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# HIMAL

ALTERNATIVE BI-MONTHLY



## Keeping Women Down

Chipko Women  
Counting Suicide  
Sex Workers  
The Muluki Ain

Kosi Disaster  
Going Cross-Country  
Monsoon Mountain  
Forestry Fiasco

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*Best wishes to Mrs Pasang Lhamu Sherpa and her team members of the First Nepalese Woman's Expedition*  
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Cover picture : Young girl of the Eastern Tarai, Nepal.  
 (Courtesy : United Nations)

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HIMAL  
ALTERNATIVE BI-MONTHLY

Vol. 4 No. 4 Sep/Oct 1991

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

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

- Kalidasa (Kumara Sambhava)

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## MAIL

### MORE ON GORKHAS

I would like to add some thoughts with reference to "Nepalis in Foreign Armies" (July/August 1991). Firstly, the map "World of the Gurkhas 1817-1991" should have mentioned not 'NEFA' but the Sino-Indian conflict of 1962. As far as the 1965 war with Pakistan was concerned, the Gurkhas were used more actively along the Sindh and Punjab borders than in Kashmir.

The deployment of the Indian Gorkhas during the 1965 Indo-Pak war was against the Tripartite Agreement of 1947. At that time, Field Marshal Ayub Khan was also an honorary Field Marshal of the Nepali Army. When inspecting a camp of Indian Army prisoners of war, he had directed that the Nepali POWs be treated well.

During the negotiations between the British and a newly independent India, in which it was Maj. Gen. Lynn opposite Girija Shanker Bajpai, the British insisted on retaining the 2nd, 6th, 7th

other than the signatories. Unless there was a secret agreement reached later, the British should not have deployed them into service of the Sultan of Brunei. And as is reported, the British received a commission of eight million pounds in lieu of supplying the Gurkhas. If His Majesty's Government had directly supplied the Gurkhas to Brunei, Nepal would have been a financial beneficiary to that extent. If the most powerful nuclear-weapon-state, such as the United States of America, could receive US\$ 55 billion from different countries for sending its troops in defence of Kuwait, and not be accused of mercenarism, then why call the Gurkhas as such?

It is true that the Indian Army does not officially restrict the rise in ranks of officers in the Indian Gorkhas, including Nepal. However, only one Gorkha of Indian origin has ever had a chance of achieving Lieutenant Generalship. He was Maj. Gen. Bhandari, who unfortunately died in a helicopter crash before he could attain that high rank.

*Devendra Raj Upadhyaya  
Kathmandu*

### ASSURANCE ON TIBET

A couple of days ago, at our college library, I saw, suddenly, a Potala Image on one cover. With rising curiosity, I pulled it out from the stack. To my amazement, its content was dominated by the Tibetan question. Extremely overjoyed and overtaken by enthusiasm, I perused the whole content and came to realise how little I know about Tibet and Tibetans.

Next morning, I was back in the Library, looking for back issues of *Himal*. I found a few copies, but to my dismay they dealt either very insignificantly or totally ignored Tibet. Consequently, my previous intention of becoming a subscriber began to subside. How about your future issues? Will they not deal with Tibet again? A change of time followed by inevitable change in politics would bring the Tibet issue again on the cover page, I hope.

With this self-revelation and optimism, I subscribed to your worthy magazine. However, a wise judgement would only be complete with your opinion and assurances. Your honour would

not be surprised with my exultation if I conclude by saying that I am a partisan Tibetan!

*L. Lodu. J.*

*Sherubtse College, Kanglung, Bhutan*

As a magazine of Himalayan society, *Himal* seeks to provide useful and authentic information on Tibet and Tibetans. At the same time, we would hope that our readers will show interest in parts of the Himalaya other than that which they consider their own. - editors

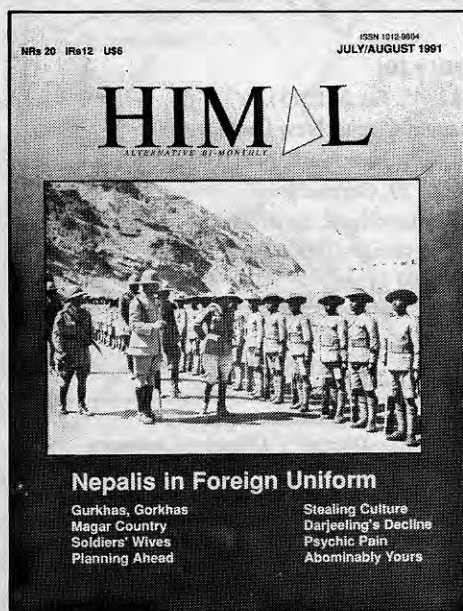
### PATAN NOSTALGIA

As I read Bijaya Lal Shrestha's interesting article "Patan: A City No More Shining" (May/June 1991), I was perplexed by his combination of keen insight into some of the factors leading to change in Patan, and the rather patronising, often impractical attitude towards change. I would like to suggest some alternative perspectives on Patan's changing urban life.

The article carries a distinctly nostalgic tone and it seems long for some imagined past before the "decline" of today. Nostalgia is usually a benign enough sentiment, though in this case it is combined with a rather distressing view of pre-1950 Patan as a kind of timeless and historical storehouse of unchanging culture.

By stating that "outside influence was kept at bay and Patan remained 'medieval' well into the late 1950s," the article risks sounding like certain genres of western travel literature and anthropological writing. For example, Tibor Sekelj wrote in *Window on Nepal* (1959) that in Nepal "nothing has changed since prehistoric times." Statements like these, which imply that places like Nepal have been stagnant repositories of quaint Culture while the west is the land of dynamic (and dominant) History, are especially disturbing when coming from Nepal itself. To imply that Patan was "preserved" and that outside influences were "kept at bay" is misleading because it denies the fact that Patan, like Florence, Milan or Rome (cities with which the writer compares Patan), has been a dynamic and changing city for many centuries.

The article speaks approvingly of the "preserved sections of old cities of Europe" while bemoaning what it sees as "the decline of



and 10th Gurkhas because they were the Limbus, Rais and Gurungs, who were thought to have superior "martial qualities".

There is another point worth mentioning. The Tripartite Agreement does not provide for the deployment of Gurkhas in service of parties

Patan's living culture." On the contrary, I would like to suggest that Patan's rapid changes are precisely the characteristics of a "living culture" while the "preserved" portions of European cities are usually sterile enclaves rigidly controlled by city codes. Historic neighbourhoods turn into showcases for the rich, who only can afford to maintain the beautiful, though cumbersome, old buildings. Preservation is what can all-too-often kills "living culture".

A 'living' city is one that functions in its contemporary context. Yet the article laments new concrete buildings and retail establishments and the changes in economic and social patterns. The author seems to be critical of people who, due to new lifestyles and expectations, have "foresaken their compact, traditional inner-settlements to live as suburbanites." Yet, is it really so reprehensible that educated young Patan residents would rather get a "prestigious" government, university or service sector job than follow "the family's calling"? In the modern context, is it undesirable (if so, for whom?) that many former farming families or those previously involved in crafts now operate retail shops or engage in land speculation? Is it justifiable to lament the passing of a handloom industry in which women were paid 10 paisa per yard? Even if the industry were revived, would Patan residents wish to dress in handloom fabrics?

Cities reflect the social, economic and political patterns that exist within them. Thus to argue that the Patan city-scape should remain unchanged (or be preserved) is to deny that life in late 20th century Nepal has changed. Unlike their great grandparents, today's Patan residents are likely to work *individually* to make *money*, not as a family or caste *group* to make *products*. They are engaged in a monetised economy where their subsistence depends on wage labour and commodity purchases.

For many reasons, a young Patan resident is likely to make demands of his city that his ancestors never did. Today a wide range of goods and services need to be conveniently located. At the same time, outside jobs and daily schedules weaken links with the neighborhood, making community *pujas* and rituals more difficult to patronise and less immediately relevant. Indeed, in this changed context, city residents are likely to have very different notions of desirable public and private spaces, thus the migration to the suburbs with their single family dwellings and walled compounds.

New building styles reflect new needs, new life-styles and new patterns of commerce. History happens. Socio-cultural patterns change. As Bhutan is discovering, trying to stop this change is like trying to stop a river. You may be able to halt movement for a while in one place, but eventually it will burst out somewhere else, often with violent results.

I am not saying that Nepalis and others should be unconcerned with the preservation of Nepali culture and built environments. Nepal should and will have its versions of the United States' Colonial Williamsburg, or France's Carcassonne. Nepalis will likely reach the necessary level of alienation, cultural objectification and nostalgic longing needed to erect these memorials to the past. However, the verb to *preserve* implies a kind of death. When we preserve a living thing, we halt its growth and development. It dies.

The article's call for preservation is very important, yet equating change with the *death* of Patan's culture is a condescending and subtly violent act. For better or worse, richer or poorer, more beautiful or ugly, Patan, like the rest of Nepal, is a rapidly changing place. As the author points out, "Education, radio, television and exposure to the 'modern world' outside" are prime factors in generating this change. To ignore the changing world that Patanites live in, or worse yet, to deny people the right to participate in that world, is not just.

Mark F. Liechty  
Lalitpur

## SARDA CANAL

The May/June 1991 issue on "Troubled Waters" was very interesting. It had not been possible earlier to find such good material on Himalayan water all in one place. You have presented a good exposition of the Sarda Canal, on which there is also another, devastating, angle. One does not know what were the benefits derived from the Canal, but vast tracts of good agricultural land have been destroyed by water-logging. There is a lot of talk nowadays on micro-hydropower. For the first time, *Himal* has presented its practical aspects.

Anupam Mishra  
Gandhi Peace Foundation  
New Delhi

## SULTANA DAKU

With reference to the leaflet which you have reprinted under your "Voices" column (July/August 1991), let me clarify some points. Firstly, there are more than 140 engineers in the Department of Irrigation, and they are all fully occupied within the organisational framework and cannot be said to be sitting idle.

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### Back Issues of *Himal*:

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?
3	4	Blue	Nov/Dec 1990	Hill Poverty
4	1	Purple	Mar/Apr 1991	Tibetan Diaspora
4	2	Grey	May/June 1991	Troubled Waters
4	3	Orange	July/Aug 1991	Nepalis in Foreign Uniform

Under the Department's Sector Programmes financed by ADB (Manila), medium to small surface irrigation systems are taken up only on the demand of beneficiary farmers. The size of the project and scope of work does not warrant expert services to prepare reports. The Department has thought it proper to develop the capability of local consulting firms and to generate more employment within the private sector. This is the only way to minimise the use of expatriate consultant services. While there should be healthy growth of local consulting firms, however, the practice of officials in decision-making positions operating such firms must be stopped.

If the Department started to do everything by itself, its size would go out of proportion. Besides, the time frame for the implementation of the Sector Programmes entails a heavy construction schedule, which the District Irrigation Offices would have difficulty fulfilling. During the discussion with the ADB mission recently in Kathmandu, it was decided to upgrade the terms of reference for making studies more comprehensive in the future. The reports made by the consulting firms in the first year were in conformity with the then terms of reference.

The regional directors in the Central Region and Eastern Region should concentrate on implementing the programme schedule and not try to do everything by themselves without the help of consultants. The charge of unethical activities is not supported by the facts. Engineers sitting in responsible positions should not care for outdated 'Sultana Daku ethics' but try instead to follow engineering ethics, which includes not making absurd and irresponsible charges.

M.D.Karki

Ex-Director General

Department of Irrigation

Kathmandu

### MINIMALIST ARCHITECTURE

The views stated by Ambika Adhikari in "A Choice of Housing" (July/August 1991) are most opportune. In the shadow of Kathmandu's beautiful architectural heritage, we Nepali architects have been contributing to the creation of an architectural vocabulary which may be termed 'minimalist' in its true sense: minimum ideas, thought and design input. We have contributed to the rapid conversion of Kathmandu Valley into a progressively unlivable place. Never in the history of mankind has so much architectural degradation been wrought by so few in so short a time!

I believe that there exist certain departments under His Majesty's Government, one for Housing and one for Town Planning. There are also three Nagar Palikas in the three towns of the valley where building plans are 'passed' after monetary transactions take place, most often at the nearest restaurant.

The truth is that it is still not too late for Kathmandu. It could easily still become a fantasy valley of parks and gardens, architectural masterpieces, and houses for the people which are comfortable and worthy of pride. We might consider recreating splendid of our traditional heritage in present-day settings: spacious Malla Darbars as shopping arcades, regal Rana palaces as office spaces, stylised row housings for apartment blocks and condominiums, and lawns and gardens for children's play.

Rather than discussing the quantum of professional fees and involvement of expatriate consultants, architects should band together with other professionals and take up the immediate formulation of a comprehensive Town and Physical Planning Act, as well as building by-laws and codes. Their implementation should be with the full participation of Government, professionals and lay persons. To save Kathmandu Valley, we must act individually, collectively and immediately.

Narendra Pradhan

Kathmandu

### BABBLER BABBLE

Information relating to the Spiny Babbler (Nov/Dec 1990) is misleading. The reported research is a bundle of fabrication. The results thus hatched are not acceptable on the following grounds.

After Hodgson's first report on the Spiny Babbler in 1836, it was not reported for 112 years because naturalists searched places where it did

Species are limited to geographical boundaries because of habitat suitability and physical barriers. How could a bird species occurring in diverse geographical regions limit their populations within political boundaries?

Detailed study is required to ascertain 'primitive' status of a species, based on anatomical and physiological study. To trace phylogenetic affinities to 'relict' assemblage of species, I suggest investigations like protein-sequence analysis and chromosomal banding, among other things. In conservation biology, 'primitive' is assumed in a species when a low genetic variability is determined within populations of the same species throughout its range. I am sure that the researcher quoted by *Himal*, Dr. Tej Kumar Shrestha, did not look into these vital parameters.

Successful hatching of Babbler eggs in captivity suggests that the bird is adaptive to a wide range of environments. I agree with Dr. Shrestha that the species is common in degraded shrublands. In Nepal, many forest areas have degraded into shrublands, and more shrubland habitat means more babblers. Therefore, I do not see the need to be concerned about its potential to breed in captivity.

Dr. Shrestha is quoted as stating that males and females of the species have strong bonding (monogamy) and that separation or death of one partner causes death of the other. Elsewhere, Dr. Shrestha has written that males and females pair only in the breeding season and that a male may associate with one or two females. How was

'sorrow' (his words) in birds determined and quantified? Also, why should a male die in sorrow when there is a second female?

There is no point in lamenting that foreigners did not study the hatching of Babbler eggs. There are foreign researchers and expatriates who have spent their lifetimes enhancing our knowledge about the natural history of Nepal. It is utterly untrue to say that they desire a good reputation at lightning speed. What about this Babbler story if it is not an attempt to get instant publicity?

Because we are supposed to be delivering science to the people, any work should be able to stand the test of quality and facts. The report on the Spiny Babbler stuck out like a sore thumb in your reputed magazine.

Pralad B. Yonzon

Kathmandu

The above letter arrived more than a year late in our mailbox, but we believe that it retains relevance for our readers. - editors



not occur and not because it is rare as is claimed. As for the 'endemic' status of the bird, the Inskippes have clearly demonstrated in their book *A Field Guide to Birds of Nepal* that it occurs in all geographical regions of Nepal, from Makalu (north) to Kailali (south), Taplejung (east) and Baitadi (west). A map in the book clearly shows that a Spiny Babbler specimen was collected in Indian territory near the western border of Nepal, and additional sightings occurred in the area.

## Mercenaries and Marx

With reference to your issue on "Nepalis in Foreign Armies" (July/Aug 1991), when young men are forced by their economic and social situation to join foreign armies to earn money, then these people are mercenaries. Bilateral agreements and decrees by the United Nations cannot change history, even if they lend it a guise of legitimacy while it is taking place. In the retrospect of history, even national armies, consisting for the most part of the poor and oppressed masses of nations, have generally served interests of ruling classes antagonistic to their own.

The army of pre-independence India was obviously a colonial army serving metropolitan interests including bankers, industrialists, planters and merchants. In contrast, the Gurkhas recruited by the army were mostly the sons of rural peasants and tenant farmers. These peasant lads joined the colonial army in order to earn some money so they could relieve their difficult economic conditions and gain a little independence in their own country. However, the colonial interests employing them were from those committed to destroying the independence and autonomy of people, especially artisans and peasants, throughout the Indian Sub-Continent. Obviously, as one of these groups, the Gurkha recruits were going against their own interests. They were serving the expansion of planters, industrialists, merchants and financiers. As soldiers in the contemporary Indian army, the position of Gurkha recruits is at least as ambiguous.

The Settlement of 1947 between the British and Indian governments (and Independence) handed centralised power over a fragmented people to, on the one hand, businessmen in intimate alliance with Euro-American corporate interests, and on the other, the "bureaucratic-military ruling class". The goal of both groups in concentrating control over means of production and labour is clearly contradictory to the interests of small agricultural producers, such as which the Gurkha recruits are drawn from.

Obviously, it is a terrible contradiction for Nepalis to serve as mercenaries, but it does no good just to blame other countries, "capitalists", or "bureaucrats", as though these entities and individuals are engaged in some sort of conspiracy against Nepalis. Conspiracy theories prevent us from reflecting upon how we participate in and perpetuate our problems or from finding a solution to them within ourselves. If the rural people of Nepal are being forced into jobs as mercenaries (to say nothing of watchmen, manual labourers and prostitutes), the question should address what is driving them from their villages and how can we change the situation at home. Especially with the strong political interests in the

continuation of Gurkha recruitment in India, mere legislative solutions will be ineffective.

The logical starting point is to ask why these people are unable to find sufficient employment at home. Human labour power is the source of all wealth; we are told that the country is poor, yet there is no place for the country's own workers. Since the time of Prithivi Narayan Shah, it has been true that a surplus is being produced from the land, but the peasant is unable to retain sufficient amounts to make a proper subsistence. Down through the years, there was increasing unemployment of labour in the countryside and greater need for alternative sources of income. Gurkha mercenaries played a major role in this process in addition to their role as military manpower for the imperialists.

Supporters of continued Gurkha recruitment often eulogize military service and claim that it makes "men out of boys" and productive development workers out of soldiers. However, in the hills of Nepal, one sees little significant impact due to Gurkha soldiers. The ethic of military service is towards individual enrichment, leading to a tendency of recruits to further their personal and familial situation and not of the community generally. If they are able to accumulate significant savings, the tendency is to establish themselves as absentee landlords in the village and migrate to the roadsides and urban centres such as Pokhara, Narayanghat and Butwal. Retired officers who extol the virtues of recruitment generally talk of personal benefits they gained from military service and not what is good for the community.

One has to ask, for example, why a village such as Barpak, with a population of 11,000, among them many ex-Gurkhas, did not have its own high school till mid 1980s, while a mercantile town such as Bandhipur constructed a high school in 1951. This is

not to say that merchants have a universal social consciousness, but they do have a consciousness befitting their class. Gurkha recruitment, on the other hand, does not provide a class consciousness, and military service is generally designed to prevent the development of any sort of such class consciousness, indeed it seeks to outright repress it.

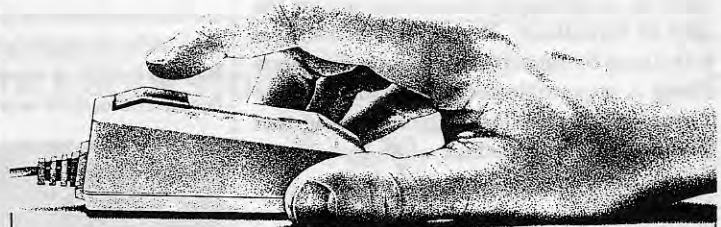
Jamuna Shrestha  
Stephen Mikesell  
Kathmandu

Readers are invited to comment, criticise or add to information and opinions appearing in *Himal*. Letters should be short and to the point, and may be edited.

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## Defending Arun-3

The Nepal Electricity Authority wishes to clarify certain misinformation and misconceptions which appeared in *Himal* ("Troubled Waters", July/August 1991). It was written that the World Bank has been preventing investigation of other projects without its prior approval as per its Power Sub-Sector Efficiency Project (PSEP). This is clearly not the case as can be supported by the fact that the upgrading of Kali Gandaki 'A' Project and feasibility study of the Upper Arun projects are both being conducted now. That the World Bank has demonstrated its good intentions to assist in the development of hydropower in a big way is clear from the fact that it is assisting in the feasibility study and investigation of mega-projects such as Chisapani, Karnali and Pancheswar. The 1989 pre-feasibility study of the Upper Karnali was also financed by the Bank, and under the PSEP, it is ready to finance the rehabilitation of Trisuli-Devighat projects.

An impression is given that in the 1990 updated Least Cost Generation Expansion Plan (LCGEP) study, attempts have been made to boost the rating of Arun-3 by penalising other alternative projects by 25 to 30 per cent. As any student of engineering should know, it is standard engineering practice to put a physical contingency varying from 10 to 30 percentage points in civil works, depending upon the level, accuracy and detail of the study made. In the case of the LCGEP exercise, projects were divided into four categories: projects in detail engineering stage, projects in feasibility stage, projects in feasibility

stage with inadequate investigations, and the projects in prefeasibility stage. The physical contingencies adopted varied from 10 to 30 per cent. Thus, even for projects like Arun-3 with detailed engineering and extensive field investigation, the physical contingency of 10 per cent in the civil works was applied. In the case of Sapta Gandaki Project, physical contingency of 20 per cent was applied in civil costs, which was more than justified taking into account the less than adequate investigation that had been done for this project. In the case of electro-mechanical equipment, the physical contingency adopted for all other projects was 10 per cent whereas for Arun-3 it was five per cent. It is highly improper to say that the allowance for physical contingency is "a guesswork and having no scientific justification."

NEA would also like to make it clear that the cost estimate of Arun-3 is adopted as a guide cost to define the unit rates because of the simple reason that these are based on a detailed analysis of most recent prices of construction material, labour, equipment, etc. However, these unit rates are modified to take into account the nature of different projects.

It has been the declared intention of the Authority to provide cheap energy to the Nepali people by implementing cost-effective projects. Hence, it is but natural for it to look for the best alternative to achieve this objective. It does not believe in the policy of exporting the energy in cheap price and at the same time selling it at higher price to domestic consumers.

Both the export and domestic scenarios have been studied in the LCGEP study. In both

these scenarios, the combination of Arun-3 as a next additional project to the system was proved to be the least cost option. In the First Donors' Meeting held in May-June 1989, the donors endorsed the project as now conceived which concentrates all civil investments in the first stage, thereby providing more flexibility to its design in meeting the projected load growth. The donors also recommended that until the position of the viability of power export is clarified, only four units (producing 268 MW) be installed initially; the timing of commissioning of the other two units would be linked to the system load growth. And that is precisely why the Arun-3 project has the flexibility of developing in two equally attractive stages.

The NEA has the declared intention of running its organisation on a commercial basis. Proper measures are in the offing towards introducing private sector oriented administration and management. But at the same time, it is the considered view of the Authority that pragmatism should be adopted in terms of the financial and physical capabilities of the private sector in this field of water resources development. NEA welcomes the contribution of private sector in developing Nepal's hydropower. However, as the national utility, NEA must be able to count on effective project implementation — effective in terms of time and cost. The Authority cannot be comfortable with a decade-long implementation schedule for adding a negligible generating capacity to its system.

*Megh Raj Upadhyaya*  
Director, Evaluation and Monitoring  
NEA, Kathmandu

## More On Arun-3

With reference to the debate on Arun-3, the 'planners and implementers' of our country have misled all of us with equivocal information regarding our hydropower potential and its development. The past Panchayat Government failed to work out a pragmatic expansion/implementation programme for hydropower development and instead promoted only the Arun-3 project, based on only the LCGEP as recommended by a handful of persons in 1990. There was no effort to consider other options. Interestingly, even the national Water and Energy Commission was never provided with copies of the Arun-3 studies, nor was its opinion solicited.

Having read the LCGEP carefully, let me point out some of my findings. Much of the data and information used for the evaluation of projects which were competing with Arun-3 are false. For example, the geo-technical data of the Sapta-Gandaki are improperly presented. The calculation of the Haulage Distances of all non-

Arun-3 projects are also faked. LCGEP says the haulage of construction material for the Sapta-Gandaki project is more than for Arun-3, easily ignoring the fact that for the latter you have to build a 200 km road.

In order to make other projects less attractive, the unit costs of major items like "mass concrete" and excavation have been inflated and manipulated. The implementing schedule for other candidate projects are designed in such a way that none of them could be commissioned before Arun-3, a fact which is patently absurd because of the long road that has first to be built upto the site. Arbitrary multiplying factors ranging from 1.1 to 1.3 are used in the cost estimates for the candidate projects without any scientific justification.

Another point: the LCGEP shows that the Upper Arun project is more attractive than Arun-3, yet this project has been scheduled to be taken up after Arun-3. Why, if it is so attractive, not do the Upper Arun first? Further, there is no reasonable justification for the LCGEP's conclusion that uneconomical 200 MW thermal power plants

are required to be installed in place of any other medium-sized hydropower project before commissioning of Arun-3.

It seems clear that the LCGEP's conclusions were tailor-made to present a 'No Option' situation to the pet project that was Arun-3. In the past, there were problems with the selection of Kulekhani and Marsyangdi projects as well, but the LCGEP's choice of Arun-3 is a mistake that can still be corrected. Meanwhile we must understand how the 'No Option' situation came about and identify those responsible. We must also immediately work out a sensible hydropower expansion generation plan. Otherwise, we might have to begin lighting candles at night for all the viable projects that have been side stepped because of problematic documents like LCGEP.

*Rishi Shah*  
(Hydropower Engineer)  
Lalitpur

To make space for discussion of other important issues in these columns, we ask those who are interested to continue dialogue on Arun-3 to please consider direct correspondence. - editors



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# Daughters, Wives and Mothers

by Rina Gill

**A**lmost ten years ago, I asked several women one simple question: IF you had a choice, what would you choose to be reborn as? Nine out of ten times, the answer was, "A man". I doubt very much whether the response would be any different today. Years of social conditioning erode at a woman's perception of herself. She is taught that she is physically, emotionally and intellectually inferior and, therefore, undeserving of any care and consideration. The little she receives by way of food, clothing and shelter is considered a privilege for which she is expected to pay by contributing her (non-wage) labour to the family. She learns to become passive and resigned to her fate.

That the root of this problem lies in infancy and childhood is an accepted fact. As reported in *The Lesser Child*, from the day of her birth, a girl is viewed as a burden and a liability. The obsession for sons cuts across all barriers of class, caste and religion, and determines the amount and quality of investment that parents make in their female children. More often than not, girls are physically and emotionally deprived of the family's affection and resources. The web of prejudices that a girl child encounters rob her of both her individuality and her dignity.

Let us analyze the factors that influence the woman's concept of herself. In infancy and early childhood, the girl's primary contact is within her family. It is at her mother's or grandmother's knee that she is first introduced to the collective wisdom of her culture through its lullabies, songs and folklore. Most often, each of these reinforces the concept of male superiority and the inherent qualities of the male child. The family's behaviour and interaction only reinforce these views. As she grows older, the girl's contact is extended to the community which acts as a larger patriarchal unit and reaffirms the traditional, male-dominated, norms and ideologies. If she is lucky, she might even be allowed to enrol in school. Here again, the teachers encourage conformity with the patriarchal value system and the text-books extol the virtues of brave and chivalrous male heroes and meek and submissive females.

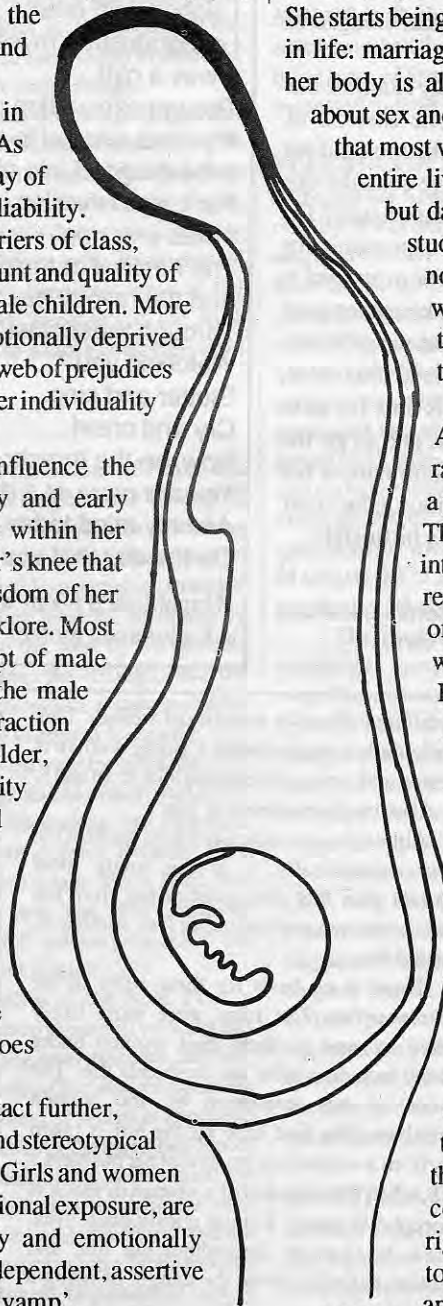
If and when the girl extends her contact further, she has to contend with the discriminatory and stereotypical images of females portrayed by the media. Girls and women are either invisible or when given the occasional exposure, are depicted as being socially, economically and emotionally dependent. The infrequent portrayals of independent, assertive women are usually those of the celluloid 'vamp'.

The girl reaches puberty. She needs to be joyfully introduced to the fact of her physical maturing and prepared for the blossoming of her sexuality. Instead, the adolescent girl is locked away in a darkened room, prevented from seeing sunlight, isolated from most human contact, and forbidden to read, listen to music, or do anything which might relieve the tension, confusion and terror of the first menstruation. From now on, she is asked to cover herself, and rigid rules of modesty are suddenly clamped on her. Outside contact, especially with unrelated males, is strongly discouraged. She starts being readied for what is considered her ultimate purpose in life: marriage and child-bearing. Curiosity or discussion about her body is almost totally forbidden. Fundamental knowledge about sex and sexuality is taboo. Is it any surprise, then, to learn that most women, after reaching their adulthood, and for their entire lives, are unable to identify themselves as anything but daughters or wives or mothers? That post-graduate students from upper-middle class families have no notion about family planning methods? That educated women die at the hands of illegal abortionists because they are too scared to discuss their pregnancies with their families?

As an adult, if a woman happens to belong to the ranks of the disadvantaged and the poor, she becomes a prime "beneficiary" for the development agencies. The involvement of women is currently considered an integral part of every project and each document religiously carries mention of the critical importance of women in the development process. Donors vie with one another to fund women-focused projects. But witness some of the reasons articulated for justifying the emphasis on women:

- \* Female literacy: Educate a man and you will educate an individual. Educate a woman and you will educate a family (or even a nation).
- \* Income generation: Men most often spend their extra income on themselves, whereas women use their income to buy food for the family and improve the quality of life of their children.
- \* Maternal health and nutrition: Healthier mothers have healthier babies.

Noble causes and intentions. But where is the focus on the woman, except inasmuch as she is seen either as a womb to bear children or as an instrument to rear them? Once again, what we are reinforcing is the traditional belief that a woman's worth does not come from being herself, an individual in her own right, but from the degree to which she can be of use to others (her children, her family, her community and her nation).



'KUNDA

We all agree that unless women become a priority in health, nutrition and education, there can never be Health for All, or Education for All, or any form of social justice. The focus on women must become an integral part of all our development programmes. However, unless we attack the root cause of the problem, our efforts run the risk of being short-lived and rejected by communities at large.

Before we can expect a woman to make the most of the opportunities and services provided for her, we need to ensure that she has enough self-esteem to believe that she actually deserves what is being offered. Without that conviction, she will neither actively pursue nor be able to fully participate in any opportunity that comes her way. Any development project that aims at providing services for women must, therefore, include the building of self-esteem as an integral part of its project objectives and activities. Development programmes must aim at changing the centuries-old attitudes which perpetuate negative and stereotypical images of women.

Perhaps the first step should be for us to critically examine our own attitudes towards girls and women. The public rhetoric of seminars and workshops is all too often forgotten the moment we step out of the meeting halls. But in actual fact, do we consider our own sons and daughters to be of equal status and importance? Do we have the same code of conduct and hopes and aspirations for them? Or do we, too, feel that the end of the road for every girl is to be married and to bear children? We would make rather poor advocates if we do not truly believe in the cause that we promote.

It is time that the woman started being considered important, as an individual who mattered in her own right. It is time for us to stop treating her as a passive recipient of services, and to go the extra mile to ensure that she becomes an active determinant of her own future: a person who demands good health, nutrition, education, and above all, equal status, not as privilege but as a birth-right. ▽

Rina Gill is a film maker and presently is chief of the Communications Section of UNICEF/Nepal. These opinions are her own.

## The Festival

I remember the day the doctor nodded and confirmed  
your arrival  
How happy I was, how contented!  
I felt you grow inside me  
With every twist and turn, with every kick,  
My heart squeezed with joy, and did its own jig!  
I longed for a girl,  
I wanted a daughter, a living doll to call my own.  
Through a veil of pain...  
numbed by excitement  
I laboured for your arrival.  
Then with a push you slipped through  
A wet, pink and slippery bundle of joy.  
I sighed with relief.  
I congratulated myself.  
It was a girl!  
Though exhaustion claimed my body  
My mind refused to cooperate,  
to be drugged into oblivious sleep.  
For it was revelling in its own carnival  
It was enjoying  
The Festival of the Coming of the Daughter!  
And the revelry has continued unabated  
Through these past twelve years  
Watching you  
Stutter and sing,  
Cry and crawl...  
Now, on the threshold of womanhood,  
You are more of a daughter than ever before.  
And my mind today still sings with joy as it did  
On the day that you were born a dozen years ago.  
  
(Unpublished poem written on the birthday of her daughter by  
a Kathmandu mother who wishes to remain unnamed.)

## The Symbolic Colour Red

by Prativa Pandey

The all-powerful colour red that symbolises *Saubhagya* or good luck in the Hindu context makes a distinction between the 'haves' and 'have-nots' among women.

Upon her husband's demise, the Hindu widow is supposed to discard everything that is red. The red Tika, red Sindoor and red coloured clothes which she used to proudly wear are taken away from her. She is made to stand out in a crowd — a subject of pity, the 'unfortunate *bidhawa*'.

What has the woman done to deserve this fate? A woman suffers enough when her life-partner dies without having the need to

look different from the majority of women. This is particularly poignant when a young woman is widowed and is now expected to look drab and is denied the brighter colours of life.

Although not wearing red does not hurt the widow economically, it is the single most important item that distinguishes her from the rest of the women and makes her feel, somehow, inauspicious.

There is no basis for these rules in the Hindu *shastras*. The rules were most likely decreed by men to keep their women under control, including after the husbands die. The practice is now continued by the women themselves. The first time all the red is taken away from a woman is at the time of her husband's death, when the tendency of a woman in shock is to accept everything without questioning. This, then, is to continue throughout her life, and deviation will only invite the danger of being a

social outcast, particularly when she needs society's help the most.

Women have to begin changing attitudes and practices. A widow should be encouraged to wear 'red' by family and friends. At the same time, the significance of the colour red should be de-emphasised by women by wearing it less often, particularly on occasions like weddings and religious festivals. Are more drastic measures needed to make changes? Should the Hindu practice of getting red *sindoor* from the husband at the time of the wedding be changed with the idea that what was not given by the husband cannot be taken away when the husband is gone? Should married women stop wearing *sindoor* and the red *tika* altogether so they don't flaunt their 'have husbandness' at the 'have-nots'?

P. Pandey is a physician.

# Of Kali Born

## Women, Violence and the Law

*Male perception of women and female sexuality as the property of men is one reason for violence against women. The law is mute. 'Shame' keeps many women from speaking up for their rights.*

by Radhika Coomaraswamy

**K**ali is the Goddess of Retributive Justice. If you interview women who go to Kali with their problems and ask them why they do not find redress in a court of law, they look bewildered. The goddess would understand their problems, but a court of law...

Adrienne Rich, the well-known feminist poet writes:

Throughout patriarchal mythology, dream symbolism, theology, language, two ideas flow side by side: one that the female body is impure, corrupt, the site of discharges, bleedings, dangerous to masculinity, a source of moral and physical contamination, "the devil's way". On the other hand, as mother, the woman is beneficent, sacred, pure, asexual, nourishing, and the physical potential for motherhood — that same body with its bleedings and mysteries — is her single destiny and justification in life. In order to maintain two such notions, each in its contradictory purity, the masculine imagination has had to divide women, to see us, and force us to see ourselves, as polarised into good and evil, fertile and barren, pure or impure.

The law is no exception. This is particularly evident in the approach of law to violence against women. The chaste virgin or mother has to be protected...the impure, independent woman has to be shamed. This dichotomy of perception will help us understand many of the law's attitudes and many of the reasons why the law has failed to give redress to women who are victims of violence.

Women are singled out for violent treatment for a variety of reasons. First, because of her sexuality and gender, she is subject to rape, female circumcision or genital mutilation, female infanticide, and sex-related crimes. These are fundamentally connected to a society's construction of female sexuality and its role in social hierarchy. Second, a woman is subject to violence because of her relationship to a man, domestic violence, dowry deaths, sati, crimes of honour, etc. These are animated by a society's concept of woman as the property and dependant

of a male protector, first her father and then her husband. Thirdly, violence is directed against women because of the social group to which they belong. In times of war, riots, class and caste violence, women are victims of violence and rape because to rape a woman is to humiliate her community. Again, this is linked to male perceptions of female sexuality and the woman as the property of another man. To attack *her* is to betray your enemy's vulnerability.

Now what does the law do about these categories of violence against women? The answer is precious little. One of the main reasons is the private-public distinction which pervades all aspects of the law. "A man's home is his castle" — this slogan must have been written by a male lawyer, for the law treads very carefully in private homes. "The sanctity of the family," another slogan, is a very real obstacle in the case of women and violence. The basic assumption behind this approach is that what happens in the home is a private affair and the law should only intervene if it becomes a public nuisance — such as when a woman screams hysterically through the night when her husband is beating her up, depriving her neighbours of sleep.

### RAPE, VIOLENCE

The purpose of this paper is to raise issues about the gaps in the law and its inadequacy to deal with many problems because of the nature of the legal assumptions and the structure of the judicial system. Rape is an area where various countries' laws have actually tried to intervene. But what happens when a rape case actually comes to court?

First, there is the general rule of the thumb — no injury, no rape. The woman who is being raped must show utmost resistance to the point of risking her life. Normally, unless the woman has clawed and maimed her assailant, she had better not bring her case to court.

Secondly, there is the "hierarchy of rape". If you are a girl under 18 who was a virgin and was raped by a man from a lower class or a minority race or caste group then you can be sure he will be convicted. But if you are an independent, lower class woman, middle-aged, raped by an acquaintance, then it is better that

you nurse your wounds at home. If, in any case, you have had past sexual experience and this has been with anyone except your husband, then of course the lawyer, the judge and the jury will be made to believe that you asked for it.

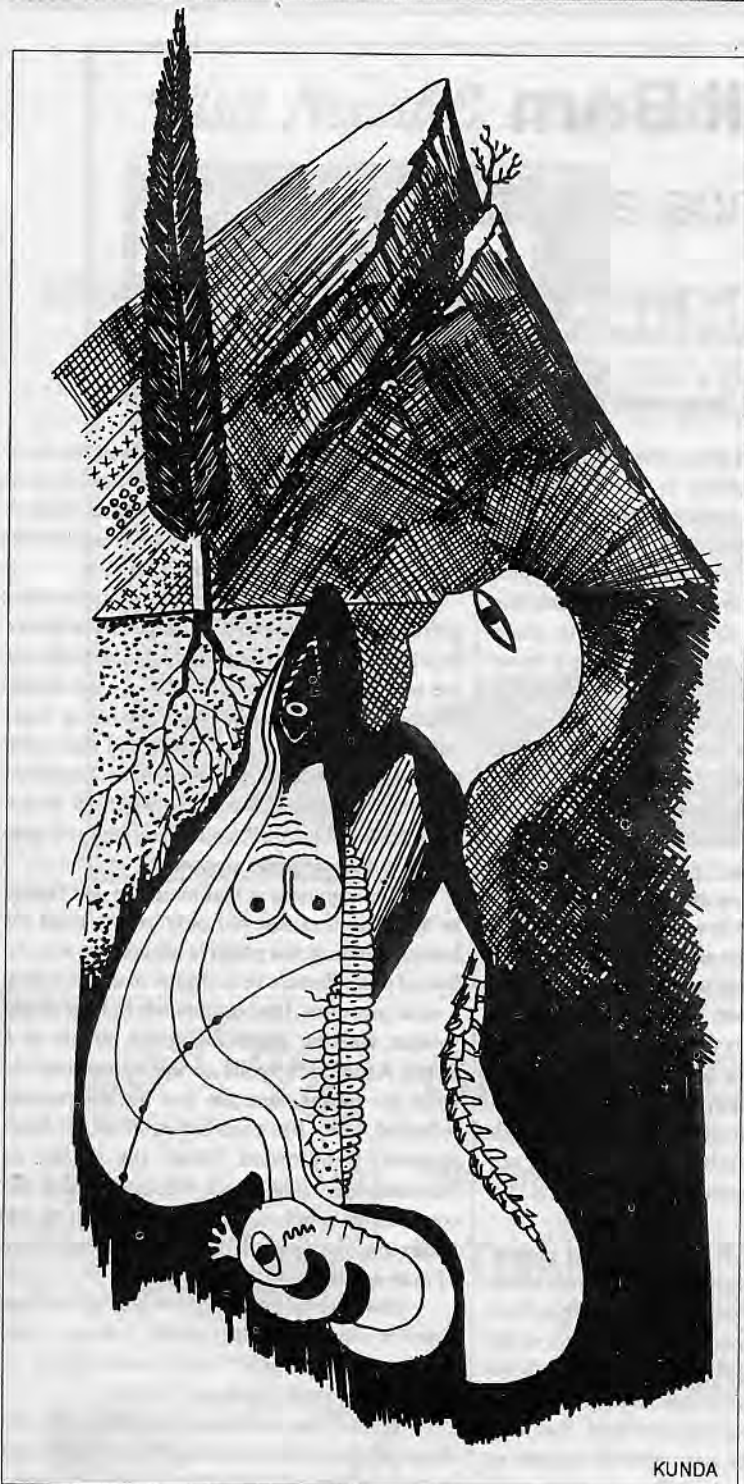
Rape is an area of the law where the state attempts to be interventionist but in actuality fails to give redress. Social and legal attitudes are the main reason for this failure — the shame attached to the crime prevents reporting, legal attitudes with regard to consent and resistance prevent conviction. There has been much research into this aspect and Susan Brownmiller in her book *Against Our Will*, a historical study of rape, attempts to give some answers.

Her argument is that marriage and family as an institution rest not only on the need for human bonding, the positive aspect, but also the fear of rape. Female fear of rape makes her seek a male protector. One only needs to be a young woman walking alone along the streets of a South Asian metropolis to know instinctively what she means. And the law has historically reflected this. Brownmiller studies in detail ancient Babylonian Law, the Code of Hammurabi, right up to Blackstone, and she comes to the conclusion that rape entered the law books through the back door as a property crime of man against man.

Having explored an area where the law has dared to intervene, only to fail, let us go into another area where law enforcement is particularly timid: domestic violence.

Police, law enforcement authorities and the courts do not like to enforce the law of assault in cases of domestic violence. Cases chronicled in the United States show how when police officers come to the home to take the husband away, the wife often switches sides when she realises that her male protector is about to be charged in the courts. For reasons of economics, dependence and children, wives are reluctant to go the full length of the adversarial process which judicial systems envisage.

In that sense, the Anglo-American system of justice appears to be particularly unsuited for crimes of domestic violence. The reluctance of police officers to enter the domestic arena, the reluctance of wives to enter the adversarial process



and see their husbands sentenced, all complicate the legal and judicial proceedings.

### CULTURE, ETHNICITY

In addition to the crimes of rape and domestic violence, which are common to all cultures, there are crimes of violence against women which are culture-specific. In Sri Lanka, we have been spared many of the horrors of North Indian Hindu cultures, such as Rajput *satis* and dowry deaths. Since many marriages among both Sinhalese and Tamils remain kinship-based, the

of the Rajputs.

Besides violence against women which is culture specific, South Asia is increasingly becoming an area for generalised violence of all kinds, especially ethnic, caste and class violence. In this context, whether they be riots or ethnic wars, women are often the first victims. The Bangladesh War served as a well-chronicled case-study of the extremities of this kind of violence. Various reports confirm that the number of Bangladeshi women raped during the war was 200,000 at the lowest estimate and 400,000 at the

extreme violence of North India has not occurred in Sri Lanka. In addition, the Buddhist influence on Sinhalese society may have mitigated against culture-specific types of violence. In any event, the question remains, how does the state respond without being accused of ethnic chauvinism and without flaming ethnic passions? When culture and ethnicity become tied up with violence against women, the problems become truly difficult.

For example, when Roop Kanwar committed *sati* in Rajasthan in 1987, the Women's Movement called a national rally of 25,000 women to protest. The next week, the Rajputs pulled out 500,000 to support *sati* and branded the Women's Movement as part of the cultural imperialism of the "Hindi Belt". Luckily, the lawmakers in Rajasthan and the Centre decided to outlaw *sati* for reasons beyond the immediate concerns

highest. Suicide rates among these victims were very high.

Bangladesh might have been an extreme case, but it is well-chronicled. However, throughout South Asia, there have been smaller wars, riots, settlement killings, minor insurgencies, etc. And the toll of violence against women as well as men is so high that it challenges the basic concepts of the right to life and dignity.

In times of war, the laws are silent. There can be no legal recourse, except after the fact. Increasingly, women are beginning to feel that they cannot wait till men, either on behalf of the state or some violent non-state actor, acquire a sense of ethics and there is often spontaneous action against such incidents.

### SHAME

Finally, we come to shame. Anthropologists have in recent times separated societies into litigious societies and shame-oriented societies. Litigious societies are those in which rights are forcibly vindicated in the courts or in the political process. Shame-oriented societies have a parallel code to the legal system which conditions responses in certain areas of social life.

There is no doubt that in the arena of women and violence, shame is an important component. It prevents women from disclosing the truth and therefore, prevents vindication of their rights under *any* legal system, no matter how progressive it may be in content and form. How does one tackle shame, for it runs deep in societies such as ours?

Shame will always stand in the way of progress, and unless the community and the family become support bases, it is unlikely that it will disappear from our social life. A woman who is raped, violated or maimed brings shame upon herself and her family. Many in our traditional societies believe that the rape victim did not have the spiritual power to ward off the evil. Because woman is seen as a spiritual centre, violence in the family is an aspect of her failure to gain divine blessings. So the silence. As Yasmin Gooneratne recounts in a poem:

Betrayed by life into a loveless chamber  
 O may my twitching hands that touch  
 and pleasure nothing,  
 my shaken gaze  
 leaping from emptiness to emptiness  
 and my body, shrivelling quietly besides  
 the aching cavern  
 where my soul stood,  
 never reveal that there has taken place  
 an act of violence.

R. Coomaraswamy is with the International Centre for Ethnic Studies in Colombo. This article formed part of a paper presented by her last March at a seminar on women and violence. Text Courtesy: *Law & Society Trust Review*.

# Counting Suicide

by Manisha Aryal

*International data on suicide indicate that, overall, more women attempt suicide than men. Numerous studies have proven that this has to do with the lower social, political, legal and economic status of women vis-a-vis men, as well as the societal expectation that women act restrained and submissive. When it is no longer possible to put up a brave front, some women are liable to take the extreme step of committing suicide.*

*The research carried out for this article was to study suicide among women in Nepal and to see if there was any unique trend that differentiated the 'suicide-status' of Nepali women from those elsewhere. The search for information proved elusive. Firstly, all across South Asia, suicide data are considered unreliable. This is compounded in Nepal by numerous practical hurdles faced by researchers in data collection and analysis. A general picture of the nation as a whole is difficult to formulate because of religious, cultural and ethnic diversity.*

Between July 1988 and April 1991, according to police records, 976 women took their own lives in Nepal. That, on average, at least one woman commits suicide every day in the country is worrisome. The mental anguish and psychological trauma which lead to such drastic action, cumulatively add up to an enormous national burden that must be addressed by researchers, social workers and the government.

Unfortunately, educated Nepalis who should be concerned are busy revelling in the tourist guidebook-influenced belief that all Nepalis, men and women, are psychologically stable. There is no government-mandated programme that takes a hard look at suicide figures and makes policy recommendations. Social organisations are too busy conducting sewing classes or organising symposia. The few psychiatrists, all Kathmandu-based, are too overburdened with individual (normally upper class) patients to be able to look at the nation.

According to the police records, during the last fiscal year (July 1989 - July 1990), there were 819 cases of suicide in the country. However, the poor collection and transmission of data lead to unlikely situations. If the police are to be believed, there were *no* suicides (male or female) in the entire Karnali Zone of western Nepal.

During the same period, Kathmandu Valley reported 115 suicides, which was 15 per cent of

the total suicides that presumably occurred across Nepal that fiscal year. Of the total reported female suicides, 16 percent were said to have occurred in Kathmandu.

There are experts, however, who question the validity of the police data. Says psychiatrist Dr. Nirakar Man Shrestha of the Mental Hospital in Kathmandu, "Even in the western context, because of social reasons and legal complications, only one-fourth of actual suicides get reported. The majority are written down as natural death." Dr. Shrestha believes that the Nepali figures cited above must be multiplied by four in order to attain a more realistic number.

## BIASES

Available suicide figures (as exemplified by the zero number for Karnali Zone) are not believable as there are too many biases in the acquisition of suicide data. Analysis based on such faulty information must be suspect.

One of these biases is the registering of murders as suicides. This is true, among others, in cases of dowry deaths in the Tarai. One social worker from Janakpur, in the Tarai, believes that the majority of deaths of young women by burning are listed in police records as suicides. This also works the other way around. He says local policemen are known to extort money by threatening to report a genuine suicide as murder.

While murders reported as suicides might lead to increased suicide data, they are more than offset by apparent suicides being reported as natural deaths. As a police inspector from Gorkha says, "If a woman is found at the bottom of a cliff, how do I know if she jumped off, was pushed off, or lost her balance while collecting fodder?"

Another Kathmandu-based police source, requesting anonymity, conceded that his department's data were so totally unreliable that it would be wrong to base any suicide-related study on them. "The name of the deceased might be there, but even that might have been changed by the family to avoid stigma. The age and ethnic background could be completely contrived as well. After all, the dead person's citizenship certificate is never asked for."

No study of suicide can afford to ignore cases of attempted suicide. This is especially important because, while the completed ("successful") suicides are dead and gone, attempted suicides live on, often as mental wrecks, some attempting suicide again and again. Unfortunately, the Nepali police does not keep data on attempted suicides.

According to international literature on suicide, attempted suicides are generally three times higher in females and completed ones three times higher in males. Interestingly, if the Nepali police data are to be believed, the male-female ratio of completed suicide came to about 10:9. We have no way of knowing what the gender-specific 'attempt rate' may be. Taking into account poisoning cases that were admitted into the four hospitals of Kathmandu valley (Bhaktapur, Bir, Teaching and Patan) and assuming were all suicide attempts, the male-female ratio comes to 10:17.

## POISONING IN KATHMANDU

While national data are more or less useless in studying incidence of suicider among women, there are at least a few medical professionals that have been studying the subject in Kathmandu. Collection of data on poisoning cases in Kathmandu hospitals showed that women attempt this method of suicide more often than men.

Cumulative Suicides for One Year (July 1989 — July 1990)

	Total	SEX			METHOD				
		Male	Female	Unstated	Hanging	Poisoning	Drowning	Others	Unknown
Nepal	819	460	355	4	512	214	49	38	6
Kathmandu	129	72	57	—	71	46	8	4	—

Dr. Bal Krishna Subedi and Dr. Bijayeswar Vaidya of Bir Hospital, for example, have studied 291 cases of deliberate self-poisoning admitted to the Bir Hospital emergency ward. They found attempting suicide by poisoning (mostly by swallowing insecticide or rodenticide) was highest among poorer families, and that 'marital disharmony' was the most common cause for attempting to take one's life. The 14 to 30 age group constituted 74 per cent of total suicide attempts, of which 28 per cent were males and 46 per cent were females. Out of the 291 cases, 71 attempts were made by housewives and 16 by girl students who had suffered a 'personal tragedy' (12 were male students).

A study by Dr. Himanshu R. Vaidya and Dr. Mark. D. Zimmerman, of 130 poisoning cases admitted to Patan Hospital over a period of 35 months (September 1988 to August 1991) showed that 58 per cent were women.

Psychiatrist Dr. M.K. Nepal says that according to his observations at the Teaching Hospital of Tribhuvan University, the number of female suicide attempts is increasing 'unbelievably'. The hospital data collected indicate that some 64 per cent of all poisoning cases were women.

In Nepal, suicide attempts by poisoning seems the most well recorded. There are, certainly, other methods, such as drowning, hanging and gunshot, the last being most common among men. More studies are required to understand the magnitude of completed and attempted suicides, as well as the proportional contribution of each of the various methods.

### LACK OF COUNSELLING

The fact that scores of women commit suicide in Kathmandu every year indicates the need for a concerted programme of counselling. Dr. Shrestha, a psychiatrist, says that psychological assessment is conducted in only one out of 500 cases of attempted suicide. The hospitals are ill-equipped to carry out such assessment. At the same time, he says, most patients and even many doctors lack the 'psychological sophistication' required to understand the nature of psychiatric problems and the need for cure. Even when the person who has attempted suicide gets referred to a psychiatrist, it is unlikely that the visit to a 'mind-doctor' is ever actually made.

A professor of psychology in a women's college in Kathmandu, who has been observing the impact of changing mores and new demands upon young city women, says that women are having difficulty coming to 'a point of compromise' between the values prescribed by traditional society and the demands of being 'modern', the definition of which eludes them. "On the one hand, there is society's stereotyping of the 'pure woman', and on the other, they are being asked to cope with too many changes, too soon." Unable to discuss matters with family or with friends, many young women are liable to take drastic action when confronted with a situation that is hard to cope with.

Sociologist Dyuti Baral believes that many suicide attempts are actually veiled calls for help. "If only there were mechanisms in society to help these young women, the majority would never take the final step," she says. Gauri Manandhar,

another psychologist who teaches at a girl's college in Kathmandu, says the time has come to start suicide prevention programmes and counselling organisations where women would be able to come and talk about the problems they face and support one another.

It is a senseless loss of life if a young woman takes her life just because she does not have someone to talk to. In another society, where support is available, she might actually never contemplate taking the extreme step. It is clear that in Nepal there will be more women attempting suicide in the future than have in the past, particularly in the expanding urban areas. The society must gear itself to meet the challenge, because every success will mean a life saved from senseless demise. Since the problem is clear, it does not really matter that the data are inadequate or faulty.

M. Aryal is a writer based in Kathmandu.

## Waking up to Sexuality

"Woe, Woe. The lingam is in the yoni" — an old Brahmanical lament.

The sexual revolution that breached the dam of Victorian sexual morality and unleashed the libidinous tides in the West in the 1960s also generated waves that have been lashing against cultural shores across the globe. But a quarter of a century and many faked orgasms later, sexual *nirvana* still remains an elusive goal in the land which gave the world *Kamasutra*.

For most 'respectable' Indians, including those living in metropolitan cities, their unmarried daughter still remains a mute thing within which the family's *izzat* resides. An unwed girl or woman is not a being, sexual or otherwise, in her own right, but the safe deposit vault of her tribe's honour. One unguarded moment with 'the devil' within her and the family is left with no face to face the world.

The problem apparently does not lie in the sexual act itself, or else, we wouldn't even be around to talk about it. Sex it seems, is fine; in fact, even essential. For how else is a woman to produce a son to keep her husband's family tree growing? But making love is not the same as *suhaag raat*, where armed with social sanction, secured through a blessing from the priest (for the conservative) or a certificate from the state (for the 'liberal minded'), the husband is authorised to force open the family vault the shy bride carries with her, never mind how he does it. By thus drawing blood, the man redeems the *izzat* of the bride's family and gains proof of his own manhood.

Sex thereafter is fine too, if the wife continues to let her husband, but nobody else, do 'it' to her. What the husband does with his wife is *his* business but no pre-marital or extra-marital sex, please! We are Indians. — from *The Sunday Observer*, Bombay, 25-31 August 1991.



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# The Invisible Female: Women of the UP Hills

*When studying the status of women in Garhwal and Kumaon, we must disentangle the realities from the myths, including those that have emerged from the Chipko Andolan. 'Development' has sidelined women even though they have formed the backbone of the subsistence agriculture of this region. The hill women are becoming more, not less, dependent upon their menfolk.*

by Manjari Mehta

Over the last two decades, the 'gender perspective' has become an accepted part of mainstream development thinking and rhetoric. However, in looking back over the experience of the hill districts of Uttar Pradesh, one is forced to conclude that women here remain 'invisible'. One reason the marginal status of women is being perpetuated seems to be the apparent reluctance at the policy level to learn from a wealth of empirical and conceptual insights about the gender implications of development efforts gained in other agro-ecological contexts. Policies that are made remain insensitive to women's contributions to the rural economy, their access to productive resources, and the constraints they face in performing their roles as agriculturalists and subsistence providers.

It was the 1975 United Nations International Conference on Women that brought women's issues to the forefront of governmental, academic and activist concern. Two parallel developments during the 1970s also injected a greater "gender sensitivity" to the study of Himalayan communities. The first was the recognition of the ecological and socio-economic crisis facing these mountain areas, which was reflected in over-exploitation of the natural resources, a widening gap between subsistence production and consumption requirements, increasing dependence on the external market economy and, alongside, increasing out-migration of males and the emergence of the 'money-order' economy.

The second development was, of course, the Chipko Andolan, a grassroots initiative at gaining

people's control over forests in pockets of the Uttar Pradesh hills. The fact that women were so often at the forefront of community organising in the Andolan highlighted their ability to mobilise to protect the sources of their subsistence livelihoods.

## CHANGING CONTEXTS

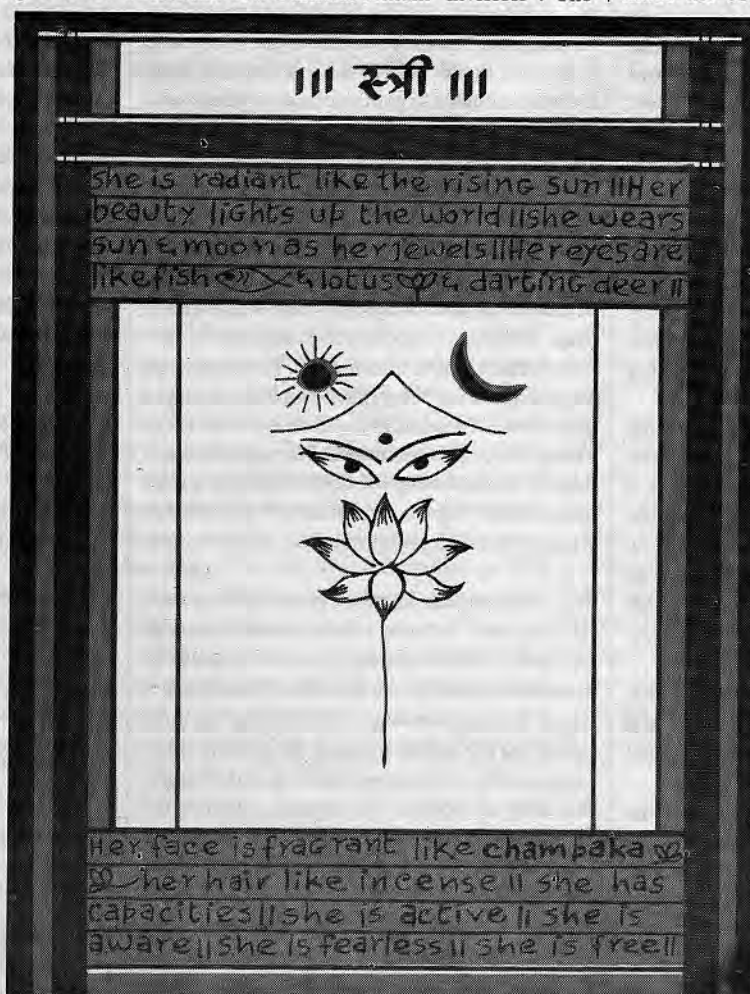
Given such abilities, why do the women of Kumaon and Garhwal remain 'invisible'? The

fault, in part, lies in the dominant images of the hill women that have shaped popular and official perceptions. Unlike Nepal, for which significant information exists, much of the knowledge on India's Central and Western Himalaya has, directly and indirectly, been informed by assumptions drawn from the Chipko experience.

The Chipko experience highlighted the ways in which environmental degradation has made the conditions of women's subsistence

work more arduous and less productive. It was because of their location in a specific sexual division of labour and because they were so susceptible to adverse changes in the available natural resources, that women were so receptive to the local-level collective action of Chipko.

This 'sexual division of labour'-level analysis informed three related assumptions about *pahari* women. Firstly, women were viewed as the primary exponents of traditional agriculture and the knowledge systems which form an integral part of subsistence livelihoods. They were thus seen as prominently 'conservationist'. Second, their roles as preservers and sustainers of the natural resource base were seen to imbue women with greater sensitivity which helps them to recognise the threats posed to their subsistence livelihoods. A third aspect of this is a gender dichotomy of interests which pitted women's subsistence and regenerative concerns against men's more commercially-oriented interests.



CHANDRAKALA SKILLS CENTRE, MADRAS.

Like all stereotypes, these images are accurate at the superficial level. The challenge emerges in disentangling the realities from the myths and recognising that many of these assumptions are highly subjective and are built upon a remarkably fragile empirical base. We must recognise that because the Chipko experience is itself located in a historically and regionally-specific context, it cannot adequately assist in analysing contemporary responses to processes of socio-economic and ecological change. This historical and regional specificity of the Chipko Andolan might explain why the potential for greater in-depth study of the changing contexts of mountain women's lives has remained unfulfilled, and a highly romanticised image of the female in Garhwal and Kumaon has got projected.

### MARGINALISATION

A partial explanation as to why the unrealistic and romantic conceptual lenses need early replacement might be the hill districts' changing relationship to the wider political economy. Since independence in 1947 and particularly over the past 20 years or so, mutually-reinforcing trends have given rise to new arenas of tension between different socio-economic groups and, although perhaps less visibly, between the sexes. The declining viability of local subsistence has forced hill households to become increasingly dependent on external markets for fulfilling consumer requirements. This tightening link to the market economy has been reinforced by 'development interventions', which have reshaped local production by making them more dependent on externally-acquired inputs, services, information and marketing outlets. The strategy adopted by households for domestic economic survival has been to become involved in income-generating activities in the off-farm sector.

This process of monetisation and the introduction of new values have led to the marginalisation of *pahari* women. There is a widening gap between their tremendous contribution to the agrarian economy and the low status that is accorded to them. Due to a complex web of 'structural' and cultural factors, women are unable to respond to opportunities the new rural economy brings with it.

Women's marginalisation is multi-faceted, and is reflected in their economic, social and political status within households and the community:

1. An inevitable aspect of monetisation of the rural economy is that money and items commanding an exchange-value have assumed greater importance relative to use-value items on which traditional subsistence practices were based. This differential valuation of what is monetised and what is, not also extends to the

tasks and, by association, to the people who perform them. As a result, women's work, which is largely centred around the subsistence domain, is considered less important relative to that performed by men in the income-generating sector.

2. As local institutions and relations have become more market-oriented, there has been a gradual realignment of the "spaces" in which men and women participated within the agrarian economy. Men's work is increasingly focussed on the commercial domain: they participate in the external labour market and also mediate for resources and services that have become an indispensable part of local subsistence activities. This expansion of men's roles has taken the place of the "spaces" in which women have traditionally participated. For example, while women's traditional roles in the selection and storage of seeds, composting and their knowledge of grasses and leaves for animal husbandry, are still crucial, they are nevertheless perceived as less prestigious now that it is possible to purchase agricultural inputs in the market.

3. Lopsided access to the commercial domain has resulted in a gender (male) monopoly over information. Because men are more freely able to involve themselves in the marketplace, they are better situated to gain information about seed and fertiliser varieties, selling and buying prices and improved cropping techniques. Because of the belief that women are ignorant and unable to learn, men typically do not disseminate information that they gain to their womenfolk.

There has also been a gradual devaluation of traditional knowledge (of which women have been traditional repositories) because of the introduction of new information. The traditional knowledge is not being passed on to the younger generation of women and girls to quite the same extent today. This is a matter of concern because, despite the increasing use of externally-acquired agricultural inputs, subsistence production remains by and large dependent on these practices.

4. Hill women, like their plains sisters, work "double days" in trying to provide subsistence to the family. Unfortunately, the basic premise of government policies for the hills is that women's labour is readily available to help free up male labour for the off-farm sector. As a result, these policies reflect little understanding of the burden that rests on women. One implicit rationale for the diversification of agriculture through the introduction of cash crops in certain parts of the Garhwal hills, was to stem the flow of male migration by providing local income-generation. Instead, the migration has continued unabated while the women have more work to do.

5. The introduction of new values and mores has further obscured women's roles in the rural economy. For example, the wide-spread adoption of a commoditised form of dowry during marriage has meant a huge drain on households' scarce resources. Now, more than ever before, girls and women are looked upon as financial liabilities rather than as valuable workers.

6. Even though they are *de facto* heads of households and managers of land, women are becoming increasingly dependent on men in order to gain access to the resources and information they require. Structural and ideological constraints prevent women from gaining independent access to new productive resources such as wage labour and credit.

7. Despite rhetoric to the contrary, there is little evidence that the role of women as farmers is taken seriously. Women have poor access to, say, banks, informal credit organisation, agricultural extension agencies, seed fertiliser merchants, traders and so forth.

8. Even when a household's economic situation improves, money is rarely made available to women to hire labour to perform highly labour-intensive tasks such as collecting fodder and fuelwood. This is true even in the cash-crop producing areas where extra domestic paid labour is only used for men's tasks. Because of the off-farm economy's growing importance, a growing proportion of a household's resources are being channelled towards educating boys who are viewed as an investment in future financial security. This is, however, only possible by reallocating the work burden to those members whose labour is considered expendable: women and girls.

### DEVELOPMENT FOR WHOM ?

It would, of course, be simplistic in the extreme to suggest that socio-economic change has bypassed women altogether. Women do share in a household's improved standard of living up to

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a point and certain interventions like the setting up of medical facilities, electrification, and supply of piped water *have* improved aspects of their lives. And by and large the women of Garhwal and Kumaon seem supportive of the changes. Nonetheless, the chasm between male and female 'life options' is widening. Men, through education and migration, have more options available to them. Women, regardless of access to education, typically can expect little more than a life confined to the parameters of their villages.

New directives in hill development policy and the rapid socio-economic and ecological transformation of the mountains beg for a reassessment of that oft-asked question: development for whom and at what cost? Failure to do so will only spell out a grim future for the hill communities and marginalisation of women.

Both official and popular perceptions of mountain women have to recognise the new imperatives that shape contemporary realities. It is no longer enough to discuss the drudgery of women's work, to assume an inevitable conflict between subsistence and market-oriented interests, and to perpetuate well-meaning but often misguided notions about women's roles as

resource managers based on scant or out-dated empirical evidence.

The reality is that, with few exceptions, mountain households are dependent on the external economy. The question, then, is how to make that interaction with the market more suited to the needs of villagers and specifically, village women? A more consciously systemic level analysis has to be developed in order to understand the hill household and its relationship to the wider political economy. This would help clarify why women's high work involvement even in the domain of agricultural and market-oriented surplus generation typically fails to translate into improved status and recognition of their contributions.

A research and action-oriented agenda on the subject would, first, seek to develop a better understanding of how the sexes are positioned within the domestic economy, and second, examine the economic and extra-economic imperatives that compel households to participate in the external economy and which, in turn, affect the organisation and goals of agricultural activities. This macro perspective would also provide greater insight into the factors that shape

and constrain women's participation in subsistence and market-oriented domains and which result in reinforcing their dependence on men, as well as help generate possible solutions by taking technical, institutional and cultural factors into account.

Those responsible for guiding hill development are still a long way from understanding, at a practical level, that development is a multi-faceted process and that however beneficial it might appear in a broader sense, there are inevitably unintended and often indiscernible consequences that emerge on the ground. In this respect, it would be well worth examining the gender-structured consequences that emerge on the ground. Most importantly, it will be necessary to examine the gender-structured consequences of development activities in other regions so as to better understand the impact of the process of monetisation on the women of the U.P. hills, as well as the differences that arise due to the agro-ecological specificities of mountain regions.

M. Mehta is a Ph.D. student of anthropology at the University of Boston in the United States.

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# A Special Role for Women

*Because the role of the woman in Nepali society is by and large restricted within the family, her participation in development must also necessarily be within the family.*

by Tine Curtis

During recent years whenever development has been discussed, "Women and Development" has been very much on the agenda. It is recognised that because of their invisibility in the decision-making process, women have not gained much from the efforts made so far. The result has often turned out to be the creation of special women-oriented appendices to projects already planned, add-ons that have generally ended up as failures. These add-ons benefit nobody, not even the women directly involved.

The main reason for the failure is that development has been planned to benefit persons in society without any understanding of the fact that women are not the same sort of citizens as men. A woman is a particular kind of social individual within a particular social formation. Women live different lives from men, through their different roles in society and through the state structures and policies. Development efforts have a different impact on women than on men.

Even though "women and development" is so often misunderstood, it is still very important to inscribe an analysis of gender identities and differences into every single plan or project. Gender is a cultural construction, meaning that the concept of 'woman' and that of 'man' are culturally specific and not naturally given, as opposed to sex, which is a biological construction. Society is built upon cultural constructions of gender, class, ethnicity, religion, etc. The perception that people differ in all social life according to class and caste relationships is already broadly recognised as important in the planning of development; for example, that it is necessary to plan according to whether the 'target group' is made up of peasants or wage earners. This is because the impact of development as well as the two groups' possible participation in development will differ.

It is my argument that the study of gender is of equal importance to that of class in determining development plans and priorities. Gender must be regarded as the fact of human social life that it is. I do not want to claim absolute determination based on this one construction, as social life will always be experienced, constructed and mediated in interrelation with all the given structures.

## GENDER ROLES

In Nepali culture, in most cases, the "woman" is tightly linked to her roles within the family, her kinship relations. The status of a woman is determined by her success in fulfilling these roles. Her success in being an obedient daughter or a kind and respectful wife, her capability of giving birth to sons and being a good mother to all children, and so on. These roles (that is, the specific construction of gender) determine not only the woman's status in society but indeed her entire life. This construction pervades the structures of society as a whole, and so the woman's place is thought to be mainly to work in the domestic sphere. This construction also leads to the state laws of marriage and inheritance.

Due to its various and widespread influence, this understanding of women's roles is thought to be a natural concept by the Nepali people. The concept of naturalness is comparable to that of sameness, as they both indicate a universality of women's roles, which is non-existent.

For example, motherhood is often thought of as a natural role for women and also a universal one. But even though the biological woman everywhere, of course, does give birth to the child, the socio-cultural reality

of being a mother differs widely. In some societies, mothers are thought to have the sole responsibility for the child's upbringing. In other societies, the child might be brought up by the community irrespective of who the biological mother is.

Because the 'construction' of woman defines her social activities, it also defines her possible actions towards changing society, i.e., through 'development'. Because the role of woman in Nepali society is by and large restricted within the family, her participation in development must also necessarily be within the family, or at least on the family's premises. Which means that among the most effective areas for women in the field of development is health and hygiene.

Changes in health are affected by decisions in the family and in the changing of everyday work-tasks within the domestic sphere, such as teaching children to wash hands before meals, how and what to cook and the overall hygiene in the house. Due to the woman's responsibilities for these tasks, changes in the health of the family in large part can be brought about by the woman. Because improvement of health is an essential factor for the development of the country as a whole, Nepali women should play a crucial role when discussing changes within this sector.

In another culture, where the daily upbringing of children is shared with social institutions, where women are more involved in the public sphere than in Nepal, or where health problems do not relate as much to hygiene within the family, women's role in the development of health programmes might be a totally different one.

Women's special role in participation in the development within the health sector is but one example. Similarly, in other sectors, the special status of Nepali women should define their role in development. Special when compared to men's participation, due to gender differences (the fact that women and men are different social individuals) and special when compared to women elsewhere, due to specific culture in society (the fact that women are not universally the same).

T. Curtis is a student of cultural sociology in the University of Copenhagen, Denmark.



# The Sex Worker and the Market

*While there is loud talk of the trafficking of Nepali girls, few are serious enough to address the issues behind the phenomenon. What are the real numbers? Who is endangered by AIDS? And should prostitution be legalised within the country?*

by Sujata Rana

When the average Nepali considers prostitution, it is most likely in the context of young village girls being lured or forcibly abducted under false pretences to India. For the more aware, prostitution looms large as the AIDS conduit which will directly transfer the dreaded disease from the brothels of Bombay to the Nepali hinterland. Very few choose to question or consider the reality behind these assumptions, or the alarmingly high numbers involved in the sex industry.

Part of the problem is that there is extreme paucity of data regarding prostitution. Most of the present theories and opinions are derived from second-hand hearsay and not from empirical research. The information gap also probably derives from middle-class mores of Kathmandu society. Even serious researchers tend to shy away from discussion of sex in public or private

life. In the end, the phenomenon of prostitution is ignored, or sensationalised from time to time.

Because there is a reluctance to personalise prostitution, the basic premise as to why prostitution and trafficking exist in Nepal is overlooked. Prostitution fills a need in society. It is a two-way process involving women (as sex workers) and men from all strata of society. It is not to be forgotten that like any other area of the economy, the sex industry is the result of supply fulfilling demand. Dr. Pushpa Bhatt, an STD (Sexually Transmitted Diseases) specialist of HMG's AIDS Control Programme in Kathmandu, says the prostitute is often used as a scapegoat who takes the blame for larger problems in the area of health, religion and social norms. "Very rarely are men looked upon as fuelling prostitution; after all, prostitutes need clients, but the men are rarely blamed."

Many 'straight' women, too, are reluctant to relate prostitution to themselves. Rather than tackle deep male-female divides that exist in South Asian society, it seems easier to think of prostitution as something "lower class women do". Also, these educated women would rather not confront the possibility that their husbands, sons or brothers might be partly responsible for continuing victimisation of women as sex workers. Even within Kathmandu's fairly timid society, prostitution is practiced at every level and not only within a narrowly identifiable group of 'lower class women'.

While not denying the trafficking of women to Indian brothels, it is necessary

to study the underlying reasons as to why the trade takes place at all. It is also necessary to consider other aspects of the sex trade as it exists in Nepal, and the related repercussions.

Let us consider what is known about trafficking to India. Owing to the lack of systematic research, existing figures are acquired by amalgamating research conducted by Indian activists, Nepali police reports, and the efforts of individual persons and small organisations who have visited red-light districts in India as well as the 'danger districts' of Kavre, Sindhupalchok, Nuwakot and Dhadhing, from where the majority of trafficked women originate.

Analysis of all available data, taking into account the methodology used and the reliability factor, indicates that an estimated 5,000 to 7,000 girls in Nepal, most of them in the 10-18 year age group, are lured or abducted each year. Figures made available by ABC, an NGO working to stop the trafficking of girls indicates that as many as 200,000 Nepali prostitutes might be operating in India, while more conservative estimates of the Indian Health Organisation, puts the figure at 100,000. Although Nepali women are spread throughout the Indian cities from Madras to Bangalore, Kanpur, Varanasi, Lucknow and Delhi, their concentration is in Bombay, where at least 30,000 to 40,000 are estimated to live and work.

The tendency in Kathmandu circles to over-estimate the numbers, like crying wolf, in the end trivialises the trauma that so many Nepali women undergo in Indian brothels. Journalists, for example, routinely claim that "one lakh" girls migrate to India every year for prostitution. Only last month, a member of the Nepali cabinet, no less, claimed at an AIDS meeting that 200,000 girls were abducted into the Indian sex trade *each year*.

## MODERN PROSTITUTION

Prostitution, touted as the 'oldest profession' in the world, is an old phenomenon in Nepal too. It has its roots in history and the socio-economic conditions that pervade in parts of Nepal. The tradition of buying and dedicating virgins to temple deities (*devakis*) has been documented over centuries. Ostensibly, these girls assisted in the religious ceremonies to be performed, but this tradition diversified into a form of prostitution.



The danger area: border of Sindupalchok and Nuwakot.

Certainly, the traditional prostitutes cannot be pigeon-holed along with the more modern form of prostitution that does not have even the social sanction they do. These traditional prostitutes are generally respected within their communities and have children, though no family life as such. Women of the Badi caste in the western Tarai, also receive strong community backing for their occupation as sex workers. In fact, the pressure to conform is sometimes so strong that girl-students feel obliged to forego schooling for their 'traditional' work.

While some forms of prostitution are sanctified by religion and culture, there is an important historical factor which has led to what might be called 'modern prostitution'. The recruitment of Tamang and Gurung girls in the royal courts of Kathmandu had existed earlier but really accelerated during the Rana period. Besides these, there were also other groups represented as *susarays* or lady servants, who often doubled up as concubines. The inhabitants of Helambu, north-west of Kathmandu, were especially favoured for their fair complexion.

With the fall of the Rana regime in 1951, the ability of their huge palaces in Kathmandu to absorb concubines dropped sharply. This was about the time when increasing poverty was making it imperative for many hill people to look for alternative sources of income. Prostitution in India filled that slot.

Some researchers lay great stress on the historical angle as a cause for present-day trafficking, but this might be an oversimplification. Certainly, the pre-1950s 'trade' gave social credibility to the notion of girl trafficking, but the key reason must be the present-day social and economic-status of those who come from the high risk areas and, increasingly, the rest of Nepal. A look at the socio-economic map of Nepal will show that the majority of women who leave, come from the more destitute areas of Central and East Nepal. As traditional society disintegrates under socio-economic pressures and urbanisation further loosens societal bonds, women from all over the country are found as sex workers.

The popularity of Nepali girls in Indian brothels seems to be a combination of 'exotic' looks or origin (the mountains), fair skin, and if it is to be believed, the fact that Nepali prostitutes are more willing to disrobe fully than their Indian counterparts.

In a recent visit to the brothels of Bombay, Shanta Dixit, public health researcher, found not only Tamangs and Gurungs, but also Tharus, Bahuns, Chhetris, Newars, and other groups



Sindhupalchok girls.

ACTION AID

represented in the brothels. Infamous districts of Bombay with names such as Kamathipura (Falkland Road), Colaba and Patheebapura Marg house Nepali women along with prostitutes from different regions of India. Houses are numbered. Women indicate their availability by standing in front of doorsteps swinging both arms in unison. Others sit, talk and laugh, while some prostitutes' children run about. They are heavily powdered, and make liberal use of lipstick and rouge.

Says Dixit, "You enter one door which has a sign, say, 'Number 215 Welcome', and the brothel-keeper, known as *gharwali*, takes you in. The house is four stories or higher with a narrow staircase that winds its way up. The bottom floor has women who have been around for five or more years, and it shows. In the upper floors, you find higher priced, newer, younger and 'fairer' girls. On the topmost floor, are girls who must have just been 'broken in', barely in their teens and looking very fragile."

#### 'EASY MONEY'

Extreme poverty is a primary cause for the 'selling' of girls. Fathers have been known to sell daughters to middle-men that prowl the countryside. The 'going rate' is between NRs 15,000 and NRs 40,000. (The cost of a Japanese VCR in Kathmandu is about NRs 30,000.) Virgins are at a premium.

Part of the difficulty in trying to stop trafficking (not that there is any concerted programme in place yet) is the number of 'Bombay-returned' women who go to their villages with an ostentatious display of wealth.

(After a few years in Bombay, some prostitutes, it seems, are allowed by their *gharwalis* to return home, with the understanding that they will bring back more girls from Nepal.) There was a time when returning *lahurays* used to dispense easy money to buy status. In many cases, this is now happening in the Nepali hinterland among ex-prostitutes. The number of village houses with corrugated tin roofs in Nuwakot or Sindhupalchok, it is said, is an indication of Bombay-sourced affluence. This indicator, however, is not popular in the villages, particularly among those who manage to put up a tin roof as a result of legitimate labour.

Not only are the more affluent returnee prostitutes socially accepted (most get married), according to development workers in the affected areas, the majority of these women proceed to advocate the path of prostitution to young girls in the village without conveying the trauma and hardship involved. With such 'success stories' abounding, how will the future development planner who would tackle

women trafficking, persuade families to give up this one source of income?

When researchers and development workers have gone to the heavily trafficking-prone area that lies north of Kathmandu where Nuwakot and Sindhupalchok meet, they invariably face a hostile reaction the moment the question of prostitution comes up. In the case of those who have actively engaged in trafficking, this is an expected reaction. "Why do you Kathmandu-based people come here to destabilise our lives?" is what the more confrontational local will say in villages such as Ichhok, Mahankal, Thakani or Pati Bhanjyang in Sindhupalchok, and Sikharbesi, Ghyangphedi, Rautbesi and Betini in Nuwakot.

#### AIDS

It is, of course, not true that all prostitutes return from India wealthy, with a retinue of porters. The majority come back broken in health and spirit. The case of Maya, from the village of Melamchi in Sindhupalchok, is an example. Now 27, she spent nine years in Bombay brothels before being forced to return due to bad health. She has contracted STD and is infected with the HIV-virus, which causes AIDS. Maya's *gharwali* released her without giving her any of her savings. Having returned without anything to show for her stay in Bombay, her family was not too keen to have her back. Making no compensation for her condition, her father insisted that she work in the fields. This proved impossible. With her health deteriorating, Maya came to Kathmandu to seek help. When she visited the hospitals in

Kathmandu, she received some medicine and vitamins and was asked to return to her village. When this reporter met her, Maya's only refrain was, "I wish I had died in Bombay."

The Bombay brothels together with Bangkok and Chiang Mai have the highest proportion of AIDS cases in all of Asia. Over the past year, the recognition that the sex trade provides a line for the passage of the HIV-virus from Bombay brothels directly to Nepali villages, has become a matter of concern among public health experts in Kathmandu. In the beginning, some girls had been sent back by social organisations which 'rescued' them from brothels. When tested, they were found to be HIV-positive. Subsequently, the Indian policy to send prostitutes testing HIV-positive back to their hometowns meant that unknown numbers of prostitutes have by now come back to Nepal, perhaps to continue their trade and to spread the disease.

The fact that returning prostitutes are a major source of AIDS introduction in Nepal is borne out even by the limited data available. Of the 24 cases of HIV infection reported in Nepal, six were among foreigners, eight were Nepali men, and the remaining ten were Nepali women. One woman contracted the infection through blood transfusion, the other nine were all prostitutes who had returned from India, mostly from Bombay (*Himal July/Aug 1991*).

The overwhelming focus on AIDS spread through prostitutes might be considered unfair targeting, especially because male migrant labourers who work in India (and visit brothels) and Nepali men who visit sex houses in Bangkok or Hong Kong are also potential carriers of the HIV-virus. However, the fact remains that a prostitute is much more susceptible to infection, depending, of course, on the number of clients she sees. In the end, while some might choose to politicise the issue by claiming that 'have-nots' have been unfairly marked out as carriers of AIDS, the identification of high-risk carriers, regardless of class or ethnicity is crucial for a long-term programme to combat AIDS. It is not a question of apportioning blame, but facing the reality of the situation.

While issues of public information, epidemiological surveillance and other measures need immediate attention, it is unfortunately also time for HMG's Ministry of Health as well as voluntary organisations to set up curative facilities for those who have 'full-blown' AIDS. Medical practitioners, for their part, must play a leading role by showing their willingness to treat HIV/AIDS cases, admit such cases to hospital and dispense humane treatment. The experience of Maya and other prostitutes shows that thus far humane care and treatment of HIV/AIDS patients has largely been limited to a very small number of individual doctors and nurses. Recently, an

HIV-positive case was refused admission at Teku Hospital, which is supposed to be the "focal point" for AIDS treatment in Nepal. In the absence of sympathetic treatment and proper counselling, it is likely that infected prostitutes will go back into the sex market while others will not even want to come in for an HIV/AIDS check.

The sudden interest of society at large regarding prostitution and its link to AIDS should not blind us to other issues related to the sex trade. In order to do so, it will be useful to separate the issues of girl trafficking and local prostitution.

Without a doubt, the majority of women working as prostitutes in Bombay are unwilling victims of trafficking. But what of those prostitutes who operate within Nepal, who choose the profession as a strategy for survival? Can they be placed on a lower moral plane, and their legal, medical and other needs (and demands) therefore regarded as less pressing?

Because prostitutes should be entitled to the same rights as everyone else, prostitution should be legalised in Nepal. Prohibiting or ignoring prostitution merely drives it underground. It does not stop it. The only victims then are not the male 'consumers' but the female 'providers' who have to rely on pimps, are susceptible to harassment by the police and are pegged as 'criminals' if caught.

By providing prostitutes with legal rights, the government would only be publicly admitting what is already known. Legalisation would facilitate proper counselling, dissemination of information regarding safe sex, and the provision of proper health facilities. Thus, the risk of STDs and AIDS spreading unchecked to the general population would also be considerably lessened. Legalisation may give prostitutes the confidence to insist on condoms, thus reducing work-related risks.

In Kathmandu and elsewhere, there are those otherwise liberal-minded people, who

become examples of Victorian prudery when the subject turns to sexuality and prostitution. Such persons consider that because prostitution is a question of public morality, the State should stay out of it. Actually, because prostitution is a question of personal morality, the state should allow the individual to be a prostitute, or to visit one. At a recent seminar held in a Kathmandu hotel, prescient observers noted that those who argued vociferously against legalisation came up with no alternatives to the "modern" urban based prostitution. At the same time, they were the votaries who with Kathmandu-based diktat declared that traditional prostitution such as those practiced by the *devakis* and the Badi community be banned. While quite willing to ban traditional, even religiously sanctioned prostitution, these 'activists' would do next to nothing to protect the urban prostitute, or her client.

### KATHMANDU GIRLS

While, again, there are no hard data to back up the point, there is a marked increase in prostitution in Nepali towns, particularly Kathmandu. One estimate is that about 5,000 prostitutes operate in the valley, increasing by a few hundred every year. It is said that there has been a spurt in prostitution because of the large number of single women who have come into Kathmandu to take up jobs in garment factories and the carpet industry. Many of these women, new to the bright lights of the city, either become victimised or voluntarily take to prostitution to supplement their income.

This garment, carpet-induced increase in prostitution is a phenomenon that is only a decade old. Previously, there were very few industries in Kathmandu to attract female migrants, and the number of prostitutes had remained static.

The situation in the urban centres is of concern not only because of 'street prostitution', but because of 'middle class and elite prostitution'. These latter categories of



Nepali girls at Falkland Road, Bombay.

SBD

prostitution involve educated women who provide escort services and more to local and foreign clientele. At one extreme, there is information of 'high-class' prostitutes being supplied to international civil servants who have a hand in determining the choice of important development projects.

The link between tourism and sex is another area of concern, and the experience of Bangkok can serve as a warning. In the 1960s and 1970s Bangkok was the main rest and recreation destination for American soldiers engaged in the Vietnam War. Consequently, the Thai prostitution industry took off. After the Vietnam War, direct air links with Europe, particularly West Germany, made it possible for Bangkok to keep the prostitution industry on a high roll.

Five million tourists visit Thailand every year. Package tours to the red-light districts of Bangkok, Chiang Mai and other cities started in the early 1980s, and today form an established feature of the tourist trade. Experts believe that there are between 700,000 and one million prostitutes in Thailand. According to a study done on German tourists, three-quarters of the 200,000 German tourists are men coming to enjoy sex-tourism.

To see how far tourist-led prostitution might spread in Kathmandu, what Thai scholar Prawase Wasi says is of relevance. As quoted by the *Times of India*, Professor Wasi draws the link between prostitution, the tourism industry, consumerism, foreign debt, rural poverty, crimes, violence, war and destruction of the environment. "All of these have reached crisis proportions (in Thailand)," says Professor Wasi. Given that many of these indicators of sex-tourism (except war) are already recognised problems in Nepali society, could mass sex-tourism be far behind, and can anything be done to prevent it?

In conclusion, prostitution is an unwholesome profession, most of all for the sex worker herself. Among the many challenges it faces, the Government of Nepal must first commission a detailed study of the extent of women trafficking, identify the danger areas in the Nepali hinterland and then work in concert with international and national voluntary agencies to provide alternative avenues for economic survival in those areas. For those who return from the brothels of India, Nepali society should be made more welcoming, particularly to those who come back without riches and with HIV/AIDS. Within Nepal, there should be counselling as well as medical facilities for HIV and AIDS patients. To protect the rights of prostitutes, prostitution within the country should be legalised. Lastly, the society should look ahead to guard against expansion of prostitution, both locally generated prostitution as well as tourist-led prostitution.

S. Rana is a writer based in Kathmandu.

# Promises to Keep

*If political power is to be achieved through parliamentary legislation, then women have first to get elected to Parliament. The male-dominated hierarchies of the major political parties have not proved very progressive in this sphere.*

by Roshia Chitrakar

For a while, it seemed that Nepali women would be able to run with the momentum of the People's Movement of April 1990 and make strides towards achieving political equality. After all, women leaders and activists were very active during the Movement and the tempo did not let up until the formulation of the new Nepali Constitution, in which woman-friendly provisions were certainly included.

But lately, what seems to be the endless meanderings of Nepali party politics, has begun. In the process, the women's agenda seems to have slipped slowly to backstage. Even though women (and some men) elected to Parliament have promised to take women's concerns into the Parliament and try their best to change discriminatory laws, the Upper and Lower Houses have yet to begin grappling with the real issue including women's demands for political equality, economic right and freedom from all forms of discrimination.

Because there had been little history of women's activism during the Panchayat years (or the Rana years previously), it was all the more remarkable to observe the manner in which women arose during the Nepali movement for human rights and democracy. While the exact numbers are not verified, at least 300 women were arrested during the course of the 50-day movement. At least six died for freedom.

The issues that some women activists and candidates raised during the elections referred to well-known women's concerns, particularly those related to the rights to property, education, health care and nutrition. Other women, however, felt that party affiliation was more important and they chose not to put women's concerns on the political agenda.

Many women leaders feel, even today, that the male-dominated party hierarchies in both the two main parties, the Nepali Congress and the Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist Leninist) are not sufficiently sensitive to women's rights, both within their own organisations and in society

at large. As Sahana Pradhan, senior leader of the CPN(UML) told a journalist colleague recently, "The simple fact is that men do not want to see women as equals. After all, they are products of our culture. Because I am a woman first, I have been trying to educate my male colleagues on the need to accept women as equal partners."

If even a prominent front-line leader senses discrimination, what of the grass-roots women political activists? They feel, even more, that the party echelons are locked tight by male participation. The discrimination even extends to male party workers not allowing women orators access to the podium to deliver speeches during the election campaign.

For the first time, the new Nepali Constitution, promulgated on 9 November 1990, has included specific provisions for ensuring a basic minimum representation of women in both houses of Parliament. (It should not be forgotten, however, that women were not represented in the Constitution Recommendation Commission headed by Justice Bishwa Nath Upadhaya). Article 46(1) provides for the compulsory representation of at least three women among the 60 members of the National Assembly (Upper House). As for the *Pratinidhi Sabha* (Lower House), Article 112(3) requires that during elections, political parties must reserve at least five per cent of the total seats for women.

Unfortunately, during the election campaign, the attitude of both the Nepali Congress and the leftist party apparatus towards this progressive, constitutional provision was not encouraging. Both the Nepali Congress and the CPN(UML) put up the minimum required

Political Party	# Women Candidates	Total # Candidates Fielded
Nepali Congress	11	204
United Marxist Leninist	9	177
Rastriya Prajatantra (Thapa)	9	163
Rastriya Prajatantra (Chand)	8	154
Samyukta Janamorcha	4	69
Nepal Communist Party (P)	9	75
Nepal Sadbhawana Party	5	75
Nepal Rastriya Janmorcha	3	50
Nepal Majdur Kisan Party	2	30
Nepal Communist Party (Verma)	4	35



May Day 1990

G. CHITRAKAR

female candidates to stay within the five per cent rule. Their inclination was to remain within the letter of Article 112(3) but not its spirit. This was not the intension of those who framed the Constitution. Female activists of both parties

were fielded in constituencies where the parties considered themselves weakest.

Out of a total of 20 parties contesting elections for the *Pratinidhi Sabha*, 15 fielded women candidates. Out of 1345 candidates, 80 were women, among whom eight were independents. Out of the 80 candidates, only seven won, five from the Nepali Congress and two from the UML. Three women have been nominated into the *Rastriya Sabha*, the Upper House, two from NC and one from CPN (UML).

In the latest *Rastriya Panchayat* house, out of a total of 140 members, eight were women. However, only three women were elected (together with 109 men). The remaining five were nominated by the King.

Why was there such a high percentage loss for women candidates during the elections? According to Mina Pandey, Nepali Congress MP, "We were given fixed programmes with fixed places to campaign from. We were not given a choice." Uma Adhikari (Nepali Congress) adds, "We

were given very little time to organise our campaigns."

Almost as if the election results provided a taste of what was to follow, the Nepali Parliament, as soon as it opened, nose-dived into inter-party bickering in which issue-based debate such as on women's rights had no chance. Some women MPs have articulated this frustration and feel that a joint women's voice is necessary if their demands are not to be swamped in the harsh glare of party politics. "I think it is necessary for us to have a joint voice for women in the House," says Adhikari of the Nepali Congress. "In the Upper House, the Nepali Congress and the UML have agreed to jointly look into the problem of prostitution, since this is the common issue," says Asta Laxmi Shakya of the CPN (UML). Maiya Shrestha (Nepali Congress) adds: "Women have to demand their rights, men will not come and present them to us."

During a recent one-day workshop relating to the responsibilities of elected women in Parliament, all members assured the audience that they will raise their voices for the upliftment of women by focusing on education, health, wages, employment, and trying to affect changes in existing discriminatory laws. But the fact is that in the House they are representing their parties first and not their gender.

R. Chitrakar is a journalist based in Kathmandu.

## "Four to Survive, Eight to Die"

by Bidhan Acharya

We were conducting a demographic study in Hattiban, a village in Nawalparasi District in the Inner Tarai of Nepal. The aim was to assess the high fertility rates in villages of the region.

We started with the question, "How many children have you given birth to?" "Seven," she answered, clearly hesitating.

"Altogether seven?"

"You want those that did not make it?"

"Yes, sister."

"What's the use of counting those who are gone?"

"It is required for our study, sister."

"Can you give a job to my son?"

We convinced her that this was not possible as we were mere student-researchers. The son she had referred to came closer and coaxed her to answer our question.

"Sixteen," she said softly.

She was 40 years old, had given birth sixteen times and there were probably more offsprings "written" in her future.

This woman from Hattiban is living proof of the failure of Nepal's public health programmes, its school system, its family planning projects. She was born in 1950, which means that she has lived through four "development decades", the term the United Nations likes to use, without any one of them touching her.

Why do thousands of mothers like her continue to bear children beyond conceivable limits? Of course, the answer lies in the old list of highs and lows: high 'natural fertility', low age at marriage, high infant and child mortality, low literacy...

Rather than continue to adopt high-sounding declarations, resolutions and programmes of action, it may be better to have one family planning slogan that says it all: "Let them have one dozen children: four to survive, eight to die."

B. Acharya is with the Central Department of Population Studies, T.U., Kathmandu.

## Young Bride's Longing

**O** Boatman, brother from the upstream country  
When you meet my father tell him about me,  
moving laments of the childless woman:  
My courtyard has been cleaned and plastered  
Give me a child who will print it with his footsteps...  
Mother, the taunts of childlessness are hard to bear  
the misery of giving birth to a girl child:  
Ten months and ten days  
The mother dreams on ever,  
I'll have a son, I'll see him grow  
And now she is a daughter's mother

(Traditional song translated in *Women Writing In India: 600 BC to the Present, Vol I*. Edited by Susie Tharu and K.L. Lalita. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, IRs 525.)

# Under the Weight of the Muluki Ain

*The legal fight for gender equality in Nepal involves in large part the effective implementation of legislation which already exists, to counter the retrograde legacy of the Muluki Ain.*

by Bharat Upreti

**T**he Muluki Ain, the general civil and criminal code that governs Nepali society, reflects traditional mores and in today's modern context, can be called extremely discriminatory against women. First formulated under the reign of Surendra Bickram in 1853 (1910 B.S.), it was last modified by King Mahendra in 1963.

Under Hindu law, as sanctioned by the Muluki Ain, fathers, brothers, husbands as well as male and female in-laws have traditionally exercised proprietary rights over the woman. Because there is no separate personal law for separate communities, the Muluki Ain, with a few exceptions, brings many hill communities also within its ambit. As long as women from such communities remain outside the ambit of the law, they are able to enjoy customary rights, but not when the Muluki Ain catches up with them.

The primary problem with the Muluki Ain as far as gender discrimination is concerned, is in the area of property rights, family rights and what might be called sexual rights. Legislative attempts over the last four decades have been well-intentioned, but half-hearted, attempts to weaken the legacy of the Muluki Ain.

## LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

In Nepal, effective legislative initiatives in favour of women's rights were lacking until the enactment of the Nepal Interim Constitution 1950 (*Nepal Antarim Shashan Bidhan 2007*). Chapter II of this historic document, which deals with directive principles of state policy, provided several provisions which sought to change the status of women from chattels to that of human beings. Among other things, it directed that no discrimination be made between men and women, and that there be equal pay for equal work, regardless of gender. The law also provided room for special legislative measures for women's protection and empowerment.

Unfortunately, the provisions of the 1950 Constitution, while achieving a first in terms of written law, were not translated into practice.

The concept of equality of the sexes envisaged in the 1950 Constitution was converted into a fundamental right under the Constitution of Nepal 1958 (*Nepal Adhirajya ko Sambidhan 2017*). This Constitution was abrogated by King Mahendra in 1960. The B.P. Koirala Government, elected under this Constitution, never had the

time or opportunity to adopt legislative measures in the field of gender equality.

The Constitution of Nepal 1962 (*Nepal ko Sambidhan 2019*) also followed the same track of legislating equality of men and women before the law. In addition, it provided the executive with blanket powers to legislate special laws for the protection and empowerment of women. This Panchayat Constitution was high-sounding and did have progressive ideals, but over three long decades the lofty constitutional provisions remained untranslated into appropriate legislative measures to empower women.

Following the successful people's movement, the Constitution of Nepal 1990 (*Nepal Adhirajya Ko Sambidhan 2047*) was promulgated on November 1990. The new Constitution broke new ground in terms of women's rights to equality and fair play. To begin with, as earlier, women enjoy the fundamental right to equality as citizens and the State has been given authority to legislate special laws for the protection of the special rights of women.

In making provision for gender equality, the Constitution has legitimised 'affirmative action' by providing that the government may lay down laws which discriminate in favour of women. Thus the fettered mandate has been given for the first time to make special laws in favour of women. Recognising that the problems of discrimination arise from women's minimal participation in the political process, the Constitution has made express provision to ensure minimum representation of women in both houses of Parliament (reserving three seats in the Upper House and five percent of all party candidatures for the Lower House.) The experience of the General Elections of last June showed, unfortunately, that the major parties are not prepared to make the most of this unique provision in order to improve the status of women.

Under Article 131 of the new Constitution, all existing laws that are contrary to its provisions shall cease to exist if not repealed within one year from the date of promulgation of the Constitution. This means that all laws that conflict with the Constitution will be automatically repealed as of 22 Kartik 2048 (i.e., 8 November 1991).

There will be a very long list of such provisions, however, such as among laws which discriminate against women and in favour of men in subjects such as property rights, family

matters and sexual rights. This so-called automatic repeal of laws could lead to a situation of confusion and uncertainty, particularly having to do with whether a particular law or part of it is or is not contradictory to constitutional provisions. Additionally, it seems that vested interests in society will not easily accept the repeal of so many laws which serve their interests.

There are several provisions in the Muluki Ain which not only conflict with the Constitution but treat women as second-grade citizens and even as chattels. These laws may be divided broadly into three groups: laws relating to a) property rights, b) family rights, and c) sexual rights.

## PROPERTY RIGHTS

The provisions of the Muluki Ain chapter on partition, inheritance and women's property deal with different modes of acquiring the right over property. Provisions under each of these chapters discriminate against women in terms of acquiring and disposing rights over property.

**Right to Partition:** To take the example of the right to participate in parent's property, under the Muluki Ain chapter on Partition, the son shares equal rights with his father the day he is born, whereas the daughter has to wait, unmarried, till the age of 35 to be eligible for acquiring such property. Moreover, her share of property devolves to her brothers if she gets married after receiving her share of parental property. There are several problems and impracticalities here. Brothers may prefer to partition parental property before the sister or daughter reaches the age of 35. The law is so discriminatorily rigid that even if a benevolent brother wishes to partition property in favour of his unmarried sister before she reaches 35, he has no legal means to do so. Other indirect and artificial means of ownership transfer have to be sought.

The right of married women to acquire rights to the family property [of her husband] is also problematic. A married woman cannot claim for partition so long as her husband or in-laws provide her with food and lodging. Even if it becomes impossible for a woman to live with her husband or in-laws, she cannot claim for partition until she reaches the age of 35, and 15 years of marriage have been completed.

**Right to Management and Deposition:** Though the existing law grants some limited



right of partition over family property, women are denied the right to manage such property. Even if ownership over property has been transferred to them by virtue of partition, women have only limited rights to dispose of such property. A man who is head of the family can dispose of the entire movable and up to half of immovable property without the consent of his wife, unmarried daughter over the age of 35, or daughters-in-law. But similar authority is not granted to a woman even if she is the senior-most and otherwise legally capable of managing family matters. A woman or unmarried daughter cannot dispose of more than half of her immovable property acquired through partition without the consent of her sons or father. Provisions made in Sections 10, 10A, 16, 19 of the Muluki Ain chapter on Partition and Section 2 of the Chapter on Women's Property provide for the discrimination cited above.

**Right to Inheritance:** Section 5 of the Muluki Ain chapter on Women's Property and Section 2 of the chapter on Inheritance provide for discrimination in inheritance and succession. Even unmarried daughters are not seen as fit to inherit property as long as the son or the grandson of a deceased patriarch is alive. Not only is a daughter discriminated against in inheriting her father's or ancestor's property, she cannot even inherit her own mother's self-earned property so long as her brothers and father are surviving.

**Tenancy Right:** The role of rural women in cultivation, harvesting and other activities relating to agriculture is vital. However, Section 26 of the Land Reform Act 2021 (1964) completely ignores this reality and prevents the daughter or daughter-in-law from inheriting tenancy rights of her father's or father-in-law's land. The problem created by the law is especially excruciating for a family which only consists of daughters and widowed daughters-in-law of a deceased male tenant.

### FAMILY RIGHTS

There are many instances of laws which discriminate against women in deciding family matters. Under the law of adoption (Section 2 of the Muluki Ain chapter on Adoption), a married man who does not have a son can adopt one, but his wife cannot do so as long as he survives. Neither can she if there is a son from her co-wife. Section 9 prohibits a married woman with a surviving husband from adopting a daughter whereas a similar restriction does not apply to men.

### SEXUAL RIGHTS

Besides keeping them from enjoying equal rights in property and family matters, the Muluki Ain also regards women as sexual "vessels" for the enjoyment of men. The ownership of the wife by

the husband is never questioned in the chapters on Husband and Wife and Adultery". If it is proved under Section 2 of the chapter on Husband and Wife that the wife has had a sexual relationship with another man, or if she elopes, her relationship with her husband is automatically terminated. The marital relations will also be terminated if she confesses before a competent court that she had had sexual relations with a man though in reality she might not have. (It is very common in the Nepali courts for women to confess under duress, to adultery they have not committed). A man will be considered by law to have remained faithful to his wife even if he has had sex with several women with the knowledge of his wife.

Section 9 of the chapter on Marriage permits a man to have a second wife under certain conditions such as if the first wife is barren, has

an incurable communicable disease, or otherwise has physical 'defects'. But a woman does not enjoy such a right against her husband (but may marry another if he dies). She cannot take a second husband even if her first husband is sterile, impotent, disabled or suffering from an incurable disease. If the wife does take a second husband under these circumstances, she is subjected to punishment with a prison term and fined under Section 2 of the chapter on Adultery.

The husband of a wife who had committed adultery can prosecute both his wife and her lover. If convicted, both the wife and her lover are subject to punishment. However, if the husband dies before or after conviction, only the lover benefits by having charges dropped or by being released. The law does not grant the same privilege to women.

### THE SOURCE OF THE PROBLEM

The problem of women's inequality is of course, deeply rooted in the social system, and the Muluki Ain is but the means through which the Establishment has sanctioned such inequality. Legislation is the modern means to counteract traditional discrimination, and fortunately, the Constitution of 1990 provides the best base so far to try and undermine the discriminatory elements in the Muluki Ain. The deeply rooted evil cannot be done away with overnight. Political awareness and legal literacy among women is important. In addition, there is a need for committed and sustained effort on the part of women and men in government, the political parties and the private sector to lead to the ultimate moment when all legal provisions, at least, will be free of discrimination. After that, the challenge will be to transfer such law into day-to-day social behaviour and interaction.



Lady Justice: Is she unbiased? S. RANJIT

B. Upreti is a corporate lawyer who does *pro bono* work on empowerment.

## A CITIZEN'S RIGHT DENIED

The 1990 Constitution of Nepal followed earlier constitutions in maintaining discrimination against women in the matter of citizenship. Under Article 9 (5), if a male citizen of Nepal marries a foreign wife, she gets Nepali citizenship upon the fulfilment of certain conditions. However, if a female Nepali citizen marries a foreign husband, the latter is not eligible for citizenship. This is clear discrimination against the Nepali woman, for she will be forced to leave her society, job and family and migrate abroad against her will because the law will not allow her husband to live with her. There is an increasing number of couples who are facing this problem, but their joint lobbying has yet to lead to any resolution.

The supporters of this discriminatory provision in the Nepali Constitution justify it on the ground that so-called foreign husbands may take undue advantage of illiterate, economically backward women. This is neither logical nor the proper means to protecting the interests of such women. A blatantly discriminatory provision such as this *must* be struck down by the Parliament, which has the power to do so.

- B.U.

# Women of the Western Himalaya

Photographs by  
**Stela Snead**



**Stella Snead**, now 81 and leading an active life in New York City, is a photographer, artist, author and adventurer. Since 1950, she has travelled extensively in South and South-East Asia, capturing landscapes and portraits in black and white. In this series, *Himal* presents photographs by Stella which capture the mood and the diversity of the women of the western Himalaya.

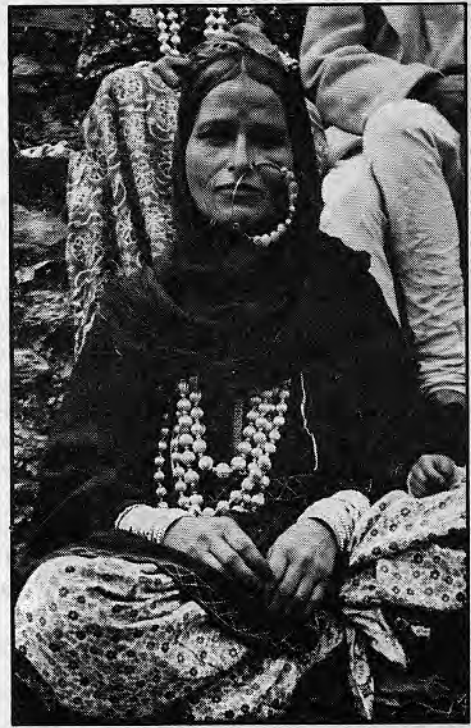
**Top:** Gujar nomad, Pahalgam, Kashmir (1965)

**Left:** Ganish, Hunza (1983)

**Clockwise from top:**  
Woman going to a wedding,  
Palampur, Kangra  
Himachal Pradesh (1956)

Chhatrari, Chamba,  
Himachal Pradesh (1956)

At Chhatrari Mela, Chamba,  
Himachal Pradesh (1956)





**Clockwise from top left:**

On the trail between Brahmor and Chhatrari  
Himachal Pradesh (1956)

Ladakhi woman wearing 'perag' head dress,  
Leh (1976)

Hotel owner's wife  
Karimabad, Hunza (1983)

## ICIMOD Tries a Change



Under pressure from an external panel which last year reviewed its performance, the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development is undergoing a major overhaul in an attempt to become more result-oriented.

ICIMOD has had its share of problems, having to do, among others with: New Delhi's wariness of any organisation that would propose to 'snoop' around border regions it considers sensitive; consistently mediocre international staff sent by China (none from Tibet, though); collection of 'dead-wood' within Nepal itself; and the inability to attract professionals of international calibre; as well as the inability so far to reach out to all of the Himalayan region. But the real problem, which explains the United Nations-like timidity of the organisation, is the fact that government representatives sit on the board and call the shots. (The Board till now has been composed of six countries of the region, the Swiss, Germans and UNESCO as donors/funders and the Executive Director.)

One item that has by and large never been a problem during seven years of ICIMOD is funding, doled out generously by the Swiss and the Germans. In 1990, the Centre spent three million dollars, US 1.2 million to pay for core activities including staff salaries, and US 1.7 on project implementation. For this amount, goes the criticism, ICIMOD has done little other than publish manuals and discussion papers, most of which are said to fall short of international standards.

The defence is that ICIMOD is an 'ideas' institution whose output is intellectual and hence cannot be quantified. Some within ICIMOD would like simply to upgrade the quality of its printed

output without turning it into a donor-driven, project implementation agency.

E.F Tacke, an agro-economist who was at the Asian Development Bank in Manila before he came to Kathmandu, says that a research institute of this type usually goes through an evolutionary process. Over the past seven years, he says, ICIMOD has been engaged in understanding what is happening in the mountains. "Now the time has come to disseminate this knowledge to all the member countries, for which the method is through reports, training and interaction."

But apparently, the three member review team (made up of Amir Mohammad, a Pakistani agriculture scientist, John Cool, an American agriculture expert, and Rolf William of the Swiss Development Cooperation) saw little logic in ICIMOD's functioning. In recommendations made to the Board in June 1990, the panel suggested 'internationalising' the Board, an obvious attempt to weaken government representation and to strengthen the presence of independent experts. The Board, knowing where its own interests lay, went half way. At a meeting held in Berne in June 1991, it decided that henceforth the "Board of Governors" would be made up of 15 members (up from 10), comprised of representatives of eight member countries (Burma and Afghanistan were added), seven independent professionals and the Executive Director.

In future, the Board is to decide on priorities and pass on the funding and other requirements to an "ICIMOD Support Group", which is an open-ended donor group presently having ten members, including the Swiss, Germans and UNESCO.

The Board also listened to the expert panel's criticism that there was over-recruitment of Nepalis. The organisation presently has 32 professional staff members, of

whom 15 are Nepali, five Indian, four Chinese and one Pakistani. The decision is to make ICIMOD less top-heavy, with a core group of 18 professionals working under a Director General and two Directors. The Board would like ICIMOD to work in a "decentralised mode", relying on a highly professional core group in Kathmandu and using existing institutions in member countries to conduct intensive research in the field.

The Board has decided that ICIMOD should not offer lifetime employment, and that there should be rotation so that specialists among the core staff can return to their countries and

further disseminate the experience gained. The initial hiring shall be for a three year period. All professional staff who currently hold "lifetime, open-ended contracts" will be discharged and those with specific contracts (such as Tacke, whose term expires in mid-1993) will stay until their terms end. ICIMOD retains the option to selectively call back its former staff as the restructuring progresses, taking into account their specialisation and "nationality balance". The recruitment of the Director level and above will be by international and not regional competition.   
Bijaya Lal Shrestha

## New Journal

To add to struggling journals for Himalayan academia, welcome now the *European Bulletin of Himalayan Research*. The journal is meant to fill the communication gap that exists among European scholars who are involved in Himalayan research. *EBHR* is brought out by the South Asia Institute of the Heidelberg University. According to Co-editor Martin Gaenzle, "As it is not yet clear whether the bulletin will be financially viable, the trial period is for two years."

The bulletin is to disseminate information on research projects; archives with literary, ethnographic, historical, archaeological, botanical and other material; current political developments in the Himalayan countries and their implications for researchers; news about recent and forthcoming conferences; funding for European scholars working in the Himalayas or those from the region to visit Europe. There will also be review articles, particularly on books published from the Himalayan region, which may be inadequately distributed in Europe.   
Contact: PO Box: 4379, Kathmandu, or Sudasian Institute, Seminar fur Ethnologie, Universitat Heidelberg, Im Neuenheimer Feld 330, D-6900, Germany.

## "Trees Equal Environment"

If you had newly taken charge of a ministry whose name was Ministry for Forests and Soil Conservation, wouldn't you just love to change it to Ministry for Forests and Environment, and bring a whole dollop of prestigious responsibilities your way? That is exactly what Shailaja Acharya, Nepal's Minister of Environment has done.

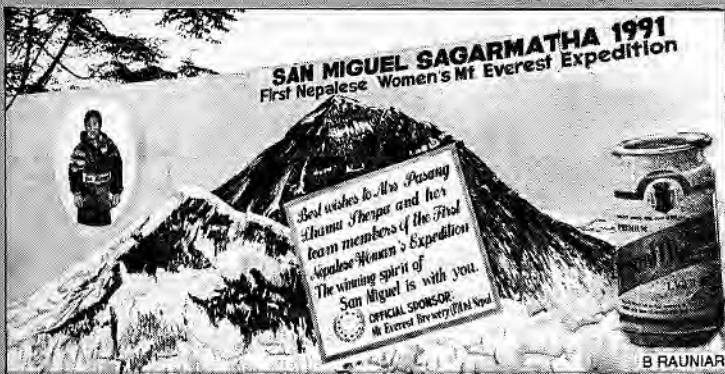
If you believe that wood fibre alone makes up the Nepali environment, there's nothing to worry about. But who will look out for toxic wastes, diesel exhaust, sewage disposal, drinking water, groundwater contamination, acid rain, global warming, ozone holes, genetic diversity, intergenerational equity...

It does seem that those who have been looking after forests are biting a bit more than they can chew. Will the working dynamics within a ministry where the Tree comes First, allow other environmental issues equal weightage? Now that Environment has gone to Forests, will the Ministries of Industries, Commerce, Local Development, Transport, Finance, Tourism have any incentive to think of ecologically safe options?

## Mountaineering First

If business sponsorship was what was keeping Nepalis from organising their own expeditions to the mountain peaks, that challenge has now been met. San Miguel Beer of Nepal and Kwality Ice-Cream of Nepal have just sponsored an assault on Chomolongma/Sagarmatha/Everest.

So far so good, and may other makers of junk food, liquor and cigarettes continue to siphon at least some of their profits towards promoting more climbs on more peaks, and may Royal Nepal Airlines always provide subsidised air passage to Nepali teams and may the Nepali Tourism Ministry always waive



royalty for Nepali climbers. All this was done with the team presently on Everest, headed by Pasang Lhamu Sherpa.

Hopefully, future funders of expeditions will not take their cue from the San Miguel-Kwality sponsorship, which has seen fit to hype up their project beyond all limits. And how can an expedition whose only female Nepali member is the leader, be touted as the "First Nepalese Women's Expedition to Everest"? All the other Nepali members are men, and there are four French women and one Belgian woman. Insider information suggests that climbers who reach the top and take pictures of themselves sipping beer at 8,848 m will receive 'gifts' of NRs 50,000 on their return to Kathmandu. Let us hope they leave their bottle openers behind at Base Camp.

## Bahuguna on the Move

On 11 September, Sunderlal Bahuguna of the Chipko movement launched a cycle rally at Gangasagar, the point where a tributary of the Ganga meets the Bay of Bengal. The cyclists, accompanied by a truck carrying environmental literature (and the 65-year-old Bahuguna), will traverse the length of the Ganga with the goal of raising awareness regarding the pollution of the river and the need to restore the upland catchment areas. Having passed through Calcutta, Varanasi and Rishikesh en route, the rallyists will reach the Gangotri temple in Garhwal on 4 November, the day before it closes for the winter. A gathering at Gangotri is expected to be the high point of the rally.

## Uttaranchal, Jharkhand & Vananchal

With everyone's attention focused on Subash Ghising's crying wolf on 'Greater Nepal', other significant events in the region seem to have been sidetracked. For example, the Lucknow BJP Government has just recommended that the Centre create a separate state out of the eight hill districts of Uttar Pradesh. The bill, following up on a promise on the basis of which the BJP won in Kumaon and Garhwal during the recent general elections, was rushed through the State Assembly in a matter of five minutes, according to reports. It all apparently happened so fast that the Opposition did not even have time to react.

The BJP government's resolution recommends that the Central Government create a separate hill state, Uttaranchal (not Uttarakhand), comprising the following districts: Nainital, Pauri Garhwal, Tehri Garhwal, Dehradun, Almora, Chamoli, Pithoragarh and Uttarkashi.

The BJP government is apparently well aware of the enormous obstacles that remain in passing the problem off to New Delhi. However, if Uttaranchal *does* come about, it might finally end the long-lasting refrain that Kumaon and Garhwal are suffering due to Lucknow's neglect. Then, the hill folks would have no one to blame but themselves.

Meanwhile, in Bihar, the tribal areas in the southern plateau continue to simmer in discontent. On 2 August, the Bihar Government rushed a bill on the formation of a Jharkhand Council through the State Assembly, but it did not satisfy the Jharkhand parties, nor the BJP, which too is in favour of separate statehood for the Chhotanagpur and Santhal parganas. The criticism is that the Council has been given extremely limited powers.

Not that the BJP and the Jharkhand parties see eye-to-eye either. The latter want a Jharkhand state carved out of 22 districts with tribal populations in Bihar, West Bengal, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh. Their belief is that "as long as the Jharkhand

region remains divided into four states and the centres of political power remain at Patna, Calcutta and Bhubaneswar, the people of the Jharkhand region will continue to be victims of cultural separation and economic exploitation."

The Vananchal Movement, which has the BJP's support, wants statehood for only 13 districts in Bihar (out of its total of 42). These districts fall within the Chhotanagpur and Santhal parganas in the plateau area of South Bihar.

## A Lhasa-Hong Kong Link?

The government of the Tibet Autonomous Region wants to operate direct flights from Lhasa to Hong Kong to attract more tourists. The only international flights out of Lhasa so far are to Kathmandu.

Zhuo Zha Duo Ji, Vice-Director of Lhasa's Bureau of Finance, says the Beijing Government has set aside 100 million yuan (US\$ 18 million) to expand the runway in Lhasa. Duo Ji was in Hong Kong recently in connection with the opening of an office of the China-Tibet Qomolongma Trade and Travel Company.

Ngapho Rinchen, Director of the Tibet Tourism Bureau, said that the number of tourists to Tibet was 12,000 in 1990 and the figure was expected to go up to 15,000 this year. (The tourist peak was reached in 1987 with 43,000 visitors, before the Lhasa crackdown.)

Duo Ji also revealed that China's State Planning Commission had already granted one billion yuan (US\$ 180 m) to maintain the Qinghai-Tibet and Sichuan-Tibet highways, and the projects were expected to be completed in about five years. Beijing had also approved 500 million yuan (US\$ 90 m) for a power-plant at Lake Yamdok Tso "to provide electricity to a wider area of Tibet."

## BRIEFS

# New Hope for Upland Rice

**S**tung by criticism that its high-yield hybrid rice has widened the gap between rich and poor farmers, the Philippine-based International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) is now trying to develop hardy new seeds for Asia's marginalised hill peasants.

Scientists at IRRI's experimental paddy fields at Los Banos near Manila are testing improved seeds to help poorer farmers who depend on upland rice.



IRRI Scientist working on Upland Rice, the Philippines.

IRRI

Mountain rice makes up only five per cent of global rice production. But in the hills of Nepal, Bhutan, northern India and Burma, it is an important component of total paddy harvests. Over

60 per cent of the 20 million hectares of upland rice fields worldwide are located in Asia.

IRRI states that terraced rice fields in Asia are under tremendous pressure. Current research is trying to curb erosion and control damage from slash-and-burn cultivation. Problems are diverse. In countries like Nepal, hill farmers are moving to the plains because of land scarcity and falling productivity, in the Philippines population pressure and spreading cash-crop plantations in the plains are forcing

peasants to the hills.

Hill farmers in Asia are often the poorest, consuming most of what they grow. Upland rice yields average one ton per hectare, compared to six tons in the plains. "Part of the solution is to provide the upland farmers a stable source of cash income," says Dr. Michel Arraudeau, a plant breeder at IRRI and author of 'A Farmer's Primer on Growing Upland Rice'. He believes upland rice yields can be doubled by improving traditional varieties which are adapted to poor soils but do not respond to fertilisers.

Says Garrity: "The solution for increasing income of upland farmers is a mix of animal, crop and forest technologies. This will be successful only if the farmer has secure tenure to his upland farm and an incentive to maintain soil fertility and improve his land."

## Mountain Agenda

**T**he campaign to put the earth's hill regions on the agenda of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Brazil next year was finally launched at Geneva in August. Over 100 countries met to finalise plans.

The Kathmandu-based ICIMOD hitched up with the United Nations University and the International Mountain Society to push "Mountain Agenda UNCED 1992" into the international arena. On hand at the Palais des Nations of the United Nations was ICIMOD's Chairman Rudolf Hogger, who said, "Mountains are a key element in the global environment and weather-making, and further deterioration can have an impact on climate worldwide." But he warned: "Poverty and inappropriate development are degrading mountain areas. New concepts of sustainable development are needed so that mountain peoples are not be marginalised."

(Nugget: About 20 per cent of the earth's land area is made up of mountains and forms a direct source of support for one-tenth of the world's population).

Sponsors of the Mountain Agenda in Geneva said that their initiative is designed to draw the attention of policy makers to the unsustainable exploitation of mountain regions in developing as well as industrialised countries. The Agenda consists of a sort of

"State of the Mountains Report", a suggested plan of action to save hilly regions, and a two-page manifesto. The report makes a special plea for the protection of the rich bio-diversity of mountain areas and points out "hot spots" like the uplands of Madagascar, the Andean slopes of western Amazonia, the eastern Himalaya, the uplands of Philippines and Sri Lanka, and the montane forests of Tanzania.

Bruno Messerli, of the University of Berne, speaking to the delegates as the representative for the Agenda sponsors, called for institutional mechanisms to allow exchanges of information and experience between, say, the Himalaya and the Andes. He said that unlike oceans, tropical forests or coral reefs, mountain regions do not have special advocates in the international environmental movement.

In Geneva, the mountain agenda was pushed by Bhutan, Pakistan and Nepal, among others.

## Gosainkunda Blues

**T**he rocky moonscape around the holy lake of Gosainkunda was relatively empty of humanity on 23rd August. The next day, Janai Purnima, there were 10,000 pilgrims teeming by the lakeside. This happens every year, only this year there was a Himalayan Rescue Association (HRA) team to watch out for altitude sickness.

Whereas HRA's previous efforts have been directed towards saving the lives of foreign trekkers and mountaineers, this was the first time any rescue body was focusing on Himalayans at risk: pilgrims who trudge up to the high-altitude shrines in the area.

Gosainkunda is situated at 14,140 feet on a high glacial valley directly north of Kathmandu and astride the valley of the Trisuli river. The access to Gosainkunda from Trisuli Bazaar has been made easier by bus service to Dhunche, at 6450 feet. Many young pilgrims push themselves hard and make it from Dhunche to Gosainkunda (a climb of 7690 ft) in a day.

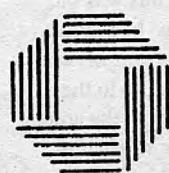
By the lakeside, Tamang shamans with tridents over their heads, lead a ritualistic dance. Large wisps of clouds swirled around the lake as the shamans went into a trance. Behind the crowd, the HRA team of two doctors and seven Nepali medical students, were engaged in a different kind of ritual: treating pilgrims with altitude sickness.

"Our team had its hands full," said Dr. Buddha Basnyet, leader of the HRA team, which had initially come with the sole

intention of collecting data on altitude sickness. "There were pilgrims showing the various symptoms of altitude sickness, including profuse vomiting, drunken gait and severe headaches. The worst hit were those who came up straight from Dhunche and planned to spend the night. In most cases, we advised the patients to descend as soon as they had their darshan."

The team found that treatment with the hyperbaric bag (a portable unit which simulates barometric pressures of lower altitudes) was very effective. Throughout Janai Purnima festivities, there were pilgrims coming up and asking to be put into the bag.

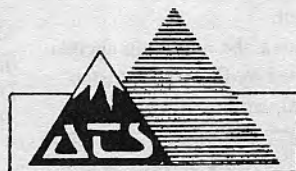
Unfortunately, according to Dr. Basnyet, there were two deaths, both men, who died at Ghopte and Thade on the trail east of Gosainkunda to Helambu. With their Gosainkunda experience, the HRA team is now energised to spread word about altitude sickness in other high altitude pilgrimages, including Muktinath (Annapurna), Panch Pokhari (Jugal Himal) and Dudh Kund (Khumbu Himal).



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# Tread Softly on Auli Gorson

*Downhill skiing is being introduced in the hills of Uttar Pradesh, but at what cost to the local society and environment? We must study the experience in the Alps, and consider cross-country skiing.*

by Mukul Mangalik

**F**ar above Joshimath, the peach, apricot and apple trees give way to the potato-fields and *bugyals* (meadows) of Auli. A forest of oak and conifers separates Auli from the meadows of Gorson, where flowers bloom for a short period between mid-June and end-September.

A 13-kilometre unmetalled road winds up the mountainside from Joshimath to Auli. Here, the Uttar Pradesh government undertaking known as the Garhwal Mandal Vikas Nigam (GMVN) is trying to develop the largest winter sports and skiing resort in the Himalaya. Although at present the energies of the GMVN are concentrated on Auli, it is eyeing the vast, undulating pastures of Gorson as well. If there is profit in Auli, the investors expect to make a killing with Gorson.

The idea of a winter sports resort at Auli was first floated in 1976. The Lucknow government promised to provide the needed infrastructure in the hope that private investors would take over and create a "tourist paradise" which would shame Kashmir's Gulmarg. Money would flow in from the influx of Indian as well as foreign skiers. GMVN would be able to offer 'locals' opportunities for regular employment.

The skiing development programme was Lucknow's much-publicised response to emerging popular sentiment in the U.P. Himalaya during the early 1970s that they had been robbed more than they had benefitted from development

in post-independence India. Auli was planned as an experiment at income generation which might also serve as an example for development elsewhere in the Himalaya.

Auli would have to be made easily accessible, so a ropeway system was designed to carry spacious cable cars from Joshimath at (6,000 ft) to Auli (10,500 ft). The construction work was undertaken by Triveni Structural, with the help of Voest-Alpine, a large engineering firm from Linz, Austria. Sometime in the early 1980s, work on the project stopped after only three out of ten ropeway pillars had been put up. The equipment which had been imported from Austria in the first flush of enthusiasm could not make it up the narrow roads and bridges of the Alaknanda valley. The heavy cables and the ropeway gondolas have lain rusting all these years at the Bombay docks.

## THE REAL COST

Fifteen years have passed since the first budget for Auli was proposed in 1976. It was revised upwards the last time in 1988 and there is already talk of shortage of funds. The contracts for preparing the foundations for the remaining pillars were re-negotiated in early 1990 and work began again last summer.

Mules laden with bags of sand and cement make their way up and down the Auli meadows, cutting deep gashes on the mountain flanks. Labourers blast away at rocks; on softer ground, smaller stones are dug out with spades and shovelled into cloth buckets slung on a wooden beam carried by two men.

Daily-wage labourers from Kumaon and Nepal cook and sleep in improvised tin-sheds at the work-site. They live in dust and they eat dust. Work begins at dawn and continues till six in the evening, with a break for the mid-day meal. For long hours of back-breaking work with primitive implements and strike-the-fuse-and-run rock blasting, they are paid Rs 25 a day.

This winter, GMVN employees were proud that work

on the pillar bases had been completed without an upward revision in costs. The contractors seemed pleased as well. I was left wondering if the Nigam, Triveni Structural and contractors had taken into account what seemed to me to be the non-calculable costs: months of reckless blasting on fragile mountainsides; the deep gashes on meadows; the travails of migrants forced to do hazardous work for low wages. How could things like these ever be costed and paid for? Or did the ultimate goal of a sanitised winter tourist resort make up for all this?

Skiing started in Auli in 1985 and in the beginning the facilities were rudimentary. For three winters, ski instructors Mr. Rawat and Mr. Nagi (one of the first professional instructors in the country) lived in the potato-farmers' huts.

Today, there are four dormitories built of pre-fabricated materials brought in from Dehra Dun. There are also two octagonal 'cottages' and a dining hall and kitchen made of concrete with roofs of tin. These constructions are miserable eyesores. Two of the dormitories already leak. Somewhere, a door has come off its hinges; elsewhere, windows are about to fall. The near future should reveal how much sand has gone into concrete and how much money into various pockets.

Imagination appears to have been absent when these buildings were conceived. Their gaudy pinks, yellows and greens stand out against the soft meadows of Auli as you emerge from the forest above Joshimath. In winter months, with snow all around, the buildings exude no warmth.

## RECKLESS OPENING

In the early 1890s, when skiing first gained popularity in Europe, no one in the Alps imagined how this sport would develop, nor what its impact would be on life in the Alps and on the alpine environment. We are born to re-learn mistakes again and again, and the problems of Alpine skiing seem likely to be repeated as skiing resorts overtake the Himalaya, spearheaded by the prototype at Auli.

The first cable cars for transporting skiers began to appear in the Alps just before World War I. However, it was only after World War II that downhill (or "alpine") skiing began to monopolise the Alps. To fulfil the demands of downhill skiing, roads were cut through virgin



tracts. Concrete parking lots replaced the green of forest clearings. Cable cars, chairs and T-bar lifts fanned out on the slopes to make vast areas accessible to skiers in a single day. As slopes began to be "prepared", large rocks and bushy clumps of Alpine roses and berries were cleared to make way for "ski-freeways".

In the excitement of post-war reconstruction, there was a recklessness in the way the Alps were opened up. Little thought was given to the effect on the sensitive physical and cultural landscape. Only in the late 1970s, when forests were seen to be dying at least partly due to the exhaust fumes from motor vehicles, and reports of disappearing birds and plants, did some people wake up to the ruthless colonisation of the Alps by no-holds-barred skiing.

Not every farmer in the Alps has given up farming, nor all cowherds and shepherds their herds and flocks. The making of cheese and butter on Alpine pastures in summer is still widespread in parts of Austria and Italy. But the lives of the Alpine villagers have certainly been affected. Suddenly, in the middle of a ski run, one passes abandoned huts and meadows on which herders no longer 'summer' their animals because the pastures have been destroyed by the slopes.

### DISCOVERING CROSS COUNTRY

Far from arguing that skiing be discouraged in our region, I think more and more people should enjoy the pleasures of the sport and not an exclusive few. The point at issue is, simply, what kind of skiing is worth encouraging, and at what cost? Downhill skiing is only one kind of skiing. There is also cross country skiing.

In the Alps, I began to feel bored queuing up for lifts, being pulled to the top of mountains, and coming down on skis and going up again. It was around this time that I started going on cross country ski tours in Tirol. I learnt to glide up mountains on skis without slipping back. I began to feel free of lifts, and the prepared slopes of packed and hard snow. Instead, I could go through forests, where the snow was fluffy like cotton-wool. I could go on any mountain I wished and decide for myself the path of my descent.

This was not the hectic up-and-down skiing amidst crowds milling around hotels, lifts and slopes, planned by colonisers and developers. On a tour, I could ski and explore the mountains as they were, in winter's moods. It was like walking the hills on foot in summer, drawing closer to the joys, dangers and sorrows of wilderness. This is not the way downhill skiing tames the wilderness: downhill skiing refuses to let the mountains be.

Touring the Alps on my cross country skis, I dreamt of roaming the *bugyals* of Garhwal on skis in winter. Free of the hegemony of downhill skiing, I looked forward to Himalayan snows —

to spend solitary hours on my skis at Auli itself, under the blissful gaze of Nanda Devi.

### GOING DOWNHILL

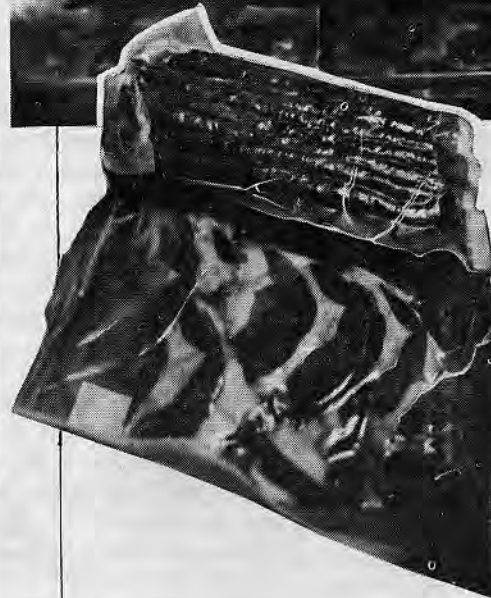
Auli's development is not informed by the experience in the Alps. The GMVN is hell-bent on developing only downhill skiing at Auli-Gorson, and its plans do not show any regard for the local hill society, nor the natural environment. The major ropeway project is already underway. Three smaller lifts will cover the slopes of Auli. Three- and five-star hotels are to be built by private parties on the meadows below the forests.

The meadows of grass and flower are already severely wounded. Ascending hordes of humans will soon drive the last snow foxes and monal pheasants away. And what will happen,

come summer, to the shepherds and their centuries-old practice of pasturing their flocks on these *bugyals*? And to potato-growing village folk who gave "Auli" its name?

When GMVN chose downhill skiing as its model for developing Auli, it did so mindlessly. It has appeared blind to the ruin it will bring in its wake to the mountains whose society it was supposed to safeguard and conserve. The Garhwal Mandal Vikas Nigam is behaving as if the mountains are its private resource to develop any which way it likes. But these mountains, these pastures and their people, were here before the GMVN and its officials arrived on the slopes of Auli.

M. Mangalik has lived and skied in the South Tirol mountains of Austria. He latest visit to Auli was in late March.



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## FORESTRY IN AN ACCOUNTABLE DEMOCRACY

# Confusion, Conflicts and Choices

*While there have been some good intentions, no one comes off shining in Nepal's experiment with forestry: not the forester, the social scientist, the "environmentalist" or the politician. Theories have been used up, the only way ahead now is to recognise the pervasiveness of 'narrow individual interest', and allow private forestry.*

by Amulya Ratna Tuladhar

**H**ow can we characterise the present national forest policy of Nepal? Is it community forestry or 'shoot-n-protect' forestry, socialist forestry or capitalistic forestry, state forestry or private forestry? Also, in terms of the more recent debate, who is to take command of monitoring the country's environment: the forester, the urban elite environmentalist, or neither? The signals emanating thus far from forestry circles in the country have been confusing, to say the least.

As far as the national forest policy is concerned, what prevails is an inefficient and confusing mishmash of the various forestry concepts. Let us first take them up one by one.

### CONFUSION

**Community Forestry:** This is the officially preferred policy approach enunciated by the Forestry Sector Master Plan for 1989-2010, a US\$ 1.7 billion undertaking currently in execution. Despite the fact that the Plan was conceived during the dying days of the Panchayat regime, the Interim Government of Prime Minister K.P. Bhattarai continued to endorse the Plan as official forest policy. The only major change

introduced in the Plan was the substitution of the word 'Panchayat' with the word 'Community' wherever it cropped up in the Master Plan document, so that we now have 'Community Plantations' and 'Community Protected Forests'. The word 'community' refers to any user group which depends upon forest products, but there is confusion today over whether such user groups are Congress Communities or Communist Communities!

**Shoot-n-Protect Forestry:** On 5 February 1991, under the Interim Government, four *sukumbasis* were shot dead in Nawalparasi District. These landless forest encroachers had been blocking highway traffic to press for their demand for the regularisation of their settlements in the Government forests.

The deaths followed a series of public appeals and stern warnings which were put out by the authorities following reports of political activists openly promoting forest clearance and settlement. The Task Force of Forest Conservation, appointed by the then Minister of Forests and Soil Conservation, Jhala Nath Khanal, had also recommended the use of stern action (read: shoot people) to deal with deforestation.

Following the widespread and sustained protest over the killings, the Nepali Congress Government has now formulated the following policy for evacuation of the landless from Government Forests: one, identify the 'true landless'; two, resettle the 'true' landless on surplus lands outside the forests; and, three, evict all the 'false' encroachers forcibly, if necessary, by razing their shacks as is being done continuously in Udaipur and Bardia.

How the Government proposes to identify the 'true' landless and where it will locate surplus land outside the forests, are matters yet to be addressed.

**Socialist Forestry:** Nepal has followed a socialist forest policy ever since, in 1957, the country's private forests were nationalised aided by B.P. Koirala. Will his brother G.P. Koirala, now Prime Minister and expressing undiminished faith in democratic socialism, apply socialism in forestry as did, ironically, the Panchayat system? It is worth recalling that in the 32 years of the Panchayat, the fundamental socialistic tenets of the Private Forests Nationalisation Act of 1957, which transferred ownership to the State, was never repealed?

What has been the price of socialism in forestry? A reduction of forest cover from 70 percent to 37 percent in 32 years. How many trees must Nepal lose forever before the Nepali Congress Government junks (as it should) socialism in forestry?

**Capitalistic Forestry:** The once-popular saying "*Hariyo ban, Nepalk dhan*" illustrates how deeply ingrained in the Nepali psyche the link between forests, money and profit, is. Since the reign of Jung Bahadur Rana in the 1850s, the forests of Nepal have been exploited blatantly to generate wealth for the Government.

In the beginning, forests were cut to provide railway sleepers south of the border. Today, they are harvested, both legally and illegally, for logs, *kattha* (a wood product used in *paans*), sal seeds, turpentine, *lokta* and *sabai* grass (both for paper). Money and profit is still being generated from forests. Many students who join the Institute of Forestry campuses in Pokhara or Hetauda seem



N. SHERCHAN

to do so with the primary motive of making quick money as foresters.

How long can the Government deny the strong smell of big bucks which attracts profiteers into forestry? How long should it live a lie and espouse idealistic policies of socialism and the 'bottom-up' approach to community development? The Government must come out of the closet and declare forestry as a legitimate, capitalistic venture that should be managed under sound principles of profit maximisation and cost minimisation.

**State Forestry:** Forestry first became a State activity when Bhimsen Thapa in the 1800s managed the passes within the forest lands of the Tarai and the mountains as strategic assets against British India and China. At no time did State control become so pervasive as after the enactment of the 1957 Act.

The production of over 200 foresters every year by the Institute of Forestry has given the State the trained manpower it requires to firmly exercise control over the country's forests. It is ironic, however, that the increase in State control over forests should coincide with the drastic decrease in the forest cover. The beneficiaries of State control over forestry were never the people at large nor the forest area. While the forest bureaucrats, as well as politicians and forest contractors benefited, forestry in private lands has become invisible to policy makers and administrators.

**Private Forestry:** Even when the State was exerting full *de jure* control of Nepal's forests, large tracts remained under *de facto* control of private citizens because the State did not have adequate manpower or logistic support. Private forests have, till recently, been invisible both to the Forest and Agriculture ministries. It is this private forestry that has filled the "alarming gap" between the supply of forest products and the unproductivity of government forest land. The Nepal-Australia Forestry Project was baffled to discover in a 20-year time lapse study of aerial

photographs of two villages in its area, that the forests were healthier in the village that had not been aided by the Project. Similarly, reports from Dhanusha, Accham and other districts normally not reached by State interventions indicate that 'Indigenous Forest Management,' 'Agroforestry,' 'Farm Forestry' and other forestry initiatives of private citizens may be more efficient than State Forestry.

The Government has permitted donor agencies such as Winrock International, the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank, USAID and Canada's IDRC to not only explore but to promote private forestry. Does this portend the Government's endorsement of private forestry as its forest policy?

### CLASS WAR IN FORESTRY

Shailaja Acharya, until recently the Minister of Forests and Soil Conservation, has succeeded in renaming her ministry so that she is now Minister of Forests and Environment. (Acharya also holds the Agriculture portfolio). The proponents of 'Environmental Forestry' are to be found among foresters within the her Ministry, and the arguments they put forth are: that forestry is the 'number one environmental problem' facing the country and the region; that it is forestry which has attracted funds for environmental amelioration of disastrous floods in India and Bangladesh, and for conserving the country's unique wildlife and biological heritage; that it is necessary to protect the Himalayan landscape from tourists and mountaineers; and that foresters have the most relevant training in environment among all the professional cadres.

Opponents of the Ministry name-conversion were mostly non-foresters, free-lance professionals or professionals outside the Forest Ministry. They would rather have had a separate Ministry of Environment where professionals would be drawn from a wider science and technology background. According to this group: environment is too big an issue to be restricted to

forestry; the forestry discipline is ill-equipped to handle issues of urban water, air, noise pollution, industrial pollution, legal and public relations, health and epidemiology; that foresters are "clannish" and closed to new ideas and multi-disciplinary work; and that the foresters have thus far left a trail of mediocrity, corruption and ineptitude.

The hidden force behind this tug-of-war over 'environment' is, of course, the strong smell of donor dollars (always lavishly spent on environmental causes), the glamour of foreign travel for those concerned about the 'environment', and the prestige of international acculturation. The tussle also indicates a socio-economic class war between the urban elite professional who by virtue of their superior education and more civilised ways, consider international environmental issues as their birthright, and the rural elite foresters who feel that they have the right training and experience, and hence are more deserving of whatever 'environmental dollars' may come by. (Objectively speaking, the environment is too big an issue to remain exclusively within Forestry. However, foresters have the cadres, the training, and the experience to take on environmental degradation in a sustained manner and at an institutional scale. So, while the Ministry might well be named after Forests and Environment, environmental issues outside the scope of forestry should be addressed by the Ministry by including professionals from other disciplines.)

### HUSTLERS AND MAGICIANS

The confusion that reigns in forest policy has arisen due to the push and pull of various segments of society for supremacy. The anatomy of the conflict between Community Forestry and Shoot-n-Protect forestry reveals the clash of overt and covert agendas, between real and supposed beneficiaries.

Community forestry was doomed by both its theoretical conceptualisation and by problems in its practical application. The approach was formally introduced in 1976 with changes in the Forest Law 1961 to create 'Panchayat Forests' and 'Panchayat Protected Forests'. The Panchayat, therefore, became *the* community.

Then came the hustlers and the magicians: social scientists, social foresters, anthropologists and agriculturists. The common enemy of this tribe were the 'pro-tree, anti-people' foresters who would not allow them a toe-hold in forestry. The social scientists took it upon themselves to restore forests to the rightful owners: the people. As banners and lances, they brought out the right weapons to vanquish the foresters: Agroforestry, Farm Forestry, User Groups, and Indigenous Knowledge Systems.

While these magicians were trying to fool the people with an array of pro-people genies,



Dead forest north-east of Kathmandu.

PADAM S. GHALE

they also worked overtime to hustle up millions of dollars to support the (Panchayat) community forestry. Who has not heard of the multi-million dollar Hill Community Forestry and Tarai Community Forestry Projects? But the greatest con game was to be the Forestry Master Plan.

Over 21 years, it was planned, the Forestry Sector Master Plan would collect from donors and spend US\$ 1.7 billion. The Plan was conceived by a small cell within Ministry of Forestry with help of national and expatriate hustlers, respectably known as experts. The Plan was sold by the Panchayat polity to the Donor Community and shoved down the throats of rank-and-file foresters. Needless to say, the foresters felt alienated by a planning process that made a mockery of decentralisation and people's participation slogans. One particularly derisive field forester summed up his feelings thus: "It (the Master Plan) is not worth the paper it is printed on. But they went and spent 11 crores just to prepare the document."

Who were the proponents of community forestry, which is the concept that the Master Plan hugs so dearly? Among foresters, they were those that had worked with communities rather than with the loggers, contractors, smugglers and encroachers. Most of their peers regarded these persons as out-of-touch, jet-set foresters who spent more time in meetings, banquets and report-writing than in protecting forests under the heat of the midday sun.

The other category of proponents were the agriculturists, who see their mission in life as the realisation of the green revolution on every inch of forest land. No one can deny that deforestation in Nepal is the story of the failure of agriculture. What little increase in agricultural production there has been has come from the floor of freshly-cut forests, not through increased productivity in agriculture. Only a small number of agriculturists subscribe to the farming systems approach where trees are recognised as integral components of the farm. Most want community forests for agroforestry. Food production is their god and the environment (including trees) must go to appease this deity.

The last category is made up of the social scientists, including anthropologists, sociologists and economists. Since social scientists become active when there are people-related problems, their stock rose as soon as the forests were nationalised three and a half decades ago.

Nationalisation put a Wall between the people and their forests. The Wall was put up ostensibly to bring the benefits of scientific management for the maximum common good. In effect, however, the Wall came to serve as the cover behind which the Panchayat plundered the country.

The Wall had bricks and a face of paint which the people encountered every day. This face of paint was the forest bureaucracy. "Pro-people" scientists came up with clever tools to try to get over the Wall, but all they were able to do was to scrape the paint, in the form of the foresters. They could not destroy the Wall.

On second thought, how could they destroy the Wall? It gave them jobs, their *raison d'etre*. Without people-related problems in natural resources, the market for social scientists would surely dip. So their motto was: bash the foresters to win the trust of the people but strengthen the Panchayat Wall, which would reward them with prestige, jobs, perks and foreign travel. The Panchayat and the Social Scientist fed off each other. So while the Panchayat endorsed junk reports of fuzzy-headed social scientists, the "pro-people" social scientists refused to speak up when the Panchayat uprooted tree seedlings planted by the multi-party community. They were too busy hustling support for community forestry projects, and the Master Plan.

### HARDLINER PSYCHOLOGY

There was no time to gloat over the humiliation of the social foresters and their expatriate gurus. As they were exposed and rejected with the fall of the Panchayat, the proponents of shoot-n-protect forestry immediately reasserted themselves. These hard-liners have long expressed their view, often privately, that 'hard' decisions must be taken to 'combat' deforestation on a 'war footing'. So when the multi-party leaders took charge of the Interim Government, they decided to act. They relied on several factors: the multi-party leadership was not so keen to endorse the Panchayat 'legacy' of community forestry; and it was worried that mass-deforestation like that which happened in 1979 might occur. Neither did the new leaders want to look like indecisive wimps.

Taking advantage of the opportunity that presented itself, the rank-and-file foresters raised the alarm that deforestation was going on at a massive scale, prodded on by both Panchayat

and multi-party elements. They warned that the breakdown of central authority prevented a crackdown and that the foresters were risking their lives to protect a national resource.

The Interim Government responded with the Task Force on Conservation which, though headed by a political appointee, was otherwise dominated by hardline foresters, which ensured foregone conclusions. Influential among the members was one individual who had made a career in Nepali forestry on a trail of blood. The Task Force went through a charade of inviting suggestions from all interested parties and individuals, visiting parts of Nepal, white washing the deforestation that was ongoing under the Interim Government's nose, and offering the *piece de resistance*: "The cause of deforestation is due to a) lack of firm political commitment, b) encouragement of the clearing of forests for individual benefit, and c) the felling of trees for illegal export of logs."

It was subsequent to this that four *sukumbasis* were shot in Nawalparasi. The Government also came up with a formal policy statement that promised to "take stern action against forest encroachers."

How can a Government that shoots people to exclude them from forests ever persuade the same people to participate in community forestry? A District Forest Officer explained his predicament, "The very people I apprehend during my night patrols for smuggling logs are the persons I have to persuade in daylight to join community user groups!"

Why are the hardliners in forestry so unyielding? An examination of the collective social psychology of those at the Ministry helps. The primary motivation for most Nepalis who join the forest service is acquisition of social power and rapid upward mobility. This has been confirmed by numerous entrants at the Institute of Forestry. They are very aware of the reach of the forest service power in their villages: the power of the forest officer to order shooting (as any army commander), the power to dispose of a legal case (as any magistrate), the power to declare forest land as residential property (as any revenue officer), and the power to extract economic gain by the cubic foot or truck-load of illegally cut logs. Thus motivated, forestry students hurry through their courses and make a beeline to the territorial positions where their promised dreams are realised.



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Over the past decade, with proponents of community forestry chipping into their domain, the District Forest Officers became a pale shadow of the Divisional Forest Officer of yore. It is only natural, therefore, for these territorial foresters to bring back the old days of unfettered power by recapturing the high ground from the cacophonous community foresters.

**TRUE BENEFICIARIES**

A pamphlet recently plastered on city walls by some forestry students was insightful. It asked some rhetorical questions:

“Whose forests are our forests?”

1. a) Political parties and their activists  
b) Landless encroachers  
c) Log smugglers  
d) Corrupt foresters; or
2. a) The Nepali people.”

The beneficiaries are, of course, those included under choices ‘a’ to ‘d’. One only needs to add one more category: the burgeoning tribe of local and expatriate ‘experts’.

The urban environmental lobby is highly educated, articulate and well-connected. Unfortunately, most of its members have entered a forest only for picnicking. The interests of this lobby are to capture the lion’s share of Green Dollars and the accompanying glamour, and to avoid the heat and rain of the field. They would like to maintain their self-image as the *avant garde* and survive by running down foresters as rural, uncouth, corrupt and inept.

The expatriate experts, backed by donor agencies, think that they are Tarzans come to save Nepalis from the deforested mess they have created for themselves. The foreign experts revel in spending 70 to 80 percent of grant and loan money on themselves. They invite friends and cronies on exotic junkets to Nepal under the guise of ‘volunteers’ and the more highly paid ‘specialists’. They work overtime trying to out-compete other expatriates in influencing forest policy, but close ranks to buy off local critics or starve them of lucrative consultancies so as to prevent embarrassing exposes. Through adroit use of donor aid, foreign trips and cocktail parties, these foreign experts guarantee their own cushy extensions, hardship allowances, tax-free salaries and the endorsement of junk reports. By and large, foreign forestry experts have palmed off unverifiable reports to the Nepali government, secure in the knowledge that they will be shelved and never be subjected to the scrutiny of peer review. Based on such mediocre reports, the expatriate will present himself to the world as the expert on Nepali forestry issues and would-be saviour of the Himalayan environment. Unfortunately, Nepali PhD students come back

misinformed by the writings of such expatriates and are hence totally misinformed about realities on the ground.

**CHOICES**

It is imperative for Nepal at this late hour to enunciate a forest policy which will enable it to navigate through the shoals of vested interests in order to bring the forests within the command of the most legitimate constituency, which is the voting Nepali public. The bottom line here is to increase the welfare of the vast majority of Nepal’s population which is directly dependent upon forest products, and to progressively increase and enrich the country’s forest cover.

To achieve this, the following is proposed:

Mass participation in forestry must be proposed, not through expensive audio-visual and other extension technologies, but by releasing the natural genius of the people to innovate and to adapt. This genius can only be released when the *economic incentive of profit is attached to forestry*, and when forestry is perceived as a means of ameliorating environmental stress such as fuel shortage and soil fertility loss.

Nepal must junk Statism and Socialism in forestry because they have benefited only foresters and the political establishment, and discouraged the private citizen who knows how to make profit from forests. It was under the watch of Statism and Socialism that the Nepal lost most of its forest cover. Private forestry, on the other hand, has shown the ability to meet the tree products shortfall created by the Government.

Land under forestry is limited. There is no more forest land left to absorb the failures in agriculture and population control. These two sectors must be disciplined by demanding results and withdrawing investment allocations.

In the end, the concept of community forestry, too, must be jettisoned. Because Nepal is so heterogenous culturally and because the people have only recently been freed from dictatorial control, it is not possible to build a ‘community of common interests’. This has also to do with cultural diversity and socio-economic inequalities prevalent in village Nepal. As a concept, community forestry has only succeeded where there has been sufficient cultural homogeneity and a strong proclivity to bow to authority, as among the casteless, racially and culturally homogenous Han people of China and among the people of South Korea.

It is necessary to preserve biological and natural heritage in national parks and wildlife sanctuaries for the sake of posterity. The Army may be used to protect such areas, but only given national consensus. In order to protect the country from environmental disaster, it will also be important to identify environmental hot spots and other fragile areas, to be managed exclusively by highly trained foresters and professionals.

All the remaining productive forests that are not set aside for preservation (parks and sanctuaries) and problem management (‘hot spots’) should be released, in phases, for capitalistic management by individuals, user groups and companies.

For its part, the Ministry of Forests (and now Environment) should transform itself from an active manager of land to a supporter of forest management in which the common people lead. Foresters, like doctors and engineers, must provide advice only when called for.

A.R.Tuladhar is a lecturer of silviculture at the Institute of Forestry, Pokhara.

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# Voices

## LAST RESORTS

*From a contribution by Laeeq Futehally, April 1991 issue of the Alternative Network Letter, a "Third World Tourism Critique" by Equitable Tourism Options (EQUATIONS), Bangalore.*

Where, then, can the family find a green and quiet spot to be together for a few weeks, to find some activity which may be shared by both children and parents and where, generally, conditions are the opposite of those towns from which they are attempting to flee? — some pleasant little hill resort, of course.

Perhaps we should pause here and ask ourselves — why particularly the hills for family holidays? Would not many families prefer to go to other places — there is no lack of sights in India which are worth seeing. The fact is that the hills have advantages for children and family groups which cannot be matched by other tourist spots.

So then we agree that a hill station is the right place for our holiday. It now remains to decide which one it shall be. The most glamorous place, Kashmir, is in ruins, and out of the question. Shimla — but we hear that Shimla has become a vast slum, do we really want to see it? Mussoorie and Nainital — both polluted and denuded. Ootacamund — once the most beautiful, the most beloved of the Southern resorts is now covered with huge, brutal concrete blocks, the forests have been cut down, so that the rain no longer falls gently to the ground to join underground streams. The result is a chronic water shortage.

With all our major hill stations damaged beyond saving, tremendous pressure will fall on the minor hill towns — Dalhousie, Dharamsala, Kasauli, Kodaikanal, Yercaud and several others which have so far escaped the onslaught of visitors. In fact, few smaller hill stations already find themselves in a desperate position. With no proper planning for expansion, their limited resources are over-stretched, and they find themselves flooded by tourists who come in large parties, searching for some way of enjoying themselves. Once the giant buses have panted up the twisting hill roads, disgorging black fumes and the ear-damaging air horns, the human cargo hardly bothers to get out and walk. Their time is spent on the spot, eating and littering. This done, they are ready to go home. The town authorities have not the means or the capacity to cope with the litter; the local population has not benefited in any way from the visit, they have only been greatly inconvenienced; and the only persons who have gained are the scores of new little "tourist agencies" who hire out these monster buses. Even worse are the young all-male bus-loads who often bring a new dimension of vulgarity to these quiet areas.

The second standard tourist group is composed of people who come to a beautiful place solely in order to drink and gamble. They are known to save themselves hotel charges by bribing the watchmen of unoccupied houses, to be allowed to do their drinking in them. In the third category are the honeymooners — inoffensive, confused, and doing their best to behave in the same way as the hero and his girl in any Hindi film.

These are the kind of tourists who may often crowd out the quiet, middle class family groups who should be the most welcome visitors to the hills, for they come to seek such values as are not available to them otherwise. They need beauty and peace and they need the elemental pastime of simple physical exercise. How long can they hope to find these things even in the smaller, little known hill stations?

## MISUSE OF HISTORY

*From an article by Bharat Dogra entitled "Avenging Past Wrongs — The Misuse of History" as distributed by the Delhi-based News from Fields and Slums feature agency.*

In the course of India's history, some kings clashed with some other kings. As was the practice in most parts of the ancient and medieval world, occasionally unjust and cruel acts, sometimes highly cruel acts, were enacted in the course of these clashes. Sometimes those who suffered belonged to one community, sometimes those who suffered belonged to another community. The crucial question is — now in the last decade of the twentieth century, should these old incidents (for some of which complete authentic details are not even available) be allowed to be used for spreading hatred and bad feelings against one community by another community?

If this is allowed to happen all over the world, then it is quite likely that the entire world will be engulfed in entirely avoidable violence and tension. The same is likely to happen in India if such feelings are allowed to spread. In fact, due to temple-mosque controversies going back to medieval India, this is already happening in a big way.

When historical incidents (or mythical incidents covered up as historical incidents) are used for spreading hatred, then at least two important questions need to be raised. Firstly, whether these unjust or cruel acts had in the past come in the way of re-establishing friendships with the 'forget and forgive' approach. If this is so, and if our ancestors had themselves forgiven these wrongs, then what justification can be provided, after so many generations have passed, to reassert these enmities on the basis of old incidents?

The second question is — can only one community be blamed for the acts of injustice? It is true that several wrong and unjust acts were committed during the reign of Aurangzeb against, for instance, Rajput, Maratha and Sikh communities. However, it is important to stress that throughout his reign a large number of Hindu feudal lords and kings continued to remain his mansabdars. They, along with Muslim mansabdars, provided the strength of the empire and the army. As evidence of Aurangzeb's wrong deeds grew, their number did not decrease, instead it increased. The number of high-ranking Hindu mansabdars in the Mughal Dynasty was at its peak towards the last two decades of Aurangzeb's rule. So shouldn't the blame for these wrong deeds also be shared by the Hindu lords and kings?

It is well-known that patrons of Hindu communal organisations today include several members of former royal families. If we carefully follow the genealogy of several royal nobles of Aurangzeb, then we are likely to get surprising evidence about family records of present day patrons of Hindu communal organisations. A list of nearly 150 high-ranking Hindu nobles of Aurangzeb is available in the history texts.

Therefore, those who preach avenging past injustices on the basis of historical records, may well find the finger of revenge being directed against them. This is the price they have to pay for their wrong sense of history.

## NOT SAINTS, NOR SAVAGES

*Comment about racial stereotyping which appeared in the No.28, 1991 issue of Survival magazine, published by Survival International, a worldwide movement to support tribal peoples.*

There is a temptation to romanticise tribal people as the ideal form of human beings, to place them on a pedestal of our own making. They are seen as uncorrupted by 'progress', still in the Garden of Eden, cocooned in the state of innocence before what Christian culture sees as the Fall of man. They have *all* the answers to life's problems. We perceive them as the only true inhabitants of the earth, as pure and innocent people with a natural superiority over the corrupt and materialistic west. Utopia.

There is certainly nothing wrong in wishing for a better world. But surely it is profoundly wrong for westerners to see tribal cultures either as a means of assuaging their colonial guilt or to make up for their own shortcomings. Nobody is doing themselves any favours by looking to a distant paradise — for it amounts to a loss of faith in one's own world, so that nothing is done to work on one's own failings, and one fundamentally undermines oneself. Surely seeing the common good in one's own and all peoples should be the starting point for change.

The fundamental problem with idealising tribal peoples is that they are constantly being seen as distant, different and 'other'. One is blinding oneself to the realities of who they are — that it is to say, ordinary human beings. For as soon as they are placed on the pedestal, a gap is created which stops them being seen as equals.

Isn't it time now to work alongside tribal peoples not as savages, nor Noble Savages, but as equals? Different, yes, but equal. They have *some* of the answers — and so does the so-called 'civilised' world.

## THE MYTH OF MILITANCY

*From the article, "The Myth of Tibetan Youth Militancy", by Kelsang Dorjee Aukatsang in the August 1991 issue of the Tibetan Review.*

A young Tibetan Youth Congress (TYC) activist is ploughing a lonely furrow in the busy and tiring metropolis of Delhi. His task is to inform the so-called members about an important forthcoming meeting. This young man knows he is out on a futile assignment. He has been on such errands before but the outcome has always been (and will continue to be) the same — no response! A branch that boasts of 300 plus members on paper has yet to hold a meeting which more than 30 members have attended. The number of times that a scheduled meeting has had to be cancelled for want of attendance, is countless. The state of affairs in the other 51 branches of the TYC is more or less the same. Contrast this with, say, an occasion like the 'youth nite' or a ball. The scene here is different. The dance floor is crowded as the youngsters reggae and boogie the night away...

How does one reconcile the above with the totally different image of the Tibetan youth being projected by the international media? Today, any write-up on the TYC or the youth is peppered with adjectives like 'militant', 'violent', 'impatient', (politically) 'restless', etc. This writer is immensely amused to see that the press in its obsession to portray the TYC and the youth as the

violent face of the Tibetan movement — and thereby in direct conflict with the message of peace and goodwill preached by His Holiness the Dalai Lama — is unknowingly playing into the TYC gameplan. The question of TYC being militant does not arise. It doesn't have the men, nor the resources, to resort to violence. I wouldn't hesitate to add that the youths of today are lacking in guts as well. The Congress can only assume the appearance of such a capability (and here the press has been of tremendous help). So the occasional burst of violent rhetoric from our youth leaders is nothing more than a bark. It is an attempt to keep this myth (created by the press), of the TYC as a militant organisation, alive.

## "NEPAL MUST CHANGE"

*From a contribution carried in ECONews, a newsletter prepared by the Economics Division for USAID in Kathmandu.*

The liberalization that is beginning in India cannot be contained. Nepal has no choice: it too must liberalize. It cannot hold back the waters of change so long as India continues to liberalize. India could get away with high tariff walls and non-economic protection because of the size of the economy. In our opinion, Nepal lacks that possibility. Nepal lacks the resources for continued subsidies and it lacks the government personnel to patrol the border and stop smuggling from India. The Nepali market is not large enough to develop efficient industries that only serve Nepal. The days of developing industries to smuggle to India are over. It is time to develop a modern economy. But it will be difficult.

We believe that if Nepal does not debureaucratize the economy, deregulate, remove subsidies, open the economy and allow competitive market forces to operate, then we shall quickly be consigned to a non-growth economy with little potential. Some may argue to go slow. This does not make much sense to us. India has changed the economic equations. These will force many changes in economic decision-making. Each time the 'slow' approach makes a change, all these decisions must be rethought. It is better to only subject the people to one set of changes and let them know the rules of the game.

If Nepal is going to change then we believe now is the time. Nepal must move faster than India so as to be able to take advantage of new opportunities. Slow movement may not be wise. Efforts to protect people from the negative side of the change are well meaning, but they only slow the change. Subsidies usually go to the powerful, few benefit the poor. Protectionism helps the industrialist, it hurts the poor who have to buy lower quality goods at higher prices.

Many pundits and politicians in India and Nepal are fond of saying that the standard economic medicine of the World Bank and IMF will not work on the sub-continent. India did not make its decision to liberalize because of what the World Bank or IMF said, but because it could no longer afford slow growth, high subsidy and protectionist approaches. They do not necessarily believe in the new orthodoxy, but the old orthodoxy failed them. Lower costs will increase exports, but the speed will depend on the responsiveness of entrepreneurs. Continuing with high prices will soon doom exports. Higher prices of imports will lower imports. The rich will find their money does not go as far. Maybe they will continue to import some luxury goods, but the rupee just does not go as far, they must cut back on something. Supply and demand is not a Western invention, it applies here, and elsewhere.



## MY ROOM-MATE

*From a Spring 1991 term paper written by a Freshman at Luther College, Iowa, regarding his room-mate, a Nepali student.*

I had never met someone from a different culture before. I didn't know what to expect when I first found out that I would be rooming with someone from a different country. I thought that I would have a hard enough time just living with another American, but a person from a foreign country! What would he be like? Would I be able to understand him when he talked? Would he do strange things like fall into a trance and start to fly around the room? Or even float above the bed when he slept? These were just some of the many questions that went through my head in the weeks preceding school.

I met my roommate late in the afternoon. He had already been here for eight days and luckily was somewhat accustomed to America and the way things are done here. At first I wasn't sure that I would be able to understand his accent. It was somewhat thick and since I hadn't met someone from Nepal before, it was very difficult to understand. I was scared to death of him. I thought he might try to kill me in the night if he didn't like me.

Throughout the year my roommate told me a lot about Nepal. We talked about the caste system, marriages, climate and the Nepalese lifestyle in general. He explained to me how it used to be in Nepal and how it is now with the Western influence. He even tried to teach me some of his language, but I didn't have enough time and neither did he, so we gave up on that.

I learnt that people everywhere are a lot alike. My roommate didn't float above his bed like I thought he might. He slept like everyone else (including snoring and making noises at night). He didn't fall into a trance and fly around the room either (unless he was late for class). He ate and drank like everybody else. All in all, I think that having a foreign room-mate has been a great experience.

## MOUNTAIN FILMS

*Part of a report by John Barry of Mountain magazine on being a juror of 41 films at the 15th Banff Festival of Mountain Films.*

Of the 41, lots were bad, plain bad. Quite a few weren't bad, a few were good, a couple knockouts. But it wasn't hardly a fair fight. There were big budget (e.g. National Geographic) films competing with shoestringers. There were films that were captured on the edge of nowhere, and filmed in the teeth of wind and fire and water, matched against films assembled over leisurely years and with every technological convenience on call.

The first film was *K2-Traum und Shicksal* with Diemberger wallowing in the gothic gloom of it all. That summer on K2 in 1986 had scarred enough of us and I knew it wasn't a tale that improved with the telling. There were a few films like that, mostly from the Northern corner of Europe. Surely being rich can't be that bad. Left you wondering if anyone ever climbed for fun any more. Worse, these goths seemed to take narcoleptic hours to spread their gloom.

Generally, the climbing films, that is, the films about climbing, were the worst. Of those, expedition films were the worst.

*Mr. Mike Is On The Mountain* is the story of a largely British expedition to Makalu (1989) told from a Sherpa's and porter's point of view; a good and original idea. There's mercifully little climbing — Himalayan snow plodding doesn't make riveting footage — but lots of socio-dynamics (as I believe the phrase is) twist the climbers and the porters. The Brits, as a group, come out rather badly... We (the Brits) are regarded by the Sherpas as tight. Apparently everyone knows that. I didn't, and it surprised and shocked me. But the film turned (and has since fallen to notoriety) on one shattering utterance, surely the most egregiously stupid by any climber to any mike. "We conned forty thousand quid out of the sponsors to come on our 'olidays." And as if the words themselves aren't damning enough, the tone was querulous, braying. Everyone cringed.

## GREAT LAKES OF FUZZY THINKING

*Article by Andrew Nikiforuk in Crosscurrents, a non-governmental organisation's newsletter published in August during the United Nations ECO'92 preparatory meeting in Geneva.*

I am not an environmentalist. Nor am I a sustainable developer. My skin is not green, and I don't spend any time thinking about planetary management of multilateralism. On Sundays — or on any other day, for that matter — I thumb my nose at the new church of "globalism". In fact, I make a point of not doing any global thinking.

My bad attitude derives partially from my naturally cantankerous disposition, but most of my contrariness comes from watching businesspeople, environmentalists, politicians and my peers in the declining trade of journalism repeatedly misuse these fashionably green words.

The indecent multiplication of these words — from 'environmental stresses' to 'ecological paradigms' — has spawned great lakes of fuzzy thinking and a prairie of deception on the real nature of our industrial economy.

These dangerous words are now being used by the powers-that-be to mask the same old economic thinking that preaches unlimited consumption. 'Sustainable development' falls into this category with a thud. It seems that everyone from Margaret Thatcher to George Bush has become a sustainable developer. Canada even has a centre on the subject, and academics have prettied up this sophistry with a mass of Latin-based words. As a consequence, it is difficult to tell if a sustainable developer advocates "sustaining the environment by limiting development" or supports "all the development the environment can sustain".

The ability of people to distort the meaning of sustainable development owes much to its verbal half-partner. Sustainable may be a big adjective, but development is a very big noun with a chequered past. History is clear on this matter: the world development has long been used to suspend clear thinking about destructive economics and inappropriate ways of living.

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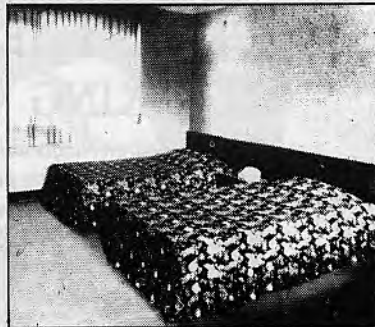


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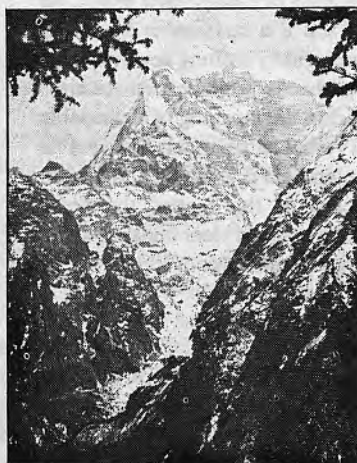
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## THE KOSI PROJECT: A Note on Myopia and Mismanagement

*Contrary to popular Nepali perception, the Kosi Project may have proved to be a nightmare for those who live within the embankment area.*

by Indra Jung Thappa

The Kosi floods of July 1991 have again highlighted the lack of consensus in Nepal and India over issues of common concern. In Nepal, news reports that a 400 metre breach in the western embankment at Hanuman Nagar had displaced 50,000 people in 12 villages in Saptari district, was followed with veiled insinuations that India was responsible for the calamity, and should, therefore, deal with it. Interestingly, the Nepali papers did not mention that 150,000 people in Saharsa and Madhubani districts of Bihar had also lost their homes in the same deluge.

The Kosi has been a focus of geo-political posturing by the two countries. India has maintained that Nepal has stymied all attempts at an exhaustive solution of the problems, while Nepal has argued that India has creamed away the benefits of the Kosi Project to the detriment of Nepal. It is our contention that the floods this year point to a deep-rooted malaise which will deteriorate rapidly if it is not addressed urgently. Focussing on an inter-related set of issues, this note aims at dispelling some of the prevailing misconceptions about the supposed 'benefits' of the Kosi Project to India, in the hope that it might promote a more comprehensive understanding of the issues.

### HYDRO-GEOLOGY

The Kosi is 730 km long and originates in the mountains of Nepal and Tibet. It drains an area of 86,900 sq km between longitude 85°20' and 88 degrees, and has the largest catchment among the rivers of India measuring 61,440 sq km. Flowing through a gorge at Chatra, it enters Saharsa district of Bihar at Hanuman Nagar and almost immediately assumes an unstable deltaic form made up of intertwining and dividing streams, separated by shoals and bars. Further south, it is joined from the west by the Kamala Balan, the Bagmati, the Soni, the Bhati Balan, the Tiljuga, and the Sugarwe. The combined waters of the Kosi collect in a saucer-shaped depression near Kursela township and enter the Ganga at Karagola.

In the last 125 years, the Kosi has shifted westward by more than 115 km from its position just east of Purnea township, and has destroyed 8,000 sq km of land in Purnea, Saharsa, Darbhanga, Bhagalpur, and Monghyr districts. The rate of its westward drift has not been uniform. Between 1736 and 1922, it moved at the rate of one mile in four years. Since 1922, this movement has accelerated to over one mile per year. The 1961 Census of India had estimated that the Kosi has uprooted 6.5 million people and has inflicted a continuous annual damage of IRs 100 million.

There are several reasons for the instability of the Kosi. First, a flattening of the bed south of Chatra results in a drop in current velocity and despite a significant increase in depth, the river begins to meander. Second, it carries the largest sediment load among the rivers of the world amounting to 7,308 tons per square mile of its catchment most of which is deposited on the flood-plain. The consequent rise in the level of the river-bed forces the river to realign itself continually. Third, the seismicity of the region has enhanced the instability of the Kosi and contributed to its sediment load. Fourth, the forces of rotational deflection whereby surface current movements are influenced by the earth's axial rotation have facilitated the river's general westward tendency. Fifth, it has an unparalleled rate of

erosion. In the period 1951 to 1953, the river eroded 10,000 feet of land in India between Belka and Hanuman Nagar. In its westward swing the Kosi has sabotaged its banks despite protective spurs at the vulnerable convex bends. Sixth, Glacial Lake Outburst Floods [GLOFs] in the mountain catchments of the Kosi may have unpredictable downstream consequences. A GLOF in Taplejung in 1980 resulted in floods 35 km south of Nepal which smashed through a spur, threatened the eastern embankment and the Bihar town of Supaul. Seventh, land degradation in the hilly catchments is suspected to have contributed to augmenting the sediment in the river.

### FLOOD-CONTROL AND REHABILITATION

Although the Kosi had evoked serious official concern in India in the 19th century, it was only after Independence in 1947 that a flood-control project acquired concrete shape. In 1953, following a personal assessment of the Kosi floods by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, a three phase flood-control, irrigation, and diversion scheme was designed. Phase I consisted of a 3,770 ft barrage across the Kosi three miles north of Hanuman Nagar. On the east and the west, earthen dams measuring 6,220 ft and 12,800 ft respectively with afflux bunds 8 miles long were planned. Phase II envisaged two embankments running southward from the barrage for a length of 75 miles on the western side with ring bunds at vulnerable points, and embankments at the Tiljuga and Kamala Balan marginals. An eastern embankment 62 miles long, and a protective bank of 12 miles above the eastern afflux was recommended. Phase III consisted of a canals on the east to irrigate 0.525 M hectares. A plan was also drawn up to rehabilitate the population inhabiting the region that would be embanked.

The Project was completed in the early 1970's and instead of ushering in prosperity has proved a nightmare for India in every possible way. The relocation scheme for 300 affected villages covering an area of 260,000 acres and inhabited by 115,000 people failed due to a lack of imagination, poor administration, and the sheer physical immensity of the task, and most of the rehabilitees returned to their original homes within two years. Today, there are about 600,000 people in 321 villages within the embankments who live under the constant threat of floods.

Of the total sum of IRs 21.2 million allocated for rehabilitation in 1957, only IRs 3.69 million was received by the rehabilitees. Little is known about the balance. In 1978, the former Bihar Chief Minister Jagganath Mishra summed up this misadventure by remarking that the only tangible impact of the Project was that it had exposed a population of 400,000 people in Saharsa to regular floods. Interestingly, the rehabilitation has been treated as a *fait accompli*, and in no official document is the existence of the embanked population acknowledged. On the other hand, the state does not fail to collect revenue from the embanked population for even barren and unculturable wastelands.

### UNMITIGATED CORRUPTION

There is a saying in Bihar that while the rest of India has two seasons, in that state there are three, i.e. the Kharif, the Rabi, and the Relief. In the Kosi area during the monsoons, a total of two kilograms of grain per individual

are distributed as relief to the marooned population by the Block administration. However, the disbursement of even this meagre support is fraught with unmitigated corruption. Surveys conducted by this writer have affirmed allegations by villagers within the embankments that the bulk of the relief is diverted to the markets through the connivance of the officials, the village head-men, and the local traders.

The matter has remained largely invisible because political parties have quite successfully divided the population over the issue. The careers of several local politicians depend on resurrecting the 'Kosi Pirith' issue during elections, and distributing lucrative Project contracts to relatives and supporters thereafter. Electoral victories bequeath control over the spoils of the Kosi Project. There is an obvious political interest in keeping the problem alive and unresolved.

The Project has also imposed a formidable burden on the Indian exchequer. A project budgeted initially at around IRs 1,200 million, ultimately cost IRs 3,210 million due to the addition of secondary components. Subsequent allocations have also been extracted from the Centre by Bihar for the augmentation and maintenance of the embankments. Since the Fifth Five Year Plan, the Bihar government has habitually demanded between IRs 500 and 1000 millions per plan from the Centre for such purposes. In the absence of accountability, the bulk of this money has been siphoned off through well standardized routines. Kosi Project contractors usually start work just before the monsoons so that the floods destroy everything, and new contracts are awarded for the same work in the next financial year. The recurring burden is borne by the tax payer and the Kosi inhabitants.

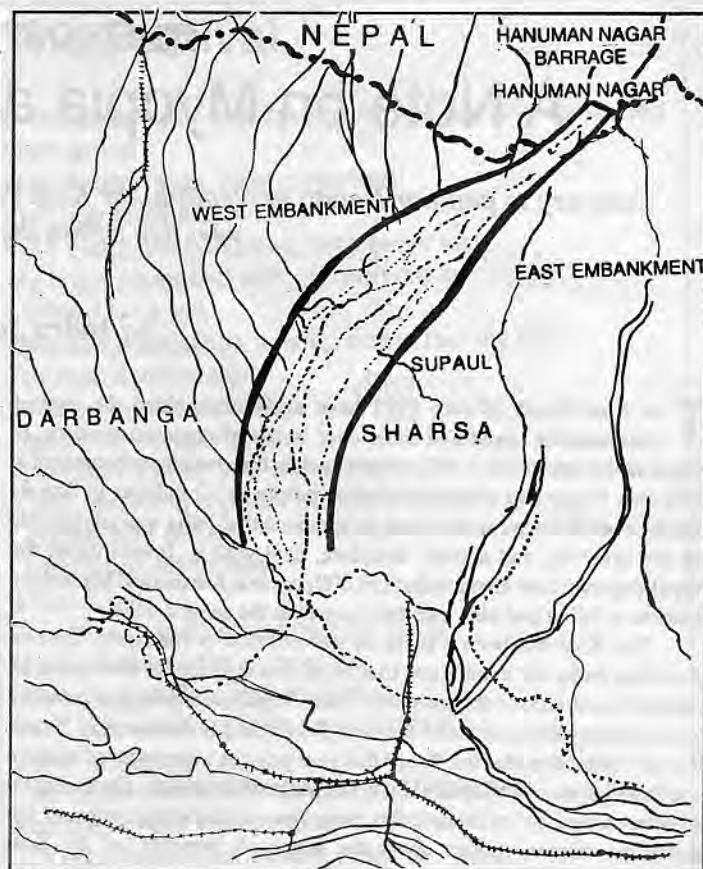
### IRRIGATION AND ECOLOGY

On the other hand, the Project has not brought any of the benefits associated with command area development. Of a total irrigation potential of 747,000 hectares created in Purnea, Saharsa, and Darbhanga districts, the actual utilisation has been of the order of 21.7 percent only. In India as a whole the utilisation of the irrigation potential is about 80 percent. The Kosi Project has with difficulty irrigated more than 30 percent of the estimated area in any given year. In the important spring and summer seasons, the utilisation is only 15 and 10 percent respectively. Unequivocally, the level of the realization of potential in this project is the lowest among the irrigation projects of India.

On the ecological front, the effect of the Project on the state of Bihar has been even less encouraging. Between 0.3 to 0.4 million acres constituting 25 to 30 percent of the command area, is completely waterlogged as a result of seepage from unlined canals, further aggravated by poor horizontal and vertical drainage. Water has also seeped through the levees because of the rise in the river-bed and the water-table within, which is evident in continuous swamps along the entire length of both the embankments. Because of a neglect of parallel land-levelling exercises in the command area, the maladies have compounded. Instead of enhancing the yields of marginally productive lands, the Kosi Project has rendered large areas totally unfit for cultivation. Meanwhile, elaborate plans are being drawn at astronomical costs by the Bihar government for countering the adverse ecological effects of the Project.

### UPSTREAM DIALOGUE

It is now universally acknowledged in India that the design and execution of the Kosi Project was seriously flawed. Apart from technical and institutional problems, officials assert that a lack of co-operation from Nepal has aggravated the situation, and that any ameliorative effort by India can achieve only limited success, as many problems must be addressed in the upper catchments. The officials in charge of flood forecasting in Khagauli, Bihar informed this writer of their inability to make accurate projections with data received only annually from their counterparts in Nepal. Consequently, they have no knowledge of floods



T.B. MUKHIA

until they actually enter Bihar. Requests by India for locating rain-gauges and wireless stations upstream in Nepal have been summarily rejected in the past. Indian officials consider progress in this sphere crucial for better over-all flood management.

Several years ago, Dr. Kanwar Sain, who as the Chairman of the Central Water and Power Commission in the early 1950s, designed the Kosi Project said that the Project had been conceived of as a temporary solution for 25 years only, and was critically dependent upon parallel secondary exercises. Among these, he assigned primacy to soil conservation and land management in the catchments of Nepal. For flood control, Dr. Sain had outlined five structural exercises. Of these, work on two critical components, namely channel improvement and soil conservation has been wholly unsatisfactory.

The effectiveness of the detention basins, the embankments, and the diversions depended on the performance of these tasks. Emphasising the unique sediment characteristics of the Kosi from the inception of the Project, Dr. Sain had recommended that both countries address this problem on a war footing. Reviewing the Project in 1980, Kamala Prasad, a former Kosi Commissioner stressed the need for immediate sediment control, failing which the life of the barrage originally placed at 100 years, would be drastically reduced.

### EMBANKMENTS AND FLOOD-CONTROL

It should be noted that the utility of embankments for flood-control in the Kosi has been seriously questioned in the past. At the Patna Conference of 1937, called to discuss the floods in North Bihar, the Chief Engineer had recommended the removal of existing levees on the Kosi arguing that rather than reducing floods in that basin, the embankments had severely aggravated the problem. In this connection it would be pertinent to mention two outstanding examples which demonstrate both the inefficacy and the outright dangers posed by embankments. On the Hwang-Ho, levees were

built in 603 B.C., and subsequently raised several times to counter the elevation of the bed due to silt. In 1897, the river which was by then flowing on a ridge, burst its banks and killed one million people. Similarly, the embankments on the Mississippi, were elevated by 17 feet between 1833 and 1927. Yet in 1882, the levees were breached on 284 occasions which caused widespread submergence of the surrounding countryside. In 1927, the damage caused by floods to the levees was so extensive that none of the embankments on the lower Mississippi are in their original positions today.

Owing to comparatively inefficient silt clearance in the Kosi, the prospects do not appear attractive. Apart from the fact that discharges can vary between 100,000 to 950,000 cusecs, a single flood season of the Kosi has been known to elevate limited areas in the basin by as much as seven feet. In the last 40 years, sediment deposited by the river in some sections has raised the flood-plain to a level higher than the embankments. The time-table for disaster is set.

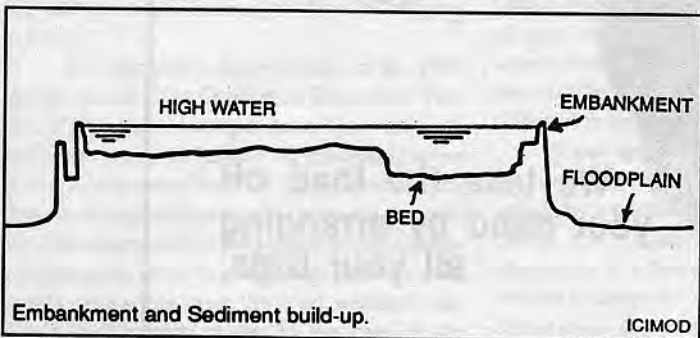
The Project which was initially designed to regulate floods became unmanageable with the addition of irrigation and power as secondary components. The subsequent difficulty of inter-locking the complex range of imponderables in this scheme has underscored the importance of defining all project components from the start. Today, with the progressive

intensification of the maladies in the Kosi basin, the redressal of the problems requires several levels of complex integrations that are not achieved easily. It should also be mentioned that despite initial indications favouring cheaper alternatives, costly structural methods were deliberately adopted.

The Kosi episode has been instructive in several ways although it is uncertain as to whether the lessons taught by that experience are being taken seriously. The Project was founded on incomplete data and even now a full survey of the entire basin has not been conducted. While Nepali studies have been confined to their own projects, the last major Indian investigation carried out in 1946 by the Geological Survey of India and the Central Water Irrigation and Navigation Commission, upto the Tamur confluence, was also incomplete and requires updating. To compound matters, neither side has volunteered any information to the other. Further, due to a palpable lack of co-operation, each side has viewed the Kosi from the vantage point of self-interest.

The benefits of experience come retrospectively, and often when it is too late. Earlier, if the search for common grounds had been pursued seriously by Nepal and India, solutions would have come more easily and would have cost less. Having paid an enormous price, both countries must now develop an agenda for the itemised basin by basin resolution of technical, institutional, and riparian issues as they relate to specific projects. Joint commissions on water resources where well-rehearsed routines are re-enacted by each side for the benefit of the other, have proved as ineffectual as political rhetoric. It does not help when discussions reflect neither a commitment to the responsibilities, nor a grasp of the problems. The first step towards the serious pursuit of a national policy and the formulation of a workable consensus is presaged by a better comprehension of the issues. Perhaps, it is still not too late to change.

I.J. Thappa, Ph.D., is a McNamara Fellow currently researching ecological adaptation processes in the Kosi area of Bihar.



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# Monsoon Mountains

*To Nepalis of the lowlands and midhills: try the high-Himal in mid-summer, rain or shine. Especially rain.*

by Padam Singh Ghaley

Trekking in the monsoon. For more than a decade the idea has been touted by the odd travel writer looking for something new to say and by trekking agents looking to expand their repertoire of packages. It has not yet caught on, and perhaps it is better that way. For the monsoon is the time that Nepalis might keep for themselves in order to get to know their own highlands. In the soft light of the monsoon, the High Himal comes into its own. The tourists stay away, the Sherpas, the Tamangs or the Bhutias who live along the main trekking trails find time to revert to the slower daily rhythms of the monsoon season.

I always tell my Kathmandu-based friends who are increasingly caught in the frenetic life of the city that monsoon is the time to emerge from their cocoons and understand their country. Not having to compete with the foreign tourist even on the main routes, they have the landscape and the trails to themselves. Monsoon is when the Nepalis who inhabit the high, wet valleys east of Dhaulagiri (east to west: Ramsher, Ghunsa, Walangchung Gola, Kemathang, Mumbuk, Hongu, Khumbu, Rolwaling, Panch Pokhari, Helambu, Langtang, Cheakampar, Larkya, Manang, Kagbeni, Dhorpatan) move up the mountain with their sheep and yaks. This is the time that the above-16,000 feet passes are free of snow, so there is maximum local traffic on the trail: trade, pilgrimages, and visiting families and in-laws.

Wild flowers and mist mark the monsoon in the High Himal, not rain and leeches, as the anti-monsoon propaganda would have it. Rain, you find lower down. Take the trip up from Melamchi Pul through the villages of Helambu, up the Ganja La into the Langtang Valley. I will not deny that it rains hard and the leeches do abound on the lower reaches, through the villages of Sermathang and Tarkeghyang. But as soon as you pass Yangrima Mountain, from 12,000 feet onwards, the rain lets up.

Instead, there is soft mist with tiny droplets that caress your cheek. None of the torrential downpours of lower down — you are in the High Himal. If you are beneath the clouds, then you can look up (or down) to their myriad shapes, their movements. Sometimes they are thick, dark, gloomy and motionless. At other times they are white puff balls against blue mountains. In between them you can see far up and down the valleys, and the air is crystal clear. Then, suddenly, a wind whips up and the clouds get jostled about in the narrow gorges. They go colliding against the crags on the steep flanks of Ganja La.

It is not really cold in the summer even high above the treeline, and normal mountain woollens suffice. None of this in the winter, when above 9,000 feet you would have to start ploughing through snow, sleet and ice. Speaking of mountain-wear, please do not imitate the tourist by packing a poncho. A trusty umbrella is much

more appropriate. (The extra-wide umbrellas available in the West are the best.) Nothing is more uncomfortable (except perhaps leech bites that fester) than sweating under a plastic or rubber poncho that sticks to the skin and hinders the stride. An umbrella, on the other hand, keeps a hand busy but otherwise provides complete freedom to inspect the clouds and the flowers. During dry moments, the umbrella can double up as a walking stick. Also bring along a polythene for the backpack.

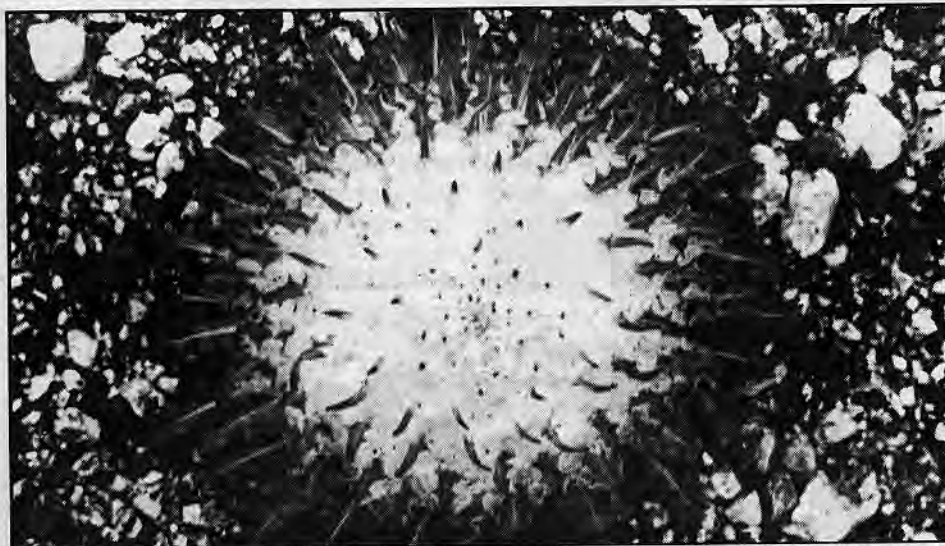
And the flowers! Between 12,000 and 14,000 feet, Edelweiss rules; not the tiny specimens of the Alps, but hefty Himalayan Edelweiss. But there are also scores of other species, including microscopic bluebells whose symmetry you need a magnifying glass to appreciate. Further up, between 14,000 and 15,000 feet, the traveller comes across huge primordial-looking flowers that grow in screes and amidst boulders along with moss and lichen. I have been too busy trekking these monsoon mountains to look up the name of this unique plant, but present a picture of a specimen for the reader's reference.

The local highlanders across Nepal use the summer months to cross over the high passes to visit neighbouring valleys. The Helambu Sherpas go up to Langtang to bring back baby yaks via the Ganja La. Between Panch Pokhari and Langtang, there is the Tilman Col which the locals use. The Sherpas also talk of yet another pass through the Jugal Himal chain that links Panch Pokhari with Langtang.

While we are on the trail to Ganja La, let us go over the top. On the other side there is a steep descent until you reach Kyanjin, from where, rather than turning left and going downstream in search of Trisuli Bazaar and civilisation four days down, turn right and continue up the moraine. You mostly will not see it through the clouds, but you are headed for the Lang Sisari massif and its four summits. This peak forms part of the high ridge that comes down from Shisha Pangma in Tibet and connects up with Dorje Lakhpa, which is the prominent twin-peak you can see clearly from Kathmandu Valley. Along the way you pass ample *goths* of the Sherpa/Tamangs of Langtang Valley. In mid-monsoon, this valley is high, quiet and untrodden. Butter contractors from various *gumbas*, out collecting a year's supply of fuel for the butter lamps, are the only non-locals on the road.

Monsoon or no monsoon, it is time for mid-hill, city-bred and plains' Nepalis to get to know their highlands. But monsoon really is the time when people and the weather are relaxed and receptive. The rains and leeches are for the lowlanders.

P.S.Ghale is a mountaineer and chronicler of mountain travel.



Unknown species.

PS GHALE

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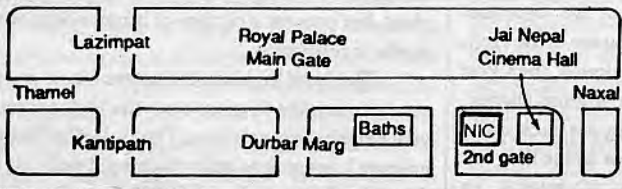
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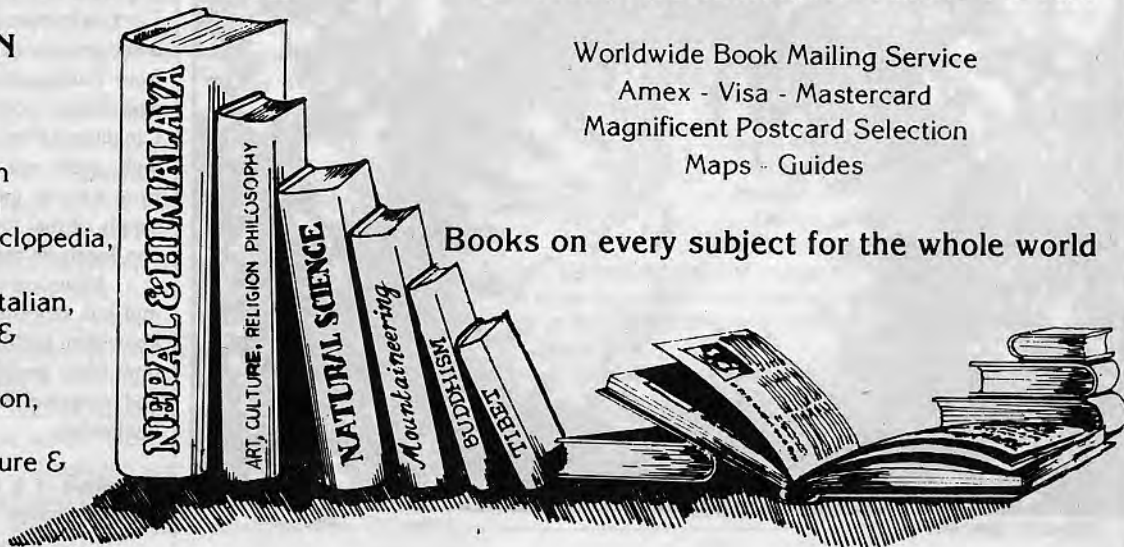


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# API

Height 7,132 m  
30°00'15" North;  
80°56'00" East

by Arnico K. Panday

Api, "Grandfather", is 7,132 metre-high. It is the northern-most and western-most 7,000 metre peak in Nepal. The only 7,000 metre peak in Darchula District, it stands 12 km east of the Mahakali River that separates India's Garhwal from Nepal's Mahakali Zone. Api is the western end-peak of Byas-Rishi Himal, a small range that branches southward from Gurans Himal and then arches westward. The second prominent peak of the range, Nampa (6,757 m), stands seven kilometres east of Api. Gurans Himal straddles the Sino-Nepali border where, just east of the Sino-Indo-Nepalese border 'tri-point', it makes a U-shape southward indentation into Nepal.

While describing the location of Api, it is worthwhile to note the mountain's location in the context of the whole Himalaya. Api (7,132 m) and Saipal (7,031 m, standing about 50 km east of Api), the two 7,000m peaks in North-west Nepal, belong to the part of the Himalaya that

stretches from the Sulej to the Karnali and includes the famous peaks of Nanda Devi and Kamet. Indeed, between those two rivers the Himalaya is one chain of tall mountains not traversed by any river. To their east, Api and Saipal are separated from the next 7,000 m peak, Putha Hiunchuli in the Dhaulagiri range, by almost 200 km. Along the 2,400 km main chain of the Himalaya there are other similar gaps: between the Nun-Kun massif of the Zaskar range and the Sulej river, and between the Bhutan Himalaya and the mountains of the Brahmaputra (Tsangpo) bend.

Api has two summits, the 7,132 m East Peak and the 7,100 m West Peak. The connecting ridge drops only negligibly between the two peaks, so that, viewed from the south, Api's summit is a horizontal line against the sky, unlike the pointed triangular peaks of many Himalayan mountains. Api's avalanche swept south face drops steeply down to summer pastures at the headwaters of the Chamliya/Chaulani River, a large tributary of the Mahakali. A glance at the map shows that the summit is less than four kilometres away from the 4,000 m contour. The verdant rhododendrons, pines, and bamboo of the Chamliya valley contrast sharply with the arid northern side of Api, the Byas Garka Region. Api's glaciated north face is drained by two streams. The Api Khola flows north-westwards, directly into the Mahakali. The Nampa Khola, further east, flows in the same direction, and

meets the Tinkar river just before joining the Mahakali. In the Tinkar Valley are the Byas villages of Changru and Tinkar. Because of the cold and snow they are inhabited only six months annually. People there trade with Tibet, carrying up grains and spices and carrying down salt and wool. Over the 5258 metres Tinkar pass they can reach the ancient Tibetan trading post of Taklakot in one day; the journey to the headquarter of Darchula district takes four or five days. Api stands in one of the remotest areas of Nepal; from the Tarai the dusty, narrow, motorable "road" to Baitadi is over 200 km long, and from there it is another ten days' march to Api's southern base camp.

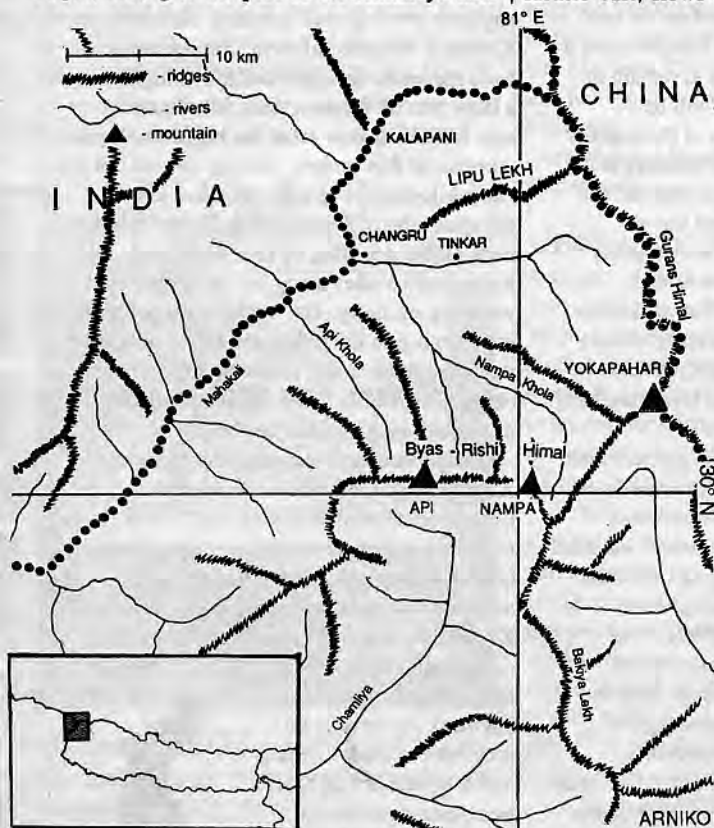


To date there have been ten mountaineering expeditions to Api. These were preceded by decades of exploration by outsiders.

In 1899 Englishman A.H. Savage-Landor overpowered border guards, entered Nepal illegally and explored the Nampa Khola valley. He claimed to have climbed Api; but in 1905 T.G. Longstaff followed his route north of Api and found Savage-Landor's highest point to have been not more than 5000 metres. In 1936, Swiss geologists A. Heim and A. Gansser for the first time photographed Api, though they mistook it for its neighbor Nampa. In 1953, after Nepal was opened to foreigners, W.H. Murray and J.B. Tyson reconnoitered approaches from the north and west, but, due to the start of the monsoon, got no further than Longstaff.

In 1954, P. Ghigliione led an Italian expedition to Api, setting up base camp in the Api Khola valley. Two members of the expedition, G. Rosenkrantz and B. Barenghi, died during separate attempts on the summit. According to Kathmandu's mountaineering "record-keeper" Elizabeth Hawley, it is possible, but doubtful, that they reached the top. The first known summiters are of Japan's Doshita Alpine Society expedition of 1960. They approached Api via India, and followed the route of Ghigliione's expedition. On 7 May, at 5 A.M., K. Hirapayashi and Gyaltsen Norbu left 6,600 m Camp IV on the north ridge and reached the top at noon. Their climb was repeated on 8 May. Since then, there have been seven more Api expeditions; three were successful in climbing: an Italian expedition in 1978, a Polish expedition in 1983, and a South Korean expedition in 1991.

A. Panday, a student, is *Himal's* mountain columnist.



# Abominably Yours,

Just returned to my Barun sanctuary amidst jeers from fellow yetis about my new jet-setting ways. Another international conference, they ask derisively, but I can see their salivary glands working overtime.

Ah, it's a good time to be a representative of a Third World ungovernmental organisation, people are falling over each other to invite you to international environmental jamborees, and the more elusive your habitat the better your chances. At a sustainability conference at the Palais des Nations in Geneva last month (the name better left unsaid), I rubbed shoulders with members of other endangered hominoid tribes like the Yanomami, the Penans and the Soviets. We exchanged notes about common threats to our heritage. But while the Yanomami are afraid they will disappear forever, our tribe does not want to be seen at all!

I was trying to explain the whole thing to my young langur friend just now. Poor countries are having a big fight with rich countries about who is ruining the planet. The rich are saying the poor people have to stay poor because the earth cannot sustain so many rich people. The poor are saying then let us take turns. You rich are burning too much gas and we'd like to burn some too. Government delegates in Geneva emitted a lot of carbon dioxide as they debated long into the night about "sinks" and "sources" of atmospheric carbon, about biodiversity and life support systems.

In the end the calculations got a bit out of hand. Your average cow, it seems, emits up to three litres of methane every time it burps and up to ten litres of the greenhouse gas in one moderate-to-brisk passing of wind. In a sample 24-hour period a normal cow was observed (heard) to engage in belching and the passing of aforementioned fumes about 120 times. I'll save you the gory details, but it adds up to about 900 litres of methane per cow per day. At the moment of going to press there were an

estimated 4.5 billion cattle on planet Earth. The atmosphere is accumulating over FOUR TRILLION litres of bovine methane EVERY DAY. And we are not even counting flatulent yaks nor the leaky biogas plants of Uttar Pradesh.

It is quite clear that something needs to be done about global warming. German tourists will not be able to go to the Maldives for their Christmas holidays any more because the Maldives will not be there. The best-case scenario is a two-degree rise in the earth's overall surface temperature by the year 2050, which may also raise the snowline in the Himalaya by a thousand metres or so. No more snowman footprints on Shipton La, you yeti hunters, har-har. All you get from now on is unrecognisable spoor squelched on the mud.

All Himalayan species will have to move a notch higher up the mountains to remain in their ecological niches. There will be crocodiles sunning themselves at Pashupati's bathing ghats, tigers will maul trekkers in the rainforests above Lukla, rhinos will raid the apple orchards in Helambu, and travel agencies (like Hannibal) will ferry tourists across the Thorung La on caparisoned elephants. The langurs from Num will move into our Barun caves, and yeti refugees may have to take up furnished lodgings below the overhangs on the south face of Gyachungkang (lousy facilities, but great view).

As glaciers melt, the Khumbu Icefall will turn into a spectacular waterfall surging out of the moss-covered boulders of the Western Cwm. Garbage from the Golden Age of Himalayan Exploration will start emerging from the terminal moraine at Lobuje as the ice

recedes. The mangled remains of an Agusta helicopter that crashed at Camp II during the 1973 Italian Military Campaign on Everest will emerge first, followed by assorted corpses, crushed climbing ladders and freeze-dried expedition excreta.

Hold it right there. Let's not get carried away. Scientists have now found that there are other atmospheric factors that could mitigate, if not negate, the greenhouse effect. Saddam Hussein is the only world leader who has done anything about global warming. He set fire to Kuwait's 700-plus oil wells. Smoke and soot from the wells have blocked off sunlight over a large part of Western Asia. Mt. Pinatubo, near Manila, is now rated the biggest volcanic eruption of this century, having spewed out 2.5 cubic kilometers of rock, dust and ash into the atmosphere. Scientists say Pinatubo has set back global warming by five years, and Kathmandu Valley smog has set back Nepal warming similarly. The Valley's air pollution is becoming so thick that you can almost cut it with a khukuri. Soon, residents will have to climb nearby hills to see the sun at all. No ozone will ever get into that hole.

It thus becomes clear what the focus of the Action Programme of Cooperation to Counteract Global Warming (APCCGW) has to be. It must seek active cooperation from God (for more volcanoes), trigger-happy dictators (for lighting additional oil wells) and Kathmandu bus-mechanics (for generating maximum amount of smoke from diesel engines). However, we may have to do something about all that hot air that is being generated in conferences and workshops on global warming.



KHUMBU WATER FALL

KUNDA





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