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# HIMAL

ALTERNATIVE BI-MONTHLY



## Hill Poverty

Lords, Masters  
Majhigaon  
Sanagaon  
Jumla Journal

Nepali Constitution  
Bhutanese Challenge  
Debating ERIP  
Thank you

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13 Worshipping Poverty

14 Jumla Journal

16 Kernel of Karnali

17 Sanagaon's Desolation



**भूटानमा सयौंको निर्मम हत्या** भूटानमा ३२७  
नेपालीको मृत्यु

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help to Bhutan

**Dragon** भूटानमा आन्दोलन दवाइँदछ

**A Tranquil Oasis**

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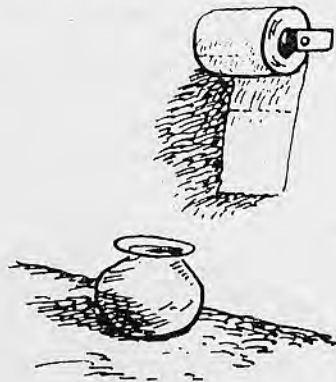
**भूटानमा सयौंको निर्मम हत्या** भूटानमा तानाशाही वर्बरता

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Cover Picture by Kevin Bubriski: Blind father and son, Chettris of Humla District of north-west Nepal

# HIMAL

ALTERNATIVE BI-MONTHLY

Vol. 3 No. 4 Nov/Dec 1990

अमृत्युन्तरस्यां दिशी देवतात्मा  
हिमालयो नाम नगाधिगजः  
पूर्वापरं तोयनिधी वगाह्य  
स्थितः पृथिव्या इव मानदण्ड

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

*A northern yardstick  
To measure the Earth*

- Kalidasa (Kumara Sambhava)

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## MAIL

### TARAI

I found the several articles on Nepal's Tarai (Sept/Oct 1990) interesting. Nepal's Tarai, while serving as the foundation for the country's economy, has all long remained outside the Kathmandu-centered mainstream. Probably, as the cover article explains, the tract of vast flatlands did not fit the image of "Shangri-La". Yet the reality is that we would be at the brink of economic disaster but for the Tarai region.

As someone who grew up in one of the towns of the Nepal-India border, I do not



believe that these border towns can be treated simply as manifestations of Nepal's dependency on India, as the article on the East-West Highway implied. The prevailing socio-cultural relationship between the populations across the border transcends the political boundaries that we in Kathmandu understand. The dependency, in fact, is mutual as people across the border also come over to Nepal for work. Even with the economic growth along the East-West Highway that the writer seems to advocate, the role of the border towns will not diminish. Any

industrial development in Nepal, to make sense, will have to find place in the larger external markets, which means that the products will have to be routed out via these outlet towns.

Deer hunting, dynamiting fish, and escapades of antagonistic power blocks in the building of the East-West Highway made interesting reading. But why was the highway at certain stretches laid through pristine forest? Was the concern cost, economy or was it national security? Were alternative alignments ever contemplated? Building the highway only a few kilometres to the south would have saved forests, integrated the more productive belt of the Tarai, and avoided the prospects of bringing development to an ecologically sensitive and water-scarce Bhabar belt, which should have been conserved for environmental reasons. But all that is history now.

Also, *Himal* seems to have discovered more causes of floods: indiscriminate building of canals (where?) and the loss of root crops (how?). Please refrain from such generalisations and sweeping statements and tell us specifics. This would add to the excellent work you have been doing. Lastly, in your map of the East-West Highway, the location of the Narayani River came as a stone in the soup.

Deepa Sharma  
Kanya Campus,  
Kathmandu

**Editors:** More stones in the soup: In the Himalayan perspective maps of the past two issues of *Himal*, the rivers Ganga and Jamuna were interchanged. Our apologies to the few readers who noticed.

### BEFRIEND MANDAL

In his "Beware of Mandal" (Sep/Oct 1990) response to Kedar Mathema's article on Nepali education, Devendra Rana demonstrates an immature understanding of Mathema's suggestions and the Indian Mandal

Commission report. I take issue particularly with Rana's saying that "The author did not have the benefit of hindsight," in his suggestion that one remedy for unequal access to education in Nepal is to allocate a "certain percentage of seats in higher education for applicants from disadvantaged groups, particularly girls."

Rana mentions the Mandal case in India to point out the perils of allocating a certain percentage of seats in terms of ethnic background and not merit. There is a difference, however, in reserving a certain percentage of seats in government jobs from allocating a certain percentage of seats in higher education for disadvantaged groups. By giving the disadvantaged groups the privilege of education, the latter form of allocation has, for example in India, benefitted large numbers of people in the most remote areas like Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Ladakh.

I also disagree with Rana's suggestion that the way out of the problem is to help the disadvantaged financially. This is no more than a neat way to say, "No". When the disadvantaged have to compete with their inadequate educational background in high school with their Kathmandu educated counterparts, the chances of their getting admitted to the colleges they apply to are almost negligible. This is the biggest problem: getting in. Unless the disadvantaged have a glimmer of hope of getting in, they will not be encouraged to get an education. Financial assistance to disadvantaged groups is helpful; but it is not enough. The government must also set aside a certain percentage of seats for the disadvantaged and encourage them to get an university education. Otherwise, the gap between the learned urban elite and the ignorant rural peasants will only widen more, to worsen the painful rifts and tensions already present.

Gopal Lama  
Yangrima School  
Sermathang, Helambu

**DEFENDING BUDHANILKANTHA**

In his article "Cheating Our Children" (May/June 1990), Kedar Mathema presented a rather dismal picture of current school and university education in Nepal. The general force of his arguments leaves the impression that the situation is beyond redemption in the foreseeable future. Without in any way wishing to gloss over the weaknesses Mathema delineates, and in particular the apparent abandonment of the policy for qualitative growth in favour of "mindless expansion", I would seek to argue that he fails to detect some areas in the present structure which should lead to a more optimistic outlook.

In particular, I would contend that his dismissal of Budhanilkanta School as a "high-cost institution" which should be "privatised" is ill-informed and damaging to the future of secondary education in the country as a whole.

Budhanilkanta is a "national school" in a very real sense. At present, it enrolls students from 72 of Nepal's 75 districts. Forty per cent of its students are supported fully or in part by Nepali Government scholarships. The much talked-about "subsidy" turns out upon examination to be something rather different. The Government accounts for less than 50 per cent of the operational funding of Budhanilkanta. Of that figure, 75 per cent provides scholarship for students who would not otherwise have any chance to receive an international-standard education. This is in no sense a subsidy for fee-paying parents. A significant portion of the 14 ex-students currently studying in British universities and bonded to return to Nepal as teachers come from among these "scholarship boys".

The school's International Programme (Ordinary and Advanced Level) itself has been remarkably successful, with examination results well above the international average. The school recently tested 111 students from 18 other schools for 15 reserved places in the Ordinary Level of the International Programme. Forty per cent of these were girls. If we are to assess things in terms of "market forces" there can be little doubt of the demand: overall, this year the school has tested over 2000 Nepali students for about 100 places in the school!

After several years during which the school was itself adapting to the demands of high-standard English-medium education and an international programme as a complement to the School Leaving Certificate (SLC), the school is now entering a different phase. Its role is changing so that not only will it assimilate girl students, but it will also become increasingly

involved in an outreach role as a "national focus" of secondary education.

No one doubts the gravity of the situation in contemporary Nepal, and not just in the educational field. Budhanilkanta offers a significant model for development with its combination of private enterprise, foreign support - the British Government is engaged in a phased withdrawal - and government involvement. A key element for success is setting of pure policy objective by consensus between the involved parties, and by a policy of non-involvement in the policy implementation stages.

I would suggest to Mathema and others that, before they assume the worst possible scenario, they meet with some of the young men who have passed through Budhanilkanta and find out from them whether there is a reason to hope.

*Brian M. Garton, Headmaster  
Budhanilkanta School  
Kathmandu*

**EVEREST OVERLOAD**

I have just come back from a trek to the upper Khumbu. Mount Everest is still there, still the tallest, and an attraction unlike any other for climbers from every nation. Yet, something has changed in the Everest magic. A large number of expeditions and an overwhelming number of people operating in the Base Camp area are fouling the already stressed environment and crowding out each other.

I learnt that a record nine climbing expeditions were approved for 1990. Everyone, including the climbers, agreed that this was too many. More yaks, porters and curious trekkers visit the crowded camps. In the acrimony of Base Camp, I heard rumours of payoffs to government officials for climbing rights by one party or another.

The Base Camp trash piles now get almost as much international attention as do the expeditions themselves, which seem to have no incentive to haul their garbage out of the Everest vicinity, especially after several grueling months on the mountain. There are occasional clean-up campaigns, but nothing is being done on a regular basis. I heard the Sagarmatha National Park administrators complain that they have no resource or authority to manage the situation.

What is to be done? Clearly, this is matter for the national government, but here are a few suggestions. First, despite the tremendous demand for climbing organisations of every type, the Ministry of Tourism *must* resist the temptation of approving more than, say, four groups for Everest annually. Second, the authorities must establish a "pack in, pack out"

policy. This can be enforced by requiring expeditions to post a bond in addition to climbing fees equivalent to the estimated cost of the clean-up. The bond would be refunded when liaison officers certify that the group has properly disposed of its waste.

Unfortunately, the more innocent age of adventure and conquest is past, at least around Everest. Now, the only way to preserve both the environment and the social integrity of the region is by adopting a responsible attitude that is in tune with the reality of the times.

*Joseph Barrabas  
(Presently in Kathmandu)*

**COCA COLA DEMOCRACY**

Dipak Gyawali's article "A Nepali Interregnum" (Jul/Aug 1990) delves into the contradictions which led to the collapse of the Panchayat system and also sets out the challenges before the three forces paramount in Nepal: the left, the Nepali Congress and the monarchy. Let me add a few thoughts of my own on the meaning of "democracy".

The mainstream thinkers in Nepal are succumbing to the dominant worldview which says that democracy is primarily a right to form parties and fight elections -- and the rest of the historical struggles have to be entertained merely as pressure group politics. Development, ecological security, identity and autonomy for the various groups are marginalised as secondary issues. Such demands are often even labeled "anti-national".

We must recognise that the new democratic struggles in Nepal and elsewhere aspire to achieve not only political freedom but also economic justice. The future of the democratic movement in Nepal lies in forging unity on the idea of political democracy and social justice. Tomorrow's participatory form of democracy must include and not exclude representation of women, peasants, workers, professionals and ethnic groups.

A valid suspicion is haunting the popular classes of Nepal: will the Nepali elites opt for the capitalist road of "Coca-Cola Democracy"? If that is the case, our historical subordination to the West will remain unchanged. As always, we will be defined, developed, shaped and modified according to imperial designs. So, will the new political order in Nepal recognise and tackle this problem? Or will it choose to be development-neutral and remain satisfied with the ups and downs of electoral politics?

For their part, Nepali intellectuals must look for a "Nepali history from below." Rather than read traditional history, if we look beneath the surface, we find that the hegemony of the ruling elites was constantly contested by the

ruled. Resistance to the theocratic state has been continuous in Nepali culture. In this sense, the contemporary democratic movement in Nepal is a culmination of resistance over at least 300 years. The hegemonic historiography and anthropology of Nepal have not accounted for such forms of resistance because the analysis of the peasantry is dominated either by the view that they are supine victims of the state and elite politics, or that they are followers of failed revolutions.

To conclude, let Nepali intellectuals look into themselves and ask whether, despite their theoretical sophistication, they behave like a dominant group. How sensitive are they to movements from below? Do they attend to the unique qualities of popular resistance at the grassroots? Have they bought the movements of women, artisans, landless, and various ethnic groups into the legitimate arena of national politics?

Pramod Parajuli  
University of Iowa  
United States



"Tryst with Democracy" by Dipak Gyawali was eloquent, but it lacked full honesty. I am referring specifically to a line on Page 4 which casually lumps the "Billion Dollar Scandal" with the "Carpet Scandal."

In the "Carpet Scandal," 40 public servants and some people in the business community were tried for corruption, and acquitted after several months of trial. All public servants were rehabilitated with honour after being acquitted.

The "Billion Dollar Scandal" was a hushed affair with no trial, no judgement. It was, in a way, typical of the post-referendum atmosphere of massive corruption.

I doubt that Gyawali is unaware of the legal term, "innocent until proven guilty." Intellectual irresponsibility on the part of the so-called "intelligentsia" threatens to turn democracy in Nepal into an exercise in opportunism and irresponsibility. I think *Himal* should rise above this kind of atmosphere.

Sunil Pyakurel  
PO Box 72  
Kathmandu

### OFFENDED TRAVELLERS

In "Happy Tourist, Unhappy Traveller" (Sept/Oct 1990), Robert Shepherd makes some shocking generalisations. He claims that neither the "happy tourist" nor the "unhappy traveller" is capable of cross-cultural communication. The tourist, he claims, willingly admits this fact, whereas the traveller denies it and, therefore, deceives himself.

Any anthropologist would be quick to point out that a traveller carries with him his own cultural baggage. This does not mean that he cannot experience another such "baggage". Perhaps some travellers feel that they have "experienced" or "done" Nepal by sipping tea in Thamel's Pumpemickle Bakery, and wearing cotton drawstring pants. This is not true of all travellers. Shepherd's claims become far too cynical in making such rash generalizations. The mere fact that people travel to foreign countries, seeking to get away from their own cultural surroundings, we believe, makes travellers worthy of some respect, despite the phenomenon of Thamel in Nepal. If the attempt of "experiencing" another culture is not a cultural interaction, then what is? Where do you start? Is Shepherd denying any possibility of cultural communication?

As "travellers" we felt offended by Shepherd's deeming of our experience in Nepal a cultural deception.

Kimberli Levin, Suzanne Watnick  
Massachusetts, United States

### GOOD COPY, POOR CIRCULATION

*Himal* once again came to us, this time with more articles and information than in previous issues, including contributions by well-known scholars such as Harka Gurung, Hemanta Mishra and B.L. Shrestha. Foreign contributions also made the magazine more demanding. Many thanks for the article on how Nepali women are suffering in Bombay.

This magazine *Himal* is not only helpful to Nepalis but also to foreigners for whom there is no better way to be introduced to the Himalayas. The "Know Your Himal" column with details of Gauri Shanker was informative.

But one thing I want to say is that *Himal* is poor in marketing. Though it is not more expensive than foreign journals, we cannot find it easily in the shops. So circulation must be increased. In the end, I hope for further progress of your paper.

Munindra R. Bajracharya  
Lalit Kala Campus  
Kathmandu

### CONFUSED

I am a regular and satisfied reader of *Himal*, but I am also a bit puzzled. The masthead of the latest issue indicates that *Himal* is an "Alternative Bimonthly". Till now my assumption has been that you were a quarterly. Is "alternative" supposed to indicate that *Himal* comes out every alternate "bimonthly" period, i.e. every four months? Also, my dictionary defines "bimonthly" in the following manner: "adj, produced or happening every second month or twice a month." You, however, use the term as a noun. So where do you stand and where do I stand? Or is it okay to play fast and loose with the English language in the Himalayas (which you prefer not to pluralise)?

Sriman Thakur  
Ranchi, Bihar

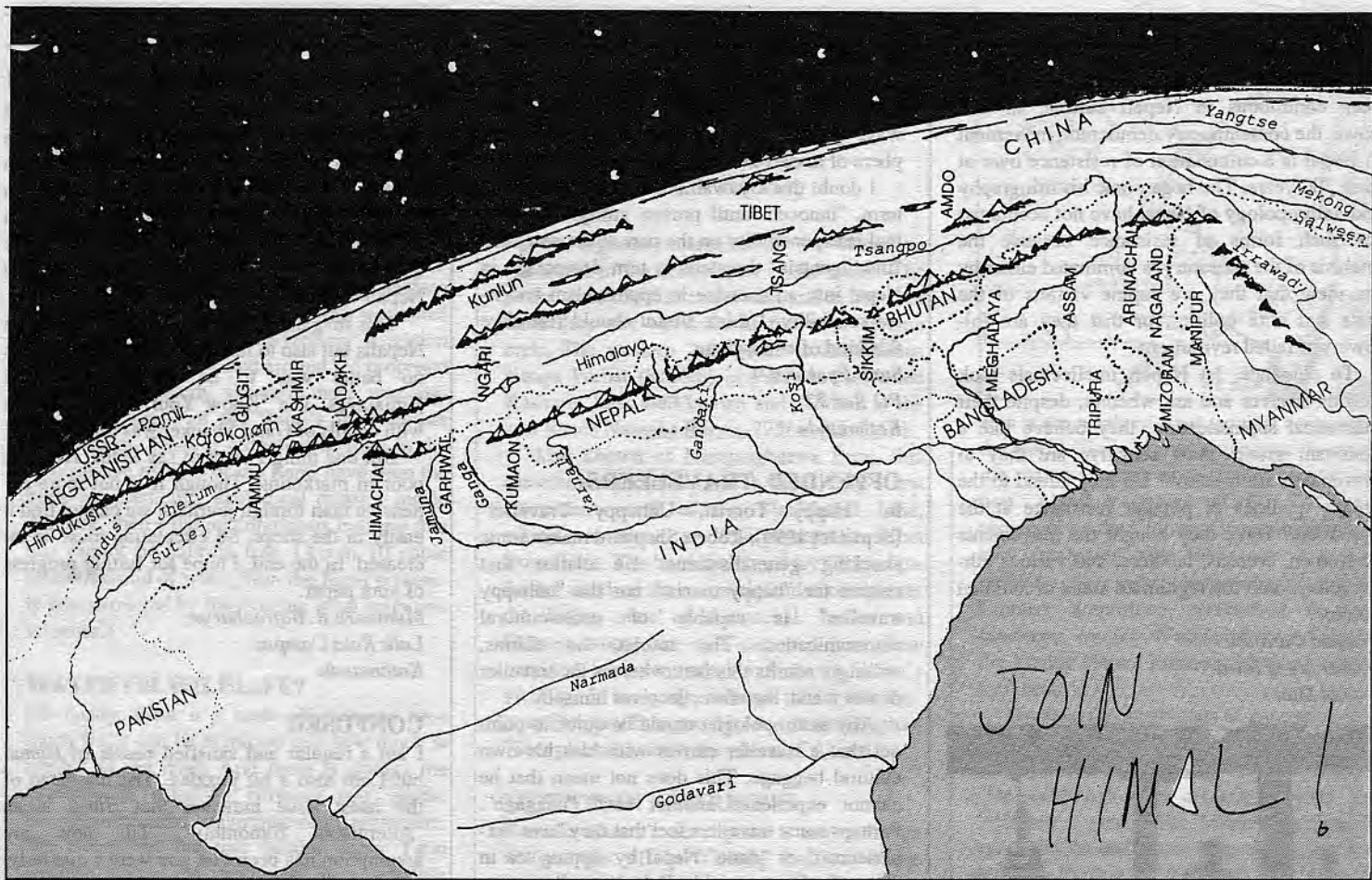
**Editors:** Although our publication has been irregular at times, we are more bimonthly now than ever before, meaning once every two months. "Alternative Bimonthly" indicates that *Himal* covers subjects that the mainstream media does not, and that it is published six times a year (12 divided by 2).



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Vol.	No.	Colour	Date	Cover Story
0	0	Green	May/1987	The Valley Chokes
1	1	Green	Jul/1988	Highlanders on the Move
1	2	Blue	Nov/Dec 1989	<i>Dharma's</i> Changing Landscape
2	1	Red	Jan/Feb 1989	World of the Girl Child
2	2	Purple	Mar/Apr 1989	Prosperous Himachal Pradesh
2	3	Orange	Jul/Aug 1989	An Obsession with Tourism
2	4	Green	Sep/Oct 1989	Changing Food Habits
2	5	Blue	Nov/Dec 1989	Development Refugees
3	1	Red	Jan/Feb 1990	The Shangri-La Myth
3	2	Grey	May/June 1990	A Nepali Interregnum
3	3	Green	Sep/Oct 1990	The Tarai, A Backwater?

# Poor in the Himalaya

*The more you try to understand poverty in the Himalaya, the more confusing it gets. How does one gauge poorness? Is it material deprivation or is it a state of mind? In Nepal, it may be both.*

by Binod Bhattarai

Since "development" began in the Himalayan states in the early 1950s, the avowed goal of technocrats, politicians, consultants and foreign "donors" has been to improve living conditions in the Himalayan hinterland. Directly or indirectly, every programme and project has sought to pull the poor out of the abyss of economic deprivation. But many poor areas of the Himalaya have remained untouched, unacknowledged. The southern parts of Lalitpur District of Nepal, for example.

The aid-givers and aid-takers who have flown in and out of Kathmandu over the last four decades have all glanced down at the hills of Makwanpur and Lalitpur, just south of Kathmandu Valley's rim. Most never realise that these rugged uplands, inhabited by the Chepangs and Tamangs, constitute one of the poorest regions of Nepal. But within a few minutes, the aircraft is dipping into the metropolitan airspace of the capital city, where the life is good and land values sky-high. The memory of landslides on barren hillsides quickly recedes.

## THE MAN ON THE HILL

Kathe (Maila) Tamang, who is 84-years-old, knows his mind. "*Garib bhaneko nai ma hun.*" ("If you want to know poverty, look at me.") He shares a small shack with his wife Kanchi Lamini, 72, on the far side of Bhardeo valley in southern Lalitpur. The couple keeps seven goats and some fowl. Three goats belong to them, the rest are being looked after on a share-cropper (*adhiya*) basis. Maila is now an invalid, so Kanchi tills the six ropanis (0.3 hectares) of dry *pakho* land with hired help. The maize crop lasts the couple through early autumn. Till the next harvest comes around, their diet is made up of grains bought or loaned from villagers. Kanchi is still able to collect firewood, and twice a day she treks downhill and over a ridge to fetch water.

"My father was poor and I am poor. That is how it is," explains Maila. He used to sell



Maila Tamang.

wood and charcoal in nearby Lele until a decade ago. Bhardeo is his life and no amount of loneliness or destitution will make him move. "I used to eat a full plate, now I eat half. I may eat even less, but when I die, the entire village will come over to bury me. Why do I want to move?" This is why the couple refuses to move to Thankot, at the outskirts of Kathmandu, where a relative will take them in.

Bhardeo valley has 276 families, each with an average of seven members. Most do not have enough agricultural production or cash income to provide for full meals all year around. The backwardness of this and other areas of southern Lalitpur are defined by inaccessibility, poor resource base, little production, feudal politics, and population groups which have little clout in Kathmandu's power centers. So close and yet, so far.

## LET THEM CLIMB STEPS

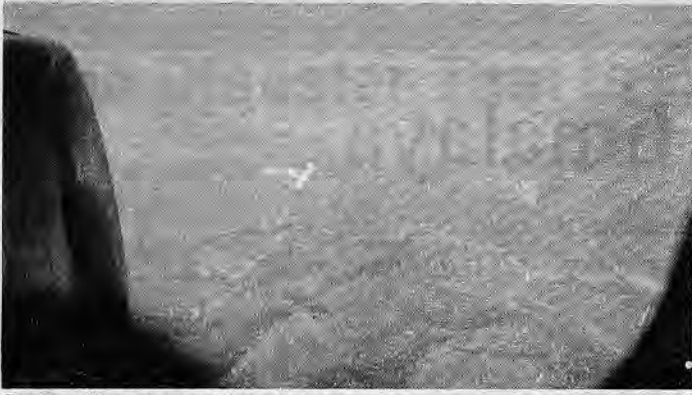
Development programmes have made it to Bhardeo, but have led to negligible progress. For example, the Bagmati Watershed Project claims to be active here but it shies away from addressing the socio-economic, ethnic and grassroots political issues. There is little imagination at the project office, where the main preoccupation is with how to spend the five million ECUs (NRs212.5 million) allocated for 1986 through 1993.

No wonder, then, that the Project builds steps. Because of its urgent needs to "disburse" money, it constructed a three-kilometre long stairway criss-crossing its way up to the Gupteswar Mahadev temple. But Southern Lalitpur's people, like all hill Nepalis, prefer winding trails to taxing steps. So they have left the stairway alone and have made a winding walkway alongside it. The Bagmati project has built a total of 30km of similar white elephant steps all over the region.

A stairway also leads up to a health post on a high ridgetop between the villages of Nallu and Chaugaray, presumably placed there to make access easy for six surrounding communities. But the climb up to the post is so strenuous that those who are really sick prefer to visit the local shaman at village level.



Maila's hut over Bhardeo valley.



Descending over southern Lalitpur.

Southern Lalitpur might present an extreme case of poverty and neglect in close proximity to a power capital. However, economic deprivation exists in pockets or in swaths right across the Himalaya. Poverty stalks the ridgelines from the Kuchin, Shin and Chan hills of Burma and the Hengduan mountains of China through the former NEFA hills, Bhutan, Sikkim, Nepal, the Uttar Pradesh hills and beyond all the way to Afghanistan. Its roots are in geopolitics, geographical isolation, the caste system, ingrained feudalism and various historical processes.

The levels of poverty differ from place to place. Himachal Pradesh is a boom state in Himalayan terms, while the Karnali region of west Nepal is at the bottom rung of economic well-being under any measuring rod. However, if being poor is a state of mind that reflects a psychological yearning for the basic consumerist trappings of "modern" society, then all of the Himalaya can be said to be under the grips of poverty.

## 75 MILLION POOR

The scale of poverty in the Himalaya is immense but has failed to make an impact on world consciousness for two reasons. One is the romanticism associated with the Himalaya. Western researchers, writers and other opinion-makers in search of "the poor" know only of the African Sahel, the Sudan and Ethiopia.

The other reason Himalayan poverty has been ignored is that its poor are scattered across seven countries. The Himalaya might be one geographical region, but statistics get muddled when there are too many frontiers. The result is that the human dimension gets marginalised.

South Asia has 29.7 per cent of the world's population. However, 46.4 percent of the world's poor (who number more than a billion) live in South Asia. According to statistics compiled by Pitambar Sharma, a Nepali demographer, the Himalayan region as a whole has

between 150 to 175 million people. (The mountainous portion Nepal, for example, has about 8.5 million people.) If it is true that material poverty affects at least 50 per cent of the region's population, then fully 75 million people of the Himalaya are "poor".

A Chitrakar

"By the most conservative definition, between seven and eight million of Nepal's population of 19 million live in absolute poverty," says the August 1990 World Bank study on "Relieving Poverty in a Resource-Scarce Economy", which defines absolute poverty as having incomes below the level required to support a minimum daily calorie intake (about US\$100 per annum, per capita).

Nepal's National Planning Commission, using its own indicators, puts 40 percent of all Nepalis below the poverty line. The Commission defines the line as the income required to supply minimum calories needed -- estimated at NRs197 monthly per person for the Tarai and NRs210 per person in the hills.

## THE DAL BHAT INDEX

It is easy to speak generally of "poverty", but it is really a vast, diffuse and complex topic. There is disagreement among economists, geographers, psychologists and anthropologists on what constitutes poverty, even in purely developmental terms. While by now it is generally agreed that merely looking at the Gross National Product (GNP) figures is not enough, does one also look at the intangibles of "spiritual contentment", in addition to available education and health care?

One of the major challenges of development theory over the past decades, indeed, has been finding the proper poverty-to-riches index. There are even a few who protest the very use of indicators and poverty levels. It is inappropriate, they say, to condemn the entire Himalayan population to textbook poverty when so little is known about what constitutes poverty.

Firstly, say these economists, there is the question of geographical relativity. One country's poverty level is another's unachievable target. Notions of rich and poor inherited through western education and socialisation cannot serve to define the status of villagers who may not know nor even hanker after the west. There is also historical relativity: if your village was always at a certain economic level, does it suddenly become poorer because roads,

electricity and irrigation arrive at the next village?

One also has to consider that people have undergone "poverty conditioning" through their culture and religion. People, obviously, are not poor by their own choice. They are what they are due to a process that has continued over centuries. Much of today's poverty is still rooted in the "caste" hierarchy. Says one rural sociologist, "Certain groups have been branded as poor by the Hindu value system, and this is accepted by society. Even if a *Kami*, *Damai* or *Sarki* becomes affluent, in terms of social evaluation he will always be looked down upon as poor." The definitive strictures of the Hindu ideology also breeds an acceptance of the status-quo by the very people that are downtrodden. The "lower castes" know their station in life, however unfair.

Dilli Ram Dahal, a demographer, is one who claims that the destitution of highland Nepalis is over-rated. Says Dahal, "If you measure poverty on the basis of whether the people get to eat *dal bhat*, or a full meal, twice a day or whether they have a roof over their heads, Nepalis are not that badly off." If subsistence-living is not automatically linked to poverty, then there will be very few Nepalis who fit into the really poor category, says Dahal. "People become poor the moment Western value tools are used to look at them. That a man goes to the fields rather than to the toilet speaks less about poverty than about accepted values."

Looking deeper, therefore, it becomes clearer why those flying in from temperate climes see more poverty in the tropics. A Bangladeshi going about in a loin cloth says more about the climate of the Ganges-



Kimtang herder: life in tatters?

P. S. Ghaley



Brahmaputra delta than about the country's GNP. Just because the people of Manang in Nepal's north live in a certain way and "do not take baths" does not mean that they cannot afford soap. In fact, they are among the richest rural communities in Nepal. "Much of our poverty is magnified when we look at Nepal through Western eyes," says Dahal.

Another person who has been unhappy with traditional methods of accounting poverty is N.S. Jodha, an Indian agricultural economist presently based in Kathmandu with the agency ICIMOD. His research has shown that households which the conventional indicators showed to be poor were actually better off when a different set of "qualitative indicators" were used. Jodha's new criteria to judge poverty levels included a reduced reliance on patronage of local landlords; reduced dependence on low paying job options, improved mobility and cash liquidity, shift in consumption patterns, and the acquisition of consumer durables.

### "BASIC NEEDS"

It was a muddle-headed understanding of poverty issues that led His Majesty's Government of Nepal in 1985 to set the goal that by the year 2000 the country would achieve a standard of living as per "basic needs according to Asian standard." Government officials were caught unawares when asked if "Asian standard" referred to that of Bangladesh, Mongolia or Brunei Darussalam.

And were "basic needs" defined according to Western or traditional South-Asian notions of living space, health care, education, nutrition and leisure activity? The very fact that 2000 under the Gregorian year was chosen as the target year (rather than the Vikram Sambat) showed that the government's thinking was far-removed from Nepali reality and was more attuned to grand-standing for international consumption.

Stung by the incredulous response to the basic needs idea, the government turned to the National Planning Commission, which later did produce a definition of what it considered "basic needs" for a Nepali populace, but by then nobody was taking the idea very seriously. When you play political games with "poverty", it is the poor amongst the public that lose. The leaders just move on to another slogan.

The basic needs *mantra* which was chanted by sycophants and bureaucrats alike for many

years under Panchayat rule serves as a reminder of the cynical use Third World "leaders" make of the people's misery. Poverty, for them, is easy to handle. It can be resolved by begging for foreign aid and then handing out doles. Witness the enormous pride in Nepali officialdom in September 1981 when King Birendra was chosen to deliver the keynote address at the Least Developed Country Conference held in Paris. How eloquent can one be in telling others about your poverty?

### DON'T WORRY BE HAPPY

The British author Charlie Pye-Smith argues in a recent book that if wealth or the lack of it was defined in terms of availability of tap-water,

"poor", though his socio-economic status might not be changed.

The smile that the Westerner or the Kathmandu urbanite sees in the villager's face might just be cultural conditioning, a mask that is not a proper gauge for presumptuous conclusions about happy lands, smiling people and serendipity.

Even if the smile is not just a mask, contend some social scientists, it can be wiped away very quickly. The king of Bhutan was widely quoted seeking not high Gross National Product figures for his subjects, but "Gross National Happiness". But what if the very definition of "happiness" begins to get transformed and defined by external influences? Even if their objective socio-economic condition remains the same, for example, will the Bhutanese "GNH" *per capita* go down because the citizens are being exposed to outside influence?

An understanding of the limits of the GNP index on the one hand and the dangers of romanticising poverty on the other, led UNDP early in 1990 to come up with the "Human Development Index". It provides a useful complement to the traditional methods of measuring poverty based on income and investment. HDI bases its judgement on capability for work, leisure, political freedom and cultural activities. It measures a population's life expectancy, literacy and command over resources to enjoy a decent

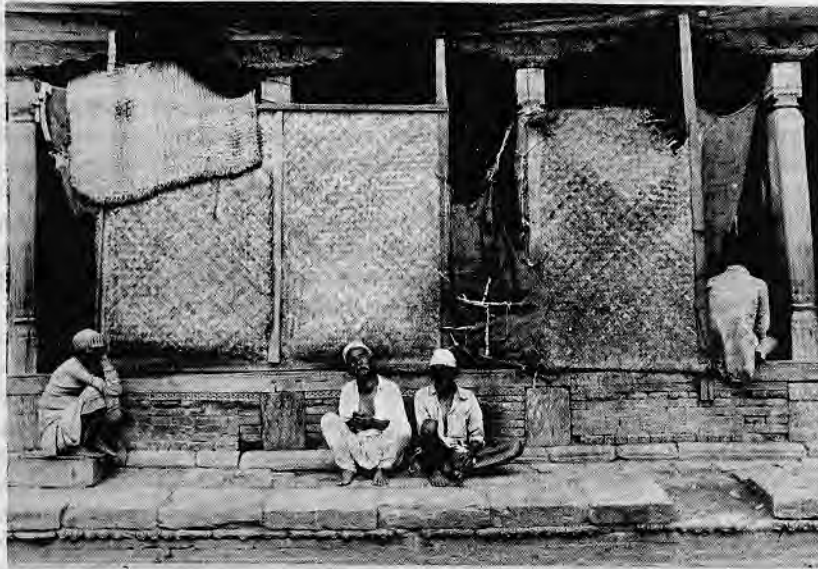
standard of living.

HDI's promise as a better indicator seems to be borne out in the Himalaya, at least. Under its reading Bhutan becomes the 12th poorest economy rather than the third poorest under the strict GNP criteria (1987 figures). Nepal is up from eighth poorest under GNP to 17th poorest according to HDI.

### POLITICS OF POVERTY

"It is a false notion to think that the Himalayan socio-economy is doomed and devastated," says alternative economist Binayak Bhadra. According to him, there are opportunities for incremental development all across the hills. However, the opportunity should be tackled not individually but at the community level. "In these hills of scarce resources, community effort is required for qualitative change."

Successful community effort, of course, presupposes that there is political space in a



electricity, drains, good clothing and medical facilities, then the Nepalis would be classified as poor. But material scarcity is not the decisive factor, he contends. Most Nepalis in the hills own houses, have some land and a few animals, he writes. "Their diet was drab but sufficient. I often met people in the countryside who said along the lines of "we're poor, but we're happy."

But is Pye-Smith, like so many others before him, merely romanticising? Those that professed happiness, were they happy because they did not know of a better life? Can Nepalis who know of creature-comforts really be so dull that they do not want some of these comforts for themselves? The question as to whether a hillman is or is not poor probably revolves around this very point. He is "happy and content" as long as the desire for better living does not arise. The moment it does, the person can be said to be "in poverty", or

UNICEF

country, a district, a village, a neighbourhood. Which brings the argument full circle to the link between politics and economy and poverty. A representative, responsive government at the centre should ultimately help the Nepali hill farmers do better. (In much the same way, if the Lucknow seat of Uttar Pradesh power had more concern for hill people, there would be less poverty in Kumaon and Garhwal.)

In Nepal, poverty has been rooted in the caste structures, an abysmal resource base, high population density, contorted geography and exploitative governance. In their recent history, Nepalis suffered 104 years of Rana rule in which the entire productive potential of an impoverished people went to one large family. While even the colonised world to the south developed a semblance of "modern rule" with the growth of administrative services, transport, media and a political institutions, Nepal remained beyond the reach of progressive development. The Ranas ruled the country for themselves up to mid-Century. While the Panchayat years of the last thirty years did, despite itself, manage to build the institutional structures of modern governance, it was unable to give these structures meaning. This failure meant that the poor of Nepal remained poor.

One of the worst legacies of the Panchayat, perhaps, was that by its second decade it had started selling poverty to gain more and more foreign aid, which it then disbursed to keep itself in power. As one economist puts it, the dependency cycle reached right down to the village level and the poor began to adapt to subsidised living. Today, the villager waits for the handout to roof the local school-house just

as the government in Kathmandu waits for someone to build Nepal a hydropower project.

The handout economy ultimately leaves the poor poorer while the commission-wallas and city dwellers prosper. The Ranas, for all their faults, maintained their Nepal's self-sufficiency. The Panchayat converted Nepal into a dependent state by patronising poverty and selling it to the best buyer. Since 1960, multi-lateral and bilateral aid agencies big and small have poured money and material into the country but have only managed to weaken the economic super-structure. Where is the total NRs16,585.2 million (US\$52.8million) that came to Nepal as grant or soft loan from governments and agencies all over the world between 1970 and 1985? If foreign aid is to serve as a catalyst for development, the aid poured into Nepal has not served the purpose.

Even a cursory survey would show that the bulk of the beneficiaries of foreign aid to Nepal have been middlemen (and, sometimes, women) in high places, corrupt bureaucrats and extra-constitutional authorities, expatriate aid staff and consultants, and Kathmandu's gentry. This has led some to suggest cynically that rather than run development projects, Nepal might have done well to divide up the total aid received since aid began into 18 million equal parts and distribute it among all Nepalis.

After decades of hindsight, it is clear that "development" as practiced in Nepal has not delivered on its promise of alleviating poverty. The regions which have prospered, such as the Khumbu and the Kali Gandaki valley, have done so due to the self-help spirit and business acumen of ethnic groups such as the Thakalis

and the Sherpas rather than the success of any top-down development programme. However, it would be wrong to think that all Sherpas or Thakalis are doing well. Sherpas whose villages are off the trekking routes, for example in Tashigaon in Barun Valley, are not as well off as their Khumbu cousins.

It is not possible to relegate all members of an ethnic group or tribe as poor, as much depends upon the local geography, economy and culture. For example, many Gurungs and Tamangs of mid-hill Nepal have prospered due to recruitment into the Nepali Army and the Indian and British Gurkhas. However, those in the upper reaches of the Buri Gandaki remain very poor. To the west of the river, towards Gorkha, are Gurungs who live in poverty in villages like Laphrak, Bangsingh and Gumtak. To the east of the Buri Gandaki, and likewise without resources, are Tamangs from remote hamlets like Barang, Awi, Laba, Khading and Kimtang. Both Gurungs and Tamangs of the area descend by the hundreds to the roadheads to work as porters in the trekking trade. This is their only form of cash income.

### RICH STATES, POOR STATES

The World Bank's World Development Report 1990 lists all the countries of the Himalayan region under its bottom-rung category of the low-income countries. No country from the other major mountain regions of the world, including the Andes, falls under this category.

The Report lists 121 countries in ascending order of destitution, using the following indicators: GNP *per capita*, GNP growth rate, average rate of inflation, life expectancy at birth and adult illiteracy. Bangladesh comes fifth in this listing (after Mozambique, Ethiopia, Chad and Tanzania), followed by Bhutan (9th), Nepal (11th), China (21st), India (22nd), Pakistan (23rd), Afghanistan (37th) and Myanmar (38th). (It is likely that the Himalayan regions of China, India and Pakistan, taken separately from their larger economies, would show scales of deprivation closer to those of Bhutan and Nepal.)

Bhutan is an economic anomaly: the indicators used in the World Bank report and by others show that it is one of the poorer countries of the world. Yet everyone agrees, at the same time, that the Druk Yul has everything going for it: as yet untrammelled forests, a profit-making hydropower resource, low population density and the lead time to make plans and allow for mistakes. Most development experts promise a "rich" future for the country, provided the societal problems that have just erupted can be surmounted.

Himachal Pradesh's prosperity, in large part, is linked to the fact that it is India's only



"Mr. Chairman, my country is in poverty. We are broke, busted, cashless, deficient, destitute, down and out, hard up, impecunious, impoverished, indigent, necessitous, needy, penniless, penurious, feeble, reduced, lacking, depleted and strapped. We demand assistance."

Shradh Ranjit

major state that is all hills and little or no plains. As a result, the hills are not marginalised amidst the other concerns of state capitals such as Lucknow for the Uttar Pradesh hills, and Calcutta (till recently) for the Darjeeling tracts. (Sikkim is also an all-hill state, but it receives so much subsidy from the Union Government that its inherent economic performance and potential cannot be gauged.)

Another reason that Himachal does so well is that it is adjacent to the successful economies of its neighbours, Punjab and Haryana. Nepal, to its long-lasting disadvantage, borders the moribund regions of eastern Uttar Pradesh, and northern Bihar and West Bengal. Living the myth of economic sovereignty, Kathmandu's planners have failed so far to consider the state economies across its southern frontier. If there is ever any genuine economic program in the Nepali hills, some economists believe, it is bound to be siphoned off by in-migration and by market forces unless development also takes place in the adjacent plains. As an example, even today, any commodity that is lower in price in the Nepali market, is promptly sucked

across the open border into India. Poverty alleviation of the Nepal Himalaya, therefore, is unlikely to work unless there is poverty alleviation in the Ganga's plains.

### THE PAIN

"The lives of the socially deprived are...not only the lives of passive disadvantage -- they are lives of struggle," states David Seddon in his book *Nepal -- A State of Poverty*. The poor, then, are not a faceless mass that suffers without pain. The material indigence, political marginalisation, social oppression and cultural discrimination, says Seddon, are matters that constantly intrude into the consciousness of the poor. There is acceptance of poverty, but also a constant awareness of that poverty.

The pain of poverty is real, and, in Nepal, it can only grow. Even the most representative and committed of governments can but try and retard the growth of the absolute poor in Nepal. The World Bank report on poverty alleviation states that "if Nepal's population growth continues unabated, and the GDP growth is no better than the average achieved over the last 20

years, then the *per capita* incomes will stagnate around US\$180 *per annum*." This would increase the number of the poor to over 20 million by the year 2010. The cost of not getting Nepal's public policy right with respect to curbing population growth, states the report, would be about 15 million additional absolute poor. Even under the best scenario of good economic performance and effective family planning programmes, there are likely to remain some 5 to 10 million additional absolutely poor Nepalis by 2010.

The problem with these figures, of course, is to humanise them. One could start by considering the eight million Nepalis that fall under the poverty line today -- children, women, men, the aged, the infirm -- *individually*. And then consider the additional 10 million individuals who might be the suffering poor within the next twenty years. And then take another step back and make a personal projection about the poor of the whole of the Himalaya, for which statistics are not provided... ▷

B. Bhattarai reports for the *Rising Nepal* daily.

## The Other Side of the Mountain

*The Sherpas of the Khumbu region look affluent, but they might not all be rolling in money.*

by Frances Klatzel

Almost everyone has heard of the Sherpas through the literature of mountaineering and adventure. Foreigner visitors to Sherpa country are impressed by the size of the homes, the tourist facilities, as well as the well-maintained religious monuments and *gumbas*. If the Himalayan valleys are generally poverty-stricken, is this "the other side of the mountain"?

While it is true that Sherpas have managed to more than survive in the forbidding environment of the Khumbu (which was uninhabited before they arrived), the image of affluence one observes along the trekking routes, such as at Namche Bazaar, is not entirely real.

As a people, the Sherpas have probably managed to survive in the Khumbu because of their diversified economy. They also made the best of opportunities to earn wages by migrating to Darjeeling or working in trekking in their homeland. However, "hill poverty" did exist during the early part of this century due to the sub-division of land parcels. Inherited plots became too small to support growing families, many of whose members were forced to migrate, primarily to Darjeeling.

Traditionally, most families owned a couple of head of livestock such that their crops of buckwheat, barley and later potatoes were supplemented by dairy products, occasionally in surplus. Another product of herding, the progeny of crossing yaks and cattle, was also an important commodity in the trade between Khumbu and Tibet. However, in 1957, only 17 of 108 households in Khumjung village were involved in herding to the extent that it involved seasonal migrations to pastures. The rest of the people could not own enough livestock to make moving their herd necessary.

Trade with Tibet brought many Sherpas additional opportunities. When they had cash to invest, once a year, they would purchase a load of salt and carry it over the frontier pass into Tibet. However, the lack of investment capital limited the role of Sherpas as middle-men in the larger trade between Tibet and India to a few families. These families achieved a degree of affluence rarely found in the mountain regions of Nepal except, perhaps, among the Thakalis of the Kali Gandaki.

Tourism has also, in the past twenty years, brought some families wealth and many others opportunities to supplement their income. However, the wealthy Sherpas conspicuous in Kathmandu may not necessarily be representative of their ethnic group.

Inflation in Khumbu has made it imperative that households have cash at hand, unless a family has considerable "old wealth" from trading. Most families must have a means of earning cash, and tourism is one way. Families without a cash income are caught in a bind when it comes to purchasing rice, millet, cooking oil and kerosene. These days, the cost of constructing a simple Sherpa home able to withstand a Khumbu winter costs between one to two lakh rupees.

The factors which have caused galloping inflation in the Solu-Khumbu District are multiple. Tourism is the usual scapegoat. However, a massive flood in 1986 that damaged trails and bridges, and the trade difficulties with India have also had lasting effects on prices at the weekly bazaar in Namche.

There are different sides to poverty in Khumbu. While a few Sherpas drink beer, others find it harder and harder to eat more than just potatoes. ▷

F. Klatzel has had a long association with the Sherpas and also works as a trekking guide.

# Lords and Masters

*In today's Kathmandu, there are two kinds of rich: the lords and the masters. Who are they?*

by Anup Raj Joshi



Mitsubishi Pajero: Pride of the new money.

Any story about poverty in the third world cannot be complete without mentioning the "lords of poverty", the faithful servants of the international aid business. (The term is used by Graham Hancock in his expose' of the international civil service, *Lords of Poverty*, Atlantic Monthly Press, 1989)

"Unsavoury", "greedy", and skilled at "enriching" themselves at the pretense of serving the world's poor and unfortunate, the lords of poverty can be seen in Kathmandu behind the wheels of their air-conditioned Japanese four-wheel-drives, or ensconced in splendid mansions whose monthly rents are five times the take-home salaries of their "counterparts" in the Nepali bureaucracy.

Occasionally, the lords engage in debates over whether or not to fund projects for the people whose lives do not in the least resemble their own. They receive hardship allowances for serving in faraway Nepal and return to comfortable suburban living at "headquarters" when they are done, in New York, Washington DC, Montreal, Geneva, Rome or Nairobi.

Should it surprise anyone that to date the international agencies and the lords they foist on the third world can produce little, if any, evidence to show how the billions of people in the "recipient countries" have benefited from their over-budgeted projects and grandiose plans?

## LORDSHIP

Many of the lords today are non-whites filling regional recruitment quotas of the international agencies, but even these brown *sahibs* and *meems* reinforce stereotypes of aloof and arrogant Westerners who have dollars to burn while basking in the salivating stares of local staff and counterparts. The difference in scale of pays and perks is so other-worldly that, in the presence of the international civil servant, Nepalis feel materially even poorer than they are.

The presence of the lords is also unfortunate for the whites with less glamorous professions and humbler incomes. These poorer Westerners are additionally handicapped because the public perceives them as the lords. What, for example, do you say of the American anthropologist who is paying his own hard-earned money to study a community in the *tarai*, the Buddhist initiate who can barely get by staying at a downtown lodge, or the person who simply wants to live in Nepal, but not as a tourist? In recent years, Kathmandu authorities have made it increasingly difficult to get long-term student or resident visas for those foreigners who love and care for the country deeply. Meanwhile, they lay out elaborate welcomes for the lords, the international contractors and the First World consultants.

The challenge for Nepalis and other Third Worlders lies in being able to distinguish between the lords who take delight in exotic assignments and the others who come to live and learn.

## OH, MASTER!

If no story of poverty can be complete without mentioning the lords, neither can we ignore the "masters". The distinction is important to make. The lords are birds of a certain feather --they fly in, they fly out. The masters are here to roost. They are *raithanays*, the local money.

The Kathmandu masters may be divided into old money and new money. The old money, if still surviving, are the former residents of the white stucco palaces, the landed classes, and the traditional trading families. They are remnants of a feudal era and culture, surviving on inherited and mostly dwindling wealth, unless replenished by smart offsprings.

Then there is the new money, brash and vulgar, imitative and superficial. Members of this class are arrogant, which they have no right to be, given that most of their booty is derived through smuggling activities or by collecting commissions from development contractors. Unlike legitimate capitalist businessmen, they have made money not through risk-taking but through links to the corridors of power.

The collectors of new money are gaudy in their display of wealth. Their coiffeur, Hongkong fashion, canned beer and bottled water, compact disk players, imported shrimp *hors-d'oeuvre* cocktails and Pajero jeeps are meant to indicate their hip westernisation. But at heart, they remain feudal masters: using harsh and abusive language towards their servants and others whom they consider inferior while displaying slavishness in their attitude towards the white lords.

Yet, even as the lords are targeted by the Nepali intelligentsia, the masters somehow seem to escape attention. They have been lucky. Nepalis are prone to fault, quickly, the westerners for assuming opulent lifestyles, but tend to leave the local elites alone because *that* target can hit back. These intellectuals hanker after causes of poverty "without" rather than blame the masters, to look for causes "within".

Another challenge for Kathmandu's educated, and by extension for that of other third world countries, therefore, lies in being able to examine their own systems and educating their mindless masters. The masters have to be made to *feel* unfashionable. After that battle is won, we can turn our attention to the lords.

Bikas Rauniyar

# Rise to Prosperity

*Compared to just a decade ago, the fisher-folk of Majhigaon today eat more, own more, and have more self-confidence. How did it happen, and how do we measure the Mahi's rise to prosperity?*

by Huta Ram Vaidya

Majhigaon is a small village of 110 households in Sindhu-Palchok District, north-east of Kathmandu valley. It lies on the main trail to Helambu, alongside the Indrawati river. The community sits above the well-known trading centre of Bahunipati, which provides the physical facilities to operate a development programme. As is clear from its name, Majhigaon is settled by the fishing caste which has traditionally relied on the Indrawati's fishing catch for a living.

As it is, Majhis (also known as *Balaute*, or sand-dwellers) are among the poorest caste groups of Nepal. But the residents of Majhigaon seemed to be worse off than most others in 1981, when I began work here as a consultant in the Bahunipati Family Welfare Project. The Project is run by the Family Planning Association of Nepal with the financial support of World Neighbours, an American group. Since 1975, it has focussed on family planning, health, agriculture and drinking water in assisting the low-income, depressed classes of Sindhu Palchok.

Like many other communities of the mountains, in 1981, the Majhis of this village were also suffering the fallout of skyrocketing population and environmental degradation on the surrounding hillsides. The catch on the river was severely diminished, so they had taken up farming on marginal lands. Firewood and fuel were not available nearby. Sanitation did not exist; housing and drinking water conditions were miserable. In addition, the Majhis had little or no idea about the benefits of literacy, education and family planning. Above all, they seemed to lack confidence in their ability to do better.

The first few months of 1981, my colleagues and I spent trying to understand the villagers, their expectations, their culture and the resources at hand. We gathered information on what the Majhis knew and did not know; what they had and what they wanted to have. We also looked at the limiting factors within the village and in our own programme.

Within six months, we came up with the guidelines which were to advance our work in Majhigaon: Do not have your hands too full.

Focus on a small area and do it well. Plan with the people. Take to heart the ancient Chinese saying: "Start with what they know. Build with what they have." And, finally, strengthen local institutions and support sustainability; discourage dependence. In trying to energise the village of Majhigaon, we tried to apply these guidelines as rigorously as we could.

## IPIL IPIL

Since a major problem identified by the villagers had been the scarcity of fodder, the project had earlier introduced *Ipil Ipil* (*Leucaena*), a fast-growing fodder cum fuel legume tree. There was also a livestock development programme already in place, and Jamunapari goats and Yorkshire pigs had also been introduced.

While the impact of these improvements were visible by the early 1980s, we had no tool to quantify the progress being made. To solve this problem, we surveyed all households in April 1983. This micro-level survey provided us with a basis to gauge future work in helping to alleviate poverty in Majhigaon.

Between April 1983 and April 1986, we were able to discern the following tangible benefits:

- a. Livestock population increased by 40 per cent.
- b. The number of quality livestock also increased, from 5 to 56 percent improved breed: buffalo 1.4 to 24.4 percent; goats 11 to 66.5 per cent; pigs 2.4 to 100 per cent. There was no improvement in cattle breed as the community showed no interest.
- c. Animal sales went up from 26 heads a year to 234, while purchases went down to 32 from 68.
- d. Sales receipts, mostly from pigs sold, increased from NRs15,500 to NRs107,000.
- e. 85 per cent of the households adopted *Ipil Ipil* as the primary fodder tree.
- f. Fodder trees per "animal unit" went up from 74. (One animal unit is one mature buffalo or 1.5 cattle or 10 goats. Young ones have value of 0.5 and pigs are not counted.)
- g. 50 households (49 per cent) had enough food to last a whole year as compared to 13 (13.5 per cent) in 1983.
- h. The rate of population increase, however, remained high at 3.5 percent every year.

By 1989, the Majhigaon inhabitants' rise from poverty was becoming even more apparent:

- a. Income from the sale of livestock shot up from NRs107,000 in 1986 to NRs383,000.
- b. 90 per cent of the households adopted *Ipil Ipil*.
- c. Farmers began accepting the farm agro-forestry concept and planted more than 2000 local and exotic fodder trees.
- d. 73 households (66.4 per cent) reported enough food to last the whole year.
- e. The per-person production of food per day went up from 402 grams in 1986 to 518 grams by 1989, an increase of 28.9 per cent within three years.
- f. The population increase rate dipped from 3.5 per cent to 1.9 per cent.
- g. The annual food production increase was 9.6 per cent by 1989.

Tom Avens



Majhigaon and the Indrawati.



# Worship of Poverty

*The East profits from Zen and the art of money-making, and the capitalist West from the consumerist spirit and Protestant work ethic. Why does South Asia totter?*

by Akshobhya Shah

Poverty has a strange status in South Asia: some of its forms are honoured while others are denounced. The ascetic with his begging bowl and avowed stand on poverty is respected, while the beggar with his commitment to get out of poverty is ignored or reviled.

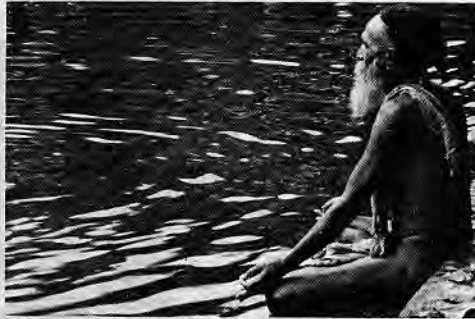
Ironically, the reasons why one form of poverty is esteemed and another is not, has less to do with Hindu/Buddhist attitudes toward poverty than with attitudes toward wealth. Both religions state clearly that wealth is necessary and that it is important for fulfilling one's economic needs. But they also point out that wealth is binding, and that it stifles a person who does not seek the ultimate, even as a vine chokes a plant. The *Mahabharata* says that wealth is both Laxmi, goddess, and a mound of earth. The great Hindu texts, however, never say that wealth, by itself, is harmful.

## WEALTH

The confusion over the status of wealth, which in turn has influenced the status of poverty, is a recent development. Pundits have interpreted religious sayings like "all men are born into illusion" from the *Bhagavad-Gita* to illustrate that wealth also is an illusion, and more so than anything else because it leads a person away from enlightenment.

These are the modern conjurings of gurus. Historically, it was never required that a person give up his wealth and take on a vow of poverty in order to attain release from the world of existence. For example, Buddhist texts say that one of the manifestations of an enlightened being is that he display economic well-being. Hindu texts show how integral material well-being is for leading a good householder's life. The four goals of life consist of *dharma* (order), *artha* (economic well-being), *kama* (desire) and *moksa* (release). Without *artha*, the pursuance of the other three goals was not possible.

Wealth, and not poverty, has been associated with ancient South Asian kings and statesmen. King Janak ruled from within the magnificence of his palace and even the poorest forest dweller came to him for blessings and teachings. Other wise kings like Ajat-satru and Balaki Garg, too, were anything but



Rajiv Tiwari

mendicants. Rama had to leave his palace for fourteen years, but ultimately returned from exile to reclaim his kingdom and wealth. The Pandavas were cheated and denied of their share of wealth but they fought for it, with the blessing of Krishna and were ultimately glorified in the *Mahabharata* for doing so.

## WHY ACCEPT SQUALOR?

Surrounded as we are by poverty and squalor, it is all too easy for us to think that South Asia has always accepted poverty. Actually, poverty's incorporation into the Hindu/Buddhist world-view and its exaltation is a recent development. What happened?

Firstly, poverty came to be associated with simplicity. Since many Hindu/Buddhist texts glorify the importance of leading a simple life and being content, the not-so-simple began to romanticise the poor. They began to argue that the poor were poor because they wanted to be simple and content. This romantic bourgeois ideal of poverty is one crucial reason why the government does little genuine work to alleviate poverty.

Another reason why poverty came to be accepted was the historical shift in Hindu ideology from *karmanajati* to *janmanajati* -- the sensitive topic of caste and birth. Originally, it was the actions of a person that determined his caste; later, a person was born into a caste and the question of personal choice vanished. Mobility was negligible. Under the new ideology, the poor became poor because they were destined to be so. And since poverty was the consequence of past actions, nothing could change it. "It is written in their *karma*...perhaps they will fare better the next time around."

Poverty is accepted, and even romanticised today, by many who believe that simplicity is the ideal way of life. They assume that the South Asian religions sanction this ideal. Yes, they do, but the simplicity they talk about is of temperance which does not necessarily derive from being poor. To liken simplicity to poverty, especially the stark, shocking destitution that we see in South Asia, is to be widely off the mark.

A.Shah is a practising Buddhist.

## India's Poor

Sixty one per cent of households in rural India fall below the poverty line, as against the national average of a little over 50 per cent, according to study released in December by the Operations Research Group (ORG), an independent research group based in Bangalore. The cut-off point used to define poverty is an annual household income of IRs9000, which is equivalent to a monthly IRs750.

According to the study, two-thirds of households in villages with population below 1000 have a monthly income of less than IRs750, as against 16.1 per cent in the case of the Indian cities with population over 10 lakhs.

In fact, 27.5 per cent of households in rural India in 1990 continued to be the poorest of the poor with a monthly income of less than IRs350. While only 3.4 per cent of village households have a monthly income exceeding IRs2500, the corresponding figure in the urban areas is 17.1 per cent. Only 6 per cent households in urban India have a monthly income of over IRs4000.

Poverty is worst in what ORG calls the Eastern Zone, comprising West Bengal, Orissa and Assam, where the percentage of households below the poverty line is much higher than 50 per cent. As much as 63 per cent of rural households in this zone have a monthly income lower than IRs750.

The ORG study was based on a sample survey covering 83,000 households spread out across India. (Source: UNI)

# Jumla Journal

*Once the home of a great empire, Jumla today languishes. Isolated, and lacking in self-confidence, its people scrape a living with "claws of steel and knee-joints of hardwood."*

by Kedar Sharma

When I spoke to a Kathmandu civil servant who had "suffered" a posting to Jumla, he began the standard monologue of all who have served time in Nepal's *durgam chhetra*, "remote district":

"I stuck it out for one year just for points. Otherwise, I would have come back in the same plane that took me in...you know, there is no place poorer, bleaker...it is extremely cold but then they also have mosquitoes, don't ask me how. A 35 rupee bottle of beer costs 70 rupees. A kilo of sugar costing 15 rupees in Kathmandu costs fifty rupees. But then, apple is so cheap! Remember to bring back Golden Delicious, it is the best. And, ah, the apple brandy!"

As Royal Nepal's Twin Otter descends through the bare hills of the Karnali into Jumla Valley, you notice the flat-roofed houses, windowless for winter-living. And on the walk from the airstrip to Khalanga Bazaar, you smell something distinctly north-western Nepal -- pine soot. The people of Jumla emerge from their dwellings, their faces browned by indoor smoke and their clothing, patched up in a dozen places. The disheveled children loll about on the mud roofs, soaking in the sun. Their eyes are swollen, and you can hear their rasping coughs. The men, too, lounge about. Only the women folk seem busier.

## JUMLA SPEAKS

"You all come with *amrikans*, asking questions of us poor souls. You embarrass us by forcing us to speak of our poverty," complains Sarpa Bista of Urthu village. Like other people of Jumla, he refers to all Western whites as "amrikan". Educated people of Jumla themselves dislike being called "Jumli" for the connotation of backwardness it has gained in the rest of the country.

"Please, some medicine. My eyes, they hurt," pleads Mun Bahadurki Ama, 52, to an *amrikan* lady at Ghodasini village. This, again, is the tradition ever since "development" brought with it foreigners and first-aid kits. A 15-bed hospital is within two hours' easy walk of Ghodasini, but it never has more than four or five patients. Why do the villagers shun the hospital? "No money", says Mairam Bista. Another villager, Nara Kathayat adds, "The doctor does not care." Drugs are expensive, a bottle of Antacid which costs NRs17 in Nepal-



Living the curse: Chettri children of Urthu.

ganj goes for NRs35 here. Free availability of essential drugs is a mirage. It is clear why the people of Jumla shun their hospital. "Going there would only add to our misery," says Mairam.

Ganesh Neupane, who has worked for a year on community participation projects in the villages of Urthu, Rini, Banta, Ghodasini and Parmara, says small bills have no use in Jumla, other than for buying the plentiful apple. Urthu's Singh Bista, speaking like an economist, says, "Our potatoes do not sell. Our apples do not sell. When they do, the price is rockbottom. Everything that we need to buy is beyond reach -- clothes, pots and pans..."

## WAITING FOR "MATAR"

There is a local ditty in Jumla which runs thus: "When will the *matar* come, poor Jumla. When will our day come, poor Jumla." The villagers of Ghodisini sing it as they dance around the fire. Actually, the only wheel the people of Jumla have seen to date are the tyres of the Royal Nepal's STOL aircraft. The villagers, other than those who have been down to Surkhet or Nepalganj, have no concept of what a motor car is, nor what it does. There is only the association of "*matar*" and "*bikas*".

*Bikas*/development is well understood, but only in terms of income to be made from projects. Sometimes, *bikas* is also taken to mean having enough to eat well and possess proper clothes -- as in "Rambahadur got a job with the Canadian project, he will now do *bikas*."

Mairam Bista feels it is not possible to increase food production for the growing population "It's just not possible. We are stuck in this situation. There is nothing to be done." Ratiman Bista, a local politician, thinks that the lack of transportation is the main determinant of Jumla's poverty. Baru Nath Yogi is not so sure. He is deeply puzzled: "We are all striving, but it does not seem to matter. We grow potatoes, keep livestock, do *khelo byapar* (petty trading),



-Courtesy: Karnali under Stress

Far West Nepal: poorest of the poor.





Baru Nath Yogi.

but somehow nothing happens. I don't know why Jumla remains poor."

A folk tale that is popular in the district tries to answer the Baru Nath Yogi's question. Once upon a time, a *danfe* (Impeyan Pheasant and national bird) descended from Jumla's *lekh* (high ridges) to the Tarai, where he courted a peahen. He wished to whisk her off to Jumla but she was reluctant: "*Chhi!* I have heard that the people of Jumla are all sinners. They use traps and kill pheasants and other wild fowl." The *Danfe* assured her that such was not the case. He extolled Jumla's natural beauty, the high ridges, the forests and the snowy glory of Api and Saipal himals. The peahen was persuaded and accompanied him up the valleys.

On Mabu Lekh, the *Danfe* was caught in a trap and met a terrible, painful fate. Even as his dying shrieks echoed across the high hills of Jumla, his bereft sweetheart gave this curse, or *sarap*: "Just as my lover was killed while he was picking for grain, may you, people of Jumla, forever have to scrounge for food. Just as you tore away the feathers from his dead body, may your clothes always be torn and bedraggled. Just as you trapped my lover *Danfe*, may you remain forever in the trap of poverty and destitution."

### PRE-IRON AGE

Says Singh Bista, "To survive in Jumla, you need claws of steel and knee-joints of hardwood." Actually, the tip of his plough (*phali*), like of all Jumla farmers, is of wood. Metal is too expensive. Other implements, too, make only the minimal use of iron.

Jadeni Didi produces oil using her bare hands on a wooden *kol* basin, squeezing the fluid from wild walnut, marijuana and *dhatelo*. The use of oil presses, levers and other effort-saving mechanisms are unknown.

In the windowless mud and rock cave-like houses, light is provided by the use of the *jharrow*, pine shavings. Infants and children, affected by the indoor smoke, fall ready prey to Acute Respiratory Illness; more die of ARI in Jumla than in any other district of Nepal.

The village of Lorpa has one of Jumla's few micro-hydropower plant. Its inhabitants seem to complain less of lung-related complications, and the surrounding pine forest is also more or less intact.

### DEPOPROVERA

Women of Jumla are hardworking but lead desolate lives compared to their sisters in the rest of Nepal. Perhaps because of the upper-class Hindu tradition, they are tied down more by old discriminatory customs and traditions. They work hard in the fields, do household chores, give birth to many children without thought to their own health, and bring up these children -- all under harsh conditions.

Recently, the women of Jumla found a unique way to bring some relief to their hard lives. For seven days, around their menstruation period, the village women are required to sleep in the cattle shed. This is especially difficult to do during the mid-winter months. The women have now discovered DepoProvera, the controversial family planning injection which delays menstruation. DepoProvera provides the women of Jumla with respite because it delays menstruation, so they can remain indoors with the family till after the winter months. According to the family planning clinic in Khalanga Bazaar, the demand for injections rises in September/October.

Franscoise Lafreniere, a rural economist working in Jumla, says that isolation is the main cause for Jumla's poverty. "Jumla is isolated from the rest of the world, economically, politically and in terms of education, communication. The people of Jumla are without information. None goes out, none comes in."

Lafreniere continues, "Perhaps because of their deprivation, the people of Jumla seem to lack self-confidence to an alarming degree. They are suspicious, not only of the outsider, but of each other as well. They constantly question motives."

The people of Jumla have also been misled by Kathmandu-sponsored "development". Rice is propagated as the desired diet when local barley, buckwheat and potatoes would be better suited in terms of nutrition. But Lafreniere is doubtful that even enhanced agricultural



Jadeni didi squeezes oil.

productivity will lift Jumla's veil of poverty. "Those who grow more crops remain equally poor. They do not send their children to school. More productivity has not changed their lives."

Because Jumla township is the capital of Karnali Zone, it houses many offices, including, incredibly, an office of the Roads Department. The administrative presence of government offices is impressive, as is the amount spent in their upkeep. Officers get 75 per cent hardship allowance for serving in Jumla. But the development programmes are helping the Jumla people little, if at all. This includes the projects initiated by K-BIRD, the Canadian-run Karnali-Bheri Integrated Rural Development project, which has "adopted" Nepal's Karnali and is based in Jumla.

Jumla, once the capital of the Sinja Empire, and the point of origin of the Khas and subsequently Nepali language and culture, today languishes as a backwater. Historically self-sufficient and proud, Jumla and its people suffer from dependency syndrome and a deep psychological yearning for something out there that they do not have.

K. Sharma writes on social and environmental issues. He edits the Nepali *Himal*.

Some back issues of *Himal* are available in limited numbers. Please write to P.O.Box 42, Lalitpur, Nepal. Or call 977-1-523845, or fax 977-1-521013.

# "A Kernel of Karnali"

**KARNALI UNDER STRESS**  
**Livelihood Strategies**  
**and Seasonal Rhythms**  
**in a Changing Nepal Himalaya**

by Barry C. Bishop

The University of Chicago

1990, Price not given

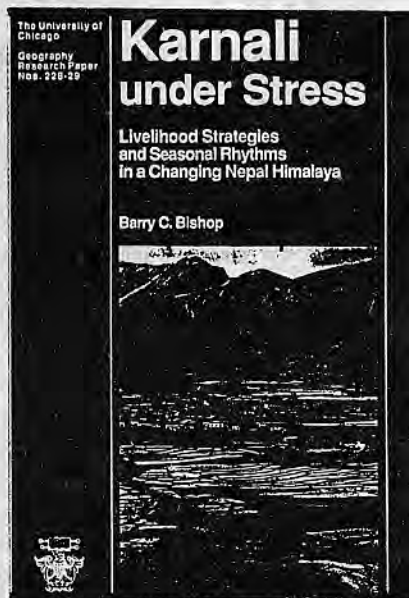
ISBN 0-89065-135-3

## Review by Harka Gurung

Of the 11 poorest countries listed in the *World Development Report 1990*, seven include countries with sizable mountain territory. The correlation between mountain terrain and economic marginality is reinforced by the regional economic disparity in Nepal where the mountain regions are the poorest in levels of development. Karnali Zone, the subject of the book being reviewed, confirms this *Nepal: Atlas of Economic Development (1980)* used 40 variables to measure the level of development of 75 districts. The five districts of Karnali Zone had the following ranking: Kalikot, 75; Mugu, 72; Humla, 70; Dolpo, 64; and Jumla, 53.

*Karnali under Stress* by Barry C. Bishop is all about a frontier region within poor Nepal. Bishop first provides an exhaustive description of the harsh physical environment of the study area. This is followed by a long discussion on historical-cultural processes that perpetuate poverty through exploitation. The succession of masters include the Khasa Malla, Kalyal feudalism, Gorkhali invaders and Rana oligarchy. Then follows substantive chapters on land, livestock and exchange economies as divergent strategies for survival.

Bishop's research approach is comprehensive and reveals interesting facts. Karnali Zone, with the largest territory among Nepal's 14 zones, has the smallest population, since only 1.1 per cent of the total area is said to be arable. Over a fifth of the land surface exceeds 4500m in elevation. Increase in irrigated land during 1868-1968 was 54.9 per cent as compared to a population increase of 159 per cent. The society is predominantly Hindu, where inequality is manifested in the fact that the Brahman/Thakuri, who constitute 32 per cent of the population, own more than half the irrigated land. The occupational Dum castes constitute one-fifth of the Zone's population but own only 8.3 per cent of such land. The Bhotia own



no irrigated land but have the highest average number of animals per household.

The distinctive aspect of the study lies in its grasping the seasonal rhythm, be it principal tasks (Table 10), crop calendar (Table 11), animal movement (Table 17), or trade movement (Table 22). The most important items that have to be imported are cloth/garments (43 per cent of imports) and salt (41 per cent). Long-distance trade is also a pressure-valve which relieves population pressure against degenerating resources. Other salient features highlighted by Bishop are the importance of "aspect" -- sunny vs. shady or *pahara vs. sinyala*, comparable to *adret vs ubac* of the Alps. The book also deals with the Hinduisation process in Karnali as well as the great importance attached to paddy culture in this temperate environment. Bishop reports on the expansion of the Indian market economy even in this remote land.

### TAGADHARIS AND MATWALIS

The discussion does not fully reveal the differences between Tagadhari Chhetri and the Matwali Chhetri, as Bishop lumps most of the economic data under a broad "Chhetri" category. In point of fact, however, the former occupy the wider valleys which grow paddy and are catered to by Brahmans. The Matwalis, on the other hand, are found in the side valleys growing dry crops. They visit the Dharmi priest and conduct *masta* worship. The native Tagadharis used the term "*Pawai*" to refer derogatorily to Matwali Chhetris.

Bishop also uses pan-Nepali terms for which native equivalents exist. These are *juulo* instead of *khet*, *chako* for steep slopes, and *langna* for *bhanjyang*. He uses composite words for dwellings, whereas the typical house of Jumla, for example, is divided into the *goth* (ground floor), *ghar* (living quarter), *thada* (first floor roof), and *panda* (second floor roof).

Bishop also refers to the introduction of apple and the low survival rate of the saplings. Recent developments, however, indicate an apple glut in Jumla due to lack of transportation, a problem that the Canadian-funded Karnali-Bheri Integrated Rural Development (K-BIRD) project has not been able to resolve.

More careful editing would have eliminated errors such as Kashikot (Kaskikot), *jamai* (*janai*), Raski (Kaski), Galikot (Galkot), Gil-mikot (Gulmikot), Tara (Dara), Madesh (Mad-hesh), *hule* (*hale*), Kalanga (Khalanga), Tharo (Thada), Katorian (Katamiya) and Dori (Dwari). The 1970 population of Karnali Zone should be 203,000 and not 188,000 as shown in one of the figures.

One of the problems of mountain areas is the slow pace of innovation. The Karnali area is no exception. The first potato planted in the Himalaya was in Bhutan in June 1774 by George Bogle. It reach Kumaon in the mid-1850s. In Chaudabise Dara of Karnali, it was introduced in 1889 by Tej Bikram Rana. It thus took 115 years for the potato to traverse 900 km between Bhutan and Karnali. The potato arrived in Tarakot as late as 1906.

Perhaps the slow pace of innovation in Karnali also affects all those who study it! There has been consistent delay by scholars in the dissemination of information about the region. This writer trekked for four months in Karnali in 1966, and the output was only four chapters in the publication *Vignettes of Nepal* (1980). James Fisher was in Tarakot during 1968-70, but his book *Trans-Himalayan Traders* was published only in 1986. Barry Bishop's field data was also collected in 1968-70, but the present book did not emerge till mid-1990.

Not that any dramatic changes have overtaken remote Karnali. The late publication of Bishop's monograph does not greatly affect its relevance. The book is packed with information, including figures, tables and photographs that expand on the text. Truly, *Karnali under Stress* captures the core issues, the kernel, of Karnali's problems. All persons interested in human ecology and regional geography of the Himalaya will find Bishop's work useful. ▽

H. Gurung is a writer and freelance consultant.

# The Buildings of Sanagaon

*There is less to the buildings of Sanagon than meets the eye.*

by Shanta B. Dixit

On the surface, Sanagaon has everything for "development" and "poverty alleviation" to occur. There are eight buildings in the bazaar. One houses the Agricultural Development Bank, and "Bikas Medical Hall". Two structures exist for the health-post. There is also one house for the Veterinary Service Center, and another for the Sajha Sahakari Sansthan. There is the building for the "Nirdesit Gramin Samiti", meant to provide villagers with provisions at low cost. There is also a "restaurant". The primary school stands a little off the main trail, and the high school further down.

In these forgotten hills of western Nepal, Sanagaon might be regarded as having it all: a health post *and* a pharmacy, a bank, a place to treat livestock, a place to obtain *unnat* seedlings and fertiliser, and two schools. Also, there is piped water.

In reality, Sanagaon has nothing. Every office is dysfunctional. The workers have no motivation and no work. The villagers accept the presence of the development bureaucracy but do not expect it to deliver. Sanagaon shows how it is not enough to provide "infrastructure" for "development". The educated bureaucracy must be made to work, but the villagers should also know enough to demand delivery.

Sanagaon lies six to seven hours walk north-east of Silgadi, which is the seat of Doti District, Seti Zone. The village lies on the main trail to the districts of Achham, Bajhang and Bajura.

All three of Sanagaon's government buildings are ghost structures. Take the schoolhouse. The Seti Project began work on the building about seven years ago with local help. Due to a misunderstanding about payment between the local builders and the Project, the construction was never completed. The Regional Director of Education has visited the site three times but nothing has materialised. However, the villagers once heard over Radio Nepal's *Jilla Samachar* that "Sanagaon's Saraswati Prathamik Vidyalaya has been completed..."

A family planning camp was held recently in the roofless schoolhouse because the health-post building is in even worse shape. Work on this building was begun in 1976 and the Ministry of Health sanctioned NRs175,000 to provide



Sanagaon's "functioning" health-post.

amenities. The money has been spent, but the building today remains a skeleton and has never been fit for habitation. The villagers point their fingers at the Central District Officer (CDO) in Silgadi, Sanagaon's own Pradhan Pancha, and the contractor.

The work of the health-post, meanwhile, is carried on in a shack built by villagers in 1974, which itself is barely habitable. Patients are seen on the landing; the in-charge lives inside with his family, while the peon shares the upstairs room with staff from another office.

Work on the Nirdesit Gramin Samiti structure was begun in 1975 with money obtained from the Agriculture Development Bank. The building plans were ambitious, but were never to see fruition. Five of the remaining houses in the bazaar are privately owned and are rented out to the offices.

Those assigned to man the offices of Sanagaon use the first excuse to stay away for extended periods. The officers of the Veterinary Services Center and the Bank, for example, are in Silgadi for two weeks if they are in Sanagaon for three days. It is said that the health-post was run by the peon for years while

the in-charge stayed in the relative luxury of Silgadi. The Sajha Sahakari Sansthan has no work because no supplies have arrived for the past year. So the keeper, who is a local, happily continues to work his fields.

The few office-holders that tarry in Sanagaon's bazaar spend their days gambling, and their evenings drinking. There are many fights among intoxicated civil servants, but the police, too, stay away from Sanagaon.

Many Sanagaon households are run by women, who are responsible not only for the children but also the aged parents and in-laws. One or more young men from almost every family is away working in Bombay.

While there is an exodus to Bombay, no one ever visits Kathmandu. Says one villager, "Kathmandu does not have any use for us. We are illiterate. In Bombay, a person who cannot even sign his name can earn four thousand rupees a month in companies," says Prem Singh Kunwar, who is in Sanagaon only for the planting season.



Sita Ram Joshi (right) with colleague.

Sanagaon's high school is a little below the bazaar. It has over 90 students, but only two are girls. "I am not very optimistic about this place," says Sita Ram Joshi, who has a college degree in Sanskrit from Bombay, and teaches at the high school. "Really, Sanagaon has no future."

S.B. Dixit recently visited Sanagaon and Mudbara.

## MUDBARA

After Sanagaon's desolation, it is difficult to think that there could be hope left in far-west Nepal. But south of Silgadi, also seven hours' walk away, is the village of Mudbhara. It is everything that Sanagaon is not. There is food, there is work, and hope.

Mudbara is off the main trail, so those who do not have business in Mudbara do not go there. The village has a high school with 200 pupils, over 80 of whom are girls. There is a working health-post, but other than that there is no sign of governmental intervention. Many of the village houses have toilets. Water was brought in several years ago and pipes and taps are well maintained. Seasonable vegetables are available.

Mudbara is a "dry" village ever since the Pradhan Pancha convinced the villagers a decade ago to stop brewing liquor. Even though the local three-penny store carries some packs of cards, there is no open gambling. Fewer people from Mudbara go to Bombay, because they seem to find employment in the Nepali administrative services. Tika Ram Joshi says he has been to Bombay, "but that was in the days of the British Raj," he says. He was there from 1929 to 1964.

## POVERTY ABSTRACTS

### The Social Origins Of Poverty And Food Strategies

by Solon L. Barraclough

Zed Books, London  
April 1991, US\$19.95  
ISBN 0-86232-9930

A professor of agricultural Economics at Cornell University, Solon L. Barraclough is the author of several books on Third World development and a former director of the Inter-American Committee for Agricultural Development Studies. Barraclough argues that any solution to hunger must be political. Until the people are able to organise and fight against the exorbitant demands of officialdom, they cannot pressure their governments to initiate policies that are locally important. His conclusion is based on ten new investigations undertaken by United Nations Research Institute for Social Development and the South Commission (UNRISD) on how public policy and collective action can end mass poverty and hunger and how the poor can feed themselves when they are outbid by market forces in the course of 'development'. Barraclough studies "food security at household level" and looks into other technical and structural issues. (Zed Books, 57 Caledonian Road, London N1 9BU)

### Against The Few: Struggles of Indian's Rural Poor

by Arun Sinha

Zed Books, London  
November 1990, US\$17.50  
ISBN 0-86232-719-9

Sinha presents a journalistic portrayal of the plight of Indian's rural poor. He takes the readers to Bihar and examines the history, caste system, class structure and tribal communities, using fictionalised techniques. Starting with the assumption that much of what the poor experience in India goes unreported, Sinha presents the unpredictability and the helplessness in the lives of Indian villagers. Authorities and power-holders continually exploit the situation of the poor, who cannot easily show a sense of solidarity and build popular organisations. As one commentator writes of *Against the Few*, "He leaves the reader with a whole series of haunting images and a feeling of having actually experienced something of the reality of the villages of Bihar." Sinha was news service chief of the *Times of India*.

### Nepal: A State of Poverty

by David Seddon  
Vikas, New Delhi  
1987, IRs 250  
ISBN 0-7069-5301-0

While many socio-political studies of Nepal done before early 1990 might be rendered obsolete by the recent developments, others will survive and perhaps even gain in relevance. Once such is Seddon's book, first published in 1987 and already in its fifth imprint. The book takes an insider's look at Nepali development and searches for answers in the many

physical and social forces that are the factors for "social deprivation". It also recommends steps to bring about changes. Seddon conducted field work between 1974 and 1982 before writing the book. According to him, the reason Nepal is a "state of" poverty is not just population growth outpacing economic development, but the "backward" or feudal, character of Nepali economic and political structures. Seddon is the author of two other books on Nepal and is reader at the School of Development Studies, University of East Anglia, UK.

### Nepal: Relieving Poverty in a Resource-Scarce Economy

The World Bank and UNDP

Two Volumes  
15 August 1990

This is important publication takes an inside-out look at the determinants of Nepali poverty. The consultants hired by the World Bank and UNDP. bring their heads together to delve into the "nature of income and poverty in Nepal, and to propose an affordable set of measures to reduce the incidence of poverty." The reasons for the chronic poverty in Nepal, states the Report, are 1) a limited resource base 2) the country's physical location 3) rapid population growth and 4) poor economic performance. The solution for chronic poverty is to help raise personal incomes, which can be done only by raising the overall economic growth which, in turn, can be achieved only if growth in population is checked. The "policy conclusions" state that the main thrust of poverty alleviation needs to revolve around "a national population campaign; agricultural intensification, particularly through irrigation; increased rural access in the hills and the tarai; education, focussing in particular on the lower levels." Recommendations are also summarised succinctly at the end of the Main Report. The publication is replete with lists, tables and indicators from studies done in recent years. The bulk of Volume 2 is made up of "sectoral papers": detailed articles on specific issues related to poverty. They are on land tenure and tenancy, labor, debt and indebtedness, agriculture and poverty, formal and informal sectors of employment and income, and food security. "Evaluations of poverty related programs" is another substantial section. There is also has an elaborate section of statistical appendices and an extensive bibliography.

### Bangladesh Development Studies: Poverty in Bangladesh

Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies  
Volume XVIII, Number 3  
September 1990 (Special Issue)

Published from Dhaka, this special issue on Bangladeshi poverty is made up of papers presented by P. Streetem, (Boston University), A.R. Kahn (University of California), M. Ravaolion, (World Bank) and S.R. Osmani of BIDS at a Bangladesh development conference held in Washington, DC in November 1989. "A concern with poverty must be, and arguably has been, at the heart of development

studies," states A. Abdullah, Research Director of BIDS, in an introductory note. The reader will find answers to the following questions: What concepts are associated with poverty and how do you measure them? Has poverty in Bangladesh been a consequence of and a constraint on growth? What is the arithmetic of poverty in Bangladesh? Has the country reached a threshold in its battle against poverty? Osmani also presents a commentary on the indicators used to measure rural poverty in Bangladesh.

### World Development Report 1990: "Poverty"

World Bank/Oxford University Press

June 1990, Washington DC

ISBN-0-19-520851-X

The 1990 annual World Development Report of the World Bank, which includes the annual listing of social and economic data of more than 120 countries ("World Development Indicators"), takes a long look

at poverty related issues. It reports that in the closing years of the decade the percentage of the population living in poverty was especially high in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. However, the report's projections for the 1990s indicate that "in East Asia and South Asia the number of poor is expected to fall dramatically..." Even though the hurdles in decreasing poverty throughout the world remain formidable, the key measures for combatting poverty are known, and the resources to support such an effort are there to be mobilised. The report, well produced and with many human interest "box items" and multi-coloured charts, deals in detail with the following subjects: diverging trends in the world economy, "What we know about the poor; progress on poverty and lessons for the future; promoting economic opportunities for the poor; delivering social services for the poor; transfers and safety nets; "shocks, responses and the poor" in the 1980s; international factors in reducing poverty; and prospects for the poor. Understandably, the World Bank is unable to come right out and call a spade a spade, and some of its recommendations are couched in euphemisms. For example, it criticises "aid" programmes of donor countries which have "a tenuous connection with development". It mentions that only 8 per cent of the US aid programme could be identified as "development assistance to low income countries". The Bank does not provide a clue as to how the rest of the aid should be identified.



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**Sector policy papers** of the World Bank, which cover topics of rural development, poverty, development strategy, employment and economic conditions.

**Papers** of the Centre for Economic Development and Administration, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu. Concerns: Nepal, rural development, rural areas.

**Reports** of Integrated Development Systems, Kathmandu, on economic conditions and social conditions in Nepal and of New Era on similar topics.

**Network papers** of the Overseas Development Institute, London. Topics covered are household, food supply, trees, poverty.

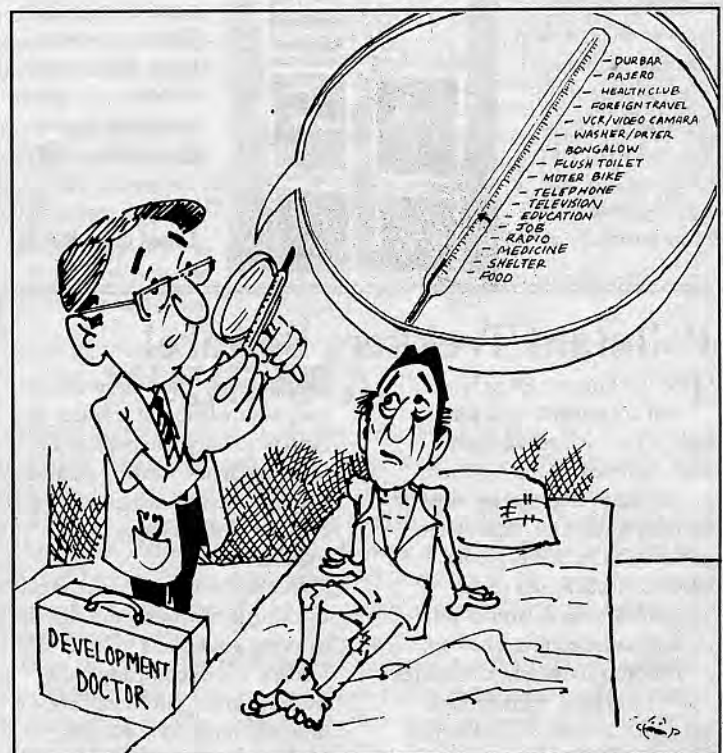
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**PIDE research report series** of the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics, Islamabad. Areas covered: rural employment and economy, poverty, agriculture and rural urban disparity.

**Wider working papers** of World Institute for Development Economics Research. A wide gamut of topics, including hunger, poverty, income distribution.

**IFDA dossier:** periodical of the International Foundation for Development Alternatives, containing wide-ranging articles on social change, rural poor and poverty from all over the world, including often unheard voices.

**Worldwatch Papers:** Occasional papers published by the Worldwatch Institute, Washington DC. Subjects include world environment, conservation, economics, energy and activism. Recent papers by Alan B. Durning on poverty related issues.



What's your temperature?

## What Right to Information?

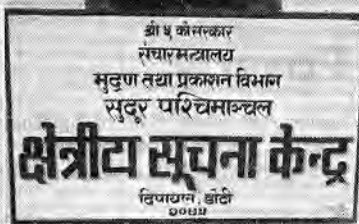
There is a "Regional Information Center", in Silgadi, Doti in the beleaguered hills of far-west Nepal. It is one of five established in the various regions of Nepal during the Panchayat era with the laudable-enough aim of disseminating national and international information to the news-starved populace.

The new Nepali Constitution guarantees the public's right to information. Unfortunately, the Silgadi information center has not received a single newspaper since the Interim Government came to power in April 1990. Indian newspapers had already stopped coming since a year earlier as a result of the Indo-Nepal trade crisis. The *almirah* containing news-magazines is permanently locked (see picture).

Gopal Prashad Shrestha, who has the job of running the office, says the Doti public is desperate for information. They do not have a glut of publications to choose from as do readers in faraway Kathmandu. "People were forming a habit of reading, and were visibly spending less time playing cards or in futile gossip."



CBS



CBS

Apparently, the Press and Information Division in Kathmandu decided that there were no funds to purchase newspapers for the Silgadi centre. However, there seems to be enough to pay salaries to five full-time staff members who have nothing to do.

So, today, Doti does not get newspapers. Nepal radio's reception is weak and Nepal Television should be called East Nepal Television because it does not cover, and is not seen, in the western half of the country. Nepal TV's loss is Doordarshan's gain in the numerous houses in Silgadi which share three dish antennas.

Meanwhile, poignantly, weeks-old copies of *Gorkhapatra* that somehow find their way to Silgadi are still savoured by the Bazaar's populace. They read everything: the articles, the news, the advertisements, the exchange rates and the weeks old weather report of Dhankuta. - S.B.D

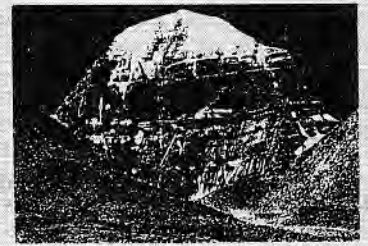
## Kailas SOS

Kailas, mountain of mountains, is spiritually as well as visually pure. Who would think that one of the filthiest areas in the Himalaya is at the very base of this holy massif.

Pilgrims come from all over South Asia and Tibet to purify themselves here, both at the mountain and at the adjacent Manasarovar and Raksash *tals*. Unfortunately, these holy travelers are not always the most environmentally conscious. They leave behind heavily polluted campsites and trails.

Besides human excreta and yak dung all over the landscape, the environs of Kailas are strewn with Tsing Tao beer cans and broken bottles, discarded clothing and footwear, waste paper, soot-blackened rocks, and jeep tracks that criss-cross the dry plateau.

The dirtiest place is the flat space right beneath the peak,



known as Dharchen, which can "house" thousands of pilgrims at a time. Also dirty is the *parikrama* route around Kailash, including the 5,500 metre Drolma La pass through which the route passes. The pilgrim season is at its height in July and August. This year, thousands of Saivite pilgrims arrived from the remote corners of Nepal and from the south as far away as Madras. With so many visitors, the Chinese police seems to have their hands full. They seem to regard their role as only to control the influx and check the pilgrims' nationalities.

- P.S.Ghaley

professionals" who are concerned about the Himalayan environment are finally binding together. They have just set up the Association of Himalayan Guides for Responsible Tourism, an organisation which will work to promote "responsible trekking". The goals of the associa-

tion are to promote exchange of valuable information, heighten awareness of the Himalayan environment and culture, and promote individual responsibility.

The first issue of *Ecotrek* (Fall 1990), the group's newsletter, takes pains to point out that tourism is not the problem, it is "how it is managed". The issue also provides practical suggestions: how to manage toilets, and how to deal with burnable, organic and non-burnable rubbish. The editors ask of foreign trek leaders: do not impose any of your own values on the local people.

The organisation is looking for volunteers trek guides from different parts of the world to represent their region in order to save the Himalayan trails. One suggestion to the new organisation would be that they not ignore local Nepali guides, of whom there are enough around. Write to: Ecotrek, Box 1913, Kathmandu, Nepal.

P.S. Ghaley



Tengboche trash.

## Pollutant Trekkers Beware!

The trekking routes of Nepal that are popular with tourists have yet to be rescued from trash. Isolated efforts have not succeeded in cleaning up most of the dirty trails. One-time clean-up expeditions come, garner headlines, and return to the United States or Australia wearing self-satisfied green halos.

The Nepali tourism authorities and the trekking industry have wept profusely over trekker-pollution, but they have been mere

gharial tears. There is no discussion as to whether it is better to burn or to bury. No penalties for bringing in unnecessary canned items to, say, the Khumbu, or for overuse of toilet paper in the high Himal.

A good way to enhance ecotrekking is obviously through the trekking guides and group leaders who accompany most trekking groups in Nepal. Fortunately, the guides and trek leaders and other "trekking

## Waiting for Druk Air



Nepali travel agents used to dread state visits by King Birendra, because it meant the requisitioning of one of Royal Nepal Airlines' few jetliners for the royal entourage towards Havana, Lusaka or Copenhagen. The travails of Bhutanese travel agents, it seems, are just beginning. King Jigme Singye Wangchuk recently commandeered Druk Air's sole passenger jet for more than two weeks.

It seems unlikely that Nepal's flag carrier will again have to jet-tison its tourist-bearing flights merely to masquerade as a royal private jet. During the SAARC

summit in Male in late November, Nepal's official media repeatedly reminded the public that Prime Minister Krishna Prasad Bhattarai had taken "scheduled" flights to Male.

Meanwhile, Druk Air's BA-146-100 aircraft (see above) was off with its king on 9 November to Tokyo for Emperor Akihito's coronation, thence to Male for the SAARC, to return to Paro airport and resume its regular flights only on 25 November. The airline was said to be paying hefty cancellation fines to irate tour operators with long-standing bookings.

## Why Iodise?

While the salt iodisation programme is going full swing in Nepal, the very idea of putting iodine in salt is under heavy attack by some Indian health experts. A whole range of organisations, from the Nagpur Academy of Nutrition Improvement to the Union Ministry of Environment in New Delhi are against the Government's plans to iodise salt for the entire country within the next 15 months.

It is almost traditional wisdom that iodised salt is the cheapest and most effective method of controlling iodine deficiency disorders, which includes goitre and cretinism. These problems are endemic to the region, as little iodine exists naturally in fast-flowing Himalayan rivers.

The Nagpur Academy experts argue that it is wrong to assume that the general Indian diet is deficient in iodine. A survey by the National Institute of Nutrition in Hyderabad found that the

average Indian diet contains 200 to 300 micrograms of iodine against the requirement of 150.

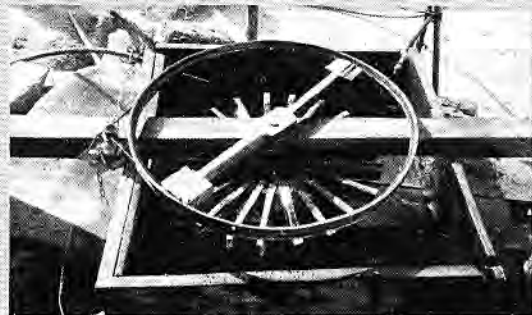
The Academy is also worried that under the influence of New Delhi's high pressure campaign to promote iodised salt, claiming that dull children will be magically transformed into energetic super-achievers, parents might actually overdose their children. Also, no thought seems to have been given to those who might suffer from allergy to iodine.

The Ministry of Environment also says the iodised salt available in the market has higher than permissible iodine concentrations. Potassium iodate, used in the manufacture of iodised salt in India, is a poison that produces thyrotoxicosis. Health authorities all over the Himalaya should be looking more closely at iodine in the marketplace, including

## Teeny-Weeny Hydro

There are mega-hydro-electricity projects such as the proposed Karnali Dam. There are hydro projects plain simple, and then there are mini-hydro and micro-hydro projects. Now here comes "teeny-weeny hydro"!

Some technically-minded villagers of east Nepal looked at their bicycle dynamo and at



Turbine with bike dynamo at left.

water gushing down the local rivulet. They decided that innovation was possible, for which no multi-year feasibility studies funded by the World Bank or the ADB was required. Teeny-weeny hydro was born, and today these little power units provide 12 volts of electricity to more than a dozen households in the Ilam villages of Shantinagar, Kerabari and Ahali.

The little paddle-wheel and dynamo units are used to run radios, play tape-recorders,

charge zinc batteries and even black-and-white television sets. Kerabari resident Jang Bahadur Rai shows off his home-built turbine, which is a bicycle wheel's steel rim with paddles attached to catch the water-jet. The head is provided by a polythene pipe. The rim is attached to the dynamo with a rubber tubing, which is a used bicycle tyre tube.

These hydro units are more than curiosity items and the villagers are happy with what they are able to do with them. However, says Rai, they have problems. Since the dynamos were not manufactured for continuous use, they have a high rate of burn-out. If a longer-lasting dynamo were available for a good price, the innovation would be much more useful.

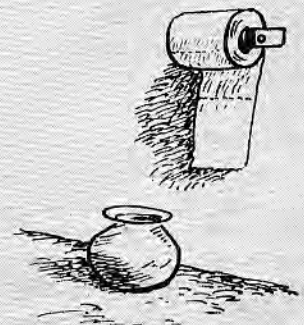
University-trained power engineers appreciate the problems faced by these "cowboy hydros". And they point out that the technology does exist to make available mini-micro-hydro dynamos at reasonable cost. The problem is, who is going to make these dynamos and distribute them so that the full potential of teeny-weeny hydros is realised?

- Kedar Sharma

## POVERTY

### The TPI Test

Almost everyone has had a go at developing a poverty index, and not just economists. There is the GNP index and PQLI, HDI, GDP, GHP, and so on. A teacher at Kathmandu's St. Xavier's School, for example, once claimed to have perfected TPI, the "toilet-paper index". He checked hotel bathrooms across the five continents and listed his findings according to whether the toilet paper rolls were coarse or fine, plain or with patterns, per-



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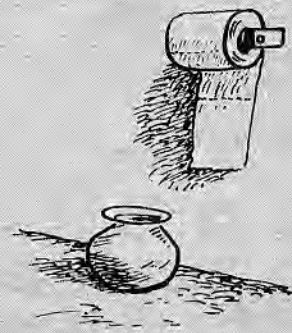
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# The Challenge of Druk Yul

*The ever-increasing external pressures were bound to crack Bhutan's self-image, forcing it to change slowly, though not silently.*

by Anil Chitrakar



Wangdiphodrang, heartland of Drukpa culture.

Twenty years ago, everybody in Nepal was chanting "*Hariyo Ban, Nepalko Dhan*". Today, the *ban* has mostly disappeared and so has the slogan. In Bhutan, the cycle is just beginning. Thimphu's citizens recite the Bhutanese version of the same refrain, and a Nepali cannot help but think, "we've been through this before."

It is true that in certain superficial ways Bhutan is today close to where Nepal was in the late 1950s. But there are significant distinctions between the Nepali and Bhutanese development scenarios. Nepal's ethnic super-

diversity, its negligible resources, and its overpopulation do not apply to Bhutan. Merely avoiding mistakes made by the Kathmandu rulers of the past three decades will not guarantee progress for Bhutan's 1.3 million people (government figure).

The constant drumbeat among rhapsodising expatriate consultants and glib Bhutanese bureaucrats is that Bhutan should not and will not make the mistakes of Nepal. Having said that, everyone is smug and satisfied that they have charted a ready course towards the next millennium.

But if the very comparison with Nepal is mistaken, what happens to the misplaced confidence? If the Bhutanese state navigators continue to tread comfortably just because they refuse to make Nepal's mistakes, then mistakes that are quintessentially

Bhutanese are bound to crop up unexpectedly. And indeed, Bhutan's challenge has come from another direction: not from the environment, nor from the economy, but from a disgruntled populace.

## DRUK YUL

Even as late as April 1990, the rest of South Asia and the West was contemplating the Dragon Kingdom, Druk Yul, as the last Shangri-La. A modern, youthful and benevolent monarch was guiding his agrarian populace forward, preserving the culture while incorporating the best of modernity.

The ruptures in Bhutanese society that emerged in the spring of 1990 have brought that idyllic preoccupation crashing on the eastern Himalayan slopes. Bhutanese society suddenly lay bare for all South Asia and the rest of the world to see. Sheltered by geography and geopolitics, Bhutan had been able to bask in the warm glow of its own self-image. That self-image was bound to dissipate; only, it is happening earlier than expected.

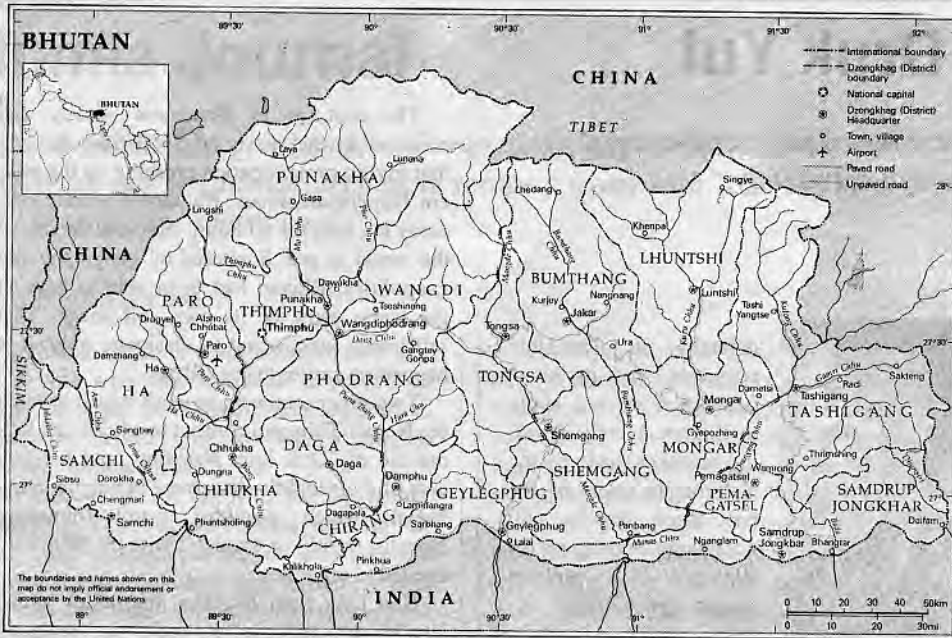
Two processes were at work which brought the Nepali-Thimphu conflict to a head: the fall-out of "Drik Lam Namzha", and the success of the people's movement in neighbouring Nepal, which provided many Bhutanese Nepalis, rightly or wrongly, with the fillip they needed to organise.

Had Drik Lam Namzha, the policy which sought to enforce a code to maintain "Bhutanese cultural identity", been implemented in moderation, with more sensitivity and less haste, it might have led to a successful and positive "Bhutanisation" of all citizens. But the widespread use of coercion made the Nepalis increasingly sullen. The restoration of democracy in Nepal provided the spark the Nepalis needed to begin their agitation.

## INFORMATION CHASM

Those who write on Bhutan for the outside world have little to go on because there are tight restrictions on information and on travel. Educated Bhutanese are well-known for their reluctance to talk to foreigners, especially writers and journalists. The only exceptions are the of-late radicalised Bhutanese Nepalis in exile. There is little reliable data on the country, from population figures to development indicators. International agencies also have remained over-cautious in speaking their minds about Bhutan.

The lack of information on Bhutan has led to many mistaken perceptions, particularly in underplaying the ethnic undercurrents. As the Nepali-Dzongkha divide has widened, the outsider's perceptions have covered two extremes: a cruel, repressive Dzongkha elite that is out to wipe out the Nepalis on the one hand, and separatist-minded quisling Nepalis who bite the hand that feeds them at the first opportunity, using the success of democracy in Nepal as a springboard, on the other. Each side paints caricatures of the other. No one will doubt that the Nepalis have grievances, nor should one contemplate Druk Yul as a police state. The truth is always in the middle grey zone, and less sensational.



## THE GOOD, GREEN LIFE

No doubt, Bhutan is much better off than the surrounding states, in terms of population density and its natural resources. Thimphu has made great strides in exploiting its hydropower potential for profit. 64 percent of the country's area is under forest cover, only nine per cent is under cultivation. Flying east from Kathmandu to the airstrip at Paro, one passes over the denuded, landslide-scarred hills of Nepal and descends through the dense woodlands of western Bhutan.

For all its potential to prosper and for all the expatriate-induced confidence among Thimphu's bureaucrats, however, Bhutan is capable of making the same mistakes as other developing countries have made over and over. And the good life can unravel very quickly. Take Bhutan's abundant forests: how easily and how quickly they could disappear.

The Bhutanese seem bent on making full use of their forest bounty and the internal demand for wood and wood products is high. Bhutanese are among the world's highest wood consumers, *per capita*. The timber-supported indigenous architecture is being revived by the government. All over the country, there are huge fireplaces and the stacks of firewood outside private and public buildings are enough to make a wood-starved Nepali (from Nepal) feel out of place.

Outsiders have started eyeing Bhutan's forests. Indian merchants are said to be offering three times the local price for Bhutanese timber, and European buyers are urging Thimphu to release timber for export to the Continent. How long will tiny Bhutan's forests last

if it decides to start selling toothpicks and chopsticks to Japan and timber to Europe?

Local wood demand is going to rise in coming decades as population expands. Also, because many Bhutanese do not slaughter cows, goats and yaks due to religious taboos, livestock numbers are increasing. Bhutan's National Forest Policy (1985) places preservation of forests ahead of economic considerations. The need of the people to use forest produce, if not incorporated into national programmes, could only help speed the destruction of the woodlands.

Many forests have been made accessible through the recent construction of a network of good roads and the destruction has begun from the roadside. The whine of sawmills as they eat into Bhutanese timber is increasingly common. In 1978, the Government nationalised all logging operations and gave monopoly to the Bhutan Logging Corporation, which has imported heavy logging machinery from abroad that can clear forests at an accelerated pace. Bhutan also has a plywood plant that is allowed to clear-cut. The World Bank is said to be working on a plan to "economically and commercially exploit Bhutan's forest revenue."

## THE PARO RESOLUTION

A recent issue of the Washington DC-based magazine *World Watch* reported reverently that in May, "an unprecedented gathering of Bhutan's highest officials sat down to discuss the relationship between environmental health and economic development, and to reconsider their own economic plans. The resulting Paro Resolution was a resounding call for a national sustainable development strategy that will be

incorporated into the next five-year plan." Such glowing development phraseology, the faith in five-year-plans and in top-down resolutions passed by "highest officials", and the belief in the determinations of parachute consultants are still not *passé* in Thimphu. A slow foreign-aid takeover is in progress. Four out of every five of the very popular Toyota Land Cruisers on Bhutanese roads are driven by expatriate aid personnel. By and large, those who make the decisions look to the West rather than to the more relevant experience of their South Asian neighbours.

Bhutanese, obviously, have to make their own mistakes on the road to development. Today, all resounding calls for action, all eloquent speeches, and studies cite the *effects* of mismanagement -- soil degradation, poverty, malnutrition and deforestation. None dare speak of the *causes*.

## BHUTANESE, ALL

Population-wise, Bhutan is made up primarily of the Ngalungs, the Sarchokpas and the Nepalis. The Ngalungs, farmers of the west, provide the ruling class, and their culture defines Bhutan's Dzongkha identity to the outside world. They make up 20 per cent of the population. The Sarchokpas, 28 per cent, are people of the east who have more in common with the slash-and-burn tribes of adjoining Arunachal. Across the lower hills of south Bhutan live the Nepalis (45 per cent, all figures are official), migrants or descendants of migrants. Besides, Bhutan also has significant but often overlooked numbers of Doyas, Santhals, Rajbanshis and Biharis. These groups make up seven per cent of the population.

The seeds of the "Nepali problem" of 1990 were sown late in the last century when the British encouraged the Nepali hill folks to move eastward to work on tea gardens and in logging operations. Many drifted into the Doars as well as the low hills of Bhutan and set up homesteads. The Nepalis infiltrated the lower hills that were uninhabited by the Ngalungs, who lived in the high valleys. Inside what was officially a Bhutanese state, they continued to maintain their "Nepali identity", albeit fragmented under so many caste and ethnic rubrics.

As long as they were politically powerless, their numbers few and concerns limited to making do, Bhutanese Nepalis could be expected to remain quiet. But, as happens with migrants and minorities, they began to stir when their numbers, education and socio-economic well-being reached a certain threshold. Neither the Sikkim upset of 1974 nor the more recent Gorkhland agitation had



Wood aplenty outside college canteen in Kanglung, east Bhutan.

significantly affected Bhutanese politics. However, the success of the people's movement in Nepal seems to have catalysed Nepali-Bhutanese leaders, both radical and moderate. It is also likely that a few opportunists have visions of a "Sikkimised" Bhutan where sovereignty is sold away in the interest of Nepali "supremacy".

**COCOON NO MORE**

The challenge before the Bhutanese state, probably the biggest it has faced thus far, is to address the "Nepali problem" in a way that an acceptable and humanistic solution may be found without jeopardising Bhutanese independence and sovereignty.

One thing is clear. Bhutan cannot remain in its cocoon because of the overwhelming modern pressures -- travel, tourism, education, the media, commerce, international diplomacy and SAARC-induced talk of regional co-operation. Only as long as the population remained docile and international and regional events were remote, could Bhutan coast along in its Shangri-La dream-state.

No government can screen out good and bad influences any more. It is best to let the population decide. You cannot have Druk Air flying out of Paro to Kathmandu, Delhi, Dhaka, Calcutta and Bangkok, or send students to study in London, New York and New Delhi,

and think nothing will change. It is not possible to welcome tourists (even select, high-paying visitors) and not expect to be affected by the love of the US Dollar. It is impossible to have a large segment of the population that is different from the ruling elites and not to expect political demands. As surely as water flows

downhill on the Thimphu Chhu, the challenge of change will have to be addressed.

While the clarion call for cultural preservation is appealing, how does one hold back the floodgates of "modern desire"? Because the government banned television dish antennas to screen out Indian influence, Thimphu's citizens turned to videos. In reality, Bhutan's Dzonkha elites and their children seem completely, if superficially, westernised. In private, they prefer stone-washed jeans to the traditional *Gho* or *Kira* garments stipulated by the Drik Lam Namzha policy.

**KING AND SUBJECTS**

There is no doubt that the King Jigme Singye Wangchuk has charted a singular course in trying to preserve Bhutan's independent identity, tugging at India's dominant presence, while opening up cautiously to the world. But the forces he is tackling are much too vast: they are the forces of commercialisation, western-style education, technology, videos, short-wave radio, transportation.

Drik Lam Namzha requires the Bhutanese Nepalis to acquire Dzonkha culture. The self-confident, inclusive official attitude towards the Nepalis has disappeared, replaced by an intolerance which is seen in the disappearance of Nepali from all street signs and signboards in Bhutan. Only English and Dzonkha remain.

Unless there is overwhelming economic advantage in doing so, will any group willingly take up another's culture? Or is "Bhutanese identity" an exclusive preserve of Thimphu's aristocrats, one that ignores not only the Nepalis of the south but also the Sarchokpa community of the east, and others?

The king told an international news-magazine in late October, "The survival of Bhutan (is) at stake. We cannot have a large population that feels it is not Bhutanese." Historical forces, good or bad, have landed Bhutan with a large Nepali populace. How are these Nepalis to be made to "feel" that they are "Bhutanese"? Can this be done by forcing them to don the outer appearances of Dzonkha culture? Perhaps "Bhutanisation" would be more successful if the Nepalis of Bhutan were to feel the economic advantages of "being Bhutanese Nepalis" rather than being Nepalis of Nepal or Indian-Nepalis.

The king also stated, "Bhutan's security and sovereignty can only be secured if we have a closely knit and strong social structure." The ideal social structure would be one that is as homogeneous as Japan's. But such a homogenous, integrated culture requires centuries to evolve. If by "social structure", what the king means is a society closely knit on economic grounds with sharing of resources and political power, such a solution might well succeed in melding Nepalis, Sarchokpas and Ngalungs into one Bhutanese nation -- a kind of a Swiss answer (also of three major communities) to a divided population.

Bhutan has to find its own unique solution to the obstacles on the path to equitable development. And it has a distance to travel yet. Today, Thimphu has no bookshop, and the Toyota Land Cruisers have nowhere to go. The sooner the outside world understands Bhutan, and the Bhutanese understand their own country, the better.

A. Chitrakar is an engineer and writer. He traveled through Bhutan overland from west to east in late October.

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MEDIA REVIEW

# Covering Thimphu

*Granted that Bhutan's is extremely difficult terrain for journalists, but the subject deserved better from the regional and international media -- more depth and less bias.*

by *Mana Man Singh*

The events in Bhutan of the past few months stood as a challenge to the international and regional media in providing fair and balanced coverage of troubled Druk Yul. Unfortunately, as even a cursory glance at the news reports will reveal, the journalists have by and large not been up to the task.

The problem in covering Bhutan lies in lack of access to its territory, the dearth of independent scholars and writings that can provide adequate background, and the willingness of journalists to lap up information provided either by the government at Thimphu or Nepali groups in exile.

## NEPALIS ON NEPALIS

Many Kathmandu tabloids, perhaps a bit over-confident after having participated in the successful movement against the Nepali monarchy, have tended to regard fighting for democracy and human rights in Bhutan as an easy crusade. They are like arm-chair liberation fighters who risk nothing in donning the garb of revolutionary mediemen. In likening Bhutan's problems simplistically with that of pre-April 1990 Nepal, these tabloids seem to ignore the vastly different socio-economic and political equations involved.

Some Nepali papers get their information exclusively from Nepali Bhutanese sources, in particular the Kathmandu liaison office of the Bhutan People's Party. There is no attempt at independent corroboration of the second-hand and obviously partisan information provided, which include detailed "eye-witness" accounts of atrocities committed by the Royal Bhutanese Army and "government-sponsored hooligans". There has been obvious exaggeration and no accountability in describing massacres reportedly conducted inside Bhutan. When mistakes are made, in retrospect, corrections are not issued.

A few Nepali journals have satisfied themselves with lifting straight

from press releases. Others have relished using banner headlines condemning "Murderer Wangchuk" and his "Barbarian Dictatorship". Such reportorial overkill reduces the public belief threshold and, in the end, does grave injustice to appreciation of the genuine grievances of the Nepalis of Bhutan.

Why has it not been possible for Nepali investigative reporters to infiltrate Bhutan to bring out first-hand reports? While some intrepid reporters from Biratnagar seem to have traveled across parts of southern Bhutan, no one seems to have ventured deeper. Granted, access is very difficult, but if Nepali reporters cannot do it, then nobody else can. It might even have been possible to hire a Nepali Bhutanese with a good pen to provide in-depth, objective "from the inside" coverage.

## INDIANS ON BHUTAN

If one can criticise some Nepali journalists for mis- or under-reporting Bhutan, the same criticism also applies manifold to the Indian media, which does not have the problems of financial or human resources that the Kathmandu newspapers have. The on-going

Indian coverage of Bhutan, as well as that of the Indo-Nepal trade impasse of 1989-90, demonstrates how many Delhi-based journalists continue to toe the government line when it comes to foreign, particularly regional, issues.

On Bhutan, Indian reporters and editorialists, by and large, seem to have decided to take it upon themselves to protect Thimphu's monarch and his government from the "unreasonable wrath" of Nepali Bhutanese. If the Kathmandu tabloids are partisans in one corner of the ring, the Indian newspapers and magazines are firmly in the other corner.

Many Indian reporters and writers fall prey to the same exotic romanticised visions of Bhutan as do "parachute journalists" from the west. The cultural antagonism of some narrow-minded Delhi or Calcutta-based journalists against Nepalis, particularly since the Gorkhland agitation and the Nepal-India trade crisis, also seems to have played a part in the alacrity with which they have come to Thimphu's defence. One reporter, in fact, made it a point of condemning the "Indo-Aryan Nepalis" for muddying Bhutanese waters.

Given the red carpet treatment (and restricted tours) Thimphu provides Indian and expatriate journalists, it is perhaps not surprising that they come back with glowing accounts of the sensitivity with which the government is treating the present problems. These reporters are allowed to meet and quote only selected high-level personages, who tend to be convent-educated, and absolutely disarming with their sophistication and good English. Just the opposite of sullen Nepali leaders in the refugee camps in West Bengal.

King Jigme Singye Wangchuk also comes off in interviews as forthcoming and "in touch with his people." He is easier for the journalist to sympathise with than, say, the King Birendra of Nepal, whose media advisors kept him far removed from the press and even when access was provided insisted on rigid, stultifying formats and pre-submitted questions.

Indian editorialists, traditionally liberal in use of the term "terrorist", have taken their cue from the Bhutanese government and are quick to label Nepali militants "anti-national terrorists". Some detect in the Bhutanese violence, unsubstantiated "sinister designs of a greater Nepalese state in India." The standard editorial cue is of Bhutanese magnanimity up against Bhutanese Nepali depravity.

continued ...

Stephen Eckherd

भूटानमा ३२७ नेपालीको मृत्यु

भूटानमा सयौंको निर्मम हत्या

Land of the Thunder Dragon

A Tranquil Oasis

India offers all help to Bhutan

भूटानमा आन्दोलन द्वाइँदछ

TROUBLE IN THE DRAGON KINGDOM

Fear still haunts South Bhutan

ASSURANCE ON BHUTAN

Bhutan: Once Upon a Time

Terrorists disguised as democrats

Land of the Peaceful Dragon

राजाको अत्याचार जारी छ

बर्बरताको शिकार

Voice Of The People

भूटानमा तानाशाही बर्बरता

Behind a smokescreen of 'democracy and human rights' the agitators' real intention is the creation of a greater Nepalese State in India.

## NO PRIZES FOR ANYONE

As for members of the western press, they have continued to report Bhutan in sanitised bits and pieces. *Newsweek*, the international news-magazine, had an article in mid-June which dealt with Bhutan as if it were show-case china: the headline was "Once Upon a Time: There Was a Nice King"; a map of Bhutan was entitled "tranquil oasis". Bowled over by his own cute vision of Bhutan, it was little wonder that the correspondent missed *completely* the volcano that was about to erupt.

The Nepali journals, by focusing on sensationalist coverage of rape and pillage, and the India and Western magazines, by insisting on Bhutan's benevolent image, have missed so far the opportunity to confront squarely the Bhutanese dilemma. The Nepali media does not seem to have the resources and the others seem to have no time, to study the processes at work in Bhutan.

The important issues that are waiting to be addressed by journalist *and* scholars include the social and economic quality of life in Bhutan; the extent of discrimination against Nepalis; details of the major ethnic groups within Bhutan, etc. When are we going to get a detailed treatment of the historical process of migration from Nepal eastwards. Hill to hill migration is as important as hill to tarai migration.

In looking deeper and more honestly at Bhutan, will Nepali journalists find that there do exist Bhutanese Nepalis who support the king and Thimphu's aristocracy for their own reasons? And will the Indian reporter find that many "Tibeto-Burman" Bhutanese are also disgruntled about human rights and democracy in their country?

The Nepali, Indian and Western press, all have made the mistake of studying "Bhutanese Nepalis" as one ethnic group, even though Sikkim's ongoing experience, and the rumblings within Nepal proper, prove that there are growing divides among "Nepalis" themselves. It might not be entirely feasible, therefore, to look at the Nepalis of Bhutan as one monolithic unit. Also, do recent developments in Sikkim, Assam or Sri Lanka hold any lesson for all concerned, or is it enough to look to Nepal's example, or Eastern Europe's?

In the end, neither the Nepali media, nor the Indian or Western media, need be proud of their coverage of Bhutan. On the whole, the reporters have shown a capacity for intellectual passivity and inability to look at the problems of Bhutan other than through their own coloured lenses.

# On the Way Up

by Kanak Mani Dixit

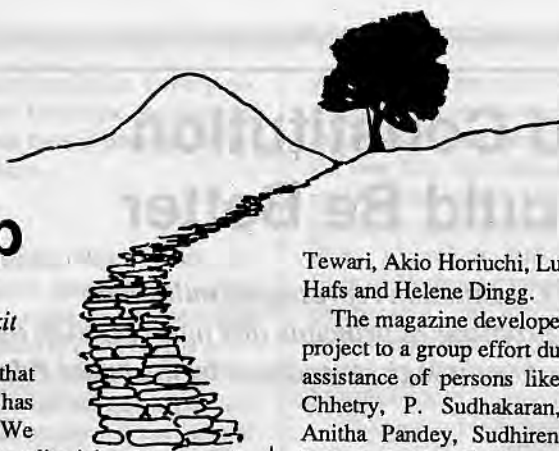
At *Himal*, we feel that our magazine has achieved a threshold. We are confident about its editorial voice as well as its survivability in the market-place. Though small in readership, *Himal* is emerging as an additional voice in the Himalayan-Gangetic region. We hope that with the help of our ever-critical readers, this magazine will grow as an effective medium for deepening and expanding discourse on regional social, political, cultural and environmental issues.

Looking forward to a vigorous future, it is also appropriate to look back at those who made it possible for *Himal* to get this far. Many have volunteered time and effort since when this magazine was just an idea. Whatever is 'good in *Himal's* look, tone, and focus is mostly due to them.

*Himal* was begun in New York City (though its prototype issue was printed in May 1987 in Colombo for reasons too complicated to get into here). As a result, those who helped shape the magazine with moral support, conceptual suggestions, desktop assistance, and eagle-eyed proofreading were New Yorker friends, the very best in the world of English journalism.

If this magazine retains any professionalism, it is due to association with persons like Miriam Poser, Douglas Hand, Robert Cohen and David Sassoon. *Himal* was also adopted in its early days by a whole clan of Dixits (then living in New York), including Kunda, Milan and Shanta. The Kathmandu end was propped up by Rupa Joshi, without whom *Himal* would have been still-born.

Among *Himal's* other early supporters were George McBean, who did our white-triangled logo under duress over a lunch break; Rajiv Tiwari, who for long was *Himal's* lone voice from New Delhi; and Claus Euler, who discovered *Himal* in a Zurich apartment and became our ambassador to Europe. He put us in touch with other volunteers, including Adolf Odermatt, whose Swiss-German work ethic made us South Asians toil harder than we otherwise might have. Others who have helped expand *Himal's* reach in the United States, Europe and Japan are Manoj Basnet, Kiran



Tewari, Akio Horiuchi, Ludwig Debuck, Zahia Hafs and Helene Dingg.

The magazine developed from an individual project to a group effort due to the patience and assistance of persons like Khagendra Gharti-Chhetry, P. Sudhakaran, Shamsuz Zaman, Anitha Pandey, Sudhirender Sharma, Keiko Itoh, Beth Chia-Rubin, Anjali Peck (who suggested the title to *this* personal column), Bill Eddy, Rajiv Khanna, Robin Dilks, Kalpana Parajuli, Chetan Singh, Parminder and Beverley Brar, Sriram Sharma, Shanker Mani Paudel, Sanomaiya Maharjan, Sujeev Shakya, Uttara Crees, Linda Sachs, Hiroko Kimura, Pradyumna Kumar Kotta and Louise LaHeurte.

Those who do not find mention in *Himal's* masthead (both in the editorial and advisory panel) but have provided high quality copy since the magazine's infancy, include Anil Chitrakar, Prakash Khanal, Rosha Bajracharya, Binod Bhattarai, Dipak Gyawali, Bharat Dogra and Sharad Ranjit. *Himal's* lean administration has been run under trying circumstances by Balaram Sharma with help from Anak Thapa and Ved Pant.

The members of the not-for-profit Himal Association have remained the backbone of *Himal* as its publishers. They include Bharat Koirala, the President, and Shanta B. Dixit, Bikas Pandey, Padam Singh Ghaley, Kabindra Pradhan, Ratna Kumar Sharma, Sita Maiya Thapa and Bharat Upreti.

*Himal* also appreciates the support extended by agencies such as NORAD, the Norwegian development ministry, the World Wildlife Fund (USA), the Panos Institute, the Ford Foundation, UNICEF and the Swiss Development Corporation. It was to our benefit that none of them set any editorial precondition to assistance provided. Within these organisations, *Himal* was fortunate for friends such as Halle' Jorn Hanssen, Ane Haaland, Emilie Mead, Donatus De Silva, Karen McGuinness, Rina Gill and Werner Wirz.

To have made so many friends over a short period of three years convinces us that *Himal* must be doing something right. We thank them all.

*Himal* invites contributions on all contemporary Himalayan issues including essays, reports and features. Please ask for our "Writing for *Himal*" brochure. Viewpoint columns do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the editors of *Himal*.

# A Good Constitution That Could Be Better

*The new Nepali Constitution represents a milestone, but it has many problems of principle and interpretation that have to be overcome through amendment by the future Parliament.*

by Rishikesh Shaha

The eight-week-long Nepali movement for the restoration of human rights and democracy which culminated in mid-April has fundamentally changed the nature of the Nepali political order. Earlier, the king was regarded as the repository of all executive, legislative and judicial powers. In theory and practice, he was the only source and centre of state authority. This is now history, as the new Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal, 2047, promulgated by the king on 9 November, explicitly states in its preamble that sovereignty resides in the people. It guarantees their fundamental rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association and the right to the rule of law. Article 116 (1) lays down that fundamental rights, multi-party democracy, and constitutional monarchy are to be henceforth regarded as inalienable.

As to the question of popular legitimacy of the Constitution, the fact remains that it was not drawn up by elected representatives of the people, nor by a constituent assembly. The 2047 Constitution is also, technically speaking, a gift of the king to the people. But its redeeming feature is that it can always be amended by the elected representatives of the people.

Two serious questions have been raised: Does the king still retain the right to revoke the present Constitution? Can he declare a state of national emergency and suspend fundamental rights, even if temporarily?

## POWER TO REVOKE

To take the first question, the king's explicit reference in his proclamation to the exercise of his "inherent constitutional and state authority and prerogative" in promulgating the 2047 Constitution with immediate effect does not seem to be inconsistent, as claimed by certain political party leaders, with what is stated in the last paragraph of the preamble of the Constitution itself which runs as follows:

"Now, therefore, keeping in view the desire of the people that the state authority and

sovereign powers shall, after the commencement of this Constitution, be exercised in accordance with its provisions, we, King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Deva, *by virtue of the state authority as having been traditionally exercised by us*, do hereby enact and promulgate the Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal by and with the advice and consent of the Council of Ministers." (emphasis added)

Whether the king has permanently given up, at least in theory, his right to revoke the Constitution is thus an open question which can only be answered by the Supreme Court. We can only hope and pray that the king might never feel tempted to do so in future out of his regard for public opinion and morality and thus avoid the occasion for mass political upheaval, which of course does not respect any constitutional niceties.

## EMERGENCY POWERS

Now to turn to the question of whether the king can declare a state of emergency on his own under Article 115. It has been pleaded that he cannot do so except by and with the consent of the Council of Ministers because Article 35 (2) of the Constitution provides that:

"The powers of His Majesty under the Constitution *except those which are to be exercised exclusively by him or at his discretion* or on the recommendation of any institution or official, shall be exercised by and with the advice and consent of the Council of Ministers. Such advice and consent should be submitted through the Prime Minister." (emphasis added)

But the plea is rendered somewhat suspect because the original draft of Article 115 as prepared by the Constitutional Recommendation Commission had explicitly mentioned that the king could declare an emergency only on the recommendation from the Council of Ministers.

Further, Article 43 (2) of the Constitution becomes untenable if we are to put the same construction on it as on Article 115. (Article

43(2) says the king can give advice and encouragement to, or alert, the Council of Ministers to issues of national importance.)

Article 115 and 43 (2) are both worded similarly without any clear mention of whether the powers are to be exercised exclusively by the king or at his discretion. Using the construction that has been suggested for Article 115, how could the king possibly, in article 43 (2), be expected to act by and with the advice and consent of the Council of Ministers while giving *it* advice or encouragement?

My contention is that an article dealing with such an important matter as the declaration of emergency should not have left any room for doubt or ambiguity. Moreover, Article 115 leaves the key word "emergency" undefined. The circumstances under which emergency powers could be exercised are described vaguely as a "grave emergency". It would have been consistent with international legal standards if an expression such as "grave threat to the life of the nation" had been used to indicate more clearly the severity of circumstances necessitating the use of emergency power.

## DISCRIMINATION AGAINST SEX

Although Article 11 of the Constitution states that the State shall not discriminate against any citizen on the grounds of sex, the Constitution itself discriminates on those very grounds in its definition of citizenship in Article 9. The children of Nepali male citizens are deemed to be citizens of Nepal by descent, whereas children of Nepali female citizens are considered foreigners, and have to reside in Nepal for 15 years before they can become citizens.

## RIGHTS TO EQUALITY, SUPREME COURT JURISDICTION

Under Article 11 (2) and (3), the Constitution restricts many of the most fundamental human rights to "citizens". Thus, constitutional protection against discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, gender is enjoyed only by citizens; this restriction is inconsistent with Article 11 (1) which states that no "person" shall be denied equal protection of the law. Likewise, the right to challenge the constitutionality of laws before the Supreme Court is limited by Article 88 (1) to any "citizen" of Nepal. The term "person" should have been used in place of "citizen" to ensure that all those residing in Nepal enjoy equal protection and equal legal remedies.

**RIGHT TO FREEDOM AND PRESS AND PUBLICATION RIGHTS**

The 2047 Constitution limits these rights through a number of provisions that could be used to curtail fundamental freedoms severely. For instance, most of the rights in Articles 12 (Right to Freedom) and 13 (Press and Publication Rights) can be restricted if they "undermine the sovereignty and integrity of the kingdom" or disturb the "harmonious relations among ethnic groups." These restrictions should have been narrowly drawn up so as to make the government bear a heavy burden of demonstrating the need for the restriction. The freedoms of expression, assembly, association and the press would have then been better protected. Under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the right to freedom of expression can only be restricted as necessary for the respect of the rights and reputations of others and for the protection of national security, public order, or public health or morals.

**RIGHT AGAINST PREVENTIVE DETENTION**

The practice of preventive detention has caused the most common abuses of human rights everywhere. The new Constitution has done well by expressly providing protection against it in Article 15. But the protective language leaves much to be desired, as in the case of Articles 11 and 12. Article 15 should have defined the grounds for preventive detention narrowly without leaving, as it does, a wide scope for justification of preventive detention as implied in the wording of the article, which requires only "sufficient ground of existence of threat to the sovereignty, tranquility and indivisibility, or public peace and order of Nepal." More stringent requirements should have been laid down in order to make it difficult for the government to deviate from the regular legal procedures.

**RIGHT TO RELIGION**

The officially distributed (but "unofficial") English translation of the Constitution has Article 19 on the right to religion read thus:

"Every person shall have the freedom to profess and practice his own religion as coming down to him from the perennial past (sic) having due regard to traditional practices. Provided that no person shall be entitled to convert another person from one religion to another."

However, the English version of the Constitution is not binding and does not have the same sanctity in Nepali courts as the original Nepali text. The literal rendering of the excep-

tional clause in the Nepali text in English should have run as follows: "Provided that no person shall cause or compel another individual to change one's religion."

Article 19 clearly implies that one can change one's religion at one's free will. The fact of the matter is that there are laws which prohibit religious conversion which are therefore inconsistent with the spirit of the Constitution as translated above. The very same constitutional stipulation had also existed in the recently revoked Nepali Constitution of 2019 (1962) but the courts, including the Supreme Court, were in the past hesitant to declare the existing laws as *ultra vires* of the Constitution. As a result, people responsible for religious conversion and also the converts themselves have been persecuted in Nepal from time to time.

The practice of penalising conversion is inconsistent with Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which specifically upholds "the right to freedom...of religion; this right includes freedom to change...religion."

It remains to be seen whether the courts will declare the existing laws barring conversion *ultra vires* of the Constitution or not. Strangely enough, Article 19 of the Constitution seems to deny, if interpreted in accordance with the terms of the "unofficial" translation, the right to practice the religion of one's own choosing, while leaving one free to follow the religion of one's ancestors.

**A HINDU STATE**

An awkwardly phrased Article 4(1) in the Part I of the Constitution has unnecessarily provoked the religious, ethnic and linguistic minorities against Nepal's Hindu majority and Hindu king. This article is self-consciously worded in an attempt to mollify the feelings of the minorities. Actually, it has had the opposite effect, and runs as follows: "Nepal is a multiethnic, multilingual, democratic, independent, sovereign, Hindu monarchical Kingdom." The Nepali version is as awkward as its "unofficial" English version: "Nepal is a...Hindu, constitutional monarchical Kingdom." The comma after "Hindu" is



Gopal Chitrakar

King Birendra promulgates the Constitution of Nepal, 2047.

significant. As the position of the Hindu king is safeguarded in Article 27 (1) of Part V, which deals with the kingship, there was no reason for calling Nepal a Hindu state in the Part I. Not only does Article 4 (1) have the effect of rubbing religious minorities the wrong way, it militates against the principle and practice of separation of Religion and the State.

The Constitution of 2047, on the whole, represents a milestone in the evolution of a constitutional order in Nepal. The actual experience of the Nepali people with the Constitution will largely depend on how it is worked in practice. It is yet to be seen whether the king and the political parties who have so far assumed the entire responsibility for promulgating the Constitution will co-operate with one another in implementing it with care and integrity. The king will still have an important role to play in effecting a smooth transition from unlimited monarchy to limited or constitutional monarchy suited to the needs of intrinsically democratic modernisation. ▽

R. Shaha is President of the Human Rights Organisation of Nepal. He had a hand in the drafting of the 1962 Constitution, but later agitated against it when it came into effect on grounds that it did not respect fundamental human rights.

# Voices

[Book Excerpt]

## QUIET DESPERATION

From book by Ludwing F. Stiller SJ's, *The Silent Cry on the desperation of the people of Nepal between the years 1816 and 1839*. On Page 290, Fr. Stiller describes the silent cry.

The silent cry, then, was the cry of the system calling for change. The emotional content of this cry, however, was the hardship experienced by the farmers in village Nepal. In the capital, the administrators of Bhim Sen Thapa's administration sat on top of the system, manipulating it to achieve what they thought the system should produce and to satisfy their own needs. But the system itself rested on the shoulders of the farmers, who were the true producers of the wealth of the nation. This burden grew progressively heavier, and within the system there was little the farmer could do but endure. If the picture we have painted in this study is bleak, it is because the reality itself was bleak. Four points of criticism have been singled out for particular treatment: the revenue system, the judicial system, government attitudes towards trade, and government's failure to supply an adequate coinage system. These four aspects of the problem do not constitute the whole problem, nor does the individual treatment of these four points constitute an adequate statement of the problem. It was the total complexus, the interaction of these elements together and with other subsidiary aspects of the problem, that constituted the burden for village Nepal.

[Poetic Attempt]

## INACTION

## LOOKING LIKE ACTION

Excerpt from "Ode to Himalayas 1990" by M.L.Dewan (PhD Cornell), a soil scientist who has worked in the Damodar Valley Corporation and for the Food and Agriculture Organisation, Rome. Dewan has written "odes" in similar vein in 1987, 1988 and 1989.

I share today with you, O' revered one  
A handful, nay, brainful of my dreams  
dreams in clear practical terms  
not vague void or empty dreams

A green army of million youth  
girls even more than boys  
mahilas more than men  
march and pledge to save you  
to green you and protect each  
plant of fuel fodder fruit trees

Streams and springs muddy and gushing in monsoons  
quiet and serene in other months  
becoming clear and crystal all or  
most of the time

women and men girls and boys  
labouring working self reliant

proud of you, O' Himalayas  
chanting pledging we will green you,  
stay with you, serve you  
we are proud of you

These are dreams but talk  
of progress achievement O' mortals  
retorts the mighty wounded Himalayas  
you talk a lot conferences seminars  
meetings symposia and what not  
all to hide your inaction  
wanting to look like action

Achievements plantings not enough, master  
venture to give two examples Ranichauri Sitla  
at Ranichauri and around  
a thousand youth marched from schools  
to nursery sites to planting sites  
singing pledgings we will protect our  
sacred Himalayas

[Open Letter]

## A HINDU FOOTHOLD IN AMERICA

A letter from Dr. Irene N. Gajjar in a recent issue of the *Hindu University of America Newsletter*, responding to calls for suggestions on how best to go forward with the University's founding.

The concept of establishing a Hindu University is a wonderful one but translating the idea into reality will be an extremely time consuming and difficult task requiring the cooperation and effort of a strong and dedicated as well as intelligent group of people who are in full agreement as to the goals and methods of achieving them. This is the first hurdle because my experience suggests we are apt to find many differences of opinions and philosophy among those who would or could be the core of this effort.

I believe that the purpose of the University should be to establish a Hindu foothold in America. This foothold should become a hallmark of the viability, sophistication, flexibility, and broad mindedness of Hindu philosophy. Thus we should not attempt to create a parochial institution bent on conversion, but rather we should create an institution of such fine caliber that it will attract the best minds and will invite these minds to explore Hinduism as a way of life and a body of thought. The University *must* from its inception be first class in every respect; it must be from the start an institution of which American Hindus and Hindus worldwide are proud. At the same time it must be open and welcome all schools of thought and all creeds. One of Hinduism's greatest strengths is the respect it has for other religions and other ways of life and this strength must be promoted (even though other religions do not reciprocate when it comes to respecting Hinduism). If the goal described above is accepted by the founders of the University, this objective must be incorporated in the Charter.



[Research]

## WILDLIFE, RELIGION AND SEX

*From a paper presented at the Fifth International Theological Congress in Rome by wildlife scientists James Smith, Per Wegge, Hemanta Mishra and Christen Wemmer.*

Wildlife research is like religion and sex. One's is usually conditioned by the amount of exposure and the frequency with which it is practiced. To the recent converts and novice players of the game, it is the elixir to all the woes of the Third World. In contrast, experienced hands view its usefulness in more moderate and restricted ways.

These views have a lot to do with the models of wildlife and environmental research in the Third World... Much of the controversy over research is in motives, economics and perceived benefits between players from developed and developing nations. Based upon our experiences, we have visualized some of the patterns of the research game...

*The Imperialist Pattern:* In this game, the research is proposed, designed and conducted by foreign citizens of a developed nation, often a former imperial power, usually for a Masters or PhD degree... The initiative for the study rarely arises in the host country. The whole program is under total control of the foreigner. If the foreigner is generous, he may offer a co-authorship to the host country's counterpart staff who may gain some measure of prestige. The foreign player receives an advanced degree, and will be liberal in designating himself as an "expert" of that country, even if he has been there for less than a year. Consequently, he immediately qualifies for the post of a Good Samaritan. Sooner or later, the host country's counterparts find out that they have been totally exploited... They also learn that competition between westerners is keen and the rewards to the foreigners for undertaking research in the Third World is considerable. This results in demands for equality by the host counterpart. The foreigner shuns the native's demands claiming that the native counterpart is not yet ready. Conflicts escalate and consequently the game ends with the foreigner moving to home base or another virgin territory.

*The Nationalist Pattern:* This pattern often evolves as a backlash to the pattern described above. The basic position of the host is, "We'll do the research ourselves, or won't be done." The work is not done because the funding opportunities don't exist in the host country. Bureaucrats regard research as a low priority and the game of "who's most qualified" slowly dampens the enthusiasm of the players. The game ends even before it starts.

*The Mercenary Pattern:* The third pattern emerges when the host values the financial benefit of foreign involvement more than the results of research. The attitude can be characterized as "You can do anything you want as long as the price is right". This situation is most likely to develop when the host detects an almost desperate craving by foreign experts who bombarded the bureaucracy with telexes, fax and other high tech mode of communication or descend upon the host country with surplus cash, dazzling ideas and over-enthusiasm to conduct a particular project. A clever host can get lucrative return, but when the mercenary motive becomes too apparent, the bureaucrats of both the donor and the host country, as referees, terminate the game.

*The Pattern of Negotiated Equality:* This pattern materializes when host and donor discuss the issues over a sufficient length of time and learn to appreciate one another's objectives, and limitations. This creates a balanced and mutually rewarding game plan. This pattern is...likely to develop when a host and donor realizes that the rules are such that both win the game. A mutually agreed captain for both is appointed and donor agency experts and counterpart staff operate on an equal status basis. Contention over disguised personal issues cannot threaten the programs as long as overall goals and the *modus operandi* of the program are reinforced as the foremost concern, by mutual consent.

[New Politics]

## AUTONOMY FOR DEVELOPMENT

*Paper on "Empowerment, Democracy, Participation and Development in South Asia" presented by Mubashir Hasan, former Finance Minister of Pakistan, at a development conference in Dhaka on 27 November 1990.*

The gross economic and social disparities among individuals and classes in the countries of South Asia, the wide gulf between the haves and have-nots, and between the rulers and the ruled, is the principal handicap in shaping the will of the millions to put their heart and soul into increasing production (and) ushering a new era of development.

And yet, the forces that perpetuate and protect the existing socio-economic order which is essentially anti-development are relatively strong. The Deputy Commissioner with all his power under the law is on their side. The non-opportunist political leaders and their parties have not quite realised who and what they are up against; that, until the forces of democracy gain the upper hand over the rule of the civil servants at the level of the village, tehsil/taluka, districts and indeed the national secretariat, the goals of development and democracy will remain unfulfilled dreams. Until these goals are realised, the political leadership in our countries shall continue to operate as junior or senior partners of civil and military bureaucracies, and in the process will continue to enrich themselves, their families and friends.

For those who believe that empowerment, participation and development are essential ingredients of democracy, two principal requirements need to be fulfilled for establishing a democratic polity in the countries of South Asia. These are: decentralisation of political, social economic power and, simultaneously, transfer of this power from government functionaries to elected institutions or representatives. At each level of organisation, the supremacy of elected persons over permanent civil and military services needs to be established. The totality of state power should be decentralised on the principle that whatever can be settled or decided at a lower level of governmental hierarchy must not go up for settlement or decision to the next higher level.

The village, the town, the district, the state or province, each at its own level should enjoy the maximum possible autonomy consistent with national sovereignty. Furthermore, power to legislate, to take political decisions, to make economic choices with political overtones, to decide on questions of developmental priorities must rest with elected persons or bodies. At each level, the elected council should be as independent as possible for its finances.

# The Disaster That is ERIP

*Irrigation projects can have far-reaching, damaging ecological impact. The government must pay more than lip service to environmental concerns.*

by Uday R. Sharma

The Government of Nepal, with financial and technical assistance from the Asian Development Bank, began to plan the East Rapti Irrigation Project (ERIP) in the mid-1980s, showing little concern over how the project might affect the environment of the area. The feasibility report does not even mention the world-renowned Royal Chitwan National Park, whose northern boundary is the Rapti river. The ADB's appraisal report of 1986 states blandly that "ERIP...is not expected to have significant negative environmental impact."

ERIP is a large-scale surface irrigation project, which, when completed, will provide irrigation facilities to 9500 hectares of land in the eastern Chitwan Valley. The planners have suggested building a low diversion weir across the Rapti. The site of the permanent intake structure is actually inside the park. The designs of the weir and the channel are almost complete, and the project is awaiting final approval.

More than 40 species of mammals, 49 species of reptiles and amphibians, 113 species of fish, and 489 species of resident and migratory birds are found within the 93,200-hectare park area. The sanctuary has been recognised as a World Heritage Site for its biological diversity and pristine representation of the Churia Valley/Inner Tarai environment. Some notable endangered species found here include the one-horned rhinoceros, tiger, gharial, gaur and the Gangetic dolphin. The wetlands formed by three major rivers, of which the Rapti is one, provide a habitat for unique species, including the extremely vulnerable mugger crocodile.

## ERIP'S THREAT

Implementation of ERIP is likely to have dire consequences on the park ecosystem. Some of these will be easily identifiable and therefore correctable; other impact can be indirect but disastrous in the long term.

ERIP planners hope to expand irrigation of winter and spring paddy crops by diverting the Rapti flow mostly during the winter and spring months, which is when the river is at its lowest.

Wildlife that specifically depend on wetlands would suffer significantly from this change. The reduced flow of water would disrupt the habitat for resident populations of gharial, mugger and tortoise, up to about 20 km downstream from the dam site. This stretch of water from Sauraha to Kasara is especially important for muggers, which need a constant flow of deep water all year around for survival. The irregularity in the water flow could disrupt access to nesting sites and flooding could destroy the nests and eggs. Similarly, the increased discharge of agricultural effluents could be lethal to the reptile and fish species.

Some local fishermen fear that the decrease in the volume of Rapti water, particularly during spring, will directly affect their fish catch. The most abundant fish species, *Punctius*, *Barilius*, and *Aspidoparia*, which will be affected by this change, also constitute important diets for otter, fishing cat, gharial, mugger, tortoise, fish-eating birds, besides the subsistence fisher-folk of the Rapti. Other prized fishes are also likely to dwindle in number. The ERIP planners have made provisions for a fish-way, but this is not enough, since water depth is also vital.

The endangered species which will be affected by the decline in fish will include birds such as the Fishing Eagle, Fish Owl, Osprey and Stork. Almost all the 160 wintering birds recorded in Chitwan, including over 20 waterfowl species, about 30 birds of prey and 16 waders, are likely to be affected by the reduced volume of the Rapti.

## GRASS AND TOURISTS

Chitwan's floodplain of *kans* grass (*Saccharum spontaneum*) provides one of the quality habitats of the park, providing ideal forage for wild herbivores like the rhinoceros. The floodplains and riverine forests together support a richness in wildlife that is comparable to that of sanctuaries in East Africa.

The maintenance of Chitwan's forests depends upon the support of the local people, who rely upon the park for steady supply of grass. Every year, more than 60,000 people

participate in the 15-day grass-cutting season, bringing out 11,000 tons of grass products. If the reduced water table in the floodplains affects the growth of *kans* grass, the rhinoceros and other herbivores will be in trouble and the park would also be less useful for the local people.

The tourist industry in the eastern end of the park could also be hurt, since ERIP could hamper eco-tourism activities like canoe rides and bird watching. In 1989, an estimated 19,000 tourists visited the national park, generating a gross income amounting to one million US dollars. The Park supports a full-time staff of 565 employees and an equal number of seasonal staff.

## IS ERIP NECESSARY?

Does Nepal need ERIP? The answer will depend upon how much importance is given to environmental issues when the final decision is made.

There is no basis, under existing law, on which to stop ERIP. Even the National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act (2029) is not strong enough. Its article which prohibits diversion of water from any river flowing into the national park can easily be overruled by the government. Says B.N. Upreti, Director-General of the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation: "Our Department's history shows that we have always lost in all major battles with the development projects that affect the national parks or reserves. Therefore, it is difficult to be optimistic about ERIP, particularly if the battle has to be won based on environmental grounds alone."

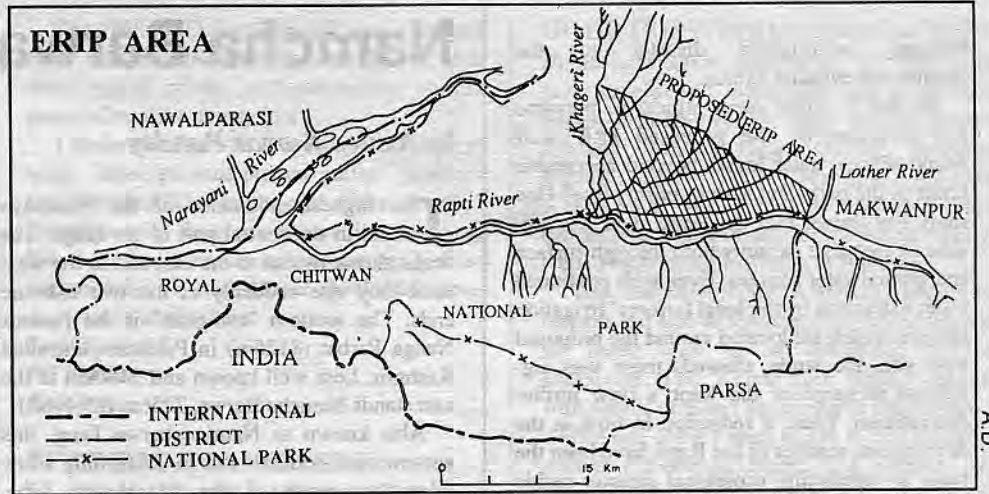
Fortunately, ERIP cannot be justified even on economic grounds. The existing small irrigation schemes have been found to be much more cost-effective. Furthermore, they run according to traditional methods of sharing water and repair work. These smaller schemes also provide a platform for social cohesion in a diverse and stratified society made up of local ethnic people and hill migrants. An estimated seven cubic meters/sec of Rapti water is being diverted into channels for irrigation to more than 8,000 hectares of land. In a way, ERIP would only be duplicating work in an area which is already benefiting from irrigation. The farmers are bound to resent a project that will bring unnecessary additional burden through future water tax.

If the East Rapti Irrigation Project is given the green signal in its currently proposed form, the Royal Chitwan National Park ecology will see devastating changes, immediately and in the long-run. Nepal will lose its face internationally for backtracking on its support of con-

servation. International support of wildlife projects might also see a decline as a result. Why risk all this when there are already small but active irrigation schemes at work? Approval of ERIP could, furthermore, signal a go-ahead for other similar projects, such as the Babai Irrigation Project, next to the Royal Bardia National Park in the western Tarai.

It is time that the Nepali government stood up for the environment and bridged the gap between its commitment to environmental policies as stipulated in the National Conservation Strategy, and actual practice.

U.R.Sharma is working for a PhD in wildlife management. He was warden of the Royal Chitwan National Park.



## Don't Call it Disaster Yet

*Protection of the environment is essential, but environmental sentimentalism must not cloud the evaluation of development schemes.*

by Ajaya Dixit

When the Chitwan Valley was opened up as a frontier for settlement in the 1960s and 1970s, several alternative irrigation schemes were considered in order to convert the alluvial plain north of the Rapti river and east of the Narayani river into a bread basket. Two of these schemes were the Chitwan lift irrigation system and the Khageri irrigation scheme, both of which supply water to the western region of the Chitwan District, north of the Royal Chitwan National Park.

The 1960s and 1970s were rather easy times for development planners, since projects then were simply a matter of how much went in and what came out. The question of environmental impact was underplayed, if not disregarded. Neither the lift irrigation project nor the Khageri project received the scrutiny that ERIP is receiving today.

### EIA ON ERIP

The questions being raised about the environmental soundness of ERIP, especially in relation to Chitwan sanctuary are appropriate. However, the debate is characterised by more emotionalism and less science. Environmental impact assessments have a vital place in the scheme of development, but they should be used scientifically and not as polemical batons to push through a biased viewpoint.

The use of the Rapti river to irrigate the eastern section of Chitwan valley received greater impetus when the river flow was aug-

mented as a result of the inter-basin transfer of water from the Kulekhani power system. This flow during the dry months amounted to almost one third of the natural flow of the Rapti.

ERIP, which proposes to divert 14.3 cubic meters/second of water from the Rapti to irrigate 9,500 hectares, backed by the Asian Development Bank, was designed by a Japanese consulting firm. The project was conceived in the mid-1980s and thus directly contravened the National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act of 1973.

Surprisingly, in its early stage, ERIP also drew little opposition on environmental grounds. The government, even after enunciating the requirement of environmental impact assessments (EIAs) for major projects under the Sixth Plan and the Seventh Plan, did not deem it necessary to conduct an EIA on ERIP. Even more surprisingly, the Department of Soil Conservation and Watershed Management, which administers the national parks, had a full fledged Environmental Impact Assessment Project which never seemed even to have heard of ERIP. To top it all, the funding Bank in its 1986 appraisal report concluded that there would be no significant negative environmental impact, which was not believable.

Towards the middle of 1989, when the detailed engineering designs for ERIP were almost complete, several agencies which were involved in conservation activities within the national park suddenly discovered the ecologi-

cal armageddon that was about to befall the sanctuary. Diversion of dry season flow, it was feared, would be catastrophic for the park's flora and fauna, as would the "return flow" of fertiliser-polluted water from irrigated land.

### QUESTION

Let us now address the question directly: Are the fears of ecological disaster in Chitwan justified? The answer is that it is not clear. There are too many variables, but too little study. It is not proper to reach conclusions based on little data and less-than-thorough understanding of hydrological and other questions. When there is inadequate data, the proper response should be to go out and collect it. Unfortunately, the tendency is to make scientific sounding conjectures, or extrapolate from unrelated and irrelevant studies conducted elsewhere. It is easy to make "soft" and unsubstantiated claims because the public is receptive to ecological disasters-in-making.

Turning to ERIP, there is a severe lack of data which makes it impossible at this stage to make predictions, good or bad. In the Rapti river, as is the case everywhere in Nepal, monitoring of river water quality is unheard of. The national park does not even maintain a rain gauge. If the park's administrators had monitored rainfall, flow and water levels on the Rapti at its Sauraha headquarters over the past 17 years of its existence, by now there would have been adequate data with which to analyse ERIP's impact more conclusively.

Similarly, even occasional monitoring of the quality of "return flow" from the Khageri irrigation system into the Rapti would have yielded information which would have helped cause-effect studies, including in relation to ERIP. Neither should we forget that the Khageri scheme *did* divert water from the Khageri, a tributary of the Rapti, without

bringing unmitigated disaster to the downstream wildlife habitat.

At first it might seem logical to presume that diversion by the proposed ERIP weir would reduce water levels beyond acceptable limits in the park. But is this entirely true? One study has shown that the Rapti river has significant recharge capacity both through surface and groundwater sources. Even with continued water extraction by the local farmers' irrigation systems which are located around the proposed weir site, the study showed, there was significant recharge of the Rapti's flow further downstream. Thus, if reduction in flow in the downstream reaches of the Rapti have been the basis for predicting ecological disaster inside the park, then existing conditions indicate that this cannot be entirely true. (About 10 cubic metres/second of water from the Rapti presently gets extracted by the existing local irrigation schemes.)

#### WATER OR WILDLIFE?

Obviously, there is a trade-off between how much water can be extracted and how much is needed in the river. And there is always the dilemma of selecting between two goods: development and environmental protection. We cannot let the one pristine Inner Tarai wildlife habitat be destroyed by a possibly ill-conceived irrigation project, just as we cannot deprive the local populace of ERIP's possible benefits on the basis of fashionable pro-environmental posturing. Because there are a lot of ifs and buts regarding the natural processes of the Rapti river system and the wild world within the national park, what is required is diligent study.

If the Rapti river so intricately governs the ecology of the park, then its sustainable management is meaningless without proper understanding of the water regime. What kind of "micro-hydrology" exists within the park, what are the river's recharge characteristics, what happens to the water extracted by the farmers' systems, and what is the minimum flow that would be desirable in the Rapti?

These are some of the questions for which the park as well as government authorities will have to find answers to in the future, ERIP or no ERIP. And, only when such information is available can a definitive answer be given to whether the project will be disastrous or not. Sustaining the Royal Chitwan National Park requires much more than mere sentimental attachment to the sanctuary. ▽

A. Dixit is a water resource engineer and editor of the publication *Water Nepal*.

## KNOW YOUR HIMAL

# Namcha Barwa

by Arnico Kumar Panday

The highest mountains of the Himalaya stand in the central part of the range. The peaks shrink in size to the east and to the west until they rise suddenly at the two extreme ends. The western "end-peak" is the famous Nanga Parbat (8126m) in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir. Less well-known and 2400km to the east stands Namcha Barwa, 7756m (25,446ft).

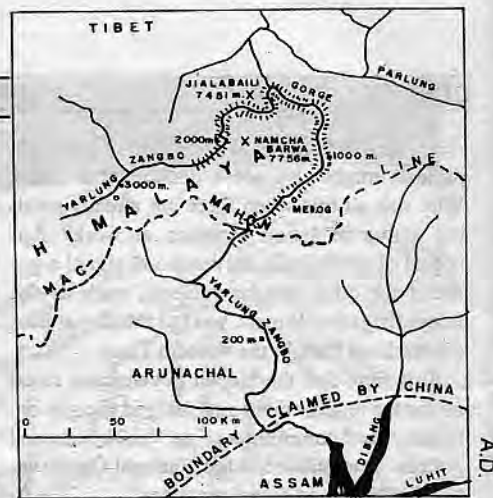
Also known as Namjangbarwa Feng, this easternmost mountain lies in Tibet, only a few kilometers north of the MacMahon Line, which was drawn in 1914 to separate Tibet from India. The border claimed by China runs further south of the mountain and encompasses the Indian state of Arunachal. Indian and Chinese troops are still stationed here. Few outsiders have ventured into Namcha Barwa's vicinity, or the gorge through which the Yarlung Zangbo (Tsangpo) river exits the Qinghai-Tibet plateau to enter the plains of Assam.

#### MOUNTAIN AND RIVER

Namcha Barwa's description is not complete without that of the Yarlung Zangbo, whose most "volatile" stage begins and ends in the vicinity of this peak. Rising in the Jiemayongzong (Chemayungdung) range north of Nepal's Kamali Zone, the river traverses a thousand kilometres across southern Tibet until, in the gorge, it abruptly turns north-east, then south-east, then south-west, completing a tight horseshoe bend around Namcha Barwa. Across the river to the north is the smaller mountain of Jialabaili, 7151m.

The Yarlung Zangbo, like the Sutlej, Kali Gandaki and Arun, predates the Himalaya. These rivers continued to flow and cut deep gorges as geological forces over the last 20 million years raised massifs such as Namcha Barwa. When it reaches this area, the Yarlung Zangbo loses altitude fast: 2,200 meters over 240km. At one point, the distance between the two arms of the horseshoe is only 38km. If tapped through a tunnel, 40,000 megawatts of electricity can be produced here. (Compare this to the 10,800MW for the proposed Kamali scheme and 2400MW for Tehri.)

Glaciers radiate out in all directions from the higher reaches of Namcha Barwa and Jialabaili. Namcha Barwa's flanks drop from its peak of 7756m to the valley floor at 600m within 43km. The mountain's lower regions host a richness in flora and fauna that few regions can match. At only 29N latitude, this



area is the northern-most tropical ecosystem in the world. There is great ecological diversity in the region because of the steep vertical zonation. About a quarter of the 170 species protected by the Chinese Government is found here, including rare birds, the red panda, monkeys, deer and snow leopard. Recently, the Chinese authorities established a natural sanctuary around Namcha Barwa, known as the Meigong Nature Reserve (Meigong = "flower" in Tibetan).

Monbas, the inhabitants of the steep valleys, are so removed from the lofty environs of Namcha Barwa that they have no word for "ice", although they get enough rain, up to 2000mm a year. The Monbas cultivate terraced fields and grow bananas, oranges and lemons. Further to the south live the ethnic group of Daflas, numbering about 25,000, who engage in slash-and-burn *jhum* cultivation.

#### EXPLORATION

The easternmost section of the Himalaya was not visited by western explorers until recently because of the difficulty of the terrain, and rumours of hostile tribes. For centuries, it was not even known that the Yarlung Zangbo was the Brahmaputra because of the forbidding terrain around Namcha Barwa.

Namcha Barwa was spotted several times by Westerners after 1879, but only from a distance. It was as late as 1912 that British explorers fixed its location. A 1913 expedition came closer to Namcha Barwa and its members saw, for the first time, the nearby Jialabaili.

Until recently, the area had not been further explored. The Chinese government has reserved the peak's first ascent for its nationals. Between August 1982 and April 1984, various Chinese groups studied the area. Seven Chinese climbers reached the top of the nearby mountain Nai Peng (7043m). The climbers did not attempt Namcha Barwa but did reconnoiter the peak and identify six possible ascent routes. A forbidding mixture of rock, snow and ice has apparently rendered all attempts to scale the mountain unsuccessful. ▽



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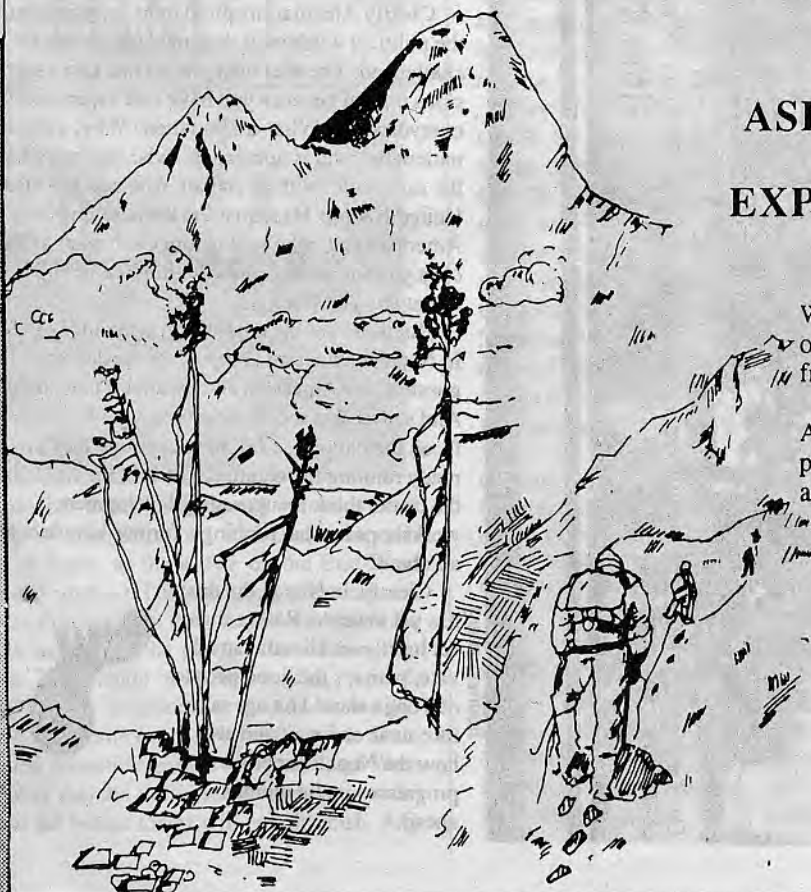
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# Abominably Yours,

If I were a king rather than an abominable snow-person, I would think that this democracy craze is getting out of hand. Those with crowns and tiaras are having a hard time holding on to them. Quaint monarchies are being forced to convert themselves into parliamentary debating societies. Ex-kings and kinglets are not faring too well either. Take the recent case of Kuwaiti royalty, the richest exiles on earth. The former kings of Greece, Romania and Afghanistan are all desperate to get back into the thick of things, but nobody seems to want them.

Saudi Arabia's King Fahad, too, also recently put his finger to the desert wind and decided that a move from theocracy to democracy was in order. He says a bill giving more power to the Majlis Al Shoura (Parliament) was being drafted by "honest men of great responsibility and dependability." We shall wait and see.

## MUDDY WATERS

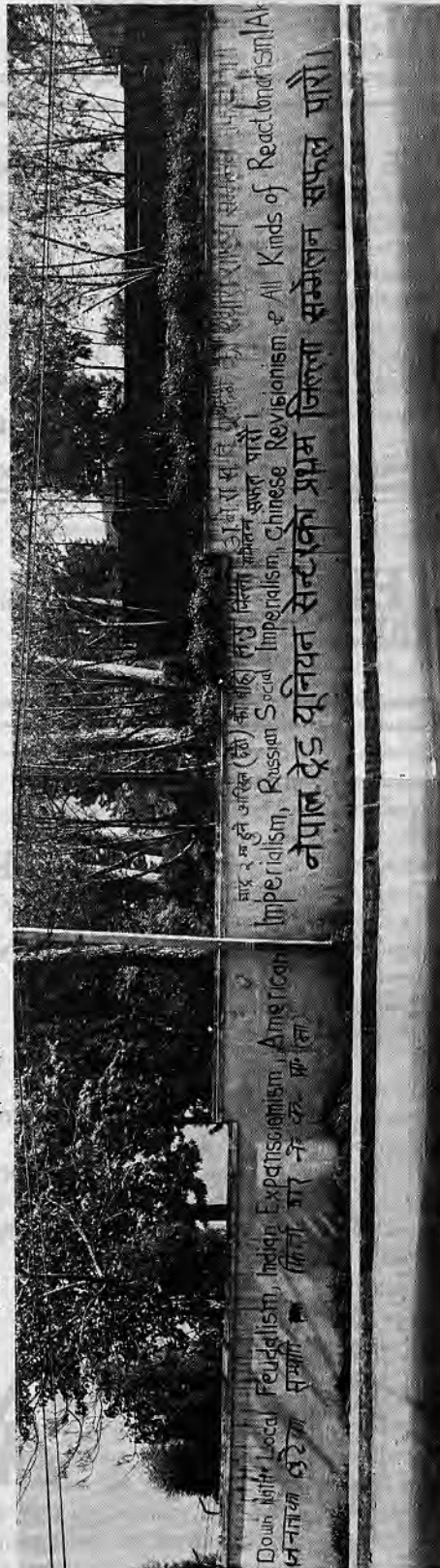
Even the easy-going Polynesians seem to have it in for kings these days. The 72-year-old ruler of Tonga, King Taufa Ahau Tupouto IV, is having to deal with "pro-democratic" forces from among his one lakh subjects. King Taufa's South Pacific idyll has never been so disturbed before. Talk of tropical Shangri-Las.

Nepal is landlocked while Tonga is sea-locked. Neither has ever been colonised. King Taufa's rule, while governed by a constitution and subject to a national assembly, is nearly absolute. He appointed Tonga's 12-member cabinet and his brother Fatefeh Tu Ipelehake as Prime Minister.

If Nepalis think their country is poor, turn to Tonga. Copra is the foreign-exchange earner but this year it did so badly that all exports were abandoned as uneconomic. The cash-strapped Tonga is regularly rocked by scandal related to its poverty. The latest one involved the sale of Tongan passports to Hongkong Chinese in order to raise revenue. Even at its worst moments, the Nepali kingdom never had it this bad.

King Taufa lives six months of the year away from his subjects' destitution at a royal residence in Auckland, New Zealand. That's as if the Nepali or Bhutanese kings spent their winters in Vasant Vihar, New Delhi. From his faraway sanctuary, King Taufa now threatens to impose martial law, but it seems that the army of 300 commoners will refuse to go along. Also, the Agence France Presse reports that Crown Prince Tupouto is sympathetic to democratic reforms and is for the "West Ministry model".

AFP also reports that the Tongans, in proper Polynesian style, are in no hurry for revolution. As yet, they have not organised a people's movements for democracy and human rights. The Tongan



attitude seems to be that everything will take its due course. As for democracy, they are willing to wait till good King Taufa is called by his ancestors. Why make his life miserable if we can wait a little longer? But the old man seems to be in good health, other than a recent ear infection requiring antibiotics.

## HIMALAYAN ADVICE

So what counsel can Nepal's people's movement consultants provide to the citizens of Tonga as they bide their time for democracy to dawn on their beaches and amidst all that surplus copra? The first advice, doubtless, is not to trust Crown Prince Tupouto, whatever he might say right now. Power is equally attractive on degraded mountain slopes or amidst rotting copra.

The best political advice anyone could give the Tongans or even the recently Ershad-less Bangladeshis is written on a hotel wall in Lalitpur, Nepal. Do not trust anybody. Condemn everyone.

"Down with Local Feudalism, Indian Expansionism, American Imperialism, Russian Social Imperialism, Chinese Revisionism & All Kinds of Reactionarism," screams the graffiti on the hotel wall, in English to boot.

Clearly Albanian-inspired in its rejectionism, the political wisdom of this message cannot be challenged. The idea being let no one cast aspersions on you because you have cast aspersions on everyone else. What are you then? Why, a Nepali nationalist who is non-feudal, who will not sit at the same table with an Indian, who will not visit United Nations Headquarters because it is on American soil, who will ignore Gorbachev if he calls you for advice, and who thinks Li Peng is a closet Hu Yao Bang.

But these are the days of miracles and wonder. In Nepal, cabinet ministers of the far-left are chief-guests at the American ambassador's lawn party. And self-styled social democrats who have not faced the ballot box for 30 years think they are already running the country. The left, the right and the center think inaugurating development workshops is what running a former-kingdom is all about.

Clearly, in Nepal, the dust has yet to settle. Rather than act hastily on Himalayan advice, perhaps the good people of Tonga should let age take its course and wait and see how the Nepali experiment progresses in the months ahead.



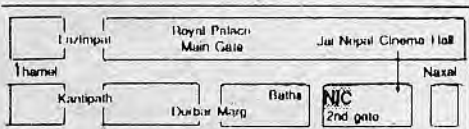
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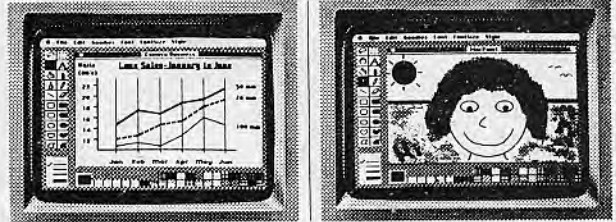
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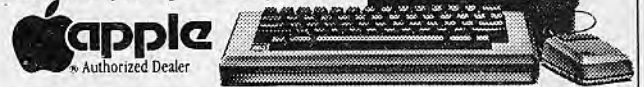
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