

NRs 40 DM 9
IRs 25 £ 4
Nu 30 US\$ 5
US \$4.75 Canada \$5.75

Vol 7 No 6
Nov/Dec 1994

HIMAL

HIMALAYAN MAGAZINE

Angry Hills



Uttarakhand State of Mind

Gorkhali Dukha • Nepali Musalman



**Northwest makes it easy to go to America.
With a choice of 8 gateways. And connection to 200 cities beyond.**

Choose a connecting city that suits you best :
Bangkok, Hong Kong or Singapore.

Northwest has daily 747 flight via Tokyo or
Seoul straight to the U.S.A.

Be sure to ask about WorldPerks, the most

generous free flight plan there is.

General Sales Agent in Nepal :

Malla Treks,
Malla Hotel Arcade,
Kathmandu, Tel. 418 389

NORTHWEST AIRLINES 
SOME PEOPLE JUST KNOW HOW TO FLY.SM



HIMAL

Vol 7 No 6 Nov/Dec 1994

अस्त्युत्तरस्यां विशि देवतात्मा
हिमालयो नाम नगाधिराजः
पूर्वापरी 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)

Editor	Kanak Mani Dixit
Associate Editor	Manisha Aryal
Photography	Bikas Rauniar
Administration	Balaram Sharma Prakriti Karmacharya

INSIDE...

COVER

10 An Uttarakhand
State of Mind
by Manisha Aryal



*Uttarakhand's
agitation for
wresting a separate
hill state from Uttar
Pradesh is
misunderstood in the
plains. It is also
misunderstood by
many in the hills.*

24 FEATURES

Dukha during the World Wars

by Pratyoush Onta

*The world knows of the Gurkha soldier's bravery but not his humanity.
He, too, feels pain, fears death, and is capable of mourning the loss of a
friend.*



35 How the Crescent Fares in Nepal

by Sudhindra Sharma

*'Hindu Nepal' has provided more security to its
Muslim citizens despite the open border to the
south. This should not change.*

45 KATHA

"The Soldier" by Bisweswor Prasad Koirala

(translation by Dorje Tshering Lepcha)

"Said the Woodcutter," poem by Maj. Arun Rao

DEPARTMENTS

3 Mail

Patronising Porters
Drukpa Victors
Tamang Sources
Terai, Terrai or Tarai

31 Review

Victor Chan's "Tibet Handbook"

32 Voices

42 Himalaya Mediafile

48 Briefs

Population Breakdown
Chomolongma in b/w
Loba Art
Placenames: Kalimpong
Ujeli's Lament
Seabuckthorn's Spread
Rape of Tibetan Woodlands
Disaster on Pisang

54 Know Your Himal

56 Abominably Yours

Cover: Angry demonstrator makes a point in Dehradun, early November, walking ahead of a banner that proclaims "Uttarakhand Samyukta Sangharsha Samiti". Picture: Manisha Aryal.

Himal © 1994 is published every two months by Himal Association, PO Box 42, Patan Dhoka, Lalitpur, Nepal. Tel: 977 1 523845, Fax: 521013.
ISSN 1012 9804, Library of Congress Card, Catalogue No. 88 912882. Subscription information on page 5. Printing: Jagadamba Offset. Tel: 521393.



TAKE OFF

IN

NEPAL

FLY



EVEREST AIR

DURBAR MARG

P.O. BOX : 482, KATHMANDU, NEPAL

Tel: # 228392 # 230672 # 222290 # 217540

FAX : 977-1- 228266. TLX : 2388 EVEX NP

GSA Alltalia



Poets and Intellectuals

Dipak Gyawali's article on the Nepali intelligentsia ("*Buddhijibi: The Intelligentsia Has No Clothes*" Sep/Oct 1994) made many important points and identified some crucial questions with exceptional clarity. I found certain passages quite gut-wrenching: why indeed has no one sought to explain the lynching of policemen in 1990? It is an event that I still cannot explain in terms of my own experience of Nepal.

On the other hand, I found the photograph of a group of Nepali writers with the caption "ad nauseam" a little depressing. The photo shows some of Nepal's most notable writers: for example, at second from left there sits Mohan Koirala, whose poetry richly deserves to be better known despite its dense complexity.

Certainly, Nepal needs the involvement of intellectuals right across the spectrum of national life. Certainly, Nepali literature has not spread to the villages as it should (though I suspect that Gyawali exaggerates the extent of its absence—I have seen copies of Bhanubhakta's *Ramayana* in the most unlikely places, and Devkota's *Muna-Madan* still sells in huge quantities). Certainly, a land filled with poets and writers but devoid of a professional

intelligentsia lacks a healthy balance. On the other hand, literature in Nepali (and increasingly in other languages of Nepal as well) is often rich and vibrant, and deserves to be recognised as such.

Michael J. Hutt
SOAS, London

Patronising Porters

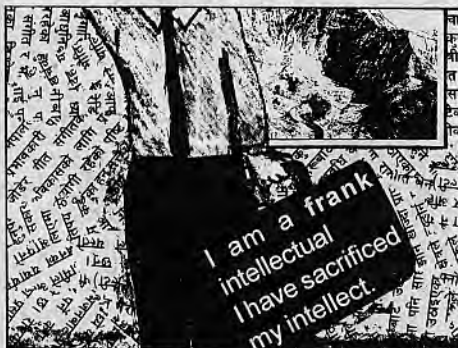
I applaud and share Doug Scott's sentiments concerning the neglected condition of many porters who carry loads in the Himalaya ("*Slave Wages on the Trail*" Jan/Feb 1994), but disagree with his assumptions and conclusions, which appear to reflect a common misunderstanding. In summary, it is technically impossible to fix a minimum wage for portering, due to its dispersed, casual, competitive and non-skilled nature. Further, virtually any attempt to do so will likely result in the opposite of the intended effect. Below are some reasons for this.

1. The Nepalis themselves, traditionally and presently throughout Nepal, are the primary source of portering wages. Foreign trekkers and climbers comprise a fraction of the porters' clientele. Clearly, this fraction may not be insignificant: already in certain areas, trek-tourists and climbers have very effectively inflated porter wages (through supply and demand, and inattention to prevailing rates) to the point where Nepalis cannot easily afford them. In a broad radius around trek and climbing routes it is the Nepali villagers who are not happy with what are considered to be the already high prices for porters. The villagers will be the first to resist further inflation in these rates or the setting of a floor rate, which Mr. Scott proposes.
2. Regulation of low-altitude

portering in the Himalaya would discriminate against the poorer and less resourceful porters. Which porters get a place within the higher wage structure (or union or whatever mechanism is used to assure a higher, non-competitive wage scale) and which porters don't? Who or what agency sets and controls the wages, and how much will the porter have to pay the regulators in order to get credentials, ID card or otherwise be assigned a job? How do you control the tap on the bottomless reservoir of aspiring porters who will flock to the region where such augmented wages are being paid?

3. For a formal system of porter wage enhancement to work, much of the initiative for it should come from Nepalis. However, the only call for such regulation, I believe, will come from government bureaucrats, interest group organisers and others who stand to gain personally (financially) by insinuating themselves into the existing free market interaction between porter and client.

4. Presently, porters do use cartels and strikes to extract higher wages. This is done in an informal manner, without regulatory middlemen designating themselves as necessary for the "common good". To say that they need formal assistance or regulation is patronising, and implies that they are incapable of doing this effectively themselves, which they very definitely are. While trying to get village development supplies delivered to rural areas, I have had long and often bothersome negotiations with porters. Ultimately, in every case, the porters are pleased with the outcome of the negotiations and the local villagers are distressed to have to pay higher rates. The Nepalis do not need ill-informed





We were two, now we are three (editorially speaking). Basanta Thapa (centre) has joined as Editor of our Nepali Himal quarterly, which will hit the newstands shortly. The other two in the picture are Manisha Aryal and Kanak Mani Dixit.

Dawa, Dixit and Dago

Lyonpo Dawa Tsering never fails to surprise, and his latest interview ("House of Cards" Jul/Aug 1994) is no exception. The Foreign Minister states that the national dress was required to be worn in only dzongs, monasteries, government offices, schools and functions. Since he has always maintained in his previous (many) interviews that the national dress was compulsory and was for the purpose of protecting national identity and heritage, why this sudden departure now? He cannot say that it has never been compulsory as there are thousands of receipts of fines imposed for not wearing the national dress.

What former Indian Foreign Secretary J.N.Dixit has to say in his interview in the same issue regarding the possibility of militancy are shocking. How can a senior Indian bureaucrat make such statements which clearly constitute interference in Bhutan's internal matters? He states that India would not interfere in internal matters of another country while in the next breath he says that India will crush any militancy. Moreover, his statement clearly indicates that India would have no qualms in asserting her power whether on Bhutanese or Nepali soil in order to preserve her interests. Let me inform Dixit that no Bhutanese or Nepali will tolerate aggression by any country as implied in his interview.

Statements such as those by Dixit give a false picture and add to problems rather than solve them. They hurt the sentiments of the people at the grassroots and result in anti-Indian sentiments, something that he certainly seems to be aware of. A senior diplomat like Dixit should strive to promote people-to-people relations rather than pick sides in a fight that does not involve him.

Finally, though your issue as a whole was quite interesting, the lack of any reference to one more

player in the Bhutanese crisis seems to have been an oversight. I am referring, of course, to Home Minister Dago Tsering.

*Tenzing Zangpo
General Secretary (I)
Bhutan Peoples Party*

Like Victor over Vanquished

Though Kanak Mani Dixit's entry into our country was deliberately blocked by Foreign Minister Dawa Tsering, we senior citizens of Bhutan in exile—the Druk Yul Council—deeply appreciate Himal's efforts to expose the skeletons on the Thimphu shelves through its in-depth study and correct assessment.

A perfect yes-man and himself an economic migrant to Bhutan, Lyonpo Dawa Tsering has always been careful and elusive in his strategy for survival. However, with Himal's probing in the fax interview ("House of Cards" Jul/Aug 1994) and his faltering replies, those of us in exile are given the opportunity to feel the pulse of the regime and the direction of its internal and external policies. As the movement in exile gathers momentum and the winds of change are felt by the people inside the country, the weaknesses of the regime and its coterie are being exposed, making us confident that the day is not far off when all Bhutanese in exile will return to our beloved homeland with honour and dignity.

Lyonpo Tsering's replies to Himal's questions serve only the interim interests of the Royal Government and its supporters, not that of Bhutan's people. On behalf of the Druk Yul Council, made up of

Bhutanese elders in exile including village mandals (headmen) and Tshongdu (National Assembly) members, let me respond to some of the points pressed by the Minister.

As regards Nepali-speakers in Bhutan, it is not true that the government suddenly discovered as late as 1988 the presence of large numbers of non-nationals of Nepali



foreign goodwill to make this difficult situation more so.

5. The Rai porters who come to the Khumbu, in particular, hail from poor farming backgrounds. The ones who leave their villages to make long portering trips are considered by villagers to be the more resourceful among them. They are now significantly wealthier than the average. For them, portering (at the trek routes' present rates) can be compared to getting summer work on the Alaska pipeline or fighting forest fires: tough work for a short period, making them (relatively) rich and allowing them to return to their families and farms. An Everest base camp porter now earns wages comparable to that of a Director General of a government department in Kathmandu.

6. Low portering wages cannot logically be compared to trade in ivory, child labour, racism in South Africa, etc., as Mr. Scott suggests. These are undesirable and reprehensible. It is not clear how porters are mistreated or exploited in the process of portering. Portering is good for both the porters and the clients—if it were not, you wouldn't see porters so anxious to get the work.

My comments concerne low altitude portering. There are many valid issues that concern porters carrying at high altitudes, and it is clear that special—and very distinct—consideration should be made for them.

*Broughton Coburn
Wilson, Wyoming*

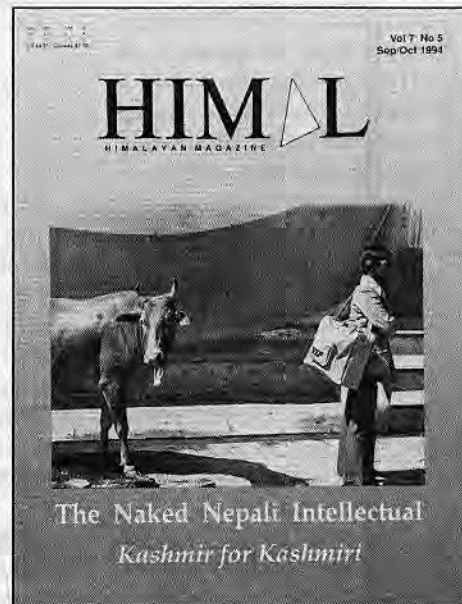
origin working in government and private organisations. Being a matter of national importance, this matter had been discussed in the Tshongdu much earlier and it was the Assembly Members of Southern Bhutan who pushed for a bill to check this illegal influx. Once the act was passed, however, for reason best known to itself the Government allowed over-zealous officials to outdo themselves in its implementation. With the result that the very Assembly members and mandals who had submitted the proposals today survive confused and dejected as refugees in the Jhapa and Morang camps, or languish in jails inside Bhutan.

While every citizen recognised the need for a national language and dress policy, the overnight implementation of compulsory wearing of the *gho* and *kira* was carried out with unnecessary vehemence in all five districts of Southern Bhutan, accompanied by police harassment, fines and incarceration. It is not true, as claimed by His Excellency, that the national dress is required only in dzongs, monasteries, and government offices. In southern Bhutan, everybody has to wear the *gho* and *kira* on all occasions and this compulsion exists till the present. Brahman pundits attending a Hindu mandir or *pathsala* have to wear the *gho*. In Gaylengphug, one of the larger districts of the South, the law was made "as difficult as possible" under orders of the Dzongdag. I was witness

to this and my plea for humanitarian concern later led to my arrest and 21 months in jail without charge or trial (from 9 December 1990 till 11 September 1992, when I was released under "royal amnesty").

When the Minister says that the Lhotshampa supported the policy of *Driglam Namzha* in meetings with His Majesty the King, may I clarify that all such meetings were designed to suit the convenience of the self-seeking nobility and the Royal Government. Dzongdag Rinzin Gyaltshen of Sarbhang told me in January 1990 that it was not necessary to take suggestions and help from any individual in carrying out the King's commands. One can well imagine the response of frightened and ignorant citizens when the highest authority of a district gives such signals. Lyonpo Tsering's claim that the *Driglam Namzha* policy was deliberately distorted by a nexus of illegal immigrants and a group of Lhotshampa is not correct. It was rather the other way around.

Similarly, how can the Minister state that the Nepali language is not suppressed in Bhutan when Nepali textbooks were burnt in public, and children were punished for speaking Nepali in school? One well-known Northerner headmaster running a school in the South told me that the day he passed the order, stillness fell over the whole school, the children stopped playing games, communications were in whispers, and within a fortnight the



very life of the school had ebbed away.

Some of the Lhotshampa who opposed the burning of the Nepali textbooks, which contained the National Anthem and photographs of the kings of Druk Yul, were branded as anti-nationals and are today passing their lives in the refugee camps. A retired civil servant, I had a nursery school for tiny tots in Gaylengphug. The Nepali syllabus was withdrawn mid-session in 1990 without notice. The Royal Bhutan Police authorities would enter the school at odd hours to check if the toddlers were following *Driglam Namzha*. The children suffered from the heavy clothing due to the immense heat and humidity.

As regards the Nepali language's use in the National Assembly and by the *Kuensel* weekly and the Bhutan Broadcasting Service, this is just an opportunistic manipulation, like the *tika* ceremony conducted every year in the Palace during Dushhera. These things help the regime project an image of linguistic and religious benevolence, which is not really there on the ground. Every 'elected member' in the National Assembly and Royal Advisory Council is required to be fluent in Dzongkha, the language of less than 20 percent of Ngalongs, the ruling class.

It is incorrect to say that the Government was caught totally unawares when the violent demonstrations broke out in the South in September 1990. The Royal Government was certainly aware of the

Subscription Rates

Only Bank-drafts acceptable for subscription orders made to *Himal* in Nepal. Do NOT send cash in mail.

Individuals		1 Year	2 yrs
Nepal	NRs	220	400
India	IRs	140	260
Bhutan	Nu	175	330
Other S. Asian Countries	US\$	12	20
North America	US\$	22.50	40
Germany	DM	50	90
United Kingdom & Ireland	£	20	35
Netherlands	Dfl	45	80
Elsewhere	US\$	25	45

Institutional		1 Year	2 yrs
Nepal	NRs	600	1100
India	IRs	260	500
Bhutan	Nu	330	640
Other S. Asian Countries	US\$	25	45
North America	US\$	35	60
Germany	DM	70	120
United Kingdom & Ireland	£	30	50
Netherlands	Dfl	100	180
Elsewhere	US\$	45	80

Send subscriptions & related correspondence to:

South Asia: P.O. Box 42, Lalitpur, Nepal (tel 977 1 523845; fax 977 1 521013), or Central News Agency, 23/90 Connaught Circus, New Delhi 110001

Japan: Akio Horiuchi, P.O.Box 9, Kiyose, Tokyo, 204 Japan.

Australia: Indra Ban, 12 Norfolk St., Paddington 2021, Sydney, Australia.

North America: Barbara Bella & Associates, 500 Sansome Street, Suite 101, PO Box 470758 San Francisco, CA 94147

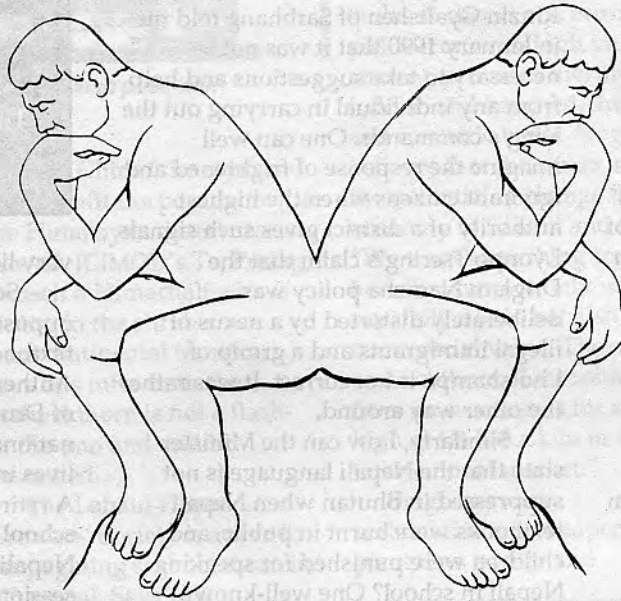
United Kingdom & Ireland: Joti Giri (Ref: H), 221 Ashly Gardens, Emery Hill Street, London SW1P 1PA

The Netherlands: C. F. de Stoppelaar, Foundation Himalaya, Keizersgracht 463, 1017 DK Amsterdam

Switzerland: Helene Zingg, Tannenweg 18, CH-3073, Guemligen, Switzerland

Rest of Europe: Durga Press (Himal), Luitpoldstr. 20, D-82211, Herrsching, Germany

For once, Think twice !



**Are you looking for the cheapest rates ?
Or, do you want value for your money ?**

At Summit Nepal Trekking we design our programmes
that ensure you get full value for your money .

Write or call us at :



SUMMIT NEPAL TREKKING

P.O.Box 1406,Kupondol,Kathmandu,Nepal

Tel:525408,521810

Fax: 977 1 523737

brewing trouble; it was only that the top-heavy ruling coterie, preoccupied with its own selfish needs, provided no room for the opinions of the disenfranchised Southerners. A gulf was deliberately being created between the people, the administrators and the King. No wonder that there were open demonstrations of unexpected magnitude covering the length and breadth of the South, involving almost half of the country's total population.

As for who is using "violence", it is the regime that has been the perpetrator. Only the people of Southern Bhutan know the fury of the violence unleashed on innocents by the Royal Bhutan Army and the Royal Bhutan Police as they marched into the villages. Arson, looting, plunder, rape, mass arrest, torture and murder were carried out as if by victors over the vanquished. Was all this necessary?

The Government could have declared a state of emergency, but was it necessary to withdraw all United Nations volunteers from the South, scrap all development projects, close down all school and health units, control the movement of essential commodities, and construct army bunkers on all motorable roads?

It is clear that the Government wanted some disturbance to originate from the Lhotshampa, so that a flushing and cleansing operation could be executed in response, which would also act as a warning to those in the North and East should they decide to align with the Lhotshampa against the regime. And so the Easterners and Northerners watched these developments in silence, disbelief and horror. Those who openly sympathised with the Lhotshampa were reviled and subjected to torture and detention without trial.

There has been no famine, racial conflict, plague or natural calamity in Druk Yul these past few years. Would it be bad manners on my part to ask the Foreign Minister, whom I have known for more than 30 years, why today a hundred thousand bonafide citizens of Bhutan are seeking refuge outside the

country? People in the tens of thousands do not just flee their home and hearth where their forefathers have lived for generations, unless something sinister has managed to dislodge them.

Readers of Himal should know that the division of communities within Bhutan is an artificial one, created by vested interests in the nobility. For generations, the people of all the three regions of Bhutan lived together in harmony, closely guarding their *nang-*

strength, however, lies in our mutual understanding and unity in this day of peril and test. The ethnic strife knowingly or unknowingly encouraged by King Jigme Singye Wangchuk has brought untold misery to His Majesty's subjects. This situation has to be rectified. No matter where we belong, North, East or South, we are all Drukpa from the land of the Druk Yul and in this order lies our strength.

Sherab Wangchuk
Druk Yul Council



Hard Livelihood: Conference on the Himalayan Porter

3,4 August 1995, Kathmandu

Himal is organising a two-day meeting to discuss portering in these mountains. Topics to include: the portering life and the changing economy; impact of roads and air cargo; health, nutrition, physiology; load, muscle and bone; equity and collective bargaining; future of portering; etc.

For more information please turn to *Upcoming* section on page 49.

masu (finger and nail) relationship. The late King Jigme Dorji Wangchuk used to tell the elderly citizens and the members of the National Assembly that his kingdom had two major communities, one being the Hindu Lhotshampa and the other the combined community of Buddhist Ngalong/Sarchop. These two communities were his eyes, which he cared for, loved and respected equally. Consider Druk Yul like a *roti*, he said, to be shared equally by both the groups and not to fight over who should take the greater share, lest it be eaten by someone else.

We have lived together like one big family. Only of late has there been a slight divide in the stream. The

Ethereal Pursuit

Charles Ramble, in his review of *Nepal: A Travel Survival Kit* challenges its author for deriving 'Tamang' from horse traders ("Writings in Monochrome" Jul/Aug 1994).

Ta means horse and *mang* means trader. My ancestors came from Tibet and they were horse traders who crossed the border into Nepal to sell their horses and salt in the Valley. On their way back, they usually brought back cow and water buffalo skin.

Later, they started to settle in the Valley and that was the beginning of Tamang settlements. This information is what has been passed down through generations and is also contained in old books. If Ramble has information to the contrary, I would, as a Tamang, very much like to know.

Karna Tamang
Kathmandu

Charles Ramble responds:

Karna Tamang has caught me out. As he suspects, I have no concrete information about the etymology of the name Tamang. If I was dismissive about the derivation proposed in the *Travel Survival Kit*, it was for the simple reason that I'd never heard it before and was unable to have it corroborated by any of the Tamang-speakers I know. My quibble was not with *ta*, horse, but *mang*, trader. If, as Tamang suggests, the word *mang* does indeed mean trader, then that rather clinches the matter.

My knowledge of Tamang language and culture is sparse, to say the least, and my acquaintance comes largely via what Tibetan sources have to say concerning the possible relationship between certain Nepali peoples and archaic civilisations north of the Himalaya. Since some of these sources and secondary accounts are not always readily accessible, perhaps it would not be out of place to summarise a few aspects of the material here.

As for the etymology of the name Tamang, it is true that the most frequently-cited derivations link the name to Tibetan terms. (Let us brush aside the minor fact that the quest for definitive etymologies of ethnonyms is, for the most part, a hopelessly ethereal pursuit.) Gendun Choephel, that remarkable maverick, was probably the first to suggest a connection between Tamang and the Tibetan *ra-dmang*, literally "army of horses" or "cavalry", describing the people as a Nepali tribe "noted for their valour". (The name Gurung, incidentally, is also sometimes given a Tibetan military derivation as *gur-srung*, 'tent-guard' or 'sentinel'.) Alexander Macdonald (1975) has assessed these and a number of other suggestions regarding the origins of *Tamang*, including Roerich's *ra-mangs*, which would mean something like "rich in horses" (and perhaps, by implication, 'horse-traders?'), to which we might add *ra-dmangs*, 'horse-people'. No doubt there may be other suggestions along these lines.

To the best of my knowledge, the earliest reference in Tibetan literature to the name Tamang occurs in the eighteenth-century Gungthang Chronicle of Tshewang Norbu. A passage in this work records the thirteenth century establishment, in southern Lo (now in Mustang District) of a fort "for the domination of the *Ta mang se mon*" (cited in David Jackson, 1978). The 'Tamang' in this case presumably refers to the Thakali of the lower Thak Khola, who to the present day refer to themselves as 'Tamang'. (It may be noted that the migration history of the Gurung, who call themselves *Tamu*, suggests early links to the Upper Kali Gandaki.) On the basis of his research in this area, Michael Vinding suggests, in a forthcoming work, a local etymology of the name Tamang which I understand to be cognate with the Tibetan *sTod-mi*, 'highland people'. There are also some Tibetan etymologies based on the first syllable being taken, not as *ta*, but as *tam* (<Tib. *gtam*), meaning 'speech'.

But what about the '*se-mon*' mentioned by Tshewang Norbu? It is not clear from Tibetan text whether *Ta mang se mon* designates one, two or three groups of people. Let us provisionally assume the latter. *Mon* is a term that occurs among Tibetan-speakers throughout the Himalaya with reference to non-Tibetans to the south, and is still used by the Tamang Thakalis to denote the Magar and Parbatiya populations further down the valley. *Se* is a particularly interesting term that deserves some attention. It survives mainly in compounds such as *Seke* (*Se-skad*), the 'Se language', the name given by Mustang's Bhotleys to the various Tibeto-Burman dialects spoken by the Thakali, Manangi, Gurung and Tamang. The name *Se-rib* (which incidentally appears in the *Dunhuang Annals*, the earliest known Tibetan sources) describes "a large region encompassing many villages in the Kali Gandaki Valley south of Lo" (Jackson, *ibid*).

There is some evidence that *Se* may in fact be an archaic ethnonym: the inhabitants of certain *Seke*-speaking communities north of Baragaon, in Mustang, are still referred to locally as *Sekar* and *Senak*, the 'White Se' and the 'Black Se'. Andras Hofer (1980) has sug-

Correction on Tigers

Charles McDougal asks us to correct several editorial errors in his article "Save the Nepali Tiger" (Sep/Oct 1994).

In the contents page at the front, the first sentence of the article summary should read: "There must be 500 or more tigers in continuous distribution for the population to be considered genetically viable by scientists." The article intro should read: "Their unbroken habitat having vanished..." instead of "Their open habitat having vanished..." In the box item "A Buffer for the Tiger", the number of villages surrounding the Royal Chitwan National Park is 31 and not 23, and they comprise 42,590 households. Elsewhere, the financial support for an anti-poaching

intelligence network was provided not by the organisation IUCN but by the International Trust for Nature Conservation (ITNC).

On the role of the Royal Nepal Army, McDougal would like to add the following: "Although in the past there was sometimes a lack of coordination between the Army and the wildlife authorities, in the past couple of years they have worked closely together. To supplement the vigilance of the Army, the wardens of the Royal Chitwan National Park and the Royal Bardia National Park have set up their own special anti-poaching teams to patrol especially vulnerable areas with pristine habitats, such as Bandarjhula Island in Chitwan, and the Babai Valley in Bardia."

gested an etymological link between this term *Se* and *Sain/Sem*, the Newari expression for Bhotleys in general and Tamangs in particular. The word now has pejorative overtones, as indeed do *Bhotey* and the *Sekar/Senak* of Mustang.

But might *Se* not once have been a perfectly respectable ethnonym? *Se* is in fact the name of one of the early Tibetan proto-clans, and as Rolf Stein has pointed out in a pioneering work in the subject, it occurs as an epithet of the Turko-Mongol Azha people of Si-hia in the region of Kokonor, destroyed by Genghis Khan in 1226. The name also occurs in the Zhang-zhung region of Western Tibet, mainly in compounds such as *Se-bon* (probably a type of priest) and *Ti-se* (Mt. Kailash).

But what has this to do with Nepal? The migration histories of a number of Himalayan peoples point to origins in the north-east of the Tibetan plateau. To cite just one example, the original homeland of the Gurung is said to be Chon/Tshong, which rather than being a reference to Tsang in Central Tibet, as some have suggested, may represent the Tibetan name for Mi-nyag (Tsong), a part of Si-hia. (Following a rather different line of enquiry my colleagues Bhovar Tamu and Pa-chyu Yarjung Kromchain Tamu have also suggested the Kokonor region as the point of departure of the Gurung.) Lack of space makes it impossible to give more than a cursory glance at the material, but the implied parallels are quite striking. Thus, the name *Se* and *Khyung*, which are often conjoined in the Tibetan proto-clan histories, are closely associated even now in Mustang; and *IDong/gDong*, another Tibetan proto-clan, is also the name of the founding ancestor of Dimdung, one of the major Tamang clans of the present day.

Perhaps it may turn out that we are only dealing with the migration of names, not of people, but the association nevertheless seem

to be worth pursuing. Karna Tamang is undoubtedly right: if a definitive etymology of the name Tamang is to be found anywhere, it will surely be within the sphere of Tamang language and tradition; and while a comparative ethnographic and historical perspective seems to provide no conclusive answers, it may at least serve to widen the boundaries of that sphere.

Silly Letter

The intrepid Bill Aitken recalls having "struggled steeply to the windy buggials" (*Mail Jul/Aug 1994*). All of us who know the Himalaya have our own memories. Thanks, Bill, for sharing that one.

Aitken might not have noticed, but there are *people* in those mountains—not only adventurers and those who carry their gear—but people who make their lives there. Too bad Aitken did not make it to the Himalayan Film Festival in Kathmandu; he might have learned something. Many of the films shown were excellent. Victor Banerji's *Splendour of Roop Kund and Garhwal* was, unfortunately, not in that category.

Are we to believe in Roop Kund skeletons, some lying on top of the ice, some fully articulated, with rings and bracelets on their intact fingers and arms? And what about the 'Garhwali' woman who greets a young trekker by the temple in a singularly American manner?

I did live in Landour for a time while doing research in the hills to the

east (contrary to Aitken's surmises, it was in the 1950s not 1960s, and I had no connection with the language school), and perhaps it is a result of this that I can recognise a Woodstock girl, even in pseudo-Garhwali dress!

My verdicts: nice film-maker, lousy film, fatuous correspondent, silly letter.

Gerald D. Berreman
Berkeley, California

Terai, Terrai or Tarai

We read with great interest Kurt W. Meyer's article, "Tarai with Blinkers" (May/June 1994), and totally agree with his basic criticism of Ram Dayal Rakesh (1994) and Hari Bansh Jha for not giving any coverage to Tharu peoples in their books on the Nepal Tarai. We regret, as does Meyer, that the authors seem to view tarai culture as one singular entity and not as containing cultural pluralism.

We must therefore recognise the diversity of the ethnic groups of the tarai, while also noting that there are similarities and relationships among the groups. The Rana Tharu of the Far West do not celebrate Dasain (as Rakesh maintains they do), but only Deepawali. In this and in other special rituals they are very different from the neighbouring Dangora Tharu, while we as outsiders tend to classify them both as 'Tharu' and postulate a unity of

Tharu culture. It is similar to Rakesh seeming to find a unity in the Maithili world.

Notwithstanding the above, we feel that authors Rakesh and Jha should not only be criticised for their failures, but also commended for writing substantial books about some aspects concerning the tarai. It must be said, however, that the titles of their respective books reviewed by Meyer are definitely misleading.

We also feel that those who work on the problems of the tarai must try to be more tolerant of each other's work. For example, when Jha asks "What purpose does the new word 'Tharu language' serve?", this can be taken to mean two things: a denial of a proper language or a denial of unity in language between Tharu groups. If we read Jha's statement with tolerance we may interpret it to mean the latter rather than the former.

Rakesh, Jha and others have been criticised for postulating a special unity of culture in the tarai which does not seem to correspond with reality. Meyer himself has been criticised by anthropologists Kittelsen and Odegaard in Kathmandu's *Sunday Post* for ignoring the basic dual division between the Rana Tharu of the Far West and other groups such as the Dangora. The latter groups seem more ready to embrace the pan-Tharu indigenous movement and the Buddhist origin myths, while the Rana Tharu are more possibly Hindu.

We agree with Meyer that the best review of the Tharu culture of his time was by Srivastava, but we must not perceive "Srivastava's Tharu" as the model for "the Tharu world". We visited Srivastava in Benaras in late October and came to know a bit more about his pioneering study on Tharu culture of the early 1950s.

Unfortunately, it seems that his research presents problems similar to that of the Nepali authors we are discussing—a unity of culture is found where one may not have existed. Incidentally, such cultural unity might be more true in India where there is less diversity among the Tharu, but it certainly does not work for Nepal.

To aid future students of Tharu culture, we would recommend the following works on the Tharu: Gisella

Krauskopf's work in French, Rajaures' articles in *Kailash*, McDonough's these (a work that needs to be published), and the 1993 book by the later Amir Hasan of Lucknow (not mentioned by Meyer) *Affairs of an Indian Tribe: The Story of My Tharu Relatives* (ISBN 81-85936-00-5), which is about Rana Tharu.

Concerning the various Tharu groups of eastern Nepal, we are still awaiting a substantial anthropological study. However, the Eastern and Chitwan Tharu seem rather similar to the Dangora and, furthermore, today they are so educated and politically active that in the end they may be the ones to write about themselves. The main point to emphasise is that as scholars we not make generalisations that are too sweeping. Nor should we put all people with the same ethnic name or surname in one group before establishing that this actually reflects reality.

Making a plea for reliable information and statistics on the Tharu, Meyer hopes that "support could be found for the Center for Nepal and Asian Studies (CNAS)..." He should know that researchers in CNAS are in fact engaged in Tharu studies under a Norwegian-financed project called "Environment, Development and Democracy", and a book on the results is forthcoming.

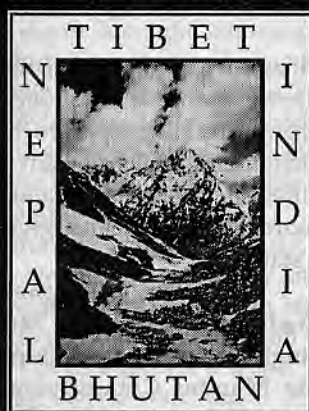
Lastly, we might not always agree on how to interpret sociological realities, but it would be nice if those of us working in the tarai could at least agree on a common English spelling for the subject of our study. Shall it be terrai, terai or tarai? We suggest the last, following the trend set by Himal.

Harald O. Skar
Ganesh Man Gurung, CNAS
Kathmandu

Readers are invited to comment, criticise or add to information and opinions appearing in Himal. Letters should be to the point and may be edited/shortened. Unsigned letters and those without return addresses will not be entertained. Please include daytime contact telephone number, if available.

PO Box 42, Lalitpur, Nepal
fax: 977-1-521013
email: himal@mosnepal.ernet.in

Himalayan High Treks



Free Catalog (800) 455-8735

Outside the U.S.A. & Canada please call:

001.415.861.2391 or write to us:

Himalayan High Treks

241 Dolores Street, San Francisco CA
94103-2211 U. S. A. Thanks!

Angry Hills

An Uttarakhand State of Mind

When Delhi papers label the demand for Uttarakhand secessionist, racist and rejectionist, they ignore the economic and cultural factors behind the agitation. Meanwhile, because the hill people lack coherent ideology and organisation, their righteous anger and energies are being squandered.

by Manisha Aryal

The eight hill districts of Uttar Pradesh state that make up Kumaon and Garhwal have always made news quite disproportionate to their size and population. More than elsewhere in South Asian hill or plain, Garhwalis and Kumaonis have been fighters for social justice—whether combatting turn-of-century feudals to emancipate forced labour, daring the British in pre-Independence times, or fighting government and big business through the Chipko movement.

Today, the hill people are once again generating news. Their battle with authority is approaching a decisive juncture. After a period of

relative quiet in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when the Chipko and anti-alcohol movements had lost their steam, the hills are once again alive with slogans and mass action. The population demands Uttarakhand, not just a collective name for Kumaon and Garhwal, but a new state of the Indian Union to be wrested from Uttar Pradesh. The six million *pahadis* of Uttarakhand want the centuries of domination by “outsiders” and “plains people” to end.

While an undercurrent for separate statehood has always been part of the earlier agitations, it was only in the middle of 1994 that the final fuse was lit. Instead of fighting

village overlords, the British, the timber mafia or the hooch merchants, the hill people are this time challenging the reluctant power elites of the Indian mainland to redraw the map and give them a state.

In March 1994, the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav decided to implement the Mandal Commission recommendation of reserving 27 percent jobs in government and places in schools and colleges for socially and economically backward castes and classes. On an Uttar Pradesh-wide scale, this recommendation was hardly a problem. The gigantic state, largest in India and with a

resolution was left collecting dust till the U.P. Assembly was dissolved in 1993. Mulayam Singh, on the other hand, sent his Assembly resolution to Delhi and put the ball in the court of the central government.

With his Samajwadi Party's support base mainly among the socially and educationally "backwards" of the plains, Mulayam Singh could afford to give up cantankerous Uttarakhand. Only one of the 19 members of the state assembly from the hills belongs to Samajwadi, whereas the BJP has ten and the Congress six. By allowing an Uttarakhand state, Mulayam Singh would not only look magnanimous, in the process he would be diluting BJP and Congress representation in the U.P. State Assembly in Lucknow.

Come July, the equation

changed. Lucknow decided to implement the Mandal recommendation across the state, to which the hill people cried foul. Mulayam Singh's government, which survives on the sufferance of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) with whom it also vies for votes of the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and the "other backwards classes" (OBC) in the plains, could no longer afford magnanimity. And there was no faulting Mulayam Singh's logic. How could he enforce two reservation policies in one state? Until the Centre decided to grant statehood to Uttarakhand, Kumaon and Garhwal were still part of U.P., and would have to accept reservation.

Separateness and Identity

Uttarakhand's separateness has its origins in geography, and over the course of history the hill economy and culture diverged significantly from that of the flatlands. The British recognised the situation when their suzerainty extended to the region. The authorities of the Raj treated Uttarakhand separately even though it came under the United Provinces, the rest of which was all plains. The hill districts were exempted from numerous rules and regulations which applied to the plains.

These distinctions were maintained after Independence. Even today, the forest policies here differ from those for the other 56 districts of U.P., and law and order is largely maintained by the *Patwari* or Revenue Police. Even though part of U.P., the hill districts receive IRs 400 crore annually from the Centre over and above what is provided in the state budget. An Additional Secretary sits in the *Uttarakhand Vikas Bibhag*, the development ministry for the hills in Lucknow.

The Indian State's cognisance of Uttarakhand's distinct identity is also a result of more than five decades of stridency by Kumaonis and Garhwalis. As early as 1938,

Jawaharlal Nehru conceded at a Congress Party meeting in Srinagar (Garhwal) that the hill people had a right to decide what they wanted for themselves. In 1946, the Kumaoni Govind Ballav Pant, then Premier of United Provinces, had to argue hard against a hill state, maintaining that the entity would be economically unfeasible. In 1952, during the final round of restructuring of the Union after the British departed, the undivided Communist Party of India put forward a demand for a hill state. It was rejected by the States Reorganisation Commission, which clubbed the hills with the adjoining plains as part of Uttar Pradesh.

However, the statehood demand was never forgotten. While the hill activists engaged themselves in other pressing causes, they occasionally descended to the plains to remind the Indian mainland that the desire for statehood had not died. Over the decades, the Boat Club grounds in New Delhi, India's national soap-box venue, saw sporadic mass meetings to demand for a separate Uttarakhand.

In July 1979, Uttarakhand Kranti Dal, a regional party which has a lone member in the present Uttar Pradesh Assembly, was formed with the specific agenda of achieving statehood. In 1987, a demonstration at the Boat Club sent off a memorandum to the Prime Minister demanding Uttarakhand.

Even after 47 years of independence, the socio-economic conditions in the hills have not changed significantly. Kumaon and Garhwal are still part of the "money order economy", running on remittances sent by menfolk in army and police and in menial positions all over the Ganga *maidan*. Lotteries have penetrated the hills; alcohol *bhattis* have begun to outnumber tea stalls as the alcohol ban has been lifted; forest mafia openly smuggle timber out of the hill forests; the income from tourism goes to plains interests and

Himachali Topi



Many activists of Kumaon and Garhwal have begun to sport the Himachali topi rather than the pahadi cap, which was an Uttarakhand gift to India's political world under the calling "Gandhi topi". Though this Uttarkhandi topi is still worn by hill villagers, as a political icon it is useless because it has been hijacked by the plains Congressmen. The resort to the Himachali cap seems both an attempt to reinforce distance from plains politics and a subliminal message that Uttarakhand wants statehood just as Himachal Pradesh did. Or it could be that the activists just want to keep their heads warm.

Nainital
rally
in
August.



ANUP SHAH

Bombay's rich receive subsidised land to open hotels and resorts. There is more ease of travel as a result of the highways built in the 1960s to confront possible Chinese aggression, but the roads also bring pilgrims and tourists by the million, and with them the associated conspicuous consumption, price rises, and siphoning of income to the plains businesses.

The peasantry has been largely neglected amidst the massive economic exploitation of the hills. The fact that Uttarakhand has sent numerous politicians to dance on the national stage in New Delhi via Uttar Pradesh—including three Chief Ministers—meant little as far as economic development and political decisions on behalf of Uttarakhand were concerned. The very scions of Uttarakhand, once they were in Delhi or Lucknow, became reluctant to push for statehood because this meant losing their Uttar Pradesh-wide clout which afforded them national

prominence. A political platform restricted to Uttarakhand paled in comparison.

Circle of Violence

The Chipko movement provided a safety valve to release the bottled-up frustrations of the hill folk in the 1970s and early 1980s. By the early 1990s, the pressure was once again up, with the hill population impelled by real and perceived slights of the New Delhi and Lucknow power-brokers.

According to Samsheer Singh Bist of the Uttarakhand Sangharsha Vahini, a non-political activist group, the reservation issue only acted as a catalyst for frustrations that had accumulated over the years. He says these had to do with, among others, the lifting in March of the alcohol ban which activists had worked so hard for; the overwhelming of hill society by accelerating tourism; and the Tehri Dam, being pushed on the hills by the central and state authorities.

Village after village was depopulated of its pahadi menfolk migrating down to find work, leaving behind only women, children and the elderly.

Says Bist, "There are so many other causes of our disenchantment. The people have now convinced themselves that the many problems of Uttarakhand will be solved only when we get a state of our own."

On 16 July, students met in the town of Pauri in Garhwal to discuss the Mandal recommendations and a government proposal to redraw village boundaries. The protests began two days later, when students gathered to collect college admission forms in Pithoragarh. By the end of July, Kumaon and Garhwal had seen numerous strikes, processions, and *chakkajams* which brought highway traffic to halt. On 8 August, police arrested Uttarakhand Kranti Dal leaders who were on hunger strike. In the stone pelting and lathi charge that followed, a fire brigade worker was killed.



SUBASH GUPTA

The hills, already agitated, became positively violent when on 17 August the Chief Minister saw fit to make an *pahad virodhi* (anti-hill) statement. He told reporters in Lucknow that the anti-reservationists must understand that his government was not elected to office by the people of the hills. What would happen to the hills if the plains decided to start an agitation in response? "My one signal can bring the people out to the streets," said Mulayam Singh. There would be no compromise on reservation.

Rallies and strikes became the order of the day; 'relay' hunger strikes were observed in makeshift huts all over the region. Struggle committees mushroomed to fight *arakshan* (reservation). Government vehicles were stoned or set on fire, schools and colleges shut down, and thousands of pilgrims stranded as the roads were blocked. Civil servants, post offices and banks joined the protests, and all of Uttarakhand stood still on 23 August in a *bandh* of historic proportions.

With Mulayam Singh's one statement, the alienation of the hills became complete.

On 31 August, believing that things were getting out of his control, Mulayam Singh invited student leaders with Samajwadi allegiances to Lucknow for talks. Even as the Chief Minister was briefing the media about an agreement to halt the agitation, the demonstrations in Kumaon and Garhwal became more violent.

On 1 September, 10,000 demonstrators came out on a procession at Khatima in Nainital District. Four were killed in police firing which a fact-finding mission of the Nainital Bar Association said lasted an hour and a half. The very next day, there were seven deaths in the tourist town of Mussoorie, including the lynching of a police officer by the mass.

A month after the Mussoorie massacre, on (Gandhiji) Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi's birthday, thousands of activists from Uttarakhand piled into some 300 buses and headed for a rally in Delhi. The plan was to *gherao* (encircle) the Parliament building and make a demand that would be heard all over the country.

Buses from Kumaon reached Delhi safely, but those from Garhwal taking the Roorkee-Muzaffarnagar route were stopped on the way. It is not clear whether the by-now notorious police action was ordered by New Delhi or Lucknow, but the pre-dawn hours of 2 October were a nightmare for the Garhwali activists, most of them still asleep in their seats.

"Hell broke lose at 5.30 am," wrote one reporter who was present. The police, members of the infamous Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC), chased the Garhwalis towards sugarcane fields, using tear gas and batons, shooting randomly and molesting

women. A kilometer long stretch of the road was said to be splattered with blood and broken glass.

The official toll for Muzaffarnagar is four killed. According to *Nainital Samachar* a credible information source, it is nine for Muzaffarnagar, seven in Mussoorie, and four for Khatima. By mid-November, more than 30 people had died in the four months of agitation.

Politics of Information

It is difficult for the observer, whether from the hills or elsewhere, to figure out exactly what happened in Muzaffarnagar, Khatima or Mussoorie. While the papers carried exaggerated or contradictory reports, for the activists misreporting was okay if it made the agitation look strong. Any weakness revealed to the press, any excessive claim that was exposed, they felt, would only affect the momentum. They were not averse to peddling propaganda, whereas reliable information was what both the hill public and the larger Indian population required.

Without reliable information sources, feeling completely abandoned by the rest of the country, and manipulated by opportunistic leaders, Uttarakhand has become a hotbed of rumours. Events are magnified and multiplied, a lathi-charge can become a massacre by the time news reaches the other



M. ARYAL

side of the hill.

In conversation, Uttarakhand intellectuals—so isolated and frustrated do they feel—often seem to have lost their sense of proportion. Take the Muzaffarnagar carnage, for example. Devananda Nautiyal, a Dehradun advocate, who was in one of the buses stopped by the PAC, says, "The police had their trucks ready to take away the dead. I don't

know where the bodies were taken, but I counted more than four hundred." Another lawyer, sitting across from him in the Dehradun kacheri, interrupts the conversation, "No, no! It wasn't four hundred, it was sixty-five." Did this second gentleman see anyone being killed, this writer asked. "No," he replied, "but I am sure it was not less than thirty."

A journalist from Pauri said he

had to climb a tree to save himself from the police. He claims to have had a good view of the cane fields and believes that hundreds of women were raped that night in Muzaffarnagar. Abadh Bihari Pant, a lawyer from Dehradun, believes there were deaths that day not only in Muzaffarnagar but also in Delhi. He said in early November, "Thousands have still not reached home."

Regional Press

Because there is no leadership and no coordination among the activist groups fighting for Uttarakhand, to a large extent it is the media that is shepherding the movement. The two papers with overwhelming clout are *Amar Ujala* and *Dainik Jagaran*, vernacular dailies from the adjacent plains which saw their sales increased manifold after the hills flared up in July.

The papers are clearly in competition and try to outdo each other in sensationalised reporting of events and inflating figures of the dead and wounded. Even *Amar Ujala*, which is the more popular of the two, has not been able to provide full coverage of the region. Its paper's Meerut edition, which is supplied to the five districts of Garhwal, carries little or no news of Kumaon, and its Barilly edition going to Kumaon leaves Garhwal alone.

Navin Nautiyal, a freelance journalist in Dehradun, derides this battle for the headlines and says that the sensational treatment given to the agitation by the two papers has escalated the level of violence in the hills. *Amar Ujala* and *Dainik Jagaran*, says Nautiyal, give currency to unverified rumours, exaggerate actual happenings and deliberately publish news which incite communal violence.

"If it weren't for those two papers, Uttarakhand would still have been a quiet place," maintains Kunwar Prasoon, a freelance writer

based in Tehri.

By end-September the people of Kumaon and Garhwal had begun to get wise to the circulation-based sensationalism of the press, and sales had begun to dip. But then in October, Chief Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav chose to ask his supporters to boycott both *Amar Ujala* and *Dainik Jagaran* as they were controlled by "communal and fascist forces". Any enemy of Mulayam's being a friend of the hills, the papers immediately gained in sales what they lost in credibility.

Unlike these two plains-based mass circulation regional dailies, there was one paper which was doing good journalism. *Nainital Samachar* is a fortnightly edited by Rajiv Lochan Shah, a hotelier in Tallital. While the two dailies went on a sustained Mulayam-bashing spree, *Samachar* was providing readers with context for the agitations, and looking for issues rather than sensation. It was analysing the reservation question, forest policies and *van panchayats*, tourism trends, the Panchayati Raj Bill, etc.

Unfortunately, the little fortnightly tabloid of the hills is no match for the two regional papers from the plains. A reporter discovered early on in the agitation that travel in the hills was the best in the early morning; once *Amar Ujala* and *Dainik Jagaran* hit the stands, the violence would begin.



पृष्ठ १६ मुख्य दो रुपये, पत्रिका दो रुपये

अमर उजाला

मौलाना सोहनलाल शर्मा, १९९४ आधिकारिक मुद्रणालय, काशी, उत्तर प्रदेश, २००१

वर्ष २०११, अंक २०९



दिल्ली जा रहे उत्तराखंड समर्थकों पर पुलिस फायरिंग, १५ मरे



आज का समाचार - अमर उजाला, अमर उजाला, अमर उजाला - अमर उजाला - अमर उजाला

दैनिक जागरण

आज का समाचार - अमर उजाला, अमर उजाला, अमर उजाला - अमर उजाला - अमर उजाला



आज का समाचार - अमर उजाला, अमर उजाला, अमर उजाला - अमर उजाला - अमर उजाला

नारसम व मुजफ्फरनगर में दिल्ली जा रहे उत्तराखण्डवासियों और पुलिस में हिंसक संघर्ष
मुजफ्फरनगर में अंधाधुंध फायरिंग, १० मरे, दिल्ली में भारी हिंसा, २५० घायल

Uttar Pradesh Roadways bus sports "Uttarakhand State Transport Corporation" sign.



RAMESH PANDEY

Virendra Paineuly of the Bhubhaneshwori Mahila Ashram in Anjanisain, a recognised non-government organisation of Garhwal, says he does not understand why people are inflating death figures. "One life is as important as ten. A revolution is something that has a leader, a philosophy and a method. This is anger, nothing else. This is an agitation run by corrupt people."

And indeed there have been reports of corruption. Some names linked to lotteries and to the alcohol and forest mafia groups are said to be associated with the agitation. All over Uttarakhand in September, buses were stopped by activists asking for donations; they gave no receipts. Says Samsher Singh Bist of the Uttarakhand Sangharsha Vahini, "It is true that all kinds of people are involved. It is the responsibility of those who lead the agitation to make sure that the bad elements are weeded out."

Vacuum on Top

While those who are corrupt certainly would not form a significant proportion of the agitation leadership, the lack of astute leadership and wise counsel has been a critical factor in Uttarakhand's frustrated efforts to make itself heard and understood by India's powerful. This leadership vacuum results in crossed connect-

ions between Kumaon and Garhwal activists, inability to use a sympathetic media, bad public relations all around, and rumour-mongering which debilitates the movement and wastes righteous anger.

The rallyists who were not waylaid in Muzaffarnagar and reached Delhi were witness to this major weakness in the agitation. As

the demonstrators gathered at the Red Fort grounds to hear the orations, different groups tried to take over the podium, snatching microphones from each other. Everyone wanted to be a leader, and in the fracas someone gave a call to march on Parliament. The entire effort of coming down from Uttarakhand to make a point was squandered in the ensuing chaos as police lathi charged and the crowd scattered.

A month earlier in Pauri, 35,000 people had gathered in an unprecedented demonstration which brought together busloads from the far corners of Kumaon and Garhwal. When the political party workers tried to capture the microphone, some of the student organisers resisted, and the mike broke. By the time another could be arranged, the public had dispersed.

Both in Pauri and Delhi, the public's participation was spontaneous but chaotic, with no channeling force to give it shape and direction. Every village in

Dalit Dabao Andolan

Not everyone in Uttarakhand is for an Uttarakhand state. Before the Mandal Commission recommendations became a factor, the intellectual opposition to Uttarakhand was mostly among those who believed a hill state would be no better than a Kumaon or Garhwal that is presently ruled from Lucknow.

Because the present statehood movement followed fast on the anti-reservation agitations, however, it had the effect of igniting opposition among the backwards to the whole idea.

Almora's Shekhar Lakchaura, who is President of the Uttarakhand Students' Union and is considered close to UP Chief Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav, accuses groups like the Uttarakhand Kranti Dal of spreading violence while working under the cover of a peoples' movement. Lakchaura, himself a Brahmin, claims there are some Harijans and Dalits in the movement only because they are scared for their lives.

The hill Dalit will only be able to develop if they are in touch with the plains dalit, says Chandra Kant Antiwal, Patron of Uttarakhand Dalit Sahitya Academy. "It will be a disaster for the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and the other backward classes if a state is carved out of UP," he says.

Sunil Kumar, a Dehradun advocate: "This is a Dalit Dabao Andolan, a movement to suppress the depressed classes. If it was Uttarakhand they wanted, why do they target the Dalit and the Harijan?" He proffers evidence of violence against untouchables in

Uttarakhand echoed with energy and slogans; every segment of the hill society—women, children, ex-servicemen, students, school teachers, college professors, journalists, lawyers, and businessmen—was involved. A call for a rally, and within minutes thousands would be out on the streets, blocking traffic, gheraoing district officials, and burning effigies. "Mulayam, Uttarakhand is not your fiefdom. It is ours!" they shouted, but to little effect.

The hill people had convinced themselves that a separate state would solve all their problems. Not waiting for anyone, least of all a leader, they went all out for Uttarakhand. But the very egalitarian nature of the movement, led as it was by spontaneous outbursts all over, meant that much of the popular energy dissipated into the mountain air. There was no coordination between the people of Kumaon and Garhwal, and little between the individual eight districts.

Conversations with journalists, advocates and university professors, the three pillars of Uttarakhand intelligentsia, tend to consist of unidirectional tirades against Mulayam Singh, Narasimha Rao, BSP's firebrand leader Mayawati, the Congress, the BJP, the UKD, and pretenders known and unknown.

Some of the activists thought that this lack of overall leadership was not a problem. "It is a revolution, and no leader is necessary for a revolution," said Abadh Bihari Pant, an advocate in Dehradun. Atul Saklani, a historian at Garhwal University in Srinagar believes that Indian history has few examples of Uttarakhand's kind of uprising. "No leadership is necessary," he says. Asked who would go to Delhi to talk to Government, he replies, "What is there to talk about? We just want Uttarakhand."

Political Parties

The public did not trust the political parties, neither the homegrown

Uttarakhand Kranti Dal nor the national-level BJP and Congress. Tired of opportunism and insincerity of the party hacks, the agitators banned politicians from participating in demonstrations and meetings if they used party banners and slogans. Thus, while the party stalwarts might have been making grandiloquent speeches in Lucknow or issuing press statements in Delhi, in the hills they were rejected. Many local politicians routinely and resignedly took to being garlanded with shoes, or having their faces blackened with soot paste.

The professional politician, of whichever party, had lost all trust of the populace. Rather than bring focus to the agitation and act as mediator between the Establishment and the hill public, the politicians fought each other for credit of the movement. On the ground, the battle for leadership was between the BJP and the Uttarakhand Kranti Dal, the regional party.

The Congress (I) party, meanwhile, has foundered in Uttarakhand. The cadres are torn between the people and the party, with a national leadership that is firmly opposed to statehood. Narain Dutt Tiwari, boss of the Uttar Pradesh Congress Committee and a man with prime ministerial ambitions, did try to use the Uttarakhand agitation to get rid of Mulayam Singh's government. He got nowhere because a wary Rao did what he does best, which is to wait out a crisis. Besides serving to clip Tiwari's wings, the continued survival of Mulayam Singh was expected to help the party's prospects in state assembly elections in faraway Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, where opponents could have made the most of a Congress-engineered downfall of a "pro-backward" government in U.P.

The Chief Minister, meanwhile, reaped full advantage of tarring the hill agitation 'casteist'

the past few months.

Surya Kant Dhasmana, a Samajwadi activist in Dehradun who is Brahmin, said of the agitation: "It is a bid by the upper castes to deny reservation to those who have suffered centuries of oppression. The upper caste Congress and BJP leadership in UP are naturally adding fuel to fire."

Kunwar Prasoon, a farmer in Nichili Khadi who occasionally freelances for New Delhi papers, represents those who have been questioning the statehood demand before the present round. Prasoon, who was active during the Chipko movement in Tehri, says there is now *akrosh* (extreme anger) in the hills against the plains people. The present standoff between Uttarakhand and the rest of Uttar Pradesh, he worries, "will drive a deep and permanent wedge between the hill people and those in the plains."

Prasoon is also open in his criticism of the methods employed by some Uttarakhand activist. "This is not a constructive movement. It is not correct that my son's teacher tells him '*Aarakshan ke samarthak ke bachho ko nahi padaenge*' (we are not going to teach the children of reservation supporters)."

Prasoon is convinced that "Uttarakhand state will not be different from UP or Bihar." According to him, the police and administration will come closer to home, as will repression and corruption. "Movements like Chipko will no longer exist in an Uttarakhand state. There will be no protests against dams, against mining, against alcohol. The people's powers will be taken away by the very people who will be representing them."



and sponsored by the *hindutwa* stalwarts of the BJP. Rather than let on that he understood the socio-economic reasons why the pahadis were distressed, it was more worthwhile politically for Mulayam Singh to label the hill activists anti-backward and anti-dalit. What he lost in the hills, he gained many times over in the plains.

A Casteist Movement?

Bol pahari halla bol, Mayawatika kachha kholl!

Was the movement in the hill anti-backwards and by that token, racist? If catchy slogans represent movements, then the slogans and rallying cries that could be heard in Uttarakhand might well indicate that the movement is primarily directed by the upper castes against the lower castes. Crude and sexist sloganeering against BSP leader Mayawati, for example, or perusal of the Delhi and Lucknow headlines, leaves one with the impression that hill Brahmins and

Thakuris are on the warpath against dalits and harijans, using the statehood demand as a cover. There are many in the hills, too, who believe that this is so (see box on page 16).

While some of the slogans and the reaction of the dalit leaders and outside observers to the movement does paint it as casteist, a more objective assessment indicates that the anti-lower-caste vocalisation is primarily an extreme reaction to the perception that the hill population is being experimented upon in a problem that is entirely plains-based. After all, why should Uttarakhand bear Uttar Pradesh's burden?

If the backwards make up only two percent of the total hill population, as is accepted, it is unlikely that activists would go to such lengths to get a state mainly to suppress the backwards. Besides, while the hill Brahmins can certainly be as conservative as the plains Brahmin, the history of

agitations of past decades does not show any great predilection towards racism.

Though the hill high castes might not be any less racist than those of the plain, the present Uttarakhand agitation seems to be neutral on the point. R. R. Tamta, a 'pahadi back-ward' working with the Akhil Bharatiya Balmiki Vikas Parishad in Srinagar (Garhwal), does not buy the "only hill Brahmins and Chhetri societies are involved in the agitations" argument. He says, "All of Uttarakandi society is involved. This is a battle of the hill scheduled castes as well." Tamta believes that only by involving themselves in the agitation can the scheduled castes ensure that existing discriminations in employment and educational institutions be removed.

Reservations to Statehood

Because the intelligentsia, the politicians and the leaders of the erstwhile Chipko were either unable or unwilling to provide direction to the people, their place was taken by the *sangharsha samitis*—"struggle committees" of women, students, teachers and government employees. Professionals who had never engaged in politics before got involved. Says Kranti Bhatt, a journalist in Gopeshwor, "If people like us do not participate in the agitation, then the villagers and the women who have joined in such numbers will be cheated, just as they were in the Chipko movement."

This involvement of non-political activists was good enough to maintain fervour at the local level, and no one would argue about the egalitarian nature of the overall stir. Nevertheless, the lack of a central coordination could be seen to be acute. In the absence of overall direction, therefore, the population became increasingly angry and confused. The anti-reservation stir was hot but going nowhere. Mulayam Singh was not interested in compromise, and the Centre was

just not interested.

Non-party activists and reporters like Mahipal Singh Negi, a correspondent for *Amar Ujala* in Tehri, decided to take matters into their own hands. The next step, almost naturally, was to move from anti-reservation to pro-statehood demands. After all, the people would be able to decide on affirmative action quotas more in keeping with the demographic reality of the hills after they had their own state and government.

In mid-September, unplanned and unannounced, the anti-reservation stir converted itself into a full-fledged demand for statehood. After all, as Bhairab Dutta Pande, onetime Governor of

Panjab and West Bengal, said, "Reservation and separate state are two sides of one coin."

Plains Papers

As the hill population agitated for its identity and to separate its destiny from that of the plains, the Indian public read only what the mainstream papers of the plains saw fit to report. These papers, in turn, chose mostly to print what their Delhi- and Lucknow-based reporters gleaned in quick dashes to the hills. The very weaknesses that were evident in the plains-based reporting of the Chipko movement (see "Axing Chipko", *Himal Jan/Feb 1994*) were once again evident in the coverage of the

statehood demand.

That the movement's roots were mainly economic and cultural with a history that went back more than five decades, was so much wheat chaff for the reporter with a deadline to meet. It was more satisfying to report on rapes, violence, and the supposed prowess of over 50,000 ex-servicemen of the hills who might be aroused any moment to pick up the gun and take matter into their own hands.

The coverage of the Muzaffarnagar affair is a case in point. All of October, the newspapers were more interested in rape count than on what the women from Gopeshwar in high Garhwal hoped to achieve in Delhi. Three women were

You Kumaoni, Me Garhwali

The need is for a common front against the plains, and so the ongoing Uttarakhand agitation has relegated existing divisions in the hills to the background. So much so that Kumaonis and Garhwalis have been willing to put aside their individual identities as Kumaoni or Garhwali. Maheshwar P. Joshi, Kumaon University's History Department in Almora, was furious when a writer brought up the topic of *Khaturua*, a Kumaoni festival that celebrates a mythical victory over Garhwal.

"*Khaturua* has no historical base!" he bellowed. "There is no divide between Kumaon and Garhwal! This movement has proved that the divide is only in the minds of those who come and ask us about *Khaturua*."

But *Khaturua* continues to be celebrated on Ashwin Sankranti, the first day of the month of Ashwin, with Kumaonis burning effigies said to be of a Garhwal general named Khatur Singh legend says was defeated that day.

By the very fact that there is a 'Garhwal' and a 'Kumaon', the two divisions of the Uttar Pradesh hills also have separate histories and distinct traditions and economies. The two divisions are also very different. Garhwal is the land of the revered Himalayan massifs such as Nanda Devi, it holds the sources of the Ganga and Jamuna, and the holy precincts of Kedarnath and Badrinath. What Kumaon lacks in physical grandeur and holy places, it makes up with its human resources. Kumaon's population is better educated than Garhwal's, more

exposed to the outside world of government and commerce, and is quicker to respond to opportunities as they present themselves.

Jagdish Bhatt, a *Times of India* correspondent in Shimla, a Garhwali, feels that the Kumaon-Garhwal divide is too wide to be bridged permanently. Like a number of scholars, he is convinced that the underdevelopment of Garhwal is a result of neglect by Kumaoni politicians who made it big in Lucknow and Delhi. "Unless we are careful, Uttarakhand will only mean a license for Kumaon to exploit Garhwal."

Talk of existing divides only take one deeper. There is, for example, Tehri Garhwal, ruled at one time by a king, and Pauri Garhwal, which came under British control. Then there are the Sikh, Punjabi Khatri, Muslim, Boksa and Bengali of the Uttarakhand Tarai who do not want to be part of the proposed hill state. They want instead to be included as Rudrapur district in Ruhelkhand, which is another autonomous province that has been proposed in the tarai.

Doubtless, it is possible with good planning and proper administration to tackle the existing divides and ensure that Uttarakhand serves the greater good of all. As if to prepare for that day of unity, this year's *Khaturua* was celebrated on 17 September with renewed vigour and with a difference. Effigies were burnt with greater enthusiasm than previously, but this time it was not the General Khatur Singh of legend who was burning, but P.V. Narasimha Rao and Mulayam Singh Yadav.

violated, and that was bad enough, but to make a good story the reporters had to have more rapes.

In mid-October, *The Nabaharat Times* sent a three-member all-male team to the hills with the assignment to cover rape. In conversation with a local journalist, one said, "Yaar, masala nahi mila, eek bhi ladki nahi mili." (Didn't get a story yaar, couldn't find a single woman.) Sushila Barthawal, an activist who was on the first bus emptied at Muzaffarnagar, recalls being hassled by reporters with whispered questions, "Aap ke saath bhi huwa?" (Did it happen to you as well?)

Women to the Back, Please

While older women march the streets in *nari samman yatras*, organised to honour women's activism with slogans, "Ham Uttarakhandi nari hai, fool nahi chingari hai" (We women of Uttarakhand are firebrands, not fragile flowers), fewer young women are participating in the rallies of Uttarakhand these days. The wide coverage of the violence and rape in Muzaffarnagar, among other things, seems to have stripped the self-confidence of many, enough to worry some activists that issues of concern to women will take a back seat in the movement for statehood.

Uma Bhatt, Editor of *Uttara*, a Nainital magazine on women's issues, is concerned that despite their deep involvement in the ongoing agitation women will ultimately be deprived of leadership roles. "There were many women activists in the independence movement. But they have all been forgotten. It was almost as if they ceased to exist after independence. If the same thing happens here in our Uttarakhand State, women's voice will be weakened and they will be given the back seat once again."



The Times of India headlined a story, "Rape Becomes Fodder for Uttarakhandi Agitators". Actually, rape was fodder for the journalist as well.

While the reporters did full justice to rape, the violence and the protest marches, the editorial columns were enigmatically silent on what mattered most: the question of statehood and whether it should be granted.

The national English language newspapers, more than the regional vernacular ones, took the high road of reporting in order to look down upon Uttarakhand. *The Times of India*, *Indian Express*, *Hindustan Times*, and even the new entrant *Asian Age*, seemed incapable of recognising the movement as one that was primarily economic and cultural in character. The headlines said it all in caricature: long after it was clear that the anti-reservation issue was but a catalyst for the much more widely-held belief in separate statehood, the English papers continued to term the agitation "anti-quota", "anti-reservation" and "militant".

Media people who ascended the hills to do event-based reporting had no time to delve into the complex issues of hill demography and economy. Never tarrying for long, they covered incidents as they unfolded, taking their cues from slogans and graffiti, and conveying the raw anger of the people and little else. Their was neither time nor sensitivity to see the disquiet in perspective.

Mostly Lucknow-based, and keen to remain 'politically correct', the correspondents were incapable of seeing the stir in the context of hill society, that there are liberals and conservatives in the hills, and that both want statehood. In their refusal to acknowledge the hills as separate and deserving individualised attention, the editors and reporters were reflecting the ostensibly liberal Indian metropolitan attitude towards caste issues and its fear of national breakup if

states are to be granted to "whoever asks". While these are fine attitudes to maintain in general, by failing to apply their avowedly liberal instincts to the case at hand, of Uttarakhand, the mainland intellectuals simply exposed their self-interest.

The eagerness with which the plains scholar and reporter jumped to conclusions about the racial and secessionist nature of the movement seemed to have transferred to overseas observers as well. An American anthropologist who has studied Garhwal, obviously relying on Delhi's English language press, was critical of statehood which he feared would hold back reservation quotas from deserving backwards. The Delhi-based correspondent of a London paper, just back from the Mussoorie hills in mid-November, understood of the stir only as "that anti-reservation thing".

Preparing Uttarakhand

What are the chances that the hill people will get what they want? But first, do they *know* what they want, and will they spawn a leadership with the ability to get it for them?

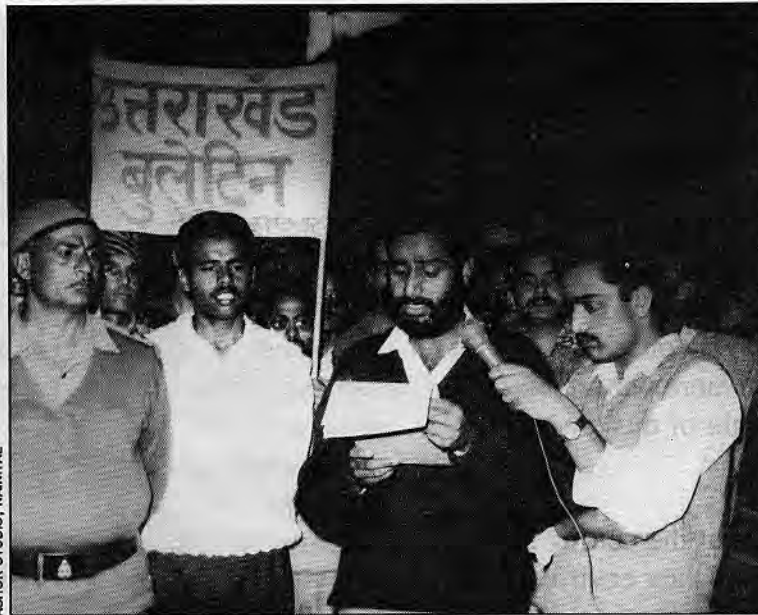
The demand for statehood is vehement, but it is not well-articulated. Nowhere in hill townships does one come across individuals who have been able to lead the population out of the wrathful *cul de sac* that they are presently mired in. The energies of hundreds of thousands are being expended, but without results. If this vacuum at the top continues for long, the people will give up the fight before long, at which point the problem will be resolved at the pleasure of Delhi and Lucknow politicians. They will throw a sop to the hills and that will be all, until the hills boil over once again a few years hence.

Uttarakhand requires the strategic vision of leaders who can negotiate with the power brokers at the national level, to argue against being given a hill council *a la* Dar-

jeeling, or Union Territory status, or some easy-to-forget promises of economic development. Uttarakhand's activists need to study Subhas Ghising's disenchantment with what he got as the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council, in which the state government in Calcutta keeps him on a tight leash. The Jharkhand Autonomous Council Accord in was signed in September to create a new entity in today's Bihar, but some Jharkhand activists now feel that the accord is excessively restrictive in terms of the proposed Council's access to budgets, fund transfer procedures, representation in Parliament, control over administration, and so on.

The people of Uttarakhand need a state of their own, to be able to make their own mistakes. And they should hold no illusions about the challenges that will come their way when the statehood is achieved. These challenges will arrive in the form of the Kumaon-Garhwal divide, which is bound to resurface once the plains enemy is dealt with; loss of clout at the Centre (which Uttarakhand have been able to wield by riding the Uttar Pradesh wagon to Delhi); the rise of autocratic leadership and home-grown corruption; and the inefficiency of a weakened and more vulnerable bureaucracy.

The Uttarakhand strategists



ASHOK STUDIO, NAINITAL

"Uttarakhand Bulletin" was a daily 30-minute news programme 'broadcast' through microphone every evening in Nainital to provide the information-starved public with the latest word on the agitation. The Nainital Samachar fortnightly began the bulletins when the coverage of the statehood movement by the vernacular press and national English dailies proved inadequate.

must learn from the mistakes made in Himachal and Sikkim—and also Nepal, Bhutan, Kashmir or the states of the Indian Northeast. They might study the escalating divide between the lower regions of Himachal and its subsidy-rich northern areas. They might also study how Sikkim has managed to consume enormous investments made by the Centre with little to show for it, and how kickback merchants arrived in Kathmandu as soon as large hydropower projects began—once there is a Uttarakhand state, the kickback merchants will migrate to Gairsain from Lucknow.

It is unfortunate that the Uttarakhand movement, perhaps by virtue of being so broadbased and relatively egalitarian, has not thrown up individuals who would be able to lead the masses towards statehood rather than martyrdom, for the fight will be long and hard. In the larger scheme of things, Uttarakhand is too small to be able to counter overriding interests and concerns of the U.P. state and the Centre.

Both Mulayam Singh and his successors will find it convenient to paint the hill people's fight as one of the high caste against the low. They will not be inclined to compromise. Due to concerns that

granting full statehood will open the floodgates to numerous demands elsewhere in India, whoever is in power in New Delhi will be against the creation of Uttarakhand. They will try to offer piecemeal solutions instead, such as autonomous hill councils.

These complex issues of organising the present movement and planning future governance cannot be handled by an agitation, however spontaneous. Even as they demonstrated, those who would lead Uttarakhand ahead will have to decide what kind of state it will be; how Kumaon and Garhwal can be integrated, which are presently united mainly in opposition to Lucknow and Delhi; what will be the state's economic base and viability; what kind of hydro, mining and forest policies it will adopt; and how will the social fractures that has become evident among the castes and classes be dealt with.

Above all, Uttarakhand the region to become Uttarakhand the state needs groups and within them individuals who have the vision, ability and charisma to lead their people in negotiations with the Chief Minister and the Prime Minister who represent the rest of India.



**KLONE
XEROX**

**Upper Cart Road
(Opposite Kalimpong
Municipality)
KALIMPONG 734301**

☎ (03552) 625



**Reduction, enlargement
typing & drafting**

Yo! Look what they're saying about us!

Himal is essential reading for anyone interested in the Himalayan region. This unique magazine not only describes the mountains and cultures in all their beauty and diversity, but even more importantly, it presents social and environmental issues with the voice and insight of those who actually live here.

- **George Schaller**, zoologist, author of *The Stones of Silence*

Himal is at the cutting edge of sensible journalism. It is a voice for the Himalayan people and their environment. It is up-to-date with all the important issues and trends, and does not carry the views imposed by someone else. Above all, **Himal** takes risks.

- **Doug Scott**, mountaineer, author of *Himalayan Climber*

Himal is a superb journal. Refreshingly, it does not seem to have political axes to grind. It is witty, informative, sane and intelligent. Here, at last, is a concerned layman's update on the state of the Himalaya.

- **Bill Aitken**, columnist and author of *The Seven Rivers, The Nanda Devi Affair*

Himal is the most authoritative journal on topics concerning the entire Himalayan region. Every issue contains information that is unavailable elsewhere. **Himal** is literate and readable.

- **Tsering Wangyal**, Editor, *Tibetan Review*

Himal is essential reading for anyone who loves the Himalayas. Each issue is packed with information. The articles are lively, sophisticated and take you close to the people and their problems and aspirations.

- **Jeremy Bernstein**, author of *The Wildest Dreams of Kew, In the Himalayas, Mountain Passages*

Himal...the magazine dedicated to anything and everything on the Himalayas...

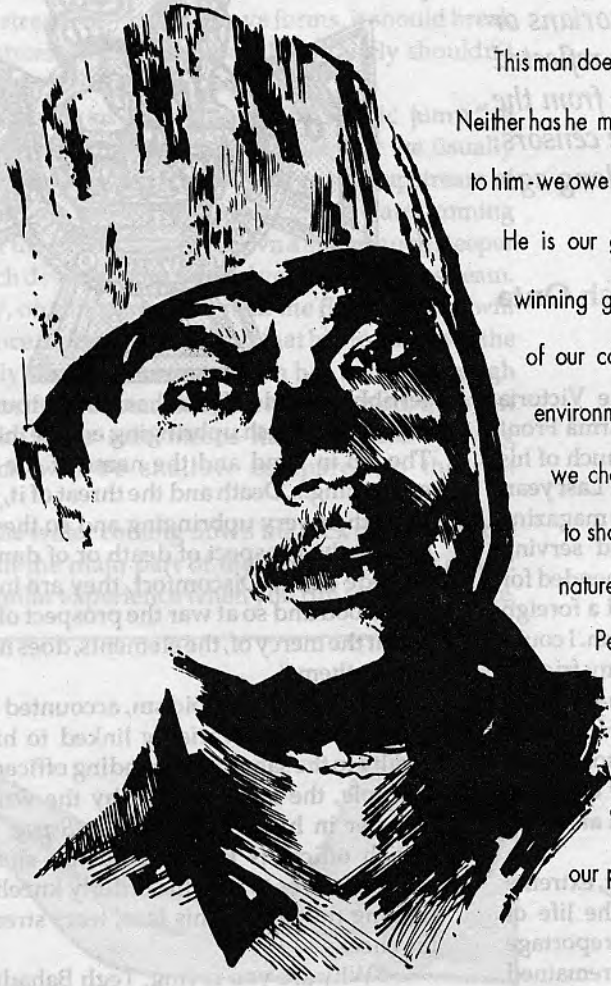
- *India Today*, 15 March 1994


Himal is imperative reading for anyone with more than a mild interest in the broadly construed Himalaya, its geography, politics, ethnography, history, etc. etc. It is refreshingly heterodox and impious...



- *Expeditions*, March 1994


CAN YOU AFFORD NOT TO READ HIMAL?

Your private paradise



This man doesn't have a Hotel Management Degree.
Neither has he mastered the art of landscaping. And yet
to him - we owe our Private Paradise. 

He is our gardener, the creator of our prize-
winning garden SHAMBALA. A true reflection
of our commitment to a greener and healthier
environment. Because within our hotel, 
we chose to build a Shangri-la - a true haven,
to show the world what they came to see -
nature's resplendent beauty. 

Perhaps, it is the splendours of our garden
that enchants our guests into coming
to stay with us, again and again.
Or perhaps, because of our gardener,
our people...who care for the environment. 



SHANGRI-LA
KATHMANDU
NEPAL

G.P.O BOX : 655, LAZIMPAT, KATHMANDU, NEPAL. TEL : 412999, TELEX : 2276 HOSANG NP, FACSIMILE : 977-1-414184

Dukha during the World War

The pain of the Gurkha in battle has never been recognised, not by the saheb chroniclers, nor South Asian historians or the Nepali elite which continues to bask in the reflected glory. Eight decades after they were mailed, letters from the battlefield, intercepted and filed away by wartime censors, provide a window into all that suffering of long ago.

by Pratyoush Onta

Laxuman Gurung was awarded the Victoria Cross for his performance in the Burma Front in 1945. He lost his right arm and much of his hearing during the medal-winning action. Last year, he was asked by *Gorkha Sainik Awaj*, a magazine representing the interests of former and serving soldiers, how many people he had recommended for the army. The pensioner replied: "I joined a foreign army; was involved in a war and lost my arm. I could have died but with luck I lived. Many of my friends died in the war, some froze to death, many were blinded when engaged in war in the high Himalaya. Anybody who sends an able young person to the army to experience all that *dukha* is guilty of *paap*. I cannot do such *paap*. I cannot recommend anybody to join the army."

Dukha—bodily pain, mental suffering, extreme hardship and death—has been real in the life of Laxuman Gurung. And yet, as a subject of reportage and scholarship, the Gurkha's *dukha* has remained virtually unexplored. Celebratory accounts over the course of the century have glorified the dogged courage and loyalty of the men from Nepal's hills, and the vicarious honour they bring their country while fighting the Empire's war. Gurkhas emerged

from the two World Wars as icons of superhuman bravery, who were in a class apart when it came to enduring the pain and suffering of battle.

The genre of celebratory writing is exemplified by B.M.Niven's 1987 coffee-table book, *The Mountain Kingdom: Portraits of Nepal and the Gurkhas*. Niven, himself a Gurkha officer, wrote: "Even



terribly wounded [Gurkhas] cling on and their tough bodies and harsh upbringing enable them to endure. The job in hand and the name of the regiment are everything....Death and the threat of it, they are used to by their very upbringing and so they do not hold back at the prospect of death or of danger that may precede death. Discomfort, they are inured to from childhood and so at war the prospect of being out in, and at the mercy of, the elements, does not in any way inhibit them."

The Gurkha's stoicism, accounted for by 'harsh upbringing', is invariably linked to his proverbial loyalty to the saheb commanding officer. There is, for example, the lore reported by the writer Edmund Candler in his 1919 book, *The Sepoy*: In France, a British officer is knocked out by shell-shock. He opens his eyes to find his orderly kneeling over him fanning the flies off his face, tears streaming down his cheeks.

"Why are you crying, Tegh Bahadur?" he said; "I am not badly hit."

"I am crying, Sahib," he said, "because my arm is gone, and I am no more able to fight."

With a nod, 'Tegh Bahadur' indicates the wound. The shell that had stunned the saheb had carried off the orderly's forearm at the elbow.

More than 60 years later, Byron Farwell wrote in his popular book, *The Gurkhas* (1984), "The stoicism of wounded Gurkhas impressed all who witnessed their sufferings. Often enough their first question on reaching the field dressing station was, 'How soon can I get back?'"

Professional historians have been equally adept at ignoring the suffering of the Gurkha, focusing as they have on matters of high diplomacy, geopolitics and Gurkha romance. Most historians have relied on written sources of British India (now housed in



various archives in India and the United Kingdom) which were created in the process of acquiring information on the localities from which the "raw materials" that could be turned into the "Gurkhas" could be found. Diplomatic negotiations between the British and Nepali rulers regarding the recruitment of Gurkhas also gave birth to voluminous writings. Gurkha historians who have thus side-stepped the entire question of dukha include Asad Husain, Kanchanmoy Mojumdar, and Sushila Tyagi.

Among Nepali historians, the recent book *The Gurkha Connection* by historian Purushottam Banskota (1994) recognises the heavy casualties suffered by the Gurkha regiments during the two world wars. But even he prefers to analyse the impact of Gurkha recruitment more in terms of Nepal's prestige in the world, modernisation of her army, enlightenment of Nepalis through experience abroad, and benefit to the economy.

Only Prem Uprety's *Nepal: A Small Nation in the Vortex of International Conflicts 1900-1950* (1984) contains a brief but useful discussion of the "physical impact of war". The faces of many Gurkhas who had been wounded in World War I, he writes, were disfigured due to the loss of noses and eyeballs; in one case the forehead had been damaged so badly that "both the eyeballs" were protruding out like that of an unearthly creature". General Babar Shumsher, son of Rana Prime Minister Chandra Shumsher, after an inspection tour of the wounded wrote "how could life linger on in such desperate souls?" According to Uprety, arrangements were made so that fresh recruits did not come across the demobilised soldiers, who bore the scars of the battlefield.

Memorialising Mass Death

The Gurkhas who arrived at the recruitment centres of the Raj mainly came from four ethnic groups of Nepal: Magar, Gurung, Rai and Limbu. During the early years of the twentieth century, none of these groups were represented in Kathmandu's intellectual class that sustained itself by *chakari* sycophantic attendance to the Rana court. This class, with Bahuns and Chhetris dominant, seem to have been vaguely aware that huge numbers of Nepali hillmen had been sucked into British Gurkha regiments. It would have been too much to expect them to show concern for the recruits' war-induced hardships.

In an account that describes Nepal's participation in World War I, *mahila guruju* Hemraj Pandey, who headed the Rana office of military supplies during the war years, fully supports his master Chandra's decision to help the British. Without understanding the apocalyptic nature of WW I, he wrote, it was not possible to understand the crisis that had beset the British Empire and the world, nor appreciate the importance of Nepal's help to her British friend. In risking their lives in the battlefield, soldiers from Nepal had enhanced the country's and the *jaati's* glory.

In *Purano Samjhana* (1972), a selected compilation



NAREN PRADHAN

of journal entries of Rammani A.D., a member of Chandra Shumsher's court, we find out that he was aware that many "sons of Nepal" had "sacrificed themselves" during the First World War. The Tribhuvan-Chandra Military Hospital in the capital was apparently made to honour these brave sons who gave up their lives to increase, in the words of Chandra Shumsher, "the glory of their motherland and to ameliorate the pain of their (wounded) colleague-soldiers."

Kedarmani A.D., Rammani's son, recalls in his autobiography *Aaphnai Kura* how as a student in Calcutta he read news about the war in English newspapers but he does not mention Nepal's connection to it. The versatile litterateur Balkrishna Sama, who was in his early teens when the war began, remembers the war years in his autobiography, *Mero Kabitako Aaradhan*, writing that, "After reading the English newspaper, *Statesman*, my grandfather used to describe the war to my grandmother and say 'In the end, the English will win, will win.' The Nepalis serving in the Gurkha regiments had already reached Europe for the war.... The photograph (in *The Illustrated London News*) of Nepali Gurkhas crossing a river with their khukuris held in their mouths boosted my morale. Thereafter, whenever we played, I felt like playing war games. I kept thinking that I too should participate in a war and die fighting."

Kathmandu's intellectual class thus responded to the Gurkha participation in the First World War by cheering from a distance, memorialising mass death as if it were blood sacrifice to add glory to the motherland. They sanitised the suffering and death of the Gurkha soldier as a moment of national celebration. The soldier's pain in the battlefield was legitimised as part of one's necessarily sacred duty to the Nepali nation. Of course, no one asked why it was

always *other* Nepalis who had to die to enhance the name of their motherland.

The Mother's Instinct

Before World War I, there was hardly any administrative structure for Gurkha recruitment within Nepal. The approximately 2,000 Gurkha recruits a year that were necessary to keep the 20 Gurkha Rifle battalions at full strength were rounded up by labour contractors in Central and East Nepal and taken to Gorakhpur, India. But when the British required larger number of recruits in the fall of 1914, Rana Prime Minister Chandra Shumsher of Nepal put to work a whole new internal mobilisation scheme.

Chandra ordered his district governors to ensure that the supply of "raw materials" was up. Although it was emphasised that only volunteers were to be taken, there seems to have been considerable forced recruitment. Incentives of various kind were given both to recruiters and those being recruited. Chandra also allowed the opening of several recruitment centres on the Nepal frontier and recruiting agents were allowed into previously prohibited areas in the hinterland. Between 1914 and 1919, over 60,000 Gurkhas were recruited into the combat regiments, and about twice that number were taken into supporting non-combative roles in units like the Army Bearer Corps and Labour Battalions.

It has been long estimated that over 20,000 Gurkha soldiers were killed during the course of the war. However, even until today we have very little knowledge of those who perished, and we do not know the names of the families, villages and communities that suffered the most losses.

When anthropologist Mary Des Chene was researching Gurkha recruitment in Kota, a village in central Nepal, one Gurung woman, born in 1898, recalled the First World

War in the following words: "Now it is different, but in my time everyone who left was lost.

They walked out of our Gurung country and got lost. They died there or they got lost. My father, I never knew him. He was coming home, we heard, but then he died, too.

My elder brother, my younger brother, my father's sister's son. All died. Many, many others

too. So many!"

The number of soldiers that were seriously wounded and disabled for life is not known but it certainly ran into tens of thousands. And we can only guess the number of soldiers shell-shocked or mentally affected for life after seeing and experiencing the hardships of the First World War. Many of the disabled were returned to Nepal during the war itself. They were met by Nepali frontier officials and occasionally assisted to their individual homes in the hills.

There is nothing to be said for the dead, but the wounded and disabled retired as unreported and isolated individuals who returned to the hinterland villages from where they emerged to be recruited. Other than the odd mountain minstrel who would sing ballads of the trauma, there were no Nepali reporters, writers and chroniclers in the early decades of the century to bring the suffering to notice. Besides, it was hardly in the wartime interest of the British or Chandra to highlight the *dukha*.

In terms of casualties, the Second World War is thought to have been a repeat performance of the earlier conflagration. The devastation of the First World War was still fresh in the memory of families across the Nepali hills when the Second began. In her 1991 Stanford University dissertation, Des Chene writes that when the *gallawala* (recruiter) arrived at Kota at the start of World War II, mothers who were teenagers or young wives during 1914-18 uniformly resisted the enlistment of their sons, "going to great lengths to hide them from recruiters and pleading with them not to go."

These women, a few of whom were still alive in the mid-1980s, feared "that their own sons were being 'grabbed' in the same way that their fathers, brothers and sometimes their husbands had been." For these mothers and grandmothers, the lands beyond the Modi valley were, in the main, "a source of sorrow"—lands where their fathers, husbands, brothers and sons had died or disappeared.

The Dukha Theme

Gurkha *dukha*, of course, does not begin in this century and is not limited only to the battlefield. The cases of desertion sporadically reported in the nineteenth century sources indicate that Gurkha soldiers were prepared to go to considerable personal risk in abandoning the army. Separation of families, additional burdens imposed on wives whose husbands are away in service, anxieties caused by broken lines of communication and forced recruitment during the two world wars are some other examples of hardships induced by this long-distance form of labour. But it is the *dukha* of the battlefield that is most physical, most obvious, and the least recorded and reported.

During the course of the First World War, the Gurkha soldiers saw action in various fronts in Europe, the Middle East and Africa. A wartime

The Gurkha feels pain and is afraid of death. He is thankful when it spares him.



HARNA GURUNG COLLECTION

ensor's office was located at Boulogne, France to keep track of mail to and from troops from the Subcontinent in France and England. It was the responsibility of this office to seize letters containing 'sensitive' information about the war fronts and conditions back at home. The censor officers prepared frequent reports which sometimes included lengthy extracts from letters they read.

Letters written by Gurkha soldiers during World War I provide the most direct written evidence found thus far for an examination of the psychology, if you will, of Nepal's soldiers on the battlefield. The letters which are excerpted below are from the stacks at the India Office Collection of the British Library in London. In the more than 20 volumes of censors' reports, each consisting of more than 200 folios, one can find only about 50 letters from Gurkha soldiers.

More often than not, the exact names of the sender and receiver were deleted from these reports, and the identification went something like "from a Gurkha wounded in France to his friend in India". The language in which the letters were written is identified as "Gurkhali" or Hindi and the extracts given are in English translation.

It is obvious that in a war participated in by thousands of Gurkha soldiers, these letters come from but a very small percentage of them. Those who could write, like the writers of these letters, must have learnt to do so in the army. It also seems reasonable to assume that most of the soldiers did not know how to read and write and their experiences are lost forever.

No other written evidence originating from the common Gurkha soldiers from World War I have been found, although it is likely that letters and diaries do exist, undiscovered in archives or attics.

Even though these are translated and extracted versions of the original letters they remain useful in weaving the dukha theme into the Gurkha history of the First World War. It is sobering to note that these letters, and their messages of dukha never got through to their addressees and have only now been discovered for historical analysis.

These censored letters give us some preliminary insights into the consciousness of the Gurkha warriors, as they tried to make sense of the unbelievable horrors experienced on the front. They also provide a glimpse of the disastrous early phase of the world war from the point of view of the Gurkha soldiers. We hear about the deaths of friends and fellow fighters, of amputations, personal regrets, and the terror of earthshaking explosions. We learn that the hospitals in England are full of the wounded. We read about prisoners of war begging for a few rupees' worth of supplies.

The Censor's Trove

After the British Expeditionary Forces sustained severe losses (in the magnitude of 15,000 men in five days) in the early phases of the war in France, a decision to

reinforce it with Indian Army troops was made in August end 1914. Corps of the Indian Army, with Gurkhas as part, had reached France by early October and seen action by the end of the month.

All accounts suggest that the Indian Army soldiers were poorly equipped and ill-prepared for the war in Europe. By early November, the Indian battalions had seen heavy fighting and sustained severe losses, resulting in the serious reduction of average battalion troop strengths. As has been reported by the military historian Jeffrey Greenhut, on 30 October alone the 2nd Battalion of the 8th Gurkhas lost more than 600 men in an assault by the Germans. Those who survived "straggled to the rear in confusion."

The morale plummeted in these battalions which bore the first shocks and, as Greenhut has reported, many men seemed to be "shooting themselves in order to be taken out of the line" — there was an unusually high incidence of wounds in the left hand. There were court-martials to improve troop discipline, and a much needed rest was given to the soldiers of the Indian Corps in early January, which seems to have boosted morale a bit. Yet in February, E. M. Howell, a mail censor officer, reported that "a breaking strain was near."

A letter written in January 1915 by a wounded Gurkha in England to his friend in a regiment serving in India: "Be anxious for me. For the war is like a huge mutiny. The Indian troops have suffered terrible losses. In my double company, the 4th, five men have been killed; and in the 2nd, one-third of the total have been killed... Our Gurkha regiments have suffered great losses... for the remainder to survive is difficult." A letter written in March 1915: "And the firing of bullets goes on, and sister, I would like to see it. Several hundreds of thousand of men have been killed and there is no hope of survival. The water (in the trenches) is up to the knees. Ishwar (God) is ruler. What can one do? Do not worry about me." Another letter written during the same month from a hospital: "It is not a war but the divine wrath of God (Parmeshwar). In a few days hundreds of men have been destroyed. The shells of the cannon have been flying about like rain in the rainy season.... The men who survive and go back to India should consider it as a new life. The whole world is being destroyed."

"Perhaps the Germans will be beaten. They attacked in three lines. Two lines were blown away.... When the Brigade attacks, the Gurkhas and Sikhs go first and the white troops are put in the second line. No one asks about the dead," wrote one soldier. A Gurkha convalescing in England to another



Laxuman Gurung

The lands beyond the Modi valley were a source of sorrow, where their fathers, husbands, brothers and sons had died or disappeared.

The congealed image of the battle-hungry Gurkha is the product of the saheb's imagination

Gurkha also in England: "At first the fire of the cannon was just like an earthquake... The piles of the killed on both sides were like heaps of slaughtered goats. I am sorry that my company lost so much." In other letters we come across lines like "it is said that all (regiments) are being finished. Here wounded men come sometimes 200, sometimes 300, and all the hospitals in England are full." A man being treated in a hospital in Brighton wrote in May 1915: "I am wounded. What can I do. Just as on parade we used to practice the position for musketry firing, so in the war we lie down. O God, O God, when can I see my elder brother?" Another letter from hospital: "I am in the Milford Depot and am now ready for the firing line. The people who are returned to India are those whose heads, eyes, feet or hands have been rendered useless."

Death seemed impossible to escape, hence there is repeated reference to those who have returned to India as lucky ones who have been given a new life. A soldier at the front wrote to his brother in Dehra Dun, "About the state of affairs here I tell you that both sides are using machine guns and cannon. Rifles are not much used. Consider yourself very lucky that you have returned to India."

Some of the correspondents were clearly aware that the letters were checked, and there is often guarded reference to "I will tell you later". Wrote one Gurkha: "You asked me about the state of affairs here. It is like being between the devil and deep sea."

When I come back to India then I will sit beside you and tell you everything, but I do not know when that will be." Another wrote: "I would write fully about the affairs here but I am sorry that the order is not to do so. Several of our letters are opened in the Post, and if anything is found written contrary to what is ordered the writer is punished. Brother, without doubt you also have a lot of hardships and work to do. But we also have more. Brother, here rain falls a lot, and it is very cold and there is lots of mud."

The Western Front

The reference to rain, water and mud in the trenches draws attention to the kind of warfare that these Gurkhas were engaged in, a mentally and physically excruciating variety of fighting known as trench warfare that was new even to the soldiers of Europe. Many western historians have long argued that trench warfare determined not only the perception of the First World War of the soldiers who participated in it, but also how it was remembered and understood by future generations. That certainly could be said to apply to the Gurkhas as well.

By early 1915, a system of multiple trenches—roughly 475 miles long—that stretched from the North Sea through Belgium, Flanders, France to Switzerland had already been dug. In this so-called Western Front, the armies were in a stalemate, and movement was measured in yards, not miles. The trench criss-crossed landscape, in the words of historian George L. Mosse, "was more suggestive of the moon than the earth, as heavy shelling destroyed not only men but nature, a devastation that would haunt the imagination of those forced to live in the trenches."

In the trenches and hospital beds, the soldiers' mind travelled homewards. One Gurkha wrote: "Subedar Bahadurji... do not let my wife have any difficulty about living." A letter from a Brighton hospital bed dated 23 October 1915: "My mother used to tell me that if I did not give up my job and come and earn my living at home I should be sorry for it. I laughed at this and now I am repenting at my leisure. When I think of my mother I say to myself 'What can I do?' What was fated to happen has come to pass. We have been caught just as fish are caught in a net... My wound is paining me a good deal just now, but I hope that in a few days, it will be much better."

Some desperately hope for a return to the village: "If there is any arrangement for making peace do... find out the true news and let me know." Another one put it in the following manner: "Up to date there (has) not been the slightest indication of the end of the war... The spring is now on and the buds appearing but we think of our own hot country." Another letter: "Since we are attached to our country when will that day appear when we will see our native land?"

There is also thanksgiving: "Now in my regiment all the sepoys are finished and I am left alive with a

Defending Bharat

There has been ample dukha expended by men from the Nepali hills in defence of the Indian Tricolour as well. The agency United Mission to Nepal has recently published booklets for newly literate readers which deal with war experiences. In *Ladainko Pida*, Jas Bahadur Dambur Pal Magar describes the moment he was wounded in the 1965 Indo-Pak war: "A red river of blood was flowing on the white snow... Everywhere there were dead bodies." He recovered from the first wound only to be wounded again. Abandoned because medical personnel thought he would die, he recovered and was subsequently pensioned.

Another booklet, *Lahureko Katha* deals with the Sino-Indian conflict of 1962 and the experience of Om Bahadur Rana, of Syangja in central Nepal. "Many who were nearby were killed. Many were taken prisoner... We went into the jungle and toward the hills to save ourselves from the attack by Chinese. It snowed continuously for seven days. We could not see the sun. Many friends were abandoned in the way because of the cold, hunger and fatigue, many died. The face of those who died were covered by their own caps as we left them... On the ninth day of our walk, I could walk no more. I thought I was going to die as well. My friends abandoned me and continued walking. I was alone. When I could not move my body any more, I threw myself on the ground inside a cave and slept through the night. On the tenth day, there was some sunlight. My body started to warm up as well." Making his way out of the battle zone, Om Bahadur eventually recovered and later participated in the 1971 Indo-Pak war. He was pensioned in 1974.

little to eat and drink, but Parmeshwar showed me great favour, on the day on which I was wounded my fellow bandsman was killed."

Naturally, the Gurkhas thought a lot about the enemy. One put it this way, "On 9th day of May 1915 our Division was ordered to take German trenches at 5 a.m. Enemy trenches were 400 yards off from us. This trenches is near new Chaple (sic) we went with fix swords and khukries in mouths, this was the famous charge I have been through. We lost many men but we captured the enemies line, I could not follow my company owing to sharpnel bits struck on my right forearm but it missed the bone, by mercy of Almighty God. Now I am in England and getting much better and shortly I will be back to France again and kill some more bastered (bastard) German because they are not men because they use poisness (sic) gas."

Fokkers and Zeppelins

The major participation of the Indian Army Corps in the Western Front was limited to the first year of the war, after which they were transferred to more fighting in the Middle East.

Among those who were left in Europe was one soldier with keen eye and lucid pen. In May 1916, he wrote: "There is no official news about peace, but how long can the enemy continue such violence? The enemy are shut in all four sides, and nothing from outside can reach them. From this it appears likely that the war will end this year, but whatever seems best to God will happen. I have petitioned to be sent back to India, and I hope for favourable reply... This war is very terrible. There is no safety for a man on the earth, or under the earth, in the air, or on the sea. Strong fortresses are overturned like dust, what chance then has anything else? When the artillery fires continuously, hills are converted into dust heaps, and the same thing happens to ships on the sea. Under the sea, submarines go and fight. On land poisonous gases and liquid fire are used. Under the earth, mines are dug and exploded 200 or 300 yards away. In the air 'Aeroplane,' 'Zeppelin,' 'Fokker,' 'Aircraft,' etc. make war amongst themselves. All these things are employed for the destruction of men. Is this true warfare? All these means are not employed on one side only. No, no, the other side is equally pugnacious. The fighting is not confined to one locality. It is spread all over the world... From all this it would seem that God is displeased with the peoples of the world."

A soldier in an English hospital who had a limb amputated writes in February 1916 to a friend in Egypt with a matter-of-fact directness: "On the 25th of Asoj [mid-October] I was in the attack against the German trenches. I was wounded and left in the trench. I was taken prisoner into Germany and there they cut my foot off. I was two months in hospital there and was then sent to England, and I am now under orders to be sent back to India." And a request

A Splinter in the Mother's Heart

While the Nepali educated classes might have ignored the Gurkha's suffering, it got recognition in the songs of *gainey*, the minstrels of the hills, and in literary narratives of the 1950s and 1960s. Gainey Jhalak Man Gandarva, in the popular ballad "*Ama ley sodlin-ni khoi chhora bhanlin*" sings of the fallen soldier who instructs his companion of how to break the news of his passing to each family member back in the home village. In Ramesh Bikal's short story "Bamko Chhirka", published in the late 1950s, word arrives that the enemy's bomb has killed an elderly mother's son in Malaya. The woman does not cry, she becomes speechless, and her eyes are suddenly stilled. She dies of shock. Writes Bikal: "A splinter of a bomb that exploded in Malaya lodged itself in the chest of an old mother in one corner of remote Nepal."

from a prisoner-of-war adds an entirely different perspective: "Your brother Bahadur Pun sends his blessing. If you have three or four rupees about you please send them, also things to eat and drink, and clothes should be put up in a parcel and sent. Dhani Ram Pun and I are prisoners of war in Germany."

Without doubt, some of the fighting men thought of the World War I fronts as occasions to "prove the Gurkha name"—there is some evidence of this in a handful of the letters at the British Library. However, the more thoughtful among the letters indicate more of an effort by these men of Nepal to understand the scale of destruction around them. While some describe the war's great losses in a seemingly matter-of-fact way ("The land was so full of the slain that it was difficult to set foot on the ground..."), others resorted to metaphors to convey what seemed beyond description. Thus, the reference to divine wrath and the destruction of the whole world.

What these letters offer is an image of the Gurkha soldier entirely different from the standard battlefield image which pervades the public consciousness in the world and in Nepal, of the Gurkha, khukuri raised, charging the enemy with the battle cry, "Ayo Gorkhali!" This congealed image of the battle-hungry Gurkha—true to his salt, loyal to his commanding officer, *bafadaar* to his country—is the product of the saheb's imagination, later identified by sychophantic Nepali intellectuals as the embodiment of the most special quality—bravery—of all Nepalis.

The soldier from the hills of Nepal as he comes across in these letters is a different kind of Gurkha. He is a hero, but because he is sensitive, intelligent and human. He feels pain and does mourn the loss of a friend in the battlefield. He is afraid of death and is thankful when it spares him.

Dukha has been central to the lives of Gurkha soldiers throughout their history. It is time, many decades late, that we begin to listen to the soldier's cry from the battlefield.

P. Onta is a historian.

Kathmandu's intellectual class responded by cheering from a distance and memorialising mass death

Visit for

**Scholarly Books on Nepal, Tibet, Bhutan etc.
Latest Trekking Books & Trekking Maps
Mountaineering Books
Guide Books of all Countries**



MANDALA BOOK POINT

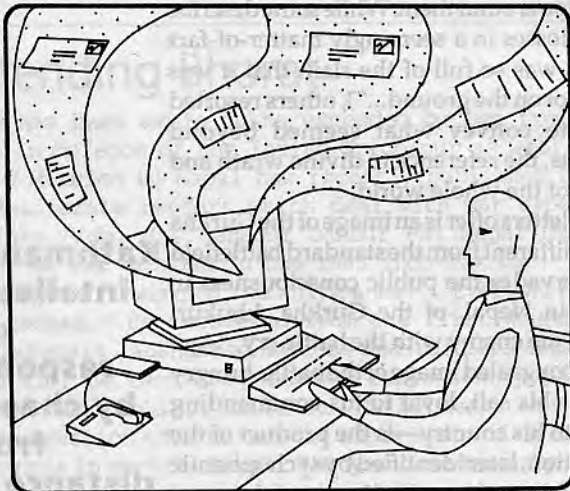
Kantipath, G.P.O. Box:528, Kathmandu, Nepal, Tel: 227711, Res: 216100
Fax: +977-1-227372 NP NATARAJ & 227600 MANDALA, Attn: Madhab, BK PT

**WE ACCEPT
AMERICAN
EXPRESS
VISA CARDS
&
MASTER
CREDIT CARDS**

**RECENT
ARRIVALS**

- ★ Proceedings of the International Seminar on
ANTHROPOLOGY OF NEPAL: Peoples, Problems & Processes
- ★ **SPIRIT POSSESSION IN THE NEPAL HIMALAYAS**
- ★ **DEMOCRACY IN NEPAL, 1950-1994** (Forth Comming)
- ★ **THE SACRED MOUNTAIN: The complete guide to Tibet's Mt. Kailash**
- ★ **TALES OF THE TURQUOISE : A Pilgrimage in Dolpo**

Edited by
Michael Allen
John Hitchcock & Rex L. Jones
M. Hoftun , W. Raeper & J. Whelpton
John Snelling
Cornelle Jest



***Get Connected to the
Information
Highway !***

**Now you have a local access into
the *Internet in Kathmandu.* ***

Call Mr. Kiran Gautam or Mr. Deependra Basnyat at **Mercantile Office Systems** (9:30-17:00HRS); Tel: 220773

Fax: 225407 or e-mail: Postmaster@MosNepal.ernet.in

* Currently E-Mail Services available.

Thick but Incomplete

Victor Chan's *Tibet Handbook*, a 1100 page tome 11 years in making, is by far the most comprehensive English guidebook on Tibet. It details the geography, monasteries, history and lore of many a corner of Tibet. It is, however, important to note that the book does not include descriptions of Kham and Amdo in eastern Tibet. Neither is *Tibet Handbook* an always harmonious blend of the traditional pilgrimage guide and modern travel guide. At times, it seems an odd mixture between traditional and contemporary approaches to understanding Tibet. Its comprehensiveness is both the book's vice and virtue. The vast amount of data presented is not always accurate.

Tibet Handbook is divided into seven parts. In the first part, the sections on the concepts of pilgrimage and the short history of Tibet are valuable, these topics being often glossed over in the regular guide book format. However, many sections are rehashes of much that has already been written. Part Two describes more than three dozen sacred sites and monasteries in and around Lhasa. From this part of the book, the reader will get an excellent overview of the culture-scape of Tibet's capital. The chapter on the Jokhang is wonderfully detailed and lucid on this, Tibet's first and foremost Buddhist monument, while the one on the Potala is more difficult to follow because, unlike the Jokhang, the Potala is not laid out symmetrically. The two diagrams accompanying the Potala chapter are hard to decipher.

The initial chapters of Part Three deal with some of the major pilgrimages in Tibet in some good detail. The description of the Mount Kailash circumambulation is the most definitive published in a language other than Tibetan, although information on page 280, providing a way to cut across the sacred circuit, seems out

of tune with the spirit of pilgrimage that the book attempts to embody. The section on Tsari with its 19 possible routes will confuse all but the most dedicated of Tibetan geographers. In fact, the exhaustive coverage given Tsari by Chan may be more a liability than an asset.

Part Four will enhance one's regard for Tibet's cultural legacy. By combining practical route and geographical information with an insightful treatment of art history, this book transcends the tone and content of most guidebooks. Travellers will have their journeys

Tibet Handbook

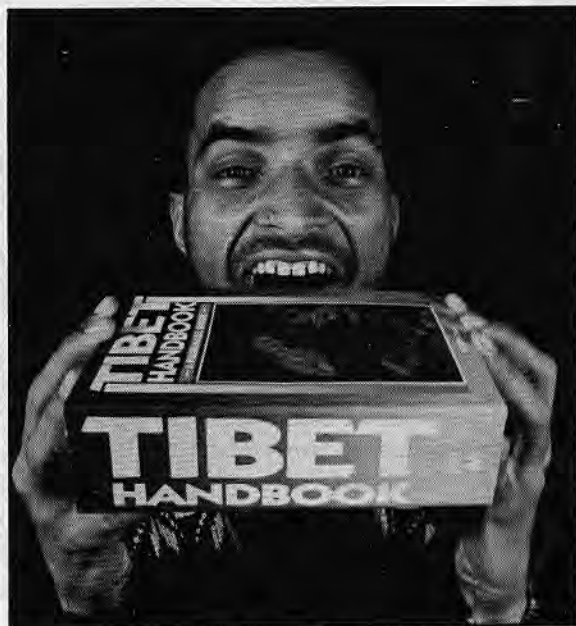
Victor Chan
Moon Publications Inc., 1994
Chico, California
Price: NRs 1040

by John V. Bellezza

immeasurably enriched by visiting a few of the places written about here. The Tibetan scholar, Robert Vitali, was instrumental in giving shape and substance to this part of Chan's book, and his contributions should have been better acknowledged.

The fifth part of *Tibet Handbook* covers a large number of places scattered across inner Tibet. The chapters on the major Bonpo monasteries, Menri and Yungdrungling, are woefully incomplete and must have been compiled before the restorations of the last five years. Herein lies one of the book's major weaknesses—information is often out of date. Chan has not visited Tibet since 1988, and the intervening period has seen significant changes.

Another critical shortcoming—inevitable in a guidebook of this scope—is that Chan commonly relies on others for information on places he himself has



BIKAS RAU/NAR

not visited. The reliability and veracity of the data obtained therefore fluctuates wildly. For example, the chapters on Namtso (pg 657-671) and Lake Dangra and Mount Tago are extremely scanty, replete with inaccuracies and wayward guesses. The authoritative undercurrent in the text should never have continued into such areas. As a result of such shortcomings, a certain pall hangs over the work as a whole. In his preoccupation with being comprehensive, Chan makes compromises.

Part Six reviews vital concerns such as language, health and travel arrangements. These subjects are covered in a concise fashion, but may leave readers wanting to know more in order to organise trips to Tibet as individual travellers. Unwieldy transliterations are employed in the chapter on spoken Tibetan. There is conspicuous absence of material on environmental protection and cultural ethics. No attempt is made to orient readers to the ethos and ecology of Tibet.

For those wanting initiation into travel in Tibet, Victor Chan's *Tibet Handbook* is perhaps not the best place to begin. Others may be alienated by its dry, impersonal style. However, for those with a little more experience and knowledge, this book is a valuable addition to the library.

△

J.V. Bellezza ("Jangali John") is a traveller of the Western Himalaya and Tibet.

V

O

I

WOODBLOCK TO LASER, poem written by Michigan-based Gelek Rinpoche in praise of the Asian Classics Input Project, which is entering Tibetan canonical texts into CD-ROM. This translation, by Michael Roach, was carried in *Wired* of August 1994.

Great friend of mankind,
Your intellect (*Lo*) is deep and vast
Born of the hundred thousand
Good and wonderful (*sang*) deeds
You've accomplished.

I bow down and salute you,
King of scholars,
For your surpassing (*Tharchin*)
And courageous efforts
To share the precious knowledge
Of our snowy land
Throughout the countries of the world.

The light of the disk
Is endless
Like the light of the disks,
Of the sky,
Sun and moon;

The generosity of your gift
Is endless
We are attracted to it
And caught,
Like fish in a net;

The lands of the globe
Are endless
Where the goodness of your contribution
Will spread;

The people you reach
Are endless,
And what you do
Is of ultimate value.

A hundred thousand
Mirrors of the disk
Hold the great classics
Of authors
Beyond counting

No longer
Do we need

To wander aimlessly
In the pages of catalogs
Beyond counting.

With a single push
Of our finger
On a button
We pull up the shining gems
Of citations,
Of text and commentary,
Whatever we seek;

This is something
Fantastic,
Beyond dreams.

But you went further,
And spread the disk
All throughout
The entire world;
A feat
More amazing still!

I throw to you
A thousand petalled blooms
Of congratulations,
And I rejoice
In the kind deed you have done,
Which I know
Will satisfy the wishes
Of people throughout the world.

May your good activities
Spread to wherever
The earth spreads,
And there too
May the praises
Of your deeds be sung.

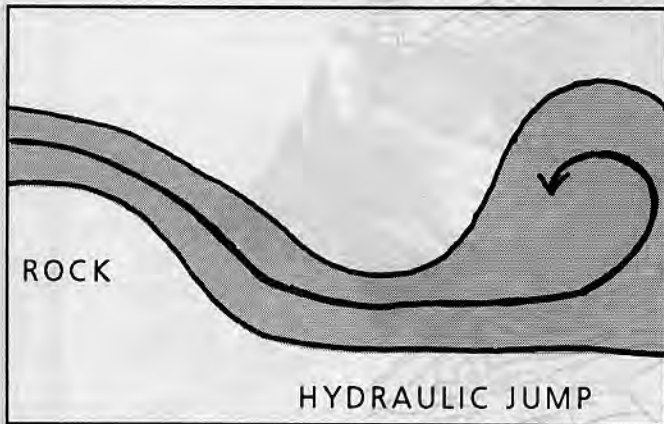
SCIENCE OF WHITEWATER is explained by scientist James Trefil in his 1986 book *Meditations at 10,000 Feet: A Scientist in the Mountains*.

We are all used to the fact that when water flows swiftly over a rocky bed, there will be a lot of foam and bubbles generated—this is what is meant by “whitewater”. But there is something strange about the waves you see in whitewater. In a typical stretch of whitewater, you might see a classical wave, except

for one thing. The stream might be moving to the right, and the turbulent crest is on the left-hand side of the wave. The wave, in other words, is pointing *in the wrong direction!* Your instincts tell you that a rock in the stream bed should push the surface of the stream up, and if a wave forms, it should break on the downstream side of the rock. It definitely shouldn't produce foam on the upstream side.

The wave is an example of "hydraulic jump," a phenomenon so common in everyday life that we usually don't notice it. Imagine that there is a large rock upstream of the whitewater. As shown in the figure, the water coming over the top of the rock is flowing down a slope much steeper than that which describes the general geometry of the stream. Consequently, on this part of the rock the flow of water will be fast; and since the amount of water that has to pass over the rock is roughly the same as that which has to flow through any other area of the stream of equal cross section, the swift flow down the steep side means that the water flowing over the rock will be shallow compared to the rest of the stream.

Once the water coming down the rock encounters the slower fluid in the main part of the stream, it slows down. You have a similar experience when you run to catch a plane,



then arrive at the ticket counter where movement is slower. When this happens, the number of people at the slowdown spot grows; a crowd accumulates. In just the same way, when the swiftly moving water slows down, water accumulates. In an open stream, the only way to accommodate more water is for the overall depth to increase. Thus some distance from the rock we expect the depth of the water to be greater than it is where the water is sluicing down the base of the rock.

It's not hard to see that we can have a situation in which the fast, shallow flow down the rock is supercritical while the deep, slower flow downstream is subcritical. If this is the case, then there must be some spot where the flow is

exactly critical. If a wave is generated in this region, it will move upstream as fast as it is being swept downstream, thus appearing to be stationary to someone on the bank.

JHINGA LA LA HO HO! is what the plains folk hear when a hillman opens his mouth, writes Sadhana Naithani of Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, in *The Times of India* of 12 November 1994.

The *Paharis* or the hill people have special representation in the popular Hindi feature films: the (non-pahari) hero or the heroine in pursuit of adventure suddenly observes a group of people wearing colourful but undefinable clothes, feathers on the heads, dancing around an unknown deity with a queer face and in the name of linguistic expression producing sounds like *Jhinga La La Ho Ho!* These quaint creatures are *Paharis*.

Outside their natural habitat they are high-cheek-boned guards at the gate of the villain or hero portrayed as absolutely foolish or at best stupidly brave! Or course, for romance, honeymoon, etc. the hills are the best locations but totally deprived of any native. Moreover, when obsolete customs like *swayamvar* need to be placed in a community then again it is that of the *Paharis*.

This fantasy would have been laughable had it not been related to the real negation of the identity of our hill people, within their state of Uttar Pradesh. Thus it is not only for the Bollywood dream merchants but also for the common people of the plains of UP that the *Paharis*, tribals, cannibals, etc. are all the same *Jhinga La La Ho Ho!* people.

The *Pahari* men are all *Bahadurs* which is synonymous with being stupidly loyal, otherwise dumb and definitely poor. *Bahadur* is not an individual name and does not belong to any known religion, region, custom or society. He is simply from the hills. How many plains people of UP can even differentiate between regions, linguistic and cultural zones in the Himalayas, is a moot question. A *Bahadur* can be a Garhwali, Kumaoni, Nepali, Bhutani, Sikkimi or anything else—the mainlanders could not care less...

The Himalayan regions of Uttar Pradesh and its people have neither shared the political power with their plains counterparts nor have their issues and problems figured importantly in the state or national agenda. The *Pahar* and *Paharis* have existed incognito. They are a part of the mainstream's Unconscious and can be represented anyhow by unconcerned politicians and fantasising dream merchants. The real roles that they, as a community, play in society, or their individual national heroes are not considered worth mentioning.

Vajra (literally--flash of lighting), is an artists' condominium, a transit home for many, providing a base during months of hibernation and creative inspiration. Its isolation, graphic splendour and peaceful ambience, make an ideal retreat from the clock of pressure.

Ketaki Sheth
Inside Outside

I stayed a week at the **Vajra**, by which time I had become so fond of it that I stayed another.

John Collee
The London Observer



in Kathmandu, the Vajra

Swayambhu, Dattu Bijyaswori, PO Box 1084, Kathmandu
Phone 271545, 272719 Fax 977 1 271695 Telex 2309 HVGHPL



The Musalman is more protected in 'Hindu Nepal' than he is in 'secular India'. And yet, externally-fuelled Islamic fundamentalism and knee-jerk Hindu chauvinism cannot rule out a nasty situation from arising.

by Sudhindra Sharma

How the Crescent Fares in Nepal

The *mauzzin* calls the faithful to prayer from a minaret that vies for height with the Ghanta Ghar next door and the tower of the Narayanhiti Royal Palace a little further on. It is Friday, and the faithful gather from the far corners of Kathmandu to offer Khutabah at the Nepali Jame Masjid. The crowd bottles up the traffic emerging from the city's exclusive Durbar Marg plaza.

In itself, the setting is not out of ordinary. The *mauzzin* has been calling from this spot for a long time, perhaps since the reign of King Pratap Malla in the early 17th century. What has changed over the last year is that the modest historic edifice has been demolished and a spanking new marble-sided, petro-dollar-financed structure, many times larger, has been erected in its place. Meanwhile, the number of Muslim adherents who turn up for prayer has increased more than tenfold over the last decade.

To those seeking communal conspiracies in the "Hindu state" of Nepal, the Friday crowd at Durbar Marg would seem to provide ample visible proof that the Musalman's strength is on the rise in the kingdom. For those in the plains media seeking to unearth geopolitical intrigues

in the aftermath of the Ayodhya disaster and the Bombay bomb blasts, this manifest Muslim presence in a downtown thoroughfare is proof enough that the infamous Pakistani spook agency, the ISI, is up to something nasty in Nepal. Indeed, Indian journalists and academics have been no laggards these past few months in issuing dire warnings of a Pakistani offensive against the Indian state, using Nepal's Muslims as cover.

This is the first time in history that the Muslims of Nepal have made news, but of a kind that they could do without. As a tiny minority, Muslims have preferred to keep a low profile and make little noise. The forced 'exposure' of the past few months have brought misplaced notoriety to a community about which little has been written in contrast to the detailed social scientific research and writing that has been done on other Nepali communities. As a political scientist at Tribhuvan University says, "The only way to counter the simplistic coverage of Nepali Muslims by Indian media, which is not merely unpleasant for the Muslim but politically dangerous for Nepal, is to describe the community and to make them human."

The political scientists and others like him believe that it is important that the escalating Hindu-Muslim animosities in South Asia not be imported north of the border. Thus far, the fact that violent post-Ayodhya episodes have not impacted within Nepal indicates that the otherwise open border between Nepal and India does serve as an effective socio-political barrier which prevents the direct transfer of fundamentalism and fanaticism. It *does* seem to matter that Nepal is a separate country.

The Hindu state has given members of its Muslim minority the right to practise their religion, at the same time prohibiting them from converting others. Historically, and up to the present, Muslims have largely complied with the stricture and Nepali society has passed from feudal times through the Panchayat era into present-day democracy with the Hindu-Muslim relations more amicable than elsewhere in South Asia.

There is little reason for national smugness on the matter, however. For Nepali Muslims studying in the Subcontinent or working in the West Asia are becoming exposed to what many consider to be more 'correct' Islam, and

are beginning to articulate their firmly-held views. The funding of schools, organisations and individuals by proselytising donors in the Gulf countries could further attenuate this trend.

Added to all this is the fact that Nepal's Hindu intelligentsia, for all its anti-Indian rhetoric, largely feeds on the writings of Indian politicians, scholars, journalists. Influence of the Indian media and inherited but as yet un-articulated anti-Muslim biases could together lead to a hardening of this intelligentsia's attitude towards minority Muslims. This attitude might also be bolstered by a perceived need to protect Nepal from the wrath of Indian politicians and administrators who are convinced (as is former Indian Foreign Secretary J.N. Dixit) that Pakistan intends to destabilise India through Nepal's open southern border.

Early Muslims and Latecomers

Nepal's Muslims, while they are mainly Sunni, constitute a heterogeneous group. Their ancestors arrived in Nepal from different parts of South Asia and Tibet during different epochs, and have since lived peacefully amidst the numerically dominant Hindus.

According to the *Vamshavalis*, Muslims of Kashmir arrived in Kathmandu during the reign of King Ratna Malla (1484-1520 AD). They built a mosque, the Kashmiri Takia, and engaged in different occupations—as scribes to correspond with the Delhi Sultanate, and as scent manufacturers, musicians and bangle suppliers. Some were admitted as courtiers to the Malla durbar, and many traded with Tibet. The descendants of these migrants live in Kathmandu, numbering about 2000. They tend to be well-educated and speak a mixture of Nepali and Urdu at home rather than Kashmiri. While many work as petty businessmen, some have joined government service or entered politics.

The second group of Muslims to enter the Valley were those of Hindustani origin. These arrived during the reign of Pratap Malla (1641-1674), who allowed them to erect a separate mosque in the southern part of the property belonging to the Kashmiri Takia. This Hindustani mosque, now known as the Nepali Jame Masjid, is originally said to have been a Shia mosque, an *imambara*. It was converted into a Sunni mosque by Maulana Sargaraz Ali Shah, a mufti of the last Mughal Emperor Bahadur

Shah Zafar, who arrived with the entourage of Begum Hazrat Mahal of Lucknow when she took shelter in Kathmandu after the suppression of the Indian Mutiny by the British in 1857.

The third group of Muslims to settle in Nepal came from different parts of northern India during the 16th and 17th centuries, invited by hill rulers to manufacture military armament (including canons). They remained in the hills as makers of agricultural implements, utensils and ornaments. Though the descendants of these migrants are known as the *Churaute*, or bangle-sellers, a majority survive as farmers. There is a fair sprinkling of these hill Muslims in Nepal's central and western districts of Gorkha, Tanahu, Kaski, Syangja, Palpa, Argakhanchi, Pyuthan and Dailekh.

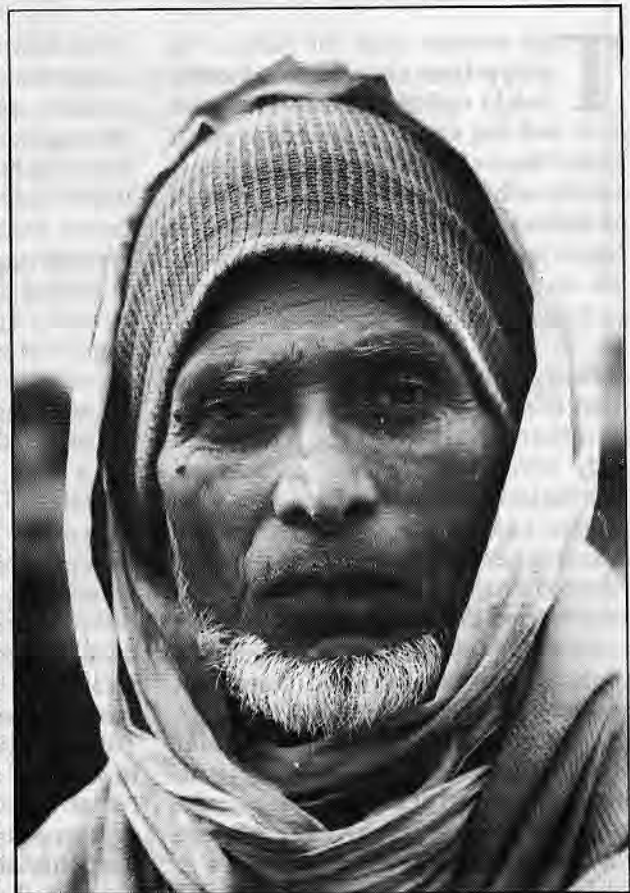
Muslim migrants of Tibetan origin include both Ladakhis and those from Tibet proper. The latter arrived mostly after the Chinese takeover in 1959, and in their language and dress these Tibetan Muslims are indistinguishable from their Tibetan Buddhist counterparts. Today, many are engaged in the trade of Chinese consumer durables and selling curios. On the whole, this group tends to be more affluent than the other Muslim communities.

While the smaller groups provide diversity, the largest community of Islam adherents—more than 90 percent—are the Muslims of the tarai. Concentrated in the tarai districts of Banke, Kapilvastu, Rupandehi, Parsa, Bara and Rautahat, some of the Tarai Muslims were present here at the time of Nepal's unification while others migrated from British India from the 19th century onwards as wage labourers. While most are small-time proprietor farmers, a substantial number still work as tenants and agricultural labourers. At home they do not speak Urdu, but Awadhi and Bhojpuri depending on whether they are of the Western or Central Tarai.

The Churaute hill Muslims have been greatly influenced by the Hindu hill milieu. They follow circum-

cision and ritual burial of the dead, but other practises like *nikah* (bride price) and *zakat* (charity collected during religious festivals) are unequally observed. The daily namaz and month-long fasting during Ramadan are lightly dispensed with. The Churaute speak Nepali, as do the Kashmiri Muslims of Kathmandu, many of whom are also fluent in Newari. The Kashmiri Muslim lifestyle resembles that of upper middle-class urban Hindus, while in their dress, food habits and some customs the Churaute are indistinguishable from their Bahun-Chettri neighbours.

Living in the Nepali state for a longer period of time and sharing common historical experiences, the above groups have developed a stronger identification with the Nepali state. The Tarai Muslims, on the other hand, like other Tarai communities, continue to have strong ties across the border and receive cultural sustenance from the larger Muslim population of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Even though the gulf between the hill and the Tarai Muslims has been wide, however, some of it is being bridged as educated Tarai Muslims marry into



Musalman of Krishnanagar.

Kathmandu's Kashmiri Muslim families, and *moulavis* from the Tarai take to visiting hill *madradas*.

There are two other groups of Muslims in the country. These are the Bangladeshi ("Bihari") refugees who arrived in 1971, most of whom have been repatriated to Pakistan. Then there are the Kashmiri merchants who first arrived in the 1970s to set up curio shops in Kathmandu's tourist quarters. There has been a spurt in arrivals from Srinagar since the political turmoil in Jammu and Kashmir escalated in 1990. Many shopkeepers arrived with their stocks of handicrafts, rugs and furs.

These recent arrivals have little or no interaction with the older Muslim residents, and most do not even know that there is an old Kashmiri Muslim stock in Kathmandu. The Indian media's attention is mostly directed at this group of recent arrivals, for their ability to provide cover to Pakistan-supported militants from the Kashmir Valley. Says Mohammad Aziz, who owns a curio shop in the Chhetrapati tourist district, "We are not interested in forming alliances with other Muslims. We are wholly preoccupied with our business and have no time for politics. Inshallah, when the situation in Kashmir improves we will go back."

The Politics of Numbers

Historically, though the Hindu state has provided the Muslim minority with the freedom to practise Islam, it has also imposed several restrictions. While providing land grants for the construction of mosques and *madradas* and establishing cemeteries, for example, it has issued a strict ban on proselytising and cow slaughter.

The *Old Mulki Ain* civil code of 1854 ordered all the communities living within the country into a single hierarchy based on notions of ritual purity and pollution. In the process, the state assigned the Muslims a caste status towards the bottom end of the hierarchy. As with Christians, they were listed among the "impure but not untouchable castes"—in the same category as oil pressers, butchers and washerfolk. With the enactment of the new *Mulki Ain* in 1964, the legal backing to the caste system was withdrawn.

According to the 1991 census, 0.65 million out of Nepal's population of 18.5 million are Muslims, or 3.6 percent of the

Religious Communities of Nepal, 1991 (in thousands)		
Religions	Number	Percentage
Hindu	15,996	86.50
Buddhist	1439	7.78
Muslim	653	3.53
Jain	7	0.03
Christian	31	0.16
Others	365	1.97
Total	18,491	100

total. The percentage was 2.6 percent in 1954 and 3 percent in 1971. This gradual increase is explained by natural growth arising from a relatively high fertility rate. The number of conversions to Islam is statistically negligible, and there has been no permanent mass-migration from India. (By way of contrast to the Muslim community's moderate growth rate, the Christian population which was statistically insignificant till 1971 rose dramatically to 4000 in 1981 and 31,000 in 1991. Only conversion can explain this increase.)

The Muslims of Nepal have never been a part of the landed gentry, as Muslims are elsewhere in South Asia. The average size of Muslim land holdings is 0.86 hectares in the Nepali hills and 1.23 ha in the plains. Many Tarai Muslims are engaged as tenants and agriculture wage labourers.

Due to social and legal handicaps, Muslims are not adequately represented in the bureaucracy, and there are few in trade and industry. In politics, Muslims have a stronger voice now than before. While the *Rastriya Panchayat* national assembly of 1981 had three Muslim representatives, there were five Muslim MPs in the Lower House that was elected in 1990. The most recent elections of 15 November, however, has put only three Muslims into the new Lower House, a setback that is probably temporary.

The Security Concern

Although in affluence and political representation, Nepali Muslims appear to lag behind those of neighbouring countries, there is a greater feeling of security among them. While their lifestyle is similar to their co-religionists across the border in terms of beliefs and culture, the Tarai Muslim have more sense of personal security than those living in India.

Communal conflagrations in Bihar or Uttar Pradesh that could have easily jumped the open border into the Nepal Tarai, have not.

There have been few outright Hindu-Muslim conflicts in the Nepal Tarai. According to the All Nepal Anjuman Islaha (ANAI), a committee appointed by the late King Mahendra to resolve communal problems, there were 12 recorded instances of communal riots between 1954 and 1977. These riots were mostly provoked by allegations of cow slaughter, religious processions such as the *Tajia*, or the building of mosques.

The most serious communal flareup was a 1971 riot in Bara and Rauthat, triggered when some Hindus murdered a Muslim on the charge of cow slaughter. The two tarai districts were unstable for two weeks and the situation of the minority Muslims seemed extremely vulnerable. King Mahendra, arriving from a trip abroad, mobilised armed police and suppressed the riot. This use of state machinery for their protection seems to have bolstered the Nepali Muslims' confidence on the Hindu monarch and state.

Marc Gaborieau, a French anthropologist, is of the opinion that the Muslims of Nepal are protected because they constitute a small minority and maintain a low profile. On the other hand, Mohammad Mohsin, sociologist and one-time minister under the *Panchayat*, feels that the atmosphere is not highly charged because the hill and Kathmandu Muslims do not react quickly to communally motivated events and tend to trust the state machinery.

It may also be that the Hindu majority does not feel great animosity towards Islam because Nepal has never been subjected to Muslim rule. And then, Nepal has not undergone the trauma of a partition based on religion as has a large part of the Subcontinent. While long-dormant resentments may exist among some, having to do with Gayasuddin Tuglaq's raid on Simraungad or Samsuddin's pillage of the Kathmandu Valley kingdoms during the 13th century, and the mythical flight of Rajputs and Brahmins from the Indus-Ganga plain to the midhills, these are not recent-enough historical experience for them to affect present-day inter-community relations.

Soon after the demolition of Babri Masjid in Ayodhya on 6 December 1992, it

was reported that an idol of Lord Krishna had been broken by a man in Eastern Nepal. With nerves frayed all around, to everyone's relief he turned out to be not a Muslim but a Hindu distraught over the death of his child.

While Hindu-Muslim relations have been affected by Ayodhya, the country did not experience the violence seen by India, Bangladesh and Pakistan. Says Mohammad Hussein Samu, the President of Kathmandu's Islamic Yuwa Sangh, "By God's grace such violent incidents have not occurred in Nepal. The credit for this largely goes to our politicians who have refrained from playing the religious card."

groups have begun to challenge the role historically assigned to them by the state, Muslims have been slow to speak up.

Many lay Muslims believe that their national level leaders have not done much to articulate their concerns. This deliberately set low profile seems to reflect the natural diffidence of a minority community, with the leaders realising well that lobbying too stridently might only invite political problems. This does not satisfy someone like Tribhuvan University Political Science Professor S.M. Habibullah, who says, "Muslim political leaders do not have the guts to speak on behalf of the community".

the political spectrum, from Sheik Idris of Nepali Congress to Salim Ansari of Nepal Communist Party, and Mirza Dilshad Beg of the Rastriya Prajatantra Party.

During the transition to multiparty democracy, there were some Muslims who believed that their community would be treated with more respect, especially when they listened to the media carrying Id greetings by party political leaders. Muslim leaders, particularly those of the Left, lobbied for a secular constitution. However, the document that was unveiled in November 1993 maintained Nepal's status as a Hindu kingdom under a Hindu monarchy. Euphoria gave way to soul searching, and many activists turned towards Muslim welfare organisations, such as the Ittehadul Muslimean Committee, Iqra Modal Academy, Islamic Yuwa Sangh, Nepal Muslim Sangh, Bajme Adab and the Muslim Seva Samiti.

Others, however, believe that a cosmetic change from "Hindu" to "secular" would not have accomplished much. Maintains Salim Ansari, "The fact is that Nepal is de facto secular." According to the Islamic Yuwa Sangh's Samu, "We have seen what goes on in the name of secularism in other countries. And what if there is a ban on cow slaughter? Buffaloes are a good substitute." Rather than argue over the constitutional fait accompli,

some educated Muslim voices believe that efforts should be directed at gaining more legitimacy for Islamic traditions and practises within the existing framework.

Indeed, there are some measures that the Nepali Establishment could take in fulfilling moderate Muslim demands. This would be preferable to having to deal with strident extremists tomorrow.

The Nepali judicial system already recognises traditional Muslim marriages, such as among patrilineal cousins. What it does not recognise is traditional Muslim divorce. Giving legitimacy to marriage but not sanctioning divorce is a legal anomaly which needs to be resolved.



BIKAS RAU/NIAR

Musalman of Nepalganj.

Democracy and the Musalman

As one minority community among Nepal's many, for all practical purposes Muslims may be regarded as an ethnic group. Says Hamid Ansari, who is an econometrician at Tribhuvan University, "Muslims in Nepal should not be seen solely in terms of a religious minority. They share some facets in common with other Janajati people in that they have been historically neglected by the state." Like the *janajati* groups, they have remained inarticulate and docile, although with the coming of multiparty democracy, ethnic assertion has arisen. Nevertheless, while some hill ethnic and Tarai-based

The Muslim community's clout seems to be hampered by the fact that while they make up a significant population in several Tarai districts, Muslims do not vote en block and therefore are not treated as vote banks by political parties. Neither do Nepali Muslims have a separate political platform to articulate their demands—there is no Nepali Muslim League or Nepali Jamiha Islamia, for example.

Even after the coming of multiparty democracy, the Muslim electorate has voted for mainstream political parties, and this is clear from the sprinkling of prominent Muslim personalities across

Muslim employees in government are not entitled to their religious holidays, which are deducted from their casual leaves. The procedure for applying for the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca is designed to needlessly harass the applicants. There are these and other matters that need to be resolved.

Rifts and Undercurrents

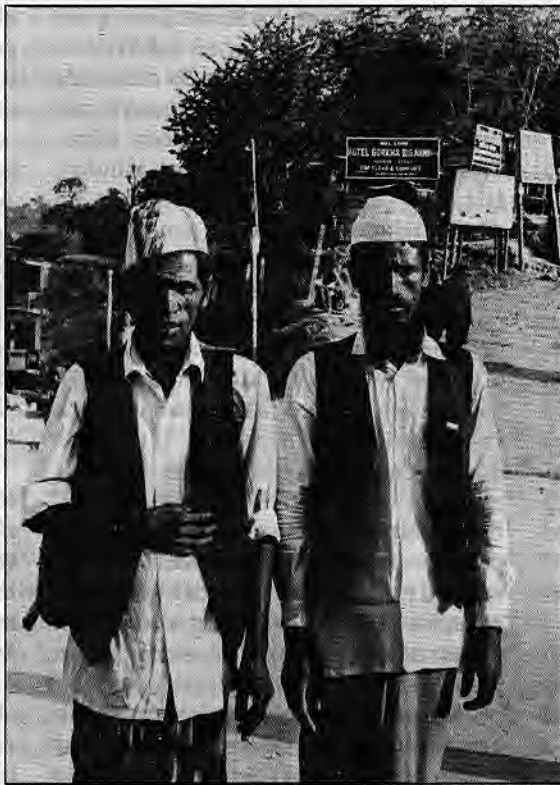
As a proselytising religion, Islam is in an incongruous situation in Nepal where the state forbids conversion. Unlike Christian missionaries who proceeded to gather a flock despite the state's injunction, the Muslim community has largely complied with this stricture.

There is a different kind of "conversion" progressing, though, and it is happening *within* the community. The reference is to the process in which a Nepali Muslim who has studied elsewhere in South Asia or visited the Gulf countries is influenced by ultra-conservative sects such as the Wahabi, and returns a more "correct" Muslim. He then tries to indoctrinate culturally assimilated Nepali Muslims. At the same time, non-Nepali clerics are invited for *Dawa*, or propagation of the faith.

While this activity is not directed at people outside the faith, some Muslim scholars fear that it would differentiate the Muslims more from the national mainstream, which would be detrimental. Says Mohammad Mohsin, "Such activities could lead to the Muslim community being further alienated from the dominant Nepali culture and society."

Propagating such "neo-fundamentalist" planks are organisations such as the Islamic Yuwa Sangh and the Muslim Seva Samiti, which, according to their literature seek to "to convey the correct message of Islam," "strive for the Islamic way of life," or "live an individual and collective life according to the Koran."

Samu of the Islamic Yuwa Sangh (of Tibetan extraction) disagrees vehemently with the term "neo-fundamentalist". He says, "Can a person who believes in the five pillars of Islam be called a fundamentalist? If yes, then all practising Muslims are fundamentalists." (The 5 cardinal doctrines are: there is only one God and Mohammad is his last Prophet; performing namaz five times a day; fasting during the month of Ramadan; zakat; and, if possible, going to Mecca on Hajj.)



Musalman of Gorkha

Adds Samu, "We do not advocate implementation of the Sharia. All we are saying is that the Muslim youth should not go into drugs, should not be lost in worldly affairs but should find anchorage in Islam."

In order to find solace in Islam, many Muslim organisations, particularly those that are tarai-based, bring in funds from the rich Muslim countries. And this is what is resented by some observers. The imposing new edifice of the Nepali Jame Masjid in downtown Kathmandu is known to have been built with foreign funds, but no one is willing to divulge the source. The allegation is made that in order to collect money in Gulf capitals, Muslim activists tend to paint an overly bleak picture of the status of Muslims in "Hindu Nepal". Moreover, these organisations are not transparent, with little accountability for funds collected for the Umma.

In their missionary activity, organisations such as the Islamic Yuwa Sangh, the largest and best organised, have been able to influence the Tarai Muslims, particularly the rural landed elite. Besides spiritual satisfaction, what they have to offer is scholarships to study in Muslim countries and job opportunities in the Gulf. These groups have not made

much headway with the non-Tarai Muslims of the hills and Kathmandu.

There is considerable hostility among the "neo-fundamentalists" towards the culturally more assimilative Muslims of the hills and Kathmandu. In fact, the brunt of their ire is directed towards the traditionally liberal Kashmiri Muslims, who, being more educated and articulate than others have traditionally been leaders of the Nepali Muslims. Moreover, these Kathmandu Kashmiri Muslims follow Sufi precepts, which the more conservative condemn as un-Islamic.

There is more of a tendency towards fundamentalism among the Tarai Muslims, with some of their leaders influenced by global militant Islam. Today, variously armed with the muscle of Gulf funding, the neo-fundamentalists seem to be gaining an upper hand in the community and emerging as the spokesmen of the community. In all likelihood, as this trend gains, the relationship between the majority Hindus and the minority Muslims will begin to sour. Unlike the

traditional liberals, the neo-fundamentalists are more strident and less compromising.

The rift between the "traditional liberals" and the "neo-fundamentalists" is neatly divided between the two mosques in downtown Kathmandu, the Nepali Jame Masjid and the Kashmiri Takia, which follow different branches of Sunni Islam. The Jame Masjid has remained a strong platform for the more puritanical Deobandi school, which calls for a literal translation of the Koran and its adoption in the daily lives of the community members. The Kashmiri Takia follows the Brailvi school, which provides a more liberal interpretation of the Koran and accepts the authority of Sufi holy men as mediators of Allah. In practice, the Brailvi schools tends to be more accommodating of local customs and practices.

Conflict and Accommodation

The leadership role among Nepali Muslims is thus shifting from Kathmandu's Kashmiris to educated Muslims of the tarai. While the Kathmandu Muslims have been, as Mohammad Mohsin says, "more loyal to the state" simply by virtue of their deeper links to the Nepali hills, the Tarai Muslims, far removed from the traditional centres

BIKAS RAJNIR

of power and the dominant Parbatiya culture, have a greater identification with the other communities of Nepal's Tarai and the larger Muslim population next door.

A worrying prospect is that Nepal's Hindu intelligentsia will over-react to the growing Muslim demand for greater representation. For all their anti-Indian sentiments, many among Kathmandu's educated elite feed from the same trough as India's Hindu elite. Their self-identification tends to be based on mainstream Indian scholarship, perusal of the Indian media, and contemporary opinion out of the south, and an underlying pride on Nepal being a "Hindu kingdom". For example, many educated Nepali Hindus bask in the praise heaped by Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) supporters for maintaining "the only Hindu *rashtra*".

There are some indications that with the seemingly orchestrated coverage by Indian media of alleged involvement of Pakistan's ISI in Nepal, the attitude of a section of the Hindu educated of Kathmandu is hardening. This is visible, for example, both in media writeups and in random discussions with Kathmandu's educated. When asked about Islam, an engineer's response was sarcastic: "Islam is undoubtedly a great religion. It prides on killing others." When a bureaucrat was asked about the wisdom of conceding to some of the demands of the Muslim minority, his response was, "You give them a little and they ask for more. See what's happening in India right now. The way the BJP is dealing with the situation is correct."

For many Hindus, Islam is simply *ulto dharma*, or reversed religion, and few are aware of its theological underpinnings. What strikes them are the details of ritual observance, particularly those features that are strange to them. Muslims appear to do just the opposite to what Hindus consider normal, such as washing their feet first during ablutions and moving towards the face rather than the other way around. Hindus face east while performing puja, while South Asian Muslims face west towards Mecca during Namaz.

At the intellectual level, the fear of Islam as the hostile "other" is accentuated by the Western media's and intelligentsia's proclivity to be anti-Islam. This attitude is epitomised by the widely publicised thesis of Samuel Huntington, professor of political science at Harvard University, that

with the demise of the Soviet Union, the next great confrontation of the West is with Islam. Huntington speaks of Islam's "bloody borders", with the eastern one presumably being post-Ayodhya India. Thus, among anglophile Nepali Hindus, Islam is increasingly perceived as an enemy religion, one that is synonymous with fundamentalism.

Yet there are voices among Hindus, particularly among those acquainted with Muslim tradition and culture, that call for a honest hearing to Muslim demands. Says Rajesh Gautam, a historian who has researched Nepali Muslims, "If the state does not heed moderate Muslim demands now, it may further alienate the community, so much so that the leadership passes from moderate to extremist hands. Already, certain radical Muslim organisations are gathering strength in parts of the Tarai, for example in Nepalganj."

The main Muslim demand relates to greater access to modern education and better representation in the state apparatus. Elsewhere, the voice of the Muslim community is less unanimous. Some believe that traditional Islamic divorce practice should be recognised by the state since it has already recognised marriage among patrilineal cousins. Others believe that this should not be a major concern, and the focus should be on

alleviating poverty among rural Muslims, particularly those of the tarai who make up the larger part of Nepal's Muslim community.

Some believe that Islamic festivals such as Eid ul Fitr, Eid ul Asha and Juma Alwida need to be established as national gazetted holidays, while other maintain that it is enough to give just Muslim employees the days off. If a portion of the Muslim intelligentsia thinks that the government needs to give subsidies to madrasas, other sections believe that doing so would only undermine the autonomy of the madrasas.

Given this lack of unanimity within the community and an absence of a national level organisations to represent the interests of all the Muslims, it is likely that the Nepali state will continue to turn a deaf ear to the major demands of Nepali Muslims. This would be unfortunate.

Kathmandu's educated classes should be steering the state towards a middle path, so that the Hindu-Muslim divide, which is a blight upon the rest of South Asia, does not finally arrive in Nepal. This middle path involves accommodating moderate demands of the Muslims while being ever watchful for the elite's swing towards Hindu fundamentalism.

▷

S.Sharma is a sociologist interested in religion.

Chessler Books

Send for our free Mail Order catalog of the world's largest selection of Mountaineering Books.

New, out-of-print, and rare.

Also Tibet, Nepal, Polar, Exploration.

Guidebooks, trekking maps, videos and more!

Please write or call for your free catalog today.

Chessler Books

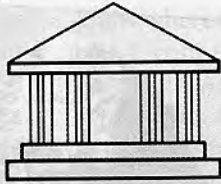
P.O. Box 399-112

Kittredge, Colorado 80457 USA

(303) 670-0093 FAX (303) 670-9727

Tavern

ZORBAS



Greek & International Specialities

With a view over Swayambhu

authentic Cuisine from the

blue sea of Greece

to the

exotic coasts of Asia.

And a different menu every month!

Swayambhu (Opposite Military Hospital)
Open daily (Except Mon.)
12:30 - 3:00 pm - 6:00 - 10:00 pm
For Reservations call : 270 924

HIMALAYA



EVEREST . K2
ANNAPURNA
MUSTANG
MANASLU
LADAKH
KAILAS
RUPSHU
ZANSKAR
SPITI
TIBET
BHUTAN

Walk in small groups to
unaffected places hidden in
the world's highest mountains.
Live in pure culture.
Walk back.

801-355-6555
FOR A FREE CATALOG



SNOWLION
EXPEDITIONS

Anything, Anywhere, Anytime



Overseas Cargo Service and J.P.N. Exports, Thamel, Kathmandu

P.O. Box 8621, Kathmandu. Phone: 977 1 413391 Fax: 416850

Lest this column be seen to be too snide for its own good, *Chhetria Patrakar* is given to dropping a good word every now then. Snide, was when I demanded in my last column that the **Perpetual Independent Fund Management** company pay royalty to Himalayans for using the Ama Dablam massif in its logo and advertisement copy. This time, appearing a nice guy, I would commend Perpetual for imaginative use of Ama Dablam on the ad that appeared in the *Guardian Weekly* of 6 November. Normally, photographic manipulation is to be frowned upon, but not when it results in work that is creative and pleasing to the eye, and makes one exclaim "Oho!"

"Tibetan nomads to survive rub butter on the face to cheat the scouring winds and the effect of this home-grown cosmetic is hardly consistent with the **fair and lovely complexion** favoured by the pouting mouths of metropolitan beauties..." Bill Aitken doesn't sober up with age, does he? This discussion of Himalayan cosmetology comes in his occasionally notorious travel column in *The Statesman* as Aitken and a friend head up to Gangotri to "study the operational grace of the Ganga" as part of the columnists' 60th birthday present. Along the way, the friend is smitten by a yogini who has spent five years in the wintry heights of Tapovan. Writes Aitken, his friend's quest "appeared to be as much romantic as spiritual for he felt the Mataji's feminine presence would agitate his dormant Kundalini." We are not told how this particular odyssey ended.

Crime does not pay, but crime can indicate if a country has achieved some measure of inter-ethnic and caste integration. It is a gauge of sorts, and so it pleased one no end to see that a major heist in Kathmandu's Guccha Tole, on 29 July, had the cooperation of a proper cross-section of Nepali society. When the police nabbed the suspects of the armed robbery in which a goldsmith was robbed of NRs 1.9 million, they included a Shrestha (Newar), Niraula (Bahun), Lama (Tamang?), Gurung and Thapa (Chhetri).



One would have imagined that by now **Indian customs** would have discarded those ubiquitous rubber stamps stating: "The External Boundaries of India As Depicted In This Map Are Neither Correct Nor Authentic". There should be no room for peevishness when P.V.Narasimha Rao has embraced Li Peng, there is *de facto* recognition of the frontiers in Ladakh and the Northeast, and the 1962 war is more than three decades old. Well, the rubber stamp is apparently still very much in use. The latest to invite the wrath of the Central Board of Excise and Customs, is a consignment of *Children's Britannica*, which remains in handcuffs in a Calcutta Port Authority dungeon because officials discovered some "creative cartography" in India's Northwest.

The Kosi Barrage has a bad name in Nepal, epitomising **the great and continuous a sellout to India**. According to a report in *Habitat Himalaya*, the newsletter brought out by wildlife biologist Pralad Yonzon, however, the Barrage has actually benefited wildlife. Built in 1964 by the Indian Government to "jacket" the monsoon flood before it devastates Bihar, the Barrage has created "abundant marsh and littoral habitats, which have become one of Nepal's most important wetland regions". Almost all waterfowl species found in Nepal occur here, including 325 out of Nepal's total 836 bird species of all types. Unfortunately, this artificially (and inadvertently) created wildlife habitat remains unprotected. The Indian managers of the Barrage (it is right by the border) are not too bothered with wildlife haven they have created. Yonzon suggests that

non-governmental wildlife groups from India and Nepal act jointly to protect the biodiversity created by the Kosi Barrage.

Hark back to April 1989 when a Punjab University geologist was accused of **scientific fraud**: pilfering fossils from Upstate New York and passing them off as being from the Indian Himalaya, manipulation of data, reporting on fictitious paleontological expeditions, and so on (see *Mar/Apr 1989 Himal*). *The Hindustan Times* reports that the Punjab University Senate has at long last accepted a commission's finding that Viswa Jit Gupta, head of its Department of Geology, is indeed guilty of cheating. And yet, the punishment meted out to Gupta has been meagre: depriving him of an official position, stopping salary increments and so on. It is a disgrace to Indian science that the Senate did not strip the academic robes of a quack scientist of Himalayan geology who could be so brazenly fraudulent. How many more such in our midst?

The Himalayan Club, venerable lady of Bombay, has pulled out all stops on a **marketing spree**—to sell some greeting cards. "After matured deliberations", the Managing Committee has decided to produce New Year Greeting Cards for 1994-1995. A set of eight cards have been printed in full colour: all pictures by Himalayan Club Journal Harish Kapadia, and all pertaining to Spiti, the Himachal region which has now been opened to all visitors. Price (incl. shipment): IRs 65 for a set, US \$ 5 for overseas orders. Send money to Shri Shailesh P. Mahadevia, 7/10 Botawala Building, Horniman Circle, Bombay 400 023.

It happened in Darjeeling, and now it has happened in Doon, both home for **exclusive schools** where the Indian ruling classes send their scions. The school calendar was severely affected in the Darjeeling region by the long and violent Gorkhaland struggle. Over the last three months of the Uttarakhand agitation, the English-medium schools affiliated to the CBSE and ISCE national boards in Dehra Dun, Mussoorie, Naini Tal were first closed by a government fiat. Later when the authorities directed them opened, it was the agitators' turn to force a closure. Presently, all have managed to open again, but the tug of war between the two sides continues, with the elite English-medium educational institutions being treated no differently than the private and government UP-Board schools of the region. Egalitarianism rides in Uttarakhand, for better or verse.

Sikkim has long wanted to be part of the **Far Eastern Himalaya** grouping of Brahmaputra valley states. Now it has been accepted into the fold. While Nar Bahadur Bhandari's application had been rejected when he was Chief Minister, the North Eastern Council at a meeting in mid-November agreed to include Sikkim as a member state as requested by Sanchaman Limboo, the Congress-friendly Chief Minister. The NEC's decision has the Centre's blessings.

The loss of **illustrious sons** during the past month includes Kumaon's B.C. Joshi, who became the first of India's Chief of Army Staffs since Independence to die while in the saddle. Gen. Joshi died of a heart attack on 19 November. Born in Almora, he served one of the most decorated regiments in the Indian Army, the Kumaon Regiment, whose origins go back to 1788. Just last month, Joshi was observed in the papers participating in Kumaoni folk dancing during a regimental reunion. The whispered gossip in Uttarakhand, meanwhile, is that Joshi was killed for his support for the ongoing movement. The people of the **Qinghai-Tibet**

plateau had better watch out. Beijing is planning a major river diversion project to supply northwest China with 20 billion cubic metres of water annually by the year 2010. The project proposes to transfer about five percent of the water in the Yangtse to the Hwang Ho river basin, reported the official *China Daily*. First, the Three Gorges Dam on the Yangtse, and now this grandiose yojana—can't these Beijing engineers and policy-makers think of infrastructure other than 'mega'?

Three red pandas from zoos in Germany and Spain. They were spotted recently in transit at New Delhi Airport en route to Darjeeling's Padmaja Naidu Himalayan Zoological Park, where they are going to add genetic diversity for the latter's red panda breeding programme. This is the selfsame zoo whose inmates have been dying like there was a plague (oops) and bringing infamy to zoological gardens all over India that is Bharat. Asked by the *Calcutta Telegraph* whether steps had been taken to improve the record, zoo officials said that some of the earlier deaths had been "natural" while others were due to "lack of expertise". That was not much consolation to our newly arrived German and Spanish red pandas. Especially when they heard that two red pandas acquired earlier from Germany had died because "they failed to adjust to new surroundings". Uh-huh. Also, there is a problem of "growth of a species of poisonous grass in the area." All in all, the three new critters do not seem to stand much of a chance.

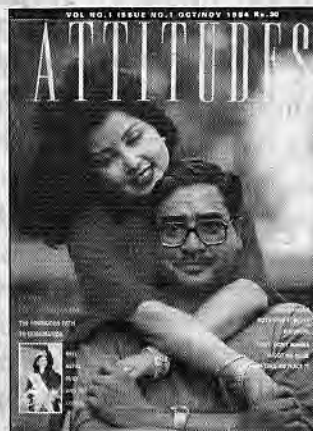
Not long after Himal carried an article on **glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs)**, a glacial lake up in the upper reaches of the Pochu (which joins the Mochu and becomes the Sankosh as it enters India) burst its banks on 7 October, bringing unprecedented loss of life and property in eastern Bhutan. Altogether 21 people are said to have died when the GLOF, careened down the Phochu in Lunana

and Punakha. Another, larger GLOF, is said to have hit the same region back in the mid-1950s. Is this not the same Sankosh that India has just signed a 1500MW hydropower project on, with storage reservoir? Meanwhile, has any politicians shown concern that the Tsho Rolpa glacial lake might burst and wreak devastation in eastern Nepal (see *Himal Jul/Aug 1994*)? No, sir.

Three German scientists have embarked on a four month expedition to study shifting landscapes in the **post-Ice Age period** and to help teach the local population to save themselves from impending landslides and avalanches, reports the *Deutsche Press Agentur*. When the sun shines, avalanches follow, says Geography Professor Matthias Kuhle of Goettingen University. "The Tibetans and Nepalis live like the people near the Mount Etna volcano. They are used to disasters. But they do not know the mechanisms behind the disasters and therefore do not know how to protect themselves, where the safe slopes are." But by the time the good professor is done, we do hope he will have identified where the safe slopes are so that we can get the villagers to move.

Embarrassment, thy name is the Nepali Nation, where a serving Home Minister and soon-to-be Leader of the Opposition poses with his newly-married working-woman spouse for a giggly-wiggly cover photo-spread and article in a slick new mag for the hoi-polloi, named *Attitudes*. Said then Home Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba (while poring over some "bedtime reading" of Krishnamurthy, we are told) of his *ardhangini* Arzu: "I intend to take her on a holiday, far away from everything. Where we can be all by ourselves with no one to bother us." There will be time enough for that.

- *Chhetria Patrakar*



DEEP POWDER SNOW

Forty Years of Ecstatic Skiing, Avalanches, and Earth Wisdom

Dolores LaChapelle

"Deep Powder Snow is a personal celebration... an historical record of the life of one of the nation's most radical thinkers... a book about what it means to be alive." —Telluride Times-Journal

4.25" x 6" • 112 pp
Paper: \$6.95 + S/H
ISBN: 1-882308-21-2



LOOK TO THE MOUNTAIN

An Ecology of Indigenous Education

Gregory Cajete



"... the first major work by an American Indian scholar to systematically work through the tangent points that exist between Indian and non-Indian understandings of education."

—Vine Deloria, Jr., Author, *God Is Red*

7.25" x 8.5" • 248 pp.
Paper: \$16.95 + S/H
ISBN: 1-882308-65-4



585 East 31st Street
Durango, CO 81301 USA

KIVAKI
PRESS

U.S. 1-800-578-5904 • Canada/Overseas (303) 385-1767



The Himalayan Specialists

Want to trek Annapurna?? Sorry, we won't take you there. 40,000 trekkers a year means you could meet more trekkers than locals, and we don't think that's worth traveling halfway around the world for. Join us for authentic cultural experiences amidst the most spectacular mountain scenery on the planet.

Above the Clouds Trekking

P.O. Box 398, Worcester, MA 01602 USA

(800)233-4499; fax (508)797-4779



NEPAL INTERNATIONAL CLINIC

Hours: 9:00 am - 5:00 pm (Sunday through Friday).

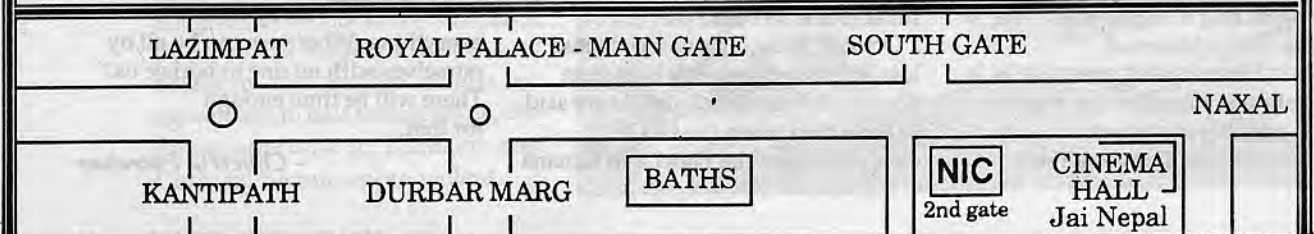
Vaccination/medical advice available even on Saturdays.

Please feel free to call us at

4-12842

Phone/Fax: 977-1-419713

- * Nepal's Leading Institution in Travel Medicine
- * US Board Certified MDs
- * Staff has over 15 Years of Work Experience in South Asian Diseases
- * Highest Standard of Clinical Care and Efficiency
- * No Hassles
- * Free Advice on Altitude Sickness
- * Convenient Location (off Durbar Marg, opposite the South Gate of the Royal Palace - see map below)
- * In Operation for 5 years





The Soldier

("Sipahi")

by Bisweswor Prasad Koirala
translation by Dorjee Tshering Lepcha

It is quite strenuous to walk alone in the hilly paths. On one such path, I had to walk for two or three days. But on the way I laid hold of a soldier, who made my journey a lot easier.

"Eay babu, where you going?" He asked me first, calling me from behind as if he knew me. I turned to look. A soldier in army uniform was approaching fast towards me with small strides. I had heard a lot about the cruelty of army soldiers, so in order to get rid of him I answered "Ilam" and kept on ahead. But by then he had reached me.

"O-ho," he laughed and the gilt front tooth gleamed in the light—"There's where I'm going too. We're together for the whole day; isn't that so, dai?" he said carelessly.

Black coat, army cap, khaki pants. The clip of a cheap fountain pen shone from the pocket of his black coat. He also had a Queen Anne watch around his wrist which could be seen as he raised his hand—he was given to raising his hands now and then while speaking. He had a huge red handkerchief around his neck.

"A soldier I am, but you—by God, if I'm not wrong you're a student. Aren't you?"

I admitted this with a smile.

"The thing is, how one's like, what he does, I can tell by

his clothes, the way he talks. Swear on your blood, I haven't failed till today, at least in this matter. I can't read or write—yes, I can sign at the time of drawing my pay and I can recite the Ramayana at least. What little I learned was at the barracks; but had I given myself to studying only, I would have ended up lean, thin and pale like you."

Now I began to enjoy his conversation. On the way, he spoke to everyone as though he knew them—"Where to?"

People, in awe of his military figure, were unable to respond. If an elderly woman came by, he would address her as mother-in-law and ask after the well-being of her daughters—"How's your youngest daughter? Do tell me please, my favourite sasu?"

He was not inquisitive about me. So busy giving accounts of his own life, what could he ask about me?

"I'm at Quetta garrison. I've been there for many days. I've a wife too, but here in these hills. She's sick and useless, but despite that, two sons are already born. I haven't been home for many days, don't want to, either. My wife must have gone with someone else. Sons must have become ruffians too—however, my younger son was rather smart; I had great hope of educating him, but bother! My father didn't send me to school but I'm fine. I've found a wife in Quetta itself. There should be something to keep you interested wherever you are."

It is good fun to listen to a soldier, he says everything openly, hiding nothing. What could he hide anyway?

I asked like an earnest student, "But what is life in the army like?"

"Ho-ho-ho...What a question! It's great fun, may I eat your flesh if I lie! We don't have problems like yours. Enjoy

yourselves—that's what our officer tells us. Took my leave from him to come here. There's talk of a war shortly. That's why I've come here to raise recruits. On my blood, I've already snared six of them. A soldier gets to wash his mouth out with milk, gets to use the heads of castrated goats as hearth-stones. It's more to liberate them than to trap them. We need soldiers for our country," he said blowing away cigarette smoke—"Dying in war gets you straight to heaven." At this, his face became grave like a man reciting the *Geeta*.

This charming conversation was making the going easy. Just then up ahead some girls were returning from cutting grass. He winked at me, said, "Hold on a bit, I'm going to tease them." Approaching them he opened with a salute, then said something to them. At this remark, the rest of the girls walked off in a huff, but one of them threw her bundle of grass on the ground and, arms akimbo, began to hurl abuses at him, entire body shaking and teeth bared. My soldier friend started laughing holding his stomach and, turning to me, said, "She is a vixen. She must be as abusive to her husband every day. I can swear by anything."

We were proceeding ahead. "It's very difficult to understand these girls. I, too, had once been ensnared by one, Ohh..." he said with a long sigh. At that time, he appeared hard like a stone statue, his legs moving mechanically. The yellow sun was descending beyond the

hills ahead of us. I asked, full of curiosity, "Yes, the what happened?"

"Yes, I was coming to it. I also loved a girl. I don't know how I fell for her. I spent many days with her laughing and frolicking. One Sunday, I found out that I had begun to love her. I was on holiday that day. As soon as evening fell I went running to her." His breathing quickened. "That day she wore a blue gown...Damn, she was looking quite beautiful that day!" That very moment we had to do a steep ascent. "Wait on, I'll buy two stalks of sugarcane. The climb's begun. It's easier to walk using the sugarcane as staves. We can chew them at the top to lessen the fatigue. Don't you like the idea?"

So saying he went off and came back with two stalks. Giving one to me, he resumed, "But that girl jilted me badly. Fancy, she went off with a captain. His fine clothes impressed her; but I assure you, she can't live with that old captain either. This is how she enjoys to keep floating on, that pretty girl." A faint breath of air blew away his last words.

I was assessing him, so I did not say anything. He smiled a little seeing me quiet and said, "I can bet a bottle of raksi, you are thinking about your wife; isn't that so? Look here, don't lie, upon my word."

I did not answer at all. A little later, I asked, "Tell me soldier dai, how do you go to war? Bombs, bullets, death—I cannot even imagine the horror.

Laughing with disdain, he slapped my shoulder and said—"A place like that is not for delicate people like you. As for me, on your blood, I enjoy myself in a war."


Talking of such things we reached the place of our shelter. There was still two hours of daylight left, but as the sun was hidden behind the western hills darkness was falling rapidly. There was the rippling sound of a stream.

I said, "I can't carry on now. Let's find a place for the night."

"Don't worry about a place. I know every stone around here. My ancestors lived here. Come on, I'll take you to a shop. I know the old woman of that shop. There was a time when many men circled round that old woman, my father was one of them. She used to have good sales, but now no one even so much as casts a blind eye on her. May I eat your flesh, I wouldn't have gone there myself if it hadn't been for her daughter."

As we were still talking we neared the shop. It was a wooden house, old and rotted by rain. The front was sagging, which forced the people to stoop while going in. We entered. Because the smoke was trapped inside the room the light of the small lamp had become even dimmer. And then again, my eyes having been ridden with sleep, that scene comes as a dream to me now. Inside were two men from the hills eating old and stale bread with tea. Sometimes while conversing they shouted, and slammed their hands on the table.

In the corner, I saw, a fire was burning, upon which stood a tea kettle—that was the source of the smoke. Nearby was a strange shelf-like almirah. All its panes were broken, and so the old tin box of Lily biscuits, the empty box of Orange Pekoe and two or three glasses could be seen. A fat



ALTIMITUDE A Newsletter for All Mountaineers

PURPOSE: ALTIMITUDE is a quarterly mountaineering newsletter published in January, April, July, and October. Its purpose is to serve the community of alpine climbers of all abilities by (1) providing exciting first-person accounts of ascents of mountains throughout the world and (2) by describing places to climb, recalling their climbing history, outlining desirable routes, and reporting on transportation to the mountain and gear needed. ALTIMITUDE keeps mountaineers informed about access, gear, and technique through short articles. The publication strives to provide high quality photographs and accurate maps.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES are \$ 13.20 for one year for postal delivery in the United States, \$ 14.20 for Canada, and \$ 15.20 for Europe (payable in U.S. funds only).

MANUSCRIPTS: Three types are sought—places to climb, first-person accounts of ascents, and how-to articles for successful high altitude climbs. A single typewritten copy of the manuscript should be submitted along with, if possible, a diskette (3.5" or 5.25") containing the manuscript stored in ASCII format. Authors are encouraged to submit photographs and maps. Unless accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope, manuscripts, photographs, and diskettes will not be returned.

ADDRESS: Subscriptions and all correspondence should be addressed to: ALTIMITUDE, 4 Lincoln Avenue, Binghamton, NY 13905-4320.

woman, resting her elbows on the table, was in an absorbing way listening to the conversation between the two hillmen. At times she giggled and interjected a few words.

While entering that room the soldier was ahead with me trailing behind. Spying the soldier, she stood up at once and running a glance over him, said, "Achche! How did you stray in here?"

"Not straying. By the way, where's your daughter?" He walked around the room flexing his arms as though he was the master of the room.

"My daughter's gone out, she's due any moment now. You seem to have forgotten us completely."

At this time a plump girl entered the room and said with indifference, "Let him forget, why should anyone remember us!"

She wore a dirty dhoti of chintz. The black streaks on her face could be seen even in that light. She had tied a dirty piece of cloth around her waist just above the dhoti. She was not particularly pretty, but she had the charm of youth.

As soon as he saw her the soldier rushed to her—"Ou, you're not going to believe this but it's you who drew me here. Who can forget you? The moment I came here I asked your mother about you. That's when you came in. Say, what I should swear by?"

"Enough, enough, don't talk too much. You talk a lot before my eyes but..." and she entered another small room. The soldier too ran after her. Once inside the young woman lit a small lamp and laid down on a mat spread there. The soldier squatted at the door and started talking.

"Okay, tell me, what have you brought for me?"

I was feeling sleepy, and I did not listen to them. But even after everyone had eaten and gone to bed, they were still talking. The woman asked him to bring her a mirror with a native frame when he came again. The soldier said that he would not only bring the mirror but also a twenty-hand long *phariya* of chintz. I, tired, soon fell into a deep sleep.

In the small hours the soldier shook me awake. Two measures of the night still remained. It was desperately cold outside. A freezing wind blew from the gorge between two flanks of the mountain range. The stream gurgled nearby. Nobody was up as yet. The cocks were beginning to crow. The hill all around looked bleak and murky; no trees grew on these hills due to the severe climate of the region. I got up rubbing my eyes.

The soldier said carelessly, "My young master, I'll take leave, I've got to go this way and you that"—and shook both my shoulders painfully with his strong hands. Sad thoughts came to my mind. I had begun to take a liking to him; but he could not care less for anyone. With long strides, he went on his way. I stood watching.

* * *

I have seen many stone statues of the soldiers fallen in war, but only once did I get the chance to meet a flesh-and-bone soldier.

△

B.P. Koirala, ex-Prime Minister of Nepal, died in 1982.
D.T. Lepcha is a writer who lives in Kalimpong.

Said the Woodcutter

by Maj. Arun Rao

Said the woodcutter to the tree
Fell you I must, I hope you see

For hearth and home, food and life
Well being of son, daughter and wife

But a last wish to you I grant
Before I cut you, dear plant

I can, from you, many things make
But, today, your desire I do take

Tell me what most you wish to be
Table, chair, couch or settee

Or, anything else which to you is dear
From you I'll make, I promise here

Said the tree I always knew I'd fulfil
My life's purpose, by your axe and will

Settee, couch, table and chair
For all these, I don't much care

Conscious thou, and thine, may be
But knoweth not, as mine, and me

Of furniture there may be no dearth
But nought will free you from this Earth

Sit or lie a few inches above the ground
Fast to it you will always be bound

Here, together, we must forever reside
And owe each other, 'tis noblesse oblige

Fell me you must, that I do see
To give to thee, 'tis my destiny

But, if I may, I'd like myself
Most of all to be your bookshelf

To be there for books that speak
Of truth and wisdom, and for the weak

And if still a bough there is left
A guitar do make, so with your deft

Fingers you may strum, and with song
Tell of me, and our love of long

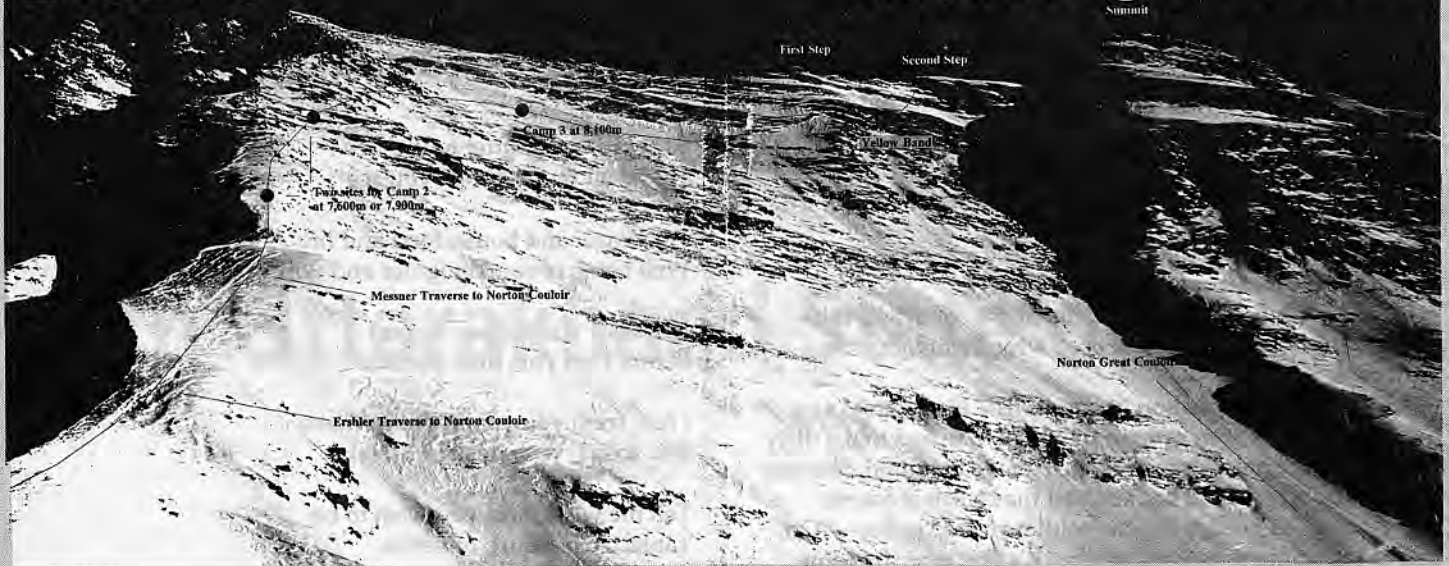
,

Maj. A.Rao is with the Indian Army.

△

BRIEFS

Chomolongma in b/w



In these days of glossy four-colour "adventure travel" magazines and postcards and posters that are drippy as treacle, it is a treat to come across crisp, no-nonsense, black-and-white treatment of the Himalaya. *High* magazine in a recent issue did just that for the

North Ridge of Everest/Chomolongma/Sagarmatha by carrying the work of climber and photographer Jon Tinker, who led an expedition to the top in post-monsoon 1993.

The magazine carries 11 crisp images taken by

Tinker's Pentax Weatherzoom, comprising the clearest photo-guide to the North Ridge yet. The pictures show various Everest-scapes from points along the climbing route including Camps II and III, the Yellow Band, First Step, Second Step, Norton Great

Couloir, and on to the summit.

In the accompanying wide-angled picture, the view is across the North Ridge and North Face from Camp I at 7000 m. The summit looks deceptively near due to the low angle of the mountain.

At Last, a Population Breakdown

Hill Chhetris, it turns out, are the largest population group in Nepal, followed closely by Bahuns. Magars make up the most numerous hill ethnic group, followed by Newars and Tamangs.

Just before the 15 November mid-term elections in Nepal, a little monograph appeared in the Kathmandu market, *Nepal: Main Ethnic/Caste Groups by Districts Based on Population Census 1991*. Brought out in Nepali and English, the publication comes from geographer Harka Gurung, from his faraway roost in Kuala Lumpur where he heads a United Nations research agency.

Basing himself on the data

thrown up by the census, Gurung dissects Nepali society and presents its caste and ethnic makeup. He says, "The 1991 population census for the first time provides data on ethnic and caste composition of the Nepalese people. Such information is essential for socio-political planning for national integration of a multiethnic society."

The census provides population data on 60 ethnic/caste groups. Gurung presents the caste and ethnic makeup in the high himal, the middle hills and tarai. The high himal group is almost entirely ethnic, numbering only 136,552. The middle hills have 7.5 million

caste groups and 4.8 million ethnics. The tarai has 2.9 million caste groups, 1.4 million ethnics, and 1.3 million under the 'other' category.

The Bhotia, Sherpa and Thakali who constitute the inhabitants of the high himal make up only 0.7 percent of the country's total population. The midhills castes and ethnics account for two-thirds. Among the Caucasoid castes, Chhetris make up 16.1 percent of the population, Bahuns 12.9 percent, followed by the Kami at 5.2 percent. The hill ethnics of 4.8 million make up a quarter of

NEPAL MAIN ETHNIC, CASTE GROUPS BY DISTRICTS BASED ON POPULATION CENSUS 1991



Harka Gurung
September 1994

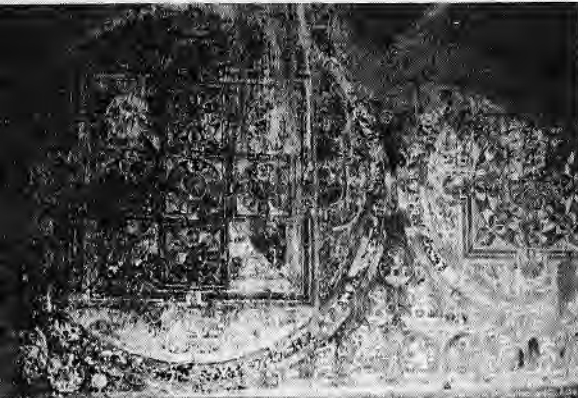
the total population, with Magars having the largest numbers at 7.6 percent of the total, Newars 5.6 percent and Tamangs 5.5.

This valuable little monograph goes for cheap at NRs 10.

Loba Art

The wall paintings of several temples in Upper Mustang are the finest Buddhist murals in Nepal and among the most unusual in the entire sphere of Himalayan Buddhist art. And yet, these treasures are endangered by poverty and neglect.

The temples of Lo Manthang, which is the largest settlement of Upper Mustang and seat of the Raja Jigme Parbal Bista, are thought to date to the 14th century, and their paintings to the 14th or 15th centuries. With Mustang off-limits to non-Nepalis till 1992, the paintings and murals of this



Upper Mustang's Jamba, Thubchen and Luri gombas. Due to the local sensitivities, the task of recording these art treasures was carried out by Philip and Marcia Lieberman, a husband-wife team, only with the approval of the local inhabitants.

The photographs taken by the Liebermans constitute a record that document the surviving paintings, an essential first step toward their restoration. Should further damage occur—which is entirely possible because restoration work has not yet begun—this record will make it possible to restore them at least to their present condition.

A set of photographs was presented to the people of Lo Manthang and Ghara this past summer, providing them with the first record of the magnificent paintings that are their patrimony. Additional prints and photographs

region have until now remained virtually unknown other than to the locals.

The physical structure of at least one of the temples in Lo Man-thang is in urgent need of repair, as wooden support pillars are virtually rotten. The paintings in the monasteries have been damaged by water leakage from snow-melt and rain, dimmed and darkened by dirt and smoke from butter lamps, and defaced by cracks in the walls.

Working in conjunction with the Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP), two American scholars have just completed a photographic survey of

will also be shared with the Loba, say the Liebermans. In addition, slide sets will be provided to ACAP and the Department of Archaeology in Kathmandu. Slides and prints will be used to create an archive to be housed at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, which will be available to all scholars and students of Himalayan art.

The scholars hope that the pictures will represent the start of a campaign to save the art of Mustang. If this is the neglected state of the Mustang art, asks Marcia Lieberman, "What other Himalayan treasures may be in similar danger?"

Upcoming...

WORKSHOP ON REHABILITATION OF DEGRADED LANDS IN THE MOUNTAIN ECOSYSTEMS OF THE HINDU KUSH-HIMALAYAN REGION
Organised by ICIMOD, Kathmandu

18-21 December 1994
Baoshan, Yunnan

Theme: alternative approaches to rehabilitating degraded lands in mountain ecosystems of the region. The objective of the workshop is to examine the major output generated from ICIMOD's implementation of the project on rehabilitation of degraded lands, to discuss important findings from field-based studies, evaluate training materials, and identify priority programmes for the future.
Contact: Pei Shengi, ICIMOD, PO Box 3226, Kathmandu. Tel: 977-1-525313 Fax: 524509

INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON KARAKORUM-HINDUKUSH-HIMALAYA: DYNAMICS OF CHANGE

29 Sep - 7 Oct 1995, Islamabad
The symposium is organised to look back at six years of intensive field research under the Pak-German Project Culture Area Karakorum (CAK), which was initiated by the German Science Foundation in 1989. The scholarship has focused on the relationship between humans, culture and environment in the high mountainous areas of Pakistan, particularly in relation to the change that has arrived with the Karakorum Highway. The dynamics are parallel with situations in neighbouring mountain areas, and the workshop will allow CAK scientists to present their results and discuss them with colleagues working elsewhere in the region. A four day excursion is planned after the programme, which will follow the Karakorum Highway to Gilgit.

Topics: mountain environment; resources and degradation; hazard and habitat; history of settlement; historical links between highlands and

lowlands; regional cultures and their transformation; Karakorum Highway and cultural change.
South Asian contact: Jurgen Schmitz, House No. 3A, Street 10, F-8/3, Islamabad Tel: 051-853623 Fax: 252885

HIMALAYAN RESEARCH FORUM, CENTRE OF SOUTH ASIAN STUDIES, SOAS LONDON
TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION:
1 Nov: Health, physique and social mobility in the middle hills of Nepal. Simon Strickland.
15 Nov: The life of Louis Mandelli (1833-80), Darjeeling tea-planter and ornithologist. Fred Pinn.
21 Nov: Drafting the 1992 Control of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes Act, a case study of anthropology and development in Nepal. Kate Molesworth-Storer.

29 Nov: Buddhism and the politics of identity in Tibet, Ladakh and Bhutan. John Bray.
6 December: Understanding Tibet—the life of Sir Charles Bell (1870-1945). Alex McKay.

MEETING ON MEDIA AND HIMALAYA
8-9 June 1995, Kathmandu
Organised by Himal
A gathering of journalists from across the Himalayan region to discuss how their countries, states, hill councils or provinces are covered by the South Asian media.
Contact: Manisha Aryal
PO Box 42, Lalitpur
fax 977-1-521013, tel 523845
email: himal@mosnepal.ernet.in

HARD LIVELIHOOD: CONFERENCE ON THE HIMALAYAN PORTER
3,4 August 1995, Kathmandu
Organised by Himal
A two-day meeting to discuss the portering life: the changing economy; impact of roads and airways; health, nutrition, physiology; load, muscle and bone; equity and collective bargaining; future of portering; etc.
Contact: Kanak Mani Dixit
PO Box 42, Lalitpur
tel 523845, fax 977-1-521013
email: himal@mosnepal.ernet.in

PLACENAMES

by Sonam Wangyal

Kalimpong: (n) ka-lim-pong. Ridgetop town in near Darjeeling.

As with the names of many places in the Darjeeling region, there are several possible explanations for 'Kalimpong'. The earliest recorded interpretation comes from L.A. Waddell in his 1900 book *Among the Himalayas* (Bibliotheca Himalaya, 1978 reprint), where the term is described to mean "the governor's fort". The colonel attributes the name to Lepcha origins, whereas a few years later O'Malley writes in the *Bengal Gazetteer* (1907) that it is a Tibetan word suggesting "the stockade (*pong*) of the king's minister (*kalon*). The place was formally the headquarters of a Bhutanese governor."

O'Malley, of course, used the only source available, that of Waddell's, and consequently did not diverge too much in his interpretation apart from adding that the name is Tibetan. Ever since the two men recorded their opinions, gazetteers and historians have blindly accepted the 'fort' or 'stockade' versions though there is no historical record nor archaeological evidence of either at the site.

A.R. Foning, the highly-educated Lepcha author and Kalimpong old-timer, has proposed a dissenting philological explanation which sounds plausible. In *Lepcha: My Vanishing Tribe* (Sterling, 1987), Foning not only disputes that there ever was a minister or a fort at the site under question, he comes up with an entirely new meaning for 'Kalimpong'. He maintains that it is a Lepcha term meaning "the ridge where we play."

According to Foning, when the whole of the Kalimpong subdivision was under Bhutanese occupation, tax collectors would converge at the present-day site of the town. Here, the Lepcha inhabitants would provide entertainment for the overlords in the form of women, song, dance and sports. Gradually, the place came to be known as the ridge where they played. Foning's deconstruction runs thus: *ka* (we or our) *lem* (play) *pung* (ridge).

Regarding *pung*, we have Colman Macaulay, then Secretary to the Government of Bengal in 1884, headlining an entry in his report using 'Kalimpung', which corresponds with Foning's suggestion. Elsewhere, Macaulay reverts to the official spelling 'Kalimpong'. It is clear, however, that there is more than one way to pronounce the term.

R.K. Sprigg, the Orientalist of SOAS fame, has his own version. He prefers to go back to the earliest mention of the name, 'Kalimpoong', by Ashley Eden (*Report on the State of Bootan and the Progress of the Mission of 1863-64*, Bibliotheca Himalaya, 1972 reprint). On the basis of this spelling, the professor suggests that *poong* might represent the Lepcha *p'ung* (Tibetan equivalent of *spun[-bal]* with the 's' silent) meaning "size, bulk, body, a crowd, herd, flock, a number, many" (in G.B. Mainwaring's *A Grammar of the Rong (Lepcha) Language*, Baptist Mission Press, 1876). Meanwhile, *kalim* could stand for the Lepcha *ka-lim* or *ka-lim-bi*, a species of solanium found in Kalimpong.

While propounding his own theory, Sprigg says that some leading members of the Lepcha community in Kalimpong do have a different view. They consider the name to be a corruption of the Lepcha *ka-lhyam-bang* (the last pronounced 'bong'), in

A Star ^{was} Born

An 11-year-old village girl chances upon a role in a video production which relates the story of a spirited young school child forced to abandon studies and railroaded into tragic early marriage.

The film *Ujeli*, first aired in late July 1992, won appreciation of Nepal's television audience. Director Deependra Gauchan received acclaim for bringing off a sensitive and cinematically flawless production on a difficult development theme. Unicef, which financed the expensive production, was pleased.

In all the excitement, Binda Adhikari, who played Ujeli, got left behind. Ramprasad Homagain, a freelance reporter who arrived in Laharey Pauwa village of Rasuwa District northwest of Kathmandu in June 1994 discovered that in the intervening period Binda had dropped out of the local

Nilkantha High School to make way for marriage.

While her parents had apparently postponed the wedding day owing to pressure from neighbours, they said they were unable to keep Binda in school because of costs involved and harassment that had to do with the authentically shot scenes depicting Ujeli's bethrothal in the film.

Binda's natural flair for acting, her capacity to absorb and enact the role expected of her, her intimacy with the camera, all pointed to an innate intelligence. The Ujeli character's vivacious personality and sharp wit are essentially Binda's own, brought out effectively under Gauchan's deft direction. How do you dredge up such a personality, use her talents, and then just let her be, was the question in the minds of readers when reporter Homagain's article appeared in the *Kantipur* newspaper.

which *bang* or *bong* means "the bottom of anything; the root, the base, the foundation"; and *ka-lhyam* being the *stercuria villosa* plant (Nepali=Odal tree).

As for Foning's explanation, Sprigg agrees with the rejection of Kalimpong ever having been a stockade or a fort, but he emphatically disagrees with the translation of the word *pung*. He writes, "The main objection to Foning's solution, 'the ridge where we play' ...is that I cannot find a Lepcha word *pung* meaning 'ridge' and that *ka-* is only part of the word *ka-yu* meaning 'we'."

Although a fort does not exist in the present-day town of Kalimpong, the ruins of the fort of Damsang, near Algarah, about ten miles away can still be seen and it was from this place that Kalimpong was administered till 1865. The fort of Damsang was in turn under the control of the Subba or Zongpen of Dalim (Dalimcote), about 25 miles from Kalimpong. However, the 19th century history has no mention of a minister or a governor stationed at Kalimpong and till proven otherwise and till archaeological evidence of a fort comes to the surface in Kalimpong, the old explanations must be taken as examples of fertile British imagination of the Raj period.

Dr. S. Wangyal practices medicine in Jaigaon, West Bengal.



B. RAUNIAR

The article rekindled the public's interest in Ujeli and there was a measure of outrage at how Bindu's life seemed to be following up on Ujeli's. It also brought into sharp focus the question of ethics and the obligations of the development filmmaker and producer towards a non-professional cast. Does responsibility end with making an effective film, or should it extend to practising what one's film preaches?

The matter became more complicated with Chintamani Adhikari, Bindu's father, claiming that the filmmakers had in fact made large-hearted promises to educate the girl, open a bank account in her name with NRs 50,000, take her on overseas tours, etc. "Being poor and simple, we were swayed by all the promises made to us," recalls Adhikari. "They have become famous and travel the world in the name of Ujeli, but our daughter has been left with nothing."

Obviously a child who is as bright as the Ujeli she portrayed, understanding the psychological state of Bindu requires little imagination.

Knowingly or unknowingly, the film crew sparked the child's imagination, exposed her to the world of filmmaking and Kathmandu professionals, and ignited expectations about the future. But there she was in the autumn of 1994, a traumatised waif, out of school, expectations shattered, minding her sister's infant child away from her home and village in exchange for food and lodging only (described well by the Nepali term *dharalo baseko*).

The person who observed Bindu's quick slide following the film's making is her teacher at the village school, Padma Nidhi Poudyal. "Ujeli's success has definitely been a nightmare for the poor girl," says Poudyal. "She was one of the best students in her class, but she suddenly lost interest in studies. Her performance took a nosedive until she finally withdrew from school altogether."

When "Ujeli's Plight" became the stuff of headlines, Unicef was hard put to explain itself. Having produced a film whose twin-theme was educating the 'girl

child' and the evils of child marriage, should the agency not have shown some commitment towards this flesh-and-blood Ujeli?

Unicef and Director Gauchan are firm that no promise was ever made to Bindu's family, although in some way the point is moot. In a letter to *Kantipur*, Peter Chen, information chief of the agency in Kathmandu, pointed out that Unicef was sad to hear that Ujeli's "family situation has compelled her to discontinue her education". At the same time, he appealed to readers "to consider the situations of thousands of other 'Ujelis' in the country also".

In a country where child marriage is rampant and girls are routinely deprived of education in favour of their male siblings, nobody would argue with Chen about the need to focus beyond one 'Ujeli'. But it was the individual instance of picking up and discarding Bindu that observers found galling.

Gauchan, meanwhile, has been tarred villain of the piece, accused of ignoring the girl who helped him win international accolades. Reena Gill, who was information chief when Ujeli was filmed and played a role in ensuring its cinematic quality, is quick to defend Gauchan. "If this is going to be the trend, who's ever going to dare make a movie with a message? This man (Gauchan) can earn his keep as a director anywhere in the world. He is among the best of his kind, and it is only his strong sense of social commitment that keeps him in Nepal."

Tactlessly straightforward at times, Gauchan is not as callous as he is made out to be. If he were, it would be a

surprise that he could make a film like *Ujeli*. "As director of a movie which has meant so much to me, I wish I could do something for Bindu. But one should always bear in mind that Ujeli was just a medium to probe a deeper issue, that of child marriage," says Gauchan. It is this existential candour and apparent distance from his human subjects that made Gauchan seem unrepentant to many journalists.

Homagains and some fellow journalists in *Kantipur* do not buy the keenness shown by Unicef and the filmmaker to remain out of the picture. They have set up a Ujeli Welfare Unit to correct what they perceive is a wrong done to Bindu. They plan a trust fund to provide Bindu with education at an appropriate institution in Kathmandu, preceded by individualised tuition.

There are those who maintain that it is inappropriate to expose Bindu to the hurly burly of city life, an attitude that Narayan Wagle, one of the would-be journalist-benefactors, finds loathsome. "That is just trying to be politically correct. How can you say leave the child alone after all the exposure and trauma that the film has put her through?" he asks.

The coverage of Bindu's situation resulted in voluminous mail and many telephone calls at the *Kantipur* offices, many from people keen to provide support. In order to protect Bindu from unnecessary exposure, the Ujeli Welfare Unit members, while they are open to contributions, want to assist Bindu Adhikari away from the limelight. One major trauma is bad enough in a young life.

- Akhilesh Upadhyay

That Tree Can Do No Wrong



Hindi-Chini bhai bhai: Lu Rongsen and Tej Pratap pose with seabuckthorn products.

Again, the seabuckthorn. This time, it is Ladakh and Lahaul and Spiti in Himachal Pradesh that are swooning over the possibility of claiming vast tracts of high desert for this deciduous shrub with origins in the cold and harsh plains of China's interior.

Chinese expert Lu Rongsen, who is with Kathmandu-based ICIMOD, is assisting in efforts to popularise the species in the Indian Himalaya. "The plant has become the green hope of the people in the cold harsh

areas of China," he says, and will benefit the population of the Himalayan desert areas as well. ICIMOD's Tej Pratap, himself a Himachali who is aiding in the shrub's transcontinental transfer, says this interest in the seabuckthorn is not a flash-in-the-pan and will be sustained.

The Lahaul Potato Growers' Society is active in propagating seabuckthorn in Himachal. Says LPS Managing Director Bhawan Singh, "We want fast propagation of soil stabilising

seabuckthorn in Lahaul and Spiti because our topsoil is eroding fast." Seabuckthorn plantations were begun in Himachal and Ladakh in 1993, and plans are afoot to extend acreage through a US\$ 1.7 million British-funded social forestry project in the Kullu-Mandi-Lahaul area.

Tenacious as a mountain goat, the seabuckthorn can do everything and has few faults. It checks soil erosion, yields fruit with high vitamin content, provides fuel and fodder, and has medicinal and cosmetic value. Singh believes that the shrub has the potential to change the economy of Lahaul and Spiti. "We want something to grow here that can not only meet our daily needs but also has commercial value. The oil of seabuckthorn alone, obtained from its seeds, sells for as high as US\$ 500 a kilo in the international market."

Singh says the seabuckthorn is cheaper to plant than poplar and

willow, which are much favoured by the Forest Department in Shimla, and it can also meet the fuelwood needs of the local tribals.

Singing praises of the wonder tree, Lu Rongsen says the planting of seabuckthorn in the Zhungar county in China increased vegetation cover from 20 to 61 percent, and the level of soil erosion has decreased from 40,000 tonnes per sq km to 5000 tonnes sq km. The per capita income of the locals increased, he says, from around US\$ 11 to US\$ 142 as a result of the land regenerated. The plant also provides fodder, fuelwood, fixes nitrogen in the soil, and has medicinal uses to treat heart disease and cancer.

If the promises hold, the high deserts of Ladakh and Himachal will be a step ahead due to the Chinese import.

- CSE-Down To Earth Feature Service

Is this Rape?

While elsewhere they speak of Chipko, community forestry and seabuckthorn, plunder of forests on a monumental scale continues in the Far East Himalaya. Logging

operations like those in the American Northeast continue to raze whole swaths of lush Tibetan woodlands in south-eastern Tibet. Here is some recent photographic evidence.

The logs shown in the picture at right are piled up next to the Dharto river in the southern-most tip of Amdo province, near its border with Kham. The Dharto drains the western Aba Prefecture, then joins the Min, flowing south and



INT. CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

east to the Chengdu plain. While it is still being done, transport of logs by river is being phased out because of the waste involved and as the price of wood rises due to increasing scarcity. These logs by the Dharto are awaiting higher waters of the summer so that fewer will be lost in the journey downriver.

Every day, hundreds of

trucks like those shown at left descend from the Tibetan highlands towards the populated plains of Sichuan. The section of the high shown is near the town of Lianglu, between southern Kham and Chengdu. Here, the road narrows to one lane, with traffic coming down in the mornings and going up in the afternoons.



Disaster on Pisang Peak

Incongruously, the most disastrous climbing accident ever to occur in Nepal happened on a low 'trekking peak'. On the morning of 13 November, a group of 11 climbers (eight Germans, two Swiss and a Nepali Sherpa) headed from their high camp towards the summit of Pisang (6091m), along a regular route taken by hundreds before. Four days later, rescue helicopters found their bodies jumbled up in a mass of ice and ropes on a gully at the base of the mountain's steep, unclimbed southwest face.

The magnitude of the accident sent shock waves through the community of Himalayan climbers all over. Pisang was a peak that many of them had climbed with ease; the regular route is not known to be particularly dangerous, and the NMA mountaineering school at Manang uses it to train rookie Nepali climbers.

How could so many die on a route such as this, and what would be the impact on "holiday climbing" in the lesser Himalayan peaks, a sport that is gradually picking up? (see also *Know Your Himal*, page 54). Would the Pisang disaster scare off potential climbers and profits, away from Nepal?

Some mountaineers tended to view the accident rather matter-of-factly. Said one American climber, "I do not understand all this excitement. In mountaineering, accidents happen. A dozen people die in the Alps every year, but people are still climbing."

This blase attitude was fine by many trek agency managers overseas and in Kathmandu, who preferred that the matter be forgotten as quickly as possible.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Tourism has asked the NMA to investigate the accident and report back to it with recommendations.

The NMA's task will not be easy, firstly because it is an organisation dominated by tradespeople rather than professional climbers, and secondly because there were no survivors of the accident to provide hard information. At best, therefore, the NMA can conjecture at several scenarios that might have unfolded up on Pisang that mid-November afternoon.

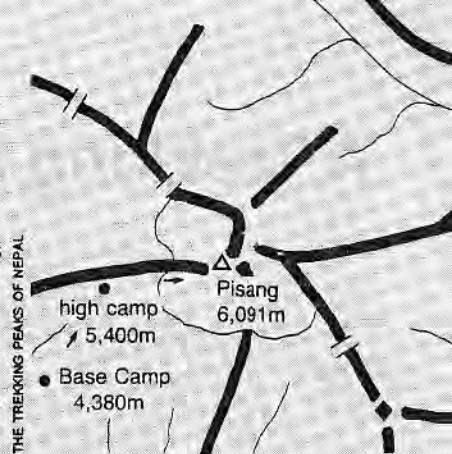
Was there negligence on the part of the trekking agencies and their mountain guide, or was this an act of god—an avalanche, cornice collapse or deadly snow storm—that no one could have predicted or prevented?

It is to the advantage of the companies involved (the German alpine group, DAV, and its Kathmandu partner International Trekkers) to highlight the latter scenario. Sigmund Rothlingshofgr, DAV's Nepal man, when asked by journalists for a plausible explanation as to why the entire team was wiped out, proposed that there must have been three

ropes of climbers coming down from the summit in a zigzag. It could be, he said, that by ill luck the three ropes of climbers happened to be on a straight vertical alignment when the topmost rope fell, dragging the two other ropes as well down the mountain.

Internationally qualified mountain guides with what are known as UIAGM certificates maintain that it is important on potentially dangerous climbs to have one guide lead a maximum of three "clients" on one rope. On Pisang, there was one professional guide among nine clients, plus one Sherpa with some climbing experience. It would have been unprofessional of DAV's lone guide—a 25-year-old German of Polish origin—to have tied the entire group to one rope on an exposed pitch.

At a press conference after the accident, Rothlingshofgr said that three ropes must have been used, based on the colour of the ropes seen on the bodies at the accident site. This critical point is hard to confirm. Meanwhile, a member of the group's non-climbing staff is learnt to have stated that the expedition had a total of three ropes, with one left behind at



base camp and one used as a "fixed rope" to aid the team at an exposed point on the mountain. If this is true, then the party would have had only one rope for itself, which might help explain why everyone in the team perished together.

The bodies of the alpinists were found at the bottom of the mountain's southwest face, for which (given the regular route to the top) the logical 'falling-off place' would be the small section of exposed ridge just short of the summit (see picture, page 54). Given that all 11 seem to have fallen as one, the likelihood is that the climbers were roped together and that one or more climber falling, or a cornice collapse, led to all being yanked off their feet and plummeting down through the rock and ice

- Padam Singh Ghaley

(This article was translated from the original Nepali.)

Quiet South Asian Coup

Lay Himalayans would hardly recognise it as such, but coup it was: an unprecedented agreement to collect and exchange national level environmental data on an agreed format between the countries of South Asia.

In early October, at a meeting organised by UNEP, ICIMOD and the Colombo-based South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP), senior officials from the regional

governments unanimously agreed to establish a national database on the state of the region's environment. The format has been prepared by UNEP; SACEP is to prepare the database regionally; while ICIMOD is to do the same for the mountain ecosystem. The sharing of the final database is expected to support environment policy formulation in all countries of the region.

While there have been enough pious declarations on cooperation within the SAARC region, governments have been very tight when it comes to sharing information. The results of this first project which attempts to reverse the trend, claim the organisers, will help the individual national agencies to do away with wastage and help them deal more effectively with natural disasters, urbanisation, deforestation, water resources, and so on.

A Trekking Peak - By any Other Name

KNOW
YOUR
HIMAL

The single biggest climbing accident in the Nepal Himalaya just took place on a 'trekking peak'. What's in a name...

by Bill O'Connor

The tragic accident on Pisang Peak (6091m) in the Manang Himal during the 1994 post-monsoon season in which eleven climbers were killed highlights the dilemma of calling a Himalayan mountain a 'trekking peak'. The name seems to imply something non-technical, as if they were suitable for non-mountaineers without an experienced, qualified mountain guide to lead and look after them. It is a name that seems to suggest that they can be climbed by any strong walker—not so. The truth is they are all serious undertakings and given the wrong conditions or lack of skill can be as difficult and dangerous as any other Himalayan mountain.

I have never felt easy about the term 'trekking peak'. In the introduction to my

book *The Trekking Peaks of Nepal*, I stated it was a misnomer and that *Non-Expedition Peak* or *Himalayan/Alpine Peak* would be better alternatives to distinguish these mountains from the higher *Expedition Peaks* like Ama Dablam, Everest, Annapurna and Makalu which are open to mountaineers, at a price. Expeditions to these higher peaks demand a liaison officer, sirdar and a lot of bureaucratic hassles. The joy of the trekking peaks is that they are ideally suited to small groups wishing to enjoy some interesting climbing, perhaps doing a new route, at relatively low cost, without a lot of red tape.

The trouble is that the 18 trekking peaks (first opened in 1978 by the Nepal Mountaineering Association, NMA) are

often confused in the minds of trekkers and commercial trekking companies with high viewpoints found on many of the great treks; of instance Gokyo Ri and Kala Pathar on the Everest trek, and even Poon Hill on the Annapurna circuit. These are in fact low summits, hills really, not peaks at all, and are invariably the highlight of a trekker's achievement. These hills are often erroneously referred to as 'trekking peaks' but are of course no more than fantastic viewpoints where yaks graze and goraks scrounge particles from packed lunches.

Those from a non-mountaineering background continue to publicise trekking peaks as suitable for strong walkers. Certainly, there have been plenty of non-climbers getting to the top of Island Peak, Tent Peak, Chulu East, Mera and Pisang. I know, because I have guided some of them. In recent years with the growth of commercial expeditions, even Everest has attracted non-climbers to its summit.

Off-Piste

The fantastic increase in the number of trekkers in Nepal since the peaks were first opened has produced a highly competitive scene in the commercial trekking market. The best companies which pioneered the trekking routes carefully planned their itineraries to ensure the health, safety and enjoyment of trekkers and used skilled professional staff to guide them. When I first got interested in the trekking peaks there were only a couple of agencies capable of running climbing trips to them. They employed highly skilled Sherpa staff and Western leaders with a track record of Himalayan climbing to ensure safety and a high probability of success.

Things have changed. I now see too many agencies offering trekking peak climbing which have little understanding of mountaineering. They imply in their



NEPAL: THE MOUNTAINS OF HEAVEN

literature that the ascent of an Island Peak, Tent Peak, Ramdung or Paldor is well within the grasp of a fit walker and often include them in ill-conceived itineraries that allow little time to acclimatise and even less for poor weather or difficult snow conditions.

Many would-be trekking peak climbers remind me of skiers who have learned their skiing within the safe environment of well-groomed slopes. Protected from the real mountain environment by the lift company and the resort managers, they need only consider what to wear and when to stop for lunch; they remain shielded from danger. Occasionally, they duck under the ropes and find themselves off-piste and out of their depth in 'real snow' and a savage environment.

It is the same on the trekking peaks. They may seem small in the context of an 8000er, but by most standards they are very high. All are glaciated and exposed, which makes them serious. Combine all of these factors and you have real mountains that demand mountaineering decisions that only experienced climbers can make. True, some of the peaks involve

little technical climbing by their 'via normale', other than to crampon along an exposed arete or kick steps up a steep slope—simple skills. But that is only part of the game. What about crevasse rescue, avalanche assessment, altitude, and the myriad of other obstacles that are part and parcel of high mountains?

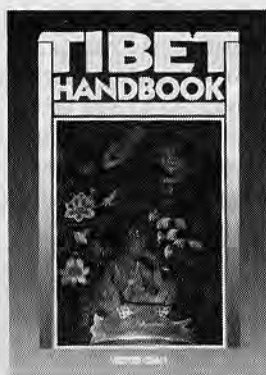
Many trekkers beguiled into going for a peak on their trek of a lifetime have never considered the risks and the consequences of high altitude mountaineering. It's a serious game, one of the most serious that climbers play and one that the epithet 'trekking peak' dangerously disguises.

Commercial companies and many trekkers seem to have missed the point and real pleasures of the trekking peaks. They arrogantly approach them as though they are little more than bumps along the way. In fact, they offer a wonderful opportunity to enjoy some affordable Himalayan climbing amongst the finest mountains in the world—surely this is what the NMA realised when they made them so easily available. The trekking peaks also hold the potential for new route exploration at an altitude that will allow

technical climbing of high order. New routes on Kwangde, Lobuje, Mera and Kusum Kangguru have shown this, and some of world's best climbers have taken full advantage of the no-fuss and low bureaucracy climbing they offer. Jeff Lowe, Doug Scott, Reinhold Messner and many other famous mountaineers have attempted new routes on trekking peaks, not always successfully. But that is the nature of mountains and adventure—the outcome is never certain which is why they are so desirable, so addictive.

Of course, even on the best run expeditions—and every trip to a trekking peak is an expedition—things can go wrong, errors can be made and a price has to be paid. Perhaps it is time for a rethink; perhaps accessibility has made us complacent. Perhaps it is time for a change in the name? Perhaps trekking agencies should re-evaluate what they have on offer, the staff they employ, and the serious nature of Himalayan climbing—even when it is *only* a 'trekking peak'. ▽

B. O'Connor is an International Mountain Guide (UIAGM) who has been on 24 climbing expeditions to Nepal and written two books on mountaineering and trekking in the country.



TIBET HANDBOOK

FIRST EDITION
1100 pages • 250 maps
US\$34.50 postpaid
ISBN 0-918373-90-5

"This is by far the most detailed and comprehensive guide to Tibet ever to appear in a Western language . . ."

—DR. MICHAEL ARIS,
OXFORD UNIVERSITY

"... invaluable for those going on pilgrimage or extended treks."

—MELVYN GOLDSTEIN,
CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON TIBET

MOON PUBLICATIONS
P.O. BOX 3040
CHICO, CA 95927-3040 USA
(916) 345-5473

Karakoram

EXPERIENCE

**Join us on a Trekking,
Climbing or Mountain
Biking Adventure...**

...to the world's most exotic
mountain ranges.

Specializing in the unusual
and unique, as well as the
Himalayan classics.

FOR A FREE, COLOR
"GUIDE TO ADVENTURE" CONTACT:

Karakoram Experience

P.O. BOX 10538 • ASPEN, CO 81612
(800) 497-9675 • (303) 925-8368
FAX (303) 925-6704

Pakistan
Nepal
India
Bhutan
China
Tibet
Russia
South
America
Alaska

Abominably Yours,

It is the fag end of festival-festooned Kartik, the seventh month in the Hindu calendar. The last of the monsoon clouds have dissipated and winter has given advance notice through the sheen of ice glistening on the shady side of my ridge. The sun feels warm but is weak astrologically. Suryanarayan is in Libra.

Cousin Langtang Langur, visiting from across several river valleys to the west, had seemed all excited over elections among the lowly beings—an exercise in which many know-nothings choose one know-nothing to represent them among some know-nothings. However, his was the excitement of the thekedar who has won a bid to build a fictitious trail to nowhere.

On his way to the Upper Barun via Kathmandu, Langtang had pulled some vines and cornered the Western donor market for Project Democracy. He was all set to be its sole authorised wholesale agent for the central Himalaya. On top of the generous dollar dole-outs, Langtang had managed to get a cut from all the five-star hotels which were to house his international election observers.

One thing I had predicted, and Langtang had ignored, was that any election in October-November would be disastrous, one way or the other, for everybody, observers notwithstanding, in Sri Lanka, Nepal, Sikkim, Andhra Pradesh, Nepal, the US congressional districts. To make this prediction, I did not need statistical software packages or winking cursors, nor schedules converting themselves into pie charts and bar graphs at the blinking of an eye.

The wisdom of ages, gleaned from watching stars in the crystalline air of the High Himalaya, is with me. You see, elections are about political power, a subject that is ruled by the royal celestial Sun, which is at its weakest in Libra. Anyone foolish enough to call elections at such an inauspicious moment is guaranteed disaster. This astrological defect cannot be remedied by any means vedic, tantric or shamanistic. Its repetition can be avoided, however, if one engages the services of the eccentric *jhankri* living in the southern edge of Lalitpur

municipality and sacrifices all party leaders above the age of 60 to Goddess Chhinnamasta (symbolically, of course, by cutting their names off the party register with a sharp knife dipped in *kodo ko rakshi*).

You may say, this punishing fate is fine for the Nepali Congress, the United States Congress and the Sikkim Sangram Parishad, and all rulers which deserved to eat crow and the humble pie that goes with it, but what about the communists?

Elementary. The Enemy is ruled by Mars which is in Cancer, its sign of debilitation. In Nepal in mid-November 1994, the commies were destined to bring down the Congress but were not to get a free hand, thanks to a debilitated Mars in their horoscope that would dampen revolutionary fervour and provide ample scope for dialectical hand-wringing. The way to counter the evil effects of an uncooperative Mars is to never lift a brick in anger, to give up wearing red, and never, never call other people names.

The tired and huddled masses, meanwhile, are ruled by the Moon. The trouble on this front is that, for the five days leading up to the elections in Nepal, the moon transited five constellations (known as Yama Panchak) from Dhanista to Revati in the zodiacs of the philosophical Aquarius and fluid Pisces, under the strong domination of Saturn. Anything that comes to pass at this time happens for the worse. When someone dies during this period, at the Pashupati cremation cesspit (formerly ghats) three effigies made of sacred *kusha* grass are burnt alongside to ward off the possibility that one death will be followed by three others in the family.

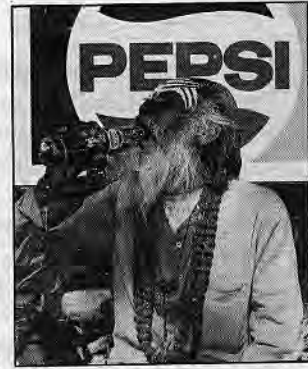
The trouble with Langtang Langur and modernists of his ilk is that they are too mesmerized by blinking cursor. They do not put their ears to the ground and hear the pulse beat of the Himalaya. With brains fried by MTV and Structural Adjustment, they fail to pick up those elements of tradition that would allow them to march to the beat of tectonic plate movements. All tradition that they pick up is second hand, stripped of its context as it

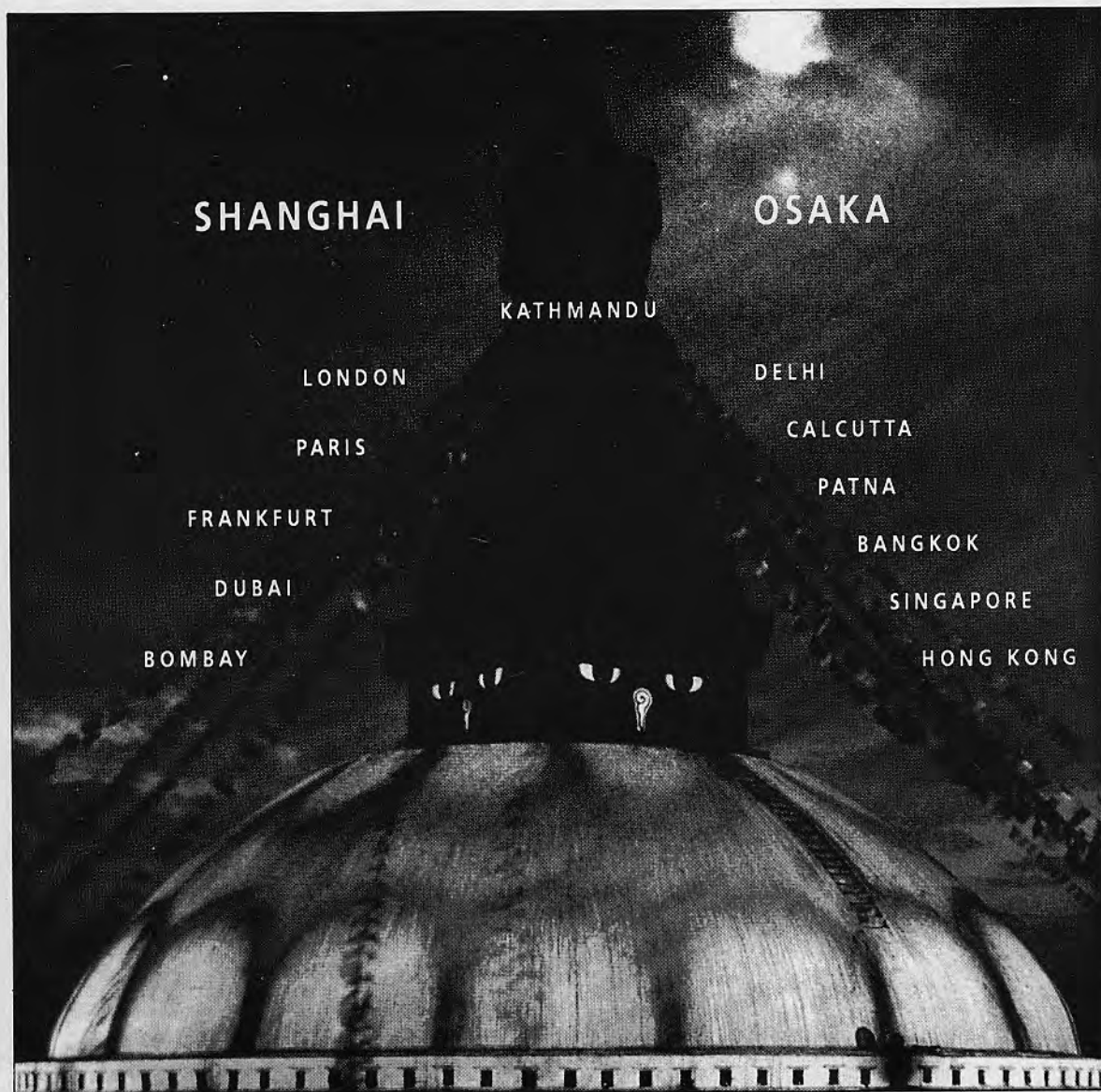
rebounds from the mass culture of consumer markets on the transmitting side of Intelsat. Even the sacred wisdom of astrology gleaned over five thousand years is demeaned through advertising gimmicks and generalisations that trivialise the sacred texts.

Well, here's how it all ended with Cousin Langtang. He was appointed special joint secretary-on-contract to a ministry. His lateral entry into the highest echelons of the bureaucracy was meant to breathe fresh life into that moribund and rotten frame. He was to bring in professional excellence and international exposure to the dusty files, cut the fat off the administration and make government services trim and fighting fit.

At the time of his appointment, a debilitated Saturn was in the eighth (house of Death) powerfully aspecting the tenth (house of Karma) and the fifth (house of Reason). Langtang Langur was destined for bad, bad Karma. Somehow he got his terms-of-reference back to front. He started to add fat to the party's frame and his own from the sale of permits to open medical and engineering colleges. He began to laterally shift civil servants and school masters deemed disloyal to the party. By raising and lowering visa fees at random and selling off national property and service agencies for a song, he drew international attention to his karma.

Why do our Himalayan modernists give up traditions so easily and get nothing but fake science, expensive technology, usurious market conditions and the black hole of grinding poverty in return? Why do our traditionalists hold on to the worst from the past and pick up only the silliest items of modernity? Why does the sadhu drink Pepsi? Democracy was supposed to put an end to all that.





SHANGHAI

OSAKA

KATHMANDU

LONDON

DELHI

PARIS

CALCUTTA

FRANKFURT

PATNA

DUBAI

BANGKOK

BOMBAY

SINGAPORE

HONG KONG

NOW DIRECT TO SHANGHAI & OSAKA

Royal Nepal-Nepal's own international Airlines operates regular flights to Kathmandu from 13 cities. You can warm to the gentleness of Nepali culture, tradition and the authentic spirit of Nepali hospitality aboard.

Royal Nepal
Airlines

RNAC, Building, P.O. Box: 401, Kathmandu, Nepal Tel.: 220757, Fax: 977-1-225348

Hongkong
3759151

Singapore
3395535

Osaka
2292545

Bangkok
2333921-4

Kathmandu
220757

Shanghai
2558899

Marmot™ For Life.

You've just spent hours
inching around a space barely
enough to accommodate
the human body.
Odd, that's what climbing in
most sleeping bags is like.

The New Sleeping Bag Collection

For our free catalogue call 707 544-4590