

Vol. I: Stories by Cittadhār 'Hṛdaya', Rāmeśvara and Kedār 'Situ'; poems by Durgālāl Śreṣṭha and Sudah Khusaḥ.

Vol. III: Introduction to Newari literature by Keśavmān Śākya; stories by Sūryabahādur Pivāḥ and Bhūṣanprasād Śreṣṭha; poems by Ānanda Jośī, Buddha Saymi, Sureś Kiraṇ.

Vol.V: Stories by Pūmadās Śreṣṭha, Dhusvām Saymi and Keśavmān Śākya; poems by Śyāmbahādur Saṃyajū, Sundar Madhikarmī and Pratisarā Saymi.

Vol. VIII: Stories by Jagdīs Citrakār, Āśārām Śākya and Darveratna Śākya; poems by Pūma Vaidya, Rāmeś Madhu and Triratna Śākya.

Translations from Maithili literature have also featured in four issues:

Vol. II: Essay on modern Maithili literature by Yugeśvarprasād Varmā; stories by Rājendra P. Vimala, Rāmbharos Kāpaḍi Bhramar and Surendra Lābh; poems by Bhuvaneśvar Pāthey, Mathurānanda Caudhari Māthur and Revatīraṃaṇ Lāl.

Vol. IV: Survey of Nepalese Maithili literature by Rāmbharos Kāpaḍi Bhramar; play by Mahendra Malaṅgiyā; story by R.N. Sudhākar; poems by Dhīrendra, Hariścandra and Ayodhyānāth Caudhari.

Vol. VI: Stories by Rājendra Vimala, Bhuvaneśvar Pāthey, Surendra Jhā Śāstrī; poems by Dharmendra Jhā Viḥval, Digambar Jhā Dinmaṇi, Śyāmsundar Śaśi and Rameś Jhā Bhāvagra.

Vol. VIII: Stories by Dhūmketu and Dhīrendra.

Volume VII contained works translated from Limbu: a summary of the development of Limbu language and literature by Bairāgī Kāilā; a story ("the first modern short story written in Limbu") by Kājīmān Kandaṅgbā; poems by Mahāguru Phālgunanda Liṅgden, Thāmsuhāṅg Puṣpa Subba Asita, Yir Nembāṅg, Yehāṅg Lāvati and Virahī Kāilā.

The original Nepali content consists of new short stories, plays, essays, criticism, travel reminiscences and sometimes 'contemplations' or a writer's profile of another writer. Some of it is challenging and controversial; little of it could have appeared in an Academy publication before 1990. *Samkālin Sāhitya* is one of the best and most interesting mirrors currently available of the changes that are taking place in Nepal's intellectual culture as a result of democratisation.

INTERVIEW

Reflections of a plant-hunter in Nepal: An Interview with Dr. Tirtha Bahadur Shrestha

Charles Ramble

Dr. Tirtha Bahadur Shrestha is currently the coordinator of Nepal's National Heritage Programme in the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN). During his distinguished career as one of Nepal's foremost botanists he has published "not very much really: just four or five books and twenty or so scientific articles." In the late 1980s Dr. Shrestha headed the task force responsible for conducting the

research that culminated recently in the creation of the Makalu-Barun Conservation Area. At that time the present interviewer had an opportunity to work with him, and was struck by his breadth of knowledge and interests. In the course of a lengthy interview, some extracts of which are printed here, Dr. Shrestha attributed his advocacy of a wide perspective to a decade in the Royal Nepal Academy, where he held the post of

Member Secretary for a year. Frustration at the oversimplification of complex situations was a recurrent theme during our conversation: for example, the eclipsing of governmental legerdemain by the conspicuous Tanakpur dispute, or the upstaging of Nepal's most pressing ecological concerns by issues such as the Himal Cement factory and Godavari Marble, currently two of the arch-fiends in the demonology of Kathmandu's ecologists.

Early in his career, after a period of teaching in high schools and in the Amrit Science College, Dr. Shrestha joined the Department of Medicinal Plants. The initial task of assessing Nepal's wealth of medicinal and aromatic herbs launched him on a trajectory as a plant collector that would eventually take him throughout Nepal.

TBS: The first trip I made was to Trishuli in 1962-63, travelling through Dhading, Gorkha and so on. We found that people were very dependent on medicinal herbs for their cash income. For commodities such as oil, kerosene, thread, cloth and suchlike they relied on the sale of herbs. We collected samples without knowing the scientific names for them. One of the plants that are sold is *bikh* [Aconitum], but there are seventeen or eighteen types of *bikh*, and we didn't know which one was which. In fact we don't know some of them even today. Scientifically speaking, it was essential to make a thorough collection, so I gradually became a plant collector. I found it fascinating, travelling and collecting plants. I've been a plant collector ever since. I collected everything I could see, as far as my resources would allow me. At that time we were permitted only two porters, because the budget was limited. Later I travelled with John Adam Stainton [author of *The Forests of Nepal*, etc.], who died recently. I travelled with him all over Nepal between 1965 and 1968 in extended tours. At that time our main interest was to discover new species, especially since

there was no constraint on the number of porters. He could afford it. The only constraint was my own physique. If I was strong enough I could collect as much as I liked, and Stainton was very supportive.

CR: How many districts have you collected in?

TBS: Most districts. The districts I haven't travelled in are... let me think... No, I've collected in all districts of Nepal.

CR: Do you think there are still many plant species to be discovered?

TBS: Among the lichens and fungi, and even the ferns, there certainly remains a lot to discover. But I don't think there are many undescribed species among the angiosperms [higher plants]. On the other hand, there is much scope for discovering the medicinal and other chemical properties of the plants we do know. That hasn't been done.

CR: Your doctoral work focussed on Western Nepal, didn't it?

TBS: Yes. The thesis was entitled "The Ecology and Vegetation of North-west Nepal". It was later published by the Royal Nepal Academy [1982]. In 1972 I had met Dobremez, who had a plan to make a vegetation map of the whole of Nepal. I put together all my previous collections, and since one set was in the Natural History Museum in London, I spent most of my time and money while in France - my doctorate was from Grenoble - travelling to England. And happily my wife was in London at the time, in 1978, doing her Ph.D.

CR: In 1979 you became a Member of the Royal Nepal Academy. How was it to be a natural scientist in an institution dedicated primarily to the arts?

TBS: Originally the Academy was a home for arts and literature, but under the patronage of the present king, in 1975, Lain Singh Bangdel was asked to reorganise it. The new vision was to have a single Academy that would accommodate all the different branches of knowledge, and the constitution also included science. They had *kalā*, art, *saṃskṛti*, culture, *sāhitya*, literature, *gyān*, knowledge or philosophy,

and *bigyān*, science. I was asked to fill the science slot. My own scientific work was done at Godavari, where I was a member of the Department of Medicinal Plants, a post that I had already held for some time. I came to see the Academy as a very important platform where people from different disciplines could sit together. I saw that there was great potential for educating literary people in science, and also for being educated from the literary point of view. At the Academy I used to spend lots of time with people such as Bhupi Sherchan (the late poet). He knew how to put words together so that they could really penetrate into the hearts of the people. I didn't realise how important it was to work with such people until I had left the Academy. The appreciation of all these things comes only later. My approach was to integrate science with literature, science with culture. For example, I wrote a book called *A Hundred Questions in Science*, aimed at addressing some of the questions children ask. At that time my daughter was just five or six, and I realised that kids ask so many questions that you can't answer from the scientific point of view.

CR: Is the book used in schools?

TBS: Not in schools, out of school. Actually, the book sold very well. The main idea was to suggest various books to be read by young mothers, so that when their kids ask them awkward questions they should be able to provide some answers.

CR: For the last of your ten years in the Royal Nepal Academy you held an important position as the Member Secretary, immediately below the Vice Chancellor. Why did you resign this position?

TBS: Following the democratic movement we felt we should resign to facilitate the process of democratisation and to avoid embarrassment to the Academy. Members of the Academy and the Member Secretary were appointed by the King, following nomination by a committee under the chairmanship of the Minister of Education.

CR: You mentioned earlier that you gained a

lot from talking to literary people and artists. Do you think the writers benefited from the presence of a natural scientist?

TBS: Yes. I soon became aware of the need among non-scientists for access to science. Scientists speak their own language in their own vocabulary, and the only aspects of science that are accessible to others are media events. If somebody landed on the moon, the writers might write about it. It seemed to me that the writers themselves were the best medium to communicate with people, so I regarded our collaboration as very important. I remember having a tough time talking to the poets about the role of an insect. In one of his poems Madan Ghimire used the phrase "as useless as an insect". I argued that he would not exist if there were no insects in the world. You can't categorically say, "As useless as an insect". I'm pleased to say that he was persuaded by my explanation, and rephrased the poem. I've always felt that knowledge is a convergent phenomenon, not a divergent phenomenon. Unless you converge, knowledge is not generated.

CR: Is there still a policy of interdisciplinary collaboration in the Academy?

TBS: Unfortunately no members have been appointed from the sciences. I wish it were otherwise. There is a feeling that science is not required in the Academy because there is the Science Academy itself. I had fought hard against this argument for several years. The Science Academy is for the promotion of science. It is not there as a prison for scientists. There is now also a demand that fine arts and performing arts be separated from literature. I feel that that is a loss, because literature is enriched by science and the arts.

CR: So you no longer see the Academy as a true forum for the different branches of knowledge?

TBS: No, not really. The Academy has two principal facets. One is as an organisation to promote a discipline or a particular branch of knowledge, and the other is as a forum. It is not a resource. When I prepared my books I

brought my own funds to publish them. I didn't use the funds of the poets, because I knew that the government had not spent money on the poets and literature. If you publish a book, that's sixty thousand rupees. And in science, once you start conducting experiments, that kind of money is nothing. So I brought my own resources from elsewhere. The Academy is not important as a financial resource, but as a place to integrate. I used to tell my friends that it is a *cautāro*. A community may have many distinct components - Damai, Kami, Rai, Limbu - but when they come to the *cautāro*, they sit together, and with a *bāsuri* they play the same music: they have an idiom with which to congregate. I've written papers on that analogy.

CR: While you were Member Secretary of the Academy you were also the head of the task force responsible for setting up the Makalu-Barun Conservation Project, between Sagarmatha National Park and the Arun. As I understand, this project originally began as a hunt for a new type of bear. How did it culminate in the creation of a conservation area?

TBS: One day, in the early eighties, I received a visit from Daniel Taylor-Ide, who told me that he wanted to go to the Barun to discover a new bear. He asked if I would accompany him on a month's trip to investigate the habitat, and I agreed. So we spent some time in this deep, dense Barun Valley, but we didn't succeed in trapping any bears, although we found plenty of evidence of the animals. People were very frustrated - John Craighead, for example, the international expert on bears. But we did find bear scats, scars on trees, and a sort of nest made by bears. On the way back, I told Dan that there was no doubt that the bears were there, but that the forest would not be there much longer if we didn't protect it. So I proposed that there should be some programme to preserve the habitat first, and afterwards to launch the bear project. He thought it was a good idea, and started to promote it. He needed some superlative

terms to describe the Barun, so as the plant-collector I again accumulated a lot of specimens. And then Kaji [Hari Saran Nepali, the eminent ornithologist and naturalist] was with us. He was fascinated by the number of birds in the area, and collected so many birds he hadn't seen elsewhere. So I think the credit goes to the birds of Kaji. Bob Fleming [co-author of *Birds of Nepal*] was also there. Kaji and Bob Fleming together felt that it was a really special area. Gabriel [Campbell] came in later at a seminar that was held in Saldima. Gabriel's presence was very important to bring people into the whole process. As an anthropologist he emphasised the people's point of view, and that dimension has remained important ever since.

CR: You say there really was evidence of a tree bear? It isn't just a juvenile black bear?

TBS: That there is a tree bear, there is no doubt. People have seen the animal, we have seen the evidence, and we have analysed the scats. Whether it is a new species or the juvenile of the ground bear has yet to be researched, and that will not be possible unless we preserve the habitat. People talk of the tree bear from West Nepal to East Nepal, and Dan found that the Barun had the highest concentration of bears, because he was counting skulls from village houses. We took some to the Smithsonian, and started to analyse them. But we don't have any definitive evidence yet as to say whether or not it is a new species. And bears are very variable. Four or five types of bears that were once considered to be distinct species have now been merged into one by the taxonomists. Dan was also very keen on the yeti thing. He thought it might be a high-altitude bear. But I discouraged him from doing research on that. If the main thrust of your research is to disprove the existence of the creature, that's not good. If you want to do research, make it positive. The yeti isn't something that has been brought to Nepal by tourists and mountaineers. People believed in yetis long before foreigners came. It's not of the same magnitude, but to some degree

it's like proving there is no God. The footprints of the yeti are in the minds of the people. Similarly, there is a tree bear: OK, let's try to find a tree bear. But let's not spend our time and money trying to say that there is no tree bear.

CR: You've now been working with the International Union for the Conservation of Nature for about two years. Does the IUCN in Nepal still play a largely advisory role?

TBS: The IUCN has been here for quite some time, but not as the IUCN. It helped the Planning Commission to produce the National Conservation Strategy. Almost all departments and ministries, as well as the university, were involved in developing this strategy. My involvement related mainly to medicinal plants. This work was approved by HMG in 1987 as a policy document, as a basis for the five-year plans and suchlike. The document was called "Building on Success". As the title indicates, the main approach was not to prescribe anything new but to build on existing success. For example, the document strongly advocates the *guthi* as a project for managing the temples, the heritage of the Gaine, and so on. Similarly, it stresses the importance of traditional forest resource-use methods, such as the Sherpas' rotational system of collecting firewood. "Building on Success" really was a success. [laughs] Except that people now don't like it because the foreword was written by Marich Man Singh.

CR: How is the IUCN's work in Nepal likely to develop?

TBS: HMG requested the IUCN to implement the National Conservation Strategy for the National Planning Commission. The IUCN is not a country office yet. Maybe next year. At the moment it is assisting the Planning Commission at the policy level. For example, most of the work of the Environment Protection Council was backed by the professional staff of the IUCN. Now the IUCN is housing - not hosting, housing - the Nepal Environmental Policy and Planning Project. The IUCN brings funds, but it also provides expertise

and professional support. But in addition to this there are some demonstration projects at the district level - district environmental planning - in Argakanchi and Lamjung. Broadly speaking, this means helping people to organise themselves to address environmental problems. Drinking water, for example. This is a very interesting phenomenon in Nepal. From *satra sāl* [1960] to the present day we have been talking about drinking water. Earlier this year I revisited a village in Rasuwa that I had been to in 1963. No change. No drinking water. No health facilities. There is some education, but the people don't want it. That's interesting. They don't want it. They don't need it. No use to them. It takes their kids away from daily productive activities. The IUCN in Lamjung and Agarkanchi is trying to identify local NGOs or traditional organisations that can provide an entry point for different projects.

CR: Has there been a policy change in the IUCN with regard to people's participation in conservation?

TBS: The IUCN was one of the pioneer organisations to bring people into environmental protection. At the Fourth IUCN Conference, in Caracas [1992], the main focus was on people's participation in protecting nature, and the protection of nature for the benefit of people.

CR: Has the IUCN got a policy on tourism with regard to the environment?

TBS: Yes. In the Heritage Programme that I'm coordinating we see tourism both as a potential source of funds as well as a potential threat to the ecology. That is one of the concerns that recently took me to Manaslu. Manaslu has just been opened for tourism, and the Ministry of Tourism has requested the IUCN to look into the prospects of ecotourism and the problems of pressure from tourism on natural resources.

CR: Do you think tourism can be a positive factor in conservation in ways other than generating funds?

TBS: Tourism has always been a factor of change. Tourism doesn't bring only dollars.

It brings ideas too. Tourism, if I may say so, brings the third eye, and tells us, "This is unique in your country; we have come here to see this pagoda, this dance, this species. You should save it." "Is that so?" we say, "Aha, well perhaps we should."

CR: Will the management of tourism be handed over to a particular agency, as it has been for example in Mustang?

TBS: It is too early for us to say. Mustang is already oversold. Still, if you're willing to pay \$ 500 to step through my gate, why shouldn't I accept it? But Manaslu is not in the tourism agenda yet. To me it seems that Manaslu would have more tourism potential than Mustang. I personally feel that Mustang is very dull country, unless you have special eyes for the lost cultures of Tibet. What has been lost in Tibet can be found in Mustang. That's the sort of feeling people have. I personally felt that the monasteries in Tibet are nicely kept, but they are not a living thing. They're museums. But in Mustang the monasteries are still a part of people's lives. But how long this life in Mustang can continue is something to worry about - and not only for the Ministry of Tourism, or ACAP, or the tourists. Unless there is international concern - people in this country are bogged down with various other issues. Like Tanakpur. If someone comes to this country and reads the papers, he would think... anyway, Mustang could be viewed as a relic of some existence, but Manaslu has its own personality. If tourists are here to click their cameras at Everest, that's fine. But if they really want to be in the Himalaya, and feel the thin air, I think Manaslu or Kanjiroba, or many other places for that matter, are much more distinctively Nepalese. I think people should be interested to discover terra incognita, rather than photographing the same mountain for decades. It is nice in its own way, but we have something more to offer.

CR: Are there any other areas that deserve special attention from the IUCN?

TBS: Yes. I am especially interested in protecting the environment of

Kanchenjunga. We have plenty of information from the Japanese and the British. One recent visitor who wrote a paper on the area said that he followed Hooker's trail. Hooker travelled through East Nepal in 1848. This man followed the same trail as Hooker, and he said that things are still intact. Things have not changed. I put the question to a group of Japanese scientists who were going to spend several months there. When they came back they agreed that it was still the same as described by Hooker. I thought it would be very interesting to protect that area, and IUCN in Nepal has agreed to respond to the request by the Ministry of Forests. To me it seems that deforestation has been exaggerated for the high hills and mountains. Earlier this year I compared the vegetation map made in 1972 of a part of Rasuwa, and it has not changed. The problem is in the Tarai, the Siwaliks, the middle hills and a few higher areas like the stretch between Lukla and Jorsale, which has been deforested. With aircraft arriving there every day, and the large numbers of tourists, the people need more firewood.

CR: The Royal Chitwan National Park was established in 1975, partly at the recommendation of the IUCN. Do you think Nepal still has a place for parks of this nature, where surrounding villagers are allowed only very limited use of the forest? Might these parks be modified so that certain zones can be used for grazing?

TBS: [Laughs] Chitwan is being used for grazing at the moment anyway. Properly managed grazing could be feasible. But if there had been no park established in 1975, do you think that the forest or the rhinos would have survived by now?

CR: It's not likely.

TBS: Of course not. They would have gone, because they have gone from the rest of the country. The park would never have been able to sustain exploitation by the huge migrant population of Chitwan. If you leave the park to the people, in less than a decade it will all be ricefields. No grasslands, no rhinos, no tigers, no trees. Then what will the

people do? Ultimately the people will be facing the same problems as they are today, but in ten years' time. In ten years' time they won't have grazing land for their cattle. It should be possible in Chitwan to develop a way of life that is compatible with conservation. At a recent conference in Italy I gave a presentation on the distinction between the Annapurna Conservation Area Project and the Makalu-Barun Conservation Project. I see a clear distinction. Both areas are designated as conservation areas. But whereas ACAP involves conservation for the people, in Makalu-Barun we are doing things the other way round. We are mobilising people for conservation. This comes down to more education, and enabling people to have sufficient resources without harming the core areas.

CR: How do you see the role of the army in protecting national parks?

TBS: In Chitwan at least the question of the army presence has unnecessarily become an issue of debate. The matter of cost has been raised as a major objection, but the soldiers have to be paid whether they are patrolling a park or doing drill on the Tundikhel. The debate should have been about the role of the army, and whether we want to change that, and to develop some dialogue between the park warden and the colonel or whoever. You can't talk about co-existence unless you recognise the existence of the entities involved. The army had been doing its job, protecting the park, and they should be given more power to protect, more scope to maintain dialogue with the people. Their role should have had a new dimension added to it, rather than their existence being questioned. When it comes to questioning something's existence, even a cat will fight back, not to mention the army. The presence of the army in the park is something that you need ultimately.

CR: Is there any dialogue at the moment?

TBS: No dialogue. Only debate. Debate

about the presence of the army in the park. Now if the Makalu-Barun Conservation Project is initiated without the army, that's a different matter, and no-one is going to raise any objections. But the army has always been in Chitwan. They were responsible. And now we're suddenly saying, Out you go. For places like Chitwan the army is important.

CR: Is the presence of the army equally essential in the upland parks?

TBS: In Sagarmatha and Langtang the army is not important. It's redundant. In Shey Phoksumdo, it's a disaster. Why do we need the army there? The wildlife is protected by the religion itself. You don't need the army. The people themselves provide all the protection. You can see blue sheep within fifty yards. They aren't afraid of people, because people don't allow guns in the area. Now there is an army unit there, with their guns, and their itching fingers. Completely counterproductive.

CR: I know that the multidisciplinary approach of the Makalu-Barun Conservation Project pleased you. Does the IUCN also have a broad disciplinary base?

TBS: We have units on the Heritage Programme, Environmental Education, Environmental Impact Assessment, and on Environmental Planning at the District Level. Another small unit is the Public Information Programme, that produces a newsletter, organises exhibitions, that sort of thing. I think there are good reasons for admiring such an approach. Scientists work in a given geographical area that's used by different disciplines. An area is not something that only one species of plants can colonise, or only one scientific discipline should occupy. My association with the Academy made me appreciate the tremendous importance of tradition and culture in the conservation of the natural environment.