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Jul/Aug 1993

# HIMAL

HIMALAYAN MAGAZINE



## LOOK BACK AT HISTORY

Refracted Images • Rana Regime • Unquiet Uttarakhand  
Tanakpur on Thames • Refugees Unwelcome



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**HE'S JUST ABOUT OLD ENOUGH FOR OUR TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAMME.**



MAIL

**Not Representative**

Despite the pointedness of Michael Hutt's introductory essay "Who Speaks for the Himalaya?" (May/June, 1993) and his translations, the poems chosen by *Himal* prove only the unimportance and marginality of Himalayan Literature. Hutt asks if those who write about the Himalayas are informed by indigenous writing. Had the posse from Kalimpong read Bhupi Sherchan? Was there any poem other than "Budget" by Moti Prasad Sharma and translations of Bhupi Sherchan's poems that could have, by the issues raised, appeared on the editorial page of a newspaper?

Compare Anmole Prasad's "Malli", admittedly a poem I enjoyed reading, with Sherchan's "Bhairawa". "Malli" attempts a sympathetic and observant account of a truckstop in Darjeeling, but the poet by his phrasing and his diction draws attention to the writer as writer. Applauding the poet, we forget the poem. Sherchan's bitter account is in effect one of exile, and yet the locality in its harshness and simplicity is speaking to us — Bhairawa coming out of a muddy pond with its "Bhai" of a Bhaisi (buffalo), "ra" of a burnt roti left in a pan, and its "hawa" of air scalding us.

*Himal* and its readers would have been better served by translations of contemporary Himalayan poetry — poems with social relevance or poems with a distinct Himalayan voice. As it stands, the photograph of Devkota says more than all the poems and sketches supposedly speaking for the Himalaya.

Wayne Amtzis  
Kathmandu

**Inter-relatedness**

Having read your issue on "Readings... Who writes for the Himalaya?", I must say it was an excellent idea. Glad to know that *Himal*

also cares about literature from the Himalaya and not only ethno-, socio-, geo-, tectonic-, politico- problems and issues. After all, everything is inter-related, including culture and language. Thanks to *Flatfile* of Kalimpong and Michal Hutt of London. It is so wonderful to read poems and short-stories written by Nepalis, Indians and foreigners who care about the development of Himalayan folks.

Satish Shroff  
Freiburg, Germany

**Despondent Readings**

Michael Hutt did an admirable job of packing the essence of Himalayan literature into four informative pages. However, a couple of questions arise after one reads his cover article.

By his own admission, there is a general lack of quality translations of Nepali literature in English — but could it be that Nepali literature (and especially poetry) completely loses its subtlety in translation? I remember the feeling of pathos that pervaded

Laxmi Prasad Devkota's *Pagal*, and it was not quite there in Hutt's otherwise brilliant translation.

Further, all the Nepali poems that Hutt presents have a harsh realism to them, and although he might have selected these as a counterpoint to the nostalgic romanticisation of Nepal by foreign writers, it could lead a stranger to wonder whether there is any optimism or light poetry in Nepali at all.

Even in the wide selection of Himalayan literature presented elsewhere in the issue, there is only one poem ("Yeti Song") which carries a jovial note. All the other stories and poems have a dark undercurrent to them, with Dorjee Tshering Lepcha ("The Queen Ant") as a Himalayan Kurt Vonnegut.

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**Cover:** Maharaja Ranaudip Singh looks back at the Kathmandu General Post Office.  
Picture by **Kanak Mani Dixit**.

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अस्त्युत्तरस्यां विशि देवतात्मा  
हिमालयो नाम नगाधिराजः  
पूर्वापरौ तोयनिधी बगाह्य  
स्थितः पृथिव्या इव मानवण्डः

*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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Nepali and other South Asian writers may be loathe to romanticise their land and cultures excessively, but surely there are countless pieces of good Himalayan literature that are light-hearted, if not optimistic.

D. Risal

Lalitpur

### Addressing Ethnicity

Saubhagya Shah and William F. Fisher (Mar/Apr 1993) examine the issues of "ethnic" identity and national unity as social and cultural phenomena. Similar themes concerning the relationships between *tagadharis* and other groups have been explored before, but because Shah and Fisher write in a changed political context, it permits them to make explicit their formulations at a level that was not possible earlier.

Yet, while an analysis of the interplay of the identities, loyalties, emotions, nationalism, etc. is very stimulating as an academic exercise, it fails to provide meaningful "cultural" policies for the State. In the discussion of broader issues, policy and implementation domains cannot be considered at a level that might be of interest and use only to politicians and policy makers.

Given the grave consequences that might ensue if the "ethnic" situation remains unaddressed (Fisher thinks that it "soon will require but a match to set off a conflagration", and Shah claims that "the regional and communal tinderbox is on a short fuse"), it is important to start immediately a discussion of alternate policies. The two conceptual issues that I list below might be helpful initial steps in developing workable cultural policies.

*The need to distinguish between "rights" and "means":* In addressing 'ethnic' inequality, it is important to start with a consideration of the concept of 'rights' and 'means', or what Amartya Sen calls "entitlements". "Ethnic" and other disadvantaged groups could have their rights carefully delineated in constitutions and other documents, but could lack the necessary "means" (including adequate

income, access to good quality schools for their children, proper health care benefits, and the ability to politicise their plight in the media) to better their standards of living. As a result, many of them are relegated to living and dying in deplorable enclaves and slums.

In Nepal, the 'ethnic' issue is regarded generally as an issue of 'rights'. The Nepali Constitution and the various *ains* (from 1851 to 1990) are invoked constantly in an effort to assess the status of various 'ethnic' groups with respect to the *tagadharis*. Even now, the vocal *janajati* associations seem to base their protests on the notion of 'rights'. Consider the statement of Suresh Ale Magar, whom Fisher quotes: "Some politicians call us dogs... we deserve to be treated as full citizens of this country." The Nepali Constitution, based on individual rights (but not group rights), treats every Nepali, including Suresh Ale Magar and his people as "full citizens". What Ale was trying to convey might have been a resentment concerning 'entitlements' that his people currently lack.

A clarification of the concepts of 'rights' and 'means' is a necessary condition for meaningful dialogue among the 'ethnic' groups, the government and other concerned people. Diverse cultures then can express their grievances concerning lack of specific 'entitlements' without disrupting the framework of 'individual rights' already secured by the Constitution.

*The need to understand the context in which the "ethnic" problem interacts with other forms of inequalities:* Before the "ethnic" issue becomes politicised and hastily generalised into flawed schisms, it is necessary to place it in proper perspective. Otherwise, remedies will be offered from a rather exclusive preoccupation with one domain of inequality to the neglect of others. In other words, there is a need to understand the ethnic issue in relation to other forms of inequalities (such as 'class', 'urban-rural' and gender differentials) before useful policies for it can be devised.

For example, consider the interactions of the ethnic issue with urban-rural and class divisions. In rural Nepal, many studies have found little association between landholding, access to resources, and ethnicity. The higher castes, in this context, then, are as poverty stricken as 'ethnic' people. However, the higher castes have been shown to possess greater cultural

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capital, their 'superiority' being communicated at routine social encounters. Given this, in the rural context, it is social rather than economic discrimination that needs redressing. The ethnic issue becomes different in the urban context where 'cultural' capital of the higher castes determines access to resources and opportunities. This is evidenced in some urban surveys that have shown a larger degree of participation by the 'ethnic' people in educational and other urban institutions. In the urban context, then, the 'ethnic' solution may lie in attempting to realise adequate means for both economic wellbeing as well as social dignity.

A full consideration of this topic would involve an examination of 'ethnicity' in interaction with other relevant variables, such as gender. Such an investigation would not only shed light on the true magnitude of the ethnic issue, but would also help design policies that may redress multiple inequalities simultaneously.

*Arun Raj Joshi*

*Massachusetts, United States*

## Greater India

The article "Looking for Greater Nepal" by Kanak Mani Dixit (Mar/Apr 1993) was remarkable for its fancifulness. The Indians must be trembling in fear of the brave Gurkhas!

Self-styled Nepali nationalists — driven by hatred of the native languages and cultures of Nepal — are doing a fine job of suppressing the very elements that can give Nepaliness a chance from being inundated under the ocean of Indian culture.

Dixit should watch Nepal Television once in a while — if he can find it under all the Doordarshan, that is. Or he should take a walk down New Road, and count the Nepalis on his fingers.

Bhupi Sherchan's poem "Evening on New Road: A Festival of Light", translated by Michael Hutt, was printed incomplete on page 18 of the May/June 1993 *Himal*. The following portion was missing:

Then I pace out New Road, Plotting a poem  
And find myself besides Tundikhel.  
I toss a smile like Bhairawa Sugar Mill's  
To the crowds all around at the Martyr's Gate,  
I light my last cigarette, put Kathmandu's  
hollowness  
Into the packet and throw it away.  
Glancing up, I fling a silent question at the Gate,  
It replies with the weakest of smiles  
And disappears into the mist.

In the present situation, "Greater Nepal" reminds me of two squirrels who, after being swallowed by a lion, continue arguing about who owned the jungle as they slid down its gullet.

*Ram Sunder Maskey*

*Maru Pyaphal, Kathmandu*

## Ravi, not Sutlej

In various issues of *Himal*, including those on ethnicity, the Gurkhas, and "Greater Nepal", I have found the extent of the Gorkhali domain (before the Sugauli Treaty) referred to as being "from the Teesta to the Sutlej".

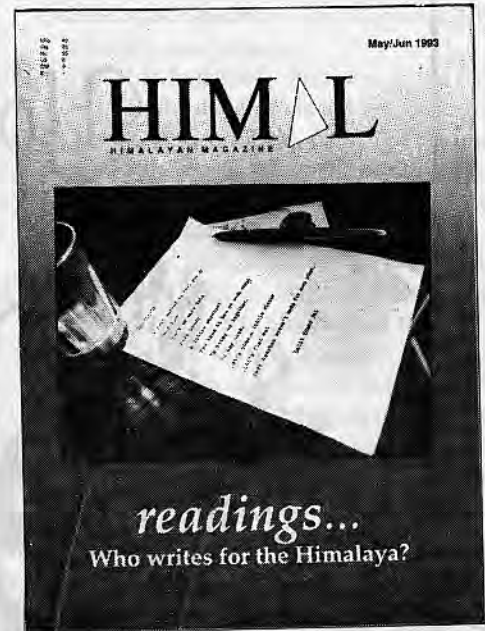
As a matter of academic discourse and historical accuracy, I think it should be clarified that the widest historical expanse of Nepal was actually from the Teesta to the Ravi, which is much further west than the Sutlej.

The Gorkhali conquest of Kumaon was over by 1794, and by 1804, Garhwal and Dehradun had been taken, as well as the territory between Western Himachal (Jamuna) and the Sutlej. The king of Sirmour or Nahari, adjacent to Garhwal, was a friend of the Gorkhals and so the latter had difficulty reaching out further west. Thus, they overtook many small principalities, such as Kyunthal, Baghat, Kuthur, Kaniya, Bhanani, Dharni and so on. The raja of Bisher (Rampur) resisted, but had to flee.

The hill region as a whole had 12 kingdoms and many small principalities. The hill rajahs were fearful of the plains-based Punjabi and Sikh rulers. Perhaps due to cultural preference, they decided that if they had to be conquered, better that it be by the Gorkhals. The Raja Mahachand of Bilaspur was sent as their emissary to meet the Nepali commander Amar Singh Thapa, and to accede to Gorkhali authority.

If one looks at the list of the rajahs who thus acquiesced to the Gorkhali authority, they include Raja Jit Singh of Chamba, whose seat was in Chamba town, on the western bank of the Ravi. From here, the borders of Jammu and Kashmir is barely 40 miles away.

The Sutlej we speak of has presently been dammed by the Bhakra Nangal, and the original capital of Bilaspur is now underwater. Beyond Sutlej, the Gorkhals had to go through Suket, Mandi, Baijnath and Palampur before they reached Kangra fort. Much beyond Kangra you reach Nurpur, then Pathankot, and further on you



come to Bakloha, beyond which lies Dalhousie, and about 30 miles further still is Chamba town.

The people of Chamba have not forgotten the Gorkhali conquest and even today a local song highlights the areas that the Gorkhals took, such as Tisa, Baira, Bhandal. The lyric also speaks of the loot engaged in by the Gorkhali soldiers.

In the Bhuri Singh Museum at Chamba, there are two letters from Amar Singh Thapa to the raja of Chamba, in which the latter is referred to as the Vazir of the Gorkhali state, which proves that Chamba was completely under the control of Kathmandu. It is only correct history to state that before Sugauli, Nepal extended from the Teesta to the Ravi.

*Janaklal Sharma*

*Panipokhari, Kathmandu*

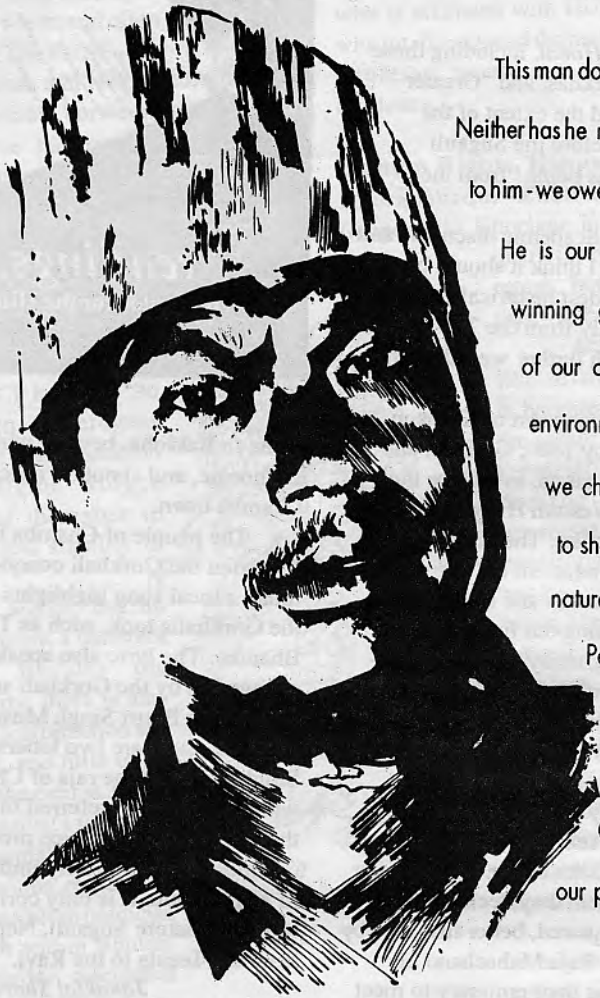
## Don't Belittle Pasang Lhamu


Dipesh Risal's narrative of Pasang Lhamu tragedy (Know Your Himal May/June 1993) made me unhappy, to say the least.



Risal questions Pasang Lhamu's mountaineering skills at a time when her mourners haven't even had time to wipe away their tears. Risal fails to appreciate the indomitable spirit of Pasang Lhamu which goaded her to pursue her aim even in face of natural and artificial hurdles. She succeeded but for the quirk of fate that acted so cruelly.


Risal says she was ambitious; but which mountaineer is not? Perhaps she was spurred by the urge of getting on top first;

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# On the Way Up

Kanak Mani Dixit

Quite a few readers were taken aback when we brought out our Literature Issue (May/June 1993). We think it was a pleasant surprise to most, and now feel that it is a good idea to be occasionally unpredictable.

When we first planned the present issue, we had not expected to touch the range of topics that we have, nor receive contributions from writers of such different backgrounds. *Himal* thanks Pratyoush Onta for helping prepare this History issue.

This issue brings with it some significant changes in *Himal*'s masthead.

Omar Sattaur, whose editorial expertise has been invaluable for *Himal* over the past year, will now be freelancing. Among other things, he is Guest Editor for our Music issue, Nov/Dec 1993.

Suman Basnet, who has carried *Himal* as its Managing Editor for two years, will still be around as Director of *Film Himalaya*, the Documentary/Film Festival we have planned for February 1994. Meanwhile, Pema Wangchuk Dorjee, who comes from Kinnaur by way of Kalimpong, takes over as Managing Editor.

Manisha Aryal is now Associate Editor of *Himal*.

Special thanks to Anup Pahari, our volunteer representative in the U.S. for being with us this past year. His enthusiasm and his patience went a long way in making *Himal* more widely read in North America.

We welcome Barbara Bella & Associates, C. F. Stoppelaar and Joti Giri who assume responsibility for North America, the Netherlands, the U.K. and Ireland respectively.

It is time for *Himal*'s "Know Your Himal" columnist, Dipesh Risal, to leave for study in the United States. We hope his knowledge of the Himalayan peaks serves him well in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, which, we gather, is flat.

but that too is the nature of the game. Pasang Lhamu was by no means a novice climber. This last attempt was her fourth bid. And haven't more skilled mountaineers met with similar climbing tragedies before her?

A country which cannot boast of a few heroes and heroines with the tales of toils, tears and sacrifices — however foolhardy they might appear to some people — can not have its history illuminated. She worked a lot to plan, organise and execute her expedition. And if the country went 'overboard' to honour her after her death, it is not as if she had demanded or designed it *a priori*. In fact, the Government made the fuss over her to recompense for their shabby treatment of her earlier.

Pasang Lhamu should not be derided by pointed references to her human failings or by comparing her achievements to British or Indian women's achievements. As a nation we are late starters, and in many regards, we are just learning to get our acts together. If Pasang Lhamu's death has helped the presently ethnically torn Nepal by binding her people together emotionally, isn't the achievement worthy in itself?

Prayag Raj Sharma  
Kathmandu

## A True Heroine

I found Dipesh Risal's treatment of Pasang Lhamu "event", as he calls it, sexist. Not only does he dismiss *Nepal Tara* Pasang Lhamu's mountaineering achievement by underestimating her victory, he also does not seem too impressed with her capabilities as a mountaineer.

In order to back up his finding that Pasang Lhamu was a poor climber, the writer reports on the row that took place between her and the French 'soloist' Marc Batard, and Batard's claim that Pasang Lhamu was too slow and engaged too many Sherpas to help her along.

Which made me flip back to the Mountaineering Issue of *Himal* (Nov/Dec 1992) and the article co-authored by Risal, in which Batard is depicted as an egotist who would do anything to get his 'solo' ascent, including lying to his own climbing partner. How can the word of such a person be used to prove or disprove Lhamu's climbing skills?

The likes of Batard should not have been invoked to denigrate someone's genuine achievements. Pasang Lhamu is a

*birangana*, a heroine in the true sense of the word, and thus she will be known in the history of Nepali mountaineering, and it will not do for a non-climbing male reporter in Kathmandu to try and deprive her of credit. Would the inside stories of the climb have been as important if Pasang Lhamu was the first Nepali *male* to have climbed Chomolongma?

Mamta Acharya  
Naya Baneshwor, Kathmandu

## Culture over Political Ideology

Looking at the problem in Bhutan from an international perspective, it becomes evident that the rulers of Thimphu are absolutely ignorant of global happenings. Neither do they read their social sciences properly.

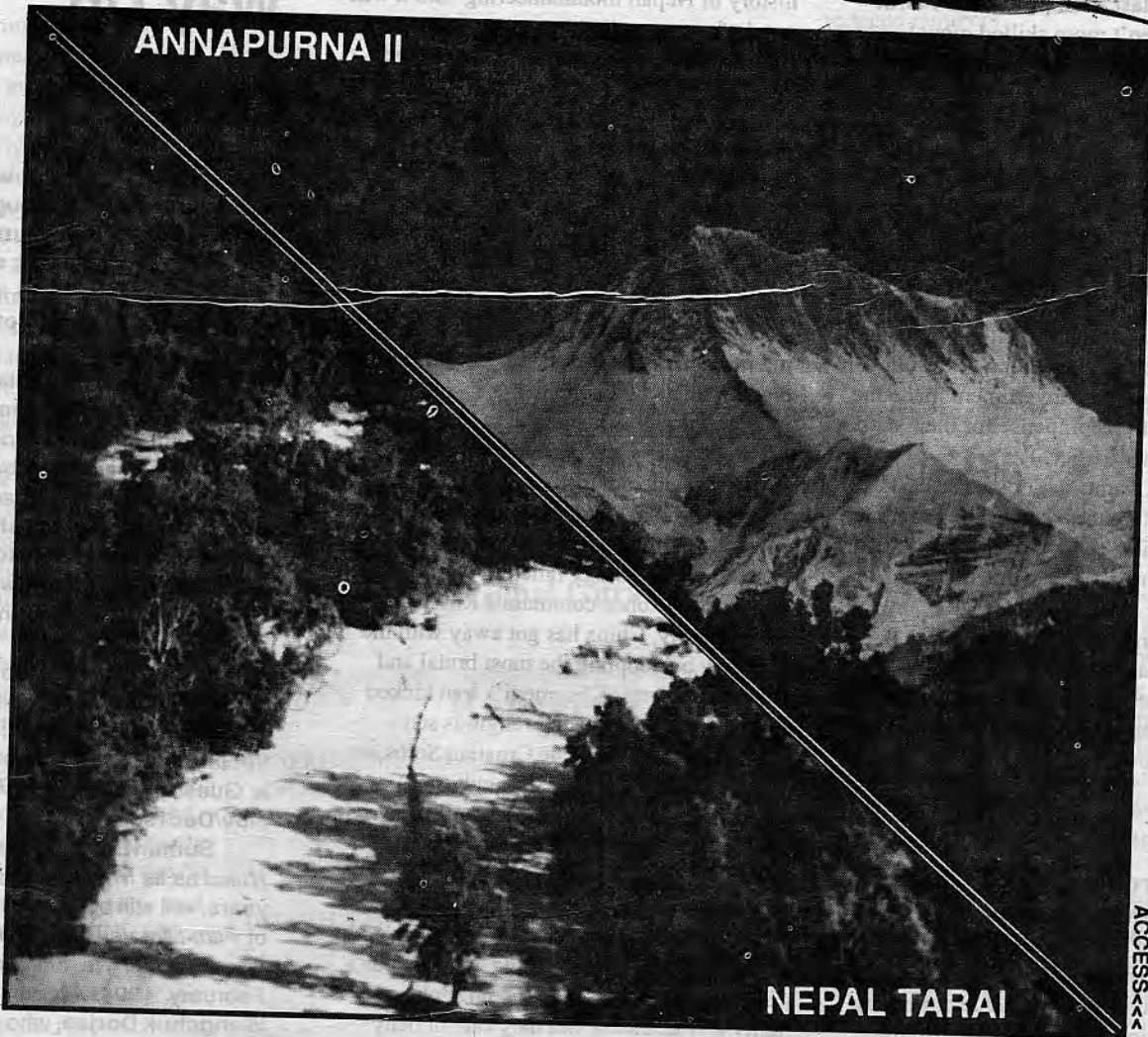
The ideologically divided Germany broke its wall and came together under the banner of shared culture. The eight decades of lessons in ideology failed to wipe out culture of the once communist Russia. Momentarily, China has got away with the ideology by adopting the most brutal and savage measures. Khoemeni's Iran kicked out the West by arousing religious sentiments of the people. The Croatian Serbs are out for ethnic cleansing. The cultural aggression on one people by another gave birth to a Subhas Ghising and his likes.

The entry of religious and cultural elements in politics creates a new equation in the political landscape. The political theorists and scientists would dismiss it as a mere transitory phase, based on sentimentality and unreason, but they cannot deny the fact that these elements create strong social forces that can wipe out an ideology as firmly established as Communism in Eastern Europe.

When culture appears in the political arena, ideology has to take a back seat. For culture is the life-force of the society. While the battle throughout the world is fought for cultural reason, Thimphu expects to wash out culture from the blood of a people.

A country like Bhutan, which neither has an ideology of its own to follow, nor enough human and natural resources to mobilise for its rapid progress, cannot afford to commit such a blunder. Imposing one's own culture on another is like invading privacy. Bhutan should learn its lessons by looking at the world and take corrective steps, otherwise history will repeat itself.

Harka Bahadur Chhetri  
Pedong, Kalimpong.



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# Scott, Amundsen and Pasang Lhamu

by Marcia Lieberman

Pasang Lhamu Sherpa has been enshrined in Nepal's national consciousness as an authentic heroine, her legend established: need anything more be said?

Decidedly, yes. The article in *Himal of May/June 1993* suggests that Pasang Lhamu was not a strong climber and her achievement relatively modest. There is more to the story. Nepal may need a national heroine, but not at the expense of its soul. That is the price of this concocted story: a freshly-minted myth, hastily packaged, that is a perversion of the truth.

I am a writer who has travelled several times to Nepal. I was at Chomolongma Base Camp this spring with my husband who was a scientific member of the American Sagarmatha expedition. Pasang Lhamu's story unfolded while we were there.

It has been presented as a drama of courage and determination: how a Nepali woman pursued her dream, and how through sheer grit she reached the summit, but then tragically perished with one of her "companions". The story bears an uncanny resemblance to the apotheosis of Robert Falcon Scott, the British explorer who led an expedition to the South Pole in 1911-12. Arrogant, stubborn and intolerant of dissenting opinion, Scott's blunders led his men to their death. (They were beaten to the Pole by the Norwegian Roald Amundsen, who returned safely with his whole team.) Scott's widow doctored the records and suppressed the evidence; Scott was painted a hero and was revered as such by generations of British schoolchildren. Only recently has the myth of the noble Scott been debunked.

In Nepal this year, a similar icon has been created. Yet, when the facts are reviewed, the Pasang Lhamu legend appears in a very different light. Instead of pluck and determination, we see greed, selfishness, incompetence and reckless disregard for the lives of others. The myth depends upon the suppression of evidence and the distortion of reality and is not healthy for Nepal.

Pasang Lhamu had made three previous attempts on the mountain. Non-Nepali expeditions are charged a "royalty" for climbing. The full royalty was waived (or greatly reduced) for Pasang Lhamu's earlier climbs. Her expeditions, however, included European climbers. On her second expedition, in the fall of 1991, six European climbers participated, including the French woman climber Chantal Mauduit, who paid Pasang Lhamu US\$ 5000. Mauduit believes that the other Europeans paid at the same rate. On her

final, fatal expedition, a Lithuanian named Vlado Vitkauskas appeared on the membership list as a photographer, yet he reportedly paid Pasang Lhamu US\$ 7000, and also had to bring his own oxygen supplies.

There were many signals that Pasang Lhamu was not interested in a team effort that would put a Nepali woman on the summit of Chomolongma. The glory — and the rewards — had to be her's: A group of Indian women had invited her to join them and form an Indo-Nepali women's team, but she turned it down to form her own team — one that she would lead and thus control. She created this team by taking along two Nepali women, Lhakphuti Sherpa and Nanda Rai.

But even within her own team, Pasang Lhamu tried to minimise competition. She told Lhakphuti that Nanda Rai was not strong enough to summit. And so Pasang Lhamu's only competitors for the victor's laurels were Lhakphuti and Nimmi Sherpa, a strong and experienced climber from Pangboche, who was on the Indo-Nepali team.

Pasang Lhamu's premature (in terms of weather) and somewhat clandestine rush to the summit, denying equipment and Sherpa support to Lhakphuti, betray her determination to summit alone at all cost. Why was the laurel wreath of such vital personal importance? A mountaineering team normally represents a group effort to place at least one climber on a summit. But self-promotion rather than teamwork evidently marked the expedition from the start. The trekking company run by Pasang Lhamu and her husband would have gained much publicity advantage from her being the first Nepali woman on the top.

Lhakphuti had been assured that the expedition would provide all equipment required on the mountain, which is normal. But, Pasang Lhamu informed her that they did not have enough oxygen masks for everyone, and so Lhakphuti would have to be on the second climbing team. She justified this by saying that Lhakphuti did not have to compete with anyone, whereas she had to beat Nimmi Sherpa and the Indian team to the summit.

Of the six male Sherpas in the team, Pasang Lhamu announced that she would take four, leaving two for Lhakphuti and Nanda Rai. When Lhakphuti protested, she was told that she did not need more Sherpas — Nanda Rai could not make it to the summit anyway. As soon as the team began to ascend the mountain, reports came down about the Sherpani who was being helped and almost lifted up the mountain by a small crowd of Sherpas.

Pasang Lhamu, her husband and Lhakphuti climbed up to Camp Three for the purpose of acclimatisation. As they returned to Camp Two, Lhakphuti observed that Pasang Lhamu was extremely slow. Lhakphuti descended alone; Pasang Lhamu was helped

down by two Sherpas and her husband.

When Nanda Rai showed signs of altitude sickness in Camp Two, Pasang Lhamu asked Lhakphuti to take her down to Base Camp. Pasang Lhamu then climbed up to Camp Three, taking five Sherpas with her. Using a radio belonging to my husband's expedition, Pasang Lhamu called down to tell Lhakphuti that if she wanted to buy oxygen, the Sherpas had "found" two oxygen bottles — this was Lhakphuti's first notice that she would have to buy her own oxygen!

Meanwhile, Pasang Lhamu, began her summit bid with the five Sherpas. It was 22 April. The Spring had been stormy and there was still a great deal of fresh snow on the mountain. No other team would summit until 10 May. And Pasang Lhamu would not be seen again until her frozen body was dug out of the snow.

Lacking good technique, Pasang Lhamu took five hours to get down to the South Summit instead of the normal 45-50 minutes. She refused to go, or was unable to go any lower. The fourth, Pema Norbu, descended some hours later. Sonam Tsering stayed with Pasang Lhamu, giving her his remaining oxygen during their final bivouac.

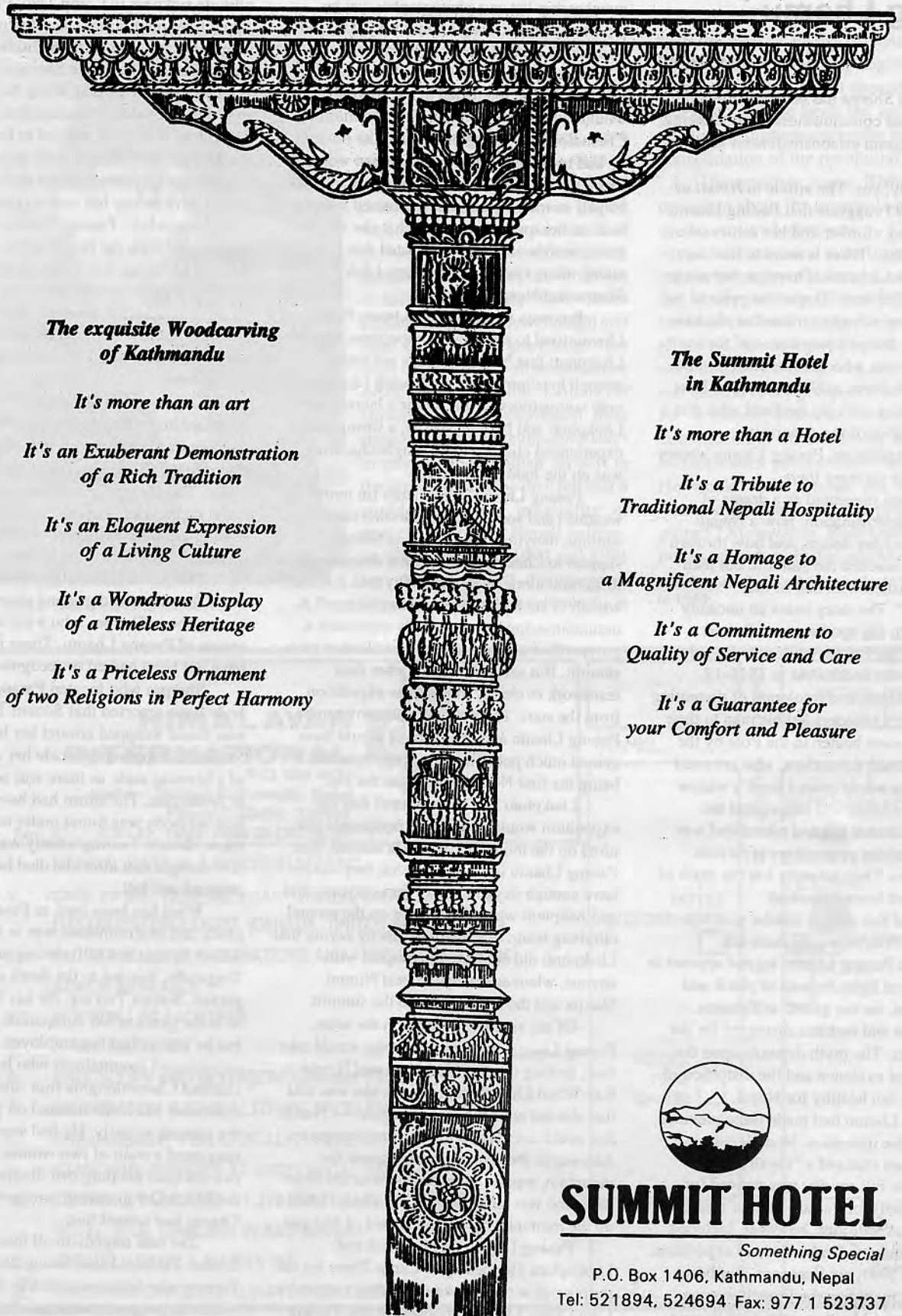
There was heroism on the mountain in those few days, and grit and determination, among those Sherpas who tried to come to the rescue of Pasang Lhamu. These true heroes have not been named or recognised.

Sherpas who located Pasang Lhamu's body have reported that Sonam Tsering's pack was found wrapped around her legs. Her Sardar had apparently made her use it as a sort of a bivouac sack, as there was no other shelter or protection. The storm had been so ferocious that her body was found under one meter of snow. Sonam Tsering's body was never found: it is thought that after she died he tried to descend and fell.

What has been seen as Pasang Lhamu's pluck and determination was in fact obstinacy, driven by ego and self-serving ambition. Tragically, this led to the death of another person, Sonam Tsering. He has been referred to in the press as her companion or comrade, but he was in fact her employee. As an experienced mountaineer who had already climbed Chomolongma four times, he was distressed when she insisted on pushing on to the summit so early. He had sensibly suggested a team of two women climbers and two sherpas, keeping two Sherpas in reserve at the South Col in case of emergency. Pasang Lhamu had vetoed this.

The true tragedy in all this is the fate of Sonam Tsering. Like Pasang Lhamu, Sonam Tsering also left three children behind, and his widow is pregnant with their fourth child.

M. Lieberman writes travel articles for *The New York Times*.



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# Refracted Images of the World Beyond

*Himalayan history cannot be seen in isolation of the developments elsewhere in South Asia.*

by Chetan Singh

History is often accepted as an account of how good kings won battles, established empires and kept their subjects happy; and conversely, of how the bad ones oppressed the poor and ultimately lost both their wars and their kingdoms.

The greater part of Himalayan historiography has done little to dispel such simplistic notions. It tends to concentrate on elaborate, extended descriptions of petty boundary disputes between tiny mountain principalities. The chronological re-ordering of the reigns of kings and intricate etymological rationalisations for concocted royal lineages are, for many scholars, the goals of their research.

Significantly, the historiography of South Asia as a whole has seen considerable change in recent years. More rigorous methods and sophisticated scholarship are uncovering intricate historical processes of the past. Scholars are re-examining the nature of the state, economic organisation and social systems.

Research on Himalayan history, however, has not kept pace with the rest of the Subcontinent. Historians remain absorbed in unravelling political intrigues and court scandals. Art historians are content to follow the lofty achievements of Himalayan art and reluctant to soil their hands with earthy socio-economic realities.

## Replaying a Past

Among researchers in the other social sciences, and particularly among Western scholars, the Himalayan region is taken as a social laboratory that enables them to observe once again the re-enactment of a long forgotten past. Irrespective of field of specialisation or research method, a constant undercurrent is the presumed isolation of the Himalaya. While the more sympathetic view is that this leads to the cultural diversity

of the region, others regard it as the cause of the 'primitiveness' of hill society.

Both groups of scholars, however, believe that Himalayan society has existed independently of the rest of South Asia, until the modern age forced it to conform. According to this mindset, as far as the present is concerned, reticent hill societies need to be prodded into interacting with a rapidly changing world.

Many Himalayan historians unwittingly carry contradictory assumptions in their theoretical baggage. While the impact of subcontinental trends on Himalayan history is implicitly accepted, it is not given due importance. The historical inseparability of hill and plain emerges only when the scholar is unable to explain certain turning points through purely 'local' material.

For example, the emergence of centralised monarchical states in the region is often attributed to the arrival of military adventurers, whose 'royal lineage' and reasons for coming to the hills both originate outside the Himalaya. Here is Fraser's account of the Himachal principalities of 1821:

*...all the chiefs of the larger hill states are originally of low country extraction; probably soldiers of fortune, more able and politic than the mass of hill chieftains, who have had power to gain a footing, and art to maintain it when gained; and to consolidate into one powerful government a portion of the vast number of ever-changing petty states...*

The Muslim invasion of India is commonly believed (rightly or wrongly) to have encouraged the migration of a large number of Hindu families to the hills. Similarly, the spread of religious orthodoxy (the import of gods, caste and scriptures) in different parts of the Himalaya is generally considered

a part of the larger 'civilising mission' of Brahminism.

Simultaneously, however, Himalayan historiography has created an insular world for itself; one that overemphasises its separateness. In their seminal work, *History of the Punjab Hill States*, Hutchison and Vogel wrote:

*In the hills social conditions have been prevalent from remote times, ...Till comparatively recent years the hills were almost entirely isolated from the plains. The rugged character of the country made invasion difficult and conquest practically impossible...*

The influence of the developments in the adjoining plains has been underplayed in order to establish a distinct identity. The stress is on presenting an unbroken, romanticised and somewhat segregated continuity in Himalayan history. To quote Hutchison and Vogel again on the Punjab hill chiefs:

*Good reason then have they to be proud of their ancient lineage. The ancestors of many of them were ruling over settled states when ours were little better than savages, and the youngest of them can point to a pedigree dating back for a thousand years. In comparison with them most of the royal houses of the plains are but of yesterday, and the oldest must yield the palm to some of the noble families of the Panjab Hills.*

Such is the contradiction. While many complicated developments are seen as products of short-term influences of the plains, over the longer duration the Himalaya are depicted as an isolated region. Historic socioeconomic transformations in the rest of South Asia are disregarded until they become too large to be ignored. Objective history of the Himalaya

can only be written if such contradictions are resolved, and the traditional obsession with insularity explained and overcome.

### Linkages

Innumerable factors have always bound Himalayan society to people and places beyond the mountains. The most commonly discussed links are of language, socio-religious practices, art forms, large-scale migration, and so on. While these links are indeed significant, we need to find out what kind of economy was able to sustain the cultural and political achievements that the scholars have attributed the Himalayan kingdoms.

Obviously, the large number of craftsmen engaged for temple-building and producing artwork were not paid out of wealth that was locally generated. Neither the non-productive cultural and artistic activities, nor the heightened military activity across the Himalaya during the late-18th to early-19th century, would have been possible without the income from trade and other commercial activities. However, the dramatic rise in the volume of commerce, must not distract us from the fact that the exchange networks had a long history and were an integral part of Himalayan economy and society.

The links with the larger world beyond

the mountains thus were very much a permanent characteristic of Himalayan history since the early times. These characteristics were not created by any single factor, such as the adventurer's conquest, the Brahman's missionary zeal, the merchant's trading activities, or the craftsman's skill. Rather, Himalayan history was shaped by a blend of all these and a lot more, a convergence of which brought into being and nurtured a corresponding worldview.

There emerged a well-knit, yet extensive, network of socio-economic, political and cultural relationships that gradually came to be taken for granted. The existing image of this larger historical dimension is yet only a refracted one. So diverse were the ways in which Himalayan societies reached out to distant regions that it will take considerable and persistent efforts to put the complete picture together.

Not surprisingly, therefore, the answer to many intricate questions of the region's history may be found in areas lying beyond the Himalaya. In economic terms, it could mean that the region had established a relationship of mutual dependence with the adjoining plains. When translated into politics, it could imply that the exchange of salt, wool, gold, textiles, timber and other forest produce

between the Himalaya and areas far beyond enabled the accumulation of an extra bit of wealth which in turn made possible the emergence of hill kingdoms and polities of fairly complex nature.

And it is not only in the economic sphere that this wider aspect of Himalayan history is applicable. In social terms, for example, the upper echelons of the ruling elites of the Himalayan kingdoms have time and again emphasised their affinity in caste and status with the dominant classes of the Indian heartland.

History-writing is a method of recording and explaining change over time. Political upheavals are at once a cause and consequence of the rise of new social classes in society. Having ascended to political power, it was necessary for them to acquire a corresponding social legitimacy amongst the peer groups. Matrimonial alliances have always been a highly effective weapon in the arsenal of rulers. To use a fairytale analogy: on many a historical occasion, it was the kiss of a Rajput princess that broke the spell of social peripheralisation and transformed the frog into a prince in his own right.

▷

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# Ranas Good, Ranas Bad...

*Three decades of Panchayat rule have been between present day (democratic) Nepal and the period of the Ranas.*

*It is time to re-evaluate their regime.*

**by John Whelpton**

**T**he past is usually interpreted to serve present purposes. The 1857 revolt against British rule in India, for example, has been analysed very differently by older British historians and by Indian nationalists, as even the names given to the episode — 'Indian Mutiny' or 'First National War of Independence' — make clear.

In Nepal, after the end of a century of rule by the Rana maharajas in 1951, it was similarly inevitable that perceptions of the period reflected the concerns of the Nepali royal family and of the political parties who had together ousted the Ranas from power. Both the monarchy and the party politicians naturally stressed the failings of the Ranas when measured against ideal democratic standards, but the monarchy's interests demanded that the Rana period also be seen to contrast unfavourably with the situation before 1846, when the Shah dynasty held real political power. The result has been that important continuities, especially between pre- and post-1846 Nepal, have been obscured.

## **Fabric of Intrigue**

The Rana era began on the night of 14 September 1846, when Jang Bahadur Kunwar massacred his fellow ministers and their supporters at the Kot Arsenal. We shall never



*Maharaja Jang Bahadur with his maharani*



MADAN PURASHIKAR PUSTAKALAYA

*From stucco palaces...*

know if the bloodshed was pre-planned, or whether he acted to pre-empt a threat against himself and his brothers. It is likely, however, that Jang Bahadur and other ministers had been involved in the assassination earlier that evening of Queen Laxmi Devi's confidante Gagan Singh, which had led her to call together all leading political figures. Jang Bahadur was nevertheless skillful enough to retain the queen's confidence and was appointed Prime Minister by her. They worked together to expel the families of the slain leaders, but then Jang Bahadur deftly shifted his support to the Crown Prince and engineered the Queen's exile. King Rajendra, probably fearful for his life, announced he would accompany her to Banaras.

A web of intrigue and treachery indeed, but nothing thus far led contemporaries to believe that a new era in Nepali history had opened. Intrigue and assassination had been part of the fabric of Nepal's political life since the death of Prithvi Narayan Shah. The control of the government by a powerful minister rather than the king himself had also been common. Bhimsen Thapa had played that role for 30 years from 1806 and after his fall, as King Rajendra had proved incapable either of ruling directly himself or of trusting anyone else to do so, a succession of individuals had

made short-lived attempts to take Bhimsen's place. Many, including British officials observing events from the Residency, believed that Jang Bahadur, too, would not last long.

In fact, Jang Bahadur did manage to break the old pattern in some ways. In the summer of 1847, he got the State Council to purge his opponents, to depose Rajendra and put Crown Prince Surendra on the throne in his place. The Kunwars took the name 'Ranas' to show that they, like the Shah dynasty, claimed descent from the famous Rajput rulers of Mewar. This opened the way for the Rana-Shah marriages which became a crucial feature of Rana strategy.

In 1856, Jang Bahadur attempted a division of authority within his family: he resigned the premiership in favour of his eldest brother, providing for the younger ones to succeed to the post in turn. He himself retained general supervisory power with the new title of Maharaja, which he intended to go to his own direct descendants. He was thus one ritual step below Rajendra, who, as Maharajadhiraj ('Great King of Kings'), remained the ultimate source of legitimacy, especially in its religious aspect.

The arrangement broke down within a year, largely because the British refused to recognise any separate authority other than

king and prime minister, and Jang Bahadur resumed premiership. On his death in 1877, his eldest son, Jagat Jang claimed the right to maharajaship but Jang's surviving brothers ensured both posts went to the eldest of them, Ranaudip Singh (see cover picture). A growing reconciliation between Ranaudip and Jagat alarmed the sons of Dhir Shamsher, youngest of Jang Bahadur's brothers. In 1885, they seized power, killing Ranaudip and Jagat. From then on the combined post of prime minister and maharaja was handed down by agnate succession within the Shamsher Rana family: five of Dhir Shamsher's sons (Bir, Dev, Chandra, Bhim and Juddha) ruled in turn between 1885 and 1945, and two grandsons (Padma and Mohan) till 1951.

The constitutional relationship between the Rana rulers and the Shah kings resembled the Japanese shogunate, which similarly put political power in one family's hands whilst another retained a symbolic, religious predominance. Closer to Nepal, the Maratha peshwas had also acted as hereditary Prime Ministers whilst King Shivaji's descendants continued to occupy a powerless throne. In devising such arrangements in the 1850s, however, Jang Bahadur almost certainly regarded them as transitional, hoping that he would eventually be able to supplant King

Surendra completely. The British Resident in Kathmandu at the time believed that Jang Bahadur would only risk the last step if the British would move to support. Such support was never forthcoming and the dual arrangement came to be taken for granted.

The system of agnate succession was similarly dictated by political necessity. Jang Bahadur had relied heavily on his brother at the Kot in 1846, and he also knew that Bhimsen Thapa, Nepal's previous strongman, had fallen partly because of family dissension. A division of the political spoils with his brothers presented itself as a natural solution. It was not a perfect one, as subsequent struggles over inclusion on the 'roll' (of succession) showed. In the end, the so-called 'C-Class Ranas' — out-of-wedlock sons who were removed from the roll in 1934 — played an important role in the movement that finally brought down the Rana regime.

### Rana Brahminism

The Ranas were an elite living in luxury on the surplus extracted from an agrarian population without making the dedicated effort for 'development' which is now demanded of governments. They were thus 'exploitative', but the same could be said of the rulers of almost any traditional agrarian society and certainly of the Nepali state in the years before 1846.

Jang Bahadur's family came to power only at the expense of other members of the political elite (the *bhardari*), and ended a period of acute instability which might even have led to the loss of Nepal's independence. Ordinary Nepalis perhaps gained a little initially because of restrictions Jang Bahadur imposed on landholders' powers over their tenants. A slow strengthening of the central administration continued under later premiers, especially Chandra Shamsher, and although the peasants were exploited, the Ranas did at least leave their successors in a better position to remedy this situation.

In his well-known book *Fatalism and Development*, anthropologist Dor Bahadur Bista contrasts the Ranas' enforcement of a rigid caste hierarchy, set out in Jang Bahadur's *Muluki Ain* (National Code) of 1854, with the supposedly egalitarian attitude towards Nepal's different peoples displayed by King Prithvi Narayan Shah in the 18th

century. Caste barriers in the hills were certainly once less rigid than they later became, and Prithvi Narayan himself may actually have been of Magar descent, as one informant told a British visitor in 1803.

Still, the Shah dynasty's relationship with their Brahman gurus and their claim to Rajput ancestry, already put forward in the 17th century, suggest that the 'Brahmanical values' which Bista decries, had got a hold on them well before Prithvi Narayan Shah's time. Although the rigour of the caste system probably increased in the 19th century, the watershed was the end of Nepali expansion in 1816, rather than the coming of the Rana rule. In caste matters, Jang Bahadur's 1854 *Ain* was just that: a codification of existing practice, not the imposition of a new orthodoxy. The innovation lay in Jang Bahadur's wish for a uniform system of law throughout Nepali territory.

In foreign policy, too, the key to Rana attitudes lay in previous history. Nepal's defeat by the East India Company in 1816, together with a China initially unwilling and later also too weak to act as a counter-balance, led to an acute dilemma for whoever was ruling in Kathmandu: how to adjust to the reality of British power without inflaming nationalist feeling inside Nepal? The ideal solution was

to play both ends against the middle: present yourself to the British as the man who could keep the Nepali army in check, while posing at home as a bulwark against British expansionism.

Bhimsen Thapa had done just this in the 1820s and 1830s, but, as his domestic position came under threat, both he and his opponents manoeuvred for British support. The British Residency did finally become deeply involved in internal politics in 1840, and although in 1842 the British decided to abandon such intervention, most Nepalis believed it could occur again. It was thus natural for Mathbar Singh Thapa, Bhimsen's nephew and Jang Bahadur's uncle, to seek close relations with the Residency in 1843-45, and for Jang Bahadur to follow the same policy.

### British Tool?

Jang Bahadur had a problem because initially, far from being depicted the British tool he is still depicted as in some popular Nepali histories, he had to overcome their view of him as a desperado who might soon fall. He achieved this by consolidating his hold on power and then becoming the first Hindu ruler to cross the *kalo pani* to visit Britain in 1850. He proved the sensation of the season for high society in London and Paris.

In 1857, Jang Bahadur led Nepali forces to support the British against the uprising in Awadh. Nepali governments had offered military assistance to the East India Company before 1848, but this was the first time an offer had been accepted. Nepal was rewarded by the return of the Tarai districts of Banke and Bardiya which had been taken from her in the 1816 peace settlement. Jang Bahadur himself received a knighthood, but not the backing for making himself king of Nepal which he had probably wanted.

It was under Maharaja Chandra, a product of Calcutta University, who came to power in 1901, that a really close relationship was established between the British and the Ranas. Since 1857, the British had turned to conciliation rather than supplanting the remaining Indian princes, and by the early years of the 20th century the colonial regime and the traditional autocracies found themselves allied against new-style Indian nationalism. There was thus



...to Rana ladies

MADAN PURAKHAR PUSTAKALAYA

a natural convergence of interest: the Ranas continued to allow Gorkha recruitment, and also sent Nepal's own forces to fight in both World Wars, whilst the British paid for the soldiers and also kept an eye on the growing anti-Rana movement amongst Nepalis in India.

The 1923 agreement acknowledging Nepal's full independence made sense in the same context: the more separate India and Nepal were politically, the less likely Gorkha troops in India would be to feel solidarity with the Indian nationalists.

Like policy towards British India, Rana isolationism had its roots in the past. From Prithvi Narayan's time onwards, restricting access to the country had been seen as vital for Nepal's national security. During the latter half of the Rana period, however, the maharajas required not security from a possible British attack but from political 'contamination'. In their final years, with British withdrawal from India imminent, the Ranas realised that diplomatic relations with as many countries as possible would strengthen their position in negotiations with independent India and began, belatedly, to change tack.

### The Damage Done

Another area in which change came too late was in the whole pattern of personal excess which both repels and fascinates us today. The elaborate stucco palaces built in imitation of Versailles and Buckingham Palace, the jewelled head-dresses, the richly-caparisoned elephants, the scale of the hunting expeditions, were all part of this and so, for many of the maharajas, was the pursuit of sex.

Jang Bahadur's amorous interests attracted interest even before he came to power. His nephew, Maharaja Juddha, kept up the tradition. The accusation in dissidents' leaflets are confirmed by a 1939 diplomatic despatch noting his tendency "to pick up any damsel that takes his wayward fancy and then to return her, with a few rupees clutched in her hand, to her parents or husband."

Such behaviour could be paralleled elsewhere in South Asia and beyond, but, as the same diplomat added, times had changed. Juddha's retirement in 1945 and the more subdued style of Padma and Mohan Shamsheer were insufficient to repair the damage.

Whatever their personal conduct, Rana rulers in this century were aware of Nepal's backwardness and did take positive steps. Chandra Shamsheer built suspension bridges, which are still in use today. He also founded the Tri Chandra College. And under Juddha Shamsheer, factories were opened in the Tarai. However, fear that rapid change might

undermine their own position was always paramount. In a report for Juddha on industrial development, Singha Shamsheer, one of Chandra Shamsheer's sons, wrote that it was in the Rana's interests to raise the people's living standards but added, "we cannot possibly take steps that may in any way be subversive to our autocratic authority." Of the two maharajas who seemed ready to take a bolder and more generous view, Dev Shamsheer (1901) was quickly deposed by his more conservative brothers and Padma Shamsheer (1945-48) intimidated into resignation.

In 1951, Mohan Shamsheer, Padma Shamsheer's hardline successor, had to accept the 1951 "Delhi Compromise". Rana rule was thus formally ended, but as in 1846, the break with the past was not complete. The many marriages between Shahs and Ranas meant that individual members of the Rana family remained members of the inner circle even when power was restored to the monarchy. In November 1951, King Tribhuvan reportedly compelled the Nepali Congress to accept his own choice of Prime Minister by threatening to impose direct rule with the help of Kaiser Shamsheer, Mohan Shamsheer's brother.

The Panchayat system of "guided democracy" which King Mahendra introduced ten years later was similar in spirit to the constitution proposed by Maharaja Padma in 1948, only with Shri Panch Maharajadhiraj rather than Sri Teen Maharaj providing the guidance.

The final 'subversion of autocratic authority' came in 1990, but many Ranas still occupy senior positions in the Royal Nepal Army. And King Birendra and Queen



Great grandfather Juddha

Aishwarya are, of course, both great-grandchildren of Maharaja Juddha.

*Nepalko nimitta sabbhanda thulo kura usko swatantrata ra sarwabhoumika kayam rakhnu ho* ("The important thing for Nepal is to maintain its independence and sovereignty"), runs a quotation from King Birendra suspended above Kathmandu's Ratna Park. If that is the ultimate criterion, then Rana rule was reasonably successful, for Jang Bahadur and Chandra Shamsheer, even if principally pursuing their personal ambitions, did much to ensure that Nepal survived the colonial and post-colonial era as an independent state. If we look at their record in social and economic development, the judgement has to be harsher, but probably no other regime which emerged from the instability of the 1840s would have served Nepal better. ▽

J. Whelpton is author of *Jang Bahadur in Europe and Kings, Soldiers and Priests* and lives in HongKong.

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# Tanakpur on the Thames

by Dipak Gyawali

**A** nondescript building by the Blackfriars Bridge, over the Thames in London, houses the Oriental and India Office Collections of the British Library. Despite its unassuming looks, it is the repository of the institutional memory of England's colonial past, a gold mine of preserved records, official memos and astute observations of her civil servants from far-flung outposts of the Empire.

For the last two years, Nepal's state apparatus has been bogged down with the controversy over Tanakpur barrage on the Mahakali (Sarda) river on the western border with India. This area of Nepal has a history intermeshed with the British Raj going back to the late 18th century. At Blackfriars, one can take a walk through the history of Tanakpur—seeing how these lands “between Kali and Rapti” were ceded to the “Honourable East India Company” by the Sugauli Treaty of 1815, how they were gifted by the British back to Nepal following Jang Bahadur's help in suppressing the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, and how Chandra Shamshere actually negotiated the details of the 1920 Sarda Treaty.

Nepal's water negotiations with India has suffered from the loss of institutional memory following the overthrow of the Ranas in 1951, eight years of interregnum, 18 months of abortive democracy, and 30 years of Panchayat rule. India, on the other hand, saw white masters depart and brown masters take the helm without a byte of memory loss within its institutions.

Of all the resources spent on tours abroad by Nepali MPs during the last two years, if only a fraction had been devoted to Tribhuban University researchers spending some time at Blackfriars (or if the Nepali Mission in London had been instructed to investigate), much of the historical facts of those times would have come to light. Instead, what we have seen is an emotional heat wave engulfing the Parliament and the nation.

One can now only speculate how the debate in the Nepali Parliament might have proceeded had, for example, the minutes of the meeting between Nepal's Superintending Engineer Kumar Nar Singh Rana and British India's Executive Engineer S. Athim, held at Tanakpur on 26th February 1918, been known in December 1991, before the Tanakpur heartburn began.

The extract below, from British Library records, shows how the figures for Nepal's share of water from the 1920 Sarda Treaty currently in force (150 cusecs in dry season, 460 cusecs in the wet season with an upper limit of 1000 cusecs if water is available) were arrived at:

*...The Superintending Engineer admitted that taking a canal across the Mohan(a) river was not contemplated and consequently the Kailali district may be left out of consideration. The Superintending Engineer stated that judging from reports received from local officials, the total culturable area, including what was inspected by Mr. Athim in 1917 may be accepted as 48,000 acres.*

*The Executive Engineer pointed out that if the gross area is as above, then the annual area to be irrigated at 66 2/3 per cent will be = 2/3 X 48,000 = 32,000 acres; and that if the 48,000 acres represent the annual irrigated area, the rabi area will be 1/3 X 48,000 = 16,000 acres and the kharif area will be 2/3 X 48,000 = 32,000 acres.*

*The Superintending Engineer stated that in Nepal the whole of the kharif area was resown in rabi and that he considered that no difference should be made. The following calculations were made by the Superintending Engineer:-*

*Kharif Area = rabi area  
= 32,000 acres*

*Kharif supply with duty of 70 acres  
= 32,000/70 = 457 1/7 cusecs.*

*Rabi supply with duty of 200 acres  
= 32,000/200 = 160 cusec*

[duty: area that can be irrigated with given water flow -eds.]

*Executive Engineer pointed out that the proper kharif duty at the head of a canal is 100 acres, and that 70 acres is adopted for distributaries that run in alternate weeks; also that in a properly designed scheme the aggregate discharge of all distributaries is nearly double the discharge at head of main canal. Executive Engineer suggested a compromise as follows:-*

*Rabi irrigation may be taken as 24,000 acres with a duty of 200 acres - the discharge would be 24,000/200 = 120 cusecs. It is, however, clear that in the Tarai the duty should be more than 200*

*acres. If 250 acres were taken, the discharge required would be 24,000/250 = 96 cusecs.*

*It was also pointed out by the Executive Engineer that in the absence of maps it was extremely difficult to arrive at definite conclusions. The Superintending Engineer agreed and said that he was acting on reports received from local officials and had no personal knowledge of the tract.*

*The Superintending Engineer stated that Nepal had a right to the Sarda water, and only so much was asked for as was considered necessary for the irrigation of a tract which at present suffered from lack of irrigation facilities.*

*The Executive Engineer pointed out that, as far as he understood the matter, the contention was correct, but this was not a question for present discussion; and furthermore, that if the water level was raised so as to make irrigation possible by the expenditure of lakhs of rupees on headworks, no claim could arise without participation in original cost and maintenance. The question as to what share may be given is one for the two Governments to decide. The purpose of this meeting is to determine what volume is required for irrigation in Nepal.*

*The Superintending Engineer expressed the opinion that kharif supply should not be less than 460 cusecs, and rabi supply not less than 160 cusecs, or 150 cusecs as a minimum; also that up to 1,000 cusecs may be required for kharif.*

These minutes are followed by Mr. Athim's “explanatory note” to his superiors listing his complaints on the process of negotiations:

*I found the whole position had changed owing to the Superintending Engineer holding that I was not shown all the country in 1917. The opinion of Lieutenant Jagat Bahadur, who showed me around in 1917, was entirely set aside. ...*

*The Koriali and Mohan(a) rivers are said to be fairly large ones. The Darbar is not utilizing to the full its resources of water in these channels, and it has done nothing as regards Sarda. Now that the British Government proposes to build headworks for a canal from the Sarda the Darbar asks for some water. It appears to*

me that unless the Darbar shares the expenses involved in raising water level of the river, it cannot claim any share. It may be expedient to allow some share, and I consider that 100 cusecs in rabi is ample.

Resistance by British bureaucrats to giving Nepal concessions was not limited to the Irrigation Department alone. A letter of 16 August 1916 by the Special Forest Officer, the Tarai and Bhabar Government Estates, to the Deputy Commissioner, Naini Tal, states (after political decisions had been made to try and swap 4000 acres of Nepali left bank needed for headwork construction with equivalent land in India):

... The old boundary between Nepal and Naini Tal district was, when it was laid down, the then mid-stream of the Sarda river with reference pillars on either side. Owing to the river continually changing its course, this boundary was found to be very unsatisfactory.

A realignment of the boundary was ordered by Government in 1909 and after a good deal of correspondence and meetings between local officials on both sides a boundary commission met in February 1912 and settled certain preliminary details which were accepted by both the Government of India and the Nepal Darbar.

The boundary as it stands is as near perfection as possible and it would be most regrettable if it had to be altered. Moreover any alteration of the boundary to give Nepal 4000 acres of British territory will mean having to go over the whole works again which has already taken up enough time of the local officials and has also been very costly to the Government. I am of the opinion that Nepal should be compensated with 4000 acres from some other district or, if possible, in money.

These and many other documents at Blackfriars show that Indian *swaraj* and Nepali *prajatantra* notwithstanding, little has changed in Himalaya-Ganga water relations. The plains governments have always asserted the principle that a land-scarce hill state can claim only that amount of water that it can actually use. In actual negotiations, the technically less-prepared party always loses. Broad political understandings can still be scuttled by vested bureaucratic interests. And, while institutional amnesia feeds the controversy, the slate is not blank. The writ of history is all over it.

D. Gyawali spent this Spring at Blackfriars as an Oxford visiting scholar researching for his book on water diplomacy.

1st announcement: May/June 1993, Himal

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# Unquiet Uttarakhand



*Social activism in the Uttar Pradesh hills has its origins back in the days when the British still ruled. Back then, too, the inhabitants of Kumaun and Garhwal were politically alert and active.*

**by Ramachandra Guha**

Over the past two decades, a wave of social movements has swept the hill region of Uttar Pradesh. These include movements against alcoholism and sale of illicit liquor, against unregulated mining, against the siting of large hydroelectric projects, and for the establishment of a separate province of Uttarakhand within the Indian Union. Most celebrated of all is the Chipko Andolan, the 'Hug the Trees' movement that is arguably the best known environmental initiative in the world.

These contemporary social movements have helped place Uttarakhand firmly on the social and environmental atlas of independent India. Yet these movements have also inspired scholars to recover, from the margins of history as it were, the heritage of earlier movements in the region. Where colonial officials liked to write of the 'simple and law abiding hillman', the fact is that the hill peasantry have been as politically active and alert to injustice as their counterparts elsewhere in India.

## Mountains, Forests and Governance

The analysis of social movements in Uttarakhand must reckon with three distinctive features of life in the hills. First, the ecological characteristics of mountain society — the close integration of agriculture and animal husbandry with the forest, the limited availability of cultivable land, and possibilities of agricultural intensification — have meant that in Uttarakhand, as in the Alps and the Andes, rural society has a more or less uniform class structure, composed largely of peasant proprietors with a relatively small proportion

of big landlords or agricultural labourers. Hence the absence of the classic agrarian conflict between landlords and landless labourers. Rural discontent has been expressed in different ways, however. This I will deal with presently.

Second, the forests of the region are among the most valuable in the Subcontinent, a source of hardy coniferous timber and lucrative pine resin. From the late 19th century, the forests of Uttarakhand have been intensely exploited under government auspices, but for the outside market. Commercial forestry entailed strict curbs on the peasant's access to the woodlands, which adversely affected the local economy and sparked widespread resentment.

Third, throughout the period of colonial rule (1815 to 1848), Uttarakhand was divided into two distinct political units: the princely state of Tehri Garhwal, and Kumaun Division, which was controlled directly by the British. Thus, while the region was quite homogeneous in terms of economy and culture, the structure of the state, and especially the style of rule, differed greatly in the two territories.

The monarch of Tehri Garhwal, representative of a 1200 year old dynasty, enjoyed enormous legitimacy among his subjects, who accorded him a quasi-divine status. Garhwal's personalised and flexible system of authority contrasted with the more rule-bound and bureaucratic style of the British in Kumaun, where the colonial state was further separated from its subjects by the chasms of race, class and language.

Where the first two factors might explain

the origins of social protest across Uttarakhand, it was political division of Kumaun and Garhwal which lay behind the different ways in which protest articulated itself.

**Kumaun:** The first century of British rule in Kumaun is notable for the absence of peasant movements. In view of its strategic location (bordering both Nepal and Tibet), land revenue was pitched at a rate substantially lower than the adjoining plains districts. The system of providing unpaid labour (*begar*) and services (*bardaish*) for touring officials were, till the advent of commercial forestry, the main source of peasant discontent. The sporadic opposition to forced labour gathered momentum following the state's takeover of the forests of Kumaun between 1911 and 1917, because forest officials extracted *begar* at will even as their actions deprived the peasantry of a key economic resource.

Matters came to a head in January 1921, when a general strike against *begar* paralysed the administration. The strike was called by a massive demonstration at the great Uttaraini fair in the town of Bageshwar. This was followed several months later by a movement against the forest department, with villagers deliberately torching State-controlled forest areas which were being exploited for timber and pine resin.

Both the *begar* and forest movements were quite successful: the former leading to the abolition of the forced labour system, the latter forcing the state to make major concessions in its forest policy (although it retained tight control over the more valuable forests). In later years, the peasant rebels

continued to set fire to commercially-worked forests to express their dissatisfaction with government policies. Meanwhile, in 1930 and 1942, there was considerable local support, led by the Congress Party, to the nationwide campaigns against British rule. This included attempts to hoist the national tricolour at public places, and general strikes in response to the arrest of local leaders.

**Garhwal:** In Tehri Garhwal, commercial forest operations had started even earlier — towards the latter decades of the 19th century. Peasant movements in the chiefdom were often connected with restrictions on access to the forests. Social movements against state forestry, which erupted in 1904, 1906 and 1930, followed a classic pattern. While breaching forest laws and attacking state officials, peasants did not question the legitimacy of the monarch, himself above wrongdoing in their eyes (by contrast, popular movements in Kumaun were aimed directly at the British). Rather, the peasants asked him to intervene by withdrawing unjust laws and punishing tyrannical officials.

While earlier movements had tended to subside after the monarch's intervention, events took a different turn in 1930. In the absence of the king, away on holiday in Europe, the Dewan (chief minister) advocated punitive action against those who opposed forest settlement operations in Rawain, a county in the northwestern corner of the chiefdom. The movement spread rapidly when village leaders were arrested. When negotiations broke down, the Dewan marched on Rawain with an armed force. Coming upon a meeting of villagers on the banks of the river Jamuna, this force fired on the crowd and caused many deaths.

Whereas the Rawain affair and the earlier social movements had arisen in response to the state's takeover of forests, the last and most widespread movement in Tehri Garhwal

focused on the heavy burden of land revenue on the peasantry. Land settlement operations, commenced in 1944, were immediately resisted by the affected villagers, who refused to submit to the preliminary survey that was being conducted, or supply *begar* to settlement officials.

When officials took an intransigent stand, what began as a localised movement was quickly transformed into a statewide revolt against the nobility. Leaders of the local Congress party played a significant role in this transformation, as did the proclamation of Independence on 15 August 1947. However, in terms of its aims and methods, this upsurge resembled an archetypal peasant movement rather than a carefully orchestrated nationalist campaign. Thus, villagers burnt court records, attacked state officials, and set up *azad panchayats* (liberated areas).

Police firing in the town of Kirtinagar, in early 1948, gave the movement added impetus — carrying the corpses of their dead comrades, peasants marched in their thousands to the capital, Tehri, ultimately taking over the town. The legitimacy of his rule at last questioned, the monarch signed the instrument of Tehri Garhwal's accession to Independent India.

### Contemporary Movements

When the Chipko movement broke out in March 1973, it was quickly assimilated into the global environmental debate, then gathering force in the wake of the Stockholm Conference, which had been held the previous year. Others saw its non-violent tactics as an exemplification of Gandhism ("Gandhi's ghost saves Himalayan trees," wrote a journalist breathlessly in one of the first published accounts of the movement.) In later years, Chipko has also been acclaimed by feminists as an inspiring example of the special bond that exists between women and nature.

It is true that there is a strong (if implicit) environmental message in Chipko, that its most important leaders come out of the Gandhian movement, and that women have participated in large numbers (though not, as is sometimes presented, in opposition to men). But in their eagerness to lay claim to Chipko, environmentalists, Gandhians and feminists have all underplayed, and often

ignored altogether, the long history of social protest in Uttarakhand that set the stage.

Interestingly, the peasants who formed the core of Chipko were themselves acutely aware of this historical heritage. For them, Chipko was but the latest in a series of movements against the state's encroachment on their rights, its longstanding denial of their moral and historical claims on the produce of the forest.

Alongside Chipko, several other initiatives have continued the tradition of popular protest in Uttarakhand. Since the 1960s, peasant women have protested the erosion of family life by the spread of alcoholism in the hills, aided by illicit distillation and sale. Led by Gandhian workers, and more recently by left wing activists, they have organised demonstrations, sit-ins at liquor stills, and social boycott of both vendors and alcoholics.

Women have also played a prominent role in the peasant opposition to open cast mining in different parts of Uttarakhand. Meanwhile, the most celebrated leaders of Chipko have been coordinating resistance to large dams being planned or built in their home territory — Sunderlal Bahuguna in Tehri, and Chandi Prasad Bhatt in Vishnuprayag.

Scholarly research on the social movements of Uttarakhand is proceeding apace, but much work remains to be done. For the colonial period, research might focus on regional variations in the scale and intensity of protest, and on the role of ideology and organisation. The more recent movements against alcoholism, mining and dam-building also await detailed and sociologically informed analysis.

Above all, we lack an authoritative history of the Chipko Andolan, the most famous and yet in some ways the most misunderstood of social movements of 20th century Uttarakhand.



Long before Chipko: Almora teacher in 1958

R. Guha is presently Fellow of the Nehru Memorial Library and author of *The Unquiet Woods: Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance in the Himalaya* (1990) and co-author of the more recent *This Fissured Land: An Ecological History of India*.



# Why I write Economic History

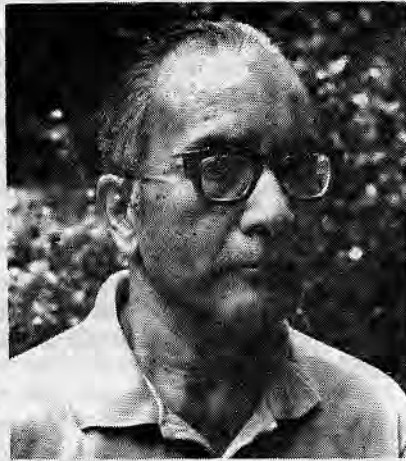
by Mahesh C. Regmi

The editors of *Himal* have asked me to write a brief note on why I write economic history. Having engaged in research and writing on the economic history of Nepal for over one-third of a century now, I could not honestly say no. Besides, I felt that the exercise would provide a good opportunity to review the reasons I have given at different times, and to clarify my thoughts and ideas as to why I have chosen economic history as my field of research.

The question why I write economic history may be countered with the question: Why not? Why climb Sagarmatha? There are people with an inquisitive or adventurous mind who try to do something that no one else has done. I suppose I belong to the inquisitive category. Before my studies on Nepal's economic history, the subject was virtually unexplored. In 1971, in the preface to *A Study in Nepali Economic History*, I wrote, "There has been a spurt in historical writing in Nepal in recent years. The patience and perseverance of a number of individuals in discovering and bringing to light documents, inscriptions and other source materials belonging to different historical periods have been commendable. Their diligence in the etymological interpretation of these source materials, and the meticulous care with which they pinpoint errors and inaccuracies in dates, names, places and personal relationships, are an essential process in our understanding of Nepal's past. One wonders, however, to what extent these efforts have made the problems and challenges faced by our ancestors comprehensible and meaningful to the present generation. From the viewpoint of substance too, the persistent disregard for economic aspects of Nepal's historical problems is inexplicable and indeed inexcusable. The choice of dynastic political relationships or the esoteric aspects of human life as subjects for historical research may be explained by the personal predilections of the researcher or his incapacity to assimilate available historical data, but the contributions made by such efforts to the better understanding of the life and problems of the Nepali people in the past is of dubious value."

My interest in economic history is also due to the realisation that it is a key aspect of the nation's life. This is why, in my 1971 book, I sought to describe "...how the people of Nepal earned their living and what factors affected their economic life during the period from the mid-18th century to the mid-19th. It deals with the economic aspects of the people's life in the belief that this is the aspect that concerns their very survival, and, as such, governs the nature of their life in other aspects too. It is concerned with such general phenomena as affect the life of the people from the economic viewpoint and not with particular incidents or personalities as subjects of intrinsic interest. Rather, it concentrates on the facts of economic life with the objective of determining the stage, nature and pace of economic development, and of identifying specific factors inducing or retarding economic progress."

Another aim was to explore the roots of the Nepali state and society, by describing "...the economic policies and programs followed by the Gorkhali rulers to mobilize human and material resources for territorial expansion." I sought insights into the basic features and



objectives of Gorkhali rule without which the political history of this period could not be studied meaningfully. My study sought to shed light on the impact of those policies and programs on the life of the people. And it was in that respect that it left the "narrow and traditional confines of previous historical studies on Nepal" and sought to cover the entire country on a broad, regional basis, analysing the influences at work among the people. In not confining my attention to wars, dynastic chronologies and political intrigues in Kathmandu as the subject-matter of historical study, I believe that I had set a precedent in Nepali historiography.

As I look back today, I also detect a utilitarian streak in my writings. For instance, I wrote my *Land-ownership in Nepal* (1976) in the belief that

"if the men of future are ever to break the chains of the present, they will have to understand the forces that forged them." Economic development policies can only be formulated and implemented effectively if there is an adequate understanding of existing institutions, particularly agrarian institutions in countries such as Nepal. As I wrote in the 1978 reprint of *Land Tenure and Taxation in Nepal*: "Economic development in societies which seek to follow the path of evolutionary reconstruction necessitates an adequate understanding of existing social and economic institutions. This is so particularly in the fields of land and agriculture, where powerful vested interests often stand in the way of policies and programs aimed at improving the peasant's lot."

A similar motivation marked my volume *Thatched Huts and Stucco Palaces: Peasants and Landlords in 19th Century Nepal* (1978), which I undertook in the belief that: "...history consists essentially in seeing the past through the eyes of the present and in the light of its problems, and that the main work of the historian is not to record, but to evaluate." I believed that my work marked "a departure from the general tradition of Nepali historiography, in which greater emphasis is laid on the auxiliary sciences of history — archaeology, epigraphy, numismatics — than on the history itself as a dialogue between living present and past which the historian makes live again by establishing its continuity with the present." Inasmuch as economic development has become the leading national slogan in present-day Nepal, I sought to explore some of the historical and institutional constraints facing such development. In other words, *Thatched Huts and Stucco Palaces* sought to answer the question: "Why is Nepal Poor?"

Having said this, I do not feel that there is any need for me to make an attempt to justify my research and writings on the economic history of Nepal in terms of their relevance to the mundane issues of economic development and political evolution. For me, far more inspiring and ennobling has been the feeling of participation, at whatsoever elementary level it may be, in the eternal quest for knowledge. In the course of exploring and recording a previously unknown and uncharted aspect of the history of the Nepali people and, therefore, of mankind as a whole, I have the feeling of having left my footprints on the sands of time. It is this spiritual satisfaction from my work, rather than its material rewards, that has sustained me during the long years of silent and lonely study, research, contemplation, and writing.

△

# Faceless in History



Fish charter in Tharu Chapagaoun

*The Tharus could not have hid out in the jungle for aeons waiting to be discovered during the malaria eradication campaign of the 1950s.*

*They must have a history of their own.*

by Tej Narayan Panjiar

Henry Ambrose Oldfield, in his book *Sketches from Nepal*, describes the Tharu of the Nepal Tarai as "a puny, badly developed and miserable-looking race, and probably belonging to the same original stock as the natives of the adjacent Plains of India."

Apart from the extreme cultural bias of this description, the belittling terminology was not borne out even in Oldfield's day, when the robust forest-dwelling Tharus were described by another contemporary book as being

"chiefly employed in the difficult and dangerous task of catching wild elephants". And a population group that had defied mighty malaria itself could hardly have been "badly developed".

As for Tharu origins, rather than his perfunctory hypothesis, Oldfield might have delved into the possibility that the Tharu have Mongolian blood, but he probably was not interested.

Unfortunately, things have hardly changed since Oldfield's days, and successive British writers and historians, as well as the subsequent South Asian scholars have, by and large, shown similar weaknesses with regard to the Tharu society and its history. As one of the most disenfranchised groups of the Ganga basin, it is perhaps natural that this should happen to the Tharus

## Sympathetic Mention

What were the Tharus doing in the malarial jungles and how did they get there? No social scientist has yet felt a need to study history of the Tharus in depth. They make up an invisible community which makes an appearance only when it suits the interests of the mainstream historians. In the case of Nepal, such a time arrived when malaria eradication finally cleared the jungles and it was imperative to say something about the resilient population of this region.

Even so, the interest of modern historians of Nepal and India seems limited to brief sympathetic mention of Tharus as an exploited population group, and how they have resilience against malaria. Some bizarre theories are also propounded as to the Tharu's origin. When they finally find the time to delve into the Tharus' past, researchers will find that they have not been faceless in history, and have in fact been active participants in the happenings of the Himalayan region and adjacent plains.

For example, there exist many *lalmohars* (land grant documents) awarded by the kings of Palpa, Makwanpur and Nepal Valley to Tharus for their bravery, "extraordinary sense of duty", or other reasons. Such documents can be found from Morang district all the way west to Kanchanpur. There are *lalmohars* from the kings of Kathmandu and Palpa which grant full enjoyment of Tharus to Tarai lands (except the tithe) if they are able to control the wild animals and the spirits of the jungles.

Mahesh Chandra Regmi, the economic historian, in his book *Landownership in Nepal during the Nineteenth Century* seeks to prove that the Tarai lands belonged to the Thakuris, Ranas and Bahuns. While this is doubtless partly true, it must be remembered that, at

best, the hill people came down for three months in mid-winter, and were gone by the end of February. They did not know what the Tharus produced in their lands, and were content to let the Tharus be the defacto landowners.

Thus, the Tharus were the masters of much of the Tarai lands, but there are numerous *lalmohars* to prove that they also had *de jure* title over vast tracts. For instance, one such *lalmohar* sanctions land in today's Parsa district south of Kathmandu in favour of the family of Darnarayan Garwar Tharu, for "gallantry" shown in a war between Makwanpur and southern marauders. There are many such *lalmohars* available for other parts of the Tarai as well.

The very fact of the linear habitation of Nepal through the length of Nepal's Tarai tends to prove that they spread out and inhabited this expanse over a long historical period. Unfortunately, we know little about this period. The priests and nobles of India and Nepal have always worked well together when the question at issue does not touch upon their rival claims upon one another. When it comes to the Tharus, therefore, these groups have found it mutually convenient to relegate the Tharus to a historical corner, the implication being that these are barbarians with no history.

## Rajasthan, Rajasthan

An attempt to write the social history of the Tharus is problematic, and credit goes to anthropologist Dor Bahadur Bista for at least having made a start in *People of Nepal* (HMG Nepal, 1967). But other historians are satisfied with fanciful notions about Tharu origins that do injustice to the community.

With no evidence to support the contention, some have claimed that the Tharus are descended from those that fled from the Thar Desert in Rajasthan during the attack of Allauddin Khilji in the 12th century and Emperor Akbar in the 16th century. Baburam Acharya, a Nepali historian of stature, has accepted this thesis and stated that many Rajput soldiers were killed by Akbar's forces and that the women of those soldiers fled to the jungles of Nepal with their servants. The Tharus are supposed to be the progeny of these mistresses and their servants.

Some innocent/crafty modern-day Tharus have taken satisfaction in this explanation, possibly because it links the community to the glorious Rajputs of Rajasthan. The reason the Tharus lost the sacred thread, it is reasoned, is because they gave up warfare and adopted agriculture. (That perhaps they were not originally Hindus is

indicated from an order that was issued to enforce the Muluki Ain (1854) among Tharus who lived between Morang and Dang-Deokhuri. Among other things, the order decrees that Tharus are not to eat pork or drink liquor, and that males are not to marry maternal cousin sisters).

Rajasthan lies to the south and west of Delhi, which was the seat of the Muslim kings and emperors. Why would the bevy of doubtlessly brave Rajput ladies insist on travelling through Mughal territory to end up in the jungles of the lower Himalaya when they could have fled easily southwards to the hills of the Satpura and Vindhya ranges?

A theory propounded by Iswor Baral, presently the Vice Chancellor of the Royal Nepal Academy, seems more plausible than the 'flight from Rajasthan' myth. Baral, who grew up among the Tharus and knows the community well, is of the view that the Tharus are descended from a community that was persecuted and banished northwards during the expansion of the Vajjii Republic. According to the Buddhist scholar Ashwagosa, this was a flourishing state during the Sakyamuni's time. From geographical history, we know that the Vajjii territory incorporated Champaran, Muzaffarpur and Darbhanga districts in present-day Bihar.

This would explain why, as Baral theorises, the Tharus call all non-Tharu population to the south by the name "Vajiya". This term has now even entered the Nepali language, "bajiya" meaning "uncouth". This theory must, of course, stand the rigours of academic reasoning, which will probably happen when more scholars take an interest in Tharu history.

### Sakya of Lumbini

The Tharus certainly were not a community that hid out in the forest for eons waiting to be discovered during the malaria eradication campaign of the 1960s. Serious work on their antiquity would probably reveal interesting linkages with the main stream of South Asian history. Could it be, for example, that the Sakyamuni Buddha was a Tharu?

The first and foremost principle laid down by the Buddha has been named Theravada. But according to its Pali rendition, it is Theragatha, that is, the story of the Tharu. It is thought by some that the Sakyamuni modelled the organisation of his *sangha* on a community such as his own. It is significant that the Sakya seem not to have the Varna system, and they were isolated to the extent that they were self-governing and their polity was of a form not envisaged in Brahminical theory.

The fact that the Sakyamuni's birthplace in Lumbini is still in the midst of a Tharu settled area might be one indication that they are the original inhabitants of this area. A. Fuhrer, who discovered the Lumbini site, was himself of the view that Tharus are the descendants of the Sakyas, though he was unable to prove his case.

Excavations done at Tilaurakot, the site of the palace of the Sakyamuni's father King Suddhodhana, have brought up some 3rd century artifacts (contemporary to the Vajjii) that deserve further study. Some of the bricks are stamped with the octoradii circle, which is the mark of the "turning of the wheel of the law" throughout the Buddhist world of Southeast Asia, Japan, China, and also in the Ashokan inscriptions. Another stamp bears the mark of the trisul. On the walls of the thatched huts of the Tharus today, one finds frescos that carry identical marks of the octoradii circle and trisul.

As followers of the Buddha, were the Tharus persecuted by the Brahminical forces, and is this why they were forced into the forests, where the 20th century finally found them? As one scholar wrote in 1896, "The clan and the disciples of Buddha were so ruthlessly persecuted that all were either slain, exiled or made to change their faith. There is scarcely a case on record where a religious persecution was so successfully carried out as that by which Buddhism was driven out of its place of birth."

Taking this line of thought a step further, it is probable that as the Tharus fled persecution they not only entered the Tarai jungle but that some also fled further north to the Valley of Kathmandu. There are several unanswered questions in the history of the Valley that could perhaps be explained if the Tharu element were to be introduced.

### Fish Lovers

Of Manadeva, said to be the founder of the Licchavi dynasty (464 AD), there is no suggestion that he was a Licchavi. It was only 126 years later that his descendant Sivadeva I laid claim to Licchavi lineage. And it is Sivadeva who had a charter inscribed in stone to the people of Tharu Drang (Tharu Village), which is the present-day village of

Octoradii  
from  
Lumbini



Chapagaon in Lalitpur District. The inscription, which is to be found in Chapagaon today, reduces the tax to the people of Tharu Drang on different kinds of fish. Tharus, it need hardly be stated, are fish lovers to this day.

Historians Dilli Raman Regmi and Dhana Bajra Bajracharya went to great lengths to try and identify the different kinds of fish that are named in the inscription, such as *Kastika*, *Mukta*, *Bhukundika* and *Rajagraba*. Despite complicated semantic analysis, they failed to identify these alien names. A Tharu would have told them that *Kastika* is a fish that can be bought even today in the Indra Chowk market. The standard name of this fish is *Gainchi*, but in colloquial usage it is sometimes known as *Kastika*, a term which indicates that the fish does not spoil as easily as other fish.

They were unable to identify a fish named *Bhukundika*, because, again a Tharu would have told them, *Bhukundika* is not a fish. It is instead a clam-type slug which is found abundantly in Kathmandu Valley but shunned by the local population. Today, the Tharus who live in Kathmandu savour the slugs as a delicacy, although today they know it as *Doka*.

And what does the similarities of the Jyapu caste of Kathmandu Valley and the Tharu say of the origins of either group? The Jyapus use the *kharpān*, balancing two loads on a bamboo pole, as do the Tharu, who call their implement the *baihingā*. No other Valley community uses it but the Jyapu. Both Tharus and Jyapus relish beaten rice (*chiura* to the Valley dwellers, also to Tharus). Jyapu and Tharu women use the *okhal* and *musalo* to beat rice, but this is not the case with the neighbouring communities of the Valley or Tarai. Jyapu women tattoo their upper heels, exactly as the Tharu women do.

Who are the Tharus, where do they come from, and what light can their history shed on the past of the Himalaya and South Asia as a whole? Some historical interest in the Tharus by scholars of today will shed some light on numerous nooks and crannies of the past. We will then gain better understanding about so many issues, from the days of the Sakyamuni, to the spread of populations along the Ganga and Tarai belt of today's India and Nepal, the populating of the Kathmandu Valley, and the reasons behind the backwardness of Tharus today. And with such understanding, hopefully, there will develop a greater appreciation of Tharu culture, which in turn will finally work to eliminate the social and political discrimination that this community faces in Nepal today.

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# V O I

**USELESS CONQUISTADORS** are those who perform most aesthetically on the mountain, as opposed to the couch potato climbers, says Michael Thompson, cultural theorist, ex-mountaineer and co-author of *Uncertainty on a Himalayan Scale*, while presenting a paper at the International Environment Academy, Geneva.

The essential point is that mountaineering would not exist if it did not have a direction, and it would not have a direction if it did not somehow generate a definition of achievement that united personal skill with personal risk-taking. To focus on skill without risk-taking would by-pass the whole business of risk compensation which, as every mountaineer knows, is what makes it all exciting enough but not too terrifying. Conversely, focussing on risk-taking without skill would lead the activity into a death-or-glory cul-de-sac, in which the direction of change is defined as the one in which everyone who moves in that direction is killed. In other words, the relaxing of one or other criterion results in the demise of the activity of mountaineering: from boredom in one direction and from death in the other. Only when both criteria are applied is it possible for the activity to continue in existence. That is how mountaineering self-organises itself, and why the aesthetic of "doing more with less" is its essence: without it mountaineering would cease to be mountaineering.

This essence, of course, is always under threat. It is threatened, from outside, by commercial interest and by bureaucracy and, from inside, by those mountaineers who want to be up there with the elite without quite accepting the risks that entitle them to be up there. So the essence has all the time to be defended, and nowhere is this defence more needed than the Himalayas. "Giving the mountain a chance" is not a sentiment that comes easily to commercial sponsors, and the whole business of selling places on expeditions guarantees that their members will do much less with much more than did Reinhold Messner before them. If the tide is running this strongly in the wrong direction what can turn it? My answer is: the environment. The argument is wonderfully simple. Those who consistently aim at doing more with less will be doing two things: they will be defending the essence of mountaineering and they will be having less impact on the environment than any of the backsliders.

**THE DELICACY OF HIMALAYAN TEAS** is so exclusive that the market must not be sullied by the lowly tea from the Doons, writes the London correspondent in *The Pioneer* of 16 June 1865.

We have said enough to convince all disinterested parties that a very high order of Teas is now being produced in the Himalayas, and that the planters have it entirely in their own hands to make the most of

their opportunities. It is to be hoped that no more inferior Teas from Government Gardens or elsewhere will be allowed to find their way into the home market or destroy the favourable impression created by the introduction of the samples of which we have been writing; and there is another point which we think the Hill planters should watch with some jealousy. Teas grown at a comparatively low elevation, and certainly not on the Himalayas, are being vended as Himalayan Teas. They are not bad Teas, but they are not Himalayan, and they are wanting in the delicacy of flavour which is the chief attribute of the article when grown at a high altitude. It is a world-wide principle that a spade should always be called a spade, and we therefore think the Hill planters, in their own interests, should see that the Teas of the Dhoon and elsewhere are not retailed to the public as Himalayan Teas. With this remark we conclude our present series of articles on Tea planting in Kumaon.

**THE PAST IS ABSENT** laments Arvind N. Das in *The Times of India*, 11 July 1993, the South Asian's neglect of history.

The method Indians appear to have found to deal with their past is to mythologise it. Fact is at a discount; fiction is at a premium among a people for whom time itself is not linear but a bewildering set of interlocking circles. Thus, while myths move millions, the actual and complex historical reality is often ignored.

... Take Hospet, take Mahabalipuram, take Bhojpur, take Khandagiri, take Vishnupur, take Vikramshila, take even Ayodhya. It is all a long tale of apathy about the neglect of the past. It is a saga of the structures of history being enveloped under the vegetation of the creepers of myth and the trees of ritual.

The problem, as Ayodhya has demonstrated, is that poisonous weeds of hatred grow unless the ground of history is cleared consciously and conscientiously.

In fact, it is the space within the boundaries of history that enables people to fashion their collective identities and to so order their present that the future becomes at all possible. It is this process that is stifled when myth and superstition, hate and bigotry, social fragmentation and unenlightened selfishness are allowed to flourish unchecked and are indeed fertilised by vested interests that feed on ignorance.

Indian civilisation has already paid a heavy price in terms of internal strife, leading even to fragmentation of its polity, not only several times through the long course of its past but even in more recent times. Indeed, the wounds of such fragmentation are still festering.

In that context, if not also in the interest of scientific inquiry, it is imperative for Indians to be aware of their past so that their future does not get blighted. It is well-known that people who forget their history are condemned to repeat it.





# Sleuth, Monk and Consultant

A glance back into the past of any nation reveals certain moments when a turn other than the one eventually taken could have altered its fate dramatically. Nepal is no exception to this, and a document that has recently come to light offers evidence of one such moment in its history.

The document in question is a 57-page letter written by one Ekai Kawaguchi to Chandra Shamsher, the then Prime Minister of Nepal. Entitled *Memorial*, this booklet was salvaged from among other 'useless' papers thrown out from Patan's Shree Durbar and is now reposed in the Madan Purashkar Pustakalaya.

Ekai Kawaguchi was a Japanese Buddhist monk who visited Nepal three times in the course of his two trips to Tibet in the early years of this century. Remarkable for the fact that he succeeded in getting to Lhasa and living there for more than a year during Tibet's strictest years of seclusion, Kawaguchi's trip was also one that made him, by his own claim, the first Japanese to enter Nepal.

Nepal, too, was rigidly observing its own closed-door policy at the time. Under such circumstances, Kawaguchi's repeated incursions into the country led to speculations that he was an agent for his government. In fact, during his second visit in 1902, Chandra Shamsher directly asked Kawaguchi if it was the Japanese Foreign Minister or the Chief Marshal who had sent him. Kawaguchi somehow managed to impress upon the Prime Minister of his being no more than a humble monk in search of Sanskrit scriptures on Buddhism. Whether Chandra Shamsher actually believed him or not is an open question but, interestingly, the two later had a confidential talk for about two hours. The substance of this conversation is still a secret, for Kawaguchi was made to give his word that he would not mention it even in his diary.

Kawaguchi arrived in Kathmandu once more in 1905 to make good his promise to bring a Japanese edition of Buddhist texts in return for the Sanskrit ones he had received previously. It was during this sojourn in Nepal that he authored the *Memorial* to Chandra Shamsher which he says was "in consequence of our last conversation." Since the letter is dated 22 October, 1905, and he arrived in Kathmandu in early March of the same year,

*Banzai, your Highness.*

*Banzai, The noble idea of your Highness.*

*Banzai, The Happynation in the holy Himalayas.*

*Banzai, The similarity between the Japanese and the Nepalese.*

*Banzai, Peace and glory of Japan, Nepal and Asia*

*I am your Highness most obedient servant The Japanese priest Ekai Kawaguchi.*

*A Japanese ascetic stopping over on the way to Lhasa finds time to tell Chandra Shamsher like it is.*

by Deepak Thapa

the conversation alluded to could not have been of three years before.

Full of courtly phrases embellished further by flattery, the *Memorial* at times reads like a Machiavellian treatise on governance, and alternately sounds like a composition by a diplomat tendering counsel to the ruler of an inferior country. Throughout, Kawaguchi is tactful enough to refrain from mentioning British India by name even once, although it is quite clear that the letter's basic purpose was to wean Nepal away from British influence.

## The Memorial

In a text that is occasionally marred by misspellings, Kawaguchi begins with the usual remarks of praise that characterise such correspondence. He calls Chandra Shamsher "the father of life and liberty" who "saved them (the Nepalis) from foreign yoke" and whose "memory will be engraved on their heart." His intention, he says, is that "the land that sent us light and moderation should receive back from us science and wisdom so that it

may retain its pristine glory."

But that is not all. His other motive is to "see the great pan-Asiatic feeling fostered everywhere" and "see the day when the Asiatic will be combined and act as a body in concert and be a guarantee to the independence of Asia." How he proposes that be achieved is spelt out in quite some detail in the letter.

Quoting Wellington on Waterloo, Kawaguchi emphasizes the importance of education, and by education he is explicit on what kind he means. "The Indians are being educated for the last two centuries and you know the quality of stuff, turned out and with the perfect system what wonders we have done in less than half a century." His view that "education must be worked under national principles" is somewhat out of tune with his later offer to secure "experienced teachers ... from my country" who "would be ... glad to serve you in any capacity."

The services Kawaguchi offers of his countrymen are not limited to education alone. The following extract, one which leads to the suspicion that perhaps the simple monk was more than what he claimed to be, is particularly enlightening of that.

*... you could establish a great arsenal in the interior of the country where your neighbour may not be able to find out what you are doing. With Electricity and Japanese Engineers (if you are afraid of the friction with your neighbour you may bring them through China with your mission) you may do wonders. A factory just to turn out rifles and guns with cordite ammunition for it should be ample for your present need. My country-men will do for you anything. Once they have put on Nepalese dress and picked up Nepalese language it is hard to find out who they are so closely they resemble your people. Your men are clever imitators so I think a small number of staff will be sufficient. I think the whole cost of the scheme will not be much. I think you cannot do this without out-side help, as for the army instructors, these could be trained in Japan. Your men after they their college education may be sent to Japan where they could learn the art thoroughly. This is a slow method but a wise one. I could understand your*

peculiar position and the careful and cautious way, you are managing things hold out a lot of hope to me.

In the ambiguity of the last sentence, Kawaguchi may have been referring to either Chandra Shamsher's domestic concerns (having survived an assassination attempt in 1903) or his balancing act vis-a-vis the British. His further comments, however, dispel any notion of doubts that the pragmatic monk may have had of Chandra Shamsher's options for dealing with them.

He advocates modernising the army, for he believes that "as a fighting machine (the Nepali army's) value is nil." And in an ostentatious display of national pride, he points out the results of the Russo-Japanese War to give credence to his view that "old tradition and valour" alone do not suffice in "these days of modern arms and their scientific application." Kawaguchi does not believe that is enough, for he advises having "reserves well-trained that could be called out at times of war" which he says "will be cheaper to the state" and at the same time lead to the fortuitous result that "your neighbour might think that you are politically not ambitious."

On the home front, Kawaguchi derides the "chakary" system as "the relic of feudalism". He attributes all court intrigues to

be the cause of this system which, he says, gives rise to the situation where the ruler's every move is known to everyone and hence emboldening hopefuls to conspire against the ruler. Kawaguchi's suggestion to Chandra Shamsher on this score is to keep his distance and yet to utilise his spy system to monitor the movements of his kinsmen who, according to Kawaguchi, are most likely to move against him. As for the other nobles, Kawaguchi feels that getting them involved in profitable occupations such as agriculture should keep their attention diverted away from the centre of power.

Kawaguchi also mentions the disadvantages of having a centralised army, for in times of domestic disputes such a body can easily be swayed to one side or the other. He says that an army distributed about the country would not be able to be used by his opponents and had the added advantage of keeping secret "the nature composition and number" of troops.

Kawaguchi seems not to have appreciated the Ranas' hereditary system of brother-to-brother succession. This imposes a burden on the country, he says. He states that under this system every new ruler means a re-filling of the ruler's coffers which would not be the case if the successor were the son. Later events of instability arising out of internecine rivalries

between Rana families were to vindicate him to an extent.

Kawaguchi's observations on various other aspects of national life are uncannily relevant even in contemporary times. He is appalled at the lack of any forest management principles and is not above stating the obvious — "... your mountains are almost bare and treeless and no step is taken to reforest them. It pays just as well to do so and cut by rotation and sell off as the ordinary rice-field."

On commerce and industry, Kawaguchi underlines government initiative as being essential to growth. He calls for Chandra Shamsher's "goodwill and moral support" in the beginning to encourage people to invest within the county and urges looking beyond immediate profit. His outlook is that this activity will "support so much of the people and the people's money is your own." The good monk probably did not realise how literally the Prime Minister might have agreed with the latter sentiment.

While taking leave, Kawaguchi tactfully reminds Chandra Shamsher that any fault in his missive is due to his being "a stranger" to Nepal, and with a plethora of "banzais", he signs off "Your Buddhist monk."

D. Thapa is a teacher in Lalitpur.



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# Long Road To Gandaki

The English edition of the classic French work by Bernard Pignede, *The Gurungs* (1966), has recently been brought out by Ratna Pustak Bhandar (see Abstracts, page 39). As an appendix to the English edition, the book's editors have included an original piece of work on the origin of the Gurungs and their encounter with Hinduism. Written by **Bhovar Palje Tamu** and **Yarjung Kromchhe Tamu**, the paper is excerpted and adapted here with permission of the publishers.

**T**he history of the Tamu (the Gurungs of Nepal) is preserved in the myths and legends of Tamu Pye (Bonism), which are recited by the Bon priests in a mixture of Tibeto-Burman dialects. Tamu Pye tells of how the first people lived in Cho (Tso) Nasa, which is thought to lie in today's western Mongolia. From here they dispersed southward, towards today's Qinghai, Kansu, Sichuan and Yunnan regions of China.

Some of the Tamu settled in the northern Bagmati region, having gone through the Kerun and Kuti passes. According to Tamu legend, they must have settled in Mustang around the first century AD, just after the Tamangs settled in Bagmati. These two groups have been separate for no more than three thousand years.

The Tamu used to hunt long distances following wild animals. They would move their settlements if they found a better place to live. While they inhabited the banks of the Mha-ri-syo (Marsyangdi river) in Manang, they adopted a new *Klye* (master) as their chief or king. His descendents are called *Klye* (Ghale).

## Village of Kohla

Some Tamus crossed the Annapurna range in the course of hunting around 500 AD. They liked the high land and sowed some grain there. When they returned on a second visit, they had a good harvest. On the third visit

peoples from three clans came and settled there in their three groups, calling it Kohla Swomae Toh. This was the first historical village of the Tamus on the southern slopes of the Himalaya and it became the last united village too. Other Tamus migrated later from Manang and Mustang. Those remaining in Mustang became the Thakali when other Tibetan groups, and probably some Tamangs, arrived.

After some centuries of peace, politics began to affect development. An increase in population caused great problems at Kohla. Groups of people moved on, to the southeast, south and southwest, to start new settlements. It would appear that there were no other tribes in the Gandaki zone except for some neolithic Kusundas (now extinct). The Tamu ate Beef before their contact with the Hindu castes.

A legend tells how some of the Kwonma clan went from Siklis to Nar in Manang to learn Lamaism from recently-arrived Tibetan Lamas. On their return those who had learned well were called Lam, those who had not, Lem. Then the Kwonma divided into three sub-clans, Kwon, Lam and Lem, according to the closeness of their kinship connections with each sub-clan. Lamas introduced the word *Guru*, indicating high prestige, and it became the familiar term distinguishing the tribe from other tribes or castes, eclipsing the word Tamu.

## Contact with Hinduism

In the 13th century, some Rajputs and their Brahman priests fled to Khasan (western hills of Nepal) from Muslim rule in India. There they converted the Lamaist Khas peoples to Hinduism. During the 14th and the 15th centuries, they extended their influence to the Magars of Magarat (mid-western hills). In the 16th century, they moved into Tamuwan or Tamu territory (Gandaki zone), bringing with them Magars and Thakalis.

The Tamu were most resistant to the new faith, having a deep belief in the efficacy of their own priests and rituals. However, the Hinduised Khan Thakuris founded small kingdoms in Syangja and gradually their people took over the lowlands in the Gandaki region, which were not settled by the hilltop-dwelling Tamu. The literate Hindu Aryans were experts in exploitation and domination, introducing the idea of caste, making slaves, and pursuing a policy of divide and rule. They studied the Tamu and noted the weaknesses in their system of government. They introduced and applied the law of dominant castes and attempted to erase the original elements of social structure, trying to make Tamus touchable Sudras under Hinduism.

Until the 16th century, the Tamu peoples knew nothing of the Hindus, having their own Ghale kings in the Lasarga, Nuwakot, Kaskikot, Arghou, Kohla, Pojo, Liglig, Gorkha, Warpak, Syartan, Atharasaya, and other regions. There were no kings in certain areas due to the bad impression given by the dissolute Samri *Klye* of Siklis.

Legend tells how Jain Khan came to the banks of the Kali Gandaki from Sringa, Gulmi. There he married the daughter of a Kaski king, and with his help, crossed the river. He defeated King Bhyag-sya *Klye* and founded the first Hindu Thakuri kingdom in Lasarga (southwest Syangja) with the help of the Ranas and Thakuris. His son, Surya Khan, became king of Khilung, and his grandson, Mincha Khan, of Nuwakot, Syangja. Mincha's son, Jagati Khan (Kulamandan Sahi) had seven sons and, in time, became king of the whole of Kaski.

## Pseudo Genealogy

Four members of the Dura clan and one Ghimire met on the banks of the Madi river (Karputar) and made plans to adopt a Sahi prince to become their king in Lower Lamjung, in opposition to the Thansi Ghale (Rag-sya) king of Pojo (Ghanpokhara). So the five men went to Nuwakot in Syangja and asked Jagati Khan for one of his sons. They took the second son, Kalu Sahi, together with officials of various clans, and made him king of Purankot



Nepal and Gurung country

in Lamjung. After three months, the Ghale king invited Kalu Sahi to Sulikot on the pretence of making a treaty with him. Together they went to the forest of Sisidhunga to hunt, and there Kalu Sahi and his companion, Naran Dura, were murdered.

Six other Hindu and Hinduised clans went to Nuwakot to take princes for their kings. King Jagati Khan was much troubled by his lack of success in defeating the Ghaley king of Lamjung. And so, political policies were adopted to encourage domination and exploitation by the Hindus, and the obliteration of the existing social system.

A royal priest, Bhoj Raj Purohit, composed the first pseudo-genealogy of the Gurung (Tamu) on 9 Falgun 1594 (around 1537 AD). In that false genealogy, the ancestors of the Gurungs were said to be Aryan, not Mongol, the migration said to be from the south instead of the north, historical Tamu characters were made Hindu. By means of the false genealogy, the king intended that his third son, Jsbam (Yasobrama) Sahi, would take the kingdom of Lamjung.

A successful attempt was made to elevate the smaller number of the Swogi clan and add them to the royal clan, Klye, which resulted in longlasting conflict between them and the Kugi. Meanwhile, four Swogi chieftains were called secretly and the genealogy and its implications were described to them. With the

promise of more land and power, they agreed to the murder of their uncle, Thansi Klye.

The four went to Pojo and told the Klye that the second Sahi king was very brave and clever, could not be killed by deception, and therefore it was better to make a treaty with him concerning the boundary than be defeated in battle. The Ghale king believed them and went to Baluwa Besi (near Besi Sahar) without weapons as invited. The Sahi's men then drew their weapons from their hiding place and killed the Ghale king and his Kugi officials. His body was tossed into the Marsyangdi river. Even today, some men of the Ghale clan refuse to drink water from that river.

Jasbam Sahi and his elder brother's pregnant wife, Jasatawati, were hidden in a cave near the junction of the Midim (Gaumati) and Ramunche (Ram) rivers. After the death of Thansi Klye, they were brought to Sindure Dhunga and married there, then they were taken to the capital, Purankot. The four Swogi chieftains were made "descendants" of Chanda Rajput of Chittaur like the Khans (rather than Nha-tsan, the ancestor of Song-tsan Gam-po of Tibet) for their part in the deception.

The chieftains used to introduce themselves as Maha Guru (borrowed from Lamaism), but the word Guru was used solely for Brahman priests, and they were given a new title, "Gurung" (Guru + Ange: part of a Guru). The Kwon changed their clan name to

the Hinduised Ghotane (Gotame or Gautam), and the Lem, to Lamichhane. The four chieftains got the power they had been promised, since when the Kworma of Lamjung have dominated the other clans on the basis of the false genealogy. The Lem also increased in power so that they became known as Plon (boiled).

Through the use of the false genealogy, King Jagadi went on to capture the whole of Kaski. That genealogy was stronger than hundreds of arrows and swords. Pratap (Pasramu) Sahi, son of Jasatawati (or Kalu Sahi), was sent across the Dordi river to be king there, as previously promised. The elder son of Jasbam, Narahari Sahi became king of Lamjung and the younger, Drabya Sahi, became king of Gorkha. Their mother, Jasatawati, ordered that neither of her quarrelling sons cross the Chepe river which formed the border between them. The six clans, Adhikari, Dura, Khanal, Bhandary, Suyal and Ghimire, formed the royal assembly of Lamjung, and another six clans, Pande, Pantha, Arual, Khanal, Rana and Bohara, formed the royal assembly of Gorkha. There was no Gurung in either. Ram Saha, the grandson of Drabya Sahi, changed the title of Sahi to Saha. His descendant, Prithvi Narayan Shah, conquered Nepal.



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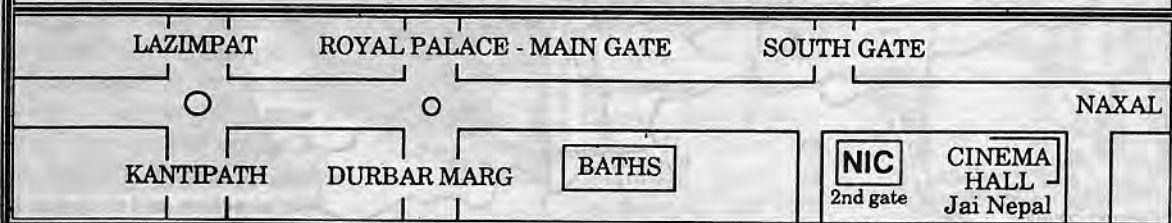
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# Whatever Happened to the “Golden Age”?



Two decades ago, addressing a gathering of social scientists in Kathmandu, historian Ludwig F. Stiller declared that they were living in the “golden age” of Nepali history. “Rarely have historians of any nation had access to so much untouched material for their use,” he said.

Stiller was confident that “the Nepali people have a sense of history,” and the field of history was itself wide open for researchers, both in terms of historical periods and topics to choose from.

## Sense of Past

It is true, as Stiller said then, that Nepalis liked history: “They like to discuss it. They like to hear stories from their history. It has meaning for them.” But it is important to draw a distinction between a people’s sense of history and the scholars’ sense of history, and the conditions under which the latter has been produced in Nepal.

Two types of historical writings represent two different senses of history among the educated and powerful of Nepal. From the past, we have the *vamsavali*, and then we have the “disciplinary history writing” by modern-day scholars.

*Vamsavalis* are, in the main, narratives of the different ruling dynasties with their genealogies and include references to important events that occurred in their respective regnal years such as the founding of a temple or an invasion by an enemy. While some of the claims made in *vamsavalis* can be independently verified, they tend to incorporate mythological and legendary stories.

*Vamsavalis* were in wide circulation in 19th century Nepal, commissioned by those in power who had a need for cultural legitimisation and to fashion a past. As linguist Kamal P. Malla writes, *vamsavalis* were instruments for providing *ksatriya*-status to kings whose lineage was in doubt. Thus, these tended to be political documents to ensure one’s continued enjoyment of power.

One of the early “disciplinary histories” of Nepal was Dilli Raman Regmi’s *Modern Nepal* (1961). Although concerned like the *vamsavalis* with political history of the ruling dynasty—the Shahs—Regmi’s work differs from the former. There is a self-conscious attempt to organise the past with references to a wide variety of sources—*vamsavalis*, travellers’ accounts, archival materials, and other published works. This organisation of the past—historical consciousness—differs from that fashioned by the *vamsavalis*. By

KEVIN BUBRISKI

*Nepali and non-Nepali modern-day historians of Nepal have a lot to answer for.*

by Pratyoush Onta

from that fashioned by the vamsavalis. By excluding myths and legends that cannot be 'proved', this sense of history breaks away from mythological time and emphasizes the secular.

### Scientific History

What were the conditions under which the disciplinary sense of the past was first produced in Nepal? While discussing how history can be utilised in the development of Nepal, Stiller writes that it is only when historians have "laid bare the institution that form our national strength and unravelled the political problems that stand in the way of progress that we can with safety decide what aspects of Nepalese society we can modify and what characteristics we can root out as a part of our development process."

The job of historians, then, was to expose for the planning experts, the "inner spirit of Nepal."

Scientific history monumentalises certain contemporaneous objects as evidence of history. This ability to bifurcate objects into historical evidence and contemporaneous things is central to the idea of progress. It is in essence the task involved when, in Stiller's words, "we decide what aspects of Nepalese society we can modify" in the name of progress, development, and the modern and "what characteristics we can root out" in the name of underdevelopment and the traditional.

This idea of progress provides the energy for official nationalism, and progress and development were central to the rhetoric of Panchayat democracy under kings Mahendra and Birendra. As anthropologist Richard Burghart laid out a number of years ago, Mahendra-inspired Panchayati nationalism in the 1960s emphasised, on the one hand, *des vikas*, and on the other, the uniqueness of Nepal. While students of all ages were spoon-fed mega-doses of Nepal's non-colonial past as a testimony of her uniqueness and her people's desire for freedom, calls for *des seva*

reminded students of their responsibilities as citizens of a 'unique' nation.

The language of progress and nationalism, which was also the language of freedom and citizenship, existed in Nepal, as elsewhere, in a symbiotic relationship with the disciplinary sense of the past. Without this sense, Panchayat nationalism's rhetoric of progress and uniqueness would not have been possible. This nationalism, in turn, made Nepali historians choose the nation-state with all its claims to unity, freedom and progress and its ultimate representation embodied in the king, the subject of all history.

### Location and History

In a curious division of labour, while the field of anthropology of Nepal has been dominated by Western researchers, most historians of Nepal have been Nepalis. If the anthropological research agenda has been set largely by the personal, national, institutional and theoretical dispositions of the foreign researchers, one could say that, in the case of history, Nepali researchers have focussed almost exclusively on the life of the Nepali nation-state. These scholars have written political biographies of kings, prime ministers and other elites, as well as narrow political and administrative histories of the state.

For the period after mid-18th century, the few non-Nepalis who worked in Nepali history have not done anything to displace this obsession with narrow political history. This is clear from recent works by John Whelpton (*Kings, Soldiers and Priests*, 1991) and Adrian Sever (*Nepal Under the Ranas*, 1993). Sever claims in his preface that his is a "history of peasants as well as prime ministers" and that it provides "some small insight into the world of the unnamed, unsung peasantry of rural Nepal." These are laudable sentiments, but the excellently produced book with its rare photos of the Rana elites is, emphatically, not a history of Nepali peasants.

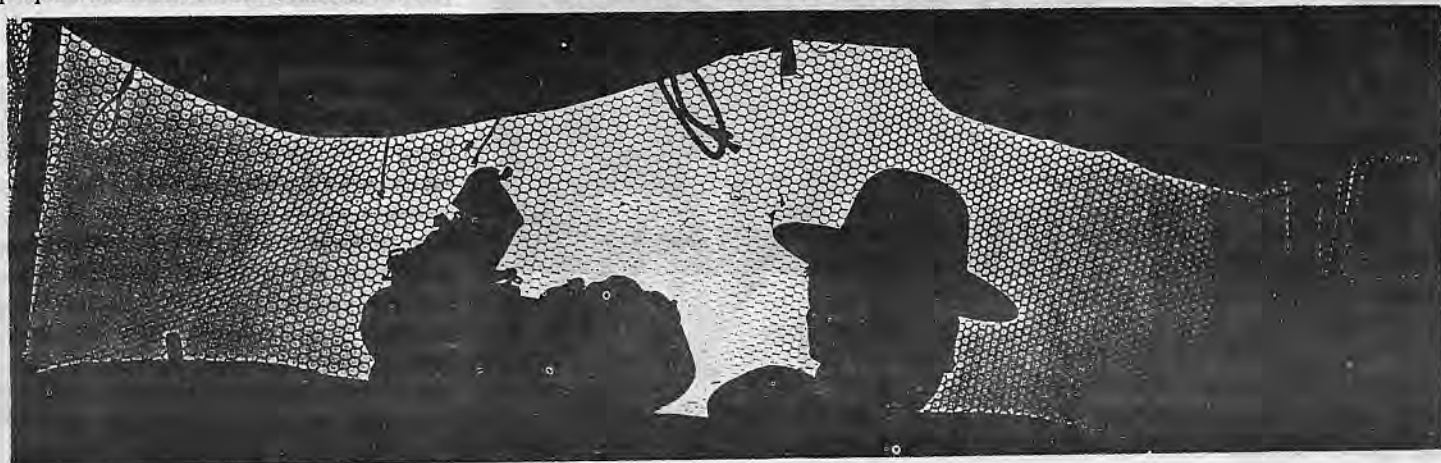
Western researchers who have gone

beyond the narrow confines of political history include anthropologists Richard Burghart and Veronique Bouillier, on the cultural history of the Nepali state, and Stephen Mikesell, on the extension of mercantile capitalism in central Nepal. Unfortunately their work has not received the attention of Nepali historians.

As for Indian researchers, Nepal does not figure much in their work (particularly post-18th century) because it was never part of British India. Among those that have looked at Nepal, there is an obsession with diplomatic history — K. N. Chaudhuri's *Anglo-Nepalese Relations* (1960), B. D. Sanwal's *Nepal and the East India Company* (1965), Ramakant's *Indo-Nepalese Relations 1816 to 1877* (1968), Sushila Tyagi's *Indo-Nepalese Relations 1858-1914* (1974), Kanchamoy Mojumdar's *Anglo-Nepalese Relations in the Nineteenth Century and Political Relations between India and Nepal, 1877-1923* (both 1973).

So Anglo-Nepali diplomatic history is well covered, especially when one also considers the well-known works by non-Indian writers such as Asad Husain, John Pemble, Leo E. Rose, and Prem R. Uprety. Even with diplomatic history, however, the primary subject of research continues to be the nation-state. There are some exceptions, such as the writings of M. S. Jain and Satish Kumar on the Ranas and Jaher Sen's on trade. More recently, in *The Gorkha Conquests* (1991), Kumar Pradhan has begun a serious reconsideration of the glorified history of Nepali unification, with special reference to east Nepal.

There exists a kind of involution in Nepali historical scholarship. A glance at recent works by scholars such as one on Bahadur Shah by B. R. Bajracharya (1992) and another on Prithvi Narayan Shah by Tulsiram Vaidya (1993) (both senior historians at Tribhuvan University) shows that Nepali historians continue to churn out isolationist, narrowly nationalist history. There is no serious effort to situate their analysis within a larger South Asian context, informed by the many





reconsiderations of 18th and 19th century histories of India that have been proffered in the last two decades. In fact, there is no indication of any familiarity with this by-now large body of work. Imagination, both in the subject of research and presentation, seems stunted.

Thus, while considering the implications of the 'location and history', one finds the horizons of Nepali historians usually stopping at the border or, at best, extending occasionally down to India and up to Tibet. They almost never publish their works outside of Nepal.

### Nationalism-Induced Amnesia

So what is wrong with this obsession with political history? It has, after all, produced many good volumes, such as Stiller's *The Rise of the House of Gorkha* (1973) and *The Silent Cry* (1976), Krishna K. Adhikari's *Nepal under Jung Bahadur* (Vol I, 1984), Triratna Manandhar's *Nepal: The Years of Trouble* (1986), Rajesh Gautam's *Nepalko Prajatantrik Andolanma Nepal Praja Parishadko Bhumika* (1989), Whelpton's above-mentioned work, and Prem Uprety's *Political Awakening in Nepal* (1992). And we do have, in the works of Mahesh C. Regmi, a detailed economic history of the Nepali state. Does not the history of the Nepali people come through in these works? Regmi's and Stiller's writings have elaborated the land-military nexus (distribution of conquered territories to his military-men in the form of jagirs and birtas) that Prithvi Narayan Shah developed as the central feature of his conquest schemes. Stiller's, Adhikari's and Manandhar's writings have elaborated the political history of 19th century rulers, the history of intrigues and assassinations until the rise of Shamsheer Ranas in 1885. Regmi's multi-volumes have clarified the process in which "thatched huts" and "stucco palaces" came to co-exist in the same Nepali space.

All said and done, however, even these respected Nepali historians suffer from nationalism-induced amnesia.

Nationalism-induced amnesia can be studied in the context of various topics of research. Take just one example — the history of the Gurkhas. Many scholars think that Gurkha history has been covered so thoroughly that there is nothing more left to say. Nothing could be further from the truth, and true Gurkha history has barely begun to be written.

Apart from glossy accounts of the Gurkhas (for example, B. M. Niven's *The Mountain Kingdom: Portraits of Nepal and the Gurkhas*, 1987), we see what British academic Michael Hutt calls "quasi-histories" in the form of works such as Byron Farwell's

*The Gurkhas* (1984). Incidentally, these quasi-histories are not devoid of the racist assumptions that inform many of the works on the Gurkhas.

Then there are the handbooks of the British Indian Army, written by and for Gurkha recruiting officers, as well as regimental histories and memoirs of Gurkha officers. But when it comes to disciplinary historical work on the Gurkhas, the obsession of nationalist and diplomatic history converge in an interesting way. Works by Asad Husian (1970), Kanchamoy Majumdar (1973), Sushila Tyagi (1984), Prem Uprety's *Nepal: A Small Nation in the Vortex of International Conflicts* (1984), Kamal Raj Singh Rathaur's *The British and the Brave* (1987), Madan Bhattarai's *Diplomatic History of Nepal 1901 - 1929* (1990), treat Gurkha history as a history of recruitment and include it in the larger narrative of diplomatic history.

It is as if the use of Gurkhas, to borrow a phrase from the impressive 1991 Stanford dissertation done by anthropologist Mary Des Chene, as "a currency of diplomacy in Anglo-Nepalese relations" exhausts the subject of all Gurkha history.

And how does nationalist history treat the subject of Gurkha history? A sense can be had from a passage by Pursottam Banskota in *Nepalko Sainik Itihas* (The Military History of Nepal, published by the Royal Nepal Army Headquarters, Kathmandu, 1992). The following is a free translation, with emphasis added:

*Hundreds of thousand of Nepalis have been recruited in foreign military service. In the course of their service, these Nepalis have participated in many important wars and exhibited their unparalleled courage and bravery. Thousands have sacrificed their lives to safeguard or expand the borders of the countries in whose armies they served. Therefore it is difficult to neglect their contribution and sacrifice in spreading the glory of Nepal and increasing the respect with which foreigners hold Nepal. Even though they serve in foreign armies, they have contributed directly and indirectly to the country's economic, social, and political development by bringing in tens of million of rupees in the form of pension, and other ways.*

So for nationalist history, the bravery of the Nepalis who have served in foreign armies, increases 'the respect with which foreigners hold Nepal' and the money they bring in contributes to its 'economic, social, and political development.'

But the great narratives of diplomatic

history and the nationalist glorification do not exhaust the subject of Gurkha history. As Des Chene has shown in her remarkable dissertation on the cultural history of the Gurkhas, for Gurung Gurkhas of the village she studied, soldiering is not about diplomacy or bravery but more about wage labour in foreign places. The years spent as soldiers do not constitute the "centerpiece of their lives" but remain "a hiatus in them."

Des Chene's work shows how when historians and anthropologists step out of the official archives to include oral historical sources, the studious works by diplomatic and nationalist historians begin to sound hollow, picking up as they do but the fragments of history.

Gurkha history worth its name must attend to other 'fragments': the pain of separation, the long list of deserters who opted out due to the rigours of military life, the psychology of the Gurkha in a "theatre of war", and so on. Who is writing about the despair which leads soldiers to run amok in the battlefield or commit suicide in a bunker far from home, or about frostbite, shellshock, and those "missing in action".

Unless we begin to represent the pain and the emotions that are part of the history of the Gurkhas, they will continue to be subsumed under sanitised diplomatic and nationalist history, which plays up only the nationalist machismo and is ultimately unfaithful.

### Victims of History

It becomes obvious that the golden age of Nepali history has not become a reality. That might not matter so much, but disciplinary history must become faithful to the life-experiences of the many 'subaltern classes' of Nepal's peoples: ethnic minorities, children, women and the 'untouchables'. Those who presume to write history must come alive to the fact that there are victims of history.

This writer would even suggest that historians abandon the disciplinary virtues as 'objectivity' along with the state-centric view of Nepali history. We should produce passionate poly-centric histories, using oral and other sources based on life-experiences, and resist the totalising claims of official histories. We must redefine the 'major problems of general interest' so that history of Nepal stops to be elite prosopography. Until that happens, there is no room for historians to feel complacent about their vocation or their commitment.

▷

P. Ontais a Ph.D candidate in History at the University of Pennsylvania, USA.

# How to Tackle an Act of God?

A story of misery unfolds in Nepal every year during the rainy season. Generally, these misfortunes do not affect the lives of the people of Kathmandu. The devastating natural fury that hit Okhaldhunga in the east on 6 July was ignored, as the capital was engrossed by the unfolding political drama between the Prime Minister and the Opposition.

Incessant monsoon rains on the 19, 20 and 21 July, however, hit much closer to home. They wreaked havoc over hills and Tarai of Central Nepal and claimed above 2000 lives (as of 26 July). Significantly, the extended cloudburst was centered in the very area where the nation's primary infrastructure is located — the Kulekhani reservoir and dam, and the main road arteries



Penstock at Kulekhani leading up to Kathmandu.

Though the whole region eastern Nepal was affected, the monsoon system appeared to be particularly active over the headwaters region of Rapti, Kulekhani and Malekhu rivers

south-west of Kathmandu. So intense was the downpour that between the mornings of 19 and 21 July about 40 million cubic meter of water was replenished in the Kulekhani reservoir, filling its 73 million cubic meters of live storage. For the first time in several years water spilled over from Indra Sarovar, the reservoir.

The floods that were unleashed smashed piers, scoured abutments and washed-off decks of more than eight bridges along the two highways to the capital. Large sections of the highways subsided, and it will probably take at least a year for normalcy to return.

Heavy rains and flood also severed a 100 m section of the penstock pipe leading from the Kulekhani reservoir. This meant that both the 60 megawatt Kulekhani I power plant and the 32 MW Kulekhani II were dead. The shutdown of the two plants was a grievous blow to the national grid, as it took away 92 MW from a system whose operating output used to be about 200 MW.

Cloud bursts and extended monsoonal showers have been occurring in the past. What is different now is that there are more and more large infrastructural projects being built in the mountains. However, the understanding of the temporal and spatial variations of the natural processes within the monsoon regime is still at a rudimentary stage. At the simplest level, there is no proper gauging network, which has allowed such hydrological extremes to go un-monitored, robbing scientists of vital clues that could have filled gaps in existing knowledge and their ability to forecast.

There have been similar

episodes with cloudbursts in the Kathmandu vicinity in the recent past. In 1984, a similar but more concentrated storm had washed away the Malekhu bridge in the Prithvi Highway. This same bridge is once again gone. A post monsoon storm in 1981 brought down entire sides of Lele hills south of Kathmandu and created havoc all the way down the Bagmati river.

This July's phenomenon, however, appears to have been more intense. The two days of downpour brought 632 mm of rains over the Kulekhani valley, which is half of its average annual rainfall of about 1200 mm. While details will be known as more information starts to filter in, this intensity of downpour is probably not the worst that can occur in the Himalaya. In 1965, the upper Teesta valley in Darjeeling recorded 3000 mm of rain in 72 hours (*Himal Jan/Feb 1993*).

The event highlights the extent of uncertainty and the critical situation that a heavy rainfall occurring within very few hours can create. The only way to deal with these calamities is to try and understand them in the long run, with scientific approach and investments in data collection, research and management.

Can anything then be done to save roads, bridges, hydropower stations, irrigation systems against such fury of nature in the mountains? At the very least, the efficacy of the current methods of planning, engineering, and operating major infrastructure projects should be studied. We must also assess the level of risk we should be ready to take, and the country's capacity to absorb the risks of a large scale. The larger the project, the larger the risk, it seems, when an act of God decides to hit.

- Ajay Dixit.  
Water Resource Engineer

## Upcoming...

Tea and Tourism Festival  
Darjeeling, 21-23 October 1993.

Commission on Mountain  
Geocology and Sustainable  
Development Symposium, 13-22  
August 1994, Freiburg,  
Germany.

Topics: questions of sustainable  
use of resources; watershed  
management and environmental  
problems in highly industrialised  
countries; discussion of "Convention of the  
Alps"; environmental issues  
facing less developed countries  
and formerly centralised  
economies.

Contact: J. Stadelbauer,  
Institute of Human Geography,  
University of Freiburg,  
Werderring 4, D-79085,  
Freiburg.

Tibet in the Himalaya: Ecology,  
Development Trends and  
Transnational Impacts on the  
High Plateau

Organised by the Royal Swedish  
Academy of Sciences, SIDA and  
EcoTibet-Sweden  
Stockholm, 10 November 1993  
Subjects: Environmental  
history and transboundary  
impacts; Development trends  
and prospects for Tibet today.  
Introduction by King Carl XVI  
Gustaf of Sweden.

Contact: ECOTibet-Sweden,  
PO Box 2032, 103 11 Stockholm,  
Sweden.

The Third Pole: Mountains,  
People and Environment of  
Tibet

Paris, 30 Sep - 1 Oct 1993  
Contact: EcoTibet-France, 2,  
Rue d'Agneau, 75850 Maule,  
France.

# Tibet, the Air Cooler

Give Tibet some credit. It is responsible for the climate which make life as we know it possible on planet Earth. This is as reported in a cover feature of the 3 July issue of the



*New Scientist*, "Did Tibet cool the world?"

"If the proposed hypothesis is true," writes journalist David Paterson in his article, "we may have the Tibetan plateau to thank for the Gobi and the Sahara, for the evolution of the grasses that were domesticated into wheat 9000 years ago, and for the ice ages that accompanied the evolution of mankind."

For 250 million years, the planet was warm and wet. Then it began to cool about 40 million years ago and the cooling accelerated 15 million years ago. The theory is that the uplift of the Tibetan plateau might have acted as the switch to the global thermostat which began the cooling.

The process of geological uplift, of course, is well-known. The Indian plate (in geological time) slammed into the Asian plate, buckling underneath and raising the vast plateau of Tibet, making it "one of the world's most prominent topographical features." But how does the

raising of the Tibetan landmass lead to cooling? What follows is a paraphrasing of Paterson's report.

Tibet's plateau, which lies between the Himalaya to the south and the Kunlun to the north, covers 2.2 million sq km, or 0.4 percent of the Earth's surface, with an average height of about 5 km above sea level. It is "like a large boulder thrust into the atmosphere, so large that it profoundly disturbs the atmospheric circulation patterns in the whole of the northern hemisphere."

The next step is to understand how Tibet's rise could have brought about a reduction of the carbon dioxide content in the atmosphere.

The Tibetan Thermostat hypothesis was put forward by Maureen Raymo of the

Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Raymo, a geochemist, suggests that the raising of the Tibetan plateau from the seafloor altered climatic conditions and reduced the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, so that the Earth radiated more energy than before, setting off global cooling. (The gas traps heat radiated from the Earth's surface, so as the level of carbon dioxide dropped the Earth radiated more of the energy absorbed from the Sun and began to cool.)

Raymo suggests that the uplift of the plateau created the patterns of air circulation that bring water-laden air off the Indian Ocean in summer and deliver monsoon rains to the Subcontinent, including the Himalayan ramparts. Dissolved in the torrential rain was carbon dioxide, forming weak carbonic acid.

"The higher the uplift, the

greater is the volume of water-laden air drawn off the ocean by the stack of rising warm air, and the greater the rainfall. And the greater the rainfall, the more carbon dioxide is removed from the atmosphere. A combination of chemical weathering by the acid rain and fast physical erosion of the plateau's rock delivers carbon dioxide, in the form of bicarbonate ions, to the oceans."

In essence, Raymo sees the plateau as a giant carbon dioxide extractor, pumping the gas out of the atmosphere through rainfall and then dumping the by-product in the oceans.

There is one flaw in Raymo's theory: it does not explain why there is any carbon dioxide left in the atmosphere — her extractor pump would have emptied the atmosphere of the gas in less than 100,000 years.

Here is one subject for Himalayan geochemists to start study on — before Tibet suffocates the earth.

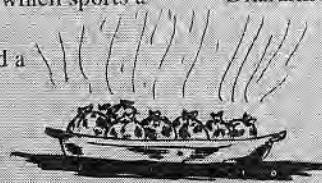
## When in Calcutta, Eat Momos

We like momos. And we also like this description of momos: "meat-filled samosa look alikes that go with flurid, pungent sauce". Diti Sen, writing in a recent weekender *Statesman*, lets us in on the secret: Calcutta is where you go to eat the steamy little rascals.

For the best atmospheric, Sen directs us to Uday Mukhia's eaterie, the Tibetan Delight, in a narrow, ill-lit alley at the corner of Chowringhee Road and Suburban Hospital Road. There you shovel in momos "in a smallish room with rough and ready tables and stools, wildly swinging bulbs nestling in straw hats suspended over them." Mukhia's mother-in-law is said to have introduced momos to south Calcutta.

May she receive a Bharat Ratna.

Next door to Mukhia's is Hamro Momo, with its "distinctly shabby portals" and, as the name implies, catering to all the Nepali babus stranded in Calcutta due to monsoon flooding. Down the road from Hamro Momo is the upscale Momo Plaza, which sports a Belgian chandelier and a wooden fan. The establishment was opened by the sophisticated S.N. Sen, who hired a Tibetan couple to churn out the cuisine. Sen says he tried out *kothay* but apparently Calcuttans do not like *kothay*.



Then there is Kunga Restaurant, ("owned by the Dalai Lama") in Tiretti Bazar. We are told that the restaurant is mostly empty, which allows the waiter to snooze peacefully in a corner. Now we could have told His Holiness that this is the way of all public enterprises, and the exile government in Dharamsala, if it truly owns Kunga, should think of privatisation. Who knows, the World Bank might come in handy some day.

Back to Calcuttan momos, Sen ends with. "In momos, we just might have the alternative to the dreary dosa. It is cheap and filling and as yet, mercifully, still handled only by Tibetans and Chinese..."

## Porters die on Larkya La

In the first week of April, four porters who were with an Australian trekking group died up on Larkya La.

Larkya La is a pass of above 17,000 ft, at the headwaters of the Buri Gandaki, which forms one of the highlights of the newly opened "Around Manaslu" trek. Unlike the Thorong La pass of the Annapurna region further to the west, Larkya is not well-travelled and can be more treacherous.

On the days previous to the mishap, the Australian group had apparently spent a night at Samagaon (at about 11,000 ft) and hurried on to the foot of the pass, at 14,000 ft. It would have been advisable for them to have spent an interim night at Samdo, which is at about 13,000 ft, as this would have allowed for rest and acclimatisation.

The trekkers did not want to rest at Samdo because they thought the weather would deteriorate, making it impossible to cross. But by skipping Samdo, the group was more predisposed to altitude sickness because of the potentially dangerous gain in 'sleeping altitude' and the extra exertion involved, particularly for the porters with heavy loads.

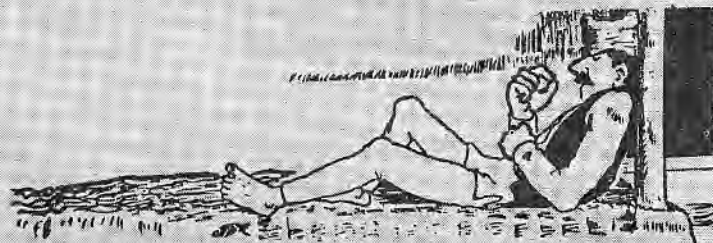
As the group approached the pass, at least one of the Western members had altitude problems and blizzard conditions were setting in. Attempts were made to keep the porters together and to move ahead to clear the path, but in the end four porters lost

their lives, [although only two were reported to the authorities.]

Every season, porters from the lower hill areas like Trisuli and Tanahu die in the high *lekhs* because of a combination of exposure, altitude sickness, and exhaustion. Many low hill villagers with little or no experience of high mountain travel moonlight as porters when the fields have been planted and there is free time in the farm. They rarely know what they are up against, particularly when the weather takes a turn for the worse. The safety of their porters is primarily the responsibility of the trekking agency, and some are better than others. The Western trekkers can also help keep portering safe by asking some pointed questions before selecting an agency. One of the most important is, does the agency provide porters with proper gear for crossing high passes? This can help prevent hypothermia.

The government can brief the police checkpoints along the potentially dangerous trails (such as in Namru in Gorkha District for the Manaslu trek) to keep a check on how porters are equipped. So far, these checkpoints only have the duty to check trekking permits, and it would be appropriate to give the policemen this new task. More awareness of the altitude sickness among the trekking staff would also help.

- **Dr. Buddha Basnet**  
Medical Director,  
Himalaya Rescue Association



## ICIMOD Gets New Head

Is ICIMOD about to wake up from its years of sleep? The international center that was supposed to break ground in Himalayan research and development, is almost ten, and a grand party is planned. Over the last decade, it has lumbered along like a United Nations bureaucracy, the last few years with Mr. E.F. Tacke at the helm.

Ten years old, ten million donor dollars down, but none too much wiser, ICIMOD nevertheless has the potential to yet emerge as a respected institution of the mountains.

The possibility of a new

beginning comes with the selection last month of the new Director. He is Robert Rhoades, an anthropologist who comes to the job with a research background, while Tacke arrived from an administrator's desk in the Asian Development Bank.

Rhoades has done research in the International Potato Center in Peru, and has knowledge of the Andes as well as the forest communities of South East Asia. He is presently Head of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Georgia in Athens, Georgia in the US.

The benefit of doubt goes to Rhoades, but he will not be joining till March 1994. Tacke, meanwhile, has been extended till then.

## Dalai Lama's Brother in Beijing

A delegation from the Dharamsala exile government consisting of Gyalo Thondup, senior member of the Kashag (the exile government's Cabinet) who is the Dalai Lama's elder brother, and Sonam Topgyal, Secretary to the Kashag, flew to Beijing on 12 July. One Indian news agency quoted Professor Samdhong Rimpoche, Chairman of the Tibetan Assembly of Deputies, as saying that the delegation represented the Dalai Lama. This would make it the first official initiative between Beijing and Dharamsala for over ten years.

The delegation carried a note from the Dalai Lama to the Beijing Government, apparently denying that he was "putting hurdles" in the way of a meaningful dialogue. Meanwhile according to news reports, spokesmen for Beijing are said to have denied that the visit even took place.

Gyalo Thondup, a

controversial figure among Tibetan exiles, has several times visited Beijing in his private capacity. He has long been advocating talks with Beijing, believing total independence to be an unrealistic goal. Such statements have made him the butt of criticism from pro-independence hardliners including his two other brothers, Thubten Jigme Norbu and Tenzin Choegyal. Last year, Norbu resigned from his position as the Dalai Lama's emissary to Tokyo, in protest against Thondup's initiatives.

Sources in the exile government claimed that the delegation was part of a "longstanding" dialogue between Dharamsala and Beijing, which goes back to the 1970s, and that the visit did not imply the acceptance of any preconditions. The latter is in reference to Beijing's obsession that Dharamsala give up demanding independence so that "constructive discussions

# Tourism? Let Them See Rice

This picture of rice terraces does not come from the outskirts of Kathmandu Valley. It is from Banaue, a region upcountry from the Filipino capital of Manila.

Banaue has been milking tourist for decades by showing them rice growing on ledges and calling them the "eighth wonder of the world". Tourists will look at everything, of course, as long they are told it is a must-see. Filipino tour operators know that the trick is to package the product properly.

And the way to package rice terraces is to sell their emerald green, the age-old, handed-



down-through-history maintenance techniques, and so on. It helps to have an airconditioned revolving restaurant at a lookout point, of course.

In Nepal, at a time when tourists are beginning to bypass Kathmandu Valley shrines because of all the dust and dirt, travel agencies are beginning to feel the need for more "destinations". They have missed the terraces completely. It is a niche market, and Banaue has proven that it works.

Not only in Nepal, tourism officials and operators all across the Eastern Himalaya, including those in Sikkim, Bhutan and Arunachal, should join to develop "Paddy Packages". The added attraction is that these

packages would sell in the lean period.

If properly marketed, the numerous amphitheatres of paddy terraces on the road from Kathmandu to Dhulikhel, or the wide, green valley below Sankhu, will soon be considered tourist heaven. Outside of Kathmandu valley, there are valleys that could even be promoted for "Paddy Treks".

Take, for example, the valley of Bardibas Phant, above the roadhead of Damauli in Tanahun district. The wide terrace contours come closer together towards the head of the valley. Parbate *bastis* lead to the Newar cluster of Syamgha. Crops change from rice to wheat and *kodo*, and the hamlets become Gurung, but it is

terraces all the way. And from the ridgetop, you see the wide expanse of Lamjung. Touristically, Banaue's one-shot wonder is left far behind.

But one can learn from Banaue nevertheless. Tourism operators and environmentalists are voicing concern over the vanishing charms of Banaue. Urbanisation, migration and a shift away from paddy agriculture have left the landscape blighted. The mountainsides of terraces are no longer well-kept, and shimmering GI-sheet roofing reflect back the sun at the various viewing spots.

Taking that as a cue, one might surmise that paddy tourism is all set to die in Kathmandu Valley before it has even begun. Brick and concrete matchboxes that are sprouting in all corners, not only covering previous agricultural land but killing tourism potential.

The spectacular valley below Sankhu is at its prettiest at this time, with its newly transplanted rice. But already, at the head of the valley where the road comes up from Gokarna, a new brick and concrete "shutter" blocks the view.

can take place.

China-watchers believe that the delegation might have been accepted by Beijing in response to the hardening Western stance on Tibet, which includes for the first time the imposition of conditions to China's most-favoured-nation status by the United States. These experts also believe that the real focus of the delegation was to try and influence Deng Xiao Peng. After the death of the ailing supreme, China will be plunged into political turmoil and all prospect of Tibet parleys will recede into the heavenly realms, until China sorts out its own problems.

There is a faction among "Free Tibet" advisors, however, who believe that such turmoil within China would actually be good, since anarchy offers Tibet its best chance of freedom. While hard-headed Tibet watchers scoff at the possibility of either prospect being realised in the near future, Dharamsala is apparently following a middle path by keeping all its options open. Hence, Gyalo Thondup's sojourn to Beijing,

## Dirty Alps

The world's dirtiest mountains are not Nepal's himals, in case you thought so after reading endless wirecopy out of Kathmandu. The Alps have the dubious distinction, particularly due to the filthy surroundings of Alpine refuges, which are huts used by climbers and hikers to bed down for the night. The pile of excreta and trash that are to be found next to these refuges do vie with

legitimate mountains for height.

A recent conference on "Alpine Refuges in the Year Two Thousand", held recently in Trieste (Italy), provided occasion for handwringing. Said one participant, "The refuges today dot the valleys and passes, and even some peaks in the Alps risk losing their original appearance forever."

Participants from the Alpine Clubs of Italy, Austria, Switzerland, France, Germany and Slovenia said they were committed to prevent "alpine

tourism from becoming the tourism of waste". They signed a document proposing a new basis for running the refuges, promoting alternative energy sources, less use of tins and packets, and carry-out policies for trash. On the whole, the refuges are to be more "spartan".

There were 16 thousand trekkers in the Khumbu in 1992. And 40 million tourists visited the European Alps. Understanding scale helps in developing strategy.



# Lichhavi Kal through Panchayat Kal with Rishikesh Shaha

It is not very often that someone who has contributed to the making of his country's history also finds the time to record for posterity his own interpretation of the contemporary events; what is even more rare is that he finds the time to analyse the development of his own country's ethos over the centuries and brings to bear on his own work a profound stamp of his own humanist concerns. The two latest books by Rishikesh Shaha, Nepal's eminent statesman-historian, bear eloquent testimony as much to his scholarship as to his affection and deep concern for the people and institutions of Nepal.

His work, *Ancient and Medieval Nepal*, is a storehouse of information in 155 pages. It delineates in a few bold strokes the historical processes and forces which over the centuries contributed to the moulding of the kingdom in its present shape. It is not merely a narrative of the battles amongst kings or of intrigues amongst nobles. It describes vividly how the hill peoples in Central Himalaya coalesced into cogent political units, later shaped into a strong fortress-state of Nepal in the late 17th century by the political-military genius of Prithvi Narayan Shah. The contribution of the Lichhavi as well as of the Malla rulers is put in perspective in the chapters on social conditions, religion and art and architecture.

The first draft of this work was prepared during the author's imprisonment in 1969-70. Thereafter, the work lay unpublished for almost 20 years. The book's appearance on the bookstands after the recent revolutionary transformation in Nepal heightens its relevance to the reawakened conscience of the Nepali people. This is important because, as John K. Locke says in the foreword, failure to root the new order in the culture and tradition of the nation will produce "a bewildered society".

Shaha's other book, *Politics in Nepal*, which covers the turbulent developments between 1980 and 1991, is a collection of essays which serves to bring the reader up-to-date with modern Nepal (344 pages). However, while revising the work, Shaha has sacrificed some useful essays appearing in the first edition, which was titled *Essays in the Practice of Government in Nepal*.

This book, too, had its share of misfortune. After barely a hundred

## Ancient and Medieval Nepal

by Rishikesh Shaha

Ratna Pustak Bhandar, Kathmandu,

1992, NRs 275

ISBN 81 85 425 69 8

## Politics in Nepal: Referendum, Stalemate and Triumph of People Power

by Rishikesh Shaha

Manohar, New Delhi,

1993, NRs 475

ISBN 81 7304 020 6

## by Arvind Ramchandra Deo

copies had been sold, it mysteriously disappeared from the bookstores. Now that it is again available, scholars have a valuable reference for the study of political transformation in developing societies, taking Nepal as a case study. If there is one regret, it is that the book is somewhat silent on the political developments in the Mahendra era.

This reviewer feels that the Nepali political bookshelf still lacks an in-depth work on what King Mahendra sought to achieve during his stewardship of Nepal from 1955-56, up to his untimely death in January 1972. The late king, not merely a monarch, was perhaps the shrewdest among the galaxy of South Asian leaders of his time. He captured every opportunity he possibly could to gather real power in his own hands, and he never allowed the tools he chose to become stronger than his own royal will.

The decade between 1979 and 1988 was, to put it mildly unexpectedly turbulent. The protest movement of students demonstrating against Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's execution in Pakistan gathered such momentum that King Birendra felt it necessary to proclaim "a national referendum...in order to explicitly understand the kind of change our countrymen desire..."

Shaha's recapitulation of those tumultuous days is probably the most faithful account on record. He also makes no secret of his scepticism about the reasons for the royal offer of referendum, which was but "a device for defusing the crisis created by the students' agitation."

The set of six chapters dealing with the referendum, its aftermath, the Third Amendment to the Constitution, the two general elections — 1981 and 1986 — and the condition of Nepali politics 1985-1990 deserves to be studied integrally. This is important if the reader is to try and fathom the reasons which led to the formulation of policies leading the Panchayati system of government to its own liquidation.

The self-destructive mechanism became inherent in the monarchy that evolved after Mahendra's royal coup of 1960 and the subsequent evolution of the partyless Panchayat system. A parliamentary facade was created for an effectively presidential form of government in which the palace bureaucracy began to wield effective power without being accountable to any elected body.

Unlike the presidential system, however, the Nepali monarchy had lifelong tenure and

was not renewable through periodic reaffirmation of the public's confidence. If the palace bureaucracy, too, was going to have lifelong tenure not renewable through periodic reaffirmation of confidence, all possibilities of change were automatically ruled out. There was, of course, a Panchayat government for all to see and to take the blame, but its promises could not always be matched in performance. Commitments made by members of the Cabinet, for example, could be blocked at the Palace Secretariat for weeks, months and sometimes years.



Rishikesh Shaha

BIKAS RAJNAR

INFORMATION DEPARTMENT



King Mahendra: Real power in his hands


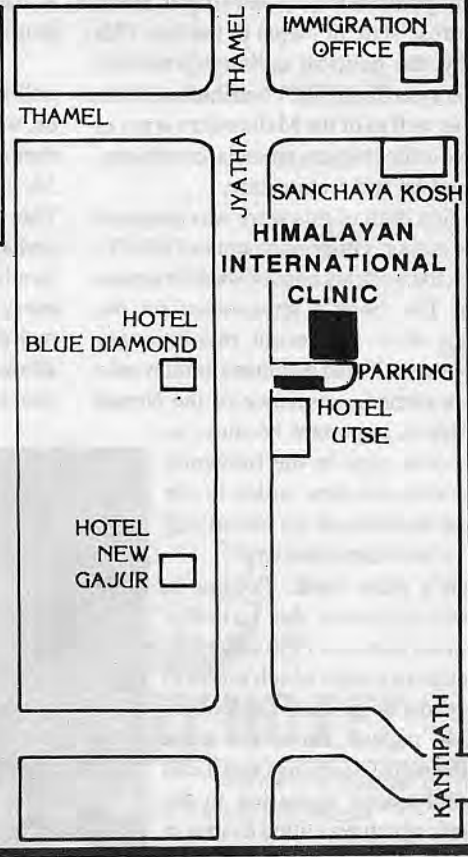
Shaha's riveting chapters on Monarchy in Nepal and Patrimonial Elites in Nepal serve the valuable function of explaining not only why the events of 1989 and 1990 took place, but also why they were inevitable. In addition, the chapter on Nepal's Zone of Peace proposal reveals how a proposal was floated without adequate preparation and pursued in a manner which finally defeated the very purpose for which it might originally have been conceived. This reviewer might add from his personal knowledge that even several political personalities associated with the Panchayat Government had expressed their strong reservations (although always in private) about Indian support to the proposal because they felt that it could vitiate any possibility of peaceful change in Nepali politics.

The events of 1990 and 1991 are generally well documented, although nowhere as coherently as

in the present work. The last chapter dealing with the visit of Prime Minister of Nepal to India and after, and the epilogue read together with the three important appendices do not in fact conclude the book but only leave some tantalising suggestions on the future course of consolidation of the revolution in Nepal.

The reviewer shares Rishikesh Shaha's optimism about the prospects of stabilisation of the restored democracy. King Birendra, who is well-educated in the formal sense of the term and has travelled widely, seems to have the ability to help consolidate the revived structure of multiparty democracy in his Kingdom. He enjoys immense goodwill, not only in his own Kingdom, but also in India, and there is every prospect that he could, if he so wished, provide leadership as a constitutional monarch to his people to facilitate their progress into the 21st century. He would well provide the answer to the question, "Where are the people of Nepal going?" Meanwhile, Rishikesh Shaha's two books provide valuable guidelines. ▽

A.R. Deo was India's Ambassador to Nepal from 1986 to 1989.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>HIMALAYAN INTERNATIONAL</b> P.O. Box 5133 Jyatha - Thamel, Kathmandu, Nepal Phone: 2-25455, 228998 Fax: 977-1-220143. Telex: 2669 GLOCOM NP</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. MEDICAL CARE IN A WESTERN SETTING</li> <li>2. CARE BY MD., GENERAL PRACTITIONER, CARDIOLOGIST &amp; GASTROENTEROLOGIST (CANADA, UNITED KINGDOM, USA)</li> <li>3. ALL TRAVELLERS VACCINATIONS AND FREE VACCINATIONS ADVICE AVAILABLE</li> <li>4. MODERN LAB FACILITIES</li> <li>5. X-RAY FACILITIES</li> <li>6. ENDOSCOPY AND ULTRASONOGRAPHY FACILITIES</li> <li>7. INFORMATION ABOUT ALTITUDE PROBLEMS</li> <li>8. ARRANGEMENT FOR SPECIALIST REFERRAL</li> <li>9. STANDARD SERVICES AT ECONOMICAL RATES</li> <li>10. CENTRALLY LOCATED AT JYATHA-THAMEL (IN FRONT OF HOTEL BLUE DIAMOND) IN KATHMANDU</li> <li>11. OPEN ALL DAYS, 9 AM TO 5 PM</li> <li>12. PRIOR APPOINTMENT ALWAYS WELCOME</li> </ol>	



**Rural Urban Interlinkages: A Study Based on Nepalese Swiss Development Experiences**

*INFRAS Papers*,  
1993, NRs 200

Decades of intervention in rural development has failed to banish rural impoverishment, and rural-to-urban migration continues unchecked in South Asia. This book, based on a study by INFRAS Zurich and IDA Kathmandu, investigates the transformation process of rural-urban interlinkages as the precondition to development. This has been studied at household decision-making level, using vegetable and fruits, metal trade and migration as the factors. The case study areas are Dolakha-Kathmandu, Palpa-Butwal, and Bajhang-Bangalore (South India). The study concludes that categories of 'rural' and 'urban' must be seen as part of a continuum rather than be strictly compartmentalised.

**The Camphor Flame: Popular Hinduism and Society in India**

by *C.J.Fuller*  
Viking Penguin Books India, New Delhi, 1992  
IRs 195 ISBN 0 670 84723 2

This is a synthesised account of popular Hinduism in India. The specialist anthropological literature on this topic is presented in a broader and more accessible framework for the general reader. Fuller also hopes that his work on popular Hinduism counterbalances "the philosophical bias apparent in other general books about Hinduism." Chapter headings include: gods and goddesses, rituals of kingship, devotional movements, and pilgrimages. The book concludes with some commentary on Hindu fundamentalism in India as of mid-1991.

**Simla: The Summer Capital of British India**

by *Raja Bhasin*  
Viking Penguin Books India, New Delhi  
1992, IRs 250  
ISBN 0 670 84728 3

Based on published accounts and oral sources, this book attempts to recapture "the vitality and excess of the giddy theatre and club life enjoyed by the British in India" (cover jacket). Bhasin narrates how Simla developed from a "nondescript hill town" into the glamorous summer capital of British India. Some of Kipling's writings on Simla are included, and the importance imperial Simla accorded its monkeys is described in a chapter entitled, "Atop the Pedestal: Government, Monkeys and People." The concluding chapter is a brief note on the decline of Simla after the Raj: its merger into Himachal Pradesh in 1966, and the seasonal tourist onslaught, which has led to "incompatible land and property use, ecological degradation and a large scale breakdown of civic amenities."

**Beyond the Trees, Tigers and Tribes: Historical Sociology of the Eastern Himalayan Forests**

by *A.C.Sinha*  
Har-Anand Publications, New Delhi, 1993, IRs 195  
ISBN 81 241 0009 8

After examining the historical antecedents of the British forest policies, Sinha analyses a variety of subjects including tea plantation and tea chest timber, forest reserves, shifting cultivation, timber trade and the supply of railway sleepers. Significantly, the book also deals with Bhutanese forests, providing a case study "away from the urban-industrial market economy." Overall, Sinha concludes that community control over the forests as it exists is not enough to guarantee a balanced regional ecology. "Something more positive and drastic has to be done," he writes, because in spite of the depleting forests, there is little awareness and grassroots movement to safe guard the forest resources.

**Claiming High Ground: Sherpas, Subsistence and Environmental Change in the Highest Himalaya**

by *Stanley F. Stevens*  
University of California Press, Berkeley, 1993  
ISBN 0 520 07699 0

This 537-page book, ten years in the research, holistically explores the organisation of Sherpa society of Khumbu, and how it has coped with the influx of mountaineers and tourists. In the author's words, the book is about "indigenous knowledge, adaptability, and cultural persistence". He discusses the local resource management institutions of the Sherpas and maintains that deforestation in the region has "a greater historical context

than has been realised and the Sherpas themselves have a greater role in it than has been appreciated." He adds, "Looking at Khumbu through Sherpa perspectives...means setting aside some of the romanticism of earlier outsiders' accounts and acknowledging the environmental shortcomings of historical Sherpa land use and management." Sherpas' relationship with their environment "were neither as harmonious in the pre-tourism past nor as destructive in recent years as had been believed." Stevens finds that major changes in the subsistence economy have occurred in the tourism era alone and that despite recent economic transformation Sherpas also continue to maintain old adaptive strategies.

**MOUNTAIN RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT**

Vol 13, No. 2, May 1993

*Jack and Pauline Ives, Editors*  
International Mountain Society, Boulder

This issue of *MRD* presents papers on the geo-ecology of the Andes, on subjects such as: climate change on the Atacama Altiplano; glaciation in the Central Andes; cultural change over the last 12,000 years; a geo-ecological view of environment and human development; soil erosion and reservoir sedimentation; preservation of indigenous foods; and (see above on the Sherpas) whether traditional pastoralism is the cause of erosion of the mountain environment.

**South Asia: Democracy and the Road Ahead**

*Lok Raj Baral, Editor*  
Political Science Association of Nepal, Kathmandu,  
1992, NRs 250

This book is the "byproduct" of the First South Asian Political Science Conference, organised in Kathmandu in June 1992. Sixteen South Asian political scientists delve into issues of consolidating newfound democracy in much of the region, the role of the military in each of the countries, democracy within political parties, ethnic assertion, regional cooperation, and so on. The editor ends his overview with the conviction that "weak and uncommitted leaders and their blind followers cannot help stabilise the process (of democracy)".

**Hill Cities of Eastern Himalaya: Ethnicity, Land Relations and Urbanisation**

*A.C.Sinha, P.M.Chacko, L.L.Aier, Editors*  
Indus Publishing Company, New Delhi, 1993, IRs 250  
ISBN 81 851 82 80 9

This book is a compilation of papers by eleven academics of the social science faculty (history, political science, geography and sociology) of the North Eastern Hill University (NEHU) in Shillong. There is a general dearth of academic work on the North, and against this background the editors hope that the volume will contribute to the understanding of the ongoing regional economic transformations. The contributors have come to the conclusion that the urban centers of the Northeast are suffocating because of missing institutional support and "utter confusion in the management of urban affairs." With all the attention diverted to the metropolitan centers of Calcutta or Bombay, "the genuine problems of the hill cities rarely gets attention." In the absence of participatory civic bodies in the hill towns, the academics see strife and turmoil in the Northeastern horizon. The book deals with the problems of the following towns in detail: Sohra (Cherrapunji), Shillong, Tura, Jaintia, Aizawl, Dimapur, Kohima, Mokokchung and Itanagar.

**Landlessness and Migration in Nepal**

by *Nanda R. Shrestha*  
Westview Press, Boulder, 1990  
ISBN 0 8133 7677 7

This book is dedicated, among others, "to all the peasants and workers who form the foundations of human history and human civilizations." The author seeks to "describe, understand and explain the various facets of frontier migration, focusing on landlessness, near-landlessness, and spontaneous settlement among hill migrants in the Tarai of Nepal." The special focus on the politics of land is justified because land forms "the axis of the political and economic system in Nepal." Despite landlessness and near-landlessness, states the author, it would be naive to underestimate peasants' revolutionary potential and their resilience. At the same time, he asks, "how long will migrant peasants remain in a state of depoliticization?" In the

end, "the future remains uncertain...only time will tell what course these peasants decide to take in their attempt to improve their survival chances."

**Politics in Nepal: 1950-60**

by *Anirudha Gupta*  
Kalings Publications, Delhi, 1993

When it was first published in 1964, this book created a furor in Nepal because of its criticism of King Mahendra's coup of December 1960 ousting the elected government of B.P.Koirala. In a preface to the second (1993) edition, which is in paperback, the author writes, "Still...the question remains — will the second experiment (with democracy) succeed where the first one failed? The question can only be studied and not answered, particularly in the context of the manifold changes that have come about in the Nepali society over the last thirty years."

**India and Nepal: Some Aspects of Culture Contact**

by *Johar Sen*  
Indian Institute of Advanced Studies (Shimla) and Indus Publishing Company, New Delhi 1992  
ISBN 81 851 82 69 8  
IRs 120

In 87 pages of main text, this book attempts to sketch an outline of cultural contact between India and Nepal from pre-historic times to present. Although there is a section on Nepalo-India trade in Chapter 2 — a subject covered more fully in the author's two previous monographs — most of this volume is devoted to linguistic and literary aspects of the cultural contact. A chapter on Indian Nepali literature and an appendix listing more than 280 journals and collections of essays in the Nepali language published from India between 1901 and 1980 are also included.

**Nepal: Human Rights in the Himalayas**

*Gopal Krishna Siwakoti, Coordinator*  
INHURED International, Kathmandu, June 1993

This booklet, which deals with "the human rights situation in Nepal and the non-compliance of Nepal with domestic and international human rights obligations", was prepared for the UN Human Rights Conference, held in June in Vienna. After reviewing the various obligations and their implementation, the booklet makes specific recommendations to the Government of Nepal, with special reference to areas relating to indigenous peoples and ethnic groups, children, women, and Bhutanese refugees in Nepal.

**The Gurungs: A Himalayan Population of Nepal**

by *Bernard Pignede*  
English edition by Sarah Harrison and Alan Macfarlane  
Ratna Pustak Bhandar, Kathmandu, 1993

First published in 1966 in French, this classic work on the "Tamu-mae ("Gurungs" in Nepali) is now available in English. Rather than just provide a straightforward translation, Harrison and Macfarlane have provided supplementary information through footnotes and appendices. The extra information provided, which makes this a unique act of posthumous act of collaboration with a dead author, is based on Harrison and Macfarlane's own work among the Gurung's or as provided by Gurungs who have read the text. The translators hope that the book "will show some of the distortions which have been imposed on Gurung culture and history by outsiders." They write, "In periods of dramatic economic and political change, such as the present, ethnic similarities and differences become particularly important and legends of origin are closely scrutinised. The Gurungs, like many other groups, are engaged in this process." (Note: Simultaneously with this book, Ratna Pustak has also brought out the second edition of the booklet, *Gurungs of Nepal: A Guide to the Gurungs*, written by Macfarlane and Indrabahadur Gurung, NRs 75.)

NOTE: A complete set of nos. 1-23 of the series *Monumenta Serindica*, has been received by the *Himal Library* from the Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa in Tokyo. Also, Himalayan chronicler Elizabeth Hawley, in the process of emptying her shelves has provided the Library with valuable books on the Himalaya. We thank both the ILCAA and Miss Hawley.

Editors.

# Living Out a Refugee Welcome

The screening camp set up by the Nepali Government at Kakarbhitta, Nepal's gateway in the eastern Tarai, is hot and tense. Dhanamaya Chauhan, a middle-aged woman in a dirty dhoti, is pleading with an official and pointing to her cousin Bishnumaya, sitting in a corner with an infant in her arms.

She asks the official, "How can you say our evidence is not good enough? We have come from Bhutan, we are refugees."

Dhanamaya's family are among the hundred or so families that have so far been denied refugee status since the Nepali Government began screening the arrivals from Bhutan in early 1993. "Bayan milena", they are told: you are not a refugee.

The flood of Nepali-speaking Lhotshampa from southern Bhutan, which reached its highest mark a year ago, is now down to a trickle. On average, 1992 saw 300-400 refugee arriving daily by truck at Kakarbhitta. The 1993 average thus far is down to about 90 a day, and the rate is much lower for May and June.

There are different views as to why this downwards trend. Pashupati Karmacharya, who heads the Nepali Home Ministry's Operation Management and Implementary Unit (OMIU), which has the task of monitoring refugee affairs in Jhapa, believes that the word about tightened procedures in Kakarbhitta has spread to southern Bhutan. Says Karmacharya, "We conduct detailed interviews and do not register those that cannot prove that they have been persecuted."

While the screening seems to have had an impact in the short term by affecting the 'pull factor', the overall trend seems to have been influenced by a scaling down of repression within Bhutan, which has been the 'push factor'.

Says an official with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), "When persecution has increased in one or the other districts of Bhutan, we have seen an immediate rise in number of arrivals. The international pressure on Bhutan has intensified, and we see the direct result of that in

*The situation in Southeast Nepal will become explosive if the Bhutanese refugees stay there much longer. Meanwhile, their leaders concentrate on running each other down.*

by Gopal Guragain

reduced numbers."

While the reduced arrival rate is a matter for relief for the Home Ministry and UNHCR, it leaves unresolved the issue of the 84,100 refugees in the seven camps of Jhapa and Morang, and of their repatriation. Quite apart from the complicated questions that the recently announced joint Nepal-Bhutan bilateral commission will have to resolve in order to identify Bhutanese nationals who are 'eligible' to return, there are major problems with regard to the management of the camps, the relations with the local population, and the vexing question of refugee politics.

## Jhapa Cocktail

The most immediate problem for the Nepali authorities is the social instability that the refugee influx is bringing to the south-eastern corner of Nepal. Says one district official, "Jhapa District has in its hands a cocktail mix of a thousand problems."

Even after three years, life in the refugee camps is not yet 'normal' for the residents. P.R.Dahal, a planner with the Agriculture Ministry back in Bhutan, left Gelephug in 1991 and is now a Timai camp resident. Says Dahal, "The first year, it was very difficult to pass the day. We spent hours and hours just walking the banks of the Mai Khola and the Timai."

Maybe four percent of the camp population has something to do: the few are engaged with the relief agencies, in camp management, or in politics. For the rest, the Jhapa days drag on and on, which is why one sees camp residents washing hands more often than they need to, sweeping their huts even when there is no dirt, walking the river banks, or engaging in idle talk in the bazaars along the East-West Highway. Says Rudra Prasad Khatiwada of Goldhap camp, "One just gets tired by not having anything to do."

Because of the inactivity, tension is always just below the surface. A strongly worded 15-point notice pasted all over the

## Refugee Data

WHERE in Bhutan do the Lhotshampa refugees say they come from, what was their occupation back in Druk Yul, and, above all, what documents do they have on hand to prove their claimed status? These are questions of crucial importance as the Nepali and Bhutanese governments begin talks on identifying and repatriating refugees.

DISTRICT OF ORIGIN	Households	Percent
Sarbhang	4806	36.31
Chirang	3259	24.62
Dagana	2399	18.12
Samchi	1296	9.79
Samdrup Jonkhar	1069	8.07
Chhukha	59	0.45
Others	349	2.65
<b>Total</b>	<b>13,237</b>	<b>100.00</b>

DOCUMENTS ON HAND	Households	Percent
Citizenship cards	8757	66.15
Land documents	1627	12.29
School certificates	33	0.25
Health certificates	240	1.81
Others	2248	16.99
Without any documents	332	2.51
<b>Total</b>	<b>13,237</b>	<b>100.00</b>

OCCUPATION	Population	Percent
Farmer	30210	77.71
Government service	961	2.47
Artisan	14	0.03
Trade and business	218	0.56
Soldier	361	0.93
Professional	80	0.21
Housewife (head of hh)	3602	9.27
Student	3428	8.82
<b>Total</b>	<b>38,874</b>	<b>100.00</b>

refugee camps indicates that UNHCR and the Government's Chief District Officer do not mean to let things get out of hand. The rules restrict the inmates from leaving camp without permission, keeping livestock, playing cards, or drinking liquor. Outsiders are not allowed in. However, a visitor finds that every patch of dry grass is occupied by card-players, while the road to the Beldangi camps is lined with raksi shops. "We have destroyed 2500 litres of raksi, but it is impossible to control," says a supervisor in Beldangi II.

### Envy the Refugee

In 1991, when Nepal was still high on adrenalin after its successful Peoples Movement, the first refugees were welcomed by the local population of Jhapa. As the refugee numbers swelled, however, a chill developed in the relationship and there is today undeclared enmity between the refugees and the Jhapalis.

Interestingly, because Jhapa is also populated by recent migrants from the Nepali hills, the demographic cross-section of the refugees in the camps and the Jhapali population outside is nearly identical. This might partially explain why the resentment about the support being received by the refugees is as intense as it is. A UNHCR field officer concedes that the tension between the locals and refugees exists in all the camps, and that it is more pronounced in Pathari camp because of its proximity to the bazaars.

Says a trader in Damak bazaar, "There are more residents in Beldangi than the entire population of our town. Anything can happen anytime." Gopal Prasad Bhandari, Deputy Superintendent of Police of Morang, says, "The refugees have not understood that it is in their interests to remain within the camps. The local inhabitants ask why they should be penalised for having been kind to the refugees."

It is the poorest of Jhapa's and Morang's population who are most affected, because the refugees have pulled the bottom out of the labour market. Daily wage rates have crashed because refugees are willing to work very cheap. "They eat in the camps and come here to break rocks, and go back for their evening meals. We have to survive on this work," says Lok Bahadur Chhetri, a father-of-three who lives in a shack by the Dans Khola.

Refugees from Pathari camp travel 25 km by local bus to Bahuni village to engage in farm labour. They work as sand shovelers on the Jirikhimi Khola or break rock (*gitti*) on the Dans Khola, supplying Biratnagar town's demand of building materials. The daily wages are down from NRs 40 a year ago to NRs 25 today. While the landlords, contractors and

*sahus* of Nepal's southeast are taking full advantage of the basement price for labour, the local poor are reeling.

The presence of refugees has caused havoc with bazaar prices as well. From the relief agencies, the each camp resident, regardless of age, receives rationed quantities of rice, vegetable, sugar, oil and kerosene. While small refugee families manage to scrape by, larger families with many children generate quite a surplus.

Because of the glut in the market, prices have come crashing. In the bazaars, rice that is NRs 12 per kilo elsewhere is available for NRs 7 or 8, and sugar of NRs 18 per kilo can be had for NRs 12. At the same time, the cash liquidity in the camps has raised the price of other commodities in the bazaars.

Many hill migrants of Nepal who live in the vicinity of the camps eye the refugee 'lifestyle' with envy and some have infiltrated. During a recent refugee count, 1222 camp families suddenly disappeared.

UNHCR's Field Officer in Damak, William Bell says that the agency has realised the need to provide services to the population surrounding the camps. It has initiated discussions to connect the outlying communities by road, provide them with healthcare, water supply, and promote reforestation.

But the locals will not be receiving the rice, cooking oil and greens, the bamboos, clean drinking water, the sanitation facilities, or the tarpaulin sheets, which means that the resentment will still be there.

### Cats and Dogs

The Lhotshampas are guests in Jhapa and Morang. How long these refugees will remain depends upon factors far from the teeming camps, in the meeting rooms of Kathmandu, Thimphu and New Delhi. There is a role in all this for the refugee leadership, but study reveals that refugee leaders are easily diverted by inter-personal feuds. It remains to be seen whether the decision by Nepal and Bhutan to finally set up a joint commission to study repatriation will have the effect of uniting, or further dividing, the leaders.

At this time, there are three parties in 'opposition' to the Government in Thimphu. These are the Bhutan Peoples Party (BPP), the Bhutan National Democratic Party (BNDP) and the Bhutan Congress Party (BCP). They do not talk to each other. The inter-party animus also affects the other 'non-political' refugee organisations such as the Peoples Forum for Human Rights (PFHR) - tilted towards the BPP, the Human Rights Organisation

of Bhutan (HUROB) - inclined towards BNDP, the Association of Human Rights Activists (AHURA) and Students Union of Bhutan (SUB) - relatively independent.

R.K. Budathoki, President of the BPP since its establishment in June 1990, dismisses BCP with a wave of the hand, "We do not recognise those who turn to politics because it is a fashion." He is willing to concede the BNDP's existence, but considers it a "bureaucrats' party", and adds, "They are all opportunists, well-to-do from Bhutan who hope always to direct affairs from above."

The BPP says it espouses democratic-socialism, but it is apparent that Marxists dominate the party. The party has its vehement critics, who say it espouses militancy and that it has a leadership vacuum — other than Budathoki, the party post have high turnover.

BNDP was inaugurated in February 1992, in New Delhi, by bureaucrat refugees who understood India's importance in resolving the Lhotshampas' problem. However, the party's lobbying in New Delhi has not met with much success. Its manifesto speaks of "mutually-beneficial capitalism" as its credo, which places it opposite the table from the BPP.

BNDP has few workers in the camps. Its President R.B. Basnet, who says, "We tried very hard to adjust into the BPP, but the BPP *bhais* are not very thoughtful." As for the BCP: "It is a new party and does not have a manifesto or constitution yet."

Established in April 1993, the BCP seems to be a gathering of individuals who just outgrew the BPP and its lack of coherent programmes. "The other parties have no moral standing," maintains President D.B. Sangpang, who lives in a Beldangi.

Is there any hope for a reconciliation among the parties? "Yes," says BCP's General Secretary R.P. Subba, "We will play a mediator's role in bringing the parties together." But the party's Vice-President Rakesh Chhetri says the BPP's "militancy" and "lawless ways" are the main obstacle to inter-party unity.

The General Secretary of the BPP is Tenzing Zangpo (Pasang) — he is a Sarchop from eastern Bhutan, an exception among the refugees, who are overwhelmingly Lhotshampas. He becomes suddenly animated when asked why BPP does not unite with the others: "Of course, we want unity, but you go and ask those who say we have to wait 50 years for unity!"

Pasang is referring to BNDP's General Secretary D.N.S. Dhakal whose view BPP with deep suspicion. "When BPP calls for unity, it

is to enhance its power. When we call for unity, it is for the movement. Perhaps we will be forced to unite if in the course of Nepal-Bhutan talks we are asked to present a joint view of the refugee demands."

"The parties quarrel with each other and use us when it serves their purpose," says a refugee who has started a business in Birtamod, the Jhapa town that acts as a hub for the surrounding refugee camps. "BPP is badly organised and lawless, and often terrorises the camps residents. The BNDP supports the status quo back in Bhutan and lacks credibility."

The animus between the various political factions has occasionally led to bloodshed in the camps. Last year, a melee between BNDP and BPP workers in Beldangi took the life of a BNDP member, while in April a BPP worker lost his life.

### Lift a Finger

Echoing the words of Nepal's B.P.Koirala, BCP hopes to "to promote return of refugees through national reconciliation with King Jigme Singye Wangchuk and thereafter to work for political stability in Bhutan".

Grand words, but no party has at present a coherent programme. Besides the obvious disunity, there is also paucity of political direction and staying power, and little or no organising in the camps. Other than fuming against each other, the leaders actually *do* very little. For obvious reasons, it has been impossible to politicise the population within Bhutan, or to tap possible discontent among Drukpas and Sarchopas.

It was a year ago that the BPP announced a programme for satyagraha within Bhutan. It still calls press conferences in Kathmandu and in order to announce the imminent start the peaceful protest. The other parties do not even go the distance of the BPP, however, prefer to remain as far removed from activism and slippery political terrain as possible.

The reluctance to soil hands also has a bearing on the question of militancy against Bhutan. While some have warned that frustration among the youths in the camps will lead to infiltration and eruption of militant violence against the Bhutanese regime, the lack of politicisation in the camps indicates that this is not about to happen.

BPP is the one party in which some factions encourage militancy. However, the sporadic infiltrations have not succeeded in alarming the Thimphu government and only handed it a propaganda advantage. Since much of the violence within Bhutan seems to be the work of apolitical vandals, there is negative public relations impact for the refugee organisations.

Says Bhim Subba, a senior civil servant who is affiliated with HUROB, "Only those who totally misread the reality of the refugees' situation would go around espousing militancy."

### Human Rights, Democracy

Rudrabahadur Khatiwada, a headman (*mandal*) in Khorsane in Bhutan's Chirang district, says, "We do hope to return, but god knows when that will be."

Actually, with Nepal-Bhutan talks in the offing, there is heightened expectations in the camps about prospects for repatriation. The standard demand of the refugee organisations has been for human rights and democracy, but it is clear that, at best, this issue can be raised by the refugees once they are back in Bhutan. The Kathmandu Government can only seek to ensure that a maximum number of refugees are taken back.

The refugee leadership is extremely anxious about the forthcoming negotiations, both in terms of who will be allowed to return and what will be the conditions in Bhutan after they return. On the one hand is a

Bhutan which will make every effort to keep the repatriated numbers to a minimum. On the other hand is a Nepal which feels morally bound to keep the refugees but is tiring of acting as host, and also worried of political problems in its sensitive southeast.

Some refugees express worry about Kathmandu's position and intentions. Says SUB's Biswa Nath Chhetri, "The Nepali Government seems to have forgotten about the 'return with dignity' clause," referring to the Kathmandu's official stand on the refugees' return. Says another leader, "When Nepal speaks of the return 'with dignity', we read that as recognition of our demands for democratic reforms."

BCP's Rakesh Chhetri: "We have

patience to wait for democracy in Bhutan. But it seems that in some quarters the patience to host us refugees is running out."

### Settling Down

Actually, the patience seems to be in short supply among a segment of the refugee population as well. They have decided that if they cannot return home, or have to wait interminably long for that, they might as well strike roots in Nepal.

Many believe that Home Ministry Dago Tshering has no intention to allow back more than a trickle. Despite their attachment to their Bhutanese homesteads, orange orchards, and other properties, a number of refugees have begun to prepare for a "post-Bhutan life" outside of the camps. Says P. R. Dahal, "I have left behind lakhs worth of property, and even my school certificates. How can one forget such things? *Tara kay garne?*"

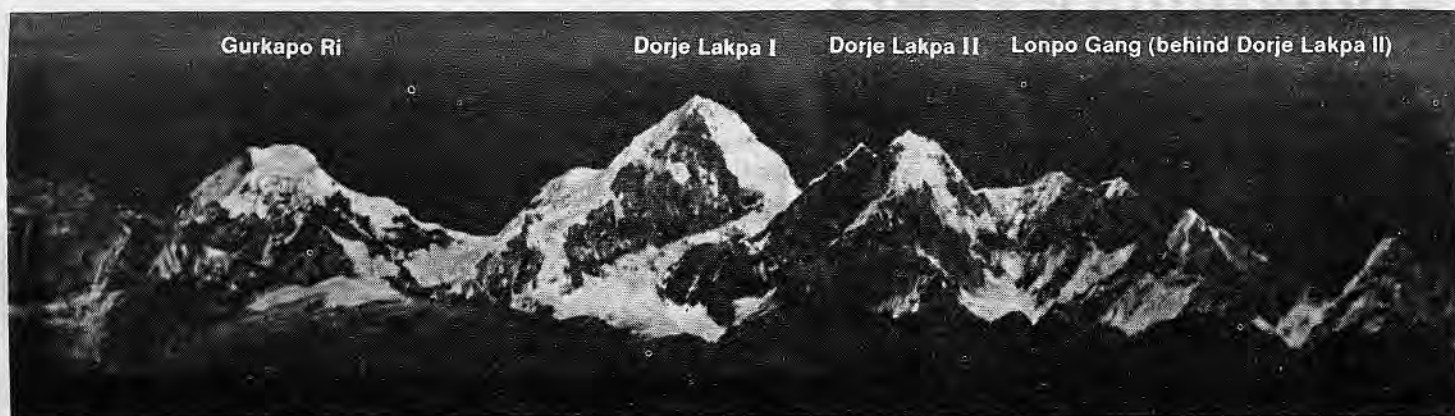
The longer the Lhotshampas stay on in Nepal, the more 'Nepali' they become. Each camp has already seen dozens of marriages with 'outsiders'. While the refugee educators are trying their best to follow the Bhutanese system, the fact that they teach Nepali (which has been banned in Bhutan since 1985) using textbooks from the Nepal's curricula means that the children are becoming 'Nepalised'.

But perhaps the most significant indicator of the developing refugee mindset is seen in the citizenship rolls kept by Home Ministry. According to a high ranking Ministry official, about five thousand refugees now have dual citizenship. Since the average family size is six, it is likely, therefore, that 30,000 refugees have the possibility of becoming Nepali citizens. Says the Home Ministry official, "We cannot distinguish between who is a Nepali and who is a Bhutanese Nepali. They look alike." Refugees have bought land, and even built houses, in Jhapa's Charpane, Birtamod and Budhabare, and in Biratnagar town.

While it is true that 66 percent of the refugees have Bhutanese citizenship certificates, and about 97 percent have some kind of documentary evidence to indicate Bhutanese citizenship, how long will they hold on to the vision of return? Says Keshav Acharya, a poet and journalist of Jhapa, "If the refugee problem is not resolved before the next Nepali general elections, two years hence, it will change the entire political, economic and social scenario of Morang and Jhapa."

▷

G. Guragain is a freelance journalist based in Kathmandu



## Giving Jugal its Due

by Dipesh Risal

Between the Trisuli and the Sun Kosi, north of Kathmandu, lies a cluster of peaks which has been divided into two himals, Langtang and Jugal. These two ranges actually share a common ridge: unlike other himals of Nepal, which are characteristically separated by rivers, no river cuts through these two ranges. So it seems quite difficult to justify their division into two separate ranges, and yet they have always been presented as such.

Even with the division, some authorities like to include Shisha Pangma and Phola Gangchen, which jut out north into Tibet from the main ridge of Langtang Himal, in the Jugal. Others maintain that Jugal is the half-arc that starts in the west from Tilman's Pass, and culminates in the easterly peak of Phurbi Chyachu (6637m). Perhaps this last grouping is more correct. All the glaciers descending from the southern spurs of this half-arc empty into one river, the Balephi Khola, and this certainly adds weight to the suggestion.

Jugal Himal is the range that is closest to Kathmandu Valley, and its peaks are seen clearly and conspicuously from Patan, and even more so from Bhaktapur. But nobody, Nepali or expatriate, feels attached to this impressive collection of assorted mountains. While climbers are probably disinterested because Jugal provides no sponsorship-grabbing 'eight thousanders', the reason for the apathy of Nepalis — and especially the Valley dwellers — to Jugal is unclear. Since ancient times, the Newar traders of Kathmandu have been travelling astride this range on their way to Lhasa and back, but they do not even have a name for Jugal, let alone for the individual peaks in this range.

Jugal derives its name, meaning "The Twins" in Nepali, from the prominent twin

peaks of Dorje Lakpa. Dorje Lakpa I (6989m), the higher of the twins, is an almost perfect pyramid, and Dorje Lakpa II (6517m), which stands south of the main ridge of Jugal, is a fierce ice-hung tooth. From Dorje Lakpa's southwest side descends the Lingshing Glacier, and from its eastern side, the Dorje Lakpa Glacier. Both are about seven kilometres long.

Interesting parallax can be observed in the position of the two peaks of Dorje Lakpa. From Kathmandu, the higher of the two peaks appears to the left of the smaller peak. But flying east of Kathmandu at low altitude, the two peaks are seen to switch their positions, so that the smaller peak is now seen on the left of its larger twin.

Although the twins of Dorje Lakpa are the most prominent peaks in Jugal, the highest mountain in this range is Loengpo Gang (7083m), also called the Big White Peak. This is one peak that deserves its English name. It has a long saddle-ridge that culminates in two end-summits as seen from the Dorje Lakpa Glacier, but from Kathmandu much of this peak is perfectly blocked from view by Dorje Lakpa. This mass of white mountain emerges dramatically from behind Dorje Lakpa when Kathmandu mountain watchers go up to, say, the Kakani lookout.

The other peaks in Jugal Himal are Bhairab Takura (Madiya Peak, 6799m), Gyaltzen Peak (6151m) and Gumba Chuli (Ladies Peak, 6256m). Although these and the main peaks of Jugal are relatively smaller than the others himals of Nepal, mountaineers who have attempted the peaks know that there are sheer rock faces and much steep ice-climbing in these peaks.

Although the other ranges near Jugal were extensively explored by the veteran

Himalayan climber Bill Tillman in 1949, the first expedition to Jugal itself was by a Scottish women's expedition in 1955. This was also the first women's expedition in Nepal. The team of Monica Jackson, Betty Stark and others explored the southern flanks of Jugal and also made the first ascent of Gyaltzen Peak.

Loengpo Gang claimed the lives of three members of a 1957 British expedition before it was bagged by a Japanese team in the Spring of 1962. The most recent expedition was mounted by a joint South Korean-Nepali team in the autumn of 1987, and they made the fifth successful ascent of the peak.

Dorje Lakpa was first climbed as late as 1981 by a Japanese-Nepali expedition. The reason for the long gap between the first attempt (in 1964) and the first successful ascent is that the peak was closed to foreigners in 1966 and only reopened in 1979. A joint American-British team made the most recent ascent of Dorje Lakpa in the Spring of 1992.

Phurbi Chyachu, with its rolling crest, was first climbed by a Japanese-Nepali expedition in Spring, 1982. This mountain has not been attempted since.

All the peaks in Jugal, except Gumba Chuli, are open to Nepali expeditions, or foreign expeditions with Nepali members. Experts reckon that there have been many unauthorised expeditions in the mountains of Jugal, as the range is close to Kathmandu, and relatively easy to get to. ▽

This will be my last contribution to *Himal*. The past one year of writing "Know Your Himal" has been tremendously fulfilling, and I wish to thank Miss Elizabeth Hawley for her assistance. Interested individuals are invited to contribute mountain-related articles to this page, so as to spread the excitement for the mountains among the people of the Himalaya.

# Abominably Yours,

One hears that the Indonesians are getting worried about the dog problem in their paradise island of Bali. Apparently, Balinese dogs howl all night long, just like the dogs of Panchkhal. The tourists are being driven away, even though tour operators have begun to speak softly and carry big sticks.

Like the good citizens of Panchkhal, the Balinese are used to the yowls and yelps that accompany the musty summer nights. Also, a certain fatalism pervades life in Bali as it does in Panchkhal — misdeeds in this life are said to be rewarded with reincarnation as an Indonesian dog. Which means that this loud mutt could well be Uncle Sutomato, who fell into the roasting spit last March. Uncanny resemblance, when you come to think of it.

Unfortunately, and most untraditionally, sleeping dogs are not being allowed to lie in Bali, much less to truth. The Government is being pressured into the attack-dog mode by a joint IMF and World Bank appraisal team presently ensconced at the Bali Bilton. The Team Leader, Clifford Bark (Jr), argues that while left to themselves the Balinese can sleep all day long without affecting their human development index, the package tourists have sight-seeing to do, which requires daylight.

Bark barks, "You see, Mr. Environmental Journalist, if the dogs howl all night, the tourists cannot sleep, which means they cannot sight-see, which means that they will stop coming, which means that Bali will be dogfull and touristless by next fall. Do you want that, huh, do you want that?" The Tourism Ministry, manned as it is by Balinese, would much rather not have raised a finger, but was defenceless against the appraisal team's doggedness.

So now militant conservationists have united under the banner of the Association for Mongrel Emancipation and Nurture (AMEN), and are targeting insomniac tourists, international civil servants and government dog squads.

Personally, I think AMEN is barking

up the wrong alley. Rio has a lot to answer for. Let's face it, which of these dog genes are so valuable? Would we worry if the genes of the Indian House Crow or the Thumbtack Cockroach were suddenly to become all tangled up? But woe betide anyone trying to make Balinese nights more peaceful, ohoho.

AMEN's argument is that the mongrels play an important role in the Balinese food chain by recycling nutrients. Years of adaptation have produced front paws perfectly evolved for raking over



Dogs of Bali.

discarded household wastes. Without its dogs, Bali would be overrun by rubbish like base camp. And just look at what happened to Lalitpur once the scavenger *sungurs* all got eaten up.

AMEN also tried to convince using inductive reasoning: every city other than Singapore has a canine problem. Singapore has no culture. Hence, cities without dogs have no culture. Gorakhpur has dogs. So Gorakhpur has culture.

Luckily, Kathmandu Valley does not need tourists, so the residents can continue with their cordial relationship with all *bhusyaha* breeds. Elsewhere, Goan mastiffs hold choir practice every evening, and Dhaka Apsos wail tremulously into the night. When in flood, they do it from the rooftops.

With a view to restoring Bali's place in the sun as Dog Heaven, I suggest a remedy that would, in one fell swoop, cut unemployment in Western countries, boost tourism revenue, and reinstate nocturnal peace and harmony.

**Project Proposal:** To set up a collaborative venture between Southern

governments and unemployed youths of the West. The project will equip each volunteer youth with a yard-long stick tipped with rubber, with which they will prod sleeping dogs between the hours of 6 am and 10 pm (in two shifts). Being forced to remain awake and sort rubbish all day, the canines will be so exhausted by nightfall that there will be no howling at night. Both tourists and dogs will sleep like logs.

While they are at it, the young volunteers could also plan their postgraduate education in fields such as bio-environmental engineering, dog zoology, or North-South Understanding in a Polluted Post-Modernist World.

The frontiers of knowledge on dog behaviour would be extended. It is true, is it not, that there are too many specialists studying the rhinoceros even though it has only one horn? Whereas ignored have been the life and times of canines, who are partners to all us anthropoids in our

common march to destiny. The rainforests may be gone, sir, but the dogs are right here under our roofs and over by the yellow containers.

There is so much we need to know about Fido, Kaley and Tiger. How plausible, for example, is the thesis that Panchkhal dogs are listless due to lives spent chasing passenger buses along the Arnico Highway, and the sudden realisation that this leads one nowhere but up the highway, whence one has to return? Is it true that Doti dogs are great rock climbers, that Bengal hosts the most maimed dogs in the Subcontinent, and that Californian New Age dogs are vegetarian? Do British dogs bark only when they're spoken to, and do they always look both ways before crossing the road. Are Gilgit dogs descended from

Alexander's pets? Do Chipko dogs have a problem with trees? And Humla dogs carry loads of salt in from Tibet, don't they?





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