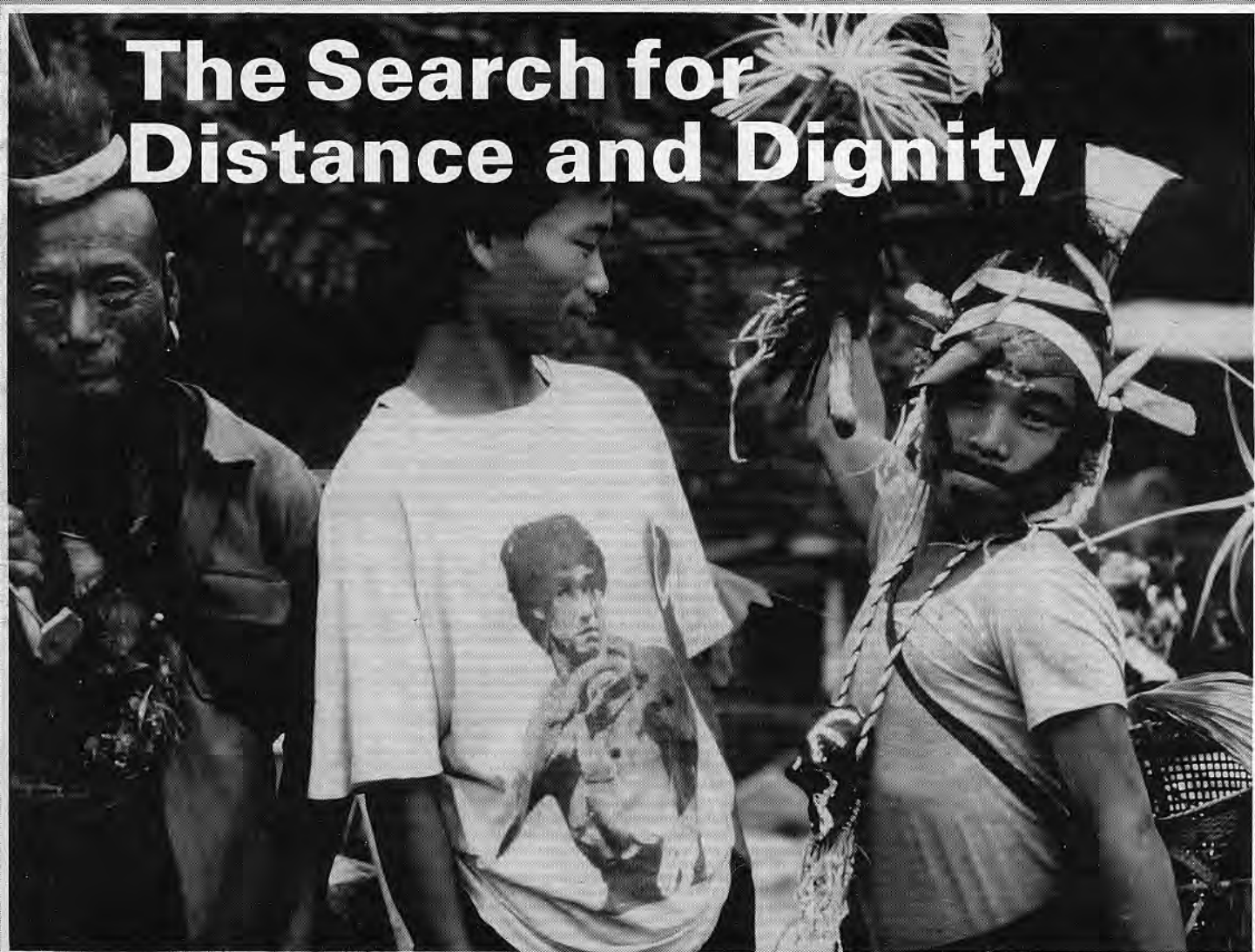


HIMAL

HIMALAYAN MAGAZINE

Far Eastern Himalaya

**The Search for
Distance and Dignity**



Megalith to Chorten

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*The Abode of Gods, King of
Mountains, Himalaya
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east to west
A northern yardstick
To measure the Earth*

— Kalidasa (Kumara Sambhava)

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Far Eastern Himalaya The Search for Distance and Dignity by Sanjoy Hazarika

Why is the region of the Far Eastern Himalaya so mired in conflict? Because the people here do not feel part of the various nation states under whose boundaries they happen to fall.

*Cover picture by Sanjay Acharya.
Bruce Lee in t-shirt meets
warrior in traditional attire
in Arunachal Pradesh.*

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Economically exploited, socially
oppressed, the Khas of Nepal's
northwest also suffer from a
severe case of identity crisis.



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Vajra (literally--flash of lighting), is an artists' condominium, a transit home for many, providing a base during months of hibernation and creative inspiration. Its isolation, graphic splendour and peaceful ambience, make an ideal retreat from the clock of pressure.

Ketaki Sheth
Inside Outside

I stayed a week at the **Vajra**, by which time I had become so fond of it that I stayed another.

John Collee
The London Observer



in Kathmandu, the Vajra

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Loud Tourism, Untrodden Peaks

Further to "Scandinavian Scandal" (Mar/Apr 1995), could it be that this Rolwaling episode heralds change for the 'management' of the great peaks?

In the centre of Australia stands the greatest monolith in the world and for years tourists went there for the sole purpose of 'climbing the Rock', a sort of pilgrimage that changed one from an ordinary citizen to 'one who had done it'. The fact that some lost their lives in the process made it seemingly more attractive.

The 1980s saw the area declared a national park and the monolith's name changed back from Ayer's Rock to its indigenous name Uluru. The traditional aboriginal owners took over its management, as it is one of their sacred places. They never climb it. They had long disagreed with the climbing of the Rock and now they began to hand out information, encouraging tourists to share the indigenous view of Uluru and to refrain from climbing it. They report that the number of climbers is gradually dropping, but not the number of tourists.

I am not a climber myself, simply a hill dweller. But I have looked up at the great mountains and have flown over the Himalaya. I regard those events as the highlights of my life, from which I continue to extract a deep, spiritual clarity. Even though aeroplanes are an intrusion, being enabled to look out over a landscape free of human habitation was an unforgettable experience. I would gladly pay for a permit to sit at the foot of a peak whose slopes are untrodden by human feet.

I'd even dare to predict that the time is not far off that the Government of Nepal and other Himalayan states can expect more foreign revenue from advertising and selling permits to view a sacred pristine peak, untrodden by mountaineers, than they make from climbing permits. But in order to be ready for that imminent change in the market, they cannot afford to lose a day and must start 'reserving' peaks now. If they could hear what tourists talk about, they'd understand that many object to wildcat commercial intrusions and spend less the more they encounter it.

Although many Sherpas make a precarious living with mountaineering, I have heard that their parents and grandparents were deeply puzzled by Western competition to get to the top of their mountains. It created an industry which brought

the Sherpa certain benefits, but it obscured the possibility that there might be other ways to share their environment and sell their services to travellers.

In a slow sort of way, mountaineering is not a renewable activity. Few mountaineers climb the same peak over and over again, and those who reach high peaks are less interested in lower peaks, unless it has a notoriously difficult approach. Physical ability aside, mountaineering remains a very costly sport, far out of most people's reach. But sitting at the foot of an untrodden peak, viewing it from the *beyul*, would attract many people—the type that do not run to prime ministers to get access.

Rolwaling seems more suitable to become a Buddhist pilgrimage destination. There are now more western Buddhists in the world than there are fleas on a dog. Many are professional people with short holidays and not all can or want to go on pilgrimage to Tibet.

Not that hordes of tourists are appropriate in these wonderful places. Mass tourism in the long run brings less profit because of its costly infrastructure and the fickleness of tourists, who turn away from a place as soon as it becomes overrun with fellow tourists. But carefully licensed tourism needs very special places, whose uppermost attraction is that their mountains are unsullied by human traffic. This will ensure generations of Sherpa people a stable income and the government a revenue that does not need to be wholly ploughed back to repair the damage.

In other words, the government and the people of Nepal should not think only of the people who are now clamouring for access to Rolwaling and similar places, but also consider those who would stay away in droves from a place, however sacred or special its history, once it has been overrun. A country can have any type of tourism it wants, but it seems that the loud variety is often the only type recognised.

Lolo Houbein
Bridgewater, Australia



Hillary's SpooF

This came to my notice after I read the Yeti's thoughts on "our Hillary" and "Bill's Hillary" (Mar/Apr 1995). *The New York Times* of 3 April has

Hillary Rodham Clinton confessing that her mother, Dorothy Rodham, had read an article about Edmund Hillary—a one-time beekeeper who had taken to mountain climbing—when she was pregnant with her daughter in 1947 and liked the name. "It had two l's, which is how she thought she was supposed to spell Hillary... So when I was born, she called me Hillary, and she always told me it's because of Sir Edmund Hillary," quoth the First Lady. Edmund Hillary climbed Everest with Tenzing Norgay in May 1953. Isn't this all a little fanciful?

Arunima Ray
Thamel, Kathmandu

Delirium in Uttarakhand

Manisha Aryal's controversial report on the Chipko movement (Jan/Feb 1994) had put the leaders who preferred 'Chipko' to Chipko in a difficult position. Her report on the Uttarakhand agitation (Nov/Dec 1994) once again succeeds in addressing underlying issues. Aryal has taken great pains in her reporting, and the article "An Uttarakhand State of Mind" is probably the only report that properly gauges the depth of the people's anger. While one might not agree with all of her conclusions, it has to be said that Aryal has tried to shed light on all aspects of the Uttarakhand agitation.

The article's conclusion that in the absence of leadership the movement would quickly die down has been proven by subsequent events. It is also true that most of the so-called leaders of the agitation took refuge in misinformation so that the public's anger would be kept at a high pitch and there would be violence all round.

The people have now begun to understand that the leaders are out to fool them. The Muzzafarnagar incident of 2 October 1994 served to open their eyes, and the people have now realised that the violence occurred because of the lack of foresight in the leadership. While the rallyists were stuck in Muzzafarnagar, the leaders were already in Delhi, because they had to make sure that they had access to the rally podium from which to lambast the Central Government. There was not a single responsible person present when the incident with the police occurred in Muzzafarnagar. The hill women who were headed to gherao Parliament were abandoned.

But when the Central Bureau of Intelligence conceded in its report that there had been rapes at Muzzafarnagar, the reaction of the leadership left a lot to be desired. Some even asked how it was

possible that women were raped and the activists came back without making a fuss. The women who returned from Muzzafarnagar have now become passive recipients of people's ridicule. They were garlanded upon their return, yet when the CBI report was made public the local people started to call them 'Muzzafarnagarwali'. Meanwhile, the Uttarakhandi who lived in the plains said that the report's being made public had shamed them!

I have always maintained that this agitation is not to demand a state. The agitationists' activities have constantly proven this point. As has also been pointed out in HIMAL, this is a '*dalit dabao andolan*', meant to keep the backwards in their place. At the beginning of the agitation, the folk poet Ghanashyam Sailani had noted that the people of Uttarakhand seemed to be suffering from *sannipat* (delirium). Nobody wants to listen to logic, however.

Some call the movement a social revolution, but I term it reactionary. No movement that is directed against the poor and the oppressed can be called a revolution, for do not the Dhunar, Tamota, Beda and Kolai figure among the dalit communities of Uttarakhand? The scheduled castes and backward classes in every district have been attacked in the course of the Uttarakhand agitation.

Meanwhile, the target of the hill people's ire continues to be Mulayam Singh Yadav's government in Lucknow. How ironic, that the very government which set up two committees for the creation of a Uttarakhand state and which had a resolution on the subject adopted by the State Assembly and forwarded to Parliament, should be the first target of the agitationists. Is there not a contradiction here? Meanwhile, the hill people support Congressman Narayan Dutt Tiwari knowing full well that he firmly opposes statehood for Uttarakhand. He receives support only because he is leading the charge to bring down Mulayam's government. This alone proves that the demand for statehood is hollow.

The Chipko leader Sunderlal Bahuguna was once a supporter of the statehood movement, but he too has now begun to worry that the natural resources of the region will come under greater threat after statehood is achieved. He is not wrong, for those who will rule over Uttarakhand state will be firmly in the grip of the forest and liquor mafias. Their first task will be to finish off what little forest tracts remain in Uttarakhand. The destruction of forests after neighbouring Himachal Pradesh

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achieved its statehood is still fresh in memory. Also, when the Supreme Court banned the limestone mining in Doon, the quarry people all moved their operations to Himachal. Perhaps this is all that statehood achieves.

*Navin Nautiyal
Dharmapur, Dehra Dun*

Inevitable Theocracies

In response to the letters appearing subsequent to Himal's Jan/Feb 1995 issue on Lhasa, I would respectfully state the following, absent the blunting language of political correctness.

1. The People's Republic of China's efforts to reconfigure Lhasa as a high-altitude mall reflect the absolute failings of the PRC to do anything other than repeat its own domestic disasters.

2. The ABC's of actual humanity require, as predicate, factoring into any discussion the ethical and the spiritual. In that sense, all nation states are inevitable theocracies, regardless of what the guiding moral force is named; otherwise, the state rules in a moral vacuum. Evidently, the policy makers of the PRC are morally bankrupt, failing to comprehend that Lhasa, like Mecca and Jerusalem, is as much a state of mind, heart and soul as it is a physical locus. In that light, one understands, if one has not been fenced in by the hideous depredations of a failed tyranny, that Lhasa is where one holds it dearest, and assuredly, Lhasa exists wherever His Holiness the Dalai Lama resides.

3. Considering the above, what point is there in belabouring a largely irrelevant political issue—the return of the Dalai Lama to Tibet? After all, for those who are fully human, Tibet is where one finds His Holiness, the symbol for all human beings of the difficulties of living as human in a world also peopled with the inhuman and the inhumane. For those who are not human, this argument is moot. One supposes, among other things, that the functionaries of the PRC imagine that the Tibetans' "standard of living" might be improved by the appearance of plazas, concrete and malls. As an American surfeited by concrete, plazas and malls, I would proffer that convenience is no assurance of overall quality of human life and that technology does not equate with progress.

4. Finally, the PRC deserves no thanks for the current pittance of crumbs from the already sparse table in its inane attempt to obliterate, once and for all, the moral paradigm of Lhasa, done in the guise of improving the standard of living. The world is an indifferent place, on balance. Children

everywhere routinely starve to death while the so-called good people pay only lip service to the horror. Perhaps, while the PRC has its bulldozers running, it might want to turn them next on the remaining cultural heritage of Peking's Forbidden City. God knows, we hear of a rotten standard of living in Peking.

I can only wonder at the shortness of memory. The Chinese are no strangers to suffering as victims of irrational subjugation. I indeed wonder at those officials in the PRC who are more to be pitied than despised, as they have so readily become all which they once claimed to hate.

*Linda Kay Newman
Reno, Nevada*

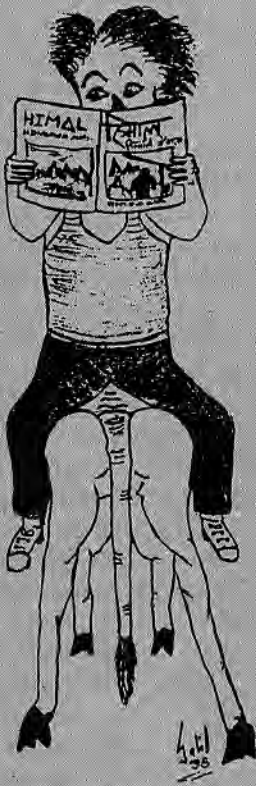
Faraway Mountains

I thought that Kanak Mani Dixit had a higher than reasonable expectation of the "Mountain Meeting by the Beach" organised in Lima by the Mountain Institute (Mar/Apr 1995). We all know that conferences do not move mountains, whether they be held at their pinnacles or down by the ocean-front. All they do is provide an opportunity to meet and exchange ideas. We have a song in Sherpa: "Far-away mountains may be visible to each other, yet they cannot meet." Therefore, a mere meeting is in itself a major feat when it involves people from different mountain regions of the globe.

As Dixit rightly points out, composition of the participants is important. If the participants shared common feelings, challenges and concerns which cultivate further future exchanges, then the objective of conferences are partially fulfilled. In this sense, only true mountain people can evoke real feeling of commitment and partnership to support a common mountain agenda. Unfortunately, there are very few academics, scientists and activists from the high mountain region who are able to take part in such meetings.

The Lima mountain meeting, I understand, was primarily organised for NGOs. But even NGOs do not flourish under the harsh mountain environment of Nepal. They are better adapted to the mild valley climate of Kathmandu, where they maintain visibility and develop a symbiotic relationship with the donor agencies. A key prerequisite for the success of the "Mountain





Sketch sent in by a Kathmandu reader, wishing the Nepali HIMAL quarterly and English HIMAL bimonthly well.

Agenda" is going to be cultivation and nurturing of true mountain NGOs, activists, and academics, and encouraging their active involvement and participation.

Meanwhile, as a follow-up, we may have to be content with an exchange between mountain subsistence farmers (without the "feel-good therapists" who Dixit so detests). The Himalayan farmer can teach the Andean how to make potato pancakes, and the Andean farmer can teach his counterpart how to freeze-dry potatoes! They can compare yak and alpaca breeding techniques, discuss coping strategies to deal with high altitude environments and lowland brothers, and can even educate the rest of the world by explaining the difference between 'lama' and 'llama'!

*Lhakpa Sherpa
Thamo, Solu-Khumbu*

A Governmental NGO Meeting

Regarding the conference organised by the Mountain Institute in Lima ("Mountain Meeting by the Beach"), it is true that the meeting started off on a somewhat disturbing note when the proceedings were taken over by a group of facilitators. In fact, feelings against the facilitators ran so high that one participant refused to distribute her card because it stated she was a "facilitator" back home! The "facilitator jokes" that emerged at Lima promise to endure.

But whereas this was irritation at the superficial level, unfortunately, more fundamental differences started surfacing among the delegates. Though this was primarily a gathering of NGO representatives, some of the splits that emerged were reminiscent of global gatherings of national governments. While there were of course exceptions, there was a broad divide between the perceptions of those representing Southern NGOs and those from the North. As usual, many of the Scandinavians and East European delegates were

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email: himal@himpc.mos.com.np

much closer in their attitude to delegates from the South. At the same time, however, there were representatives from some countries of the South who for ideological or personal reasons sidled along with the North.

Strong sentiments, strongly expressed, that mountain agendas must be built from the bottom up, from villages to nations, and from nations to regions and to the world, were summarily dismissed by the organisers. It was argued that national regional meetings have already taken place and this was was a global meeting. When the representative from ICIMOD pointed out that the Asian regional meeting, which was hosted by them, had actually been a meeting of governments and that the NGO viewpoint had not been represented, her intervention was brushed aside. The demand that the recommendations of those regional meetings, if they had taken place, also be made available to the participants also fell on deaf ears.

Based on the somewhat inappropriate resource papers produced by a few 'experts', the meeting brought out a set of such general recommendations for the global Mountain Agenda that, amazingly, not one of the over 40 points attracted any significant dissent or debate. The language was sweeping enough to accommodate all shades of thought, regardless of the diversity of opinion that existed among the participants.

Certainly, the recommendations that emerged from Lima contained very little that was new. They also captured little of the rich experience of the participants, essentially because the useful experience was all local while the recommendations were global. Indeed, in the various working groups there had been interesting discussions of down-to-earth case studies, but these were lost in the irrational process that was adopted of synthesising recommendations into bullet points. It was an indictment when one participant got up to say that the recommendations sounded almost identical to the ones that emerged from inter-governmental meetings.

Having said all this, one cannot disregard the fact that the exceptional group of people who gathered at Lima, even with all the constraints, could not but help move the Mountain Agenda forward. Strong, informal bonding took place, and addresses and fax numbers were eagerly exchanged. Despite the superficial and non-so-superficial irritants, the Lima conference

represented a unique meeting of mountain people who were, at the end of the day, committed to focussing their formidable energies at moving the Mountain Agenda.

Shekhar Singh
Indian Institute for Public Administration
New Delhi

The Gore and Glory

As soon as I arrive in Kathmandu in my twice-yearly visits, I always buy those back numbers of Himal which I have missed. So it is that I have just read "Dukha During the World War" (Nov/Dec 1994) and Ronald Burroughs's response (Jan/Feb 1995).

A few weeks ago, I stood on the hill at Kalanga among the sal trees and the rubble that had once been the fort where the inspired Balbhadra Kunwar held out against a far stronger British force at the Siege of Nalapani. Then I moved on to the Malaun Ridge, where Bhakti Thapa gave his life at the very cannon's mouth at Deothal. I felt as much pride as any Nepali to be at those places where the Gorkhas showed their mettle, and about whose courage pupils still learn in the schools of Nepal. So why should Mr. Burroughs find it disgraceful for a Nepali, wearing his Gurkha hat, to have a world-wide reputation as a brave and reliable soldier?

As an officer who commanded Gurkhas in World War II, I can tell Mr. Burroughs that when the time comes the Gurkha does not fight for the money—although why it should be a disgrace to be paid I do not know!—but for the family honour of his regiment. And he is no fool: like any soldier in any army, of course, he is afraid, and he tries not to show it although he knows he can be killed or wounded. And he fights with the skill of good training and not, as John Cross so rightly says in his splendid letter (Mar/Apr 1995), as a psychopathic killer.

Although I found Pratyoush Onta's article most moving, as any ex-Gurkha officer would, it came as no surprise. As John Cross says, it has been written about in other books. With a complete lack of modesty, I would mention my own book of a year or so ago, *Beyond the Threshold of Battle*, in which I described my personal experiences with Gurkhas on Wingate's First 1943 Expedition into Burma where, as we were fighting far behind Japanese lines, any soldier

seriously wounded had to be left behind in a Burmese village and had to take his chances with the Japanese—a touch-and-go situation. Or, if mortally wounded, treated with compassion and given a lethal dose of morphia. A fate, I would add, which was exactly the same for the British soldiers. In the face of this terrible adversity, my Gurkhas

showed great courage, although obviously disturbed and apprehensive.

How can Mr. Burroughs have the gall to compare such brave men to prostitutes! I know that if he had told them this to their faces, and there happened to be a khukuri handy, he might well have discovered the true difference between glory and gore.

Finally, I have absolutely no hesitation in ending this letter with

a resounding: AYO GORKHAL!!!

Harold James
PO Box 9101, Kathmandu



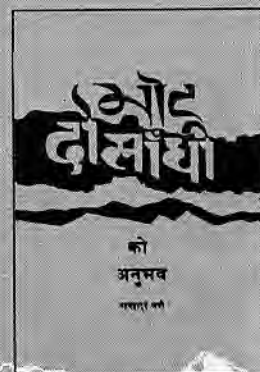
Shocked over Reprint

Anne de Sales in "Wild Imaginings: French Anthropology in the Himalaya" (Mar/Apr 1995) quotes a book called *Mero Bhot-Doshandi Ko Anubhav* (1972) by the late Rudra Bahadur Khatri, as translated in French by Brigitte Steinmann in her work *Les Marches Tibétains du Nepal* (1988). It is said that Khatri's book has more than an ethnographic quality to it and that it is an attempt to reflect on the country's culture and to present it to his compatriots.

It is indeed so, but what is lacking in Brigitte Steinmann seems to be intellectual sincerity and a sense of fairness. The translator, while seemingly concerned enough about the need to preserve Nepali heritage to want to translate Khatri's book into French, did not bother to take permission from the publisher.

As that publisher, I was unaware of the French publication of 1988 until I was referred to the Himal issue and de Sales' article. Although I have not had the opportunity to see Steinmann's work, I am informed that she has carried the Nepali text in toto alongside with her translation.

While I am happy that my effort to bring out Khatri's work to the notice of Nepali readers many now also benefit Western scholars, I am perturbed that Steinmann has not shown the sensitivity to a publisher's concerns over copyright. This, I am



told, is an important priority among Western scholars. Or could it be that the scholar believed so much on the inherent goodness of her deed as far as Nepal was concerned that she thought the matter of copyright infringement irrelevant?

I would very much like Steinmann to get in touch with me through Himal as soon as possible. With this letter I include a copy of the book *Mero Bhot-Dosandhi ko Anubhav*.

Umesh Rimal
Balaju, Kathmandu

Worm As Editor

Kanak Mani Dixit, editor of Himal, has found a pet enterprise of late: Bhutan-bashing. Nothing is allowed to come in his way, not even the hallmark of his profession: objectivity. Anybody who says anything remotely positive about Bhutan is a worm. A person who has not been able to get into the country is a "Bhutan Expert" on a sanctified pedestal from which scathing and spurious charges can be launched against the Bhutanese Government.

I have news for Mr. Dixit. Thousands of requests from people who want to come to Bhutan are on hold; not out of distrust or enmity, but simply because the country cannot cope with as many visitors as it would like to have in the country at any given time. The editor of Himal need only look at his own backyard to see the tragic impact of lousy gate-keeping on a small, traditional, developing country.

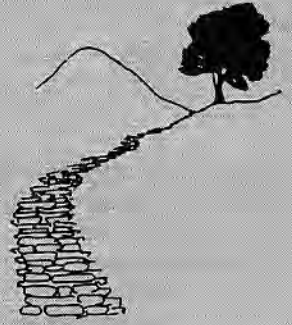
The first time I read one of his voluminous works on Bhutan, I was highly entertained. This guy writes good stories, I thought. With titles such as "Dragon Bites Its Tail" and "House of Cards", they evoked images of Hong Kong martial arts and spaghetti western pot-boilers. But I was shocked to hear that they were not supposed to have been works of fiction. Some kind of temporary affliction causing delusion, I thought.

But he keeps churning out major productions in the same vein. And I think I finally know his game. He is doing exactly what he has consistently accused others of: using the exoticism and the 'sexiness' of Bhutan to get attention and sell his magazine.

"Dukda"
New York

The last paragraph of the letter has been dropped due to use of obscenities. Eds.

On the Way Up



This issue of Himal has a more than our usual variety of articles, traversing as we do the Far Eastern Himalaya to Jumla, the Nepal tarai, and Chang Thang. The subjects covered range from the unraveling socio-political base of the Indian Northeast, to feudal roadblocks in the path of progress, the violation of a prehistoric site, and the origin of a species.

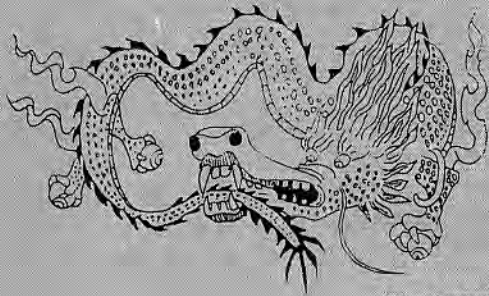
Delhi-based writer Sanjoy Hazarika presents the cover feature, on a region that is fast overtaking the rest of South Asia as a place where violence is a part of daily life. Unfortunately, more rather than less savagery seems to be written into the region's future.

Dor Bahadur Bista, the guru of Nepali Anthropology, has spent the last three years trying to put his theories of fatalism and development to test in Jumla. Trust the professor to speak it like it is. Whenever Jangali John (alias John Vincent Bellezza) turns up in Kathmandu on his way from Himachal to Tibet or Tibet to Himachal, we get an article. His investigation of the conversion of an aboriginal site into a modern Buddhistic one is the kind of writing that Himal's hopes to present more of. From the high plateau to the tarai: with origins in Los Angeles as an architect who used to design great office towers, Kurt W. Meyer has evolved into a researcher of Tharu life, spending much of his time jostling through tarai backroads in his red Maruti jeep.

If you have noticed some changes for the better in Himal's layout and design, including a slight but significant change in the font used on the Himal logo and the addition of the band on which it sits, the man to credit is Amsterdam-based designer Frans Meijer. Over the course of the last two issues, Meijer provided us with just the amount of new design elements that he felt a short-staffed Himal could handle. We also thank Cas de Stoppelaar and the Netherland-Nepal Friendship Association for making Meijer available to us.

Readers should perhaps be told that in mid-April, Himal's Associate Editor Manisha Aryal got married to Himal's Board Member Bikas Pandey. Their individual links to Himal, we are told, was coincidental.

- Kanak Mani Dixit



WELCOME TO KATHMANDU

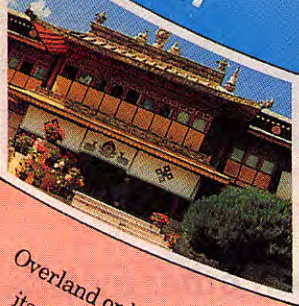
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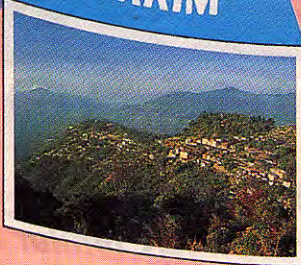
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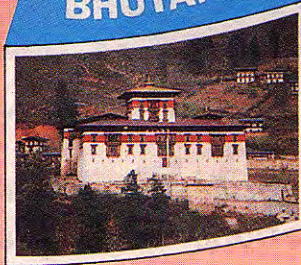
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DRUK-AIR



Far Eastern Himalaya

The Search for Distance and Dignity



Arunachal roadside at Thankip.

S. HAZARIKA

The peoples of the Far Eastern Himalaya, isolated from each other by hills, jungles, rivers and national boundaries, confront similar challenges based on changing demography, economic neglect, conflict over resources and governmental suppression. In response, the Far Easterners are vehemently asserting their ethnic identity and fighting the paternalistic nation state. Cycles of unreason and circles of violence characterise a region that is fast becoming one of the most violent corners of Asia.

by **Sanjoy Hazarika**

The stretch of the Far Eastern Himalaya from Sikkim eastward is significantly different from the rest of the mountain range. The reach of the Ganga plains—of Hindu ethos and historical Moslem influence—is much more muted here.

If anything, many of the animistic hill tribes have gone the other way by embracing Christianity. Unlike the cultures of the faraway flatlands, these eastern communities are more directly linked to the Tibetans of the north, or the Indo-Chinese of the south and east.

The region is also unique in its geography. Although part of the same Himalayan range, these southern latitudes nurture a lush tropical landscape drenched by one of the highest precipitation rates in the world—strikingly different from

the high desert of Ladakh or the dry terraces of West Nepal. The High Himalaya itself is lower at these extremities, with the peaks descending eastward from Mount Everest (8848m) in the Khumbu, to Kanchenjunga (8598m) at the Nepal-Sikkim border, to Namcha Barwa (7756m), standing guard as the great bend of the Tsangpo. About here, the Himalaya breaks southward into Burma and dwindles away eastward into hills of the Hengduan mountains of Sichuan-Yunnan.

From Sikkim, with Tibet a constant companion to the North, the political boundary snakes across Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh, where it makes a sharp southern twist to plunge along the edges of Yunnan Province into Burma's Chin and Kachin hills, with spurs roping in the states of Meghalaya, Nagaland, Mizoram and Manipur, before meandering through Tripura into the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh, close by the sea.

The western part of the Himalayan range is neatly packaged into a progression of states from Pakistan to Nepal to Bhutan. But here in the east the range becomes a geopolitical jigsaw, crossing national frontiers with impunity. The rectangle of the Far Eastern Himalaya is broken up among five nation states: little Bhutan, the Northeast of India, the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh, the Arakan region of Northern Burma, the southeastern tip of Tibet and the hills of Yunnan.

Compared to the peopled Himalayan hills of Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Nepal and Sikkim, this is a region that is still under-populated with natural resources largely unexploited. Natural gas, petroleum, rushing water, minerals, tea, fish and timber—the wealth is there, largely un-exploited, due to reasons of history and geography. The bounty that was bypassed by the colonial rulers is eyed lustfully by today's market forces.

One potential source of wealth lies in the rivers that slice through the

deep gorges and green valleys. Travelling eastward all the way from Mount Kailash, the great Tsangpo takes its 180 degree bend beneath Namcha Barwa, descending through vertical canyons into Arunachal Pradesh before disgoring into the Assam plain. Here are some of the most powerful rivers on earth, going by volume and gradient: the Brahmaputra (Tsangpo), Chin and Dibang. In the gorge country of Burma and Southeastern China are the headwaters of the Irrawady, Salween, Mekong and the Yangtze Kiang.

Asia in Miniature

While the geography and fractured frontiers of this region are fascinating in themselves, it is the population that holds even more interest: the cultural diversity and shared history, the deep animosities within and the xenophobia as far as outsiders are concerned. Ruled by the forest and inhabited by an endless procession of Tibeto-Burman tribes, the belt is a region of unceasing conflict, violence, anger and grief. Modern times seem only to have exacerbated the situation.

The babel of languages heard along this Himalayan flow includes the guttural Tibetan and its offspring Dzongkha, the sweeter Assamese in the Brahmaputra valley, and the lilt of Tibeto-Burman tongues in the hills of Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram. Each step of the way, the jungles seethe with unrest and rebellion, as diminutive men and women, some in battle fatigues and others in tattered clothing, some with modern weapons, others with crude arms, fight for ideals, funds, drug profits, or lost causes. They confront the military might of their respective governments.

This region is Asia in miniature, a place where the brown and yellow races meet. Taking a south-north transect, for example, you encounter the Bengali migrants in Assam, Tibeto-Burmans in the Himalayan midhills, and the Khampa of the high plateau. Going west to east, the spectrum is even more diverse: from the people of

Tibetan stock—the Bhutia and Lepcha of Sikkim and the Ngalong Dzongkha-speaking people next door in Bhutan—the population takes on Tibeto-Burman hues with the Sarchop of Eastern Bhutan, who have affinity with the tribes of neighbouring Arunachal. Eastward, the communities become progressively less 'Tibetan' and more 'Burman'. The variety is astounding.

The tiny state of Manipur, bordering on Burma, has a population of 1.8 million, yet it shelters more than 30 separate linguistic and ethnic groups, including the Tarao whose number is down to less than 400. The forested frontier between Yunnan and Burma is host to 15 distinct groups, including the Yi, Naxi, Bai and Lisu.



Several communities of Arunachal Pradesh, such as the Abhor and the Mishing, are also to be found northward in Tibet.

Straddling the ages and the mountains, the people of this winding trail form an anthropological bridge to Southeast Asia, where the roots of many still lie. The Khasi of Meghalaya are believed to have come from Kampuchea and still speak a form of Mon-Khmer, although because of British missionary influence they use the English alphabet. The Thai Ahom migrated from Thailand to Assam 600 years ago and settled in a land they

Nocte tribe members of Arunachal with daos in hand going foraging.

**Jhumming in
a Chittagong
hill tract.**

reported was as valuable as gold. The number of Thai speakers in Assam is small, but there is a Thai Association and the community is politically active.

There are Garos in Meghalaya and in Bangladesh; there are Nagas and Mizos in India and in the neighbouring hills of Burma. Festivals, liquor, dance, and music shape approaches to life and habitat of the tribes. History and contemporary experiences also forge attitudes, affinity and identity, the latter being regarded as the most crucial in maintaining both distance and dignity in the face of intrusion of the larger cultures of South Asia. Convictions about the sanctity of borders are weaker here than elsewhere. Many Nagas still refer to their own region as "Western Nagaland", referring to areas with Naga communities in Burma as "Eastern Nagaland". Guwahati, the capital of Assam, is closer to Hanoi than it is to Delhi. Watching graceful young women in sarongs, skirts and blouses pedal to work in Imphal, the capital of Manipur, one could easily imagine being in Vientiane or Rangoon. There is a fierce pride and independence that marks the tribes. And a disdain—despite using the good things that money can buy and Central funds can achieve—for the national elites and locals who they patronise.

This bewildering medley and mosaic is dear to the social scientist, but makes administration and political control extremely complex for the faraway capitals, be it New Delhi, Rangoon or Dhaka.

Shadow Play

What the constituent regions of the Far Eastern Himalaya also have in common is scarcity of information and difficulty of access. Southeastern Tibet, northern Burma, the Yunnan highlands, the Chittagong Hill Tracts, and Northeastern India—these are areas with negligible international profile. There is no other region this large in all of Asia of which as little is known. The fierce independence, deep



TE PHATAP

enmities and seemingly eternal violence all occurs in a kind of a vacuum as far as the outside world is concerned. Relegated to the far corners of each of the nation states of which they form a part, the inhabitants live in a media shadow.

The recent outflow of the Rohingya and news about drug trade keeps northern Burma in the news pages, but on the whole this region is out of the information map. The same is true for the Chittagong Hill Tracts, whose sole claim to fame seems to be the outflow of Chakmas. Southern Bhutan is in the news only because that is where the Lhotshampa refugees emerge from. Compared to the detailed social science and other research that has gone on in, say, the Uttarakhand or Nepal hills, researchers have left the Far Eastern Himalaya largely alone. Even here, however, the south-eastern extremity of Tibet is unique for the absolute unavailability of information.

One of the reasons there is little reporting and research is because outsiders face restrictions in travel everywhere in the Far Eastern Himalaya. Nowhere do the national authorities of Burma, Bangladesh, India, Bhutan, and China allow free movement of outsiders, and in many cases there are restrictions even on citizens. Everywhere, diplomats, journalists, scholars and independent travellers face special problems.

Thus have national governments successfully shielded the brutal

military operations they have taken against the locals—often rebellious minorities seeking to preserve their identities—from outside eyes. By restricting access and travel, they have obscured this region from the ears and eyes of their own people as well.

It is by the choice of the locals that Indian citizens from the 'mainland' require special permits to enter the Northeast. However, this exclusivity is a double-edged sword, for it is due to this very lack of access that information about the uniqueness and aspirations of the Northeast is kept from the larger India.

Nevertheless, more news about the Northeast gets into the press than any of the other regions. In comparison to the news blackout as far as Southeast Tibet or Northern Burma are concerned, the Indian Northeast comes across as a very 'open' society indeed. Perhaps, as the rest of the region struggles to catch up, they too will be dogged by the problems that India's Northeast today faces. Perhaps, in that sense, the experience of the Northeast will be instructive for those elsewhere in the Far Eastern Himalaya, the rulers and the ruled alike.

Unity in Adversity

A shared ecology and geography, and a history of isolation, has given rise to lifestyles and languages that link the tribes and communities behind the five frontiers. In fact, many of these tribes have more in common with

each other than with the nation states of which they form distant appendages.

The cultural chasm between the people of Northeastern India and those of the 'mainland' is so deep, and the leap through time that they have to take to catch up with the national cultural mainstream so great, that this region is unlikely to be psychologically integrated with India for some time to come. If the Sikkimese even today refer to the border point at Rongphu Bridge as the place where "India begins", the feeling of distance is much more palpable in the hill states that lie to the east of Bhutan. Perhaps the map, too, aids in developing this mental state: every other part of India, including Kashmir, is joined integrally to the mainland, whereas the Northeast hangs on a 14 km neck of land between Nepal and Bangladesh.

The entire Far Eastern Himalaya is peopled by marginalised communities. These are peripheral groups, distant from the levers of governmental power. Much of their economic and political affairs are controlled and manipulated by all-powerful central entities. In most cases, tiny powerful local elites have emerged, patronised by the Centre, but these are invariably alienated from their own communities.

The failure to cope with change, an inability to deal with the major forces of economic and social transition that are transforming our world, is creating a deep sense of unease among this population.

A region that is used to oral traditions is being asked to turn to the newspaper and satellite television, one which used the traditional tribal methods of dispensing justice through village councils and chiefs is having to embrace British jurisprudence.

Vibrant communities are therefore turning inwards and nurturing deep resentment towards what they perceive to be colonial behaviour by central governments and national elites. This is true of the Northeasterner's attitude towards the Hindu-dominated and Hindi-speaking belt of the Ganga plain, of the Chakma's towards Dhaka's rulers, and of the Tibetan's towards the Han cadre who call the shots from Lhasa.

Seen in reverse, loyalties of Nepali speakers being questioned in Thimphu, of the Chakma in Dhaka, of the Naga in Delhi, of the Rohingya in Rangoon. The domestic policies of the national governments to the marginal peoples are almost identical, varying perhaps only in the intensity of violence with which rebellions are crushed.

The problem profile of the region is also similar: a lack of industrial development, sluggish economic growth, a tattered infrastructure of roads, telecommunications and power, escalating demographic change, inadequate use of natural resources such as water, environmental degradation, low per capita income, and poor agricultural practices. Added to all this, of course, unrest and insurgency.



Because national authorities seem unable to recognise the cultural chasm, to meet basic needs, nor to devise a formula for sharing of the natural resources in which the region is so rich, there will be no peace in the Far Eastern Himalaya. While the people agitate for their identity, government is perfectly willing to exploit mineral reserves, allow forests to be razed for timber, and rivers to be dammed. A withering away of national boundaries is not in sight, but as long as the reality of separateness is not understood, the problems of the region will remain unaddressed and the inhabitants will continue to suffer under-development and violence.

Insurgent militiaman in Burma's Shan mountains.



S. HAZARICA

Fractured World

Demographic change is the most immediate source of conflict in the Far Eastern Himalaya. Unwanted migrants are on the move across the region, in tens of thousands, trailing confrontations in their wake. Mass movement in a traditionally insular area invites linguistic, ethnic and religious strife. Settlement of an alien

Tea garden life is very un-aboriginal.

population leads to battle over resources, particularly land.

South Asia saw its largest migration during the Partition, and the Northeast was not spared. Though not on the same scale, exoduses and influxes continue, of both political refugees and economic migrants. National governments, which have their own political calculations to make, are not necessarily averse to population movements, for they can

Northeast Rebel Rundown

The first to rise against independent India were the Naga, whose movement is today split into three major factions. The most powerful is the leftist NSCN led by Isak Swu and Thenguilang Muivah. The Mizo and Manipuri revolts followed in quick succession. Whereas the Naga and Mizo rebels were Christian hillfolk, the Manipuri troubles were led by young militants of the Hindu plains-dwelling Meitei. They had a working alliance with the Kachin Independence Army in Burma and at least one group has ties with the NSCN. The Mizo (also known as the Lushai) insurgency lasted from 1966 and 1986, and in their initial success they captured several towns including the capital of Mizoram, Aizawal, and a radio station. The end of Pakistani support after 1971 led to a weakening of the force, and by 1980 the rebels were negotiating a surrender. An accord was signed in 1987 between Rajiv Gandhi and Laldenga, President of the Mizo National Front. The Tripura insurgency was a reaction against the arrival of Hindu Bengalis from Bangladesh and ended after New Delhi offered more representation for tribals in the state legislature and a pledge to stop illegal migration and land alienation. However, this political arrangement has not been satisfactory and militant activity has resumed, aimed at Bengali settlers and security troops. Assam, which had long been untouched by violent rebellion and was always regarded as part of the Indian "national mainstream", also saw insurgency with the rise of the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), which pledged armed struggle for independence. The organisation fell apart under sustained military operations in 1991, but is said to be regrouping in Bangladesh and in parts of Assam. The most recent rebellion is that of the Bodo, an indigenous tribe of 1.1 million that lives in pockets along the northern Brahmaputra Valley. They want a separate state. An autonomous council was hastily announced by New Delhi in 1992 but it has not worked. The militant-minded Bodo Security Force is trying to force non-Bodos to flee its region with a series of well-planned attacks on vulnerable targets. — S.H.

be used advantageously as vote banks, to open up frontier lands to economic exploitation, or as part of pacification and assimilation policies towards hostile local populations—as evident in the 'Han-isation' of Tibet by the China.

Indeed, the best orchestrated, and ongoing, migratory pattern is to be found north of the Himalayan divide, where people from mainland China are moving all the way into the Tibetan heartland of U Tsang, and not just the outer provinces of Kham and Amdo. The Dalai Lama's aides maintain that the original population of six million Tibetans is being overwhelmed by the Han invasion. The official Chinese figures are far lower: they put the population within the Tibet Autonomous Region (excluding large sections who live in Kham and Amdo) at 2.12 million, and the number of Han Chinese at 79,000 (but excluding the tens of thousands of troops and Chinese cadres who live without permanent resident status).

Once the migrants or refugees arrive, the immediate cause of conflict is the question of land and its control. For host communities whose very cultures are derived from the soil and forests, the loss of land to migrant groups means a shedding of cultural identity. Population movements have affected every state in the Indian Northeast, and in two of them the original inhabitants have by now become minorities in their own land—which is the fear that impels all Northeasterners to react against migration.

One state whose indigenous inhabitants are now tiny minorities is Sikkim, where the Lepcha and Bhutia were overwhelmed over the course of the first half of the century by an inflow of Nepali-speakers. It was manipulation of the Nepali majority by New Delhi's political leadership which led to the kingdom's merger with the Indian Union in 1973.

The other state where the locals have become a minority is Tripura, the narrow thumb that juts into Bangladesh from the southeast of

Assam. Once dominated by 19 Buddhist and Christian tribes, the state has been swamped by Hindu refugees from Bangladesh since the 1950s. In 1947, Tripura had a population of 600,000 of whom 93 percent were from the indigenous tribes. By 1981, the tribes had been reduced to a minority of 28.5 percent, out of a population of 2.06 million. Political power slipped out of the tribals' hands as they were displaced by the settlers. An insurgency began against the Bengali settlers in 1980 but it had ended by 1988.

Rejected Peoples

Numerous communities in this region constitute what political scientist Myron Weiner refers to as "rejected peoples". Count among them the Bangladeshi migrants in Assam, Chakma refugees in Arunachal and Tripura, the Rohingya refugees from Burma now taking shelter in Bangladesh, and the Lhotshampa refugees of Bhutan.

Bangladeshi. In few regions has the impact of population movement been as vivid, painful or divisive as in Assam. Its wide and fertile valley watered by the Brahmaputra, the state has long suffered from the depredations of migration, settlement and subsequent conflict. The place of origin for most of the migrants has been Bangladesh, which has a population density of more than 800 persons per sq km—the highest in the world. The corresponding density in the Northeast is 284 for Assam, 262 for Tripura and 33 for Mizoram. The "push" and "pull" factors are obvious.

Even unskilled labourers find a ready market as construction workers, porters and maids in the Northeast. Language is the key factor favouring Bangladeshi migrants, for Bengali is widely spoken in Assam and understood in the hinterland. The biggest outflow of Bangladeshis took place in 1970, when a brutal Pakistani army crackdown sent more than 10 million fleeing into India. Most went back, but more than a million stayed behind in West Bengal and Assam.

Influx into Assam continues today, largely due to economic and environmental conditions within a Bangladesh which seems to lurch through an unending cycle of flood, cyclone, drought and famine.

Reaction against immigrants has exploded several times in bloodshed and rioting. Movements against 'Bangladeshis' have shaken the Northeast since 1979, particularly in Assam, which has taken the brunt of the immigration. The conflict has been exacerbated by the fact that the migrants and their descendants are predominantly Muslim whereas

Land was the source of conflict: the settlers had taken over—bought or bartered—property from locals even though such transactions were prohibited for non-tribals. However, there was poor implementation of land and tenancy laws, and there were politicians who depended on support from the Muslim vote bank. Over the years, resentment over dispossession built up in the Lalung tribe, until it finally exploded in 1983.

Although the violence against the Bangladeshi has ebbed, the settlers continue to be targets of distrust and political abuse. Lately, they have

teak forests, swift streams, and undulating valleys, the area is bounded by Assam to the north, upper Burma to the east, the Arakan of Burma to the south, and Chittagong District to the west. There are 12 major tribes, largely Buddhist, who practice jhumming, or swidden agriculture.

When the Pakistan government completed the Kaptai hydro-electric project in 1964, the reservoir flooded about 40 percent of the arable land in the region and displaced more than 100,000 tribals. An estimated 20,000, mostly Chakmas but also some Mogs and Jajongs, moved across the frontier into Tripura. The refugees were first moved to the Lushai Hills, now Mizoram, and then offered a choice of three locations by the Indian authorities. They chose the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA), which is now Arunachal Pradesh.

While lightly populated Arunachal Pradesh—which was attacked and briefly annexed by China during the Indo-China war of 1962—has been one of the more quiet places of the Northeast, over the past year it too has become tense. The immediate reason is that the migrant Chakmas already make up seven percent of the population of 700,000. Student organisations have started a sustained campaign to oust the migrants, who have been threatened and intimidated, thousands fleeing to the relative safety of Assam.

Among the many contradictions that remain unresolved in the Northeast is the question of nationality. While the Indian Constitution states that any child born in India is a citizen, thousands of Chakma offspring who have been born in Arunachal since the 1960s have not been absorbed by India. On the other hand, if the children are to be accepted, where are the parents to go? The state which they fled does not exist, and the successor state of Bangladesh does not recognise them as nationals.

The larger and more recent influx of Chakmas has less to do with the

Bengali Muslim complaining to Assamese politician.



the Assamese are largely Hindu. Today, the very word 'Bangladeshi' has taken on a pejorative meaning in Assam.

Attempts to get the refugees to return have only resulted in more tension and violence. Meanwhile, for decades, police and high officials—and especially politicians—have actively encouraged illegal migration because of the profits involved and the advantages of engaging in "vote bank politics".

The price, as always, is paid by innocent people, most brutally in 1983 when more than 4000 men, women and children, mostly Muslim settlers, were slaughtered in a series of pogroms in Assam during an election. The worst killings occurred in rice fields of the village of Nellie, where at least 1,700 were butchered.

fallen victim to insurgency in the region, with frequent attacks on them by armed members of the Bodo Security Force in western Assam.

Chakma. Population movements are fed by remorseless factors. Take the case of the Chakma; they seek refuge in Tripura because they are a religious minority, because their rights are being trampled upon, because *their* lands are being settled by Bengali-speakers in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, and because their loyalty is questioned by Dhaka. Even after decades, in some cases, the Chakma refugees have not been able to settle down in the host region, whether it is Arunachal Pradesh or Tripura.

Chittagong's hill tracts cover 5093 sq miles, or 16 percent of Bangladesh's surface area. Marked by

Kaptai Dam and more with population movements *within* Bangladesh. The root cause lies in Dhaka's programme to settle the Chittagong hills with Muslim Bengalis from the over-populated delta region. This concerted move to

'Bengalise' the region drew sharp reaction, culminating in an armed revolt in the 1970s by an armed group calling itself the Shanti Bahini. There have been several bouts of conflict in the past 20 years between the Bangladeshi armed forces and the tribal

nationalists, who have received armed and training support from New Delhi's security agencies.

The Dhaka government's crackdown has been brutal. It devastated culture, kinship ties and tradition, which resulted in refugee

Concern for the Northeast

A series of reports in recent weeks in the Indian press indicates that concern for the Northeast situation is at a heightened level among Indian policy-makers.

The Chief of Army Staff General Shankar Roychowdhury said on 8 February in Guwahati that a "Northeastern coordination council of security forces" should be formed immediately to tackle the insurgency problem. He said the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan was providing support to the rebels, but refused to elaborate. The situation in both Kashmir and the Northeast was assuming the dimensions of an external aggression, and it would be short-sighted to treat it merely as a law and order situation. With the NSCN (Muivah group) extending its activities to Nagaland and parts of Assam, it was necessary to look at the entire Northeastern region as one unit as far as security was concerned. Earlier, General Roychowdhury had stated that the insurgency problem in the Northeast was as sensitive as the terrorist activity in Kashmir, with external forces playing an equally disruptive role.

On 29 April, the Union Home Secretary K. Padmanabhaiah stated in Shillong that "self-imposed isolation" of the people of the Northeast punctuated with "some extent of negligence of the Centre" was the main cause of the prevailing uncertainty. An "action-oriented coordinated and concentrated" plan was required to solve the burning problems in the region: there was a need to boost the morale of the police force by providing them with basic facilities, and the Northeastern Police Academy should provide proper training. Other than in Nagaland, the insurgent groups of the region had no ideology and represented nothing but "lawlessness". The media, meanwhile, should highlight genuine problems of the region without projecting only the negative aspects. While there were some genuine grievances of the people of the region, it did not mean that one should "retreat from the spirit of oneness with India".

A study prepared by the 1993 batch of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officials titled *Understanding Ethnic Unrest in Indian Peripheries—1994*, which was released on 2 May, asserts that political parties are responsible for fuelling ethnic unrest in the Northeast. The paper also points the finger at the absence of development, exploitation by outsiders, and absence of policy decisions. Among other things, the paper states: "The central leadership of mainstream political parties has manipulated ethnic

symbols... The frequent imposition of President's rule has also reinforced the imperialist image of the Centre... The political bosses have failed to establish psycho-emotional links with the historically insulated population... The influx of 'outsiders' has altered the demographic pattern and reduced the local population to a minority... External material and moral support has sustained ethnic movements in border areas..." To contain external interference, the study suggests that India improve its bilateral relations with its neighbours. The IAS officials suggest "a single-minded devotion to economic development" in the Northeast, stating that "the population should derive meaningful benefits from economic activities rather than being exploited by them... Ethnic violence is the manifestation of a deeper malaise in the system and can hardly be contained by military or political action."

On 5 May in Guwahati, the Union Finance Minister Manmohan Singh stressed the need for "serious analysis of the underlying causes of unrest and insurgency in the Northeast so that the development process could be accelerated in the proper direction. It would be a tragic mistake to regard the problem created by secessionist forces as merely a law and order situation, he warned, and said "the design and style of a social, economic and political evolution of a good society must fully take into account the multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious characteristics of the societies of the region..." Subsequent to identifying the root causes of discontent in the Northeast, "we can and we must evolve imaginative approaches to deal with them," said the Finance Minister, who represents Assam in the Rajya Sabha. In view of the pluralism and diversity of the societies of the Northeast, special arrangements had to be made in the form of autonomous district councils with powers to protect the interests of tribal communities, their social customs and customary laws. The quality of public administration must be toned up, and civil servants should have an incentive to serve in the Northeast rather than treating the region as a "punishment posting". The proposed Northeast Development Bank should be able to provide the regional economy with a much-needed boost, he said.

The Finance Minister was giving the keynote address at a regional conference organised by the Indira Gandhi Memorial Trust. Sonia Gandhi, Chairperson of the Trust, told the gathering that both Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi had deep interest in the people of the Northeast and their "aspirations, concerns, problems and hopes..."

surges across into Tripura in 1978, again in the early 1980s, and most recently in 1989. While New Delhi and Dhaka have been engaged in talks and there has been some repatriation, about 50,000 refugees remain in camps on the Indian side, unwilling to believe Dhaka's assurances of security. It is not even clear that the two countries are genuinely interested in solving the problem; for Indian security agencies, particularly the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), the Shanti Bahini remains a pawn in the power game.

Rohingya. Bangladesh plays host to its own 'Chakma situation' in the case of the Rohingya. Over a period of a quarter century, first in 1978 and then in 1992, the Burmese military has swept into the Muslim dominated Arakan Province in drives against Rohingyas. These Arakanese are regarded as not sufficiently Burmese as more Islamic than nationalist. The Burmese authorities, who are predominantly Buddhist, have claimed that many of those in the Arakan area are not really Burmese and that they have illegally crossed over from Bangladesh.

The Rohingyas' low-level rebellion has existed for decades but not much information is available, other than that the government crackdowns were vicious. The military regime in Rangoon has always been wary of the Muslim population for having independent leanings. Its actions have led to two waves of refugees into Bangladesh, totalling more than 200,000 Rohingyas each time. Not surprisingly, Rangoon claims that those driven out are Bangladeshi, a charge the Rohingya strongly deny. Efforts to repatriate them have not succeeded, although lately Burma has agreed to international monitoring of a future repatriation process.

For all their genuine grievances, the Rohingya too have been enmeshed in regional geopolitics. The troubles with the military and the Rohingya is seen by many as part of the larger confrontation between



Bodo leaders at negotiation in New Delhi.

Burma and Bangladesh, which views with unease Beijing's military assistance to Rangoon. There are credible accounts of Rohingyas receiving military training from Bangladeshi intelligence and military agencies.

Lhotshampa. The story of Nepali settlement in Bhutan is less than a hundred years old. Encouraged by the Bhutanese Governor of Western Bhutan, in the late 19th century Nepalis from the over-populated hills of the home country moved in as labourers and farmers. Over the decades, they prospered and their numbers grew in settlements and jungle clearings along the Dragon Kingdom's southern border. These frontiersmen and women who helped create today's rich farmlands and orchards came to be known as the Lhotshampa, the people of the south.

When a census in 1988 turned up many more Nepali-speakers than the authorities had expected, Thimphu's fears of the being overwhelmed by a Nepali swamping and going the way of the Chogyals' Sikkim were heightened. In an interview in 1993, King Jigme Singye Wangchuk,

Bhutan's absolute monarch, said that as many as 113,000 had been identified as illegal migrants in a newly calculated national population of 600,000. The anti-royalist agitation in Nepal which reduced the once-absolute monarch King Birendra to a titular head of state, also clearly worried Thimphu.

Like elsewhere in the Northeast, the fear of losing their 'Drukpa' identity led the Bhutanese authorities to engage in a fierce anti-migrant reaction. Unlike the other communities of the Northeast, who are battling the establishment, however, here it was the Government itself, representing the dominant community, that oversaw the process with the resources at its command.

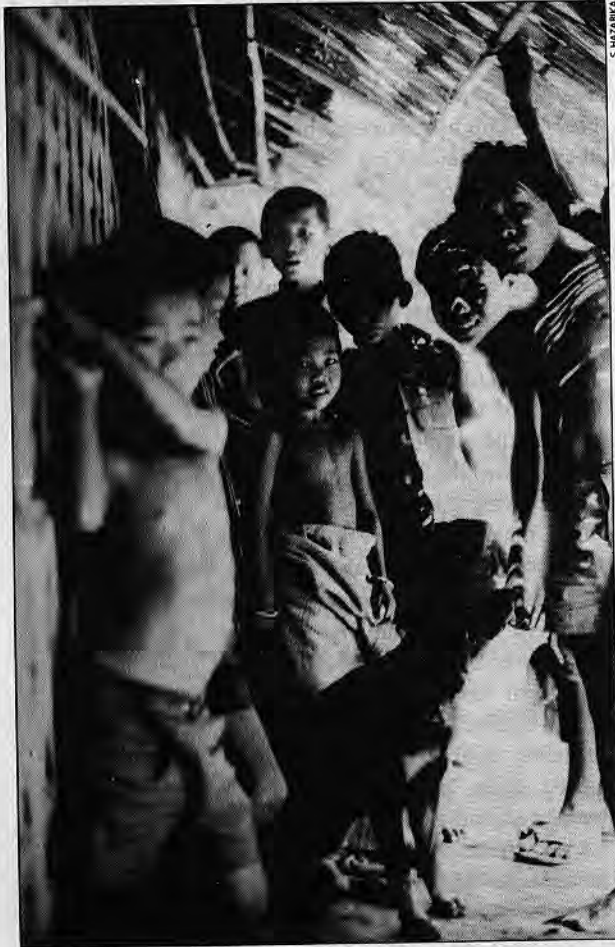
As the pressures grew in southern Bhutan, the first refugees fled into the Jalpaiguri tea belt of India, and from there transited to eastern Nepal's Jhapa District. The first surge of exiles, of about 35,000, might be called true "political refugees": terrorized, famished, and very sick. Those who came later constitute a amorphous category, for it seems that they departed not because of political

repression but because life was becoming too difficult to manage in isolated farms and hilltop hamlets.

There are today more than 110,000 Lhotshampa refugees, both in the camps of Jhapa and scattered across Nepal and neighbouring areas of India. Kathmandu has been roundly outmaneuvered by Thimphu in bilateral talks that have gone on for three years. The Bhutanese government has managed to rid the country of a seventh of its population, and controlling the remaining Lhotshampa will be that much easier.

The process is the same everywhere: mass movement into a lightly populated region from regions of high density. The cycle consists of displacement, migration, settlement, identity loss, resentment, leading to violence on the settlers and counter-violence by settlers. It is not true, however, that conflicts have always been between hill tribals and invading plains folks from outside the region.

*In search of citizenship:
Chakma children
of Tripura.*



The fratricidal confrontation between the Kuki and Naga tribes is a case in point. Over the course of the past three years, more than a thousand Kukis and Nagas are known to have been killed in increasingly violent attacks and counter-attacks on each other. The bitterness between the two sides, too, is linked to migration. Kukis settled traditional Naga lands several decades ago, and the memories linger.

Strategic Compulsions

It is strategic compulsions that drive rulers of nation states to seek control over distant communities and to snuff out the insurgencies and agitations which resist such control. No one has much time for critical questions relating to human rights, the sweeping powers given to the security forces, and inherent disharmony between communities of the periphery and the central governments.

Why do nation states attach such importance to these peripheral areas? In one phrase, it is fear of disintegration of the nation state, which can never be allowed, for no national leader wants to be accused of having dismembered the motherland. Another reason is the vast natural bounty of these places: the oil, gas and other minerals, the timber, hydropower, fertile soil, and the biodiversity.

Men in uniform and those from security agencies swarm over the region. India, for one, justifies their presence not merely because of the insurgencies it faces but the presence of tens of thousands of well-equipped Chinese troops on the other side of the mountainous border. The strategic importance given to the Northeast can be seen in the fact that large state of Arunachal Pradesh does not have a single civilian airport. Meanwhile, the military helps in the expensive task of airdropping food and consumer goods to scattered civilian communities.

It is not just Central neglect and lack of vision that is holding the Far Eastern Himalaya back. The extensive and deep-rooted insurgencies also

have a role. In all cases, the earlier convictions and total commitment to independence from the nation state no longer hold good. Often, the violence-for-violence's-sake ethos among the insurgents coupled with the rigid stance of government keeps moderates from finding a voice. Many insurgents stay on to fight in the jungle simply because they know of no other way. Also, new equations have developed in these wooded hills of the Far Eastern Himalaya. Drug smuggling has become one of the major sources of funding for the guerillas in the woods, which fuels insurgencies and maintains the circle of violence. Meanwhile, much of the halo of the insurgents has dimmed. Many are feared, even among their own people, as ruthless figures who will kill if the price is right.

The most enduring conflicts are in India's Nagaland and Manipur, and in Burma between Rangoon's generals and the Kachin and Karen, whose rebellions have lasted half a century. In the Northeast, the Naga and Bodo of Assam present the biggest challenges to the state security apparatus. The National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) and the Bodo Security Force have established common training camps and often work together to ambush security forces.

The trend for the future is clear: an increasingly sharp delineation between areas of governance by the state and ungovernable areas where the political vacuum is filled by powerful dissident groups like the NSCN and the Bodo Security Force. The Indian state has failed to ensure stability in parts of Manipur and Nagaland, and to a lesser degree along the northwestern edge of Assam where it touches Bhutan. As a result, the NSCN controls parts of Manipur, especially the Ukhrul and Senapati districts; it levies taxes, recruits people (often forcibly) into its army, and harasses businessmen.

Likewise, the Bodo Security Force has the run of parts of Kokrajhar District of Assam, and uses the forests

of southern Bhutan as a hideout. The Bhutanese are disinclined to act against the Bodos because they are outgunned, and several operations mounted by the Indian Army with King Jigme's permission have failed to flush them out. In recent months, the NSCN seems to have expanded its base and made inroads into the Naga-dominated district of North Cachar hills, ambushing troops and engaging in major gun battles. It has access to funds through the fear it inspires among the tea planters, who pay protection money much as they did to the ULFA when it held sway between 1988 and 1992.

Mother of Insurgencies

Every state in the Indian Northeast, barring Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya, has seen major armed insurrections against the Indian state. The response of the state has been, as usual, to call in the army and invoke sweeping powers of search and detention. Once, it even flung the Air Force against Mizo rebels.

The entire region is heavily militarised, from Tibet through the Indian Northeast and into Bangladesh and Northern Burma. Firstly, there is the military presence to guard the borders, particularly along the Indo-Tibetan frontier. And then there is the heavy military presence to maintain order over a sullen populace, as in the case of the People's Liberation Army in Tibet, or to pacify rebel groups, as with SLORC's forces in northern Burma and the Indian Army's extensive presence in the Northeast.

The role of the unfriendly neighbour, which Indians euphemistically call "the foreign hand", is also significant in sustaining militant organisations. The Shanti Bahini operates in the Chittagong hills with help from Indian agencies, and the rebels in northern Burma are said to receive support from Dhaka. As far as the Northeast is concerned, in the 1960s, it was Pakistan and China that were providing sustenance to the Naga and Mizo rebels. This support



ended with the 1971 Indo-Pak war. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Kachin Independent Army was providing support, training and weapons to the NSCN, the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), and to various Manipuri groups. This backing faded after New Delhi threatened to oust Burmese refugees who had fled the repressive SLORC regime and were staying in India. Subsequently, the NSCN, basing itself along the Bangladeshi and Burmese borders, has used its own skills to forge a leadership of the Northeastern rebellions. As far as the Northeast is concerned, says one intelligence specialist, the NSCN is "the mother of all insurgencies".

Another pattern that seems to characterise the regional rebellions is the breakdown of "accords", when agreements between rebel forces and governments go sour. The only successful agreement between militants and the Indian state seems to have been the Mizoram Accord of 1987, which enabled insurgents to surrender, receive an amnesty, and start life afresh.

Most of the other agreements have been fatally flawed, beginning with the Shillong Accord of 1975 between one group of Naga rebels and the Indian Government, which fell apart and led to the growth of the

NSCN. The pattern of breakdown of accords tends to be similar: acceptance of accommodation by moderates and subsequent rejection by hardliners. This has happened in Tripura and in Assam, especially with regard to the Bodo. The hard core of the ULFA leadership also rejected peace moves by their colleagues, and the organisation suffered a split from which it has yet to recover. When the Bodo struck a deal for greater autonomy with the Government of Assam in 1993, the package of promises began to unravel because the Bodo homeland's borders had been left undefined, as had been the all-important question of power-sharing. The extreme Bodo Security Force, which seeks full independence from India, struck at security forces and vulnerable targets such as unarmed Bengali settlers, in order to demonstrate its power and its rejection of the accord.

In Burma, the Rangoon government has followed a policy of punitive action against rebel groups combined with efforts to buy them out. This has worked with some groups, including a prominent Communist faction, and failed with others. One of the key factors about insurgencies and governmental response in Burma is that both have their fingers in the drug trade. Over the decades, Burma

has emerged as the single largest exporter of heroin to the West, and both government officials and insurgents depend on the trade for funds.

Into the Next Millennium

Amidst the crises overwhelming these fractured lands, it is difficult to envisage what the future holds for the Naga and the Mizo, the Ahom and the Mishing, the Khampa and the Chakma. Migration will continue, for no walls, laws or police forces can stop people, like water, from seeking their own levels for survival. In a Subcontinent which will see nearly a billion Indians, 220 million Bangladeshis and 30 million Nepalis (in Nepal) by the year 2020, it is not feasible to hope that population flows will cease entirely.

Likewise, the nationalistic grip on the region by each of country capitals will continue, constricting the space for autonomy and self-determination. The market forces, the

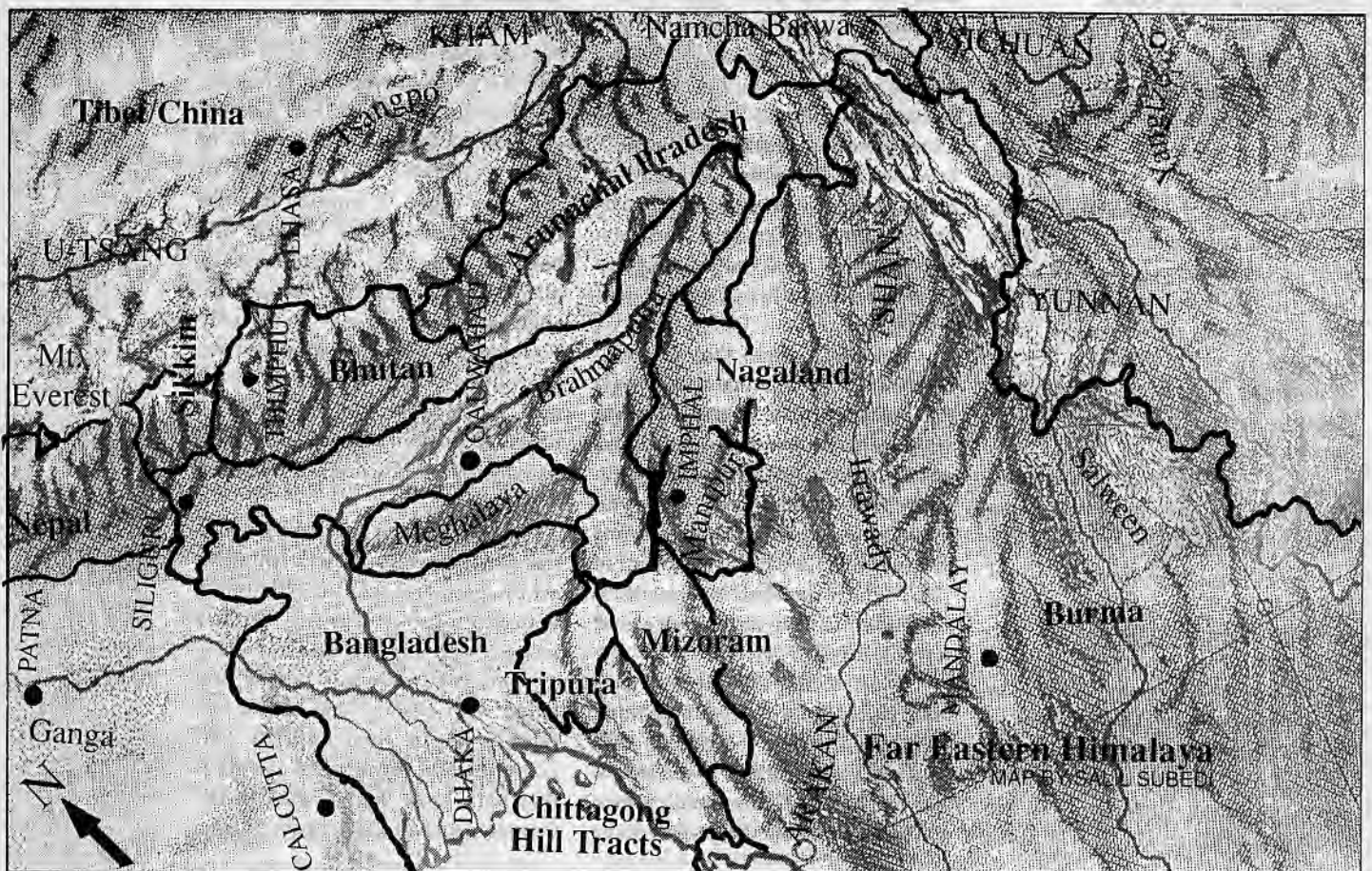
state and the local elites are bound to continue to be in league to exploit the natural resources in a manner that only a few will benefit, and not necessarily the tribals with closest links to the land. The rebellions that have become the defining attribute of the region are also likely to continue, although individual insurgencies may tire out and disappear.

At the same time, it is doubtful that greater autonomy to economically unviable, small communities will benefit the people in the long run, except in temporarily raising hopes and creating new local aristocracies. Without outside personnel and central funds, these states and provinces will find it difficult to fulfil modern desires that have grown over the decades. Some of these might still be forest societies, but everyone wants to modernise.

The choice for the Far Eastern Himalaya is clear. It is either to throw up one's hands in despair at the

problems associated with divided geography, migration, reaction and military presence. Or it is to try to chart a path that involves joint planning for economic growth. If massive inflows of migrants and refugees are to be reduced, and the people of the region are to be saved from endless rebellions, the economies of the Far Eastern Himalaya, relegated to the periphery for too long, must expand, and expand on all sides.

Economic development, rooted in the sharing of water and other natural resources, multilateral trade, and assisting communities at the micro level—instead of imposing centrally sponsored schemes—seems to be the way out. A sense of inclusion and participation of local communities is critical in making programmes work. Paternalism only provokes bitterness. Locals need to be given effective control over resources, and development schemes must have their participation and not be devised and dictated by central authorities. An

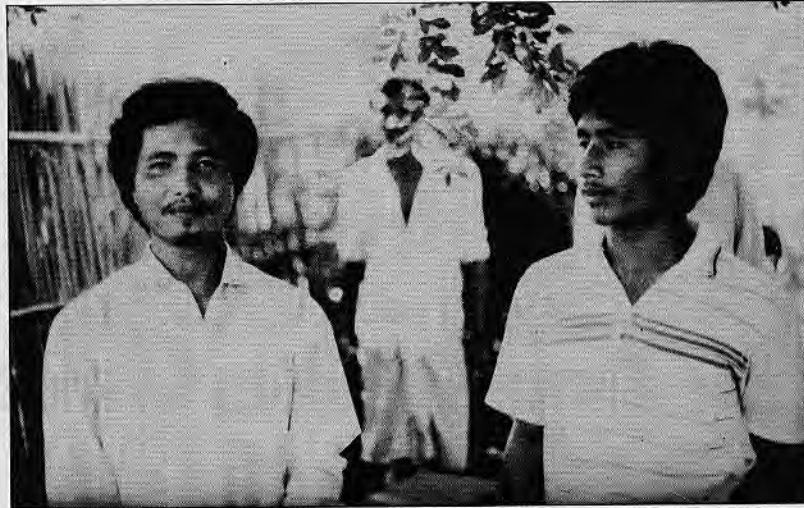


example of effective local institution-building is the system of Block Development Villages in Nagaland, where locally managed schemes are working where larger top-down schemes have not.

In Delhi in early May, South Asia's leaders decided to move ahead with the South Asia Preferential Trade Zone (SAPTA). In fact, the region of the Far Eastern Himalaya, so different from the rest of South Asia and so much like each other across the borders, would seem to make a coherent trading block in its own right. The absurdity of national boundaries that divide similar peoples and breaks up viable economic units is nowhere more clear than it is here, which is why this eastern Himalayan stretch could constitute a suitable area to make regional cooperation begin to work.

A formula has to be found where it is possible to work across the borders while maintaining the sanctity of frontiers. The possibilities are endless, if the vision exists. True, it will require the national governments which have barely begun to address some of these issues to put their heads together, and for moderates among the regional leadership to make a show of their strength. In the end, only regionalism spurred by the search for economic possibilities will bring peace and progress to the Far Eastern Himalaya.

A network of small and medium dam projects in parts of Bhutan, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh would tap the explosive power of the rivers and streams disgorging from the Himalaya. The production of hydro energy would spur economic growth in both hill and plain. The reduction of flood damage would open up new lands for cultivation and ease some of the demographic pressures in the Bengali-speaking lowlands. Power could also be exported to other parts of India and Southeast Asia, for energy hunger is destined to grow rapidly in the next decades as unshackled economies surge forward.



Bodo activists.

S. HAZARIKA

One may be forgiven for looking ahead to the day when workers from different parts of the region participate in economic activity under strict migration and employment laws. The economies cannot expand without better roads, railways and communication facilities, and these arteries should be intra-regional and not merely for maintaining links with the individual national mainlands. Opening up of port and transit facilities in Bangladesh and Burma would itself, in one stroke, provide economic fillip to the hinterland.

With a loosening up of border restrictions, numerous cross border contacts would be resumed. To use just one example, the Garo and the Khasi of Meghalaya would restart their trade routes with Bangladesh, facilities that they enjoyed for centuries before Sir Cyril Radcliffe drew the line that divided British India. Rather than transport their goods to Assam using unreliable public transport, they would, like in the past, simply march "down the hill" into Bangladesh.

Development of tourism and promotion of handicraft and handloom industries will also make an impact. In India, the marketing of products should involve much more than displaying local items at the state emporiums in New Delhi, and must involve a look at national and international possibilities. Improved agriculture and water-use strategies

will strengthen community-based economies, and there should be a major emphasis in adding value to exported items, so that it is not only raw products such as timber, and crude petroleum that exit the region.

This is not to say that insurgencies will end. Ethnic aspirations and questions of identity will remain. But at a time when the world has recognised that mere political independence does not necessarily lead to a better future, ultimate peace to the Far Eastern Himalaya will come when a measure of autonomy is accompanied by access to markets, and the definite possibilities of improving the economic conditions of one's life.

A period of education is required, both for the regional leadership, as well as the national elites, in the search for peace and prosperity in the Far Eastern Himalaya. The people have spanned more than a thousand years in a lifetime, and they, more than anyone else, would like to see the creation of a new and revitalised region.

S. Hazarika is Delhi-based author of several books, including *Strangers of the Mist* (Viking), on migration and insurgencies in the Indian Northeast and Bangladesh. He has been a correspondent for *The New York Times* since 1989, recently co-authored *The Degeneration of India* (Viking) with T.N. Seshan, and is working on a follow-up book on "the agenda for change".

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Aama's-Eye View of America

Broughton Coburn's *Aama in America* is the tantalising follow-up to *Nepali Aama* (1982), his lyrical text-and-photo portrait of the woman from Syangja, Vishnu Maya Gurung. *Aama in America* is the chronicle of octogenarian Vishnu Maya's unlikely pilgrimage to the United States. In addition to being a portrait of the United States—as seen through Vishnu Maya's displaced but perceptive eye—the book is also the story of the author's relationship with Vishnu Maya (who is his *dharma* mother), and with his natural mother whose death left him with troubled, unresolved emotions, and with his girlfriend, to whom he is not sure he wants to commit. The book has a large and wide-ranging premise which Coburn tries to resolve, sometimes erratically but mostly engagingly, over a journey that starts in Syangja and goes through the Tokyo airport lounge on to Seattle, Washington, California, Maine, Montana, Washington DC, New York and back to Nepal.

The most luminous parts of *Aama in America* come from the observations made by Vishnu Maya, whose cultural references are so far removed from those of the country she is visiting that her pronouncements on American cultural artifacts and behaviour are deconstructively incoherent and, at times, visionary. In particular, her encounters with the mundane aspects of American life such as public toilets, safety belts and ice cream abound with wit.

In a grocery store for the first time, Vishnu Maya exclaims, "*Mero baajey...* look this bazaar, I can't believe it—all the food is lined up, one kind of meat in this line, another kind in that line, fish set out over there. You would think it would all spoil before people had a chance to eat it." Once, as the author drives by some sheep on a country road, she says, "Boy, [a small question of idiom here], those sheep are moving fast—no, wait, *we're* moving fast." It is precisely this disorientation which gives way to her back-door insights about the United States: at one point, the drab homogeneity of the American highway and the similarity of every Chevron gas station leads Vishnu Maya to believe that Coburn and his girlfriend have been driving her around in circles.

Coburn is sensitive in following the logic of Vishnu Maya's observations. At every sea-shore she searches for Malaysia, which she has been told about by a Gorkha soldier. She cannot believe that there are no Gorkha soldiers to be met in the country she supposedly calls "Amrita", especially after she meets one quite by chance. She is disdainful of the American custom—or at least oversight—of having toilets on top of kitchens. Her visit to American sacred sites like a Catholic church, the Pacific Ocean, or a meteorite exhibit in New York, capture vivid encounters between ardent, unquestioning Nepali-style worship and the starry-eyed new-age spiritualism, or the



**Aama in America:
A Pilgrimage of the
Heart**

by Broughton
Coburn
Anchor/Doubleday
New York
May 1995
US\$ 22.95
ISBN 0 385 47417 2

by
**Manjushree
Thapa**

M. Thapa is author of *Mustang Bhot in Fragments* (Himal Books, 1992). She is currently working on her first novel.

United States' boundless profanity. It is especially heartening to read about Vishnu Maya observing, analyzing and passing confident judgement on a land that has intimidated many lesser immigrants. As in *Nepali Aama*, Coburn portrays Vishnu Maya as a person of rare self-possession. Her response to the United States is like a summons to Nepalis to be confident in ourselves, and in the cultural references we operate in, when confronting seemingly overpowering foreign ways.

Equally charming are snippets of American reactions to Vishnu Maya, who seems to have travelled throughout in velvet blouse, *patuka* and *lungi* set off by a coral necklace and medallion-shaped earrings of gold. At the slot machines in Las Vegas, a man recognises her as Mother Teresa. This isolation of many Americans, which leads to a particularly American brand of uninformed but enthusiastic friendliness, is familiar to any Nepali who has been there and tried to explain where he or she comes from. One child is inspired by his encounter with Vishnu Maya to ask what it is like to die, followed by, "Has *Aama* ever died before?" Another child exclaims, "She lives just like the Flintstones!"

Situations which provide the most dramatic possibility, such as Vishnu Maya's visit to Disneyland or to the casinos of Las Vegas, are, not surprisingly, more flat and cumbersome. Perhaps the contrasts are simply too overwhelming to portray, for the moral gravity of the juxtaposition of Vishnu Maya and Mickey Mouse—when the two meet, or even when they are worlds apart—cannot be easily expressed with grace. As such, the book might not have lost much had the author refrained from writing about these sections of the journey, and kept the book's premise smaller, more intimate. The reader in search of insight should look to the more low-key but epiphanic segments of the book, such as Vishnu Maya's triumphant, quite logical rejection of the authenticity of whales, or her reaction to large-scale mechanised farming.

The resolution of personal issues regarding the author's mother and girlfriend takes over at the end of *Aama in America*, which keeps Coburn from ending on a broad philosophical note about the crisis of spirit in the United States, or about the spiritual resilience of Nepalis. In choosing to settle the issues raised by the book only within the realm of his personal experience, Coburn leaves the reader wanting, but not receiving, a forceful conclusion about the way things are or ought to be in one of the world's most spiritually impoverished countries, the United States, and one of the world's most materially impoverished countries, Nepal. This omission, and occasionally strained writing, are the weak points of this otherwise well-conceived book.

V O I

SEED IN SAMADHI, from a speech by H.Y. Mohan Ram, Professor of Botany at the University of Delhi, at a tree planting ceremony organised by Tibet House in New Delhi to mark the 59th birth anniversary of Tenzin Gyatso, the Dalai Lama.

A tree is a perfect example of an organisation with its own rules and relationships among the component parts. A tree represents a decentralised democratic system. If a young branch is lopped, another takes its place. Parts of two different trees can be grafted. They will unite and function as one. Another miracle that has baffled scientists is that all flowering plants, including trees, spend a part of their life as seeds. There is no equivalent of a seed in the entire living world. A seed is neither the beginning nor the end. It contains the future plant in the form of an embryo and stored food. A seed looks dead; it has no apparent attributes of life such as respiration, metabolism, growth or responses to stimuli. It can awaken from this state of suspended animation—or *samadhi*—when sown and watered. Even a tiny seed has built-in genetic potential to grow into a particular tree—be it the stately Bodhi tree, the evergreen mango, or the majestic sal.

CHRIST IS MAITREYA BUDDHA, writes Benjamin Creme of London in the Notes and Queries column of The Manchester Guardian, responding to the question: "If Christ returned, how likely is it that he would become a Christian?"

Very soon, I believe, your readers and the world will know the answer. For 20 years, I have sought, by worldwide lectures, books, Share International Magazine (as editor) and innumerable TV and radio interviews, to make known the imminence of His return and, since July 19 1977, the fact of His presence in the Asian community of London.

He has come, as He predicted through Jesus, "like a thief in the night, in such an hour as you think not," and not from "heaven" but from His ancient spiritual retreat in the Himalayas; from where, as the Embodiment of the Christ Principle or Consciousness, His mind "overshadowed" that of Jesus from the Baptism to the Crucifixion. This time, He has come Himself as the leader of a large group of spiritually enlightened men, including Jesus.

He is not a religious teacher per se, but an educator in the broader sense, showing the need for spiritual, political, economic and social structures if we are to survive. He has not come to found a new religion nor to create followers, but to teach humanity "the Art of Self or God, Realisation". Awaited by Christians as the Christ, by Jews as the Messiah, by Muslims as the Imam Mahdi, by Hindus as Krishna, and by Buddhists under His personal name as *Maitreya* Buddha, He is the World Teacher for all groups.

DIALOGUE WILL NOT WORK, writes Sankarshan Thakur in The Calcutta Telegraph of 5 May 1995, reacting to the announcement that India and Pakistan are to resume high-level discussions on Kashmir. In the meantime, he writes, "paradise must suffer its season in hell".

If conflict is the essential truth of our lives and of most of our history, the essential myth about it is that dialogue can resolve conflict. That great and dangerous myth—great because of its sheer size and longevity and dangerous because like all duplicitous things, it wears the mesmeric cloak of virtue—has let us down a million times and a millions times we have fallen. Look at the body of history and you will see how riddled it is with war. If dialogue could resolve conflict, history would be made up of conciliatory whispers, not the sound of gunfire.

The thing about conflict is that it turns on power and power turns on its own dynamics; dialogue is, at best, a cog in the workings of those dynamics, it is not power itself. Dialogue is not, and cannot be, essential to conflict resolution; only power is, in whatever manner used. The twist and grip of power can dictate a situation of dialogue but dialogue itself, and on its own, cannot achieve much.

This is the essential thing New Delhi should remember in the context of Kashmir and Pakistan: dialogue will take it nowhere, only assertion of its power—essentially political and military power—will. If India wants to keep Kashmir, and quite clearly it very much does, it cannot afford any dialogue with Pakistan on the issue. Imagine high level delegations of India and Pakistan ranged—suspicious eyeball to suspicious eyeball, false smile to false smile—across a long table in a long, aloof room in New Delhi or Islamabad. Imagine them starting a dialogue on Kashmir. However they might choose to couch it in diplomatese and however many roundabout ways they might take to say what they have to, the two sides will, in substance say just this: Kashmir is ours, lay off. India will say it is an integral part of the country whose future is not negotiable; Pakistan will say it is psychologically (and historically) part of Pakistan and must be ceded over. (This sort of dialogue, of course, takes place with full prejudice to the people of Kashmir who, in their heart of hearts might be with neither India nor Pakistan, but that is another matter.)

BACK TO THE FUTURE is the title to a chapter written by geographer Jack D. Ives in *Mountains: The Illustrated Library of the Earth*, a coffee-table book that presents the world's highlands from the pens of experts. Ives is editor of the volume.

Is complacency warranted—because of the supposed indestructibility of mountains—or should we give up in despair because mountain topsoil will all be washed into the oceans shortly after

the turn of the century and mountain decertification will prevail? Neither complacency nor despair is in order. The answer lies somewhere between the two extremes; in some mountain ranges the situation is close to crisis, whereas in others a healthy relationship between human activities and the environment seems to prevail...

Despair is not called for. Mountain environments and mountain peoples are far more resilient than is often believed. The word 'fragile' is overused and counter-productive. Mountain forests do grow back on their own, and mountain farmers, without government or international aid, do plant trees and tend them. Perhaps one of the most important needs is to recognise that mountain people can do much for themselves and have much to offer the world at large. After all, they have already provided us with potatoes, coffee, maize, and many domesticated animals; and there are indigenous crops as yet untapped commercially, such as quinoa, amaranth, and literally hundreds of species and varieties of tubers and leaf vegetables.

Mountains have been a major influence on the human mind since our ancestors first looked up to them and gloried in their splendour, placed their gods and goddesses among them, and accepted their challenges. They continue to inspire a large sector of society—an inspiration that is greatly needed today. Perhaps the so-called new world order will become a reality as the Cold War and superpower competition fade from memory. Then perhaps the mountain problems can be wisely and effectively addressed. This will never come about, however, until the mountain issue is clearly identified and until mountain people, scholars, and decision-makers are working together on a fully international scale.

CULTURE QUIZ in *Culture Shock* by Jon Burbank ("A guide to customs and etiquette of Nepal", *Times Book International*, 1994) contains a test section which challenges travellers to get under the skin of the natives. Below is "Situation 5", with commentary.

The office storekeeper on your construction project is discovered stealing from the project—about 100 bags of cement and some tools are missing and have been traced back to him. You call in your excellent Nepali project manager and ask him to start placing police charges against the storekeeper. A week later, when you ask what's happened, you are amazed to hear your manager hem and haw before he admits nothing has happened. Maybe, he says, it's just better to let the storekeeper go and forget about things.

You ask your Nepali program officer. He doesn't give a direct answer, but just says what a difficult process arresting and prosecuting someone is. The storekeeper has a wife and three small children, he adds, and the cement

is long since gone, too. You:

A. Call in the police yourself and ask them to arrest the storekeeper and you start to investigate the program officer and project manager yourself.

B. Have the storekeeper arrested and bring in a new expat as boss above the Nepali project manager.

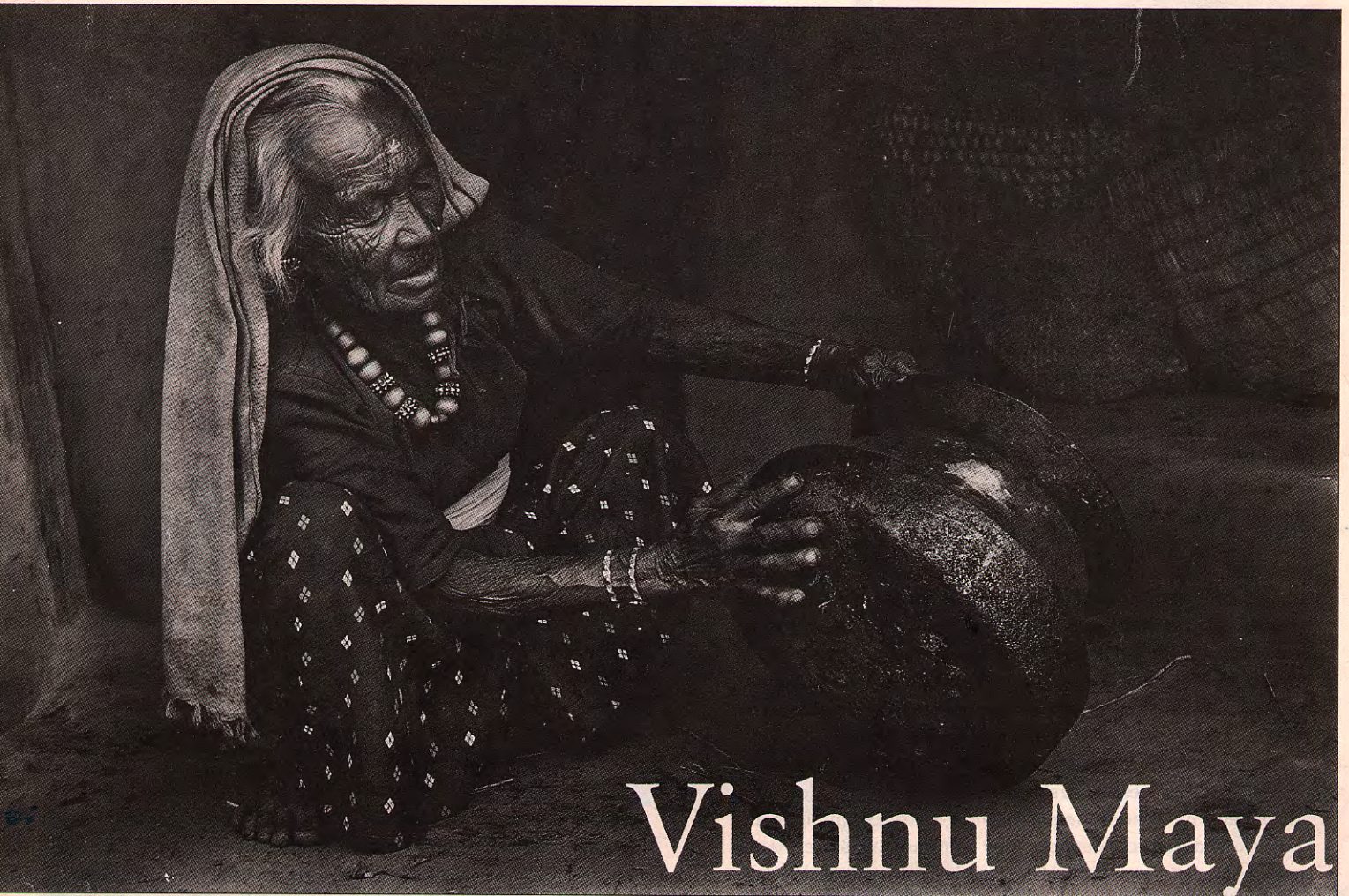
C. Call in your Nepali project and program officers and ask for their recommendations. They recommend giving the storekeeper a chance to replace the missing stock and dismissing him if he can't. They say give him a month to do it, you say a week. Everybody agrees on two weeks.

Comment: The large amounts of aid coming into Nepal are a temptation some people succumb to. Corruption can be a problem. With the large amounts of materials used in aid projects, it isn't uncommon for some of them to disappear into other people's homes. A tight inventory control system will help remove some of the temptation.

Nepalis are very reluctant to press charges for several reasons. You can never tell where the case will lead to. The trail could lead to government staff or politicians who could make it very difficult to finish the project. Jails in Nepal are not pleasant and neither is being in police custody. Locking the storekeeper in jail puts extreme hardship on his whole family. In cases where their own money or safety is not involved, Nepalis are very reluctant to inflict that on somebody else.

You hurt yourself and your office if you call the police without exhausting all other possibilities first. No one will trust that they can speak in confidence to you anymore. Option B doesn't get the cement back and everyone in the office will resent the lack of faith you show in your Nepali staff. With C, at least everyone will see you are giving the storekeeper a fair chance, even if you don't get the cement back. The storekeeper, with no job, no chance of a recommendation, and three kids and a wife to support, is being punished fairly severely, anyway.





Vishnu Maya in Amrika

IN 1973, WHEN BROUGHTON COBURN arrived as a Peace Corps volunteer in the village of Danda, a day's walk south of Pokhara town, he lodged in a loft provided by Vishnu Maya Gurung. She became his 'Nepali Aama' and he, her adopted American son. In 1988, 84-year-old Vishnu Maya agreed to make a trip to the United States with Coburn. Travelling coast-to-coast through 25 states, along the way Vishnu Maya met Mickey Mouse, California Redwoods, Old Faithful, Native Americans, an orca whale, Mid-Western farmers, and curious children.

Coburn might or might not have done right in exposing an elderly Himalayan village woman to such a surfeit of alien stimuli, but the images of Vishnu Maya in America are a unique record of a Nepali woman's odyssey. (See book review on page 23.) Back in her village, Vishnu Maya died a couple of years after her Amrika trip.

"So much stuff is for sale—where are all the people to buy it? Maybe word hasn't yet travelled that a bazaar has been set up here."



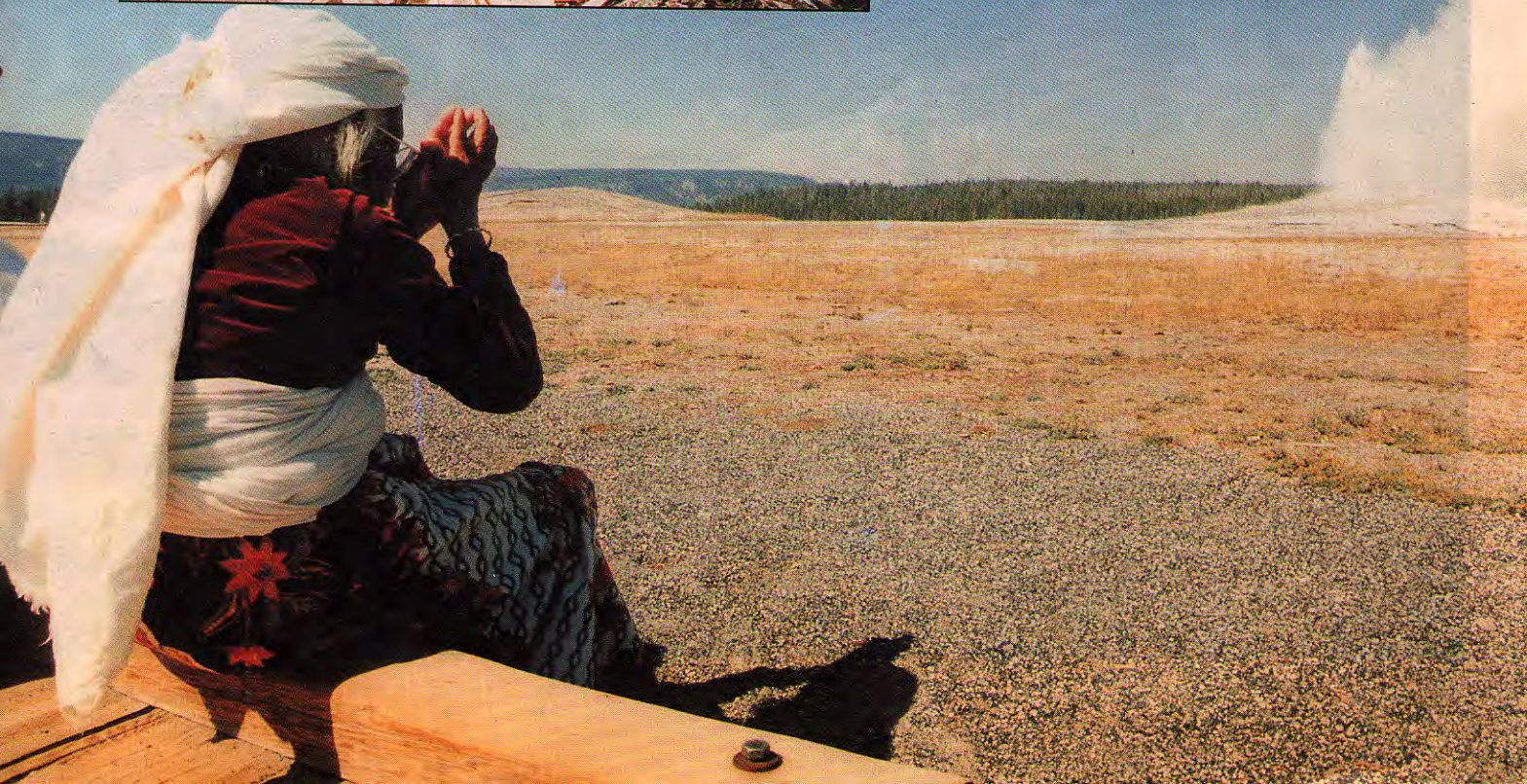


"May you be healthy, have many children, live to be a hundred years old, and live in peace and harmony with all the fish and animals of the sea. May you not eat people—and not be eaten by people—but rather find plenty of smaller fish to feed on..."



"It is a sin to leave grain on the ground to rot like this—whole ears being trampled by machines meant to harvest it. We pick up every single kernel when we see it spilled or left on the ground. The land here is crying..."

"If your ancestors knew what was underneath the ground—here and throughout America—this generation shows no indication of that knowledge. This place should have a shrine."





"Are you selling all of this? This looks like a shop front."



With Broughton Coburn in Seattle.

A well-deserved rest with family friends.



Doring Revisited



A prehistoric site of megaliths was discovered in Tibet's Chang Thang in the 1920s. A traveller who goes in search of it seventy years later comes up with chortens, and more chortens. What had happened?

by John Vincent Bellezza

Tibet is a land that popular imagination has associated with magic and mystery. Even at an age when science dominates and the frontiers of the planet are clearly delineated, Tibet still shrouds a number of mysteries. This is nowhere more true than in the field of prehistory. While the first Tibetan historical documents, the Dunhuang manuscripts, date back to the 8th century, the Tibetan human legacy extends deep into the stone age. Bronze, Neolithic, Mesolithic and Palaeolithic sites have been discovered scattered across Tibet, from Ngari in the far west to Kham and Amdo in the east.

One of the first scholars to explore the prehistory of Tibet was George Roerich, the Russian-born son of the famous painter Nicholas Roerich. Between 1925 and 1928, George Roerich embarked on an ambitious journey to survey the prehistoric sites in the nomadic areas of the Asian hinterland. He mounted expeditions in search of prehistoric monuments to the Altai, Mongolia, Eastern Turkestan and Tibet. A major objective of these journeys, which together came to be known as the "Central Asiatic Expedition", was to explore "nomad barrows" (barrow = ancient grave mound).

Among the extensive discoveries of Roerich were 'slab graves' in Mongolia and

Namru in the Chang Thang, and the widespread incidence of a genre of ornamentation found throughout the nomadic regions in Central and North Asia which Roerich called the "Central Asian Animal Style". In addition, his expeditions discovered megaliths in Mongolia and on the Chang Thang.

Megalithic sites have also been located in Tibet by David Snellgrove, Giuseppe Tucci and Sonam Wangdu, but none have matched the spectacular site discovered by Roerich in 1928, in Namru, about 300 km northwest of Lhasa. Discovery of this site, at a place called Doring, became the crowning achievement of the Central Asiatic Expedition, which had

already accomplished so much groundbreaking work in archaeology and ethnology. In 1930, Roerich published a monograph with the Seminarium Kondakovianum, entitled "The Animal Style among the Nomad Tribes of Northern Tibet", describing the striking megalithic site of Doring. In the monograph, Roerich wrote:

"The expedition...was fortunate in discovering several megalithic monuments to the south of the Great Lakes. These were the first megalithic monuments discovered north of the Himalayas. In a place called Doring, situated some 30 miles to the south of the Great Salt Lake Pangon tsho-cha, the expedition found important alignments consisting of 18 rows of stone slabs or menhirs, placed in parallel rows and running East and West. At the Western extremity of the alignment, was placed a cromlech or stone circle consisting of two concentric circles of menhirs or stone slabs. Inside the cromlech were situated three menhirs with a crude stone-table (lhatho) or altar in front of them. The central menhir was some 2.75 metres in height, had traces of butter libations, and I was told by a local headman that the stone was the abode of a lha or god protecting the route and travellers. The place is named Doring, after this menhir. The headman considered the alignments to be natural formations. If one compares the famous megalithic monuments of Carnac in France with the megaliths discovered in Tibet, one is at once struck by the remarkable similarity of the two sets of monuments. The Carnac alignments run from east to west and have at their Western extremity a cromlech or circle of stones. The Doring monuments have precisely the same arrangement."

Zhangmo Gonpa

Upon reading this account of Doring, this writer became excited with the idea of visiting the site and carefully documenting it. The thought of a megalithic site in Chang Thang resembling another in the north of France was intriguing, and Doring was well worth a trip. As a traveller and writer of Tibet, I also hoped by visiting Doring to

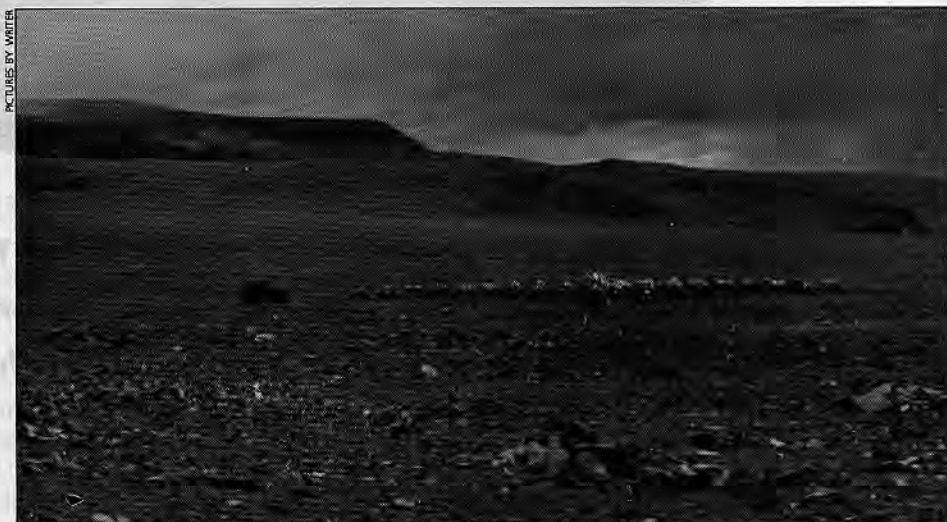
come to a better understanding of the ancient origins of Tibetan civilisation.

To my knowledge, no Westerner had visited the Doring site since George Roerich first discovered it nearly 70 years ago. I only hoped that it had withstood the ravages of the Cultural Revolution. Roerich had believed that Doring was a kind of temple used by a "native cult". With the strides made by Tibetan studies in the fields of archaeology, mythology, religion and cosmology since Roerich's time, it should be possible to present a more detailed picture of Doring.

On 7 May 1994, I left Katmandu overland for Tibet with full expeditionary gear and research materials. In Lhasa, I sought out and met Sonam Wangdu, Director of the Administrative Commission for Museums and Archaeology Data in the Tibetan Autonomous Region, and Adjunct

which includes an account of the discovery of Doring. This book would serve as my guide to rediscover Doring. The 1928 expedition, with fully laden camels and yaks, headed in a westerly direction from the capital of Namru Province called Namru Dzong, which is today the county seat of Palgon. Armed with the geographic data encapsulated in Roerich's detailed work, I too arrived in Palgon, and set out to find Doring.

I travelled alone on foot, quite a contrast to Roerich's heavily laden expedition, but very effective in terms of the distance one can cover. Travelling solo, I found, also facilitated contact with the drokpa, the nomads of the Chang Thang plateau. Following the directions given in *Trails in Innermost Tibet*, I skirted the northwest corner of Namtsho lake, passed the drokpa settlement of Shungchen, and made it to the



The patch to the right of the jeep constitutes the hundred cairns of Chorten Gyapa.

Professor in the History Department of Sichuan University. Wangdu, who is recognised as the foremost authority on the archaeology of Tibet, told me that there were megalithic sites in Saga and Nagarze counties as well as in Lhatse and Nagtshang, but that he was not familiar with one called Doring, nor with any megaliths south of the Pangong and Ziling lakes. He did not have knowledge of Roerich's work and its reference to Doring. I reasoned that Doring could have been discovered by a mapping team and never reported to the archaeological establishment.

In 1931, George Roerich published *Trails in Innermost Tibet* (Yale University Press),

Bonpo enclave of Potshe, with its landmark blue-grey mountain with a flat top. Arriving on the northern shores of Churu Tsho (Coral Lake), which until the Chinese invasion of Tibet had supported several Bonpo hermitages, I followed Zhang Chu upstream. Climbing up a small pass called Marokhumchen La, I had an excellent view of the snow giant Nyechenhang Lha, 85 km to the south-east. I was now in the Zhang Chu basin, utterly enveloped by the vast Chang Thang landscape.

I figured my best chance of reaching Doring was to seek guidance at the Zhangmo Gonpa, which by correlating Roerich's route descriptions with my maps I estimated was

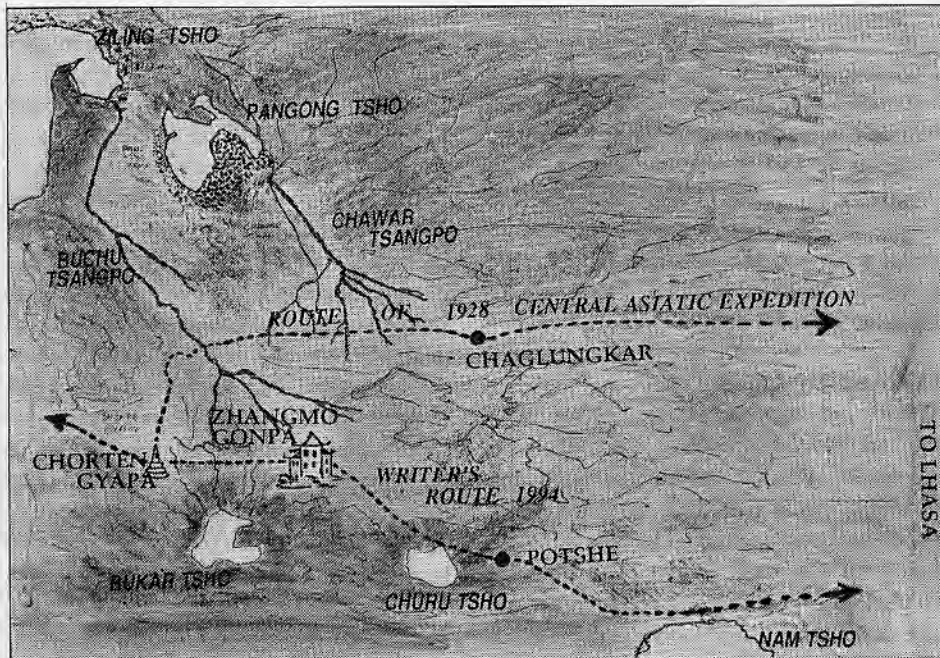
no more than 40 km east of Doring—a short distance on the Chang Thang.

Zhangmo is a Nyingmapa monastery that is in the process of being rebuilt. The two young reincarnate lamas of Zhangmo, Lama Gochen and Lama Gochung, were welcoming and patiently answered all my questions. I was disappointed to learn that they did not know of the existence of a site such as the one described by Roerich. Not only was an authority like Sonam Wangdu in Lhasa unaware of Doring, but the same was the case here in the very area where Doring is supposed to be, with two of the most knowledgeable men of the region.

Over the course of the day, Lama Gochen and Lama Gochung summoned drokpas from the area to inquire about Doring, a supposed complex of menhirs laid out in rows and circles, they explained to the locals. With utmost deference, the lay folk would approach the two tulkus and humbly insist on their ignorance about Doring. That evening, the two lamas confronted me and stated that positively no such place, nor any complex of menhirs, existed thereabouts. Lama Gochung then added, as an aside, "Remember when you came I said that you must have come looking for Guru Rinpoche's Chorten Gyapa?"

I was perplexed. I had located the rivers and valleys and other landmarks which led the way to Doring, but Doring itself seemed to have vanished into the rarefied Chang Thang air. Still, having come this distance, it would be interesting to visit Chorten Gyapa.

The next morning, the two reincarnate lamas, three attendants and myself squeezed into a Chinese-made jeep and headed westward across a bone-rattling plain, towards Chorten Gyapa. Leaving the Zhangmo basin, we entered the Burkar lake basin. To the north of our line of travel was a distinctive granite ridgeline, which surely was the "granite massif" circumvented by Roerich. On its summit are five pinnacles called Khadrode-Nga Choechen, "The Mountain of the Blissful Five Dakinis of the Great Dharma". This is the most obvious landmark of the vicinity. We then entered a narrow valley, described by Roerich as "sheltered by undulating hills". Precisely where Doring was to have been, was where Chorten Gyapa was located.



The paths taken by Roerich and writer Bellezza.

Megaliths and Chortens

Chorten Gyapa, "One Hundred Chortens", consists of a hundred cairns (called *laptse* in Tibetan) in ten rows of ten. Each cairn is built of flat rocks heaped together with a small slab of rock sticking out of the top. The upper sections of the cairns are whitewashed. There is a central cairn which is built like the others but is bigger, almost three meters tall. It is surmounted by a vertical stone projecting half a meter beyond. Prayer flags are strung from it to adjoining cairns, and yak horns and yarn are placed on its side as votive offerings.

Lama Gochung explained the significance of Chorten Gyapa to me. Each of the 100 cairns represents a bead of Guru Rinpoche's *mala*. The central cairn represents the *bindu*, or largest bead, of the mala. One day, a *srinmo* or ogress living in Burkar Tsho threatened to flood the entire region and displace the encamped drokpa. The locals, who were at the mercy of the *srinmo*, sought help from Guru Rinpoche, Padmasambhava, the tantric adept and exorcist. Guru Rinpoche agreed to help the besieged people and travelled to Burkar Tsho. He neutralised the power of the *Srinmo* by determining where the heart or life-force of the ogress was located. It happened to be where Chorten Gyapa now stands. The small hills on either side of Chorten Gyapa are the *srinmo*'s breasts, hence called Numari ("Breast Mountain").

Guru Rinpoche, with the assistance of his tutelary deities, bound the ogress to the earth by pinning her heart down. This he accomplished by striking his mala on the ground which magically was transformed into the hundred cairns of Chorten Gyapa. From that time on, the *srinmo*, representing one of the many malevolent forces subdued by Guru Rinpoche in Tibet, could cause no more harm to the drokpa. One of the most important Guru Rinpoche sites of Namru, Chorten Gyapa was nevertheless overlooked by the Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution because they regarded it as worthless and remote.

The story of the ogress and local beliefs notwithstanding, geographic evidence suggests that Chorten Gyapa is the site of Doring. The location of key landmarks, valleys, passes, rivers and lakes leaves no doubt that this was the location identified by Roerich in 1928. The field data I have compiled on the geography of Chorten Gyapa correlates with the physical and cultural data derived from the U.S. Defence Agency 1:50,000 Tactical Pilotage charts, as well as the Tibetan language maps published by the Chinese. The evidence is irresistible; Doring is Chorten Gyapa. However, by no stretch of imagination does Chorten Gyapa resemble a megalithic site. Here there were no cromlechs, menhirs or circles of stone as per Roerich's description. Furthermore, the chorten complex is conceived as a unit of 100

cairns. It is not round with rows of upright stones radiating out. Also, Chorten Gyapa is built of small stones, each of which could be handled by a single man, and there is no evidence of the monolithic stones which Roerich describes. Though Doring and Chorten Gyapa occupy the same geographic coordinates, they share little resemblance. What happened to Roerich's megalithic site?

Mic-hos, Lha-chos

There is only one explanation. Sometime in the last 70 years, Doring was purposely altered to create Chorten Gyapa. Using the old megaliths as the root stones at their base, the drokpas of the region built the hundred cairns of Chorten Gyapa. The original character of what might have been a stone age site has been altered to the point of being unrecognisable. In order to invest new meaning and significance into Doring, the site was transformed into a testament of Guru Rinpoche's magical powers and prowess. The haunts of a local aboriginal deity was elaborated upon to better conform with the tenets of Vajrayana

Buddhism. The architecture and mythology was altered.

The process of legend-building around Padmasambhava and his exploits is something that has gone on for 1300 years. In the complex set of factors that come into play, at some juncture, the Guru Rinpoche connotation of the Doring site, related to a more 'modern religion', eclipsed the more primitive layer of beliefs. This is a process evident elsewhere in Tibet as well, where the *mi-chos*, the religion of the people, or folk religion with its aboriginal aspects, is eclipsed by the more organised modern *lha-chos*. It was Guru Rinpoche who was instrumental in taming the chaotic terrestrial forces which inhabited the landscape and who tamed these elemental forces and brought order to the world, which led to the spread of Vajrayana Buddhism. This victory of one force over the other also seems to have occurred in Doring as well, in the way cairns have overwhelmed the megaliths.

There is no question of fraud or misrepresentation on the part of Roerich, for the site was photographed by his team.

This is a case of planned and purposeful modification of the architectural character of an ancient monument by those who set about building the hundred cairns.

How many other such prehistoric monuments may have been effaced, not by the ravages of time nor the violence of the Cultural Revolution, but by the overweening efforts of the Tibetans themselves, to rewrite their history in order to bring it more in line with Vajrayana orthodoxy? This is an important question if we are to better understand how cultures remould themselves, reflecting changing conditions and values. At some time, someone made a decision that Doring should be more than the dwelling place of an aboriginal deity. Through this effort, the hold of Buddhism on Tibet has increased by a small measure, but at the same time a vital link of the people to their ancient history was obliterated.

J. V. Bellezza is a traveller of the Western Himalaya and Tibet.

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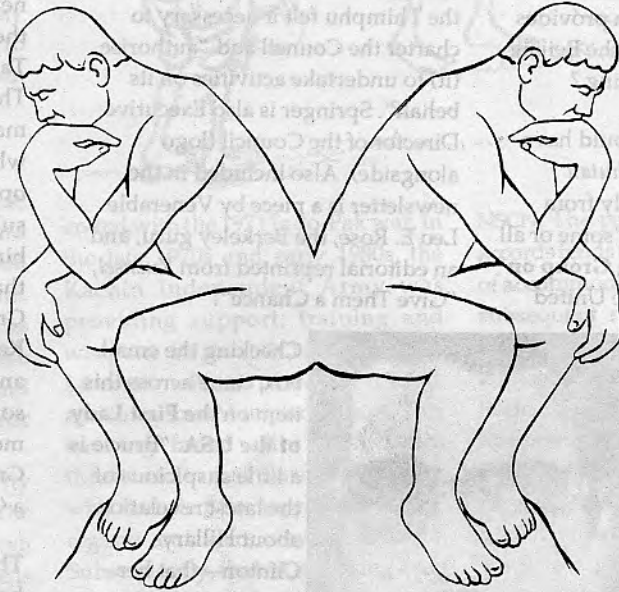
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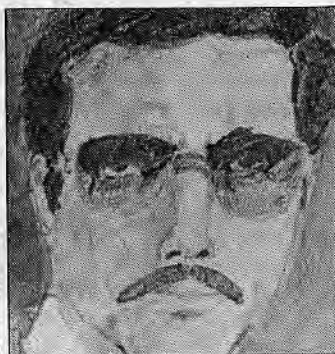
शुभम स्वस्तिम्

In Meghalaya, the Association for the Reformation of the Family Structure is fighting a **reverse gender battle**, campaigning to change the traditionally matrilineal Khasi society into a patrilineal one, reports *The Indian Express*. Claims the Association, "The Khasi men have to fight for equal opportunity with women. Here the women have all the rights and opportunities." Predicatably, the Meghalaya Women's Alliance pooh-poohs the campaign, claiming that the existing matrilineal system provides for "genetic perfection". Is the Beijing women's conference listening?

Here is something that should have made the headlines. *The Bhutan Review*, the refugee monthly from Kathmandu, has accused "some or all members" of the **Working Group on Arbitrary Detention** of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, of "connivance and complicity" with the Government of Bhutan when it decided that the detention of Amnesty International Prisoner of Conscience Tek Nath Rizal was not "arbitrary". The Working Group also decided that "there is nothing to suggest that the trial of Tek Nath Rizal was not fair and in derogation of acceptable international standards." For the information of the three committee members—made up of a Frenchman, an Indian and a Senegalese—the refugee journal points out that Rizal was abducted from Nepali territory, that Rizal was punished retroactively on the basis of legislation enacted years after he was put in prison, and that the legal system of Bhutan by no stretch of the imagination can be said to be at par with "international standards". The editors claim that they have no choice but to believe that the Committee members have received a payoff.

For those who think they have been too much **Bhutan bashing** and not enough propagandising on behalf of

Druk Yul, comes a new quarterly newsletter, *The Thunder Dragon*, published by the American-Bhutan Council (founded 1993), which is based in Ojai, California. It is a handsomely produced effort, with lots of black and white pictures, and includes an article "Bhutan Deals with Difficult Problem" by Editor-in-Chief Karl Springer which makes clear why the Thimphu felt it necessary to charter the Council and "authorise (it) to undertake activities on its behalf". Springer is also Executive Director of the Council (logo alongside). Also included in the newsletter is a piece by Venerable Leo E. Rose, the Berkeley guru, and an editorial reprinted from *Kuensel*, "Give Them a Chance".



Checking the email-box, came across this item on the **First Lady of the USA**: "Bruce is a little suspicious of the latest revelation about Hillary Clinton—that her mother named her after Sir Edmund Hillary. He points out that Hillary was born

in '47, whereas Hillary didn't hit his peak till '53." A witticism accompanies the sign-off, unrelated to Hillary: Question: "Is that Sherpa Tenzing?" Answer: "Looks perfectly relaxed to me!"

A documentary film, *The Kashmir Story*, apparently hangs in limbo due to trembling hands over at *Doordarshan*. Made by cinematographer-couple Gopal Sharman and Jalabala Vaidya, the film probes the history of insurgency in the Valley and describes the sufferings and aspirations of all—Sunni, Shia, Hindu and Buddhist, with the camera crew travelling from Jammu to Banihal to Leh and Kargil and all corners of the Valley. Already said to have been cleared by the Indian Foreign and Home ministries and by the all-

powerful "PMO", Door-darshan should show some guts and air the film.

There are some who dream of a Greater Nepal, while there are others who are working for a **Greater Nagaland**. *The Telegraph* reports that some Nagas of Nagaland would like to incorporate into their state the Naga-inhabited areas of neighbouring Manipur, particularly the four hill districts of Ukhrul, Tamenglong, Chandel and Senapati. The Kuki minority as well as the majority Meitei of Manipur, meanwhile and understandably, are firmly opposed to the idea. While still on the subject of greater this or that, little bird that flew in from Leh tells me that Ladakhis too have an eye for a Greater Ladakh, to include Leh and Kargil, certainly, but also Himachal and (no!) Tibet. Now, *that* will require some serious geopolitical realignment. There will probably be a Greater Maldives before there will be a Greater Ladakh.

The **Indian Army** has suddenly become a protector not only of Bharatbarosa, but also of traditional Tibetan medicine as practised by the amchis of Ladakh. The Army has embarked on a project to study herbal medicine in the Ladakh region for possible application in treating soldiers of high altitude illness, reports *The Times of India*. The study is headed by Maj. Gen. Vombatkere, the Additional Directory General (Directorate of Vigilance), who had this to say: "Patenting this indigenous system is necessary since it could be under threat from some interested multi-nationals in the wake of the recently signed World Trade Organisation Agreement". The study that the General heads forms part of the Great Himalayan Expedition (HIMEX), which is "a multi-national, multi-dimensional and multi-disciplinary adventure conceived by the Army with the larger aim of developing an understanding of the ecology and

adventure potential of the Himalayan range." Ambitious.

According to the *Agence France Presse*, the Communist Party of China has picked an **ethnic Han Chinese** man as Tibet's model hero. On 21 March, the *Tibet Daily* called on the people of Tibet to follow the example of Kong Fansin, a party official originally from the eastern Shangong province and former mayor of Lhasa, who died in a car crash in December 1994. The daily noted that "by modesty, integrity, hard work and devotion, he is an example to all cadres in Tibet and a symbol of the unity of all of China's races." Somewhat like holding up John Wayne as the paragon of virtues for Native Americans to emulate.

Did you know of the existence of a **Council of North Indian States for Cooperation and Regional Development**, which even has its own cute acronym—CONCORD? Tired of the Central Government's disinterestedness, the five states of Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh and Delhi have banded together to forge an inter-India common market. They plan to coordinate inter-state highways, set up a transportation grid, cooperate on tourism circuits, optimise water resource management, promote cross-border economic growth, etc. etc. If the Europeans can do it, why can't the North Indians, as long as they do not forget to take the Himalayan region along for the ride. May CONCORD push the throttle and take off like the Concorde!

What to make of the *Xinhua* news item which states that "scientists have discovered some **3500 species** of plants in a virgin forest in south-eastern Tibet"? Do they mean that these previously known plants have now been discovered in this virgin area, or that these are 3500 newly discovered species? Must be the former. The report is ominous when it states that the virgin forest has "a living timber reserve of 1.5 billion

cubic meters, making it the second largest forest in China". Even a news report on a scientific subject is written with an eye of "timber reserves" and don't we all know about Chengdu's timber merchants and how they have raped the rest of Tibet's woodlands. Please spare this one corner!



Speaking of which (Greater Nepal), Chhetria Patrakar noticed that several Indian papers have recently carried photographs of demonstrations by **Indians of Nepali origin** in New Delhi. Now here is a community that seems to feel that it has spent enough time in the doghouse and is finally testing its vocal chords. Their demand is to be recognised as full-fledged Indians and not as surrogate Nepalis of Nepal. A picture in *The Telegraph* showed women activists of the All-India Nepalese Unity Society demanding "redressal of their grievances".

Some treacly verbiage I picked up from a press handout distributed by Pakistan International Airlines about its **Air Safari**, which is described elsewhere in this magazine: "The invincible majesty, the irrevocable beauty, the awesome splendour of one of Nature's grandest feats—the snow-capped peaks, in all their glory and grandeur, provide one of the most moving and awe-inspiring moments of your lives. A close visual, though intangible, contact with the manifestations of Nature is a mystifying, mystical, experience—that transcends



one from the peripheral to the spiritual." Clearly, lines written by a plainsman copywriter!

As the column goes to press, the Dalai Lama has named the new Panchen Lama, and he is six-year-old **Tenzing Gedhun Yeshe Thrinley Phuntsog Pal Saggio** from Lhari district in Nagchu province. The previous incarnation passed away in January 1989. The good news is that the reincarnation has been located firmly within Tibet and not in some new age family in Seattle or Madrid. Now comes the part where one bites one's nails and nervously wonders, "What will the Chinese say?" For his part, the Dalai Lama says, "It is my hope that the Chinese government will extend its understanding, cooperation and assistance to the Tashi Lhunpo monastery in enabling Rinpoche to receive proper religious training and to assume his spiritual responsibilities."

Saw this plug for a **Kailash trek** in the 16 May *Times of India*, which presents Indian pilgrims ("whether you are young or old") with a Delhi-Kathmandu-Kailash itinerary for IRs



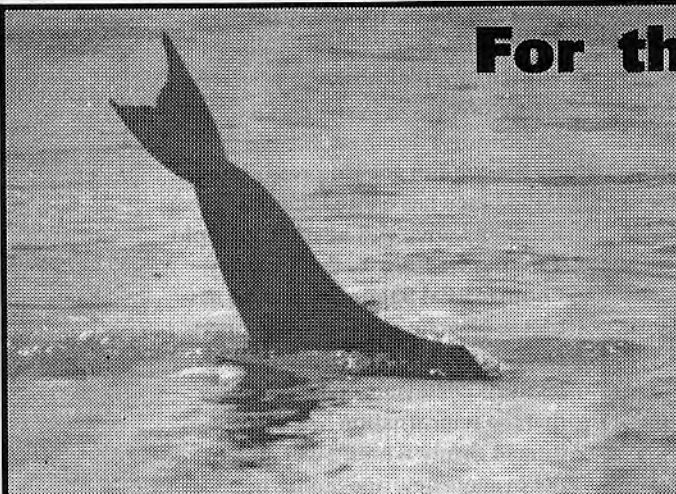
46,666. The trip is organised by Vishnu International Tours, whereas you and I know that it would have been better if the deity

were Shiva. For the first time ever, the ad succeeds in presenting Mount Kailash as if it were shaped like a beehive turned upside down. And, by the way, what is that logo of

Vishnu International all about? A fighter plane—looks like a Mig 21—being tagged by an arrow, which could only be a ground to air missile. Is this a coded insert? Am I missing something?

- Chhetria Patrakar

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Karakoram Sky Dance

For those who thought only Royal Nepal Airlines and its private sector siblings in Nepal conducted mountain flights, there is some news. Since August 1993, Pakistan International Airlines has been conducting "air safari" flights over the Karakoram.

Unlike Nepal's turbo-prop Avros and Dorniers, which fly lower and slower, PIA uses its Boeing 737-300 jets to wing it over the Karakoram. Taking off from Islamabad's airport, the plane banks northwards, following the Indus River and the Karakoram Highway straight into the mountain country.

Before you know it, the plane is overflying the Northern Areas, and the steep ramparts of Nanga Parbat (8125m) come up astride the starboard windows. This is where the serious business begins. The pilot banks the plane to the right and heads straight for the Baltoro Glacier and the distinctive pyramid of Mount K2 (8611m) which lies at its head. The mountain, still 200 km away standing on the frontier with China, is already visible.

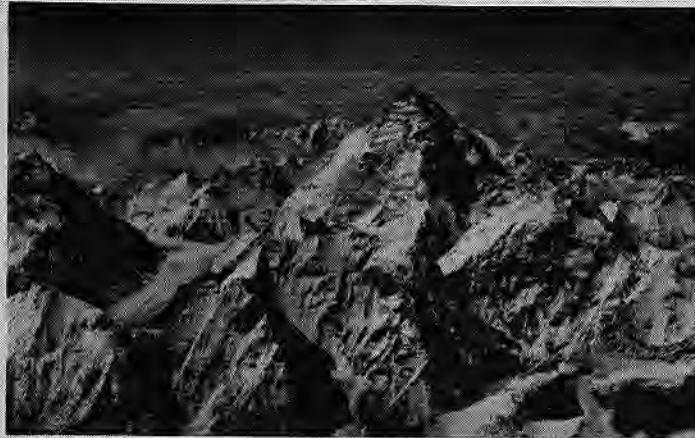
After turning the corner at Nanga Parbat, the pilot begins an hour-long figure-of-eight which will regale passengers on both sides with breathtaking vistas of the hallowed peaks of the Karakoram and their attendant glaciers: Mashherbum (7831m), Rakaposhi (7788m), The Ogre (7300m), Chogolisa (7400m), Mustagh Tower (7284), and the Gasherbum group that huddles close to K2. PIA's Boeing has been known to fly

within 1.5 km to K2's summit, close enough to spot mountaineers, whereas the mountain

have selected ensure that passengers on both sides benefit. (In the Everest

valleys whose names are straight out of the books of colonial adventurers: Hunza, Chilas, Astor, Skardu... To the north, where the mountains give away to an undulating yellowness in the horizon, lies the Taklamakan desert of Western China. Beyond the Hindu Raj mountains in the northwest is the Wakhan Corridor where Pakistan, China, Afghanistan and [Tadjikistan] meet. And there, a couple of hundred kilometres away to west-west-north, stands Tirch Mir (7708km), the highest mountain of the Hindu Kush.

PIA's Air Safari charges US\$ 225 or PRs 6225 for a window seat. For those travelling together and willing to share a window, an aisle seat is sold for half the price. The flights take off at 10 a.m. every alternate Saturday.



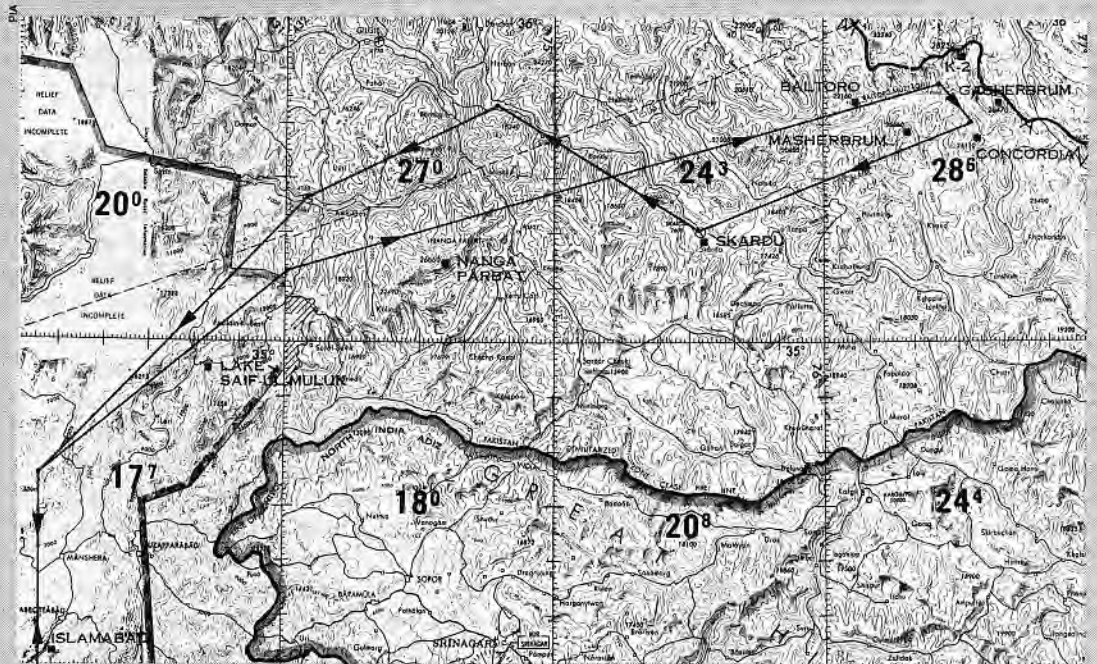
K-2 from 737.

flights in Nepal keep a respectful distance.

Unlike the one-sided view of the single-file Himalayan crest that is available in the ex-Kathmandu mountain flights, the Karakoram's scattered peak arrangement and the flight-path PIA's pilots

mountain flight, passengers on the starboard side have to wait for the return leg to view the line of peaks.)

After one has had one's fills of the mountains, it is time to look further afield. Beneath the fuselage, there is the progression of towns and



Flight path of Karakoram mountain flight.

Pot Profits Lost

Marijuana has become the United States' number one cash crop, reports the *New York Times Magazine*. If only Richard Nixon had not forced Nepal's government to make marijuana cultivation illegal back in the early 1970s, would Nepal's hill peasants be reaping great and legitimate profits from cannabis today?

In retrospect, all that has been achieved by the ban forced on Nepal is that what was legal became illegal in a remote Himalayan kingdom while the consumer demand for grass in the great consuming nation never dipped. Rather than import from the far pot-growing corners of the world, cannabis cultivation went domestic.

US President Bill Clinton might have claimed on the campaign trail that he had "smoked but never inhaled" pot, but his contemporaries and the following generation did not abandon marijuana. In fact, they helped make the plant what it is today, a genetically engineered breed that would stand as an example of efficiency of the free market, were it not illegal.

According to writer Michael Pollan, 20 years ago virtually all the marijuana consumed in the US was imported. "Today, thanks in no small part to the Federal war on drugs (which prevented imports), American marijuana cultivation has developed to the point where the potency, quality and consistency of the domestic product are considered as good as, if not better than any in the world. In an era of global competition, the rise

of a made-in-America marijuana industry is one of the most striking economic success stories of the 1980s and 1990s."

From a hobby of aging hippies, pot farming has burgeoned into a high-tech cottage industry with earnings estimated at US\$ 31 billion a year. "That makes it easily the nation's biggest cash crop," writes Pollan. Corn is the next largest cash crop at US\$ 14 billion, and soybean is next at US\$ 11 billion.

At first, American growers were familiar with only one kind of marijuana, *Cannabis sativa*, a strain that could not stand the cold northern climate. By the late 1970s, however, they had discovered *Cannabis indica*, a stout, frost-tolerant species cultivated for centuries by



NEW YORK TIMES

Himalayan peasants. American growers were soon producing hybrids of the two plants, hardy as well as providing good flavour.

All in all, what seems to have happened is that the

profits from a plant which was reared and nurtured for thousands of years by the South has been cornered by (illegal) growers of the North. Did anyone say *Intellectual Property Rights*?

They Love to Hate Swidden

India's bureaucracy continues to buy the colonial myth that shifting cultivation, a traditional farming practice among forest dwellers in much of South Asia, is an unsustainable practice that should be eradicated. India's draft Conservation and Natural Ecosystems Act, proposed in 1994, seeks to give more teeth to the prohibitory powers of forest officers to help curb shifting agriculture.

The draft legislation, essentially built upon earlier acts of 1878 and 1927 left behind by the British when the understanding of forests and forest peoples was still

rudimentary, ignores a large body of scientific findings which defend *ghum*, or swidden, agriculture. Work by eminent Indian ecologists such as P.S. Ramakrishnan seems to have made no impact with the foresters who drafted the Act.

Historically, the Mughal, Maratha and other rulers of India were content with collecting tributes from tribal and forest people. The forests themselves had little value. However, the advent of the British Raj and the railways transformed trees into vital raw material. It was about this time that, conveniently, the exploitation of tribal lands was begun by propagating

the myth of the ill effects of *ghum*.

The colonial theories have now been sufficiently debunked by Indian ecologists, with a recent study by Ramakrishnan indicating that *ghum* even contributes to plant diversity. Indian scientists say that traditional forms of production like shifting cultivation hold critical lessons for the sustainable use of marginal lands. A total ban on swidden agriculture would be retrogressive, a message that should be sent to the devotees of British Raj in the forest bureaucracy.

(CSE-Down To Earth Feature Service)

Beijing Targets Dalai

The Chinese authorities have stepped up their campaign to discredit the Dalai Lama as a leader of Tibetan Buddhism, taking specific aim at his spiritual standing. In the past, fearful of rousing more anti-Chinese resentment in Tibet than already exists, Beijing had been content in deriding 'the Dalai Lama clique' and the 'splittists' of Dharamsala. However, it had tended to stop short of virulent personal attacks. That threshold now seems to have been passed.

Since April, Chinese television broadcasts in Tibet have accused the Dalai Lama of "blaspheming Buddhism, flagrant deceptiveness and demagoguery, and pretending to be a spiritual leader while actually being a separatist chieftain."

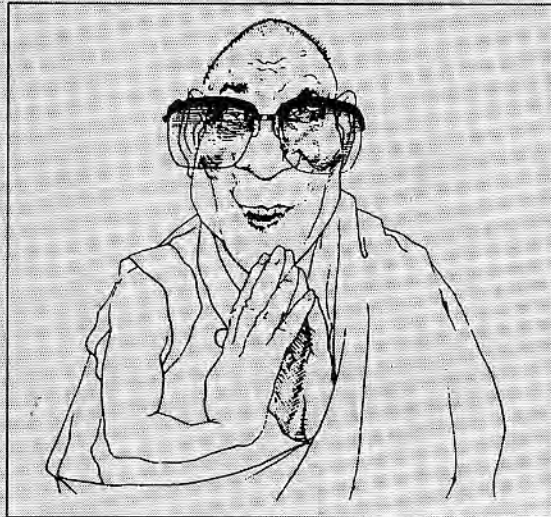
In reports carried simultaneously by the official *Tibet Daily*, the Dalai Lama was accused of 'forging' Buddhist texts, altering the teachings,

and violating the principles of Buddhism. At the National People's Congress session in Beijing in March, Raidi, the Chairman of the Tibet People's Congress Standing Committee, referred to the dual role of "political hooligan and spiritual leader" played by the Dalai Lama.

Recent articles in the *Tibet Daily* reveal official concern over the tendency of the population to equate Tibetan Buddhism with Tibetan nationalism, warning that such "erroneous concepts were gaining a following", especially among the young. "We must make a serious distinction between correct religious activities and counter-revolutionary activities under the cloak of reli-

gion," the paper said.

According to the London-based Tibet Information Network (TIN), Beijing's change of strategy to include



Political hooligan?

personal attacks on the Tenzin Gyatso, the Dalai Lama, were taken in July at a policy-making conference of the Third National Forum on Work in Tibet. TIN quoted an unidentified Tibetan party

member as saying: "The main spirit of the Third Forum is to... separate the Dalai Lama from Tibetan Buddhism."

As it evolves, the strategy seems to be to try and prove that the Gelugpa school which the Dalai Lama leads is not the leading sect among the four main sects of Tibetan Buddhism. And, as the word goes, even among the Gelugpa the Dalai Lama is only one of several leaders.

Attempts have been made to promote leaders of other sects as the spiritual leader of all Tibet: particularly the Karmapa, the 11-year-old leader of the Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism. The present Karmapa is considered to be the 17th incarnation in a line stretching back to the 12th century, while the present Dalai Lama is the 14th in a line going back to the 14th century.

- Yojana Sharma (IPS)



"Chyoputsering Himal" from Hanumane Bhanjyang. Bus riders are bound for Jiri to celebrate Tihar with their families. Picture by Chandra Shekhar Karki.

If 'Uncle Chips' Can Do It So Can Garhwali Women

A social action group called the Himalaya Environment Study and Conservation Organisation has been successfully using science to make villagers' lives easier in the Garhwal hills, reports the CSE-Down to Earth Feature Service. Established in 1979, HESCO has tried to introduce innovations that improve the living standards of Garhwalis without forcing the villagers to take a big leap away from their traditional practices.

At the hamlet of Gholtir, for instance, HESCO scientists modified the traditional *gharat* water mill to increase efficiency. A teflon bush was attached to the mill's shaft to increase the spin, and a flume reduces friction of the rushing water. "Earlier I used to grind 15 kg of wheat in an hour, but now I get double that," says Narayan Rana, the mill's operator.

"We do not want to impose alien technology on the villagers. We suggest best alternatives and let them decide on what they want," says Kiran Rawat, who modified the water mill at Gholtir.

HESCO's assistance goes beyond mere technofixes, however, and includes marketing support. Realising that the residents of Bilagarh were being cheated by middlemen of earnings from a bumper potato crop, the group trained Bilagarh's women

on the finer points of making potato chips. It also provided a packaging machine. Now Bilagarh's chips, priced at IRs 6 for a 100 gm pack against an input of IRs 20 per kg, are sold all over the region. Says Sangita Dhobhal, an active member of Bilagarh's *mahila mangal dal* (women's welfare group), "We are now in competition with Uncle Chips and Pepsi Foods!"

In Animath, an isolated village of 20 households which was not connected to the electricity grid, HESCO has put up a gasifier plant that generates 3.5 kw electricity out of briquettes (loose biomass converted into solid fuel by tamping). The gasifier was developed by the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Delhi, and the villagers have been trained to make briquettes and to run the gasifier.

In the same village, HESCO has shown the villagers the uses of rambans (*agave*), a commonplace thorny fibrous plant which has traditionally been considered useless other than to line field perimeters. Indira Devi Rawat, a weaver, now earns IRs 600 a month selling rambans fibre products.

Elsewhere, 12-year-old Kuldeep Singh Negi of Gwar village has learned how to grow mushrooms on the skin of the sully plant (*Wuiphorbia royleana*). In his first month of production, the boy gave IRs 45 to his mother, who was doubtless pleased with this turn of technology in the Garhwal hills.

PLACENAMES

by Sonam B. Wangyal

The Rice Country

In the last issue, we probed the possible origins of the term 'Sikkim'. We now study the 'native' names for Sikkim, both Lepcha and Tibetan.

As Waddell has it, "The aboriginies, the Lepchas, call it Nelyang or 'The Place of Caves', while the Tibetans call it Den-jong or Demo-jong, or 'The Country of Rice and Fruit' as it is a granary for bleak Tibet." Mainwaring, in his *Dictionary of the Lepcha Language* (1898), agrees, giving the *nomen proprium* as *Ne(-sa)lyan*, or 'the country of caves' (*Ne* = a place, a cave, a cavern; *lyan* = earth).

The Lepcha enthusiast, K.D. Tamang, the grammarian and lexicographer, in his book *The Unknown and Untold Story about the Lepchas* (1983) states, "This region was known in the ancient times by the name of Myel Lyang, which means 'the land of hidden paradise' or 'the delightful region or abode'". Similar views are also expressed by another Lepcha writer, Foning, in *Lepcha: My Vanishing Tribe* (1987), who equates *Myel Lyang* with the Garden of Eden. Meanwhile, the scholar Tapan Chattopadhyay (*Lepchas and Their Heritage*, 1983) incorporates almost everything into a lengthy tongue twister: *Nyemayel-ran-jong-lyang*.

The Tibetan name for Sikkim poses some problems because of the very complicated form of spelling used. The most commonly used Tibetan term is *De(n)jong*, which in Tibetan would be spelt as *hBres-ljongs* but other use *Gres-giogn* (Rev. Della Penna: 1717), *Bra-ma-scjon* (Van de Putte: 1730), and *Bras-jong* (Graham Sandberg: 1904). For those unfamiliar with Tibetan orthography, it is difficult to make sense out of Roman transliterations. As a sampler, consider Risley's remark: "The Tibetan names for Sikkim are pronounced Denjong, Demojong and Demoshong, though actually spelt *hBras-ljongs*, *lBras-ma-ljongs*, and *hBras-gShongs*, and mean 'The country or valley of rice'."

The Tibetan spelling is so confounding, one can sympathise with Sir Richard Temple, though not necessarily comply with his choice of spelling, when in *Travels in Nepal and Sikkim* (1887), he resorts to the rather inaccurate *Dinjing* and *Dinjang*. Nari Rustomji must be given the place of honour for brevity, accuracy and simplicity, when (in *Sikkim: A Himalayan Tragedy*, 1987) he simply states that the traditional name is *Denjong*, or 'Valley of Rice'.

Very recently, the Gorkha National Liberation Front's maverick leader Subhas Ghising lived up to his reputation of creating controversies by stating that the very name of Sikkim is "defective". So far, he has not elucidated on the matter and one can only presume that he means the name ought to have been *Sukhim* instead of *Sikkim* (see *Placenames*, Mar/Apr 1995). While Ghising does seem to have the uncanny genius of pulling out an ace from where none seems to exist, and till he enlightens us, suffice it to say that the last word has neither been spoken or written.

Dr. S.B. Wangyal practices medicine in Jaigaon, West Bengal.

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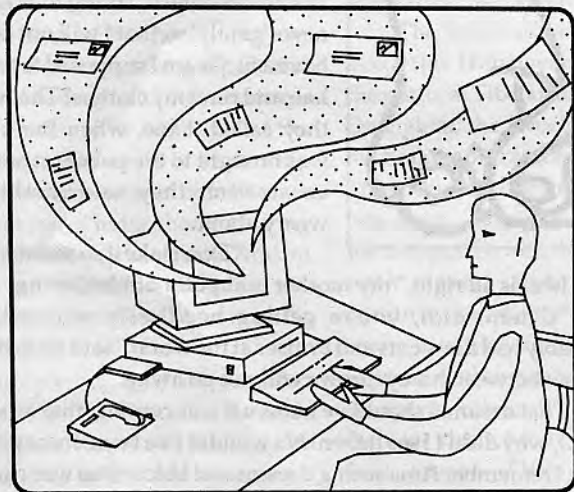
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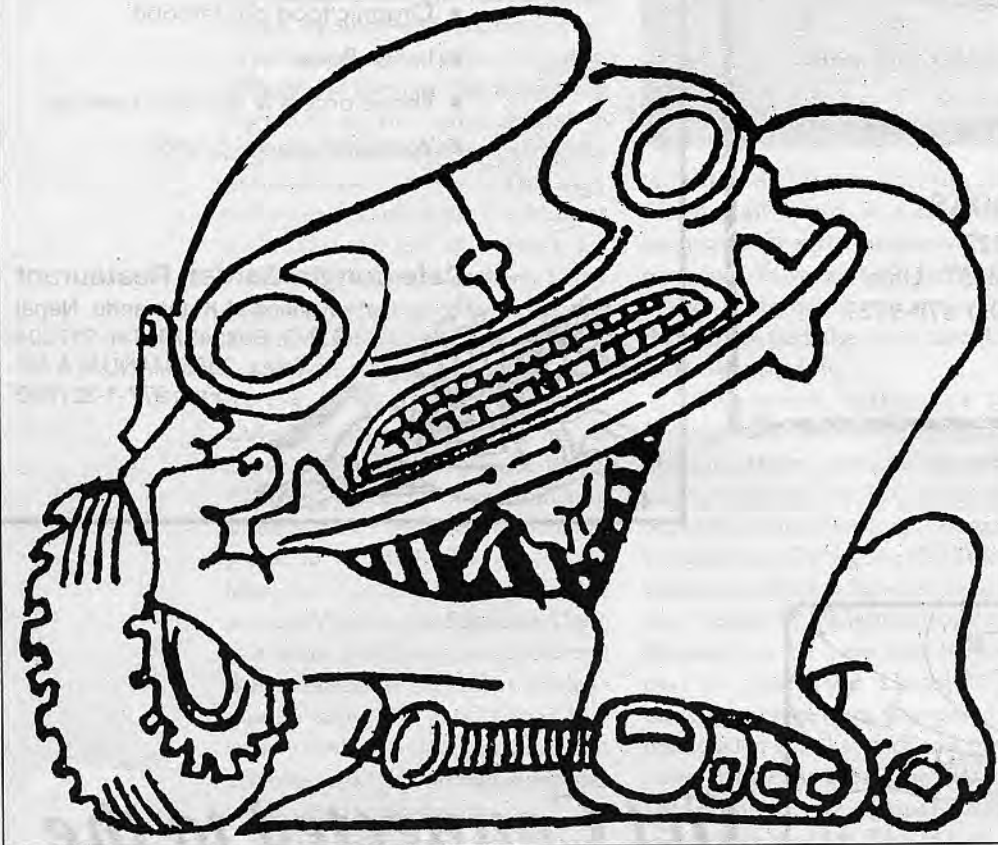
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J'Wai

by Anadi Pawan Chhetri



The dream haunted her. Several times, she caught herself thinking about it; in the middle of her cooking, her washing. But try as she might, she came no nearer to an understanding of her unease.

Vaguely she discerned that the root of it lay in the increasingly bitter quarrels that had begun. It was then that she had started seeing the dreams.

Kamala dreamt it again that night. She was standing with her daughter before the dark doorway of the house. Rohini slips from her grasp and runs in shouting Baba Baba, where are you! She runs after her. Inside, the walls are weeping and mouldy. She holds her struggling daughter fiercely, almost cruelly, as the windows swing open letting in a blast of wind; she can hear a howling outside, she flails at the window. Three black Ambassadors are crouched before the porch. Another snarls up, horn blaring, tires screeching; followed by another, and still another, until, as far as the eye can see, the ground is flooded by a sea of cars with steaming black bonnets.

Then she woke up.

I came home with the shopping. There is no one in the kitchen. My mother and the family were gathered in her bedroom. A wall of grave faces. I look my surprise.

"Ganesh phoned from Darjeeling; Jwai has met with an accident." The faces closed in.

Sympathetic arms fluttered about my shoulders, led me to a chair. Through the murmur of commiseration I make out the fragments of a conversation.

"I could not get the rest of the message... the line went dead halfway through... only made out that it was a serious accident..."

So that's it, I thought, that's what the dream was all about. He *must* be dead. Why are they going on so, do they take me for a stupid woman who keeps on hoping against hope till the end? Yes, *accident*, that's how they would describe it, trying to break the news 'gently' so that I will not faint or have a fit. Or am I supposed to tear my hair and rend my clothes? That's what they called it too, when Bua's body was brought to the police station. Just an *accident*, they said, nothing to worry about.

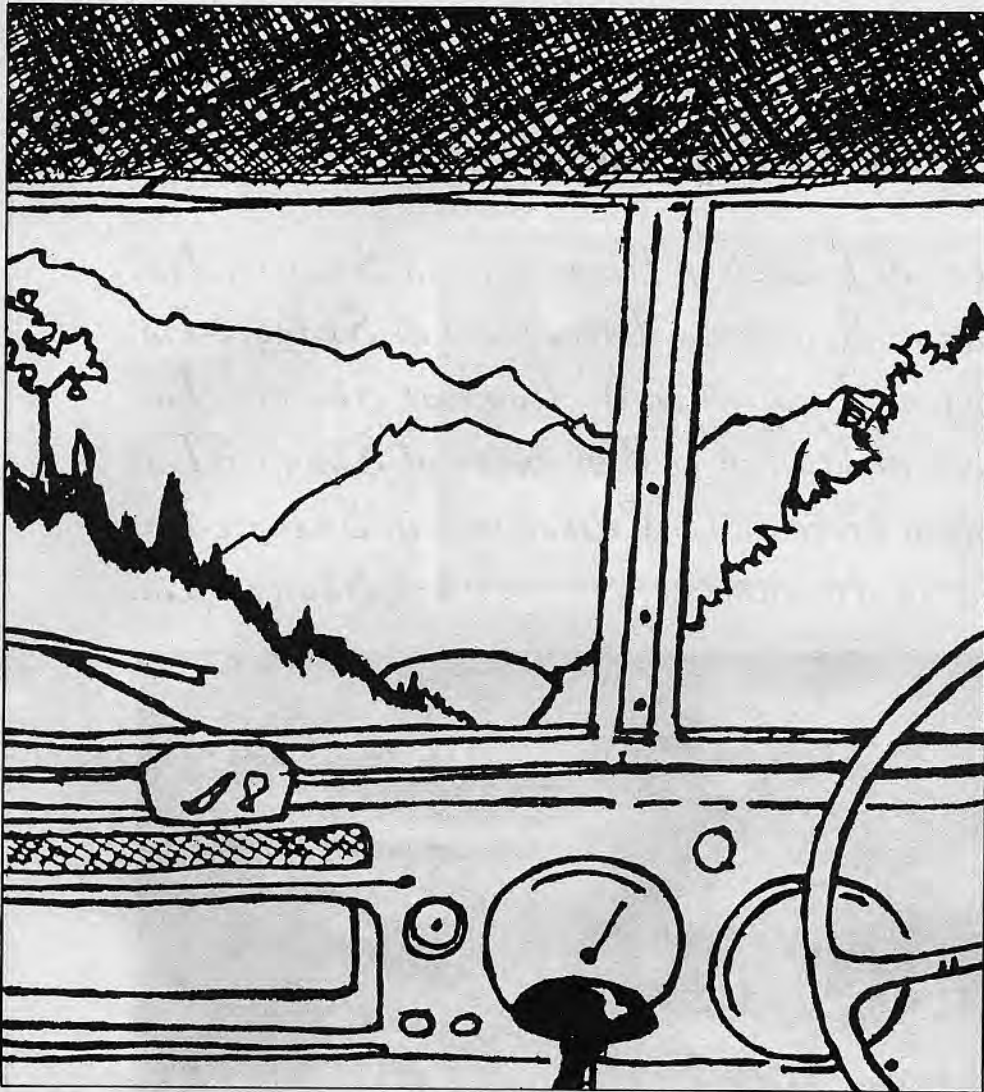
"Don't take it so seriously, I'm sure Jwai is all right," my mother is at point of blubbing.

"C'mon, didi, you're getting needlessly worried, he's probably had a few cuts and bruises at the worst," said Sisir, but the furrow between his eyebrows will not go away.

That dream. I should've known it was coming, that he would die. O, why didn't I see it then! No wonder I've been uneasy all this time. I remember Ama seeing dreams just before Bua was run over by that truck...

But now I must get into the car; it's time to go. Why do they break off their hushed conversation at my approach? Why do they revert to inconsequential remarks in overbright tones? They all think he's dead--no, they *know* he's dead, they've known it all along.

What a tedious journey this is. I wish this old Land Rover would move faster. If Bishnu is alive, he'll need me there by his side. O God, I wish I knew for certain whether he's alive. Heaven knows what I'll find. Perhaps an end to many things including my ordeal. How swirling and chaotic are the waters of the Tista. Not like the early days of our marriage...



No, those were happy days when we were so close to each other. Bishnu used to help me then, in little ways, at home, in the kitchen, outside, everywhere! It couldn't last—it didn't. Something happened which changed him. Not suddenly. Not overnight. But gradually his kindness and consideration evaporated. When I asked for his help, he responded with a gruff, Do let me finish this newspaper in peace! Or a plaintive, Just when I want to watch the news! I didn't mind though, did I? I put up with it all doggedly, did all the housework, helped Rohini with her lessons.

But I couldn't buy peace; he became more ill-tempered and impatient. And cruel. I still cringe at the memory of his sarcasm over my stupidity or ignorance and his wounding remarks about my family. How silly I was to be provoked into defending them. But he has a way of drawing out the worst in me. We quarrel as never before. I break into tears afterwards. And then he's contrite and makes it up to me. Why do I smile at the thought? Do I still love him? Do I miss his bumbling pawing and clumsy timing? He would want to do it just as I was dressing to go to work, or when I'd left something on the chulha. I dared not refuse. I would submit to his selfish thrusting rather than bear the vicious lash of his

tongue about my frigidity or about how I secretly hated him. Occasionally, when I didn't respond, he relapsed into a sulky silence, refusing to speak to me for the rest of the day. My days now coalesced into an endless agony. Sometimes, I was on the point of leaving him but the thought of Rohini stopped me; I couldn't afford to be selfish.

It's cold...we're almost there. There are only a few people on the streets. The shopfronts are already shuttered. And now we've arrived. Everyone is getting out. I've come back home. But why home? Why not the hospital? I ask Sisir. We had to come home and find out, he explains rather lamely. My dread is sour in my mouth. He *must* be dead. That's why we have come home. I am alone now. I must work harder. I have a daughter to look after. I'll put Bishnu's life insurance into a deposit in the bank for her. I'll take boarders, do tuitions, knit sweaters. I am full of plans—and guilty about such unholy thoughts at a time like this.

My sasura is at the door. He doesn't speak to me—he thinks it's my fault the marriage broke down. He thinks I walked out on his son. Silently, he leads us into the bedroom.

Dear God, he's alive! Bishnu's alive! His leg is in a cast, his head is bandaged, but he is leering at me.

"Surprised, eh? Thought you were well rid of me?"

Why are my legs giving way, why are they helping me once again into a chair? Why, deep down inside am I devastated by my disappointment? And why am I gripped by this nausea?

▷

A.P. Chhetri is a writer who works for the Kalimpong Municipality. This story first appeared in *Flatfile*.

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In northwest Nepal lives a group that is economically backward, socially oppressed, and psychologically pressured. The Khas of Jumla are a group that fell through the cracks of history.

by Dor Bahadur Bista

Khas of Chaudabisa

You wouldn't know it when you meet them today, but the Khas people of Jumla District are descendants of proud rulers of an empire that once stretched all the way from here to Kashmir, and from the Tibetan plateau to the inner tarai. The Khas are the progenitors of the Thakuri-Chhetri and of some of the hill Bahuns who traveled eastward to conquer the lands that would ultimately form the Kingdom of Nepal. The Nepali language, once known as *Khas-kura*, owes its origin to them, and the Khas also lent their style of adopting Thakuri and Chhetri titles to other ethnic groups of the Nepali hills.

Despite the accomplished past with which they are associated, this once-proud people today survive as a docile and unaware class relegated to an undeveloped corner of the country, exploited by those who know better, and burdened by an identity crisis that is unique in all Nepal.

As an anthropologist who has studied and written about the people of Nepal for four decades, I have over the past three years been doing 'applied research' amongst these Khas of Jumla. My work proceeds under the umbrella of the Karnali Institute, based in

the Chaudabisa Valley, whose efforts have been geared to applying the theories of the social sciences and development studies to raise the social and economic conditions of the Khas community.

Working in Chaudabisa, it has become clear to me that sincere efforts to develop awareness, self-confidence and a sense of worth among backward populations immediately brings forth a reaction from the privileged classes. The more effective the

development activity, the more virulent and reactionary is the response. For an academician who decided to try and practise what he preached, it came as a shock to learn that the political, economic and priestly forces are predetermined to join hands to prevent empowerment of the downtrodden. This happens because true development work has the effect of snatching away privileges and income that these forces have enjoyed without



Above and Right: Khas smoker and Khas schoolkids.

challenge for centuries.

The experience of the Karnali Institute will doubtless apply to other pockets that exist all over the Nepal Himalaya, where groups of people continue to suffer from the yoke of feudalism, and wherever efforts are being made to shake up the old and in order to bring in the new.

Chaudabisa

Chaudabisa valley used to come under a separate district called Tibrikot until some 12 years ago, but now it forms the eastern part of Jumla District. The area lies east of Jumla town, at the headwaters of the Tila and the Chaudabisa beneath Kanjiroba and Patrasi himals.

I was drawn to selecting Chaudabisa as the area for applied research because of an incongruous situation that exists here. The indigenous Khas live in absolute poverty even though their region itself is rich in natural resources and should be delivering a much higher standard of living. In fact, encouraged by the high demand for herbal raw material in the plains market, the locals were engaging in indiscriminate plunder of the very resource base which promised them a better future.

My interest also has a personal element, for my ancestors came from this area more than 300 years ago to settle down in the kingdom of Patan in Kathmandu Valley. I wanted keenly to gauge the distance that had developed between myself and this region of my *purkha*.

Jumla used to be the center of the powerful Khas kingdom of the western hills of Nepal from around the 14th century until the close of the 18th century. It is a region with interesting historic vestiges. Sinja, which formed the northern part of today's Jumla district, has interesting archaeological remains, including records of the Khas kingdoms of yore. The earlier Khas kings were Buddhist (while the public was shamanistic) and employed lamas to keep their records in the Tibetan language. Subsequent infiltration of Hinduism led to destruction of much of these Khas records, although some are still available for scholars, scattered in monasteries and other repositories of Mugu, Humla, Dolpa and Dailekh.

The Khas people were of pastoral nomadic background and were spread widely in many parts of present-day western Nepal. Their tribal character began to change from around the latter part of the 14th century when Brahmin pandits began arriving at the court of the Khas kings. The illiterate kings and courtiers with their rustic lifestyle must have liked the idea of a Hindu caste framework based on the principles expounded in *Manusmriti*, as this would give them a permanent high status based on birthright rather than on personal ability and competence.

The unravelling of the Khas empire accelerated with the seizure of the throne of Delhi by the Mughals, as more displaced Brahmins came up to settle in the Khas territory. More Thakuris and Chhetris had to be created as clients for the incoming Brahmins to cater to. That was the beginning of the end of the Khas people's collective strengths.

Agents and Profiteers

For a social scientist, Chaudabisa was also a place of interest because its nature had not been overly affected either by tourism or the negative effects of modernisation and its attendant material culture. Many other High Himalayan areas of Nepal such as Solu-Khumbu, Mustang and Langtang have been influenced beyond recall, but Chaudabisa provided laboratory conditions for the social sciences and development studies together to engage a region in genuine and long-lasting efforts at social and economic transformation. Hopefully, if the work here is successful, the model can be used with modifications in other similarly situated hill areas of Nepal.

In recent years, because of increased population, the local people have been pressuring the surrounding natural environment. Part of the reason for the population increase is the success of child survival programmes in an area which did not receive family planning help, which was refused on grounds of political ideology. (Funds for the programme came from USAID, which could not allow family planning programmes under directives formulated by a Republican United States President.)

The agents and profiteers in the herb trade are lined up all the way from Delhi's

Khari Bauli bazaar, across the border, and up to Jumla town. With a pittance of money, these people lure Chaudabisa's population into destroying the fragile natural base of their hillsides, uprooting herb plants roots and all.

The Khas have been exploited historically by all kinds of people, including government employees and local feudals, such as in their being forced to provide free labour. The first time the Khas of Chaudabisa recall receiving payment for work done was when King Mahendra made his famous trek to Rara Lake three decades ago. It was only then that the system of wage labour began to be implemented.

More than 30 years of educational programmes at the primary level and more than 12 years of secondary education have done nothing for the Khas. Education has not been meaningful.

Child marriage is a bane of Chaudabisa's Khas. It often leads to disenchantment when the bride and groom comes of age. About fifty percent of early marriages in Chaudabisa end in elopement of either partner, with the new husband being made to pay compensation to the former husband. Women suffer grievously from loss of status in the process.

Janajati Khas

The irony is that many Nepalis and most western scholars think that all Khas are Chhetri and that therefore they are not one of the so-called *janajati*, or ethnic, communities of the country. To be qualified as *janajati*, is the understanding, one has to have Mongoloid racial background and must speak a Tibeto-Burman mother tongue.

The fact is that a vast majority of the Khas have never been Hinduised, let alone 'Chhetri-ised'. Thus, while it may be true that today's Chhetri of Nepal branched off from the Khas, what has happened is that the descendants of the original Khas remained distinct, remote and deprived like other *janajati* groups of the country. The status of the Khas has dipped so low that the very term 'Khas' is today used by the upper classes as an insult. This is why the Khas people tend to style themselves as Chhetri, even though the *tagadhari* (thread-wearing) Chhetirs treat the Khas as low caste shudra.

The bulk of Jumla's Khas continue to live with their shamanic ritual practices, make alcohol at home, offering it to their deities, and drinking themselves. Nevertheless, due to historical and political reasons, their racial background disqualifies them from being called 'janajati'. All this has left the Khas with an identity crisis unique even in Nepal, and a total loss of self-esteem and self-confidence.

To be janajati in present-day Nepal is at least to have the ability to demand that mainstream society recognise the existence and rights of your tribe or community. While this right might have little use other than bring some peace of mind to ethnic activists, the Khas do not even have this on their side. They do not have an existence: their language is not even recorded in the national census even though they have a tongue that is distinct.

Fatal Legacy

Mostly, the problems of the present-day Khas of Chaudabisa reflects the exploitative traditions maintained to this day by the upper caste people of Jumla town, also known as Khalanga, and of the surrounding hills. Jumla town and Sinja retain the vestiges of the former exploitative feudal structure perhaps more than do most other hill regions of Nepal. This explains why the people here remain so poor whereas the region itself has abundant economic potential.

Some members of the sixteenth century converts to high caste are still struggling to maintain and assert their caste and class status. This, by definition, means the mistreatment of the Chaudabisa population, which is homogeneously Khas.

The Bahuns of Jumla continue to collect their dues of blankets, rugs, calves, goats, shanks of mutton, and cereal grains once a year from every household in Chaudabisa valley that has a death, a debilitating illness, a birth, or a marriage. They collect without having to provide any of the ritual services of a priest. Wedding, funeral, birth or illness, meanwhile, go on without the appearance of a priest. The Bahuns arrive in Chaudabisa at their convenience during fair weather. They visit their clients, collect the goods, and make them carry them to their homes in and around Jumla town.

Having lost this self-confidence and self-esteem over the course of centuries, the Chaudabisa Khas is willing to submit to this kind of exploitation. Having sunk to the lowest rung of the economic, cultural, religious and social hierarchy, there is little self-respect left. To the Jumla people, these are the barbarious Khas, "*khas pavai*"—a term that is still in use.

In Chaudabisa, it is common to hear the locals go on and on: "*hami garib, hami dukhi, hami murkha*" (we are poor, we are hopeless, we are ignorant). Part and parcel of accepting their lowly position, they continue to wear filthy rags, and maintain dirty habits. It is this syndrome of absolute apathy that the Institute hopes to attack.

The fatalistic philosophy is insidious because it destroys optimism and the ability to take the initiative. Fate is blamed for anything that they do not get, even though they may not have worked for it. The locals do not want to work beyond the absolute minimum required. With the practice of the government providing money for all kinds of development work, Chaudabisa's people have found it easy to sit back and show even less initiative.

Chaudabisa does not represent an isolated pocket of exploitation: its situation is multiplied many times over in other Khas valleys of the Karnali region. Among this population, fatalism generates the view that one's entire life is a continuous present and is fated to be what it is. Instead, if the people could be persuaded to accept only the past as an important educator to provide guidance for future, and treat the so-called present as the

flicker of the moment that continuously moves along with the progression of our lives, we could probably have a healthy, future-oriented society led by optimistic political and cultural leaders. This, at any case, is the goal set by the Karnali Institute for itself in Chaudabisa.

At Cross Purposes

When the Institute landed in the midst of this caste- and class-ridden exploitative structure, it began work by trying to help the Chaudabisa Khas to learn to help themselves. The existing high school was expanded, health services were made regular, and training of locals began with carpentry and stonework classes. Two micro-hydropower stations were installed in the valley.

The Institute is spearheading efforts to help local people to become optimistic and look into a possibly prosperous future. Besides helping raise the living standards and educational level, the Institute also hopes to cleanse them of the ways of child marriage, cow worship coupled with cow starvation (and no milk at all!), and ill-treatment of women including the selling of wives.

Perhaps inevitably, the Institute and who I will call the "Jumla lords" are working at cross purposes. The Institute is treated as a rival not only by these lords, but also some politicians who style themselves as progressive leftists. The Institute has had to face continuous attack from these forces, who feed contrived stories to population and do not miss an opportunity to put things in a bad light. Quite a few of the Chaudabisa locals were themselves initially suspicious of the Institute's motives, for they found it hard to comprehend why an outsider would want to help them without obvious benefit.

Those who do not wish the Chaudabisa Khas well can be categorised into three groups. Firstly, there are the political leaders who are concerned that they might lose their influence in the area. Politics providing the fastest route to influence, it remains the most appealing vocation for many. Because I was seen as a 'democrat', both the extreme left and extreme right decided that they would lose their vote bank if the Institute's work became popular.

Secondly, there are the economic leaders who feel that their base of economic exploitation will be pulled away by any



The writer at field site.

activity aimed at developing self-awareness in Chaudabisa. Thirdly, are the priests whose role in Chaudabisa society would rapidly diminish if the people were to be educated. The priests, on the whole, work the most insidiously to undo the process of positive change.

Various stratagems have been used to poison the minds of the Chaudabisa locals against the Institute, including the spreading of a rumour that the research work was only a cover for propagating Christianity. The canard is also doing the rounds that the Institute will exploit and hurt the population because it favours a specific political ideology. One political candidate during the general elections in November campaigned to throw the Institute and its founder out of the Valley (he lost). Jumla's inhabitants are known all over to be avid litigants, and two cases have been filed in the courts against the Institute. One of them has been won by the Institute and the other is still being heard.

Things will not remain static in Jumla district forever, however. The Karnali Institute, plus several other organisations are committed to widening the horizons of the people of Chaudabisa. The economic lords who used to exploit the labour and the

valuable herbal resource of the region are watching intensely over a processing factory that has just been completed in Chaudabisa by the Agricultural Development Bank's Small Farmers Development Programme.

The two micro-hydropower units that have been set up will change lifestyles and expand horizons as children begin to read in the evening, as mothers begin to use electric cookers, and as fathers get engaged in producing craft items at home.

Enrolment in the Chaudabisa schools has doubled over the last three years, and the number of girls attending classes is also up considerably. Plan International is supporting adult literacy classes at the high school during off hours. The Chaudabisa population is beginning to wake up to the possibilities that are open to them.

The overt and covert opposition of the Jumla lords notwithstanding, the Khas of Chaudabisa will have their day in the sun.

▷

D.B. Bista, author of the longtime classic *The People of Nepal* and the best-selling *Fatalism and Development*, spends his time between Chaudabisa and his home in Patan.

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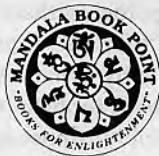
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Making Criminals of Climbers

by Deepak Thapa

There are thousands of above-5,000m peaks in Nepal, of which only 142 are open for climbing after permission has been received from the concerned authorities. Anyone who climbs one of these 142 without a permit or climbs any of the other remaining of 'un-opened' peaks will be doing so illegally. And climb illegally is precisely what hundreds of visitors do every mountaineering season in Nepal.

These are facts known to everyone associated with the climbing trade in Nepal. The Ministry of Tourism (MoT) does not deny it, nor does the Nepal Mountaineering Association (NMA). Yet, clandestine climbing continues unchecked.

Tourism Act

Climbing permits for Nepali summits are issued at two different places. The NMA has jurisdiction over 18 peaks and is concerned with only these so-called 'trekking' or non-expedition peaks. The rest are dealt

with by the MoT, which does not have resources or the manpower necessary to keep a thorough check on what goes on high up in the mountains.

Legislation to address climbing without permission does exist in Nepal and despite the erroneous language it uses, manages to convey the message. The Tourism Act, 2035, states unequivocally: "No any mountaineering expedition team shall be entitled to climb any Himalayan-Peaks without permission under this Act." Failure to comply can result in various penalties on which, too, the Act is clear. But enforcement is another matter altogether.

The MoT relies on external sources for information on climbs that take place in contravention to the rules. There was just one complaint the Ministry received in all of 1994 and even that was not acted upon on the grounds that further information requested was not forthcoming. The NMA is equally hapless. Having no legal authority, the Association cannot take any

action against clandestine climbers without the involvement of Ministries of Tourism and Home, neither of which seem to have the interest or manpower.

To go back to the Tourism Act provisions, it seems important to define the term "Himalayan peak": does it include high spurs of the Mahabharat range, are high and distinctive ridge-tops such as Lhotse Shar to be considered independent summits or appendages of the main peak? The Act obviously refers to the snow mountains that range the northern part of Nepal, but the fact that the regulations do not state explicitly what constitutes a *Himalchuli* creates a problem for climbers and allows flexibility to those agencies who do not mind cutting corners.

The grey definition also makes it possible for trekking agencies in Kathmandu and their partners abroad to sell climbs to lesser peaks which are not on the permitted list. Unfortunately for one of them, International Trekkers of Kathmandu, the furore that followed the Pisang accident of last November forced the authorities to engage in a closer reading of the Act and follow it up with a penalty. The agency has been barred from any mountaineering activity for a period of two years, an action that some industry analysts believe is unfair given that "everybody does it". Meanwhile, the ban on International Trekkers does not seem to have made an impression on its peer agencies, whose itineraries still feature such peaks to be climbed without permission while on trek.

It is not only 'closed' peaks that are being climbed on the sly. The 6183-metre-high Imja Tse (Island Peak) in the Khumbu is one such peak that sees over 15 groups every season attempting it without permission. There are known attempts even on the higher peaks, such as Cho Oyu (8201m), whose "tourist route" up from Nangpa La has been known to attract



itinerant climbers. Even on Chomolongma, there have been reports of lone alpinists piggy-backing on fixed ropes of large expeditions and bivouacking on well-stocked camps up the mountain. However, there are no reports of successful climbs of Sagarmatha by such illegal climbers.

Aesthetics vs. Morality

Why does illegal climbing take place after all? One reason is the savings in fees and on the bureaucratic hassles involved. The royalties charged—for example, the US\$ 150 to US\$ 300 charged by the NMA—may seem a pittance to an organised trekking group, but could be a hefty sum for a backpacking alpine-style climber. The free spirit that is the genuine mountaineer obviously dislikes the shackles placed on his ability to climb a peak, and he may deliberately set about evading the regulations. From a purely aesthetic (not moral) standpoint, whether a Himalayan peak is climbed with permission or without does not make that much of a difference.

Most illegal climbing in Nepal takes place along the popular trekking routes, viz., the Annapurna circuit, the Langtang and Khumbu valleys. It is easy to go about one's business quietly in these areas amidst the hundreds of trekkers swarming the trails. It is possible to reach an impromptu decision to climb in Khumbu, for Namche Bazaar's climbing bazaar offers climbing gear of the same range and quality found at any outfitters in Chamonix. Lending a helping hand are mountain guides and trek operators without whose complicity it would be quite difficult to climb a Himalayan peak, however small.

The interest in enforcing the regulation is mainly that of the host country, for the lost income that clandestine climbing represents. It is therefore in Nepal's interest that illegal climbing be checked. The NMA alone, it is estimated, loses more than NRs 5 million annually from unauthorised climbing of the peaks at its command. By the same reckoning, the central exchequer is losing many more millions of rupees from all the peaks that are being climbed without permission.

In this perspective, one would assume that serious steps would be taken to prevent

illegal climbs. Predictably enough, this is not the case. No one even knows where to begin.

Question of Virginity

Another issue thrown up by illegal climbing—which almost by definition is undocumented—is whether or not to believe that the "virgin peaks" are really untrodden. Given the hundreds of peaks available in Nepal, and the inability of the authorities to check what the adventurous climbers do once they are in the High Himal and beyond the range of the base camp-based liaison officers, it is quite likely that many more "virgin peaks" have been climbed than even the climbing world knows of.

Those who climb a virgin peak are not likely to turn up at the NMA or MoT to register their feat. Those who would want to come again to the Nepal Himalaya might not even own up to their triumphs in one of the world's many mountaineering journals. Besides, the Nepali authorities certainly do not have the ability nor the interest in perusing the world's these journals to maintain an updated list of illegally climbed peaks. The problem here is not only that of the Nepali Government: climbers in years will obviously attempt newly-opened peaks believed to be unclimbed, whereas the summits might already have been violated.

The different organisations concerned with climbing in Nepal do not seem to view the matter seriously apart from pointing fingers at each other. The MoT places blame on unscrupulous trekking agents; the established agencies see small-time operators and individual tour leaders as the culprits; the NMA perceives both trekking companies and the MoT responsible—the Ministry for not setting out clearly-defined rules and trekking companies for looking at the regulations in ways that best suit their interests.

However, as the theoretical protector of Nepal's mountaineering trade, NMA cannot shirk its responsibility so easily, especially because it and the Trekking Agents Association of Nepal (TAAN) share a close, almost incestuous, relationship. The NMA should, at the very least, be able to keep a check on what itineraries

are being sold by trekking agents. Amid all this passing of the buck, the main issue of how to stop unauthorised climbing is being forgotten.

The NMA did make an attempt at monitoring back in 1991 by placing a representative each in Manang and Namche Bazaar but the operation floundered within a year. It proved impossible to confirm that a climb had taken place once the climbers had descended. The Association is once again said to be thinking of a similar operation, this time with two person teams which can act as a roving patrol.

There are other methods that have been suggested to check illegal climbing. One is to mobilise the local administrative bodies such as village development committees with the incentive that they receive part of the fine realised from those caught climbing without permission. Another is that national park personnel be utilised, since many peaks fall within the boundaries of one park or the other. Meanwhile, trekkers entering the country need to be notified about Nepal's mountaineering regulations, for many might forgo illegal climbs if only they knew what their agencies were putting them up to. Permits can also be issued, say at Namche Bazaar, Kyanjin Gomba, Manang and Jomosom, albeit at a higher rate than what they cost in Kathmandu, so that those who get the climbing bug while on a trek will have a way out rather than having to make an illegal bid.

Stricter rules and serious enforcement of them are also being advocated. Sardars could forfeit their NMA registration if found taking part in illegal climbs. Trekking companies could lose their licence altogether instead of only having to suffer temporary suspensions. However, rules will not solve the problem if they are impractical. Many trekkers climb peaks illegally just because they involve mere side trips from the main trail and can be done with equipment on hand.

Making permits unnecessary for peaks such as Thorung Ri on the Annapurna trek, which is being climbed all the time anyway, should not be much to Nepal's loss. After all why make criminals of climbers if it can be helped?

▷

Abominably Yours,

Instead of whining on and on about how the Indian plague killed tourism in the Subcontinent, it is time the region's planners came up with innovative ways to boost the visitor industry. Take the total eclipse of the sun that will traverse the Ganga basin east to west in October. Where is our forward-looking strategy? We should be blitzing prospective tourists in Europe and Japan with catchy commercials that go: "See The Taj Mahal in Eclipse", or "Fly Delhi-Calcutta In Total Darkness, Only On Indian Airlines".

In the Himalaya, the eclipse will only be partial, but it will still be quite a show as the sun suddenly dims from 220 volts to 110. Here in the Upper Barun, scientists are planning to study the effect of solar brownout on the gliding ability of the Himalayan chough. German geologists will observe temperature change in glacial lakes during eclipses. In Chitwan, researchers are preparing to monitor how mating behaviour of rhinos adjusts to solar darkness.

If the scientists are so engaged, why is the tourism trade lagging? There is still time to plan for the First Ascent of Mt. Everest Via The Southeast Pillar Without Oxygen And Without Sherpas During A Solar Eclipse, not to mention the Around Annapurna Penumbra Trek, which should have many takers. Nepal's unique flag is ideal as promotional material, with the moon from the upper triangle occluding the sun below.

The selling point about total eclipses, of course, is their timing. There won't be another one to cast a shadow over the Taj Mahal in quite such a fashion till the year 2353 or thereabouts, by which time most of our great-grandchildren will have gone on to be reincarnated as Sandflies or Thermophilic Bacteria, depending on how they behave themselves. The rarity of total solar eclipses also limits their potential for tourism promotion.

Sex, on the other hand, has a certain timeless quality to it, and sex sells. As a region, we have not done enough to promote Sex Tourism. Before politically correct readers dash off angry letters to my editor recommending that he gag his ab(ominab)le columnist, let me hasten to

add: this is not a suggestion to turn Connaught Place into a naughty place.

Seeing the contemporary squeamishness and taboos on sex in the Subcontinent, it is hard to believe that we were once the world's Sex Superpower. No one else in world history had been as obsessed with The Birds and The Bees as the Subcontinentals of the last millennium, not even birds and bees. South Asia's glorious tradition of wanton lust has shrunk to a tiny speck of its former self. Today, India is to Sex what Portugal is to Colonialism.

While one cannot help but observe a certain contradiction between the copulation taboo and the population boom, a serious scientific study is needed to explore the correlation between sex, economic development and political stability. Recent studies have linked social decline and joblessness to the rise of fascism in Europe and of white anti-government militants in the American heartland. An idle mind, it seems, is the fundamentalist's workshop. Similarly, could it be argued that sexual suppression leads restless South Asian males to seek other onanistic avenues to dissipate energy: razing shrines, burning buses and calling bandhs?

We have historical records to prove that the explosion of erotic art between the years 800 to 1200 was also a time of extraordinary social harmony and cohesion. There was less crime, prostitution was unnecessary, wars were rare, and there was no censorship. As Shri Rajneesh re-discovered a thousand years later, sexual intercourse as a source of pleasure and mode for procreation is the most tangible manifestation of the existence of the Supreme Being. Sex also made people tolerant.

Sexiness used to be right up there on a pedestal with godliness. Hindu philosophers like Vatsyayan wrote tomes on sex—including the world's oldest and bestselling lovemaking manual. Kings commissioned elaborate temples of love that have survived monsoons and vandals to this day. Voluptuous



sandstone apsaras guard divinities engaged in foreplay, their bodies tangled in formidable feats of sexual acrobatics. From a gender perspective, here are women as equal partners and not just submissive pleasure-givers.

So what happened to this rich heritage, huh? Somewhere along the way, the role of women became subordinate, and sex became power play.

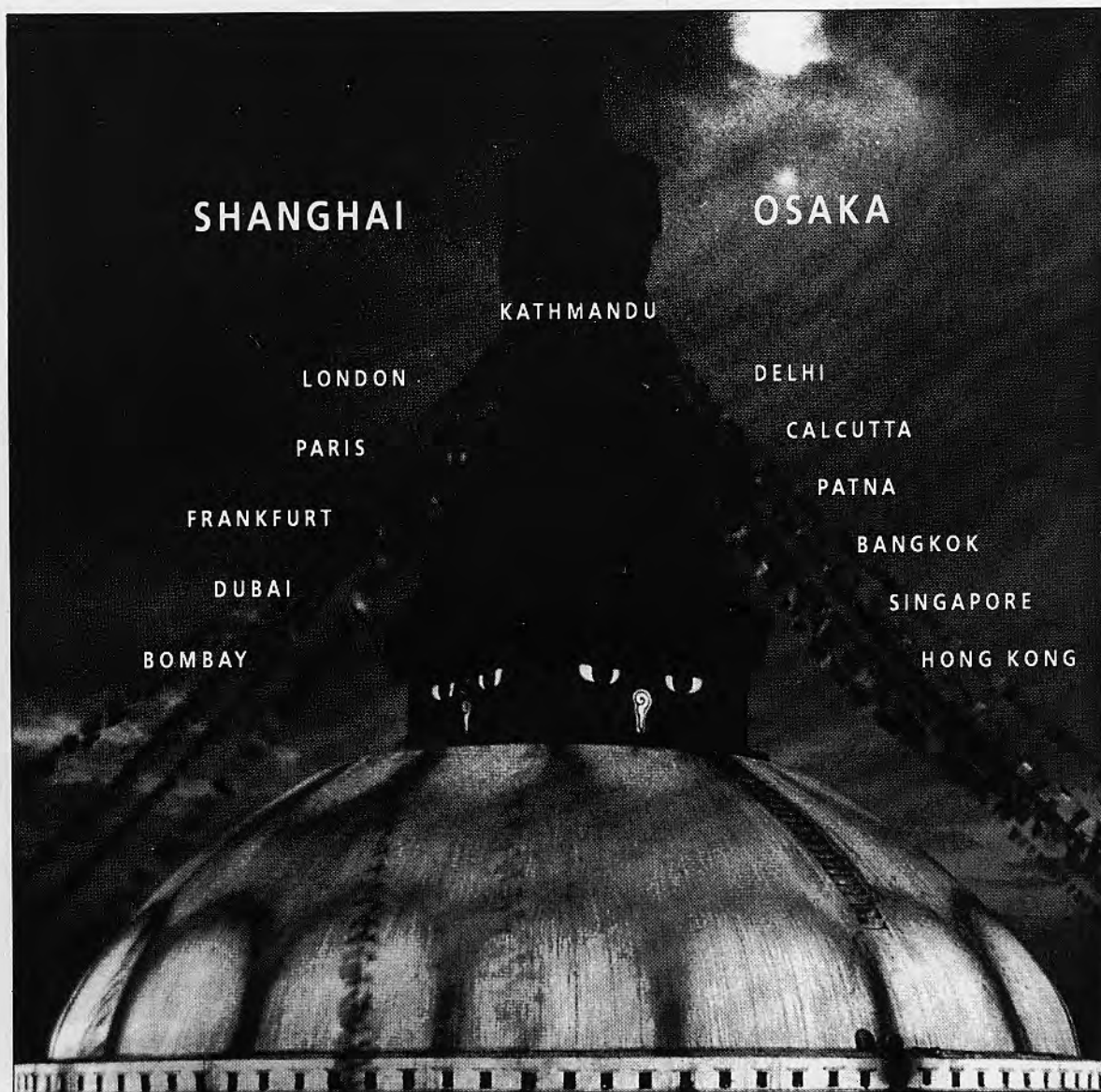
But all is not lost. We see today the birth of India's Second Sexual Revolution. Aided and abetted by satellite television, promiscuity is once again sweeping the land from Kanya Kumari to Kailash. Nikki Bedi and Imran Khan are the new role models as the channels borrow and mix the Old East with the New West.

Catching up with the times, the Subcontinent's tourism operators must gear up to market the region's historical erotica. A series of sex tourism itineraries will have to be developed for the foreign tourist. The Tantric Tour can take the traveller from the architectural relics of Khajuraho to the Tibeto-Nepali temple art where Tantra reached its climax. The Kamasutra Special can explore the emergence of erotica in religion, incorporating a train tour of the main temples of love in the plains.

Better still, let the SAARC governments give up all this SAPTA business and join in a cooperative programme to take advantage of the upcoming October eclipse as occasion to launch the South Asia Lovers' Paradise Tour Package (SALPTP).

After all, darkness and love-making evolved together.





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