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HIMAL

FOR DEVELOPMENT AND ENVIRONMENT



EATING

LEH IN TURMOIL
TIBET'S FORESTS
TELEVISED RAMAYANA

NOBEL LAMA
LANDSLIDES
LOVE TRAGEDY

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Cover picture by **Kevin Bubriski** shows Ishwori Tamang of Chapagaun in Kathmandu's outskirts having a traditional *saag* and *bhat* meal, while her mother Kanchi Tamang supervises.

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HIMAL

Vol. 2 No. 4 Sep/Oct 1989

अस्त्युत्तरस्यां दिशि देवतात्मा
हिमालयो नाम नगाधिराजः
पूर्वापरौ तोयनिधी वगाह्य
स्थितः पृथिव्या इव मानदण्डः

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

A northern yardstick
To measure the Earth

- Kalidasa (*Kumara Sambhavam*)

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MAIL

THE CIGARETTE'S BURDEN

While you pointed out in "Let Them Smoke Cigarettes" (Mar/April 1989) that the poor suffer the worst health hazards from cigarettes, we wish to add that as a revenue source cigarettes represent a regressive tax that passes a greater burden to the poor than to the rich, both absolutely and in proportion to income. Like alcoholic beverages and, for that matter, soda pop, cigarettes are especially insidious because their sales collect significant revenues in small day-by-day nearly painless increments which, unlike taxation, seem to be giving some value in return for the money of the poor. Consequently, there is not the political fallout that would result from the imposition of a straight regressive taxation (or, more to the point, from the richer groups in the case of a more equitable progressive one). In addition to the long-term health costs, the regressive character of cigarette sales also contributes to the further impoverishment of the productive base of the country.

We might add that Nepal is not alone in seeking insidious forms of taxation: the lotteries of Europe and North America are also examples of regressive taxation, self-interest of the ruling classes, and the lack of courage on the part of the policy-maker. The title of *Himal's* article does well to remind us of the fate of Marie Antoinette: we cannot have our cigarette and eat it too.

Stephen L. Mikesell, Jamuna Shrestha
Kathmandu

DUST AND HIMAL CEMENT

The cover story of *Himal's* prototype issue ("The Valley Chokes," May 1987), had reported on the dust pollution created in Kathmandu by your namesake, the Himal Cement Factory. If there is one good that has come out of the Nepal-India dispute of past months, it is that the valley's inhabitants have been able to breathe dust-free air as Himal Cement has had no coal to run on. But the coal will arrive sooner or later, as winter will arrive and with it, temperature inversion. The valley will choke yet again.

The technology for reducing the dust is readily available, in the form of electrostatic precipitators. With all the foreign money flooding this country for all kinds of projects and *tamashas*, I do not understand why some of it has not been diverted to present Himal Cement with an electrostatic precipitator. Surely, healthy lungs in Kathmandu should mean something to the national planners.

In the latest issue of the Pakistani journal *Science, Technology and Development*, there is an article entitled "How to Increase the Performance of Electrostatic Precipitators" (pages 10-23). The article states, "Dust collection is today one of the important operations of cement industries throughout the world. Most cement plants in Pakistan used electrostatic precipitators for dust collection..." It goes on to describe how to increase the efficiency of the precipitators at low cost.

I would suggest that the General Manager of Himal Cement photocopy the article and keep it for the day when his factory will actually install the precipitators -- for it is bound to be run inefficiently and we would continue to suffer unless Himal Cement acts on the article's advice.

S.N. Thapa
Kathmandu

An official from Himal Cement, when contacted, stated that electrostatic precipitators were inappropriate for the kind of machinery being used. Equipment for upgrading the factory's German plant had arrived, and included a "wet scrubber", but it had not been installed for lack of funds. There are no plans for a scrubber so far for Himal Cement's Chinese plant, which is larger and produces more dust.

TENGPOCHE REJOINER

With regard to Mr. Amrit Pradhan's views on the rebuilding of Tengpoche Gumpa (Jul/Aug 1989), first, we would like to thank Mr. Pradhan for his expression of confidence on the Sherpas' ability in rebuilding the gumpa destroyed by fire.

Unfortunately, Mr. Pradhan has overlooked an important consideration, which is the difference in building a gumpa in 1936 and the task of building one now, keeping in mind the area's vastly dwindled natural resources over 60 years. Today, a basic material such as timber for the gumpa's structure, readily procurable in the gumpa's vicinity in the 1930s, has to be air-

freighted at considerable cost from Kathmandu. Mr. Pradhan also wrote: "It seems that the Sherpas were perfectly capable of rebuilding their own gumpa when it was destroyed by an earthquake in the 1930s. Why is there now a need for foreign aid...?"

When the gumpa was rebuilt in 1936 after the disastrous earthquake of 1934, it was meant only to be a retreat for the local Buddhist monks. No one in Nepal had anticipated tourism then. Today, thousands - last year it was 8,000 - from all over the world visit Tengpoche because of its importance as a Buddhist cultural center and its location on the main trail towards Everest. So much so that the entire area, including Tengpoche, has been designated a World Heritage site.

The destruction of the gumpa by fire in January this year not only shocked Sherpas and other Nepalis but very many people in other countries who have had the opportunity to visit Tengpoche and the area. Many of these people have come forward entirely voluntarily to help the Sherpas in the restoration of this important site.

Third, Mr. Pradhan is wrong in saying that a worldwide campaign has been launched to search for architects or that tenders for the rebuilding have been solicited internationally. Such a campaign has not and will not be launched. In fact, only one architect firm in Kathmandu has been consulted and that because it makes sense to take advantage of improved construction methods rather than stick with those of an earlier era. But even so, we do not

plan any significant changes in the form of the original gumpa.

Ang Rita Sherpa and Tengpoche Gumpa Reconstruction Committee

COMMENT

Your much publicised first printing in Kathmandu is welcome and the quality stands up, but there are some ugly proofing and other mistakes in the copy. Hope you will iron these problems out in future issues to make us really proud of an international magazine from Kathmandu.

Further, Mahabalipuram ("An Ob-session with Tourism", July/August 1989) is very much a seaside resort. In your Himalayan enthusiasm, you have accorded it a non-existent hill-station status. One more suggestion: please try to stick to one system of counting. Presently, *Himal* speaks in crores in one breath and millions in another. Being an international journal, I would advise you to adopt millions.

Kamal Mani Lalitpur

I am a student at the North Eastern Hill University. I was happy to read your Nov/Dec 1988 issue. The magazine has tried to reveal the complexities of life in the Himalaya, and to capture the various views on Himalayan society. Here is an answer to people who harp constantly on the "low standard" of magazines in our region.

The article on the Nepalis of Fiji won a brilliant stroke. The idea of Nepalis celebrating Dasain with gusto on sandy beaches shows taht their love

for kith and kin extends to far shores. These mild, peace-loving people do not want ethnic hostility with the natives. The misconception of natives should be uprooted and the hostility should be wiped out. I hope that *Himal* will publish information on the present situation of the people of North East India.

*Shiva Kumar Bhattarai
Shillong, East Khasi Hills
Meghalaya*

I was delighted to go through the March/April 1989 issue of your esteemed English magazine. I greet *Himal* for its resourcefulness. Its language and get-up bears testimony to good method. I admired "Abominably Yours", which reflects an aesthetic-artistic understanding of language and rare quality of script writing. I have encouraged my students to go through *Himal*.

*Bodhraj Dogra
Department of Geography
Visva-Bharati University
Santiniketan, West Bengal*

We ask readers to use the Mail column to comment, criticise or add to information appearing in this magazine. Letters should be short and to the point, and are subject to editing. Send all your mail to:

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Is There Just One Path to "Development"?

Western-style progress has wreaked havoc on the environment and failed to eliminate poverty. Meanwhile environmental conservation has remained an exclusivist fad.

by Prayag Raj Sharma

What *Himal* provides its readers, particularly those in Nepal, by focussing on the problems of the Himalayan environment, is both useful and interesting. If a little awareness is aroused among the people here as a result of which some day a group or individual may resolve to fight off the irrationalities and selfish acts of government bodies, corporate groups, contractors and industrialists in the degradation of our environment, your magazine will have played its part very well.

You have dedicated *Himal* to the twin goals of the study of development and environment, which to me seem to be terms in contradiction. Much of the world's environmental nightmare today has been saddled upon us by the industrialised countries of the West during the last 150 years. In the name of development and perpetual "progress", they have torn holes in the ozone layer, polluted the air, sullied the Himalaya, poisoned the waters of rivers and oceans and brought the world to the very brink of disaster. They now speak with concern about these problems, but cannot come up with solutions which they themselves are ready to implement.

The poorer and developing countries of the Third World do not set themselves too far apart in sharing this guilt. Although their contribution to global pollution may be relatively small, today they are set to follow the same path of the industrialised countries in the name of economic progress. All these states, too, have set for themselves similar targets of growth based on borrowed money and technology. Reckless industrialisation programmes are on-going with no thought for safety measures. The goal is simply to have an increased level of production and to spread the consumer culture of cities and urban centers.

Although they may pass legislation and legal provisions, respect for law in the Third World is minimal because of "political backwardness." So most of the plans for environmental protection go askew. Politicians are manipulated by business firms, manufacturers and contractors while governments look the other way.

No person in authority discussing the problem of environmental degradation today seems to realise how much change in the prevailing ideas is needed before one can hope to correct the damage, if it can be corrected at this late hour.

In this kind of psychological setting, concern for the environment becomes academic and little that is substantive will be achieved except some piecemeal works and isolated projects. Thus, there may be a "Project Tiger" here and a "Sagarmatha National Park" there, but the degradation elsewhere goes on much as before.

All this seems to reduce the whole talk about environmental problems to a mere fad for many. Those who are more clever may show off their knowledge, but they lack a sense of mission. The few dedicated individuals and organisations, meanwhile, face obstructions and impediments all the time, not the least from their own governments.

Some western governments are petrified that the Green Party might come into its own some day. In India, the *Chipko* movement has not spread beyond a band of activists like Sunderlal Bahuguna. The Indian Government honours persons like Bahuguna with medals, but it does little to heed his voice. Bahuguna visited Kathmandu as part of the *Chipko* campaign to exhort Nepalis to launch a similar movement. But beyond giving him a patient hearing at a small gathering at Tribhuvan University, in which not one official

conservationist was present, no one was really moved or inspired.

Nepal's response to the problem of nature conservation and environmental protection has been strictly channeled and orchestrated by the government. The people in it are members of a high-style exclusivist conservationist club. It is through them that the phlegmatic state tries to project its conservationist image internationally and thus regards itself as having fulfilled its obligations to the world environment beautifully.

In my opinion, the ultimate answer for environmental regeneration lies in changing the whole ethos of modern living, in redefining what our understanding of progress. This may involve reassessing the utility of the manufacturing culture and banishing the goal of perpetual economic growth. The apologists for economic growth will make the usual arguments, but what has all the progress and economic development achieved do far?

The remedy to poverty does not lie in replicating the model of the industrialised West. A whole new code of living needs to be drawn up -- an internationally backed charter of new ethics and morality for all men and women of the world to follow. Basic research in science, medicine and agriculture may continue. However, every discovery need not end up in the hands of industrialists and manufacturers to spawn a whole range of luxurious, dispensable -- and often harmful -- products.

I find the teachings (not the religious dogmas) of the world religions, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity, quite useful and relevant in this regard. Their common message is that we should eschew a life of too much material comfort, keep what is most essential for a modest living, and spend surplus earnings for the common good.

The ideas jotted down here were triggered while going through your magazine. If you find my ideas too presumptuous, I ask for your indulgence. △

P.R. Sharma is a political scientist at Tribhuvan University.

New Foods, New Habits, New Hazards

Eating conventions are in a state of flux as Himalayan communities open up to outside influence. While the most dramatic transformations are in the urban middle-class diet, changes in rural eating habits and nutrition are potentially more hazardous.

by Kadam Arjel

Habits die hard, and eating habits are said to die harder still. What we grow, how we cook, and how we eat and drink are perhaps conventions most difficult to change. And yet, in the hills across the Himalaya, routines of eating and cooking are under assault. New crops, innovative planting techniques, and the availability of processed foods and soft drinks are altering our diets in significant ways, not always for the better. Nutritious *makai-bhatmas* is giving way to soft popcorn; local buttermilk (*mohi*) is losing out to orange squash and aerated drinks; unleavened bread (*roti*) is being replaced by mass-produced white bread; and in the hinterland, nutritious local grains are being supplanted by rice and other exotic varieties.

"Food habit is a static concept as long as it is not disturbed by external forces," says Yogesh Nandan Baidya, Chief of the Nutrition Division of Kathmandu's Central Food Research Laboratory (CFRL). Ever since potatoes entered into the Himalayan diet a century ago, these "external forces" have gathered momentum. Asparagus,

kurilo, is now a major sales product in Kathmandu's Ranamukteswar market. No local farmer would have been able to recognise the vegetable just three decades ago.

Change in dietary habits has been a fact of life in every civilisation. However, the transitions have generally been gradual enough to allow societies to adjust. Not so in today's world, shrunk as it is by road transport, radio, television, and the long and effective reach of advertisers and MBAs. Traditional diets are under attack like never before by new and exotic ways to prepare and consume food. Because this change is increasingly sudden, it deprives societies of the lead time they had always had to adapt to a new food possibility. Unlike developed regions with adequate consumer protection traditions, Himalayan societies are quite unprepared to deal with white loaf, for example. Who will tell the porter in Pokhara's outskirts that the rather tasty piece of bread he is dunking into his glass of milk tea does him less good than *sattu*, his traditional fare.

DIETARY CATASTROPHE

Over time and over generations, indigenous foods have always been found to attain a nutritional balance closely tied to the particular needs and circumstances of each society -- be it the Newari diet of Kathmandu valley, Gurung of the hills of central Nepal, or of other ethnic groups. This dietary balance evolved from the environmental and climatic conditions, the quality of land, irrigation, and the cultural heritage of a society. When external forces impinge, the nutritional equilibrium is among the first to be impaired. Traditional flattened rice, *chiura*, is replaced by modern packaged snacks. Fruits canned in syrup stand in for fresh produce. Mountain spring water is replaced by sodas peddled by multi-national corporations. Easier-to-grow crops replace hardy and nutritious traditional strains.

If changes in dietary patterns came gradually or were planned, societies could actually adjust to and benefit from the new eating possibilities. It is important for traditional diets to maintain their nutritional equilibrium. The



Kevin Bubriski



M. Thapa

best example of this happened when the potatoe entered the Sherpa diet in the Khumbu to slowly take over as a staple (Nov/Dec 1988 *Himal*). If the change is sudden, unplanned, and a result of marketing acumen of the new food peddlers, then chances are that the nutritional needs of the population would be drastically affected, and, society would be headed for a dietary catastrophe.

At least for middle-class Himalayan society, such a dietary catastrophe is a distinct possibility. In Nepal, one hears often of the Tourism Master Plan, the newly launched Forestry Master Plan, and other plans. But few are aware that there is a Food Master Plan, formulated in 1985 with the help of the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). In the absence of a well thought out and implemented food policy, the society is adrift and prey to the blatant commercialisation of soda pop manufacturers, the purveyors of instant noodles, "cheese balls," and other attractively packaged western-style eatables. While the rural populace has not been affected by these "modern" food items, they too have had to deal with dietary dislocations brought about by development activity and foreign aid. Development agencies have been largely ineffective in guiding the introduction of new hybrids and new food items.

Not all dietary changes are alarming or unwelcome. Indeed, often, there are changes that have benefited society. The recent introduction of soya milk and of vegetable oils in Nepal can be taken as examples. The production of cheddar cheese in the hills of eastern

Nepal with Swiss help, is also potentially beneficial, if it ever becomes affordable to the general public. On the other hand, sudden and haphazard intervention from the outside can easily ruin the nutritional health of a people. The need, therefore, is for thoughtfulness and caution. For example, horticultural authorities, taking cues from foreign experts and the success of Himachal Pradesh, have rushed to promote apples in the hinterland, though without much success. But for some reason they never considered an indigenous fruit, the guava. Says Yogesh Baidya, "the guava has more roughage than apples, provides Vitamin C and is said to control cholesterol." Being up to ten times cheaper than the exotic apple, certainly, it could be said that it is "an *amba* day" that would keep the doctor away, if given a chance to enter the diet in the face of apple propaganda.

Modern Eurocentric dietary practices are also dealing a death blow to traditional foods that are good sources of nutrition. According to Baidya, these include *gundruk* (which contains calcium, iron and Vitamin B); *sattu*, the "traditional instant food" made from powdered maize, soya beans or grains; or *masyaura*, made of lentils and different vegetables. *Kwanti*, mixed beans sprout, is probably the most nutritious among Nepali diets, providing calcium, phosphorus, iron and Vitamin B. It is a particularly rich source of protein for vegetarians. And yet, even traditionally, *kwanti* is eaten only during the observance of *Janai Purnima* in early August. Unless it is made a "fad" by the tiny

health-conscious elite, *kwanti* will probably not endure in Kathmandu households.

THE RESTAURANT CULTURE

The influx of Tibetan refugees in the early 1960s was of major significance to Kathmandu's dietary history, says Madhav Gautam, a nutrition expert at the Agriculture Project Services Centre (APROSC) in Kathmandu. That was when the "momo business" took off. Traditionally, the local steamed meat dumpling known as *mamacha* was largely confined to Newari homes. The Tibetan dumpling, on the other hand, hit the streets as the refugees searched for ways to make a living. Bahuns and Chhetris found it possible to dispatch proscribed buffalo-meat dumplings in the security of eating-houses without being found out by peer or pundit. Today, signboards announcing "New Taste Momo," "Five Star Momo," or "Rasilo Momo," entice the passer-by in the streets of Kathmandu.

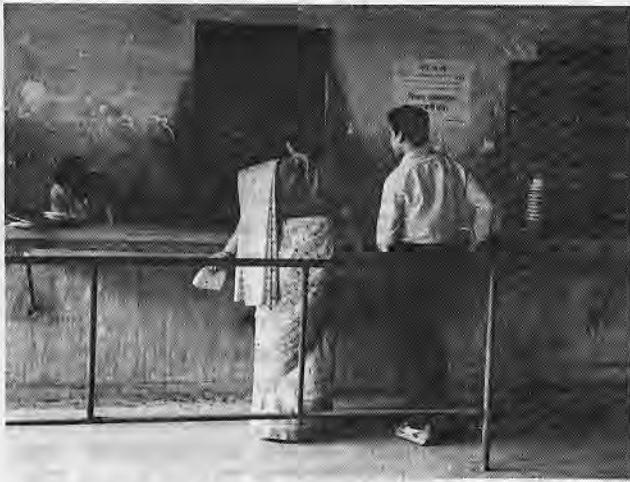
Given their proliferation, it is hard to believe that restaurants are a new phenomenon in Kathmandu, barely four decades old. Until then, all meals were taken at home and the local *bhattis* served mainly the traveler. It was the tourist industry that spawned the restaurants in town. The majority of office-goers still have their *dal-bhat* before leaving for work and have a tea-snack before returning home for dinner. The traditional combination of lentils, rice and vegetables continues to provide adequate nutrition. But the hundreds of travel executives in Kathmandu make it their proud ritual to



Kevin Bubriski



Kevin Bubriski



Waiting for RaRa: University Cafeteria

M. Thapa

take a "lunch break" between 1 p.m. and 2 p.m. to eat often poorly prepared international fare. Yet another dietary custom, eating food at home, thus bites the dust, at least with the "trend-setting" section of Kathmandu society.

Thukpa, too, long a standard in the Sherpa diet, was alien to the Kathmandu culture. This noodle-meat-vegetable soup also entered via the Tibetan refugee restaurant. Unfortunately, *thukpa* is losing out today, pushed aside by yet another entrant -- the instant noodle. Order a *thukpa* in a local eatery today and you are likely to get not the traditionally rich Tibetan dish, but the mass-produced "RaRa Chow-Chow" in your bowl, garnished with a few pieces of scallions and carrots.

KHAJA TIME MENU

It is not that all the Himalayan societies are willy-nilly shifting over to alien foods. Says nutritional anthropologist Ava Shrestha, "When there is a perceptible change in the core food, then there must have been some degree of acculturation of the host society." Of course, the vast majority of the Himalayan communities, in Nepal and elsewhere, have not imported western culture or plains culture in enough doses to change their "core foods", or staples, such as *dal-bhat* and *dhindo-gundruk*, the corn-flour paste dish with fermented vegetable leaves.

Even in the major towns of the Himalaya, the "core" diet has not undergone major changes, except among a very few ultra-westernised families

which have crossed over to corn-flakes, lamb chops and soup-before-meal. There is, however, a distinct evolution regarding the consumption of snacks, or *khaja*. Traditionally, snacks at home or at the workplace, used to consist of *chiura*, beaten rice, with eggs, yogurt or curried potato. It was as recently as the mid-1980s that imported varieties of "junk foods" routed these traditional snacks.

Potato chips, instant noodles and other instant or near-instant foods are becoming important components in the middle-class diet.

Definition: Junk food is food that has excess empty calories and salt. In a society where protein-calorie malnutrition is prevalent, this definition is not adequate. Food items of no nutritional value, while welcomed in diet-conscious western societies, may be termed junk in the context of Himalayan diets.

To be sure, there were enough of what might be regarded as traditional junk food before the advent of the modern junk. Take the traditional *titaura* appetiser made from the Lapsi fruit, or *pushtakari*, made from hardened concentrated milk. But what was wrong with the traditional junk was not their nutritional value but their suspect observance of hygienic standards. In today's urban culture, however, even the traditional junk's nutritional value is being undercut. Today's *pushtakari*, for example, is adulterated with flour and stale, curdled milk -- thus making convenient use of food rejects.

CHOU-CHOU SYNDROME

Modern junk and fast foods must be studied in the light of their hygiene, their nutritional value, and their questionable use of chemical additions and colouring. The major inroad into the middle-class Nepali diet is being made by instant noodles. The market was pioneered by "RaRa", consolidated by "Maggie", and finally won over by "WaiWai", which remains the leader

today (*see accompanying article*). The instant noodle peddlers have proven the standard maxim that "the market can be created."

All instant noodles, of course, contain monosodium glutamate (MSG, known locally by its Japanese name, *azinomoto*), which enhances flavour but is considered by many experts to be carcinogenic, though this contention is disputed by some. (Indonesia, Philippines and Thailand actually include MSG in diets as fortification for Vitamin A, much as salt is fortified with iodine to counter goitre in the Himalayan region.) Whether MSG is a boon or bane, much heard of are the instances of acute "Chinese Restaurant Syndrome" -- diners complaining of severe headaches after having MSG-laced food. Similar allergic reactions are visible, say experts, among many individuals who consume instant noodles. Meanwhile, seduced by its supposed taste enhancing magic, many housewives are sprinkling liberal doses of MSG into their traditional Nepali dishes.

TODDLER'S TIFFIN

While adults should know better than to give in to the glorious virtues -- read convenience -- of the instant noodle, children are unwittingly victimised by the market forces and the increasing urbanisation of their parents' lifestyles. No longer is there time to prepare nutritious snacks for toddlers. It is so much easier to "reward" them with "WaiWai", the brand that children eat un-cooked, straight off the packet, for their tiffin. With a smile, the child goes through the ritual of crushing the packet before opening it so that the noodles break into small pieces, then sprinkling hot *masala* from the small packet provided, and presto, the meal is ready.

Anuradha Pradhan, who runs the Amar Sishu Vidyalaya at Kupondole, expresses her frustration in her attempts to convince guardians not to make instant noodles their wards' staple. "Parents are too busy and too submissive to their children's demands," says Pradhan. "They don't realise the harm done by exclusive

reliance on this type of tiffin." She voices the fears of others educators that Kathmandu's children, who in no time since television's arrival have become TV addicts, imbibe the message of motivated commercials. A Rara chow-chow commercial jingle, for example, claims that children study better when they eat that brand.

It is not only noodles that worry concerned teachers and counselors in Kathmandu. The last couple of years have ushered in the non-brand "cheese ball." These balls are nothing more than salted corn puffs, round and brightly coloured. Nutritional value: nil. These pseudo cheese balls, without a strand of cheese in them, are the creation of Om Shrestha and R.Sharma, two entrepreneurs from the town of Narayangarh who designed the cheese ball machine. A case of innovative indigenous technology going awry, perhaps.

D.K. Suman, of Nepal Snacks Industry, a major producer, boasts that children love the cheese balls. But evidently, this "love" is not enough to grab the market. He and other manufacturers of non-brand cheese balls have begun putting pictures of film personalities, rubber balloons and plastic whistles in the polythene packs to attract more children.

SODA TAKES OVER

Speaking of enticements, the Coca Cola bottlers hit upon a brilliant strategy of including flags inside the bottle caps.

That alone must have given a boost to their sales. Starting with Coca Cola imported from Calcutta two decades ago, today the bottles of Coca Cola and its multi-national competitor, Pepsi, are found all over. The spread of Coke, Pepsi, Fanta, Limca and 7-Up from the furthest reaches of Khumbu to the high valleys of Manang and Mustang have been assisted by the presence of tourists.

The strong subliminal advertising message of the multinational sodas -- be western, be hip, be modern, be successful -- "has been taken to heart by most Nepalis who can afford it, and many who cannot. It is the same story" -- the "Third Worlder" who is taken in by the secret formulae of the multinational soda merchants, added sugar syrup, water, colouring and carbon-dioxide. Almost unnoticed, in Kathmandu, the traditional soda-walla who used to produce carbonated drinks using half-a-century old gadgetry has lost out to the Coke and Pepsi.

COLOUR IN YOUR FOOD

While the local bottlers of multinational sodas are at least thought to use permitted colouring in their products, there is hardly any monitoring or testing of the vast array of other modern snack items that have entered the Nepali market. Cheese balls, for example, come in all hues and colours. In fact, production differentiation is done through colouring, with one factory producing

Have Candy, Will Decay

by K. Tseten

Dentist say there is a 100 percent correlation between diet and tooth decay; and that the worst thing in diet is the eating of refined sugar as found in candy and other sweets. That is why, says American dentist Brian Hollander, there is less tooth decay in the lesser developed areas of Nepal, where little refined sugar is consumed.

While trekking in Khumbu in 1981, Hollander examined the teeth of Sherpa children. He found that the incidence of tooth decay was directly related to how "developed" -- that is, how exposed to tourists -- villages were. There was a 76 percent occurrence of caries -- tooth decay -- in Namche Bazaar; 56 percent in Khumjung; and only 17 percent in Phortse, a village then off the trek trail.

Where there are more tourists, more candy, soda pops and other sweet edibles are available, sometimes handed out by tourists, but more so because they are introduced to satisfy the tourists' demands. The Sherpas also end up consuming the sweet products, says Hollander, who has been with the United States Embassy dental clinic in Kathmandu since 1981.

Unfortunately, as remote areas become "developed", bringing in the "candy culture," dental care lags far behind. Indeed, abysmal is the word for the state of dental care in Nepal, where there is one dentist for 600,000 people. Trying to improve that statistic at least for one corner of Khumbu, Hollander is currently involved in a project to build a dental clinic in Namche, to be run by a Sherpa dentist. The clinic is slated to open next year.

Hollander found a lower incidence of decay among older Sherpas, presumably because their diet is virtually sugar-free, though they now drink more tea with sugar than with butter and salt. Unfortunately, if experience elsewhere is any guide, dental decay is the hand-maiden of "development". ▽



Sprite for a new generation

pink cheese balls, another orange, and so forth. "The colours used are organic, but the quantity is higher than our prescription," says Urmila Joshi, a senior officer at CFRL.

Manufacturers claim they use only permitted colourings or additives. But sources in CFRL admit that they have neither staff nor expertise to continuously keep track of colouring use. In India, there have been oft-reported cases of unscrupulous traders using the very dangerous Metanil Yellow and even highly toxic textile dyes on food-stuffs, particularly in *jilfis* and *mithai* sweets. The same is possible, if not probable, in Nepali food products, though there is no telling to what extent. The effect of the use of illegal, untested dyes range from mere indigestion to anaemia and pathological lesions in vital organs such as the liver, kidney and spleen. Nepal and India both permit coal tar dyes as colouring in foods even though serious doubts persist about their safety.

RURAL DIETS

The problems relating to changing diets and the advent of instant food items are for the moment confined to the towns of Nepal. Much of the rural hinterland remains concerned with the more crucial problems of daily survival. In many places, particularly in west Nepal, food grains last for only seven months of the year, and thence villagers have to revert to diets consisting of *bhyakur* (yams) or *sisnu* (nettle).

Rural Nepal remains poor in cash liquidity. Because the modern food sector has not penetrated much of the hinterland other than via trekking routes, and also because of the limited reach of advertising, diets in the country's far corners have not and will not change as rapidly. However, development activity, introduction of new crops or new strains of old crops, and the reach of highways are liable to bring about dislocations in local eating habits. Already, there are reports of porters in east Nepal preferring instant noodle packets to the more nutritious *sattu* that was the traditional trail food.

The diet of hill people often consists of maize and millet, and rice is con-

Middle Class Diet:

Towards Coronary Catastrophe

by Dr. Narayan Bahadur Thapa


Generally, in the Himalaya, the poor population eats vegetarian food, and meat only on special occasions. The situation, however, is quite different for the burgeoning middle- and upper-middle classes. Although on the average Nepal is not getting any richer, the size of the *nouveau riche* has increased considerably in the past two decades. And what is happening to the dietary pattern of this group is quite startling.

Traditionally, people ate meat (goats slaughtered at home) only occasionally. Now, professional butchers sell meat every day except on certain holidays. Those who do not observe religious holidays can get frozen meat any time. This is a reflection of increased buying capacity and a changed lifestyle. Today, there are many more social get-togethers and vastly increased consumption of alcohol, both of which is said to call for meat-eating. Not only is the *khasi* eaten with skin and fat, but the liver, kidney and entrails are fried in oil and eaten as tidbits with drinks.

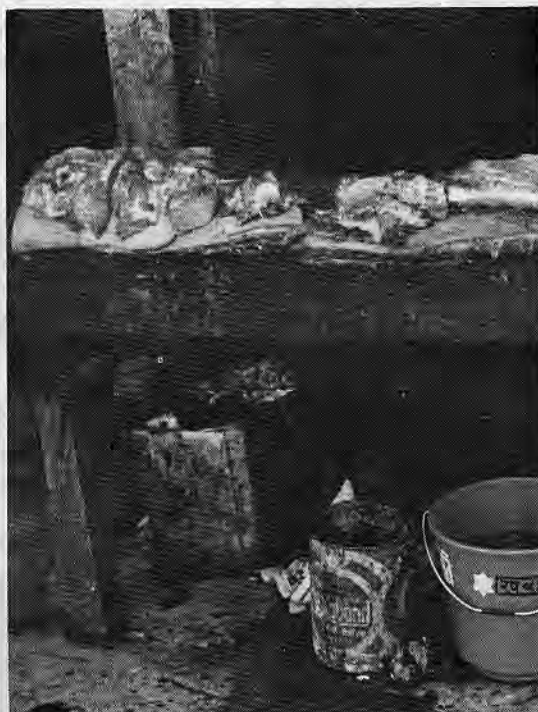
With more disposable income, the middle class' food has become much richer. More sweets, chocolates and soft drinks are consumed. People are also getting much less exercise. Walking has more or less been abandoned in favour of motorised vehicles. Midriffs have widened all over. To add to all this, stress has become a part of daily life for many. Smoking has become a growing national pastime and non-smokers inhale from others who are. Very few Nepalis have regular medical checkups and are, therefore, not even aware of deteriorating health.

With dietary habits changing for the worse, and with less exercise, high consumption of alcohol, higher stress and increasing smoking, middle class Nepal is set for an explosion in the incidence of Coronary Artery Diseases (CAD). Evidence so far indicates that the process has begun. While two decades ago one rarely heard about people dying from this dreaded disease, today hardly a conversation is carried out without a mention of someone going abroad for bypass surgery.

Without sound epidemiological data, it is hard to know whether there is a real increase in the incidence of CAD or only that more of it is being discovered because of better diagnostics. But if the world trend is anything to go by, we are headed towards a dangerous precipice. And if we are to benefit from the lessons learned by others, we should change our lifestyles early on. What should we do?

We should: *stop smoking, cut down eating khasi and animal fats, eat fish, use polyunsaturated oils for cooking, take regular exercise, minimise alcohol intake, control weight, and have regular medical examinations.* 

Dr. N. B. Thapa is Director of Kanti Children's Hospital in Kathmandu.



M. Thapa

Dashain khasi at Ranamukteswor

sidered a luxury. It was in such conditions that the Food Subsidy Programme of the Nepali Government brought rice to the hilly regions and changed the consumption pattern of many. The milled rice made available through subsidy loses most of its micro-nutrients, especially Vitamin B during milling and polishing. There is also the question of what happens when the programme is ended? Examples of miscalculated introduction of crops abound in the hills of Nepal, but ironically, it is because of economic backwardness and isolation that the bulk of the hill population has been spared some of the ill effects of marketing hardsell, new foods and new habits.

FOOD POLICY AND THE FUTURE

The Nepali Government's "Basic Needs Programme" has declared that by the year 2000, all Nepalis (including the 42 percent who presently fall below the poverty line) will have a daily intake of 2,250 kilo-calories a day. Meanwhile, the Government has given priority to paddy and wheat cultivation in the hills. Herein lies a paradox.

If the target is to increase the per capita calorie consumption, then the resources be concentrated on more robust grains such as maize and millet, whose total calorific value is much higher than the more popular rice and wheat. Additionally, says Yogesh Baidya, the 2,250 calorie mark is a production target and not a consumption target. He adds that the quality of food intake quality should not be measured only calories, but should look at overall nutrition, balance in micro-nutrients such as vitamins and minerals, health issues, and the economics of food.

As diets change in the urban landscape and as development distorts traditional diets, it is important for the government and public to realise that they are dealing with a matter that has a long-term bearing on the health of the population and of the economy. Dietary change may be inevitable, but the challenge lies in pointing it in the right direction. What will not do is the present policy of leaving an unknowing populace at the mercy of western foods

Will Nepalis Make Their Own Baby Food?

by James Emmons

Much talk of economic independence has been spawned by the trade and transit crisis with India. There are exhortations of using of native wicker-work wastebaskets and dreams of running cars on electricity. Meanwhile, amid the pedestrian and the grandiose, comes a practical aspiration -- an effort to make baby food.

Nepal imports the weaning formula Cerelac and Farex from India but markets no formulas of its own. The imports dominate, yet they hardly satisfy the need for such foods. In a typical year, Nepal imports roughly 150 tons of cereal formula, only enough to feed one in 165 newborns. The formulas are expensive, unaffordable for the majority of Nepali mothers, and now more so because of the trade crisis. Cerelac, the instant milk cereal from India, had a pre-crisis cost of about NRS33 per tin; it now costs NRS40.

Nepal's food scientists believe the country could produce weaning foods for one-third the cost of the Indian variety. The Joint Nutrition Support Programme, a four-year-old undertaking of the Ministry of Agriculture, develops weaning foods from locally available crops. Its process calls for little more than malting, hulling and grinding of local grains, and the teaching of these methods. It is all appropriately low key. What's new of course is the replacement of traditional

rice -- too bulky and lacking in protein -- with a variety of well-balanced cereals and pulses. The mothers find they are able to feed their babies less often, yet more nutritiously.

Now, for the coming year, the programme proposes to its sponsors, UNICEF and the World Health Organisation, an ambitious step. It would like to extend its sphere of assistance to the commercial sector. If the plans go forward, businessmen, or women's groups, should be able to seek technical and financial assistance to establish small commercial productions of weaning foods.

At UNICEF, Raymond Jannesen, programme coordinator, welcomes the proposal and calls it long overdue. In the past, similar commercial ventures were dogged by difficulties of distribution, and Jannesen concedes that such difficulties are well entrenched. On the other hand, urban centers in Nepal are growing at a remarkable rate -- 8 to 10 percent a year, with the pace expected to increase even further. More concentrated markets should result, together with greater demand for store-bought formula. Whether Nepal meets the new demand with a domestic product, or more imports, is something today's crisis may be deciding. △

J.Emmons is a United States-based freelance writer.



A promotional photograph from the Health Department showing the proper ingredients for a child's diet.

and alien (but extremely effective) marketing techniques. While much attention has been paid of late to issues such as environmental degradation, trade and transit, and foreign aid, the "mundane" subject of diets and nutrition has been left for discussion only in specialised seminars and symposia. Meanwhile, entrepreneurs are at license to profit at the expense of an unsuspecting population.

WHO'S THE WATCH-DOG?

In a state of ever-increasing external influences and constant flux, nothing can stay put for long. Eating behaviour can change haphazardly. Social norms alone may not correct the maladjustments in society's eating patterns. What and how we eat will ultimately reflect on the country's overall health. After all, next to breathing, eating is the most important activity for human survival. Its study should not be neglected. A

proper nutrition policy should consider changing diets in the urban areas as well as in villages.

Though not obvious, there exists a relationship between the increasingly "modern" foods being consumed by the rich and middle-class and the traditional foods of the rural majority. Kathmandu's decision-makers, increasingly remote from the diets of the villager, are liable to take decisions regarding nutrition according to their own preconceptions. Are resources being used to subsidise products that contribute to the palate of the rich while compromising the nutrition -- and, therefore, the health -- of the poor? Why waste resources over Pepsi and Coke when water quenches thirst just as well, and is healthier to boot? It is clear that food policy has to be linked to industrial policy as well.

Perhaps it is too much to expect government alone to fulfill the demands

made on it. "There must be continuous watch. And this watchdogging must be done by consumer protection groups," says Madhav Gautam of APROSC. Clearly, Nepal and the other Himalayan states need their educated public to be mindful of how their societies make their march towards the sometimes dubious "rewards" of modernity and affluence. One important aspect of this modernising tide is the matter of nutrition. Government must remain alert and consumer groups must emerge to sound the alarm when things get out of hand, as they are beginning to. Somebody must watch the changing urban dietary landscape and be on the look-out for the possibly graver dislocations in the dietary standards of the hinterland.

K. Arjel is a Kathmandu writer who likes to keep track of how modernity affects traditional lifestyles.

Hello Chou Chou! Goodbye Dal Bhat?

by Prakash Khanal

High on a pass a day's walk east of Bhojpur in Nepal, porter Krishna Bahadur Limbu slurps up a bowl of noodles before heaving his *doko* of grain and heading up the hill towards market.

In Kathmandu, housewife Meera Sharma prepares packaged noodle soup for her three school-going children. "The kids love it and it needs less fuel," she says.

Throughout the hills, pre-cooked noodles in brightly coloured packs, bottled soft drinks and factory made biscuits are bringing sweeping changes in the eating habits of Himalayans.

Taking cue from attractively-packaged and slickly-marketed instant foods in neighbouring India, Nepali manufacturers of noodles are targeting middle class urbanites and rural consumers. Sizzling commercials on Nepal TV depict junk food enthusiasts nibbling noodles as today's culinary role models.



Birendra Singh

DHINDO VS. FAST FOOD

To be sure, noodles are not yet about to dislodge the staple *dal* and *bhat* from the Nepali home and hearth, but nutrition experts warn that junk food has made sufficient inroads to pose risks of widespread malnutrition. Manufacturers and consumers say packaged foods save time and fuel, which is crucial during these times of acute kerosene and firewood shortage. Besides, a packet of noodles costs NRS7, while a meal of rice, dal and

curry in a modest eatery can cost upwards of NRS15.

The noodles need only two minutes in boiling water to cook, whereas a traditional *puri* and *aloo* snack requires ten times as much time and fuel. *Himal* asked the porter in Bhojpur why he was not eating the traditional rice or *dhindo* (millet and buckwheat paste).

Limbu's reply sounded like a radio commercial: "Light to carry, easy to cook, they need fewer utensils and they taste better."

But while saving time and perhaps even money, experts say, the new junk foods are reducing nutrition intake. An adult's minimum daily requirement of 2,400 calories is hardly met by a diet dominated by noodles, biscuits and soft drinks, according to an expert. "Noodles are not bad provided they are

prepared with plenty of vegetables, eggs, meat and beans. But by themselves they definitely cannot substitute for a balanced diet," he says.

But for most noodle addicts, adding such ingredients defeats the purpose of an instant two-minute meal. Most rural consumers simply boil the noodles and add the powdered spices that come with the packet. Surveys have shown that 70 percent of Nepali children are severely malnourished. Up to 20 percent of them are said to suffer from third-degree protein deficiency. Warns an official at the Central Food Research Laboratory: "This condition is sure to deteriorate if more children eat noodles as a whole meal."

Binod Chaudhary of Nepal-Thai Foods, which produces the "WaiWai" and "MaMa" brand instant noodles, disputes these charges: "Being wheat-based with at least 14 percent protein and 10 percent fat, the noodles are highly nutritious."

MARCO POLO'S RETURN

Krishna Acharya of Pokhara's Gandaki Noodles Factory says: "We are proud to have changed the eating habits of Nepalis within a short span of six years." Gandaki is the maker of the "RaRa" brand noodle and has recently

brought Marco Polo a full circle, as it were, by introducing macaroni, spaghetti and vermicelli in the Himalayan market.


Fierce competition and the challenge of convincing a nation what to eat has prompted both organisations to spend heavily on promotion. Voluptuous noodle lovers grace television screens and radio jingles exhort Nepalis to devour the stuff anywhere, anytime. Packaging material is printed in Singapore and add 8 US cents (NRS2.20) to the cost of each packet.

Despite the costs and newspaper warnings about the high content of monosodium glutamate (*azinomoto*), more and more Nepalis seem to have become noodle junkies. Sales have wriggled up from 10,000 packets a day in 1985 to 25,000 a day in January 1989. Gandaki sells most of its noodles in rural areas. The ads seem to have worked like magic -- the crinkly packets are now found from tea-shops in Jogbani in the eastern Tarai to trekking lodges below Thorung La in Manang, at 5,400m.

"Our sales are rising by 20 percent every year. Noodles have become as common as jeans," says Acharya. The denim analogy seems to reflect a marketing strategy that proselytises the

public to emulate eating habits of alien consumer cultures or glamorous screen personalities. Gandaki and Nepal-Thai both launched door-to-door sales and gave away free samples. Gift coupons could win noodlers television sets, motorcycles and even tuition fees for their tots.

Gandaki Noodles' production of noodles jumped from 200 tons to 700 tons in a five-year period. It earned NRS30 million in that time and spent up to 25 percent of its net earnings on promotion in Nepal and in India. Both brands had made inroads into the Indian market until the Indo-Nepal trade dispute put a stop to it.

But despite jabs from critics and nutritionists who call pre-cooked noodles junk food, the product seems to have filled a need for fast, easy-to-prepare and fuel-saving meals. Despite the assertion of anthropologists that a peoples' eating habit is the most difficult thing to change, Nepalis seem to be attacking their WaiWais and RaRas with the same relish as they do their *gundruk* and *bhat*. 

Prakash Khanal is a science writer based in Kathmandu.

Where Have All the Cows Gone?

by Rajiv Tiwari

The village of Chopta marks the beginning of the back-breaking trek up to the temple of Tungnath in the Garhwal Himalaya. At a wayside shop, a pilgrim bargains with the owner for a kilogram of *ghee*, trying to bring down the price from IRs60 to a more affordable IRs40. But the shopkeeper will have none of it. "Just take what you can at my price. *Ghee* is precious now. If not you, there will be others."

Ghee, clarified butter, used to be cheap and plentiful just five years ago. The pilgrim does not understand that a complex web of factors -- new roads, tourism, "development" -- have con-

tributed to *ghee's* price rise. The same is true for other milk products.

The rolling green alpine pastures around Chopta, known as *bugyals*, used to provide excellent grazing grounds for local mountain cows. The *bugyals* are still there, but the bovines no longer come to chew the cud under the shadow of Chaukhamba Peak. The Uttar Pradesh government has banned seasonal migration by nomadic Gujjars, who used to be the mainstay of the area's dairy supplies. The villagers of Chopta are now expected to take loans under one of the many "anti-poverty" programmes run from Lucknow and

buy crossbred Jersey or Freisan heifers, which would have to be stall-fed.

GOD AND GOVERNMENT

The shopkeeper at Chopta is commiserating with the pilgrim: "This is how it goes in *kaliyug*, *bhaisaheb*. What God gives with one hand, he takes with the other."

Substitute "government" for "god", and you have a fairly accurate description of the nutcracker that today's hill people find themselves in. The "environmentalist" sitting in the plains -- both in and out of government -- cannot see the people for the trees. He



Jersey import, with mountain cow in back

decrees programmes that cause havoc among the populace in the distant hills. An increasingly common term among the people Chopta is "*pet par laat mara*" -- it is like being kicked in the stomach.

A series of new forest regulations passed by the Central Government in New Delhi severely curtails the right of Garhwal's villagers to gather minor forest produce such as honey, tubers and wild fruit, which used to supplement the nutritionally poor diets. The forests are now the exclusive property of the Forest Department, which sees the woodlands as a money-making resource, to be auctioned off to the highest bidder for timber value.

As a substitute for honey and herbs, the Garhwali can now waste his money on urban junk food such as noodles and biscuits, completing the cycle of alienation from his natural environment.

The influx of tourists has led to a further shift in the local diet, from the indigenous *mandua* grain to wheat. The local staple is now considered of low-status even though it has higher caloric value than wheat flour and is said to generate more body heat. An important consideration in this alpine region. *Mandua* is held in such low esteem that villagers are embarrassed to even talk about why they do not grow it.

MILK OR MILK POWDER?

Back to milk talk. At Kund, which is a cluster of houses where the road crosses the Mandakini River on its way to Gauri Kund, two types of tea are available -- one with powder milk, the other with real milk. The tea with milk costs twice as much and is bought only by the pilgrim-tourists. The villagers can afford only powdered milk.

Before, milk was readily available in the valleys of Garhwal, providing protein to the largely vegetation hill peasants. But the milk flow has now been diverted to the main highways where it is downed by the multiplying pilgrim-tourists. The more efficiently the government sells tourist packages to Garhwali shrines, the more the people of Garhwal will shift to from milk to milk powder.

For centuries, the traditional method of handling surplus milk had been to concentrate in into *khoya* or make *ghee*, both of which found a ready market among the *halwai* sweet-shops of Garhwal's towns. The "developers" -- bureaucrats and commercial contractors -- were quite unhappy with this state of affairs, for it offered little scope for constructing roads, cement buildings and modern dairy plants. No, what was required was "income-generation

activity." So Indian and Western bureaucrats fly between New Delhi and foreign capitals to produce feasibility reports to bring development to this corner of Garhwal.

A herd of crossbreeds is marshalled, and a fodder producing machine bought to feed the Jersey cow's hefty appetite. A veterinary doctor is posted at a "center of excellence" in the hills. A dairy plant using imported machinery is set up to convert milk into products that find no use in the hill kitchen.

Before long, the vet decides that he has to leave for the sake of the children's education. The engineer exits soon after the doctor. The bureaucrat, of course, has been long gone and is flogging yet another project to eager donors. The contractor has had his laugh all the way to the bank. The villager has less milk than he started out with.

Out there, somewhere on a hillside in Garhwal, stands a monument to mal-development -- a Jersey cow. The villager smokes his *beedi* and stares at this relic, and wonders and waits for the day when his herd of mountain cows will be back to full strength. △

R.Tiwari is a Delhi-based journalist who writes about the people and environment of the Indian Himalaya.

Himal Alert!

Himal welcomes news reports, articles and opinion columns on any and all aspects of Himalayan society. Forthcoming issues will cover, among other things, hill poverty, the Tarai belt, the Gorkha retrenchment, Kathmandu real estate, iodine deficiency, enchantment with the west, and "development refugees". While all submissions will be read and considered, the editors are not obliged to return unsolicited manuscripts. For a copy of "Writing for **Himal**," please write to P.O.Box 42, Lalitpur, Nepal.

With the forthcoming Nov/Dec issue, **Himal** will begin carrying a column on "Upcoming Events." Please send in information regarding seminars, symposia, conferences, fairs, educational course and tours which have a bearing on life in the Himalayan region. Please include names of contact persons, dates, addresses and a brief description of the proposed activity.

"I'm a Simple Buddhist Monk"

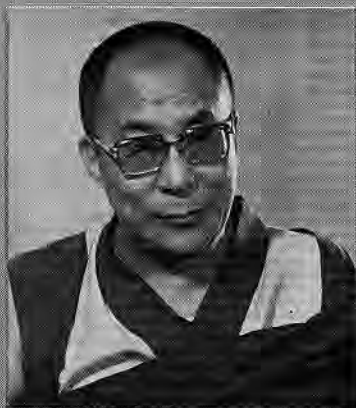
A simple monk, that is how the 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso said he wished to be known to the world. But the world will not forget that he is a simple monk with a Nobel Peace Prize. This is only the fourth Prize to honor an Asian since it was first given in 1901, the most recent one having gone to Mother Theresa of Calcutta in 1979.



Terra Himalaya

A French group of social scientists and natural scientists, known by the name Terra Himalaya, is organising a major scientific expedition which will traverse the entire range by foot from Bhutan to Northern Pakistan. An international team of experts will focus on the environment and ecology of the Himalaya as they travel from Thimphu westward through Lukla, Kathmandu, Pokhara, Jhulaghat, Manali, Srinagar, Skardu, Baltit, and on to Gilgit. The expedition will take place between August 1990 and October 1991. It will be divided into six segments, with members walking parts or whole of the itinerary.

Terra Himalaya, whose logo is a Himalayan Griffon Vulture, is currently gather-



The Prize was declined by Le Duc Tho of Vietnam in 1973, and Japanese Eisaku Sato received it in 1974.

What plans did the Lama have for the US\$445,000 that comes with the gold medal? He told *Time* magazine that he had three ideas so far: helping alleviate starvation, a center for peace, or an educational institution for passing on "love and compassion to future generations."



ing funds for the project. Those who are interested in financing or joining the expedition should send their queries to 30, boulevard Gambetta, 38000 Grenoble, France. Already, the fields represented in the expedition are geology, agronomy, forestry, animal husbandry, glaciology, wildlife and ornithology.

Down the TV Antennae

Officialdom in both Thimphu and Kathmandu are worried about Delhi's Doordarshan TV making inroads into Bhutanese and Nepali households.

Nepali authorities can only mutter "cultural imperialism" and bear it. Bhutan, without a TV station of its own, simply banned television. As part of "Driglam Namza" -- a programme started in April with the aim of reviving Bhutanese tradition and culture in the face of sudden exposure to outside influences -- the government ordered all TV antennae dismantled. Explaining the move to the fortnightly *India Today*, HM King Jigme Singye Wangchuk said Bhutan was investing nearly US\$ 6 million on its own satellite TV system. "If people get used to Indian or Bangladesh TV they won't patronise Bhutan TV, whose programmes will be inferior initially. Once our TV is on, they can see TV of neighbouring countries."

As the King explained it, entrepreneurs without licenses were installing dish antennae for IRs20,000 and given connections for IRs1,000 to IRs2,000. When reminded that even the antenna atop

the Royal Palace had been removed, the King answered, "How can I do something I do not want my people to do?"

The authorities in Kathmandu had their own problems with dish antennae but are unable to put an outright ban on their use. Instead, the Ministry of Communications has asked satellite dish owners to register their antennae.

Nepal Television's reach is limited due to the country's rugged topography. The television signals broadcast from atop Phulchowki hill south-east of Kathmandu get blocked by the mountain ranges. NTV's programmes are therefore limited to Kathmandu valley and parts of the central and eastern Tarai plains. This is no match for the reach of Doordarshan's satellite-fed broadcasts, which theoretically can be received all over the Himalayan belt with proper antennae.

The cost of the dish antenna -- about NRS35,000 -- is what keeps Doordarshan out of most Kathmandu households. Recently, however, communities have started pooling their resources to put up neighbourhood antennae to tune in India. As a result, the forest of antennae over Kathmandu's medieval skyline thickens and cables that snake their way from house to house bring the latest episode of "Mahabharata" to viewers tired of watching seminar/in-augurations and station-sponsored volley-ball matches on NTV. Kathmandu streets, too, are empty during Sunday mornings, when the Pandavas take on the Kauravas. --Binod Bhattarai



Dish antenna and Taleju Bhawani

N K Mahajan

More Environmental Talk

Every other day, one hears new calls for environmental initiatives at the global and regional level. Gro Harlem Brundtland of Norway and her *Common Future* is already a memory to many and few seem to have taken seriously Rajiv Gandhi's call in Belgrade for a global fund for the environment.

In July, eminent Indian scientist M.S. Swaminathan, President of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), told regional journalists in New Delhi that the South Asian countries must launch an "environmental crusade" for the protection of soil, water resources and biological diversity. Speaking later that same month at Gandhigram, Madurai, Swaminathan called for an "international code on ecology" for the sustainable and equitable use of life support systems.

Over at the United Nations in New York, picking up where Mikhail Gorbachev left off last year, Geoffrey Palmer, New Zealand's new Prime Minister, called for a United Nations "Security Council for the Environment." The new council would have power to take binding decisions on planetary environmental issues such as global warming, ozone depletion, destruction of natural resources, and disposal of hazardous wastes. "Strong medicine is needed for a sick planet," said Palmer. If only someone came up with a plan to implement these initiatives, we would be getting somewhere.

Homeless Hsuan-Tsang

If the seventh century trans-Himalayan pilgrim traveler Hsuan Tsang were to be reincarnated in present day Bihar, he would quickly pack his back-pack and head for the hills instead of spending the years at Nalanda that he did.

The Dalai Lama presented the relics of Hsuan Tsang to Jawaharlal Nehru in 1955. Work on a Chinese-style memorial to house the relics was begun in 1961 and finally completed 23 years later. That was in 1984. The memorial has yet to open because of wrangling as to who should manage it.

Back in December 1983, the Indian Minister of Education and Culture had proposed to the Patna authorities that the memorial be merged with the Nava Nalanda Maha Vihara and governed by an autonomous body. On September 9, 1988, Patna finally sent an "interim reply" indicating that the matter was receiving consideration at the highest level, reports the *Statesman*.

Obviously, the Bihar Government has dragged its feet because the new organisations would come under the Central Government's control. The feeling in Patna seems to be that since Hsuan-Tsang has

been cooling his heels for 1,300 years, he can wait another few years before his remains find a resting place.



AD 800 silk painting of Hsuan-Tsang with backpack

Apple Trees Up In Smoke

Shermathang Village,

Helambu. Its bathing time for trekkers in Ashoka Hotel. Mrs. Kami Lama stokes the fire and feeds more dried apple wood to the stove. The scenario is the same all over this hill region north-east of Kathmandu. Apple trees are being converted into firewood, and orchards back into farmland.

The fruit was introduced here by a local man, Chewang Chumbel, who had worked as a contractor in Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh -- both apple growing regions. Later, the Government opened nurseries and helped plant more than 13,000 trees. The trees took 15 years to mature and used to produce over 650 tonnes of fruit a year. So why

are they now being hacked down?

The authorities had promised Helambu residents that roads would be brought right up to their doorsteps to cart the apples away to Kathmandu markets, says Pasang Sherpa, a former pradhan pancha. Of course, the road never made it and piggy-backing apples to the capital was expensive and hardly feasible. There was such

abundance in Helambu that even the animals seemed fed up with apples in their feed. Helambu apples could not penetrate the Kathmandu market and the villagers lost interest. The trees became infested with pests and disease.

Orchards are now reverting to farmlands, and it is back to barley, buckwheat, radish, potatoe and mustard for the Sherpas of Helambu.

-- Rajendra Dahal



Helambu apples: headed for the axe

Economy at Standstill

Cycle Fever



Old Atlas bike and new Oyama

Are multi-g geared mountain bikes essential for Nepalis' daily lives? This question has triggered a battle between economists and those who run the Nepali economy.

Bicycles had never inspired debate before this. The sturdy old Indian and Chinese designs -- of World War II vintage -- had served the country well enough even though people who could afford better dismissed them as only fit for "peons". The entry of the mountain bike has changed the scenario.

As the India-Nepal dispute flared up in March and gasoline became scarce, businessmen managed to get the bicycle included in the Open General License (OGL) list, which is the provision made by the Government to ease the import of basic commodities. Shiny imports from Taiwan and Hong Kong, many times more expensive, took over the Kathmandu market.

The mountain bikes have thicker tires for better traction; most have 10 gears, some have sixteen or more. They come in bright colours with chrome handles that are straight and low-slung. Mountain bikes are used elsewhere for sports on

rough terrain, and their use on Kathmandu's metalled roads are being questioned.

Of course, status and not utility is what is behind the fad. Office-goers and college youth, who used to turn their nose up at the old designs, suddenly took to the streets on upwards NRs8,000 models named Mustang, Oyama and Commodore. It became so much of an "in" thing that a vernacular folk number became a hit: "*Maya laune saikalai chadera*." (We'll romance along in our bicycles.)

Romance was hardly in the minds of economists calculating the damage to the Nepali economy. Altogether 12,000 mountain bikes worth over NRs 70 million were imported between March and September, and the Department of Commerce expects the imports to swell even further during winter, unless the trade dispute is resolved. Critics, including Rastriya Panchayat members, objected vehemently to the bike imports, while the Government defended its OGL decision saying bicycles were light transport that saved fuel.

Economists might grumble, but the cycle-repair

shops were not complaining about the windfall. "Flat tyres give us a livelihood," said one proprietor. --Ray Mee

M. Thapa

Perfume: A Basic Need

At a time when Nepal was reeling under the long-lasting trade crisis, Kathmandu authorities sanctioned the import of perfume under the OGL scheme.

While Kathmandu's residents were being pampered with liberal fuel quotas and heavily subsidised availability of basic rations -- and perfume -- the scarcities finally began to hit the hinterland. The crisis having lasted more than six months, the hill people's annual stock of basic necessities began to run out. The jeeps stopped bringing goods to roadheads, so villagers all over had to walk extra days with *dokos* to the major market towns. In tea-shops across the hills, the spoonfulls of sugar in your

glass became smaller and smaller. Dasain came and went with many unable to afford new clothes to replace tattered ones. There was not a single dhoti in the market of Silgadi Doti, at whatever price, when an ex-minister's family tried prepare for a wedding.

How did perfume come to enjoy the same OGL status as the gasoline, salt, coal, sugar, medicine, newsprint and rice cookers? Minister of State for Commerce Sharad Singh Bhandari was hard put to defend the anomaly. "The perfume mentioned in the OGL list refers to the oil needed by the soap industry," he said. A member of Kathmandu's fast-growing Community of Cynics had a more generic explanation: "Its because those who make decisions are more in touch with Singapore, Bangkok and Hong Kong than Muzafarpur, Gorakhpur or Bareilly." Meanwhile, millions have already been spent on the import of this "basic need" of upper bracket ladies.

--Ray Mee



Bishal Bazaar perfumery in Kathmandu

M. Thapa

Why Climb a Trekking Peak?

The 18 "trekking peaks" of Nepal are no less challenging because of what they are called. They provide the mountaineer with many unclimbed routes and thrilling faces.

by Bill O'Connor (courtesy Mountain magazine)

Mountaineering in Nepal is neither open nor free. Of its countless summits, only 104 peaks are on the permitted expedition list for which a large fee, increasing with the peak's altitude, has to be paid. Fortunately, in 1978, under the control of the then newly formed Nepal Mountaineering Association (NMA), 18 mountains between 5,587 and 6,654 meters were opened to foreign climbers without the financially restricting and administratively onerous regulation governing the "expedition peaks." This newly created list formed the so-called "trekking peaks," a term carrying the misleading implication that the peaks are a walk up and in some way similar to the well known trekkers' ridge-top viewing-points of Kala Patthar, Gokyo Ri and Poon Hill. They are not; all are worthy mountaineering objectives involving a varying degree of technical expertise. Found throughout the Nepal Himal, with some notable exceptions (namely the Kanjiroba, Dhaulagiri, Makalu and Kangchenjunga regions), the list includes the following mountains grouped under their administrative zone or geographical area:

Manang Himal: Chulu West - 6419m; Chulu East - 6584m; Pisang - 6091m. **Annapurna Himal:** Mardi Himal - 5587m; Hiunchuli - 6441m; Tharpu Chuli - 5663m (Tent Peak); Singu Chuli - 6504m (Fluted Peak). **Ganesh Himal:** Paldor - 5896m. **Langtang Himal:** Naya Kanga - 5844m (Ganja La Chuli). **Rolwaling Himal:** Ramdung - 5925m; Parchamo - 6187m. **Khumbu Himal:** Kusum Kanguru - 6367m; Kwangde - 6011m; Lobuje East - 6119m; Kongma Tse - 5849m (Mehra Peak); Pokalde - 5806m; Imja Tse - 6183m (Island Peak); Mera - 6654m.

ENDLESS EXPLORATION

It is possible to trek and climb in these areas with little more formality and cost than that of obtaining a "trekking

peak permit," in the style similar to that enjoyed by Eric Shipton when in 1951, after exploring the Rolwaling, he wrote in *The Times*, "This form of mountaineering, the exploration of unknown peaks, glaciers and valleys, the finding and crossing of new passes to connect one area with another, is the most fascinating occupation I know. The variety of experience, the constantly changing scene, the gradual unfolding of the geography of the range are deeply satisfying, for they yield a very real understanding, almost a sense of personal possession, of the country explored."

What they also provide, yet to be fully realised, is the potential for endless exploration of new routes at altitudes allowing technical climbing more akin to alpinism than traditional Himalayan ascents. Whereas they were first climbed by the leading mountaineers of their day, they have, apart from a few notable exceptions, been neglected by today's elite, so that the reality of the trekking peaks is that the majority of the ascents are of the standard route by "mail order mountaineers." The NMA records show that the majority of the peaks do not receive an annual ascent.

Take, for example, the Khumbu, where there is the greatest concentration of peaks and climbers. More than 90 percent of the permits granted are for Island Peak, for which two recorded routes exist. All the NMA records show that the ascents of the original route were made via the South East Face and the North Ridge; yet its West Face is a stunning sweep of ice and snow. A day's hike away, Kongma Tse and Pokalde rise on either side of Kongma La, perfectly placed for multiple ascents on rock and ice of ridge or face. How long will they have to wait?

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Elsewhere in Nepal, there has been even less activity on the trekking peaks. In the Annapurna Range, Mardi Himal remains neglected and almost unnoticed beneath the omnipotent spire of Machapuchare. Across the river, standing as a bastion at the gateway of the Annapurna Sanctuary, is Hiunchuli. This complex peak has all but been neglected. Within the Sanctuary, Tharpu Chuli is popular with trekking agencies, but again it is rarely climbed, other than from its North West Ridge. On the

The Trekking Peaks of Nepal

by Bill O'Connor

Crowood Press, Wiltshire

1989 Price unlisted

This is a detailed guide to the 18 official "trekking peaks" of Nepal (listed above), describing the approach routes, the climbs and descents of each peak. O'Connor, who runs his own adventure travel company from the United Kingdom, points to the remaining unclimbed faces of the trekking peaks and also suggests alternative treks and climbs. The book contains numerous useful photographs and line maps to clarify approaches and camps. It also has sections on travel within Nepal, accommodation, rules and regulations for obtaining trekking and peak permits, health and emergency procedures and how to organise one's own lightweight expedition. O'Connor states in Mountain magazine, from which the accompanying article was abstracted, that the official records on the trekking peaks are incomplete. There have undoubtedly been other climbs of which he would be glad to receive information so that records could be made more accurate. Any information and photographs are to be sent to him at 10 South Drive, Harrogate, North Yorkshire, HG2 8AU, United Kingdom.



Mountain Travel

Chulu East (6584m) from Chulu Far East

other hand, its nearest neighbour, Singu Chuli (Fluted Peak), a much finer mountain, is sadly neglected.

Further north, in the rain-shadow of the Annapurnas, the Manang Himal contains a complicated plexus of mountains, the Chulu group, that have taken a lot of sorting out. The NMA recognises two Chulu Peaks, East and West. The available trekking map just about does the same. In reality, there are numerous peaks of which four main summits are readily defined. Of these, Chulu Far East, usually referred to as Chulu East by ill-informed trekking agencies, is the one being climbed. What remains is a plethora of possibilities, of which the South Faces of Chulu West and Central are the most obvious.

Undoubtedly held back by a lack of reliable and available information, most parties first visiting the Himalaya have opted for the known rather than the adventurous, preferring the possibility of success to the probability of failure (the latter being the cold reality of Himalayan statistics).

Also without doubt one of the major barriers to realising the full potential has been the term "trekking peaks," which conjures up a long, boring slog, if not up scree then up the next worst thing, sloppy snow. Easy treks they certainly are not. There was a move afoot to rename them "alpine peaks" but this is equally inappropriate as they are certainly not alpine. Perhaps "lesser Himalayan peaks" is more descriptive, but equally likely to be unacceptable to the climber who might find the epithet "lesser" off-putting. Δ

DAM NEWS

Karnali Update :

To Build or Not to Build

Nepal's plans to build one of the world's largest hydro-power projects awaits further thought, bilateral agreement with power buyer India -- and funding.

by Binod Bhattarai

Thirteen years from, now Nepal will see the completion of one of the world's largest hydropower plants. The dam on Karnali river at Chisapani, in the far-western mid-hills, will then be operational, producing 10,800 megawatts -- 67 times more than the country's entire present electricity output. Beneath the 270 metres dam will be 18 power generation units, each producing 600 MW.

There is only one problem with this anticipated scenario -- it is largely a product of wishful thinking. Though the latest feasibility survey is expected to be completed by year-end, it will hardly signal the civil works to begin. Karnali will require about US\$4.7 billion, which is about two times Nepal's Gross National Product.

BILATERAL ISSUES

Closely connected to whether or not Nepal can get the required financing for Karnali is the thorny "bilateral aspect" of the project. Marathon "technical discussions" have been held between Nepal and India over the years, but they have not resulted in a breakthrough, the main sticking point being the sharing of costs and benefits. The present cold wave in relations between the two countries makes an early settlement even more remote.

Dam builders and power planners have been eyeing Chisapani gorge since the early 1960s. The fourth in the string of feasibility studies is being conducted by Himalayan Power Consultants, a Canadian-American consortium. The company is expected to have an updated cost estimate by December.

"This is one of the world's most economically attractive projects," says O.T. Sigvalldason, team leader at Himalayan Power Consultants. He says the cost of Chisapani -- at US\$435 per-kilowatt -- is comparatively low. This

figure can be compared to the US\$4,000 for the hydropower plant at Mar-syangdi, soon to be commissioned (July/August 1989 *Himal*).

Some experts maintain that, because of the sheer size of the Karnali project, Nepal must come to a power-peddling arrangement with India *before* going ahead at Chisapani. Karnali planners disagree. "It is not yet time to start bargaining over the price," says one.

A PEAKING PLANT

Apart from generating electricity, Karnali is also expected to provide irrigation for both Nepal and northern India. The construction will take nine years, while another four years will see all power units installed and commissioned. The project will be a "peaking plant," which means it will provide electricity during hours of maximum demand in north India.

Delay in the project, however, has not made everyone unhappy. Some environmentalists have been critical about the displacement of people by the dam. "All the better if there is no dam at all," says one, who asked not to be named. The population in Chisapani's displacement zone is 43,000, but will rise to 55,000 by the next decade. The total cost estimate for the project includes US\$154 million for rehabilitation.

When Himalayan Power Consultants' study is submitted, assuming bilateral technicalities are resolved, Nepal can start casting about for money. The most important question is whether or not pouring so much resources into Karnali is justified in terms of economic returns. Even though so many feasibility studies have been conducted, there has not even been one study of the macro-economic impact of Karnali on the Nepali economy. "There is still a lot to be done," concedes an engineer associated with the project. Δ

LANDSLIDE!

This year, too, late monsoon rains brought news of devastation as mountain-sides succumbed to the pull of gravity -- from the Indian north-east westward through Bhutan, Nepal, to Himachal Pradesh and beyond. The mountains are "dynamic" and up to an extent landslides are a part of the natural process, but their numbers are on the increase, say experts.

While there have been much generalisation and hyperbole about the causes and consequences of landslides, there is more study of the phenomena today than ever before. Experts remain divided about deforestation's role in causing land to slip, and how to promote "slope stability." Although trees are widely believed to stabilise slopes, some believe that grasses provide more protection. In some cases, says one geologist, the weight of trees on a slope could actually trigger a landslide.

The hill farmer has been held responsible for much erosion said to lead to landslides, but, increasingly, the peasant is being regarded as victim rather than perpetrator. Simplistic theories are being discarded and more detailed studies bring out the complexities of why land slides. For example, the combination of roads and irrigation canals on unstable slopes often aggravates the instability and increases the likelihood of landslide.

This much is clear: that the variety and individual nature of landslides demands more consideration from geologists, social-scientists, engineers, planners and policy-makers. This photo essay takes a look at several landslides in Nepal in order to introduce some of their variety and complexity. Dates indicate when the pictured were taken. - Editors



Tagaring, Lamjung
courtesy
Harka Bahadur Gurung
(October 1964)

This landslide was initiated by the great earthquake of January 1939 and has grown since. The slide buried the salt brine of Nun-Khani on the banks of the Marsyangdi river and swept away some fields of Tagaring village. Above the slide is a temperate oak forest. Hundreds of large and small landslides were triggered in east Nepal by the quake of August 1988. The Bajhang region in west Nepal is another area where earthquakes trigger many landslides.

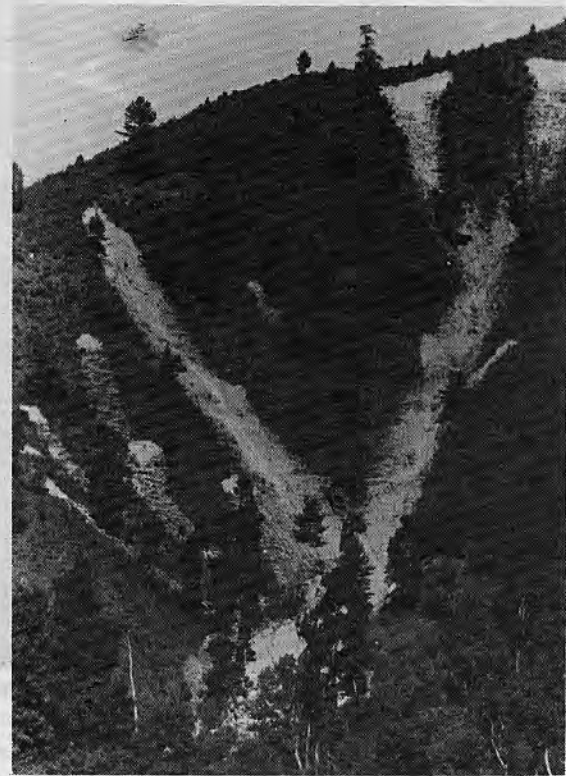


Bajhang
courtesy Amod Mani Dikshit
(January 1987)

Rock strata that jut outward and downward on this mountain flank in Bajhang, along with limestone rock and the underlying clay, present an ideal condition for what geologists call "structural failure." The heavier limestone presses down upon a layer of clay, and when water seeps into the weaker clay, movement of the whole mass is imminent. Landslides are much rarer where the strata is at right angles to the slope.

Lele, Lalitpur
courtesy Kunda Dixit (September 1982)

Sometimes, not deforestation nor weak soil structure, but the sheer impact of heavy rainfall, can tip the balance. Landslides tend to go towards the latter half of the monsoon because by then the soil is waterlogged and much heavier. Sometimes a cloudburst – torrential rainfall concentrated in a small area – can leave behind a hillside scarred by scores of landslides, as was the case in Lele.

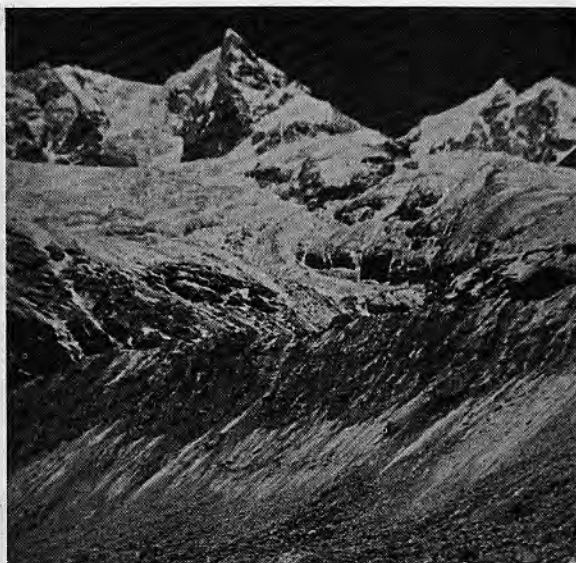


Bhakunday Chaur, Kabhre Palanchok
courtesy Dipak Gyawali (December 1988)

On this site below the hill of Dapcha in Mathura Pati village was once a field flat enough to be called Bhakunday Chaur ("ball field"). Due to excessive grazing by livestock, the grass cover of the field disappeared about two generations ago. First, there was "sheet erosion," or topsoil runoff, followed by "rill formation" -- a series of shallow depressions on the surface. With successive monsoons and continued grazing, these rills expanded to form gullies, crevasses and finally the canyons that we see today.

**Langmoche Glacier, Khumbu Himal
courtesy AMD (March 1986)**

Landslides and avalanches are common in the high Himal, but only occasionally do they affect the lives of those in the valleys, such as when the collapse of a glacial lake releases vast quantities of water. The picture shows where the Dig Tsho moraine which held back a lake at the mouth of the Langmoche Glacier was breached. The wall of water that was released into the Dudh Kosi wreaked havoc up to 40 km downstream, taking four lives, destroying 30 houses and as well as a hydro-power plant below Namche Bazaar. It is thought that an avalanche of ice and rock falling into the lake led to a surge wave which destroyed the moraine dam.



**Sunkosi Valley
courtesy T.B. Shrestha**

The numerous land slips seen in this photograph are largely due to deforestation. Some scientists believe that the loss of tree covering and binding accelerates the rate of soil erosion. When no preventive measures are taken, the most effective stabiliser of the soil seems to be the much maligned banmara weed (*adenoforum euphatorium*), otherwise notorious for its proliferation and ecological uselessness. The vegetative covering of banmara softens the impact of rainfall and minimises surface erosion.

**Kapurkot, Salyan Highway
courtesy AMD (April 1985)**

The slide in this photograph was the result of road construction. The "incision" made by construction crews using earthmovers and dynamite in an otherwise stable slope can create landslides. This happens either due to removal of the vegetative covering or by weakening of the rock structure. Furthermore, when the debris from small slides is cleared for the road, their natural function as a retaining wall for the slope is removed, which can induce larger slides. The economic losses caused by ill-considered road alignments have been phenomenal.



Is Himalayan Geology Tainted?

Allegations are mounting as colleagues say scientist's field findings were made up.

The sparks continue to fly around Panjab University, Chandigarh, geologist Vishwa Jit Gupta, who was accused last April by an Australian scientist of having made fraudulent reports of fossil discoveries over the last two decades (*Mar/April 1989 Himal*). If the charges stick, much of the geological history of the Himalaya would be open to question because Gupta has reported and written on fossil discoveries for the last 20 years. The overall impact on the study of the formation of the Himalayan mountains would be immense and the work and reputation of scores of scientists who worked with Gupta would be jeopardised.

In September, the Geological Survey of India finally set up a five-man panel of experts to investigate the charges made by Australian John A. Talent. Meanwhile, the British science journal *Nature*, which first carried Talent's allegations, has printed a rebuttal by Gupta, as well as a series of letters from past co-authors of Gupta, all of whom criticise Gupta.

Talent maintains that Gupta misrepresented discoveries of prehistoric organisms called conodonts in Bhutan, India and Nepal. Further, Gupta was vague about the location of findings and that Gupta duped scientists world over into co-authoring papers based on specimens he claimed to have found in the Himalaya.

Defending himself in the 7 September issue of *Nature*, Gupta, who is a senior professor at the Centre of Advanced Study in Geology in Chandigarh, states that "it is seldom possible to do fieldwork in the Himalayas by oneself" and that his collections were made with various teams of scientists. He says conditions for geological fieldwork were very poor 25 years ago in the remote parts of the Himalaya and that the Indian Government did not allow the use of detailed topographic or army maps, leading to difficulties in giving precise locations.


Writes Gupta: "Talent proclaims that I have been able to fool all of the people all of the time. The period concerned is a quarter of a century, and the number people -- all of them highly regarded palaeontologists -- more than 60. The contention is unbelievable...Talent has made sweeping pronouncements on Himalayan geology. Yet he is not an authority on the subject. I can only conclude that his attack on me was made for two reasons - to draw attention to himself and to deflect criticism of his own failure to contribute to Himalayan geology."

A.D. Ahluwalia, a geologist who also teaches at Panjab University, says "most of the doubts expressed by Talent are well-founded". He writes, "Allegations of recycling of fossil specimens by assigning fictitious locality labels, or using foreign materials once housed in foreign museums to illustrate 'new discoveries' from the Himalayas, are indeed serious and are being treated as such in Chandigarh."

S.B. Bhatia, another of Gupta's colleagues at the Centre in Chandigarh, recounts having been misled by Gupta, who had passed on to him a sample of rocks said to be from Kurig which were clearly from the Devonian age, whereas Bhatia's own field observation in Kurig had shown rock samples to be from the Permo-Car-

boniferous age. Bhatia agrees with Talent that palaeontologists should have been quicker to voice their doubts about Gupta, but adds that it is "better to be late than never."

In another communication, Udai K. Bassi, of the Geological Survey of India, states categorically that it would be impossible to obtain Devonian fauna from Kurig as claimed by Gupta. Bassi states that the register at the border post does not record Gupta's party passing through Khimokul La as claimed, nor did the local people remember Gupta having visited the valley. He concludes by saying, "I regret having published three palaeontology papers with Gupta."

Philippe Janvier, of the Institut de Paleontologie of the Museum National d'Histoire Naturelle in Paris, says 90 percent of the published palaeontological data is based on trust of the field geologist who collects the fossils. Most scientists dared not even think that their colleagues might deceive them. "The reason why Professor Gupta could continue to travel around the world with his 'Himalayan' fossils is that, until the appearance of Talent's article, those who were really aware of problems in Himalayan stratigraphy and tectonics never expressed their doubts in print, and in an unambiguous way." 

Geologists Come of Age

Nepal's one hundred plus geologists have long felt isolated and ignored. Tectonically speaking, Himalayan rock formations do not allow large-scale commercial mining, so the scope for geologists to make their mark is quite limited. The theories of mountain formation have remained the exclusive spheres of Western scientists, and research into "pure" science is hampered by lack of funds. Those who build roads, canals and bridges have not yet fully appreciated the use of the "rock scientist".

Against this bleak backdrop, for the first time in late August, the Nepal Geological Society held a seminar on the geology of the Nepal Himalaya. Unlike the tepid response to most seminars in town, this one saw enthusiastic participation. The quality of papers -- on subjects such as the August 1988 earthquake, mining, and the formation of the Himalaya was said to be high. "We felt that we had finally arrived," said one organiser of the conference.

Tibet's Forests in Peril

Tibet is often thought of as a high and barren desert, but its eastern regions have lush forests that host many plants and animals. Unfortunately, indiscriminate logging is putting these pristine woodlands in peril.

by APPEN

British diplomat-adventurer Hugh Richardson, who served in Lhasa from 1936 till 1950 and wrote the book *Tibet and Its History*, had these comments to make: "In some 15 years of acquaintance with Tibet, I saw there was a deep, almost religious respect for the rights of each strata of society...This fundamental expression was extended towards all of nature. The majority of the people made efforts to live as much as possible with nature -- not against it. Tibet's ecosystem consequently kept in balance and alive."

As Richardson and others before and after him have reported, in Tibet there was traditionally a general taboo against encroaching excessively on the natural environment. This was the direct result of Buddhist philosophy's belief in the interdependence of all living things and in the inter-relationships among the whole spectrum of plant and animal life, as well as "non living" elements of nature such as

mountains, lakes, valleys, rivers, air, sky and sunshine.

A direct result of this attitude towards natural life was that great forests of maple, oak, linden and birch were left untouched and hosted numerous species of animal life. The English explorer F.K. Ward wrote upon visiting southern Kham in 1920, "I have never seen so many varieties of birds in one place." And J. Hanbury-Tracy, a traveler in Kham in the 1930s, stated, "The Salween valley is a haunt of wild birds even in winter...there were partridges, eagles and hawks of a dozen varieties, rose-finches, orange-beaked choughs, crows, rock pigeons and numerous dun-coloured birds. All were extraordinarily tame on account of the rigidly enforced ban on hunting."

VITAL WOODLANDS

That was how it was decades ago. Since then, huge tracts of forests in east and south-east Tibet have been transported into the Chinese mainland. The surface

of Tibet plays a vital role in the world's climate in general and the monsoon in South Asia in particular. Changes in forest cover and snow cover could significantly affect local, regional and global weather conditions. Widespread erosion in Tibet could also produce serious changes in the flow of many great rivers flowing from Tibet into the Chinese mainland, India and Burma.

T. Danlock of the University of British Columbia wrote recently in *News-Tibet*, published in New York: "Forests of fir, hemlock, spruce, larch, pine, cypress, juniper, walnut, birch, poplar and rhododendron cover a vast expanse of the mountains and valleys. These forests as a resource are worth much more alive and standing than cut, floating down the Yangtze and Hwang Ho. They are the living biological essence, the climate modifiers, the water attractors, the vital habitat for continuity of all living things, including human beings. Excessive logging has been in progress for some time, resulting in extreme soil erosion and downstream floods."

The major forest areas in Tibet are in the eastern region (Chamdo, Drayah, Zogong and Markham) and in the central and southern region (Kyirong, Dram, Pema Koe, Kongpo, Nyintri, Metok, Po, Zayul and Monyul). These make up China's third-largest forest reserve. Add to them the traditional Tibetan regions of Derong, Mili, Minyak, Tawu, Drakgo, Nyarong, Lithang, Gyalhang, Karze, and Ngapa, now incorporated into the provinces of Yunnan, Sichuan (Szechwan) and Chinghai (Tsinghai), and the total must constitute the largest forested landmass in China at present.

RAVAGED BOUNTY

According to the Sydney-based Australia Tibet Council, one recent Chinese document states that in eastern Tibet, the total forests of Po Tamo spread over more than 4,200 sq km. If the felled lumber were lined end to end, it would stretch for a staggering 111,000 million metres. Trees felled in the fertile old Tibetan forest lands of



K. Tseden

Large tracts of forest around Lake Shudu, in Gyathang, are being felled



Timber four feet in diameter is common in Gyalthang's woodlands

Ngapa, Karze and Mili, now part of Sichuan, would measure 10 billion cubic metres, or 70 percent of the timber reserves of this forest-rich province.

Gyalthang's ancient woodlands (now incorporated into Yunnan) cover more than 10,000 hectares, with a wide range of sub-tropical trees, including valuable varieties of firs, pines, Tibetan cypress and dragon spruce. In these forests, pandas, golden monkeys, and white-mouth deer abound. They also provide a rich source of plants for China's herbal pharmacopoeia.

Tibetan forest regions of Nyintri, Gungthang, and Drago, were ravaged between 1965 and 1985 and a total of 18 million cubic metres of timber were transported downriver. The Tibet Autonomous Region, is connected to China with four large highways, which make it easier to transport the tree trunks. From the forests of Chamdo, capital of Kham, 2.5 million cubic metres of timber valued at 75 million yuan (US\$20.3 million) were taken between 1960 and 1985. These figures were monitored from Radio Lhasa.

Devastation of forests also extend to Ngapa in Amdo (presently Qinghai) province. A radio broadcast from Lhasa on 15 July 1983 said that 1,100 tons of *thangchu* (gum) and another 30 tons of a thicker variety were collected between 1966 and 1976. Forest weeds

also have a value in China. A Chinese timber factory claimed to have milled eight million cubic metres of weed which was valued at 80 million yuan (US\$17.2 million).

TIMBER DOWN-RIVER

The *Boston Globe* newspaper reported on 10 March 1989 that massive deforestation taking place in the eastern province of Kham, called Sichuan by the Chinese. Tibetans who have been allowed to visit the province were horrified by the quantities of timber being trucked or floated down the rivers to the north-east. So many logs are transported by floating them on the rivers of east Tibet that often the water cannot be seen. Lumbering has been carried out so enthusiastically that whole hillsides are barren and large areas have been completely defaced. An artist in Lhasa included a veiled message in a painting submitted for exhibition. It was entitled "How the Golden Bridge between Lhasa and Beijing has been turned into a Wooden Bridge." △

The Asia-Pacific People's Environment Network (APPEN) is an information group based in Penang, Malaysia, that is committed to ensuring that the people's voice is heard on environmental and development issues.

On the Way Up

by Kanak Mani Dixit



When *Himal* brought out its prototype issue in May 1987, there were well-wishers who expressed worries about the magazine's sustainability. Since the prototype issue seemed to have covered every matter worth reporting, what would we do for subsequent issues?

Our standard answer was always been that the 37 million people of the Himalaya are not living in a vacuum. The question is not whether there are things to write about, but whether we have the writers and the resources to cover the numerous of interesting, informative, educational events, ideas and trends with a bearing on Himalayan living.

Every other PhD thesis written about this region has something that is worth sharing with a larger audience. Every seminar organised, book written or intelligent conversation held, can get *Himal's* antenna beeping.

Unlike the mainstream news-magazines, *Himal* does not have a large staff of resident writers and reporters. We rely mostly on the "expert" who understands the need to communicate news and ideas to others.

For this magazine to fulfil its promise as the thinking person's manual to the Himalaya, we need many more people who are willing to share information. Most experts hesitate to write in magazines because they feel that in simplifying their ideas for a general audience the scientific rigour of their theses will be compromised. Actually it all depends on how you write and how we edit. Serious ideas *can* be discussed in uncomplicated language.

We request all scientists and professionals -- economists, geologists, anthropologists, sociologists, physicists, meteorologists, geographers, demographers, doctors, nurses, bureaucrats, educators, or MBAs -- to consider writing for *Himal*. Do send for your copy of our "Writing for *Himal*" brochure. △

K. Tseten

Riots in Ladakh and the Genesis of a Tragedy

Recent ethnic unrest in this "remote" region have to do with the Ladakhis' own victimisation to the phenomenon of "intellectual colonialism" that began with the Western missionary.

by Siddiq Wahid

It has been a commonplace habit to refer to Ladakh as a "remote and inaccessible" region of India. In the past few weeks and months, the news from Ladakh has been such that it now appears to have been properly assimilated into the modern world, or at least the world of modern politics. The reports have a familiar ring to them, one that seems endemic to politics today: there has been unprecedented rioting between Buddhists and Muslims in Ladakh.

When reading the newspapers, one would think that this was an age-old rivalry. There are reports of explosions being set off in monasteries, shops being looted or burned, and stones being hurled at mosques. And through word-of-mouth less sensational but, perhaps, more tragic news: gangs of vigilante youth walk about beating up members of rival communities. For the first time in living memory, Ladakhi Muslims and Ladakhi Buddhists failed to exchange greetings at the festival of *Id ul-adha*.

One cannot be completely surprised by this turn of events. The incidents being reported are no more (and one might add no less) than a "sign of the times," and the times are those of the *Kali Yuga*. However, those involved, particularly the Ladakhis themselves, are not absolved of the need to know the genesis of the problems that have shattered their peaceful existence. Indeed, if there is any hope of arresting this downward spiral in the life of Ladakh, it lies in an understanding of its beginnings.

There is no dearth of theories as to the causes of the riots. It has been suggested that the problems have arisen due to resentment amongst the Ladakhis at the Kashmiri merchants' monopoly of the tourists trinket trade. Other reasons suggested are election-year politics, economic competition within Ladakhi society, dissatisfaction with the state government, and even forcible conversions of members of one community by those of another. If the causes were so easily identifiable, their effects would only be temporary. But the real reasons behind today's riots in Ladakh are a bit more complex and have to do with the victimisation of Ladakhis, both Buddhist and Muslim, by the phenomenon that might be termed intellectual colonialism.



Steve Powers

Empty street of Leh in September

One of the first scholars who investigated the anthropology and history of Ladakh was H.A. Francke. He was a Moravian missionary who lived in Ladakh for many years and, apart from his missionary activity, broke ground in the study of Ladakhi culture. Writing at the end of his career in Ladakh, Francke makes some far-reaching observations about the Ladakh of the early 20th century:

Now, with regard to the question of progress, we must say that Islam is certainly making progress in Ladakh, Buddhism, although considered as one of the strongest enemies of Christian missions, does not seem to have strength enough to resist Islam. In Ladakh, Islam is gaining ground continually from West towards East. Its apostles are the great merchants who believe that money is well spent, if it serves to convert an unbeliever to Islam. (In "Islam Among the Tibetans," *The Moslem World*. 1929, p.139)

It is important to remember that Francke was a missionary and a scholar. The nexus between religion and booklore has been a potent one in the advance of intellectual colonialism. Francke's missionary role, and the infancy of the subject of his scholarly attention, Ladakhi studies, soften one's judgement about his biases. What is surprising is that this line of thought, of prejudiced political thought, has not been abandoned by the Western scholar of Ladakhi culture 50 years later in the mid-1970s. In an otherwise apolitical study of Ladakhi history and culture, David Snellgrove, one of the doyens of Himalayan studies, and Taduesz Skorupski, make the following "observation":

It may be observed that Islam is by far in the stronger position (in Ladakh) not only in numbers which are relatively continually on the increase, but also on account of a greater single-mindedness concerning the nature of their faith and the sheer fact of the enormous potential backing which they possess. Ladakhi Muslims can draw upon the strength of Islam in Kashmir and ultimately upon a vast Muslim world. Ladakhi Buddhists are now literally driven into a small corner between Islam on the one side and Chinese communism on the other. (*The Cultural Heritage of Ladakh*. 1976, p.142)

Snellgrove's conclusions have no basis in fact. Certainly he does not supply any demographic evidence to support his claim. With good reason, for there is no census which suggests that the number of Ladakhi Muslims in proportion to Ladakhi Buddhists has changed over the years. What has happened, of course, is that this eminent scholar has confused ethnicity with

religion. Apart from his failure to support his conclusions with demographic evidence, he also fails to present any evidence which demonstrates that a people will commit ethnic suicide in the name of religion. Indeed, there are many studies which show, on the contrary, how religions are moulded to suit a given ethnic psyche and ambience. What Snellgrove and others who have written similarly would have us believe is that to be Ladakhi is to be Buddhist! It is this subjective conception of what it means to be "Ladakhi" that leads Snellgrove to blatantly suggest that, in Ladakh, Buddhism is threatened by communism whereas Islam is not. Never mind that there exists no evidence to suggest that communism in any other part of the world has played favourites to Islam! It is time to recognize that a culture and a civilisation is what it is as a living organism, and not what its students conceive it to be.

What do the academic opinions of Francke and Snellgrove have to do with the present-day rioting in Leh and the nearby Indus valley hamlets? The answer has to do with the perception of such individuals as objective specialists in their fields. As "specialists" their works are read by other specialists whose field of interest may be Ladakh in only a peripheral way; so they rely on the specialists on Ladakh to make the first-hand investigation and pass on the results of these to their audience in a less critical fashion. It is this process at work when we read in a book on Buddhism, meant for lay audiences, that: "There is also a large and increasingly influential Muslim population in Ladakh, so that in a long-term perspective the future of Buddhism in Ladakh seems to be problematic."

The remainder of the process of intellectual colonialism has to do with the notion of "development". Indeed, this latter concept has become a faith of the new "religion" that might be termed modernity. One of the ingredients of this modern faith is "compulsory education," which more often than not means merely (and I use the word advisedly) the ability to read and write, preferably in English. The march of history has been no different in Ladakh. A quarter of a century ago, the so-called development of the land began in earnest. This meant, to begin with, a good road and a window out to the glitter of modernity. In the context of schooling, the most sought after goal was English education. Concurrent to this venture outward, there began to develop a curiosity about Ladakh on the part of non-Ladakhis, specifically Western scholars.


Picking up from the research of those such as Francke, these scholars began to interpret Ladakhi history, religion and culture. Much of this research broke new ground, but some of it reinforced old prejudices as has been shown above, and that is what concerns us here. Broadly put, some of these scholars began to legitimise Western conceptions of what this outpost of greater Tibetan civilisation "is". In effect, this conception was such that the idea of a Ladakhi Muslim was inadmissible in the Western conception of Tibetan civilisation. This took hold first in the mind of the Western missionary, then in that of colonial agents who came as traders. The latter were followed by the scholar, until eventually this misconception

began to crystallise in the mind of the Western enthusiast of the culture as well. Never mind that ethnicity has been confused thoroughly with religious belief; never mind that there can quite evidently be Arab Christians and European Jews.

Parallel to the above development, the book-feeding of Ladakh's new generation has kept apace over the last quarter century. And so the Ladakhis learn about themselves from the English-literate specialist. Thus, the Ladakhis learn to perceive themselves as "unique", in gratification of the specialist's ultimate goal; for unless this uniqueness is glorified, the specialist becomes defunct. In point of fact, of course, Ladakh's culture is no more unique than any other: but rapidly, this sense of uniqueness translates into the Ladakhi's fascination with his own quaintness. There are many aspects to this "quaintness", but what concerns us is the one which permits the society to be perceived as exclusively Buddhist, no matter what the empirical evidence. What we are witnessing in the riots in Ladakh today is the assimilation of this aberrant perspective by its very victim to the extent that the latter (both Buddhist and Muslims) are beginning to act in accordance with this corruption. *It is this that has ruptured the fabric of Ladakhi society's health.*

It is precisely the above process that occupies a central role in the phenomenon that I have termed intellectual colonialism. The latter is no less than the insidious usurpation of the ideological and linguistic (in the broad sense of the word) foundations of society and a redefinition of those foundations in the vocabulary of the new colonists. This new colonist is not of the modern West in a racial or geographical sense; he is so in a psychic and an ideational sense.

What, then, is the tragedy we are witnessing in Ladakh? In a real sense the tragedy is not that there is strife in Ladakh or that Ladakh is changing: both are an integral part of life and, significantly, no two religions expound more eloquently on these two aspects of living than Islam and Buddhism. The tragedy is that the force of aberrant ideas have converged with their catalyst-symptoms for economic greed, political avidity and religious fundamentalism. This convergence of idea and history has victimised all the participants in today's tragedy in Ladakh, be he Buddhist or Muslim, state or central government politician, rich or poor.

The physician tells us that the cure for any illness, and Ladakh is suffering from an illness, begins with the victim recognising that a sickness has taken hold of him. Thus, the first step in the cure lies in the answer to the questions: Will the Ladakhis recognise that they have been victimised? And will they accept that the offender is not so much the Buddhist or the Muslim, the state government or the central government, but rather the seemingly innocuous advances of the missionary reinforced by the agents of British India and, now, by the scholar? 

Siddiq Wahid is a Ladakhi who lives and works in New Delhi.

Responding to the Ganga-Brahmaputra Floods

Social – and not – civil engineering will help floodplain societies to benefit from floods while reducing their vulnerability to them.

by Jayanta Bandyopadhyay and Dipak Gyawali

Recent years have seen growing media attention directed to the floods in the lowlands of the Ganga-Brahmaputra basin -- the home of one-tenth of humanity. The misery and insecurity this large and predominantly poor population suffers in the aftermath of heavy monsoons has rightly drawn sympathetic attention the world over. Looking beyond immediate relief measures, the challenge is to attain understanding of the hydro-ecology of these floods, to study their devastation as well as their benefits. In this task, however, environmentalists have often taken a simplistic yet alluring stand, blaming hill deforestation while ignoring other factors at work. There is need for a holistic ecological analysis of the hydrological processes of floods and the socio-biological adaptations that have evolved. There must be a more scientific and objective basis for the environmental analysis of the mega-disasters in this large basin.

A flood is defined as the subservience of land not *normally* inundated. Surely, one cannot describe as flood the regular inundation of lowlands from high tides. One should also not describe as flood the inundation of the floodplain during the monsoon downpour when the rivers of the basin are *normally* expected to carry a volume of water several hundred times greater than in the dry months. The behaviour of the monsoon has never been uniform, with spatial and temporal variations in the rainfall an integral part of its *normal* behaviour. Hydro-ecological analysis of floods must distinguish between this *normal* pattern of behaviour of nature from the collective yet subjective expectations of human beings who are increasingly colonising the floodplain and bearing the resultant risks.

Matter dislodged from steep and unstable Himalayan slopes, forested or otherwise, together with water, is what moves downwards along the drainage corridors of the Himalaya. Floods in the mountains are linked to this displacement of matter. In the high Himal, the failure in the lip of glacial moraines allow the icy lake formed behind it to burst out in a violent flood. These are known as glacial lake outburst floods (GLOF). In the mid-hills, landslides regularly block rivers and then collapse to release devastating flash floods into the lower reaches. This phenomenon has periodically occurred in the Himalaya and are known among the Nepali hill people as *bishyari*. The water level goes down, often accompanied with fish kills, and if it is daytime and the villagers are alerted, they head quickly for high ground. Unlike in the plains, there is no lead time to prepare for catastrophe. *Bishyaris* and GLOF



courtesy Royal Nepal Army

A *bishyari* in Jumla, September 1989

release tons of debris and sediment which ultimately find their way to the plains and raise the level of the river-beds. They constitute one more reason for the flood prone nature of the Ganga-Brahmaputra basin.

In the hills, as long as the river gradient is steep, suspended silt, pebbles and even boulders move with the flow of the river. As Himalayan rivers emerge from the mountains and enter the Tarai plains, they encounter a very low gradient along the river bed. Jhapa, in Nepal's eastern Tarai, is only 60 meters above sea level. Downstream, the sea port of Calcutta is due south about 500 km. This means an average gradient of only one centimeter in 100 meters! Such a low gradient not only incites rivers to overflow their banks at the slightest pretext but forces them to part with the matter load they carry. The result is that the river beds rise continuously and make the rivers even more prone to spill over their banks. Because more matter is flowing down from the Himalaya than can be carried to the sea by the Ganga and Brahmaputra, their tributaries, such as the Kosi, have the characteristics of inland deltas with channels that shift as the river bed rises. Flooding in such cases is *normal* when judged with geological eyes against a time span of decades.

In the deltaic region, inundation of land occurs diurnally and fortnightly in the form of tides, seasonally in the form of high river discharges during the monsoons, as well as when sudden cyclones in the Bay of Bengal whip up tidal waves. The Brahmaputra and the Ganga generally have peak floods in August and September respectively. In the case of a coincidence of flood peaks in these two rivers, devastating inundation can occur. If this coincidence is simultaneously reinforced by high tides or cyclonic tidal waves, flood waters will find their access to the sea impeded. Then, floods can be disastrous. This phenomenon of coincidence is probable and has occurred with regularity over decades.

Land scarcity (over 60 percent of the people of Bangladesh are said to be landless) will have forced many of the poor to move to highly risk-prone areas during years of calm between disastrous years. When the coincidence occurs, the destruction wrought will be massive. Unfortunately, the poor and marginal hill farmers in the uplands, who do not have an organised voice to articulate their grievances, are convenient

scapegoats for the floods. Deforestation in the hills thus becomes a convenient, albeit untenable, cause of the floods in the plains. Even the climatological and hydrological reasons already cited above are forgotten in the rush to blame the hill farmer. The large impact of constricting natural drainage in the floodplain has not been openly discussed. The consequence of building highways, railways, embankments, bridges and urban landfills are conveniently ignored.

Our argument is not that loss of forest cover has no impact on the hydrological characteristics of hill slopes. The point being made is that even if the whole of the Himalaya were forested in its primeval state, floods would not be prevented. Certainly, they could be delayed. The water absorption capacity of the forest floor would of course reduce instant run-off significantly in the early stages of the monsoon, during July. By the middle of August, the forest floor does not have the capacity to absorb spare water. At this stage, intense rainfall will lead to high surface runoff, in turn leading to floods in late August or September. *There is, thus, no scientific reasoning to substantiate the contention that the reforestation of the Himalaya would solve the Ganga-Brahmaputra flood problem.* Reforestation, however, is direly needed for the other vital needs of the hill people; and it must be undertaken just on that count alone.

There have also been arguments that deforestation causes an increase in silt load. Here, too, a minor factor is being made central. "Mass wasting" is an intrinsic Himalayan process which, in volume, is on an order of magnitude higher than surface erosion. If human-induced factor is to be considered significant, it may be primarily the rampant "cut-and-dump" road construction and then only the encroachment of agriculture on steep slopes.

Unless there is a drastic change in the behaviour of the monsoons, floods will continue to occur. Human societies in the floodplain need to make the best use of the floods while reducing their vulnerability to them. An old peasant in north Bihar commented that "earlier, the floods used to come like a small cat, give you some fertile silt and go in a few days. Now

it comes like a hungry tiger, takes away everything, and does not want to leave." The wisdom in this statement may guide future action in the flood plains. Programmes should try to tame the floods -- not stop them. Domesticating the flood is what should be aimed for so that the local economy reaps the benefits. Drainage constriction should be minimised so that the "hungry tiger" can easily depart.

People in the floodplain have learned over centuries to take advantage of floods. Indeed, if one calculated the cost of alternative chemical fertilisers to replace the fertility brought by floods, it would be far more than what the peasant societies of Bengal or Bihar could ever afford. The environment, thus, provides goods and services, such as silt and water, which societies have always taken advantage of to create wealth.

The aim is to fight floods to minimise risk to life and property while allowing the advantage of fertile silt to accrue. Whether these twin objectives can be met by simple civil engineering of embankments and dams or whether other social sciences should enter the fray to decide on the proper way to take advantage of floods is the pivotal question. Indeed, experience of large dams in other less risk-prone areas of the world has shown that in actual operation electricity and irrigation interests override those of flood protection.

An ecologically and economically sound response to floods will emerge from focusing primarily on the floodplain society and only secondarily on physical interventions into the natural regime of rivers. Questions such as who owns the land, who are the landless who benefit from the sharing of products, and who bears the brunt of the risks, have to be answered before river regime modifications are attempted. This calls for the primacy of "social engineering" over civil engineering, of hydro-ecology over hydro-technics. △

J. Bandyopadhyay is an ecologist with a special interest in natural resource conflicts and environmental management. D. Gyawali is an engineer-economist with Interdisciplinary Analysts, Kathmandu. This article is based on their joint presentation before a floods conference in Calcutta last May.



Scarcity in the midst of plenty: Dhaka, September 1988

Nepal's Water Wealth Untapped

WATER IN NEPAL

Dipak Gyawali

East West Environment and Policy

Institute Paper No. 8

East West Center, Hawaii 1989

Review by B.G. Verghese

Falling water is Nepal's wealth. As is the case with some other small, land-locked countries like Paraguay, Laos and Bhutan, its hydro-electric potential is Nepal's greatest natural resource. Given Nepal's long period of isolation until the 1950s, it is understandable that this obvious but unsurveyed potential remained virtually untouched although a small hydel station was developed at Pharping as far back as 1911. Other micro and medium-small projects have been undertaken more recently. Yet, as Gyawali remarks, only four percent of Nepal's population has access to electricity at present, much of this in and around Kathmandu-Hetauda-Birganj. The average cost per kwh is 6 US cents, or NRS1.60.

According to Gyawali, development costs of hydro-electricity in Nepal have been far higher than, say, in neighbouring India -- partly on account of the high cost of small hydro units. A weak data base -- hydrological, geological and seismic -- is a limitation that can and must be overcome. But the major thesis that Gyawali propounds in this thought-provoking book is that Nepal has been unable to exhibit the social and political will to develop despite the existence of a small, elite segment of modernisers. These modernisers are unable to guarantee that the substantial investments that hydro development requires will promote equity and general welfare. He contrasts the drive and work ethic of the occidental *homo faber* with the more contemplative, non-material and other-worldly outlook of the oriental *homo mysticus*, cocooned, as in Nepal, in a still stagnant and feudal society. Any implication that development, especially large hydro development, will not take place

unless there is social and political change would be mistaken beyond a point as structural changes in society are both the product and the cause of development. Gyawali's statement is not and should not therefore be read as a counsel of despair.

Gyawali's other premise is that Nepal's steady-state society is ruled by elites "with a severely restricted vision regarding the role of the weaker sections of society in development." They see progress as a zero-sum game as between the haves and have-nots. Hence the conclusion that "development efforts have largely failed in Nepal because they have concentrated too heavily on the hardware (such as hydropower plants and lift irrigation) and ignored or down-played the changes needed in social software." Problems of agrarian reform, credit and market access, are perhaps more important than civil engineering investments in irrigation if agricultural productivity is to be increased. The point is well taken and would be true of India and most traditional societies set on the path of development. In political terms, Gyawali sees the existing Nepali polity as having slowed down development.

Economic stagnation has resulted from a divorce of power and responsibility, and the marginalisation of popular participation in development.

Another cause that Gyawali believes has impeded more autonomous decision-making has been the heavy dependence of the economy on external assistance. Hydro resource development has been slowed down by a fascination with

mega projects like Karnali, requiring huge inflow of foreign capital and dependant on a monopoly buyer for the bulk of the electricity generated -- India. He suggests that Nepal might have been better advised to go in for small and medium run-of-the-river projects of 50-200 MW capacity which would have enabled it to negotiate sales to the Uttar Pradesh and Bihar electricity boards or to private entrepreneurs in India, with the ability to absorb this power internally if required. This is an interesting proposition but might not work in the manner intended as India's foreign trade is centrally controlled and sanctions would still need to come from Delhi. Gyawali's proposition would however have a chance were there to be a more relaxed Indo-Nepal political atmosphere.

It is perfectly understandable that Nepal should feel the need to venture cautiously into a US\$5 billion investment such as Karnali might entail, or the easier yet very large Pancheshwar Indo-Nepal boundary project on the Mahakali. But the question Nepal must ask is whether or not it is foregoing a transforming opportunity at a time when its current growth strategy has reached a dead end. Projects like Karnali would generate more than energy



Chisapani Gorge, site of the Karnali project

or provide irrigation and flood control. They would entail area-development, the development of considerable infrastructures and manpower, provide a powerful engine for modernisation, and create the basis for the growth of a broader-based entrepreneurial and professional class in Nepal. The large employment potential, both direct and indirect, in construction services and watershed management in the upper catchment, would begin to reverse the north-south migration that is generating a variety of social and political pressures and would also set in motion an east to west migration that would

make for a better demographic balance within the country. Whole new market opportunities would be evident. The very considerable revenues earned after servicing the investment costs could be ploughed into other regions and other sectors of development.

In other words, Karnali could be a trigger to transform social and political structures and lift Nepal's economy and society to an altogether new threshold. The parallel with the oil-rich Gulf states would by no means be exact; but it may not be altogether irrelevant either.

This is not to suggest that the smaller and medium projects need wait. Arun III in east Nepal, with its 400 MW capacity can play the same role in Nepal as Chukha (336 MW) has played in Bhutan, which has followed a more creative path in water resources development despite a later start than Nepal. There is a lesson in this too.

B.G. Verghese, a former editor of **The Indian Express**, is with the Center for Policy Research in New Delhi. His new book, **The Waters of Hope**, a study of the Ganga/Brahmaputra basin, will be published shortly.

A Good Pahar that Could be Better

PAHAR

Joint Issue No. 4 & 5

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Review by Bharat Dogra

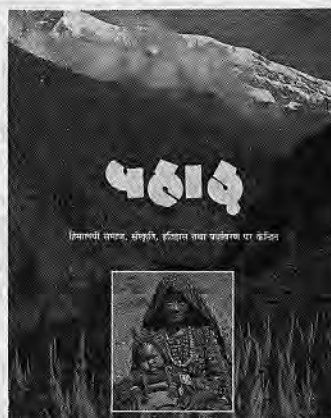
Is this a book, a magazine or an academic journal? *Pahar* is none of these, yet a little bit of each. It is a new concept: an annual magazine that contains selected writings on ecology, history, culture and other aspects of life in the Himalayan region.

Pahar was started by Shekhar Pathak, a historian and social activist from Nainital, in collaboration with many like-minded friends and associates. Their group, PAHAR has so far produced three *Pahar* issues, including the one under review, three booklets and several posters.

The present joint issue of *Pahar* contains papers and articles of long-term relevance. Several are on ecological questions, including one on the crisis facing the lakes of Nainital, another on the proposal to melt Himalayan glaciers to provide extra water for the plains, and a detailed report on Kashmir and Ladakh region. Pathak has written a balanced editorial on ecological issues of special concern to the Himalaya.

This volume is rich in its coverage of history, particularly the history of the freedom movement. There are papers on "Uttarakhand in the National Freedom Movement" by Pathak and Ramachandra Guha; on "Awakening among Dalits" by Muhammad Anwar Ansari; women in the freedom movement by Savitri Kaira and Basanti Pathak; and people's movements in Tehri, Himachal Pradesh and Kashmir. There are other writings of value in specialised areas such as archaeology and sociology. These "heavy" writings are balanced by inclusion of poems, short stories, travelogues and memoirs. (Note: most of the articles in *Pahar* are in Hindi.)

So far, so good, but the ultimate evaluation of *Pahar* has to be in the context of its role as a social change agent. Here we are in for some disappointment, for this present volume does not deal with some of the burning issues of present-day Uttarakhand -- the hill districts of Uttar Pradesh in which *Pahar* has had special interest since its launching. *Pahar* has almost entirely ignored the drive by some people to axe trees (this, in the land of Chipko!) in the name of opposing forest laws. Neither has it covered adequately the demand for a new hill state in Uttarakhand -- a subject which has dominated



all recent debate. How does *Pahar* intend to play a role in social change while side-stepping these issues? Why this reluctance?

The editor admits in his introduction that there has been a gap of over one thousand days in bringing out the present volume. Why was it necessary to wait so long to publish this bulky 350-page issue when the same amount could have been spent on, say, seven issues of 50 pages each, taking up the current controversial issues as well as carrying some lasting articles. In fact, the three PAHAR booklets are more closely connected to social change, such as the one on the anti-liquor movement written by Pathak himself. The booklets are also more affordable than the whopping sum that this bulky issue demands. How many among those who would read *Pahar* can afford to pay for even the paperback edition?

Regardless of the drawbacks relating to subject-selection and price, this edition of *Pahar* meets the high standards set by past issues. The breadth and depth of coverage remain impressive. No person truly interested in the Himalaya can afford not to read *Pahar*.

B. Dogra is founder/editor of the News From Fields and Slums (NFS) feature service in New Delhi.

"Ramayana, Ramayana, Ramayana"

by Dor Bahadur Bista

Let me acquire my share of merit by reciting the name of *Ramacharitra Manas* three times before dwelling upon the mundane aspects of its influence upon the daily lives of the people of Nepal. We know that a dacoit turned into a saint by reciting Rama's name the wrong way round. Perhaps my own wits will be turned downside up.

Nepal has been screening the *Ramayana* television series for the past couple of months and I find that it has been by far its most popular programme, especially among women. I do not mention women just as a category separate from men but as mothers, grandmothers, and would-be mothers, who have the monopoly in shaping the human mind at all times and places.

The programme does a good job of selling cultural messages at a time when Nepal Television seems to have slapped a ban on all commercials for Indian products, including baby foods and pharmaceuticals. The Indian authorities themselves have been quite generous to have their messages and way of life allowed so freely across the border when they have been meticulously restricting fuels and so many other products from coming over. Indeed, the *Ramayana* series very subtly hits home at a time when all other social, political, trade and commercial exchanges are closed.

On Monday, 18 September, I chanced upon an episode of *Ramayana* at home. That evening, in front of the television set, I received three valuable lessons for which I feel quite grateful to the film-makers. I lay out the lessons below in proper chronological order.



M. Thapa

Lesson One: Worship the Guruji

Even the divine Prince Rama and Princess Sita considered it proper etiquette and good manners to wash the feet of a Brahman pundit, Vashistha, when he arrived at their house. I was greatly impressed with the ritual when Sitaji poured water over Guru Vashistha's feet, which Rama gently washed. I whispered into the ears of my wife and begged her to hold the water jug while I gently rubbed the holy feet of our own *punditiji* when he next favours us with a visit. We might otherwise be labeled uncivilized *matwali* savages uninitiated into the manners of high caste and proper pedigree. Besides, it would make good sense to wash his feet: he has to walk

"Who could have thought that this was the same Kaikeyi, valiant lady, who drove the chariot with the wounded King out of the thick of battle. But then, you see, Kaikeyi was only a woman..."

through piles of precious dirt and filth which our neighbours carefully and painstakingly deposit on the approach to our house. In fact, it would not hurt if my family adopted the ritual of washing the feet of everyone who walks into our home.

Lesson Two: Beware of the Woman

Next, the TV series instructed me to be cautious and watchful of every woman that crosses my path, for they clearly are wicked, vicious, cruel, unpredictable and altogether insensitive. Not only the maid Manthara, but even the highly respected princess, the beloved and trusted queen consort

Kaikeyi of illustrious King Dasarath, turned out to be the embodiment of evil. Who could have thought that this was the same Kaikeyi, valiant lady, who drove the chariot bearing the wounded King out of the thick of battle. But then, you see, Kaikeyi was only a woman, quite capable of this sort of treachery.

The *matwali* ethnic people of Nepal have always treated their women naturally and matter-of-factly, as equals. They neither worship their women nor despise them. But then they are not civilised people as are the thread-wearing castes. Thank heavens that here in Nepal we have a few *punditjis* who are running around busily organising Vratavandha ceremonies for the *matwali* ethnic boys such as the Khas, Magar and Kirantis. There will come a day when all Nepali men will be wearing the thread and this land will be chock-full of civilised Chhetris. The country will be fully

developed as all the ethnic peoples will have been converted. Then they will learn to deal with the women properly in accordance with the message that the *Ramayana* series is exporting to Nepal.

Lesson Three: Beware of the *Bar-daan*

Never break your promise no matter how painful it might be to keep it. Other people do not count. What counts is your self-image, especially in the context of your high-caste background and family pedigree. It is unwise to waste your time worrying about the common people when you have your reputation, prestige, caste status and ritual cleanliness at stake.

People become great and immortal by keeping their promises no matter how great the price they have to pay in the process. So please keep your word even if you have to destroy the entire world. After all, that is what the illustrious Dasaratha did. He said, "Rather death than breaking the promise for a King in the lineage of the Great Raghu dynasty." At the cost of the suffering of millions of people within the kingdom of Ayodhya, Dasarath banished the innocent couple for 14 years. Ultimately, the action also brought about his own death by shock. So please do not worry if you have to destroy everything except your self-centered and egotistic interest of maintaining your image. What counts is the ego-centered value system of the high-caste, which is the hallmark of the Great Hindu Civilisation.

This is an especially important message to take to heart for those of us in Nepal, as there are still a considerable number

"Other people do not count. What counts is your self-image, especially in the context of your high-caste background and family pedigree."

of ethnic *matwali* people here who are by tradition and temperament collectivists and not egotists, as are most "civilised" high-caste people. The message has to be driven hard especially into those stubborn *matwalis* who refuse to mend their ways and insist on their ethnic identity instead of converting themselves into Chhetrihood.

One other important point to remember is that such messages should not go to them in their own languages, which their children comprehend, but either in English, or better still, in Sanskrit. It does not matter if the targeted people do not understand Sanskrit, for they will acquire enough *punya*, merit, by merely listening to it.

Vive la Sanskritam! Vive la *Ramayana*! ▲

Anthropologist D.B.Bista, describes himself as a Matwali Khas.

A Himalayan Love Tragedy

The story unfolds high on the Mahabharat Lekh, somewhere in West Nepal, many years ago. Gurans (*Rhododendron*), a girl tree, was in her gangly adolescent stage. Her branches hung out awkwardly and she had not yet learned to sway gently to the soft Himalayan breeze.

Young Gurans was infatuated with the tree named Uttis (*Alnus nepalensis*), who, in his early adulthood, had grown tall and slim. He had shiny dark leaves and was quite attractive.

Though shy, Gurans gathered up her courage and went up to Uttis one day. She expressed her deep love for him, her desire to sink roots next to him, and to age together under the gaze of Api and Saipal.

But Uttis did not like Gurans' proposal and shrugged his branches in exasperation. He had no time for all this adolescent sap from the young female. He did not even make an excuse or try to explain to Gurans why he was not interested. Instead, Uttis looked away down the valley, contempt evident in his erect posture. An early afternoon cloud came by and when Uttis turned around, Gurans was gone, humiliated, lovelorn and quite alone.

It was an early autumn day three seasons later that Uttis was looking out over the valley when on top of the adjoining ridge he saw a ravishing sight. Yes, indeed! It was Gurans, now in full bloom, delicately built, and resplendent with the most beautiful crimson flowers all over. The gangly girl had become a beautiful lady. No tree, bush or *banmara* on the hill could keep its eye off her, and Gurans was quite aware of this.

Uttis forgot his indiscretion and rudeness of three years ago. He preened his leaves and called up to Gurans and asked if she would be his consort. She gave a start, then in a voice cold as the axe-man's hated steel, she replied, "What! Be your consort? Have you no shame, you miserable shrub! Begone! *Ja, bheer bata khasera mar!* Go fall off a cliff, for all I care!"

And that is what actually happened. Uttis stepped back in shame and sorrow and accidentally slipped over the edge of a steep landslide. He came to rest far below amidst fallen rock and rubble. Which is where all of Uttis' descendants remain to this day, for Gurans' curse was for eternity. The fast-growing Uttis arrives wherever there is a landslide, to stabilise the soil and to enrich it by a process called "nitrogen fixation."

And that is why, if you go up anywhere in the Mahabharat Lekh today, you will find Gurans trees in bloom on sunny mountain-tops, while all Uttis scabble around in deep gullies and degraded hillsides.

Moral: Reject an advance and you are condemned to be an environmentalist! ▲



**The Sherpas of Nepal
in the Tibetan Cultural Context**

by *Robert A. Paul*

Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi
1989 IRs95 (paperback)

The title of this book highlights the Sherpas, but the author's entire attention is actually directed to the culture and society of Tibet. Paul starts his analysis "...in that corner of the Tibetan world with which I have direct personal acquaintance, namely the ethnology of the Sherpas of Solu-Khumbu." He begins with a study of Sherpa social institutions and proceeds to analyse several of the great literary monuments of Tibetan culture proper, from different parts of Tibet and from different eras. Finally, the book studies the institution of theocracy and its transformation through the course of Tibetan history. The aim is to carry out a psychoanalytic exploration of the Tibetan symbolic world. The author uses the assassination of the anti-Buddhist king of Tibet, Gland-dar-ma, in 842 AD as a device for breaking into "the endless knot of interwoven strands of symbolism in Sherpa and Tibetan culture" and to explain quasi-legendary history in terms of a complex and coherent language of symbolism. In analysing the king's death, Paul sees the depth, centrality, significance, and "grammaticality" of symbolism.

**Conservation Communication
in Nepal**

by *Aditya Man Shrestha*

Published by author, Kathmandu
1989 NRs200

This book is an attempt to alert decision-makers of the importance of communication in promoting effective forest management in Nepal. Shrestha, who is President of the Asian Forum of Environmental Journalists, presents a strategy for conservation communication, with particular reference to Nepal's Tarai plains. This strategy has been formulated on the basis of an overall review of the state of mass media and interpersonal communication systems in Nepal. The author goes on to deal with selection of communication tools (radio, print media, etc), selection of messages, production aspects (from brochures and logo stickers to T-shirts) and cost estimates (T-shirts: NRs50 per piece).

**Land-Locked States and
Access to the Sea
(Towards a Universal Law)**

by *Kishore Uprety*

Nepal Law Society, Kathmandu
1989 NRs75

One-fifth of the international community, 30 States in all, states the author, are without a coastline. In varying degrees, this lack of access to the sea engenders a series of economic, juridical and political problems, as is clear from the current Indo-Nepal problem. Uprety, who holds a doctorate in International Law from the University of Paris/Sorbonne, takes a sweeping yet analytical view of the history and application

of right of access to the sea. He maintains that the much-ballyhooed 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea lacked "a creative approach" and has not helped to clarify the rights and status of states without access (SWA). "The SWA are still to be considered the losers in this Convention, particularly the land-locked States of Africa, Asia and South America," Uprety says.

**Nepal Mandala
Nepal Travellers' Guide**

by *Richard Josephson*

Pilgrims Book Store, Kathmandu
1988 NRs129

Printed in Nepal, with fine line drawings (which we could not find credited), this is a new addition to travel guides on Nepal. It is unique in that much of it is a simplified distillation of Mary S. Slusser's celebrated work, *Nepal Mandala*, which weighs five kilos and costs US\$150. Additional practical information for the traveler has been added by Josephson. The Slusser half of the book opens with a history of Nepal from Lichhavi times (300 A.D.) to the present, dealing along the way with the evolution of a culture. It also covers wars, cultural exchange, migration, architecture, and the mix of Buddhism and Hinduism in Kathmandu.

**Aksai Chin and
Sino-Indian Conflict**

by *John Lall*

Allied Publishers, (New Delhi)
1989 IRs150

The Aksai Chin, north-east of Leh and between Sinkiang and Western Tibet, has remained a thorn on the side of Sino-Indian relations since the war of 1962. Lall's new book, states a reviewer in the *New Delhi Statesman*, is important because it discusses a British Note to the Chinese Government dated 14 March 899 and its implications for the Indian claim to the Askai Chin in the Western Sector of the Sino-Indo boundary dispute. The 1899 Note reportedly proposed a boundary in which the route of the Chinese road linking Sinkiang with Tibet would have been located on Chinese (or Chinese-protected) soil. There did not emerge any officially defined border here between 1899 and 1947 other than that indicated by the 1899 Note. The suggestion is that there might have been no war in 1962 had India accepted the 1899 boundary,

Buddhist Book Illuminations

by *Pratapaditya Pal and Julia Meech-Pekarik*

Ravi Kumar Publishers, Hongkong
1988 US\$225

This lavishly illustrated book introduces the subject of Buddhist text "illuminations" (gold or silver embellishments to illustrate covers, title pages, and margins of religious works). Buddhist decorated manuscripts used for preserving and disseminating sutras were produced in India,

Nepal, Tibet, Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Indonesia, China, Japan and Korea. Introducing the subject of illuminations in a historical perspective, the co-authors provide detailed description of illustrations and stylistic and scholarly interpretations. The two important centers for copying and illuminating manuscripts in Bihar were the monasteries of Nalanda and Vikramasila. The tradition disappeared in both Bihar and Bengal by the end of the 13th century, while it still survives in Nepal. Buddhist manuscripts arrived in Tibet from the seventh century onwards (from Kashmir and Nepal) and illumination and creation of manuscripts were regularly undertaken in the monasteries.

**Himalayan Research
and Development
Problem Oriented Studies
Vol 7 (I & II)**

Himalayan Research Group, Nainital
Subscription: IRs85 p.a.

The June and December 1988 issue of this bi-annual publication, just out now, presents a number of scientific articles on the ecology of the Indian Himalaya. One deals with the impact of climatic changes on "slope development" around the Uhl river in Kangra (Himachal Pradesh). Another discusses the problems and prospects of forage improvement in the cold, arid desert of Ladakh. Numerous other subjects are dealt with in this issue. For example, there are articles on urbanisation in the Himalaya, the presence of the fungi genus *ramaria* in Bhutan, the "hypothalamic neurosecretory system" of certain cold water fish in Kashmir, development of fisheries in Manipur, seasonal regime of water flow in rivers of Pithoragarh District, road transport accessibility in Kumaun Himalaya, and the menace of "white rust" plants in Garhwal Himalaya. There is a paper on the plant known locally as *allo* in Nepal, which yields fibre for making ropes, nets and sacks. There is an enumeration of the ferns of the Western (Indian) Himalaya as well as an enumeration of the flora of Pithoragarh District. The latter lists a total of 2316 species of flowering plants belonging to 994 genera and 175 families.

The Newars

by *Gopal Singh Nepali*

Himalayan Booksellers, Kathmandu
1988 Price unlisted

This pioneering ethno-sociological study of the Newars of Nepal was first published in 1965 by United Asia Publications, Bombay. In his work, Nepali has concentrated on Kathmandu and the village of Panga for intensive study of urban and rural Newari lifestyles. The sections in the book are divided into "economic and material life", birth and initiation, death, caste organisation, *guthi* organisation, marriage, the family, kinship, the Newar pantheon and festivals, both domestic and community-wide. The author also seeks to draw a link between the Newars and the Nayars of distant South-West India. The culture of the Newars, he states, "is oriented towards emphasising peacefulness, toleration, compromise

and the cultivation of the artistic sense." The sum total of Newar culture-traits is "complete integration of the individual with the society", he says.

Tibet
The Lost Civilisation
by Simon Normanton

Hamish Hamilton, London
 1988 20 Pounds

This unique book is compiled almost entirely from the words and pictures of some of the very few outsiders who visited Lhasa in the first half of this century, starting with the pictures taken by the 1904 Younghusband Mission to Lhasa. Much of the interpretation of events in Tibet is derived from the book **Tibet and Its History** by Hugh Richardson, the British political representative who remained in Lhasa almost without a break from 1937 to 1950. The bulk of the text, however, is first-hand accounts by people who knew "old Tibet". Normanton has pieced together from the books of Tibet's visitors, a continuing story of which their various adapted accounts constitute chapters. Most of the pictures are in colour, which is remarkable for the period we are talking about. The text and photographic description of Younghusband's push into Tibet is especially riveting.



Everest
Kangshung Face
by Stephen Venables
 Hodder and Stoughton, London
 1989 IRs325

The Kangshung face on the eastern flank of Everest had till May 1988 remained one of the greatest challenges in Himalayan climbing. The sheer cliff that descended 7,000 feet from the South Col to the Kangshung Glacier was considered practically un-climbable -- Everest explorer George Leigh Mallory had taken one look at the face back in 1924 and left it to "other men, less wise." Those men turned out to be the members of the "Everest-88" expedition, one of whom was the Briton, Venables. This book goes beyond the ego trip of many climber-writers and bears a sensitive touch, such as when Venables writes about the mountain and its history, fellow climbers and support staff, and the environment that surrounds him. As John Hunt writes in the foreword, the most gripping part of the book is the desperate descent after Venables reaches the summit on 3:40 p.m. on 12 May. He is forced to bivouac at 27,000 feet on the South-East Ridge, and the following morning rejoins two companions to descend to the South Col. The three then fight their way down the Kangshung Face, frostbitten, dehydrated, without food, tents and sleeping bags abandoned, losing touch with their fixed ropes and finally losing touch with one another. "I know of no finer example in mountaineering, of mind triumphing over matter," says Hunt of this climbing classic.

Oriental Rug Review
 April/May 1989
 Vol 9, No 4
 New York, US\$8

Oriental Rug Review, a leading trade magazine from the United States, devotes this entire issue to Tibetan rugs, a subject on which little has been written to date. Editor George O'Bannon says: "Putting this Tibetan issue together has been a challenging, learning, and mystical experience...thus we learned about not only a different rug world but also different ways of looking and thinking about rugs."

Indeed, the wealth of information in this 80-page issue offers a valuable crash course on the many facets of manufacturing, designing, colouring, collecting (antiques) and marketing Tibetan rugs. Seventeen articles cover such subjects as "chemical analysis of Tibetan rugs and trappings," a Tibetan rug primer for the uninitiated, "Flying backwards on a Tibetan Rug," explaining how "playing (at) rugs" became a business, and travel stories touching on rugs and interiors found in Tibetan and Ladakhi monasteries. In short, there is ample space given to the warps and wefts of rugs as well as to the romance of the worlds where they were first woven and used. Helpful -- often scholarly -- background of ethnological and historical nature is also provided.


The most fascinating story recounts the evolution of the Nepali-Tibetan carpet industry -- as the rugs produced in Nepal are called. Nepali-Tibetan rug-making began with the setting up of the Tibetan Refugee Handicrafts Centre in Jawalakhel back in 1961. Rug-making is now a full-scale industry and earns Nepal about US\$60 million in foreign exchange, second only to tourism. It is possibly the largest employer (more than 200,000). It is remarkable that Nepal, which does not produce wool in any significant quantity, should produce arguably the best rugs of this kind, though there are signs its export niche will face growing competition from China and India. Another article is by a Tibetan-American, who quit his banking career to begin a new venture: Tibetan rugs from Tibet. The time is right, he writes, for a newly revitalised Tibetan rug industry to take its rightful place as an exporter, which it had never achieved despite centuries of rug-weaving.

There is a "Conversation with Ivory Freidus", who owns "the most significant collection in the US, if not in the world." The New Yorker began collecting Tibetan rugs 18 years ago with a few "mangy" rugs she bought for US\$100 from a Peace Corps volunteer who needed cash to return to Nepal. She now pays thousands of dollars for a good quality, old Tibetan rug from a fast depleting supply.



Lalitpur rug shop.

The only quibble with this long-deserving focus on this oriental -- actually Himalayan -- folk art is its rather flippant use of the word "karma". Wrote the interviewer of Freidus' famous collection: "Or in a more mystical sense, they have come because the karma of the rugs have chosen her as the vehicle to make Tibetan rugs known to the world." In point of fact, Tibetan rugs have about as much karma as a factory-produced door-mat. The difference is that they are made with care, representing a craft that is centuries old, and the labour of hands.



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M. Thapa

In this column, we report on significant developments and new ideas relating to articles which appeared in past issues of Himal.

THE TUKIS OF DOLAKHA

(Mar/Apr 1989)

"Tukis" are agricultural extension workers, model farmers who motivate neighbours to use improved farming techniques. The system was begun by the Integrated Hill Development Project (IHDP) in Dolakha and Sindhupalchok districts east of Kathmandu. Subash C. Joshi, an agronomist trained in the University of Nottingham, has now completed an evaluation of the Tuki system in Sindhupalchok.

Joshi found that more than 60 percent of the Tuki contact farmers were of the same caste/ethnic group as the Tukis themselves. This facilitated the spread of the extension message to the farmers. When the ethnic composition is mixed, and the Tuki's caste/ethnic group is a minority, however, the system is less effective. The Tuki was able to communicate better with those of lower caste than himself. Joshi found that Tukis had no influence on Tuki "non-contact farmers." Because the majority of the Tukis are from dominant ethnic groups, the supply of technical information to the lower caste population remains severely limited. The selection and distribution of the Tukis within the villages was "disproportionate and unscientific," so that more than 50 percent of the Tukis remained inactive. Since IHDP's final phase terminates in spring 1990, Tukis are demoralised and uncertain of the future. The handing over phase has already begun but the Tuki system requires greater flexibility and openness than is currently provided by His Majesty's Government, says Joshi.

AN OBSESSION WITH TOURISM

(July/August 1989)

The impact of mass tourism on the environment is causing concern in the Himalaya, and the same seems to be true for Europe's premier mountain range. International environmental groups have warned that the Alps risk

being destroyed by rising mass tourism, estimated to bring more than 100 million travelers into the mountains each year. "The main problem is too much tourism and the departure of agriculture," says Martin Holdgate, head of the World Conservation Union. Pollution, especially by cars, downhill skiing and littering were the major dangers.

Back in the Himalaya, the rapid environmental degradation around Gangotri has forced the Uttar Pradesh government to restrain tourists from staying overnight in the area. A Gangotri Development Authority has been constituted to implement various schemes designed to restore the holy precincts to their past beauty. After the construction of a bridge at Lanka on the Jad Ganga, the pilgrim and tourist traffic to Gangotri-Gomukh area has increased manifold, resulting in haphazard development, encroachments, unauthorised construction, problems of human waste and pollution.

Sunderlal Bahuguna, the famous environmental activist of the U.P. hills, writes in a recent issue of *Frontline* magazine that development Gangotri is part of a bigger plan to develop the Himalaya in which the tourism industry has a major share. "Our planners and policy-makers...think that whatever comes from (the West) is the best. So, while thinking about the Himalaya, they have the Alps in their minds." The rush of tourists had started after the construction of highways to the Himalayan shrines. Tourism helped a few rich people who established hotels and travel companies but did not create adequate jobs for the poor. There was a craze for constructing natural looking hotel buildings in tourists spots -- "log huts" which required a hundred times more wood than ordinary houses. To build one such hut for "VVIP" tourists, says Bahuguna, "30 old, majestic deodars with girth over 2.5m were felled from the neighbouring protected forest."

Kinnaur and Spiti, in the high north-eastern frontier of Himachal Pradesh, have been thrown open to tourists -- of both the foreign and domestic variety. Till now, entry into

the "Inner Line" required hard-to-get permit issued by the border authorities. The first package tour entered the area on 15 September to explore the valleys of four rivers that originate here -- Sutlej, Spiti, Chandra (Chenab) and Beas. Among the places of cultural importance in this region are Kibber village (said to be the highest village in Asia), the well-preserved eight-storey fort of Ghondla, the temples of Sarahan, Triloknath and Mrikula Devi, and the monasteries of Tabo, Kye and Kar-dang.

PAGODAS IN HIMACHAL

(Jan/Feb 1989)

The 400-year-old temple of Tripura Sundari at Nagar village in Kulu Valley was considered one of the best examples of Himachal Pradesh's unique pagoda-style architecture. Najm-ul-Hasan of the *Times of India* reports that the temple has been destroyed by an "act of pious vandalism." The historic structure was apparently pulled down in August when a wealthy family from Nagar decided that the village deserved a brand new temple. A senior official of the Archaeological Survey of India said the country "had lost a jewel from its treasure-house of architectural heritage." Surprisingly, Himachal authorities were unaware of the vandalism, even four weeks after it had occurred.



The Tripura Sundari *mandir* is thought to have been built in the late 15th or early 16th century and its foundation stone mentions Raja Siddh Singh of Kulu. The pagoda temple had triple roofs, the top tier being circular and the other two characteristically square. The temple, overlooking Beas River, is one of the reasons Himachal tourism authorities had declared Nagar a "tourist village."

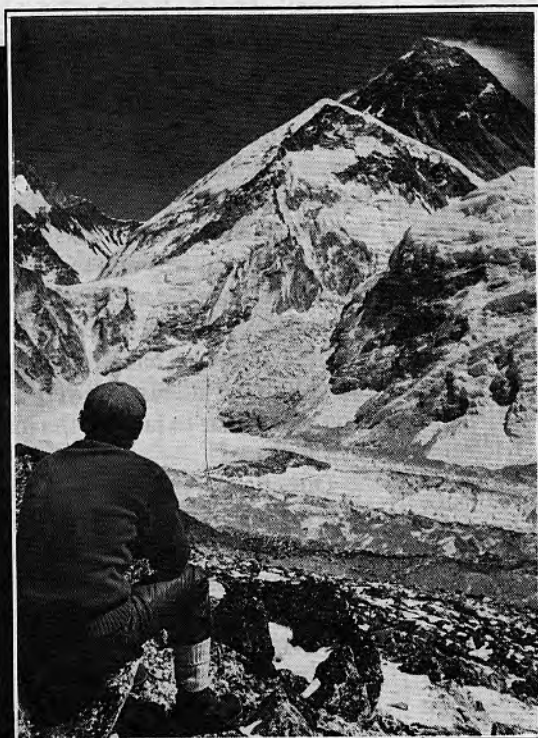
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What if the Indian Tourism Development Corporation (ITDC) sent out a "Welcome to India" brochure that showed Pakistan's Mount K-2 on the cover? Pretty dumb you'd say. I agree. Well, I was returning from this Pilibit seminar I told you about, when the stewardess handed me a disembarkation card issued by the Department of Tourism. "Welcome to Nepal," it said under a mountain landscape. All very nice, except the peak shown is Changtse, in Tibet.

Obviously, the lads at Tourism intended a picture of Chomolongma (29,028 ft), but they got its neighbour Changtse (24,780 ft) mixed up. To most people, any peak that stands behind a saddle and is relatively dark and rocky is Chomolongma. The world's highest mountain, of course, peers behind the Lhotse-Nuptse ridge. In the case of Changtse, it is Lho La, the same col over which George Leigh Mallory, peering down into Nepal in 1924, wondered at the profusion of peaks over on this side.

Certainly, the tour guide I met some years ago back on Mussoorie's Gun Hill had never heard of Mallory. Blithely, he pointed to the peak Banderpunch (20,400ft) and announced to his largely plains audience, "And that, ladies and gentlemen, is Everest." Which, in point of fact, sarcastically cleared its throat 550 miles over the horizon to the east. Many a Punjabi tourist has since then displayed on his mantle-piece the treasured shot of Everest from Mussoorie.

I saw a more recent blooper in the 17 September issue of *Link* magazine

from Bombay. An article entitled "Nainital and the Magic of Kumaon" by Sushma Chadha states: "From China Peak, the view of the Himalayan ranges, Kanchenjunga in particular, is entrancing." Kumaon would indeed be truly magical if you could spot Kanchenjunga from Nainital. Which would mean that you could see Banderpunch from Gangtok. And Mount Kailash would have got up and sidled over to Muktinath.

A New Yorker is supposed to be able to distinguish between the Empire State Building from the World Trade Centre. The Londoner knows his or her Big Ben the Qutab Minar. Why shouldn't Himalayans be required to know their himals? What good is boasting of our Himalayan heritage if we not know enough to recognize Machhapuchare from Chimborazo and Cotopaxi? Even panorama artists, such as the hallowed personage of Serbjeet Singh, seem to be afflicted with high altitude disorientation every time they try to sketch a peak. A panorama of the "The Himalaya from Kakani," for example, will show you a series of stubs on the horizon, one no indistinguishable from another.

Photographic panoramas are just as notorious for failing to provide perspective. The hideous Khumbu panorama taken from Kala Patthar ranks real low in my esteem. Because of parallax, Nuptse comes over as massive, larger than life, while Chomolongma is relegated to the background. The highest peak deserves to look tall.

Few photographs northward from Kathmandu do justice to the Jugal Himal group of mountains, because they are smallish and do not figure among the climber's pantheon. On the other hand, commercial photographers strain extra hard with telephotos to force the Himalaya closer to the Chitwan jungle. You'd think the rhinoceros went trekking up the Annapurna Sanctuary when not showing off in front of tourist-laden elephants.

KMD



Oops! Wrong Chomolongma!

I have penned a plea to the editors of *Himal* asking them to carry a regular column on identifying individual mountains so that the creatures of the Himalaya, both human and abominable, can recognise their own himals without having to ask the tourist. Write to the editors if you agree.

On a wholly different subject, have you noticed a slackening off in "yeti sightings" lately? Got to do something about it, or Himalayan exoticism will never be the same again! Now, I am too lazy to come down from my Upper Barun hideout to make some ambiguous tracks to humour the Department of Tourism (our tracks are a great draw) but why don't you, dear reader, get into the act? Every patriotic Nepali with access to a high ice field or glacier has a nationalist duty to report at least one yeti footprint a year to jack up the tourist arrival charts.

Directions: *Find a wide expanse of snow in front of a trekking or climbing party. Punch a hole in the snow and squiggle your fist to widen the depression; insert four index fingers into the snow -- squiggle them too. A sample pugmark is shown at left to help you perfect the technique. Be sure not to be caught in the act or we'll all be found out.*





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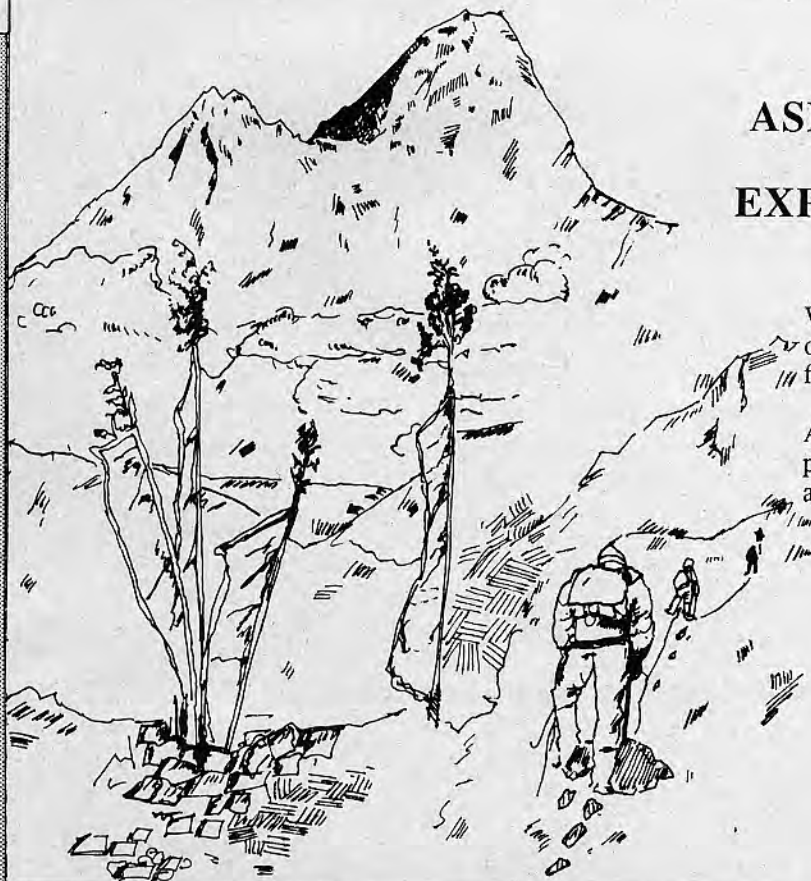
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