is to document the art

of this unique people in photographs and drawings so that it can take its rightful place in the realm of folk art.

Few people have the desire and fewer still the opportunity to experience the Nepal Tarai the way we have since January 1993: crisscrossing the land from Jhapa to Kanchanpur, putting 24,000 km on my Gypsy jeep in visiting 120 villages.

In researching our subject, we found few substantive works. Ironically enough, most publications have been researched and written by non-Nepali academicians. By far the most comprehensive book was published by the French Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) in

Paris. Its author, Giselle Krauskopff, spent the better part of 10 years amongst Tharu, mostly in Dang valley. Her book *Maitres et Possedes* ("The Masters and Those Owned") is an excellent study of Durgora Tharu culture and customs. Unfortunately, because it has only been published in French, the work is not accessible to most Nepali researchers. This is regrettable because, based on our first hand experience, many politicians, business people and even academicians have only scant knowledge of Tharu culture and would benefit from reading Krauskopff's book.

Why do I say this? Where is the evidence?

Two recent publications demonstrate this lack of acceptance of Tharu culture — either by design or through inadequate knowledge. The first, *The Terai Community and National Integration in Nepal* by Hari Bansh Jha, and *Cultural Heritage of Nepal Terai* by Ram Dayal Rakesh, both writers from Janakpur in the Eastern Tarai. What makes these books so astonishing is that both these accomplished scholars choose to play loose with the culture and ethnic composition of the Tarai, in other words with a part of Nepal which is occupied by approximately one half of the population of Nepal.

Both Jha and Rakesh are intrigued by the Maithili and Hindi languages and cultures. Both shortchange the other ethnic groups who live in the Tarai, particularly Tharu.

To avoid misunderstandings, let me state that I think well of the Maithili culture. The disagreement stems from the authors' obvious disregard for Tharu. This is most regrettable because the two works claim to talk about "national integration" and "cultural heritage of the Nepal Terai".

If a democratic system of government is to blossom in Nepal, *all* ethnic groups must be given recognition; to integrate the country, everybody must be included.



*With their backs on Tharu: Rana Tharu Women of Dhangadi, West Nepal.*

As the scholar and author Prayag Raj Sharma wrote recently in another context, too many people seem to make the "...ingenuous assumption that ethnic problems can be circumvented by simply not counting... (the minorities)".

### Problem of Methodology

Jha tends to deny Tharu their identity when he states, "...What purpose does the new word 'Tharu language' serve? Perhaps one of its objectives may be to show that Tharu are different from the rest of the Madheshi community, which it is not (emphasis added)."

In the light of his opening statements this is hard to understand: "...the objective is to discuss the problems of the Madheshi community in regard to the manifestation of their language, culture and identity..." But then when we look at the methodology used by Jha to 'prove' his point, all becomes only too clear. Although he claims to have designed a scientific survey which examines the cultural cross-section of the entire Tarai, in fact he uses a 'convenience sampling' in which the study area is reduced to only five districts, namely: Jhapa, Dhanusha, Parsa, Nawalparasi and Banke.

You might ask why all of the other 15 districts are excluded. Are these five districts truly representative of the entire Tarai? Hardly. Most major Tharu concentrations happen to be in Kanchanpur, Kailali, Bardiya, Dang/Deukhuri, Chitwan, Parsa, Siraha, Saptari, Sunsari and Morang. Jha seems to have chosen a self-serving study area, excluding districts which comprise the majority of the minority peoples of the Tarai.

When the question was posed to Jha as to why his "scientifically" prepared survey did not cover the historic Tharu districts, he explained to me that this was not necessary because he had travelled these other districts and therefore he "just knew" that the statistics he quotes in his book for the five districts applied to the other 15 as well.

Since his carelessly drawn conclusions have such shaky foundations, all of Jha's subsequent statistics are open to

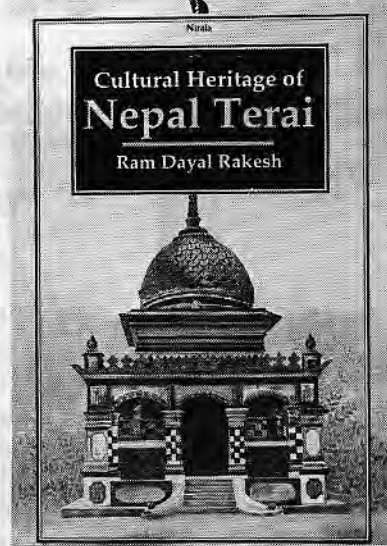
question and cannot be relied upon. This is really too bad because it obscures and diminishes the impact of Jha's other positions, such as when he discusses in forthright manner the plight of Tharu and other peoples of the Tarai in the chapter entitled "Migration and Its Impact on the Terai".

This writer hopes in all sincerity that Jha's statistics will *not* be used by students or politicians when addressing matters of language, ethnicity or culture of the Tarai. We do, however, need reliable information and statistics and it certainly is not too much to hope that support could be found for the Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies (CNAS) of Tribhuvan University to do comprehensive field work that includes all Tharu groups. Without this, no meaningful conclusions can be drawn, nor policy decisions be made when addressing the future of the Tarai.

### Maithili Tales

Because Ram Dayal Rakesh's book contains a good documentation of Maithili culture, society, festivals, marriage customs, folk tales and art, it should have been titled "Cultural Heritage of the Terai Mithila". Instead, the book claims to speak for the cultural heritage of the entire Nepal Tarai. It is, of course, possible that the misleading cover is the work of a careless foreign publisher who is unaware that the region is home to many groups whose culture is quite different from that of the Maithilis of the eastern Tarai. On the other hand, the title may reflect nothing other than skewed political thinking.

An expert in this field, Rakesh had included a well-written article about Tharu in his earlier book, *Folk Culture of Nepal* (1990). Having recognised Tharu in that volume, it is puzzling that he should assert in his



current work that the Tarai population is homogeneous. Today, he writes: "The people of the Nepal Terai are similar in their ethnic origin, in their appearances, attitudes and behaviour, they are not different in any special manner, ... because the root are the same..."!

Three years ago, in his chapter about Tharu the same author identifies many

distinguishing traits that set Tharu apart: "...the women have a very high position in the family. They enjoy full freedom and complete authority in the running of the family..."; and "...Some Tharu have intercaste marriages..."; or... "widow remarriage is also in vogue..."; and... "worship their own tribal gods and deities." Also... "The hallmark of the Tharu village is its cleanliness...the rooms are airy and neat and clean, with everything in its appointed place..." "...they are proud and honest people, free and frank in their behaviour..."

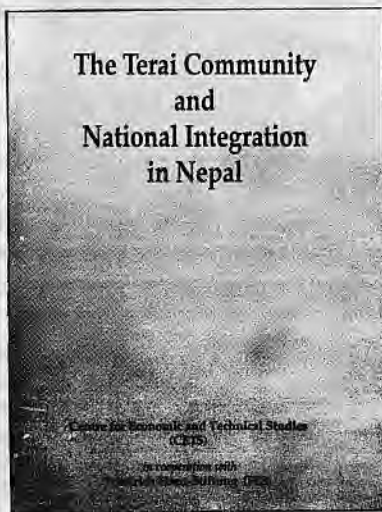
Why this change of heart between 1990 and 1993? People who have sincerely studied the Tarai know that not "all people are alike". Far from it, some, like Tharu, are quite different from the rest. In fact, in our travels we found that the Rakesh's above-mentioned attributes are not generally found in the villages of the ethnic majorities of the Tarai, but are indeed true about Tharu.

### Majority, Minority

It is quite unfortunate that these two publications are likely to be used as reference material by Nepali and non-Nepali scholars. Both authors maintain a personal and political stance which lacks objectivity and misrepresents — by carelessness or design — the cultural/ethnic mix of the Tarai.

We have a right to ask for more. And indeed there is more.

In 1958, S.K. Srivastava at Agra University published a book entitled *The Tharus: A Study in Cultural Dynamics*. This well-documented study describes the traditional life of Tharu people in good detail. The study is applicable to Nepal's Rana Tharu, even though it is based on Tharu who live in Uttar Pradesh, just



west and adjacent to the district of Kanchanpur. Political borders are not cultural borders.

Srivastava presents a remarkable statistic, for example, which confirms our own experience in Nepal: in his study area over a 10 year period, eight crimes were committed by Tharu, while during the same time span 501 crimes were committed by non-Tharu.

Of some interest, but of more limited value, is the publication called *The Ethnobotany of the Tharus of Kheri District, Uttar Pradesh*, also on Rana Tharu.

Studies in Nepal have concentrated on Dang valley and Chitwan. Most noteworthy are the writings of Drone Rajure of CNAS, such as "The Tharu Women of Sukhrwar" (which, incidentally, shows just how different Tharu women are from Maithili women). Just how distinct Tharu religious practices are from Maithili ones is clear from Rajure's article "Tharus of Dang: Tharu Religion" (*Kailash* magazine, no 1 1982). By the same

Districts studied by Jha ■  
Areas of major Tharu concentration ▨



author in *Kailash* no 2/3 1982: "Tharus of Dang: Rites de Passage and Festivals". In *Kailash* no 3/4 1989, Christian McDonough of Oxford addresses "The Mythology of the Tharu: Aspects of Cultural Identity in Dang". And lastly, Giselle Krauskopff in "Architecture, milieu et societe en Himalaya" has written an excellent piece comparing Dang Valley Tharu longhouse with Rana Tharu houses in the west.

What a shame that the Nepali authors limit themselves to one portion of the Tarai while the entire region is so rich. Of course, it is hard work to leave the tranquillity and security of the campus and to travel to remote villages of the Tarai. But the wealth of cultures to be found makes it worthwhile and necessary if

one wishes to write about the diverse peoples of the Tarai. In a deeper philosophical sense, however, neither Jha nor Rakesh do service to the efforts of coming to grips with the problems of "living together" by the various ethnic groups. If living together in harmony is a goal, the existence of one group or another cannot be wished away. The two authors mislead in the way they disregard the minority Tharu culture—a tragic mistake because their work is divisive when our times demand mutual understanding.

When growing up in my native Switzerland, we were constantly reminded that the very existence of a democracy depends entirely on how the majority treats the minority. And this is the lesson all Nepali scholars—from hill or Tarai—must accept.

K.W. Meyer is a Los Angeles architect who is devoting 3 years to the study of Tharu folk art and culture.

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Himal magazine invites entries from amateur and professional photographers for a picture exhibition on Kathmandu Valley's mounting problems of smoke, garbage, dust, toxic effluents, plastics, and other filth. Himal is looking for imaginative photographs with artistic or journalistic flavour that focus on the Valley's air, water and solid wastes pollution. Disturbing images which reflect the weakening spirit of our beautiful Valley are required for shock therapy.

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# V O I

**HOW TO LOOK AT A MOUNTAIN**, suggestions by Tom Cole in Expeditions, the journal of a San-Francisco-based trekking company Inner Asia. "Mountains live at such a slower pace than primates that we need to gear way down to see their pulse," he writes at the top.

**PUT DOWN THE CAMERA.** Letting your camera do your appreciating for you is an easy trap to fall into, but remember: it's hard to do justice simultaneously to the place you are now and the drawing room of your salon two months from now, as you click the projector, telling your rapt friends what it was like *then*.

**PUT DOWN THE BOOK.** What book? The book, the many books, of fabulous landscape photography. The ones where each page is a sensation, and you turn the page and get another jolt, and greedily turn the page and... I love those books, too, but I've learned that they have as much to do with life in the mountains as the pneumatic Miss Playmate for July has to do with my sleeping habits. There is more to Mozart than the stratospheric good bits, or to Beethoven than the hammering heartstopping, and there is more to the mountains than sizzling alpenglow. Too many glossy Miss Playmates numb us to real-life lovemaking, and too many stunning mountain photos deaden us to the nuance and power of what Jose Knighton has called "the homely, flat-chested, overweight landscape."

**GIVE LANGUAGE A REST.** Many people feel speechless in the mountains, but are somehow compelled to speak. So often I've seen the earnest trekker look up from her Sherpa tea and peanut butter *chappati* and say, "It's beautiful, so beautiful," and almost wince with embarrassment at the triviality of language amidst the booming import of the peaks. As William Golding has written, "language fits over experience like a straitjacket."

Mountains — forgive me if this sounds sappy — are not only alive, they speak. To hear them, we have to put aside our language and as big a chunk as we can of our file-cabinet minds. Listening to mountains is one of the secrets of seeing them.

**PUT UP A CONTEXT.** Like surfers on a tidal wave, we sometimes find it hard to look beyond the greatness of the thing. We can be overwhelmed, and when we're overwhelmed it's easy to lower eyes to the foreground, or stick up a camera in self-defense. So it helps to look at *Machapuchare*, rather than *that amazing mountain over there*. It's enjoyable to know that this Machapuchare is sacred to the local Gurungs, that the first attempt to climb it was turned back a hundred feet below the top, and it's never been climbed since...

We don't want merely to see dumb clumps of mountains any more than we want to whiz through the Louvre chanting "great painting, great painting beautiful painting." The connoisseurs I like to hike with will look at Machapuchare, and grunt, and point out that little hanging glacier on the north face, and wonder at the flying cornice on the west ridge, and make a surmise about snowfall and temperature up there and bring to mind the huge, now shrunken glaciers that scraped the mountains into its horn-shape. Then they will shut up and look...

**LOOK.** The most difficult position in Hatha Yoga, we're told, is the pose of complete motionlessness and relaxation. As Elizabeth Marshall Thomas says, "to sit idly, not doing, merely experiencing, comes hard to a primate..." Yet we mountain zealots have found that the mountains unveil themselves, and speak more and more beneficially the quieter we are in their presence and the less we do. I think this may be the key to the great art of looking at mountains: quieting down, looking up. Not much else.

**HIERARCHY OF BIRTH** *must be banished, but this will not happen easily, writes Keith D. Leslie, Nepal Director of Save the Children/US organisation, in The Kathmandu Post of 24 March 1994.*

How unusual it seems that those who actually work honourably with their hands for the benefit of all would be considered beneath others' dignity. For whom have our *damai* friends stitched their clothes, and who wore the shoes made with care and precision by our *sarki* friends? Which farmer in Nepal has not fed his family with the iron instruments that his Vishwakarma neighbour laboured to make over a hot furnace? We talk so much these days about pollution and hygiene, but hasn't it been the *podes* who have walked the streets of Kathmandu sweeping them before us for centuries? What is high and what is low in these labours? How can we reconcile the love of democracy with a rigid social hierarchy of man? For whom is development if not for the poorest among you? These are some of the questions we face while discussing these issues...

The elimination of centuries of casteism and racial discrimination in Nepal will not be accomplished by a seminar in a Kathmandu hotel or one rural community development project. We all know that. It will require years of commitment from the government and social leaders to support these changes through new programs for the *dalits*; from development organizations to provide jobs to capable

# C E S

members of these *dalit* caste and tribal communities; and, from *dalit* parents to educate their daughters and sons to give them the pride to be as well-informed, intelligent and resourceful as any child from any caste or ethnic community in the country.

Even then, we must not delude ourselves, for most people there will still be caste and tribe, brown men and white men, Hindus and Jews—but there will no longer have to be an unnatural hierarchy of birth. Rather, each of us will proudly carry the name of our ancestors and cherish our tribal and caste affiliation. There will still be Newar and Tharu, Gurung and Pariyar, Brahmin and Limbu, Charmakar and Chhetri. The words “high caste”, however, will be for the noble of spirit and “low caste” refer to those of mean and selfish egos. This will then be the garden of Nepal that Prithvi Narayan Shaha wanted to see planted in the soil of a young country with ancient roots: a nation for all castes and all its children; unique in this part of Asia for its openness, honesty and diversity.

*GREEN EYE OF THE YELLOW GOD*, poem by J. Milton Hayes in *The Best Loved Poems of the American People*, selected by Hazel Fellman after 15 years with *The New York Times Book Review*. The first imprint of the book, by Doubleday, was in 1936 (ISBN 0 385 00019 7).

There's a one-eyed yellow idol to the north of Khatmandu,  
There's a little marble cross below the town;  
There's a broken-hearted woman tends the grave of Mad Carew,  
And the Yellow God forever gazes down.

He was known as “Mad Carew” by the subs of Khatmandu,  
He was better than they felt inclined to tell;  
But for all his foolish pranks, he was worshiped in the ranks,  
And the Colonel's daughter smiled on him as well.

He had loved her all along, with the passion of the strong,  
The fact that she loved him was plain to all.  
She was nearly twenty-one and arrangements had begun  
To celebrate her birthday with a ball.

He wrote to ask what present she would like from Mad Carew;  
They met next day, as he dismissed a squad;  
And jestingly she told him then that nothing else would do  
But the green eye of the little Yellow God.  
On the night before the dance Mad Carew seemed in a trance.  
And they chaffed him as they puffed at their cigars;  
But for once he failed to smile, and he sat alone awhile,  
Then went out into the night beneath the stars.

He returned before the dawn, with his shirt and tunic torn.  
And a gash across his temples dripping red;  
He was patched up right away, and he slept all through the day.  
And the Colonel's daughter watched beside his bed.

He woke at last and asked if they could send his tunic through;  
She brought it, and he thanked her with a nod;  
He bade her search the pocket, saying, “That's from Mad Carew,”  
And she found the little green eye of the god.

She upbraided poor Carew in the way that women do,  
Though both her eyes were strangely hot and wet;  
But she wouldn't take the stone, and Carew was left alone  
With the jewel that he'd chanced his life to get.

When the ball was at its height, on that still and tropic night.  
She thought of him, and hastened to his room;  
As she crossed the barrack square she could hear the dreamy air  
Of a waltz tune softly stealing thro' the gloom.

His door was open wide, with silver moonlight shining through.  
The place was wet and slipp'ry where she trod;  
An ugly knife lay buried in the heart of Mad Carew,  
'Twas the “Vengeance of the Little Yellow God.”

There's a one-eyed yellow idol to the north of Khatmandu,  
There's a little marble cross below the town;  
There's a broken-hearted woman tends the grave of Mad Carew.  
And the Yellow God forever gazes down.

*FANTASIES OF TIBET* may backfire on the movement, says Donald S. Lopez Jr., Professor of Buddhist and Tibetan Studies in the University of Michigan, in the Spring 1994 issue of the *American Buddhist review* Tricycle.

Fantasies of Tibet have in the past three decades inspired much support for the cause of Tibetan independence. But those fantasies are ultimately a threat to the realization of that goal. It is not simply that learning that Tibet was not the place we dreamed it to be might result in some “disillusionment”. It is rather that to allow Tibet to circulate as a constituent in a system of fantastic oppositions (even when Tibetans are the “good” Orientals) is to deny Tibet its history, to exclude Tibet from a real world of which it has always been a part, and to deny Tibetans their role as agents participating in the creation of a contested quotidian reality. To the extent that we continue to believe that Tibet prior to 1950 was a utopia, the Tibet of 1994 will be no place.



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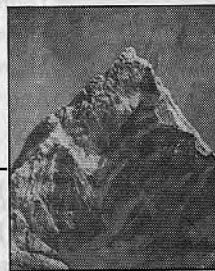
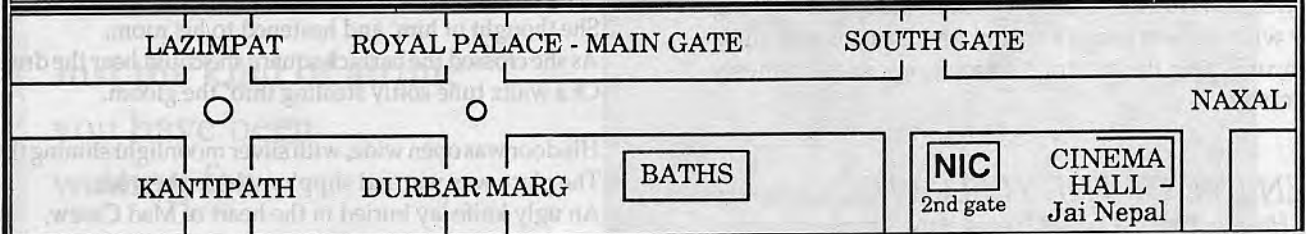
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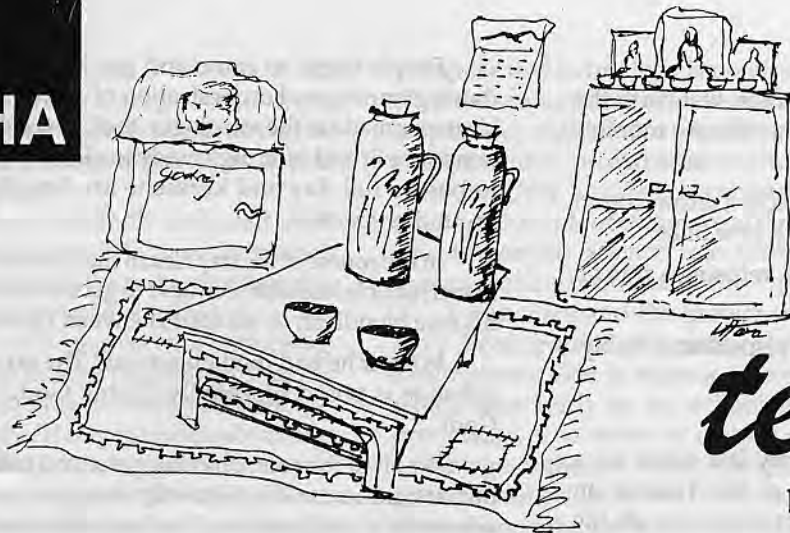
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# teacher

by Kesang Tseten

Teacher is always saying marrying young helps; and when he says it he holds his five-year-old daughter like she was a piece of evidence.

Teacher, clear eyes, thinning, greying sixty-ish hair, then pats his girl on the bottom which signals she go out and play.

"Listen to experience speaking," he says, sitting cross-legged on a pile of rugs that serves as his bed. His voice is clear, his choice of words exact but without stiffness, never committing more than 60 years can back up.

"A man can't build without a wife," Teacher says. He drinks, puts down his wooden tea-bowl, and pours a fresh addition from a thermos flask with storks painted on it.

"Or," he says. He looks me in the eye. "Or, join the monastery." He sounds as though he exhausted the first option.

Join the monastery, I think. What a bright idea! I walk back home from Teacher's, promising fidelity to it. I read the Vinaya, the twenty-five-hundred-year-old rules of the Buddhist campus. But a little later, with the three 'Tens on the subject - Raptan, Saptan and Thuptan - a whole sky slips between Idea and Action, even though the action is monkhood.

That night after dinner I sit thinking things over while mother thumbs her prayer-beads and steals glances my way.

"Amala," I say. "Will I increase your merit if I join the brotherhood?"

"Stop playing the fool," she replies and returns to devotional bead-turning.

I am still playing the fool as I get into bed. Before falling asleep, I try engineering my dreams to search for links between Idea and Action instead of screening action-packeds.

\* \* \*

Returning to Teacher's the next day, after lessons we sit side by side on his rug-bed, drinking endless refills of tea from the thermos with the storks on it.

Teacher's room is the world's best room. It has two beds (a lot of money in rugs), an altar, a Godrej safe, picture-framed deities, the Enlightened One during his emaciated days of leftist asceticism, a radio-cassette player covered with a magic-needle embroidery of his second wife's young face.

There is a lunar calendar with full-moons red-inked,

suitcases with clothes, a biscuit tin with Teacher's ritual accessories, a biscuit tin with letters from his first wife's children. There is also an extra thermos with red flowers on it, filled with fresh hot water, standing by in case the tea runs out.

When it is full, the room has Teacher, Teacher's second wife, and their five-year-old who obeys cues to go out and play. Teacher's noodle business and other needs are taken care of downstairs.

In the intimacy of this room, the world comes into focus. We talk about everything, helped on occasion by the radio, from the devaluation of the rupee and who got caught with gold at the airport, to the U.S.-Sovietization of the world.

In this room, we knife off the fat from the issues, place them on the low table on which the thermos with storks stands, beside our tea-bowls, and alongside Teacher's:

"Listen to experience speaking."

One day I do and I ask: What is wrong with a 60-year-old, a Teacher to top it, with a young second wife and an obedient five-year-old?

Teacher's only response is a quiet look of exasperation.

The next time I put this question, the second wife has slipped into the room. The second wife stops what she is doing, wordlessly takes the girl's hand, and they walk out together.

\* \* \*

A year passes, then two. I observe that Teacher has stopped dyeing his thinning hair. He works less, sits more, and when he sits he prays. He is calmer, more detached.

Before, from my window, I would see him pass by, headed for evening visits with his buddies. He would poise his head up in a slight slant, and call out, and come up to chat if I was home, smoke a cigarette, then continue on his way. He doesn't anymore.

His wife serves him well, it would be testified by all. But when they quarrel, she calls him "old man," and he suddenly grows quiet. Though he remains kindly to his daughter, who can now walk to school by herself, an invisible distance has grown between them.

"Can't keep up with her," he says when she turns to her mother to find a better ear for her school goings-on. And he

gives me that look again.

One day his wife comes by with noodles, wet, with the smell of fresh eggs in them. She says Teacher plans a month's retreat.

I run into Teacher a few days later. Below a cream cotton hat lies a smile on a weary face etched with new lines.

"Oh, just around the corner," he says, refusing a ride on the backseat of my new motor-cycle.

"I'll be gone a month, no more," he whispers and, feebly, he shakes my hand.

He is to go on retreat the next day.

In bed the following night, taking my last drags on a cigarette, envious thoughts come to me of my Teacher on retreat, up in the mountains, by a silent monsoon fog. As the last wisp of smoke tapers from the stub of my cigarette, my name is called, my heart jumps.

It's Teacher, it's Teacher, says an informing voice in the dark.

"Come, quick."

I dress silently, and rush to Teacher's. I part the door curtains, and there's Teacher - in striped pajama and a singlet - prostrate on a straw mat. Seeing his pallor, I think of that face two days ago and kick myself for not having seen it then.

I enter the room and the violent glare from its single bulb. Teacher's wife sits curled, besides tearful neighbours; her shoulders heave and drop as she sobs: "There was no warning, there was no warning."

A new sound emerges from behind the curtains. Teacher's daughter appears, crying. She has just awoken somebody whispers.

People begin to come and go. There is whispered pre-dawn planning and orchestration of duties for the cremation. Visits are made to the astrologer, the Lamas, the Sangha. Butter lamps are lit and offerings made to all the monasteries. Wood to burn a full day and kerosene are bought, the cremation ground prepared.

In the course of the day I learn that Teacher had postponed his retreat. He had not been able to get out of bed that morning, his face bloodless; in his state, he wasn't going anywhere.

What if he had died on retreat? The arrangements? - the question is posed repeatedly. Thank God, he didn't! Thank God!

We sit in the room, having gone and returned, executing our assignments. It is a greatly changed room, without the warmth of a familiar order. Teacher's wife has stopped sobbing, then she starts again.

In the corner sits Teacher's daughter, playing. She's over her fright, poor girl, a red-eyed somebody says softly. Suddenly, the girl gets up gripping a handful of sweets and walks toward her mother.

"Is it time to go to school? Is it?" she asks her weeping mother.

"Mother, I want to go to school! I want to go to school!" she is now shouting.

Then as she slings her schoolbag over her shoulder and keeps shouting, I see, hauntingly, mother and daughter hand-in-hand walking out wordlessly, embraced in an understanding peculiar to only them; and an image flashes of Teacher, sitting cross-legged on his rugs, saying:

"Listen to experience speaking."

K. Tseten is a writer and lives in Kathmandu.

---

## *the loss of a mother's son*

The gurkha with a khukri  
But no enemy  
Works for the United Nations  
And yet gets shot at  
In missions he doesn't comprehend  
Order is hukum, hukum is life  
Johnny Gurkha still dies under foreign skies  
He never asks why  
Politics isn't his style.  
He's fought against all and sundry:  
Turks, Tibetans, Italians and Indians  
Germans, Japanese, Chinese, Vietnamese and  
Argentineans.  
Loyalty to the utmost  
Never fearing a loss.  
The loss of a mother's son  
From the mountains of Nepal.

Her grandpa died in Burma  
For the glory of the British.  
Her husband in Mesopotamia,  
She knows not against whom  
No one did tell her.  
Her brother fell in France,  
Against the Teutonic hordes.  
She prays to Shiva of the Snows for peace  
And her son's safety  
Her only joy, her only hope  
Farming on a terraced slope.

A son who helped wipe her tears  
And ease the pain in her mother's heart.  
A frugal mother who lives by the seasons  
And peers down to the valleys  
Year in and year out  
In expectation of her soldier son.

On 18 May 1994, five Nepali soldiers serving with the United Nations contingent in Mogadishu were killed by Somali gunmen, and one was later abducted from hospital.

A smart gurkha is on the way  
Heard from across the hill with a shout  
'Tis an officer with his battalion.  
A letter with a seal and poker-face  
"Your son died on duty," he says  
"Keeping peace for the country and the  
United Nations."

A world crumbles down  
And comes to an end  
A lump in the Nepali mother's throat  
She cannot utter a word.  
Gone is her son,  
Her precious jewel.  
Her only insurance and sunshine  
In the craggy hills.  
And with him her dreams  
A Spartan life that kills. - Satis Shroff

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## Stories from the Heart of Nepal

Nepali school children do not have quality literature in the vernacular available to them. And adult new literates have been even more neglected.

United Mission to Nepal (UMN), a missionary organisation working in development, is trying to set this situation right by starting *Pipal Pustak*, a publication series that is producing a line of readings meant specifically for those emerging from adult literacy classes all over Nepal.

Says Kathy White, the Australian educator responsible for producing *Pipal Pustak*, "Common people get access to press. Village dwellers, the oppressed and even the non-literate will have a voice."

Non-formal education material aimed at the rural population tends to be poorly selected and badly printed. "We decided to go against the trend, providing good text, written as it is spoken, with fine sketches, good paper and colour covers, which are laminated so that they do not wear easily."

What is unique about the *Pipal Pustak*, says White, is that they are authored by individual villagers in far corners of Nepal. Typically, a scribe sits with the villager and takes down the story, asking questions and clarifications as they go along. Only minimal editing is done on the original words, to take out repetition and ensure consistency.

UMN has produced 11 books till now, divided into four colour-categories — red:

easiest, purple: relatively easy, blue: difficult and green: very difficult. The books are further grouped into *mala* (series) — *Sainik Jeevan* (soldiers' lives), *Swasnimanisharuko Katha* (womens' stories), *Jibikoparjan ko Bato* (earning your living), and so on.

Recent titles include

*Lahureko Katha* (Soldier's Story), a true-life account of a Indian Army Gorkha jawan caught in the Indo-Chinese border conflict of 1962.

*Nepalko Afno Circus* (Nepal's Own Circus), about an extravaganza in Okhaldhunga and the Sherpa circus family that performs in it.

*Pipal Pustak* thus seems to set plumb the depths of rural Nepal's collective



memory — to provide authentic, readable Nepali fare that will be useful not only to neo-literate adults, but to school children and social scientists as well.

The series will also be an important source of oral history in the Nepali speaking Himalaya.

Contact: United Mission to Nepal, PO Box 126 Kathmandu.

## Nagas descend on Kathmandu

No, the insurgency in the Indian Northeast has not made it to the Central Himalaya. But it was an unusual event all right — a Nepal-Nagaland Tourism and Craft Promotion Exhibition organised in Kathmandu in early April.

K.T.Thomas Kent, of the Directorate of Tourism of Nagaland, was on hand to speak eloquently on the need for Nepal and Nagaland to

work together to promote tourism. "Besides the topographical similarities between Nepal and Nagaland, the striking physical semblance of the two peoples cannot be missed," he told *The Kathmandu Post* daily.

Kent had brought along 52 Angami tribesmen and women, along with the Doordarshan compere, Meena Thungo. The Angami

performed the Lisi, Tesesiya and other dances, while visitors browsed through stalls and purchased ethnic Naga items.

While it might have benefited from some extra publicity, the event was unique, the first time any Indian Northeast community had come to Nepal and made its presence felt. The migration has normally been in the other direction.



Cross-Himalayan encounter. Naga dancers stomp feet in downtown Kathmandu

## Bhandari blames it on palace politics

## Nar Bahadur puts up a brave front

## Bhandari out Limboo sworn in CM

### Shahtoosh

The Chandigarh *Tribune* in its 20 March issue delved into the shahtoosh trade and came up with fur-raising details.

Shahtoosh is the finest, warmest, lightest wool in the world, and it is the contraband of choice of a smuggling ring operating in China, Nepal and India, writes P.P.S.Gill. The "base camp" of the operation is the Majnu-ka-Tilla locality in Delhi.

Shahtoosh is obtained from the rare and endangered Tibetan antelope (*Pantholops hodgsoni*). The animal is invariably slaughtered in order to shear the fur, and one antelope yields about 150 grams of fur. Three shawls can be made from about one kilogram of

the fur. The shawl trade has been a monopoly of Kashmiri merchants, although a line of middle men from towns like Gerze in Chang Tang and down through Nepal and Uttarakhand provide muscle for the trade.

A major haul of shahtoosh that was nabbed at the airport in New Delhi last May consisted of 107kg of wool, equivalent to the lives of at least 750 antelope. Apparently, the Indian Customs authorities quietly released the seized shahtoosh in July 1993.

In February the wildlife authorities conducted raids in Delhi shops and confiscated 21 shawls and eight scarfs, and succeeded in spreading panic among the dealers. A shahtoosh shawl

The headlines say it all. Nar Bahadur Bhandari threatened and he bragged, he cajoled and he blustered. In the end, on the floor of the Sikkim Assembly on 17 May, the flamboyant Gangtok autocrat knew he was beaten by the 16 dissidents led by his Health Minister Sanchaman Limboo. Thirteen years as Chief Minister in Mintogang was suddenly over.

While Bhandari and his

seized at the Central Cottage Industries Corporation of India was priced at IRs 72,600, while a scarf went for IRs 6930.

According to eminent



zoologist George Schaller, who has been engaged in setting up the Chang Tang Wildlife Reserve, there was open trade in shahtoosh in Tibet till about 1988. Schaller, who was in Kathmandu in mid-May on his way to Chang Tang, says that with a government clampdown the trade is now underground but continuing. Villagers who kill the animals (males are considered more valuable) get the equivalent of four sheep per hide, he says. They sell the hides to middlemen, Nepali and Tibetan, who have the fur plucked and transported in gunny sacks to points south.

MP spouse Dil Kumari Bhandari, did all right by the Nepali-speakers of Sikkim and elsewhere in India — obtaining constitutional recognition of the Nepali language, for example — the native Lepcha and Bhutia communities were restive. The last straw on Bhandari's back (which is none too healthy, from police beatings during past days of anti-merger dissidence) was when the Central Government withdrew a finance bill which was to give tax exemption to Sikkimese tribals.

After a Bhutia/Lepcha (Kazi Lhendup Dorji), a Gurung (B.B. — for barely 13 days in 1979, and Bhandari (a Chhetri), Sikkim now has a Chief Minister who is Limbu (an OBC — "Other Backward Class").

Regardless of the sharing of the top position, however,

the genie of ethnic division is out of the bottle in Sikkim — native Lepcha/Bhutia against the people of Nepali origin, and a parallel ethnic division within the people of Nepali origin themselves. It remains to be seen whether the new government of Limboo (who has accused Bhandari of brazenly playing ethnic politics to save his seat) can succeed in pushing the genie back into the bottle.

Sikkim's inter-ethnic relations will be put to severe test in the following months as the state's various political fronts — Bhandari's Sikkim Sangram Parisad (SSP), Limboo's newly formed SSP(S), Pawan Kumar Chamling's Sikkim Democratic Front, and the Pradesh Congress Committee's Ashok Subba — joust for position as the Assembly polls come up in November-December.

### Some Tea and Pesticides Please

In January, a consignment of Darjeeling tea was rejected by German authorities on the ground that it contained excessive pesticide residues. Indian exporters are now worried for their 190 million kg worth of exports, reports *CSE/Down to Earth Features*.

The Teekanne Darjeeling Gold brand of tea was rejected because it contained 0.24 mg of tetradifon per kg of tea — 24 times German regulatory limits.

Buckling under pressure, Indian tea planters have assured visiting representatives of the German Tea Association that all attempts will be made to bring down pesticide residue levels to

meet Bonn's standards.

India's Tea Board maintains that Indian tea poses no health hazard. One Tea Board spokesman told *CSE/Down to Earth*, "Unlike residues in fruit or vegetable, the residue in tea is left behind in the leaves."

Meanwhile, prominent tea producers like Goodricke are experimenting with organic tea, which also command higher prices in the international market.

Is Indian tea to be ultimately pesticides-free only for the foreign connoisseur, or can South Asian consumers, too, look forward to the day when their tea will be free from carcinogens.

## Disastrous Sedimentation

**A** report by Nepal's Department for Soil Conservation on sedimentation at the Kulekhani reservoir due to last July's catastrophic cloudburst in the hills southwest of Kathmandu is sobering, to say the least.

According to the Department's data, the total storage capacity of Nepal's first and only reservoir project, has been reduced by 9 percent (7.7 million cubic meters) in the aftermath of that one extended 30-hour-long cloudburst of 20-21 July 1993. Adding the siltation that had occurred in earlier years, the storage capacity has now been reduced by 12 percent (10.2 million cu m). The storage capacity at the time of the reservoir's commissioning was 85.3 million cu m.

All this is devastating news for Nepal's economy. The US\$ 120 million Kulekhani Hydroelectric Project (1982 prices) was to have had a design-life of 75-100 years, when the reservoir was expected to be inundated with silt. Instead, almost 91 percent of the "dead storage" (the space provided for sediment accumulation) has been silted up in just 13 years since commissioning. Thus, sedimentation will now start

to encroach on the reservoir's "live storage".

Last year's cloudburst in and around Tistung Valley, which makes up much of the Kulekhani river's catchment area, was unprecedented. A temporary shift in the monsoon trough resulted in intensive rainfall throughout the Mahabharat belt south and southwest of Kathmandu Valley, with weather stations recording 300 to 500mm daily rainfall on 20-21 July.

The 20 July recording gauge at Tistung village showed 540mm, which was the highest daily rainfall ever recorded in Nepal since instrumental meteorological work began. The deluge caused floods, mass wasting and erosion and much loss of life and widespread damage to infrastructure, including roads, irrigation works and Kulekhani's hydroelectric installations.

The data on Kulekhani's siltation was provided by bathymetric surveys carried out by the Department in 1993 March and in December-January — before and after the cloudburst. According to the calculation, the 30 hours of rainfall led to the removal of about 61mm of soil and debris from the entire 126sq km watershed area of Kulekhani. In coming years, the sedimentation rate

**W**hy did Prime Minister Franz Vranitzky of Austria bar the Dalai Lama from speaking at the Vienna Human Rights Conference last June? One reason might have been that he did not want Austrian firms to lose lucrative contracts held out by Beijing, one of them being the controversial dam project on the Yamdrok Tso.

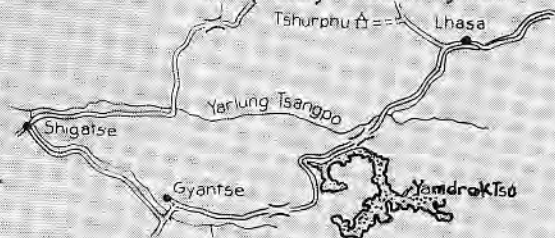
The two Austrian firms are J.M.Voith and Elin Energieversorgung.

The Yamdrok Tso power project expects to produce 90 megawatts of energy by channelling the lake waters through four 6.4km tunnels to a drop over the Yarlung Tsangpo river. During off peak hours the lake is supposed to be refilled by reverse pumping. Work on the project began in 1985, only to be halted a year later due to environmental considerations. It was resumed when the Panchen Lama, an opponent of the project, died four years ago.

of the reservoir is bound to be greater than the earlier siltation rate because of the fresh landslides that today scour the entire watershed.

While it is improbable that a cloudburst of similar proportions would hit Kulekhani Valley anytime soon, its incredible bad fortune should serve as a reminder to water resource planners elsewhere in the Himalaya not to overlook the devastating potential of natural processes, be it seismicity, hydrology or monsoonal troughs.

Environmental advocates say that the continuous turbulence caused by daily emptying and refilling of the lake would damage Yamdrok Tso's sensitive ecology. The lake's clear waters would be replaced by the Yarlung Tsangpo's turbid flow, threatening fisheries. Experts also fear that the lake will dry up completely within 50 years.



What do the Austrian firms have to say?

Public Relations Director of Elin Energieversorgung, Ursula Schneider, says, "We carefully examined the project before its implementation. But this project is ecologically only a little alarming since there is water for the power plant and there is no kilometres-long dam to be built. Tibet is one of the poorest regions in the world. The power plant brings an increase in the living quality of the population."

Schneider's company is the same one which participated in the Pak-Mun dam in Thailand, which also received Austrian State credit guarantee. That dam destroyed the riverine fish population and involuntarily displaced 20,000 people. In Indonesia, the firm helped build the Cirata dam, which displaced 60,000. Both companies were involved in the Mosul dam in the Kurdish region of Iraq, where the job of clearing the human population was handed over to the Iraqi army.

- Martin Frimmel/  
Greenpeace Austria



Thousands upon thousands of landslips scour the hillsides of Kulekhani.

## Discord in Dharamsala

**A** Tibetan youth stabbed and killed a Gaddi friend in early May, apparently following an altercation over an India-Pakistan cricket match. What followed was an violent anti-Tibetan riot in Dharamsala bad enough for the Dalai Lama to suggest that perhaps the seat of the exile government should be moved to Bangalore, with the Himachal Chief Minister imploring him to banish the thought.

Press reports of the suddenly public communal divide tended to gloss over the social and economic context in which the event took place, and the reasons behind the deep-seated resentment of the local non-Tibetans.

The overwhelming majority of the shops and businesses in Lower Dharamsala is owned by Indians originally from Punjab or the NWFP, with Pahari as recent arrivals. The same ethnic mixture in conjunction with Tibetans rule the economic roost in upper Dharamsala.

The youth who took part in the rioting are said to be mostly Pahari — young males who provide the tinder-box for communal violence all over South Asia. It did not help that Dharamsala is the only district in all Himachal where a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MLA was able to hold on to his seat during the last Assembly elections. It was MLA Krishen Kapoor whose fiery speech at a rally preceded the riots.

The Tibetan community of Dharamsala is not blameless, either. While receiving huge amounts of assistance in cash and kind from overseas over the last

## Are Tame Rhinos Real Rhinos?



A rhino couple provides the rear view to Chitwan firangi.

**T**he rhinos in the Royal Chitwan National Park can be divided into two categories: "tourist rhinos" and "wild rhinos". The former are to be found in the eastern end of the park, around the tourist watering hole of Sauraha and its chock-a-block safari lodges.

Here, unflappable rhinos allow the camera-laden elephant-back visitors to approach them — for side view, hind shot, full frontal, close-up of horn, etc — before sauntering off into the bush. Elsewhere in the Park, though, non-tourist rhinos still become agitated at the

sight of an approaching pachyderm, and make off in a shuddering of hoofs.

Is tourism breeding tameness into the animals to the extent that it affects their health? Are tourists, in the end, as bad as poachers for the effect they have on rhino health? According to *The New Scientist*, two researchers from the University of California, Davis, feel that tourists on elephant-back do modify rhino behaviour.

"You're left to wonder what in the world is going on with that rhino," said Dale Lott, one of the researchers,

three decades, Tibetans of Dharamsala have contributed little to develop the hill township beyond the immediate areas of their self-interest. They remain socially and economically insular and exhibit scant interest in the social development of their neighbours. Because they use but do not contribute to municipal services, Upper Dharamsala is the picture of an environmental catastrophe.

The Tibetans' direct access to foreign assistance and their easy relationship with a dotting international community does not seem to endear them to the locals. Perceived social and economic disparities, opportunistic local politicians and the excuse of a stabbing incident was enough for Dharamsala to erupt in communal chaos.

Meanwhile, the coverage of the disturbances has ignored the lives and inter-

ests of Gaddi, nomads who have traditionally used the Dharamsala area, now swamped by the other more prosperous communities. The Gaddi community has been economically marginalised, and has not been a participant in the phenomenal growth that the area has witnessed in recent years. Their land-based culture is suffering, but adequate alternatives have not yet been found.

at a meeting of the International Society for Anthrozoology. The scientists timed how long individual Chitwan rhinos spend being watchful, foraging or walking, and also how close is the elephants' approach to the rhinos. They learned that, not surprisingly, rhinos spent more time being alert and less time feeding while the tourists were nearby. The closer the tourists, the stronger the effect on rhino behaviour.

When the elephants came too close, about half of the rhinos studied left the feeding area altogether, taking shelter in denser vegetation. "They're leaving an area that they've chosen to come and feed in — one filled with new grass with high quality protein," said Lott. "These large herbivores really need to feed an awful lot, so putting them at a foraging disadvantage is a serious matter."

To keep the rhinos of Chitwan from being fully domesticated, the Davis researchers suggest a programme to persuade elephant drivers, *pachua*, to keep their distance.

ests of Gaddi, nomads who have traditionally used the Dharamsala area, now swamped by the other more prosperous communities. The Gaddi community has been economically marginalised, and has not been a participant in the phenomenal growth that the area has witnessed in recent years. Their land-based culture is suffering, but adequate alternatives have not yet been found.



# Deconstructing Myths About People of India

Now that 10 volumes of the long awaited *People of India* series are finally here, with 33 more to follow in a couple of years, a new awareness is being created in Indian academia on the incredible multiplicity of cultures that make up the country. Better appreciation of India's diversity is certain to help the diverse communities in India's Himalaya a well.

Most of what passes for Indian ethnography has been the legacy of English scholars such as Herbert Risley and J.H. Hutton, whose work tended to have political colouring in step with their times, and served to confirm imperial stereotypes of Indians. The *People of India* series is said to be the first comprehensive post-colonial study of India's people.

The field work for the entire study has been completed by the Anthropological Survey of India, over seven years and with a budget of IRs 69 million. According to the reports that are already out, there has been a great and ongoing loss of spoken languages/dialects all over. While the 1961 Indian census listed 1,652 languages in India, according to *People of India* the count is down to 325.

Other interesting bits of information: a majority of Indian communities trace their roots to five language

families (Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, Tibeto-Burman, Austro-Asiatic and Indo-Iranian); nearly half the people of India speak the 14 languages (except Sanskrit) listed in the eighth schedule of the Indian Constitution; there is large-scale incidence of bilingualism (64.2 percent, whereas the 1961 census reported 9.7 percent).

The survey debunks the myth, long prevalent, that the upper castes of India are of the Caucasian race while the rest are descended from Proto-Australoids.

"Biologically and linguistically, we are very mixed. It is extraordinary," Kumar Suresh Singh, Director General of ASI, told *Sunday*. The report states that there is quite a degree of homogenisation in terms of morphological and genetic traits, although this holds more true to the plains population than for the hill tribals. Looking at 775 traits in a sampling of the population, ASI found that Hindus share 96.7 percent traits with Muslims, 91.19 percent with Buddhists and Jains, 88.99 percent with Sikhs and 77.46 percent with the Jains.

The son of the soil theory also stands demolished, with the ASI discovering no community in India that can't remember having migrated from some other part of the country. On the other hand, *People of India* also reveals

that the Indian states as they now stand are not as unrepresentative of communities living within their boundaries as has been made out. The ASI research

## Departures

Those who love the mountains, too, die. Himal is saddened by the death of several Himalayans in recent months.

**Nari Rustomji** — scholar, civil servant, author — who served in the Indian Northeast with distinction since the 1940s, died in Bombay in December. As A.D. Moddie wrote in the Himalayan Club's newsletter, Rustomji was "one of an earlier breed of Indian Civil Servants whose interests went beyond the strait-jacket of bureaucracy." Starting with NEFA (now Arunachal) in 1948, Rustomji held a number of senior posts in Assam, Meghalaya and Nagaland. He was Dewan of Sikkim from 1954 to 1959 and later, Political Officer. He also advised the king of Bhutan. Rustomji was interested in tribal culture, and helped found the Institute of Tibetology in Gangtok. He is author of *Enchanted Frontiers, Bhutan: The Dragon Kingdom in Crisis, Imperilled Frontiers: India's North-East Borderlands*, and *Sikkim: A Himalayan Tragedy*.

**Richard Burghart** died on 1 January at the age of 49 after a long and painful illness. Starting out as a journalist, Burghart turned to Asian anthropology in the early 1970s, teaching at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London. Burghart was convinced about the need to re-evaluate old ideas and to motivate new research on the Himalayan region, and organised many meetings (such as "Sovereignty in the Himalayas") and was the founding editor of the *European Bulletin of Himalayan Research*. Among his many works, Burghart analysed the social organisation of the Vaishnavite pilgrimage centre in Janakpur, the Nepali nation-state, and the structures of Hinduism. According to *EBHR*, "His was a vision which always aimed at what one may call the *essence in its context*; it drew benefit from his talent for perceiving contrasts, hidden boundaries and underlying unities, and was articulated in concise, unpretentious language, without indulging in rigidly abstract or wholesale generalisation."

"**Indrani Aikath-Gyaltsen** will surely be hailed as a major discovery in literature," wrote author Amy Tan recently. Sadly, Aikath-Gyaltsen's career as a novelist barely had time to flower. She died under mysterious circumstances even as her prophetically titled latest book — *Hold My Hand, I'm Dying*, published by Penguin — arrived in the market. A Bengali heiress married to a Tibetan, Aikath-Gyaltsen brought sophistication, feeling, and Himalayan associations to her writings. Her new novel, seemingly partially autobiographical, is about Beas, a headstrong woman, wrongfully accused of the murder of her retarded son, who decides to flee to an isolated bungalow in the hills. Distraught and exhausted when she arrives, Beas slowly rediscovers living, as the magic and beauty of the mountains touch and restore her.

revealed that 71.77 percent of the communities were located within the boundaries of the state.

All in all, the ASI effort

provides a benchmark and a mirror on which Indian politicians, scholars and others can start looking at themselves.



## Dhupi Not Welcome in Darj

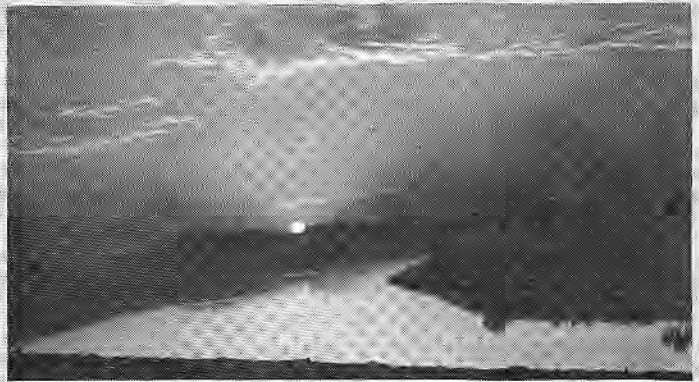
**D**arjeeling, dirty Darjeeling, now has its own Environmental Protection Society which aims to "protect nature and save our future". The Society also has its own newsletter, *Himalayan Paryavaran*, edited by Umesh Dwivedi of St. Paul's School with help from a cross-section that reads like a Who's Who of Darjeeling.

In the lead article, "Sustainable Development in Darjeeling", Dwivedi maintains that the Queen of Hills has been ruined by increasing vehicular traffic, deforestation, faulty planning, and construction of big hotels and residential complexes. Dwivedi suggests that bus stations and taxi

stands be moved, the Dhupi tree (*Cryptomeria japonica*) be replaced by broad-leaf species, and construction of big hotels be stopped. Kurseong, Kalimpong, Sukhia Pokhari, Mirik and Jorebungalow must be developed as satellite towns to reduce pressure on Darjeeling, he writes.

Among many other suggestions too numerous to list here, Dwivedi also suggests the setting up of a distillery in Darjeeling to produce "quality wine" from rhododendron flowers.

For a tasting session, contact: Secretary, Environmental Protection Society, C/O St. Paul's School, PO Jalapahar, Darjeeling.



## Cranes Don't Come Here Anymore

**S**outh Asia might have said its final goodbye to the Siberian Crane, the endangered species which has traditionally braved the high passes of the Far Western Himalaya over Pakistan and Afghanistan to come winter in the Bharatpur sanctuary in Rajasthan.

The number of cranes arriving at Bharatpur dwindled from 77 in 1971 to 33 in 1979. Bird watchers were shocked when only five touched down in the winter

of 1992. This past winter, none arrived.

"The time has come when we fear we will have to declare extinct the Siberian cranes visiting India," Meenakshi Nagendra of the International Crane Foundation told *WWF Features*.

Will these birds ever return to South Asia? Indian naturalists are not optimistic. An evolutionary link which connected the warm wetlands of South Asia with the plains of Siberia, is now apparently broken.

## The Value of Dung

**D**on't turn your nose up at cow dung. It has more value than we had ever imagined. The Delhi-based *EEG Features* reports that dung generated annually by domestic cattle in India is equivalent to 2000 mega watts of power.

Bovine excreta made it into the headlines when, recently, the Dutch proposed that India take their dung. They devised a scheme to export the accumulated stocks (10 million tonnes) under eco-friendly label, "envirodung".

When researchers began counting, it turned out that India had at least 180 million dung-producing cattle, if not 270 million, reports EEG. The Department of Science and Technology estimates that 865 million tonnes of dung is produced yearly, whereas the National Council for Applied Economic Research estimates the figure to be 1335 million

tonnes. The National Planning Commission's figures came somewhere in the middle — 1200 million tonnes.

It might be impossible to come up with a figure for the Himalayan hinterland, but the efforts of yaks, goats, mountain cows and buffaloes ought not to be insignificant. At the very least, we should be able to come up with a methodology which will put monetary value to the use of Himalayan dung as fertiliser, in religious rituals, as disinfectant and household paint (when mixed with *ratomato*, red mud), and for its methane-producing power through dried cakes or gobar gas.

Gobar, obviously, should also stand up and be counted as part of the Gross Domestic Product. According to EEG, what we need is "a comprehensive dung policy".

## Cost-Benefit of a Health Care Centre

**A** team from the Department of Economics, SGRR College, Dehradun, has devised a method to do cost-benefit analyses of health care centres, in the hope that setting a monetary value to health care projects will help establish their "net social benefit".

The subject of the study was a health clinic in the village of Talai in Pauri Garhwal, run by the Himgravika, an action research group supported by the University of Calgary, Canada.

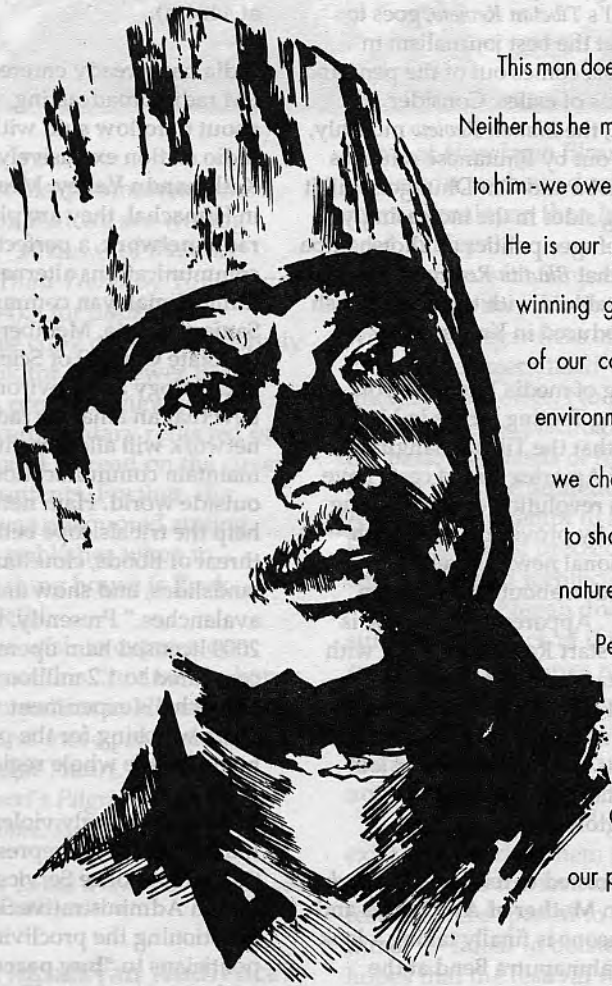
V.A. Bourai, the economist who led the team, says the research methodology and results can be of practical use for economists and health planners. "Under our cost-

benefit formula, a health project is considered socially justified if the increase in benefits, valued in money, is greater than the associated increase in costs, also valued in money."

At the end of the exercise, the average benefit to villagers of Talai from one visit to the health centre was calculated at IRs 155. The benefit to cost ratio of the health centre was 3.145:1. This, according to Bourai, "proves that the health care centre run by Himgravika is significantly beneficial to the people of Talai village."


For more information, write to: Department of Economics, SGRR (PG) College, Dehradun, UP.

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Comes the news from New Delhi that the Tibetan exile community is about to give the likes of Star's and CNN's Rupert Murdoch and Ted Turner the run for their money. Yangchen Dolkar of Tibet Communications has started a **video news magazine** in Tibetan, titled "Sargyur" (news), which she says, "shall shortly invade all Tibetan homes". In hourly digests every month, Sargyur intends to cover news of Tibet and the Tibetan cause, and interviews, panel discussions and "crossfire" — this last indicating a willingness to handle controversial issues as well. A sample copy can be had for IRs 125 from B-2, Tibetan SOS Youth Hostel, Sector-14 Extension, Rohini, New Delhi 110 085.

The Tibetan exile press is properly exercised, but the South Asian media as a whole has its head properly in the sand, about **classified Chinese documents** leaked from Beijing which indicate a comprehensive plan to "divide and destroy" Tibetan exiles of the "Dalai clique" through the use of propaganda. According to the Washington DC-based International Campaign for Tibet, which did its own propagandising upon receiving the leaked documents, the four documents were prepared for a March 1993 meeting of government officials to discuss external public relations strategy on Tibet. The documents show that the Chinese plan to exploit the "deep feelings for their homeland" harboured by Tibetans in exile by emphasising the economic and social development within the autonomous region. The Chinese are to "launch a tit-for-tat struggle in public opinion against the Dalai Clique and the international forces," and, further, "organise experts and scholars to write articles and books and use historical facts to declare righteously to the world Tibet is an inseparable part of Chinese territory."

We all agree that *Gorkhapatra*, the venerable **lady of Bhugol Park**, is the oldest Nepali paper, and it loses none of its historical shine because it is steadily losing readership to the private sector upstart, *Kantipur*. However, was it necessary for the *Gorkhapatra* management on 7 May to celebrate with such the 94th

anniversary of the paper's founding — or is there a fear that it will not make a century?

The writings of Bhuchung K. Tsering, back-page columnist of Tibetan government-in-exile mouthpiece the *Tibetan Bulletin*, is decidedly non-propagandist and **recommended reading**. His copy, and the ever-interesting independence of Tsering Wangyal's *Tibetan Review*, goes to show that the best journalism in South Asia comes out of the pens and keyboards of exiles. Consider, for example, the *Bhutan Review* monthly, brought out by Bhutanese refugees Bhim Subba and Om Dhungel. Will it be taking sides in the increasingly messy refugee politics of Lhotshampa to state that *Bhutan Review* is the English tabloid with the best English to be produced in Kathmandu?

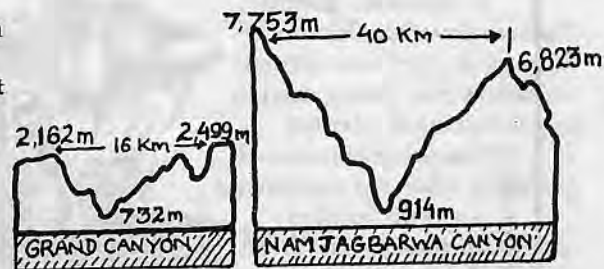
Speaking of media hiter and yon, Bhuchung Tsering writes in his column that the Tibetan language **Voice of America** broad casts have started a revolution of sorts among Tibetans by providing them with international news as well as information about "the freedom struggle". Apparently, the VOA is about to start Radio Free Asia, with the Tibetan-language service included in it. On another level, there is much anticipation among career conscious Tibetans hoping to join VOA's staff and wing it to Washington DC.

Was interested to read the *Asiaweek* article on **Mother of All Gorges** and that someone is finally taking a look at the Brahmaputra Bend at the extremity of the Far Eastern Himalaya, where the Yarlung Tsangpo makes a loop around Namcha Barwa. A scientific expedition led by Richard Fisher of the University of Arizona ventured on rafts into a virtually unknown region that is rugged in the extreme, with tribes that are completely isolated from adjacent areas in Tibet. "The area holds the most diverse wildlife and forests in the Himalaya. Some groups are probably extinct everywhere else," says Fisher, who speaks of

snow leopards, tigers, antelope-like goats, and various types of mountain sheep. The trees of the area might be the largest in Asia, he says, and the Namcha Barwa canyon the deepest in the world (5909m deep), dwarfing big-name aspirants such as the Grand Canyon of Arizona (1430m) and the Colca Canyon of Peru (3205m). (The Kali Gandaki Valley of central Nepal is the "deepest valley" in the world, at 4404m).

India has already entered the age of FM radio broadcasting, and Nepal is about to follow suit, with a public radio station exclusively devoted to Kathmandu Valley. Meanwhile, over in Himachal, they are planning a **ham radio network**, a perfect communications alternative for far-flung Himalayan communities. Sanjeev Gupta, Member-Secretary of the State Council of Science and Technology and Environment, told *UNI* that an amateur radio operators' network will allow farflung areas to maintain communications with the outside world. Ham networks will help the tribals cope better with "the threat of floods, cloudbursts, landslides, and snow and glacier avalanches." Presently, there are only 2000 licensed ham operators in India, compared to 1.2 million in Japan. Himachal's experiment with ham bears watching for the potential it holds for the whole region.

In the increasingly violence-prone Indian Northeast, representatives of the Indian Police Service and the Indian Administrative Service are questioning the proclivity of politicians to "**buy peace at the cost of the law**", reports *The Statesman*. The IPS and IAS officers are agitated over pardons given to militants in order to secure their surrender. They claim that surrenders do not necessarily mean a change of heart, and the rehabilitation process gives the insurgents an advantage over



youth who "remained loyal citizens". The Assam Government of Hiteswar Saika, however, insists that the policy of pardon has yielded results, pointing to the rejection of violence by most members of the underground Bodo organisation, ULFA.

Good news from the Met! The **Metropolitan Museum of Art**, famous repository of worldwide art culture, has opened new galleries devoted exclusively to South and Southeast Asia, reports the *Calcutta Telegraph*. The galleries will include a large number of artifacts from India, Nepal and Tibet, which have been collected over the last two decades but have not been exhibited due to lack of space. Just to turn a little nasty here, it might also be a good idea to go over to the Met with a checklist of untraced stolen idols (Lain Singh Bangdel's *Stolen Images of Nepal*), just so that the inventory is complete.

Going decidedly against **conventional ecological wisdom** and providing a whiff of optimism to Nepal's despairing environmentalists was French ecologist J.F. Dobremez, who told the Ecological Society in Kathmandu that Nepal's forest cover "is not in such bad shape". According to the *Kathmandu Post* of 22 April, the well-known scientist buttressed his point by comparing Nepal's present state with that of 19th century France. The population density in the French mountains was high then, he said, but the forest cover was restored when industrialisation led to migration to the cities. The rate of deforestation in Malaysia was similarly alarming two decades ago, he said, "but as the country achieved economic success, back came the forests." As for soil erosion, Dobremez said "Sixty to eighty percent of the erosion is natural. People in the Himalaya should learn to live with it."

Mata Prasad, the Governor of Arunachal Pradesh, has proposed that the **Devnagari script** be used for the 36 dialects spoken in the state. While all the dialects have a rich oral tradition, writes Dibang in *The Times of India*, only the Khamti dialect has a script. Arguing in favour of Devnagari, Prasad said, "Devnagari is one language which is spoken by

all the tribes in Arunachal Pradesh. Different tribes do not understand each others' language and Hindi is the link language." He says Devanagari phonetics are "so perfect that there is no ambiguity", and that many sounds in the local dialects have no equivalent in the Roman script. "Already, Bodo and Jemi (Naga) languages are written in Devanagari script," he says. Prasad also feels that youngsters conversant with spoken and written Hindi would be able to "go out and seek employment in other parts of the country." The only question that remains is whether the Governor — who is calling a meeting of intellectuals, educators, politicians and administrators to seek consensus — is trying to make it easy for tribals to communicate with each other, or whether this is the Hindi camel's first tentative entry into the Northeastern tent.

The Tibetan name of a **rug manufacturing company** need no longer indicate that the ownership is Tibetan, Chhetria Patrakar discovered when going through an announcement in the *Rising Nepal* of 3 May. A carpet company calling itself "Shigatse" lists the following surnames under it, not one of from north of the Himalayan divide: Shrestha, Raj, Dhar, Shrestha, Dalee. The market is, increasingly, god.

Rasoul Sorkhabi, editor of the newly launched *Himalayan Notes*, a newsletter whose focus is the natural sciences, makes a plea in the March 1994 issue for **open scientific discussion** among geo-scientists who study the Himalaya. Obviously making a well-considered jab at we know not who, he writes, "Discussion and questioning should be welcome and encouraged in order to develop Himalayan geoscience further. It is sad to see that some researchers take criticism of their models and ideas personally... Permit me to say that nearly a decade of reading Himalayan geo-literature has convinced me that all of the existing models on the tectonic evolution of the Himalaya-Tibet have been built upon the works of many researchers (none is unique to a single person), and no single model holds the whole

truth... Healthy discussion helps us to discover the geologic truths of our beloved Himalaya."

Darjeeling's **Padmaja Naidu Zoo** seems intent on killing animals. The Indian Minister for the Environment admitted in the Lok Sabha that 27 rare animals have died under the zoo's custody over the last three years. The deaths since 1991 include three Snow Leopards, three Siberian Tigers, two Himalayan Black Bears, four Tragopans and four Tibetan Wolves. The Minister, responding to queries of the CPI(M) member from Darjeeling, Ratna Bahadur Rai, said the zoo was going to take a full-time veterinary doctor to take care of the animals. The only response to this incredible confession can be a spate of explanation marks !!!

The migration issue in the Indian Northeast gets more complicated. *The Statesman* reports that the **All-Arunachal Students Union** has threatened "direct action" if New Delhi continues to dilly dally on the repatriation of all "illegal migrants". Says the AAPSU General Secretary Domin Loya, "All foreigners must be expelled. At the very least, the Centre should take a stand on the issue and tell us whether they intend to grant citizenship to the illegal migrants from Bangladesh, Nepal and Tibet or concede to our demand." Said another leader, "If this state of affairs is allowed to continue, Arunachal, which till now has been the only Northeast state which hasn't seen a major insurgency, is likely to go the way of the others."

Afraid of tweaking well-known geopolitical sensitivities of the **regional super-power**, I will not comment on the following, but restrict myself to reproducing what appeared as an ad in *The Times of India* of 9 April:

A Retraction by Readers Digest: The article "Quest for K2", appearing in the April 1994 issue of the Indian edition of the Reader's Digest, inadvertently states that K2 is in Pakistan. In fact, K2 is in Pakistan-occupied-Kashmir, which, of course, is an integral part of India. We regret the error.

- Chhetria Patrakar

# Abominably Yours,

As I was saying before being so rudely interrupted by the editors, I am not making up any of this stuff about tobacco that glows in the dark and pigs with human genes. Transgenic mutants of the future will be bar girls crossed with fish to produce mermaids, who can serve tourists who arrive on charter flights from Dusseldorf.

Since military applications have spurred all invention (the discovery of fire, the first khukuri, the first rucksack, and the Space Shuttle), this is likely to be true of genetic engineering as well. Armies will no longer have to fight with human soldiers — the age of cavalry will return, only this time a new beast cloned from the genetic combination of a horse and Arnold Schwarzenegger will do the fighting.

Poverty alleviation and development can also be addressed genetically. Genes from the bone marrow extracted from spinal tap of World Bank consultants can be grafted into toads so that when the tadpoles grow into adolescents they can croak in the Ganga-Tsangpo delta and spread the development mantra at the grassroots.

The Human Genome Project could have a sequel, genes-for-nature swaps whereby countries whose indigenous tribal genetic codes were stolen can get loans for big dams, (provided, of course, they agree to crack down on counterfeit jean manufacturers who have infringed on the intellectual property rights of pantaloon designers at Wranglers).

The Bank's grand design to make biogas a true energy alternative in South Asia has been repeatedly foiled by the region's constipated cattle. Answer: The Super Poo Bovine, a four-legged whose genes have been spliced with chromosomes of spineless earthworm species (no aspersions on character intended). If you think I am bull-shitting you, you're right. But field trials have shown the SPB to be a prodigious producer of patties. The volume produced is truly awesome, and researchers shake their heads in wonder.

Now, a research lab just outside

Pilibhit is developing the SPB Mark II. A special methonogenic bacteria that is the microbial equivalent of a Formula One race car driver has been discovered, which can be injected into a ruminant so that biogas is actually produced in vitro, as it were, in the animal's tummy. You have thus effectively (and ingeniously) turned cattle into mobile LPG tanks that will go wherever there's a trail. No more need to lug around kerosene on treks as per HMG's tourism regulations — just have a specially fitted yak follow your party up to Lobuje and back.

The SPB Mark II eliminates the use of costly biogas digesters, and farmers can henceforth

park the model outside the kitchen window, plug the hose from their gas stove directly into the bull's butt by means of a special adapter valve, and voila, let the cooking begin!

You may think that all this is a little far-fetched, and you'd be right. But five years ago, who'd have thought that Lhotshampa refugees would return? Or that editors would be so craven and fainthearted as to cut off their longest-serving and only columnist in mid-sentence? Khair, let it be.

Something else you would not have been able to predict five years ago would be the proliferation of magazines on specialised subjects. (*Editors' note to readers: You will detect a definite shift in subject here. Khair, let it be.*) There is a fear that the Rocky Mountains in the United States are actually rising faster than would be possible solely through tectonic pressures. This has been now attributed to the relative subsidence of the eastern and western seabords (where there are more readers) because of the added weight of magazines produced.

Many of the new magazines are of the Quayle Quarterly genre which zero in on a specific personality (Dan, Hilary, Bubba) or subject area (primary health care, anti-viral vaccines, biogas from chicken-doo, polluted valleys).

One big factor in the bending of

Rockies seems to be the sheer weight of just one magazine, *The National Geographic*. Generations of accumulation of this yellow-bordered periodical in the basement homes from Alaska down to Baja California has pressed down on the magma and created a new fault zone — notice the increased frequency of tremors in the Los Angeles area, a large repository of sedimentary deposits of National Geographics from the pre-Cambrian period.

Carbon dating of a finely preserved mausuli (gecko) fossil caught dead between the pages of an article on "The Incredible Hottentots of the Okavango and Their Dinosaur Steeds" showed that the magazines were never read.

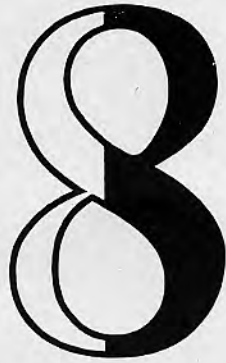
The hope of seismologists is that the advent of the CD-Rom will ease the subsidence pressure, as more and more Californians turn to on-screen magazines. But come to think of it, the effect on the earth's crust and continental drift of the cumulative weight thousands of millions of CPUs capable of reading CD magazines and books is an unstudied phenomenon that needs urgent further research. It would be sad if hard disks and monitors were to be held responsible for the sinking into the sea of entire coastal areas of the USA.



The best solution would be to initiate a widescale transfer of computer hardware from the Rockies to the Himalaya, so that the seismic burden is transferred to a younger, more energetic mountain chain. This would also be about as unique a way as anyone has devised to get computers for free. Khair, let it be.



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