

Tourists and Sherpas

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To travel for economic or religious reasons (e.g. to pilgrimage sites) is as ancient a human activity as any we possess. But touring for rest, relaxation, or education began only in the 19th century as, on the one hand, the distinction between urban and rural began to reflect that of work and leisure, and, on the other, the socialization process of elites began to include the "Grand Tour" of Europe (Callimanopoulos 1982). As distant places, and the people in them, became idealized, travel became an antidote for our industrial civilization's discontent. But modern mass tourism is an entirely new phenomenon dating only from the mid-1960's when industrial affluence, an expanding middle class, and relatively cheap commercial jet travel combined to make it possible.

Observers of tourism tend to divide into two camps. One view, generally adopted by critics from the "tourist" side, is that the prize trophy caught in the tourist trap is the indigenous peoples who are its bait. On this account tourism ultimately dehumanizes and destroys the cultural integrity and richness of the toured areas because it "places the whole of the visited culture on sale, distorting its imagery and symbolism, turning its emotions loose, transforming a way of life into an industry...A culture...is turned from subject to object, from independent to dependent, from audience-in-its-own-right to spectacle". (Smith 1980).

Khumbu tourists frequently fall into this critical camp, although their concern is typically with degradation of the environment rather than the culture, as is illustrated by the following comment entered in the visitor's log book of the National Park Lodge at Tengboche Monastery: "I fear the trend...of "Industrial Tourism". Must we lead Nepal down the same ruination that so many of the western nations have gone? They have paved with asphalt the area around "Old Faithful" geyser in Yellowstone National Park, Yosemite has smog and traffic jams, they have buried the beautiful Colorado River behind Glen Canyon Dam, and the Canadians have blasted the so called "Ice-fields Parkway" right through their beautiful Jasper and Banff National Parks. Is that progress? Will the government's plan to build a road into this area improve it? or the lives of the people here? This spot, as well as the other beautiful and unique places on earth, should be considered the property of mankind, not a handful of developers, and should be treated with respect so that our children and their children can experience the beauty and solitude that we have all felt on this trek. If we want to help the people of Nepal, let's help them in real ways - better means of food production, schools, hospitals. Please, let's spare them from the garbage that is burying us". A more laconic trekker expressed the same sentiments more sardonically: A hot shower, steaks, and 500 ft. viewing tower with central heating would definitely be in order".

The opposite, more sanguine view holds that tourism is a boon because of the economic benefits it allegedly brings to indigenous peoples and their governments. Not surprisingly, central governments are generally persuaded by this argument, and His Majesty's Government of Nepal is no exception: tourism earnings now form the backbone of the non-agricultural sector of the economy. But as in other tourism-oriented countries, this is a very recent development.

The Rana regime that ruled from 1846 until 1951 devoted most of its governmental energies to seeing that as little development activity (not to mention tourism) as possible took place. But even before they were overthrown they (and the governments that had preceded them) had made some feeble and notably unsuccessful attempts to find exploitable mineral resources in the mountains. More energetic geological surveys since then have not yielded much either, and by the 1970's the Nepalese realized that their only substantial natural resource (other than hydroelectric power) had been staring down at them all along. Foreign tourists would pay handsomely for the privilege of entering the country to view the art and architecture of the cities and the rugged scenery of the countryside. Tourists who wanted to see and walk among the mountains would bring money to the often remote and poor rural villages. Only about 15% of all tourists to Nepal go trekking, but against this small figure must be measured the fact that they account for 37% of the nights spent in Nepal; those going to Khumbu spend an average of twelve days there (see Burger 1978).

According to the 5th plan (1975-1980), the development of tourism has three aims:

- (1) to earn foreign exchange and thus help produce a balance of payments;
- (2) to increase employment by developing local arts and handicrafts and to raise the purchasing power of the majority of people.
- (3) to install tourist centres at appropriate places to promote regional balance and to encourage interregional and regional tourism.

The first, and easiest, aim is being accomplished, which is no doubt also the main reason why tourism was a \$ 79 billion foreign exchange earner worldwide in 1976. The best way to assess whether the second and third aims are being accomplished is to examine the effects of tourism as they actually unfold in a particular mountain region. Khumbu is a 'best-case' area to study the local benefits of tourism because not only are its inhabitants visited by large numbers of tourists (though less than a third of all trekkers to Nepal), but unlike those who live in other trekking areas, its inhabitants also hold the most lucrative jobs in trekking: Sardars, Cooks, Sherpas, Cook-boys, and to a lesser extent even management jobs in the trekking companies in Kathmandu. The word Sherpa in this context is not an ethnic term out a job categorys-one who assists the trekking party by setting up tents, managing loads, and doing whatever other tasks need to be done in the course of a trek.

Thus whatever local benefits of tourism exist should be most immediately and conspicuously evident in Khumbu, whose population is involved with tourism in the most as well as in the least remunerative ways.

Methodology

In addition to obtaining basic demographic and economic data for all of upper Khumbu, I made a more detailed, comparative investigation of three villages and the monastery which serves them. Unless otherwise indicated, the data describes conditions as they existed in 1978.

Of all Khumbu villages, Namche Bazaar is the most directly affected by tourism, and for obvious geographical reasons. Every tourist (every Sherpa, for that matter), who enters upper Khumbu from Nepal must first pass through Namche Bazaar, central gateway to the rest of Khumbu.¹ Given the long, tiring climb up to Namche from the Dudh Kosi, it is also a natural stopping place for the night. Namche entrepreneurs have responded quickly to the economic opportunity tourists present by opening roughly 25 shops and hotels, which cater also to the 300 or so Nepalese government officials who now live in Namche. More establishments are springing up all the time.

The twin villages of Khumjung and Kunde are also strongly affected by tourism but in a more indirect way. Located an hour's walk above Namche they are slightly off the main trail to the major attractions of the area, such as Mt. Everest base camp. But large numbers of Khumjung and Kunde Sherpas work for trekking companies as Sardars, Cooks, Sherpas, and Cook-boys, as well as ordinary porters.

The third village, Phortse, stands apart from the others as the most traditional, conservative village in all of Khumbu. It is also the least affected by tourism. Finally, the monastery nearest to these three villages is Tengboche. Most of its monks are drawn from these and nearby villages, and it is to Tengboche that villagers repair for Mani-Rimdu, the major religious rite of the year. It is also Tengboche's monks whom they call to officiate at funerals or to read Tibetan texts to bring good fortune to a household.

Internal Variation

Westerners - tourists and anthropologists alike - tend to think of Sherpas as essentially uniform in culture, at least within Khumbu itself. But what I found especially intriguing were the internal differences distinguishing the three villages, and this was certainly apparent in the case of tourism. In Kunde, 85% of all households had at least one person working in tourism as Sardar, Cook, Cook-boy, Sherpa, or Porter. In Phortse, by contrast, only 47% of the households had someone similarly employed. The relevant figures for all three villages are as follows:

	Namche	Kunde	Khumjung	Phortse
% households with at least one member working in tourism	84%	85%	76%	47%
# individuals (total pop. in parentheses)	150(540)	68(227)	113(585)	35(277)
Rs/year earned in tourism	895,000	304,100	479,280*	184,850
Mean earnings/individual	5,967	4,472	4,241	5,281

* This figure does not include wages for portering water the mile or so from Khumjung to the Japanese-built luxury hotel, the Everest-View. About 20 families provide porters for this purpose, which costs the hotel as much as Rs. 12,000/ month. The total annual income to Khumjung villagers for carrying during the monsoon and has relatively few clients during the coldest months. (For lack of reliable air service to Syangboche, the hotel closed, except for local customers, in 1982).

As the participation in tourism varies, so do the effects not only quantitatively, but qualitatively.

Economic Implications

As the village totals show, there are large sums of money to be earned in tourism, and these figures do not include the extras - tips, equipment, and clothing that can be used or sold, and the like. The lion's share, 40%, of the tourist trekking dollar goes to the trekking companies-themselves; the balance breaks down roughly as follows: trail expenses, 5%; food, 20%; Sherpas and porters, 35%. Of the 20 or so registered trekking companies in 1978, Sherpas had a majority financial interest in only four; by 1985 Sherpas owned about 30% of the companies.

The great majority of Khumbu Sherpas have never in their lives had access to such large amounts of cash, but much of their monetary gains is consumed by inflation, ubiquitous in Nepal and the rest of the world, but exacerbated in Khumbu as ever-increasing numbers of tourists compete for the goods sold in the weekly bazaar in Namche (the competition would be more acute if 50% of the food for organized groups were not bought in Kathmandu). The following comparisons of the period from 1964-1985 give some idea of the scale:

Wages, Food Prices and Percentage Increase in Khumbu, for Selected Years

	1964	1974	1978	1985	1964-85%
Porter wage	Rs. 6/day	10(67%)	18(80%)	30(67%)	400%
Sherpa wage	Rs.10/day	15(50%)	25(67%)	45(80%)	350%
Sardar wage	Rs.16/day	25(56%)	35(40%)	50(43%)	231%
Rice price	Rs.9/pathi	26(189%)	35(35%)	80(129%)	788%
Potato price	Rs.2/tin	14(600%)	20(43%)	25(25%)	1150%

The table only states in statistical form information Sherpas are quick to volunteer: although they are earning unprecedented wages now, things are really much the same as they were before because the cost of living is even higher. But this does not mean that the purchasing power of the Sherpas has declined or remained static since 1964, because in 1964 very few Sherpas had tourist or mountaineering jobs. Since they are, in this sense, starting from scratch, their cash situation can only have improved.

The extent that Sherpas grow most of the food they eat (unlike, for example, the Thakalis north of Pokhara), they are not affected by the ravages of inflation. But Sherpas now also buy as much rice, at its constantly inflating prices, as they can afford. This creates severe difficulties for those who can least afford it - the families that have little or no recourse to the financial benefits of tourism. The difficulties arise not because of the need to eat rice at home (there are always plenty of potatoes for domestic consumption) but because of the many social occasions on which it is culturally mandatory to serve expensive imported food. For example, whereas formerly buckwheat or potatoes was distributed at funerals, or at the annual Dumje festival, now it would be humiliating to serve anything other than rice. Even the remuneration paid to lamas to read texts at private Sherpa houses has increased.

Sherpas whose major source of cash is derived from the sale of dzom or zopkio face great financial uncertainty, since whether, and what, yak will reproduce from year to year is highly variable. Such animals are simply unreliable as sources of income, whereas by contrast herds of tourists have so far generated a dependable and even increasing annual income. Another type of difficulty is that faced by those - in the Thame valley, for example - who have traditionally bartered the Tibetan tea they bring from Tibet. Khumjung Sherpas who work for tourists can now use cash to buy Tibetan tea in Kathmandu cheaper than they can barter for it with the Thame traders.

But the most dramatic economic change is the increase in employment. To obtain work with an expedition in 1964 or before, a Sherpa had to go

to the Sardar with a bottle of change and ask for the privilege of carrying a load.

By 1974 the situation was utterly reversed. I remember Sardars for the Spanish Mr. Everest Expedition that year feverishly combing Khumbu villages for any spare animals or otherwise unemployable humans (like elderly women) who would carry their loads from Lukla to base camp. Another indication of the labor shortage is the disappearance of the 'chit books' in which Sherpas used to carefully keep letters of reference, written by expedition leaders, to use in future job-hunting. In a seller's market, such recommendations have become superfluous. Sherpas starting with little or no cash in 1964 - certainly the vast majority - are in enviable economic positions today, and they know it.

But partly because of inflation, partly because the pay is seasonal, and partly because most Sherpas have little business experience, there has been little savings or productive investment. When asked what they have done with all their substantial earnings, Sherpas reply, in Nepali, that they have 'eaten' their money - and they usually mean that in the literal sense that they now eat a more varied and expensive diet than previously. In Khumbu, this means not only more rice, formerly a relatively rarely eaten luxury but now eaten as often as two or three times a week; but also more vegetables and fruits, some grown locally, the result of garden - experiments by individual Sherpas.

A still wider variety of fruits and vegetables is available from the weekly bazaar in Namche, which did not even exist in 1964. Before it began functioning in 1965, "Namche Bazaar" was really a misnomer justified only by the fact that many citizens of Namche were traders and kept stocks of goods - including rice - in their houses; some of the rice they transported to Tibet on yaks, but they would also sell locally on demand. Sherpas believe in the Tibetan proverb they quote, "You don't become poor from eating, but from being lazy". What they do not spend in other ways they spend on jewelry primarily, or on repairing or upgrading their houses by, for example, replacing their traditional slate or wood roofs with sheets of corrugated iron. In Kathmandu "eating" their money can mean spending not only on more expensive food, but also on alcohol, parties, taxis, movies, and so on.

As there is much more to spend money on now, even within Khumbu (not only food, housing, and jewelry, but also clothes and modern items such as watches and radios), incipient class differences are emerging as a new 'tourist Sherpa' class begins to develop. This nouveau riche group is distinguished by the novel source of wealth at its disposal (land and yak herds were the old basis of wealth) and the ostensibly different life-style it can buy. Formerly too there were great wealth differences among families, but wealthy people looked and lived about the same as poor people - at least for most everyday, practical purposes. There was little the wealthy could do with their money (other than host feasts such as Dumje more lavishly than poorer people could, or donate generously to religious projects, or wear more jewelry), to distinguish

themselves from those who were less well off. But with imported hiking boots, colorful wool sweaters, and down parkas, it is not hard to distinguish a trekking Sherpa from a fulltime, old-style potato farmer. In the absence of traditional wool garments, poorer Sherpas now have to pile on many layers of cotton to keep warm. (Fürer-Haimendorf 1975).

Another result of massive employment in tourism is that people no longer have time to do some of the things they did before. Time "has the great advantage that it is measurable and that it must be used in the satisfaction of any ends whatsoever", and changing allocations of time clearly reflect changing livelihood patterns in the Sherpa case. While one can always make increasingly precise measures of anything - including time - it is enough here to note that any Sherpa involved with tourism spends more time out of Khumbu than at home, and many Sherpas spend ten months a year away from their homes. There is certainly precedent for seasonal absences from home in the long-distance trading to Tibet, but the present trend has greatly increased both the number of Sherpas gone from Khumbu and the total time they are away.

Some traditional local crafts are dying out, not only because tourist jobs are more profitable, but because the supply of wood and wool is not as large or as dependable as it used to be. With so much cash on hand people now just tend to buy manufactured items; instead of making their own clothing, for example, they can easily buy Korean or Japanese cloth in the Namche shops. Or instead of the traditional heavy wooden water carriers, people increasingly use light-weight plastic jerry cans, part of the expeditionary flotsam and jetsam that has accumulated over the years.

On the other hand, sales in Tibetan-style tourist curios are brisk. Confronting the tourist as soon as he steps off the plane at Syangboche or Lukla, as well as at various places along the trails, are curio salesmen - frequently Tibetan refugees - with their wares spread out on a blanket or ground cloth. Almost all these curios are flown in from Kathmandu (and some of the items are made by Tibetans living in India), although tourists think they are getting the genuine article by coming to what they imagine is its true source (the only Tibetan curios that actually come from Tibet are yak bells).

The job of school teacher, although certainly not an occupation with a very long history in Khumbu, is another casualty of mass tourism. Of 33 teachers spread over the five Khumbu schools, only two are Sherpas; the others are all Nepalese outsiders. The same fate has befallen other skilled professions, such as carpenters and power-house operators for the new hydel plant in Namche. Young Sherpas regard trekking jobs as much more attractive, although the advantages are somewhat illusory: teachers earn a regular monthly salary while most trekking jobs pay only during the actual trek and not between treks or during the off-season. But Sherpas think not just of trekking jobs but of trekking careers, and the capstone to a career in trekking is the position of Sardar. The hope of becoming a Sardar is what draws the younger generation out of the schools and into tourism in such large numbers.

The remuneration to a trekking Sardar is highly variable, according to the policies and resources of the different trekking companies. But those who hold "A" class Sardar positions (the highest of the three classes, A, B, and C) typically earn Rs. 900/month, twelve months a year, plus insurance, a pension fund, and free food while trekking. Lucrative as this is, it represents only a part of the total income potentially available to a Sardar. The possibilities open to a Sardar to augment his income through graft are exceedingly rich, since it is he who acts as bursar for the trekking group's trail expenses. For example, if he is paying Rs. 30/day for porters, reports that he is employing 35 porters but actually has only 30 loads, he can pocket the wages of the five phantom porters for a daily profit of Rs. 150 to himself, on top of his regular, legitimate earnings. This is in addition to the practice common in Khumbu before the present labor shortage, and still practiced elsewhere in Nepal, of extracting a "commission" from porters in return for giving them jobs.

There is an irony in the fact that Sherpas prefer trekking to teaching, since one of the main qualifications Sherpas have for working with tourists nowadays is their knowledge of spoken and written Nepali and English, which they would not have had if they not attended one or the other of their local village schools. Thus they acquire literacy in schools which they then abandon to take jobs which increasingly require it. From virtually no literacy in Nepali, not to mention English, in 1964, by 1978 there were 157 Sherpas literate in Nepali in Namche Bazaar; 174 in Khumjung; 57 in Kunde; and 51 in Phortse. Students in the upper classes tend to prefer the immediate rewards of trekking to the delayed gratification entailed by further education. Even some of those attending college in Kathmandu play hookey during the trekking season to work for tourists. Some of the older mountaineering Sardars, recognizing how fragile the trekking industry potentially is, want a university education for their children but the children themselves generally want to get into trekking as soon as they can.

Another traditional occupation that has suffered is agriculture. Beginning in the Spring of 1974, Khumbu Sherpas began hiring Solu Sherpas in large numbers to work their fields while they themselves went off to pursue more lucrative trekking jobs (see Bjonness 1983). This pattern is now well established, and in 1978 a majority of the households in Khumjung-Kunde had at least one servant paying, them Rs. 6/day plus food for their labor while they themselves earned trekking wages and pocketed the difference.

For a variety of reasons, including the tendency for hired labor not to execute jobs with the care that a landowner working his own land would, and the decrease in leaf-litter that has accompanied deforestation, the general consensus is that there has been a slight drop in agricultural productivity. Sherpas are not alarmed by the decline, perhaps because it has been offset by the recent introduction of a strain of potato with three times the yield of the traditional variety. Sherpas prefer the taste of the old potato and use the new variety in pancakes, to make beer, and so on. They keep about 20% of their fields planted in the old strain, which are preferred for boiling.

Still, the feeling persists that crops are not what they used to be, and marginal, relatively unproductive fields - in high summer pastures, for example - are being abandoned for lack of manpower to cultivate them. The strict rules designed to keep animals out of the village during the growing season and until after the harvest are now very loosely enforced in Khumjung; by contrast Phortse still observes these rules to the letter, and they still produce good crops - much better, it is commonly acknowledged by the inhabitants of both villages, than those in Khumjung.

Perhaps the greater danger of mass employment in tourism is that tourism itself is vulnerable to so many potential threats. A basic principle of ecological analysis, Liebig's Law, states that a viable adaptation to an environment must be able to survive the most difficult conditions, as opposed to just the average conditions, that the environment imposes. Otherwise one is faced with a strategic situation similar to that of the non-swimming statistician who drowned trying to wade across a river whose average depth was only three feet.

Khumbu Sherpas have to worry about increased competition from Sherpas elsewhere in Nepal as well as from other groups, such as Tamangs. Already their monopoly even on countaineering expeditions has been weakened. Of 32 high altitude Sherpas employed by the American Mt. Everest Expedition in 1963, 25 were from Khumbu and only three from Solu (four were from Darjeeling). No large expedition today is likely to be staffed so overwhelmingly by Khumbu Sherpas, and the notion that a Tamang or Newar could reach the summit of Mt. Everest (a Tamang made the ascent in 1973 and repeated it in 1985, when a Newar also reached the top) was not seriously entertained in 1963.

Sherpas must also face the possibility of external threats beyond their control, such as an economic recession, an oil embargo, political turmoil, or a government policy to discourage tourism. Any of these factors could halt tourism overnight. The spectacular financial success of tourism is thus limited in the same way that the increased production of the Green Revolution is. The Green Revolution is spectacular only if all the necessary inputs - irrigation, fertilizer, and so on - are available in the right amounts at the right times. The same is true of tourism in a remote place such as Khumbu. Tourists are a new kind of crop the Sherpas are raising on their steep mountain slopes, and this crop is as subject to environmental constraints, pressures, and disasters as any strain of miracle rice. An even more appropriate analogy is the one that Sherpas themselves use: to think of tourists as so many cattle, since they both represent highly productive and prestigious, but perishable, forms of wealth. Like cattle, tourists give good milk, but only if they are well-fed.

Images: Tourists

To understand tourism in Khumbu requires understanding not only Sherpas but also their clients. Tourists want to come to Khumbu not only to see Mt. Everest and the Himalayas, but also because they like the Sherpas or like what they have heard or read about them, whether in

a book about Sherpas specifically, or incidentally in a book about Nepal or mountaineering which mentions them. (Although the result may be due to the sense of humor of tired trekkers who had hoped to escape from questionnaires in the Himalayas, the book tourists mentioned most frequently was *Tintin in Tibet*.) Having discovered that technology enables us to control nature without enhancing our experience of it or ourselves, tourists retreat to the high Himalayas to intensify their sense of both. Khumbu offers the rare opportunity (rare because men and mountains meet so much more closely there than they do elsewhere in the Himalayas) to experience culture and nature, and their combination - adventure - at the top of the world.

There exists now and always has existed a kind of mutual admiration society between Sherpas and Westerners, and just why this should be so is an interesting question in itself. What is involved is the set of images, in many ways stereotyped, each group has of the other. The image Westerners have developed of Sherpas is extremely positive: that of an egalitarian, peaceful, hardy, honest, polite, industrious, hospitable, cheerful, independent, brave, heroic, compassionate people. This image begins on the basis of hearsay, literary evidence, which has by now assumed epic proportions, and then is reinforced, when everything goes well, by personal experience in the course of a trek.

These images reflect not only what Westerners think about Sherpas but what Sherpa culture itself values in human beings. So far as they go these images do capture one side of Sherpa personality - but only one side. Like all people, Sherpas have a public side - a front stage where they act the way they want the rest of the world to see them. They also have a private side - a back stage where they are more unadornedly true to themselves. The images sketched above characterize the front stage. They are also present on the back stage, but so are many other, less flattering types of behavior.

One of the difficulties of working on a tourist trek - a 24 hour/day job - is to maintain the official front stage image fulltime - a task designed to tax a saint. So it is only when the trek is over and the backstage can be safely unveiled at home that the unrelenting binges and general hell-raising that go on for days take place. Successful trekking Sherpas realize that they are, in part, paid professional actors and entertainers. The stories and dances and songs are genuine enough, but they are also what clients want. And what clients pay for, they get. There are other less salutary sides to Sherpa character - for example, the smuggling which provides the money to support life-styles of ever-escalating luxury, comfort, and ease. But this is all back-stage behavior, not to be revealed in the official image.

The original, pre-Lukla image Sherpas held of Westerners was one of a technologically sophisticated, generous, wealthy, irrationally adventurous, egalitarian, and well-intentioned if not always very physically strong people. This more-or-less coherent image was formed on the basis of contact with a relatively homogeneous, small number of people, mostly mountaineers and the occasional hardy trekker. But this image has given

way in recent years to a much more inchoate one, which has emerged out of their myriad experiences with thousands upon thousands of tourists - everyone from the psychotic French woman who had to be strait-jacketed and evacuated, to the American who has taken the vows of a lama, to the German divorcee in search of romance. In addition to the original positive image, foreigners are now equally apt to be thought crude, stumbling, demanding, unpredictable, and cheap. Where foreigners are concerned, Sherpas have learned to have no stable expectations. So much for unitary images.

The reason Westerners are so enchanted with Sherpas is that the qualities the Sherpas are thought to possess are not only those Westerners admire; they are also precisely those they feel they should have but conspicuously lack or do not adequately measure up to. So Sherpa society, or the Western image of it, represents a dramatic realization of what Westerners would like to be themselves, hence the frequently breathless enthusiasm of the former for the latter.

There is also probably a measure of admiration for what Westerners regard as the liberal Sherpa sexual ethic, and in this there are precedents (both in the anthropological reporting and in the public admiration) in earlier work by Margaret Mead and B. Malinowski among the islanders of the South Pacific.

Although the causes, strength, and justification of the mutual admiration may be debated, there clearly is an affinity between Westerners and Sherpas, as evidenced by the high rate of intermarriage. There have been 40 or so cases of marriage between Westerners and Sherpas, almost all relatively uneducated villagers from Solu or Khumbu (Fürer-Haimendorf 1985). And there have been many more informal liaisons, primarily between trekking Sardars and their Western female clientele. The latter phenomenon is a reversal of the more typical tourist situation elsewhere in the world where single tourists are apt to be males traveling in pursuit of interests both exotic and erotic.

Images: Mountaing and Mountaineering

One example of a mutually false image is the fundamental incompatibility between Sherpa and tourist perceptions of the environment - ironic in view of the fact that it is the environment that attracts Westerners to Khumbu in the first instance. The most general Sherpa term for beautiful (*lemu*) can apply to the physical features as well as personality qualities of human beings, both men and women. It can also apply to inanimate objects and to the environment as a whole. But while a field or forest might be *lemu*, the giant snow peaks towering in every direction over Khumbu are never considered *lemu*. Their color (white) is seen as uninteresting - not a surprising judgement in view of the obvious Sherpa preference for the vivid colors which are so evident in such disparate contexts as religious paintings and women's aprons. A snow peak elsewhere might be admired for its shape, and Pertemba, one of the foremost Sherpa Sardars of his time, says that one of the pleasures he derives from climbing is the beauty of the different views from high on

a mountain. But otherwise familiarity has bred indifference rather than awe, and the shape of the Khumbu snow and ice peaks is just too boring to be considered *lemu*.

Sherpas are generally mystified that Westerners come to Khumbu at such great expense and in such great numbers, whether to trek or to climb. Even the most experienced Sardars admit they cannot fathom why Europeans climb, thought they make guesses. One hunch is that they climb for fame, since the books they write always include plenty of pictures of themselves. But Sherpas also know that books are bought, so a second hypothesis is that people climb to make money - one Sardar, for example, thought this was the case with Chris Bonnington since he has written (and presumably sold) so many books, whereas the same Sardar thought it is fame that drives Reinhold Messner to the summits. Another wondered whether science was not the prime motivation, while still another view was that climbers climb to clear their minds from the worries of office work.

The Sardar who held the latter view said that if he were an office worker he might well need to clear his mind too, but if so he would do it by going on a weekend picnic rather than by climbing. Eight of Khumbu's most experienced and prestigious Sardars unanimously agreed that virtually the only reason they climb is because they need the high income they cannot earn any other way. As one put it, if he had the education to qualify for a good office job he would unhesitatingly choose that line of work. Sherpas basically see no intrinsic point in climbing: neither fame (though that is welcome since it helps them get their next climbing job more easily), nor challenge, nor adventure. Climbing is simply a high-paying job. None of the eight Sardars expressed much enthusiasm for a hypothetical all Sherpa expedition, simply because they could not imagine any earnings accruing from it. This does not mean they do not enjoy the camaraderie and the scenic views, or that they do not take pride in a job well done: it simply means that those reasons alone would never motivate them to move up a mountain.

One liability of climbing is the difficulty caused to women who are left behind to manage the household, but this is seen even by the women so affected as a relatively minor inconvenience that is compensated for by the pay that is earned. Sherpas see danger as by far the most unrelentingly negative feature of climbing. As they see their friends die one after the other as the years go by, they are only too vividly aware of the risks. Their wives and parents are universally opposed to their expedition work for that very reason. But the climbing Sherpas' view is that danger comes with the territory; they just hope they can learn enough from the deaths of their friends to avoid their mistakes. Their judgement is that climbing is a hard but good job in which the benefits balance the risks - a view which is probably shared by Nepal's other big foreign exchange earners, the Gurkha soldiers who are paid to fight and die for Britain and India. Climbing Sherpas compare deaths on a mountain favorably with those of soldiers and taxi drivers, whose deaths are not insured. Those who feel the risks are not justified by the difference in pay (and equipment) between climbing and trekking choose

the latter, although many do both depending on the vagaries of opportunity and their own fluctuating financial needs.

Sardar Pertemba is typical of many climbing/trekking Sherpas who abandoned his studies and started working earlier than he might have otherwise because of the English he had learned at his village school (he also points out that knowing English will not help you get to the top of the mountain). Pertemba likes both climbing and trekking, but the work he enjoys most is the teaching he has done at the government mountaineering school in Manang. Most Sherpas learn to climb primarily not from foreign mountaineers but from other Sherpas, usually between Base Camp and Camp I on their first expedition. Pertemba thinks Sherpas need a mountaineering school in Khumbu to train young Sherpas properly and systematically in mountaineering technique.

The fact that mountains are not aesthetic monuments for the Sherpas does not mean that they are indifferent to all of them. Some peaks, like Khumbui Yul Lha, rising behind Khumjung-Kunde, are sacred by virtue of the deities which reside on them. Sherpas were reluctant to climb Karyolung, because of its sacredness, during the first all-Nepal expedition to that peak in 1975. They had no such compunctions about Kwangde, the second objective of the expedition, and proceeded without further ado to the top, as it turned out, of the east peak which they mistook for the main summit. Whether such spiritual reluctance would have existed had the summits of Khumbu been accessible in 1907 when Sherpas first began climbing, in Sikkim, is an interesting but unanswerable historical question. Certainly no such general reluctance exists today. Not only the mountains but also some of their spiritually may have eroded over the years.

Khumbu must now be one of the most thoroughly mapped regions on the face of the earth, with vernacular names for virtually all prominent features of the landscape, but this detailed nomenclature is often a creation of foreign cartographers. As recently as 1950 Tilman listed Ama Dablam, by now probably the most photographed peak in Nepal, as 'unnamed', and when I visited Everest base camp in 1964. 'Kala Patthar', now of the most popular trekking destinations in Nepal, was unnamed.

All this geographical detail is evidence of the reversal of values which historically made Solu, with its lower elevation, more fertile fields, and more salubrious climate, the more highly valued land. One scenario is that the earliest Sherpa pioneers probably settled first in the more hospitable climate of Solu, and it was by and large the late-comers or impoverished Solu Sherpas who had to settle for the harsher, more rugged landscape of Khumbu. Now it is Khumbu which is the centre of a booming prosperity, thus demonstrating that a resource acquires worth only upon the simultaneous convergence of technology, values, and a market.

Images: Social

Another example of incompatibility of images concerns concepts of pollution. While Sherpas have a concept of pollution, *tip*, it has

nothing to do with the pollution of their environment by tin cans, plastic, and rubber that tends to unhinge the minds of so many Westerners - porters and Sherpas are responsible for the bulk of the non-toilet paper litter. Sherpas do not care much about this Western-style pollution one way or the other, because their concept of pollution concerns only the self, or human creations and artifacts, such as houses (see Ortner 1973). *Tip* is a feeling, a moral state of mind, and is not generated ultimately from empirical observation of the natural world. For example, pollution can be induced socially by contact with certain kinds of people, such as low-caste Nepali *Kamis*, or blacksmiths, of whom there are a few families in Namche and one in Khumjung, or members of the Tibetan butcher class. Westerners would surely, if they were aware of these discriminations, moderate their views of egalitarian Sherpa society. But since all Westerners must of necessity come to the Sherpas via the far more obviously hierarchical Hindu societies to the south, they are lulled into ascribing an egalitarian ideology to the Sherpas which is a simplification if not downright distortion of the ethnographic facts.

But I do not want to leave the impression that Sherpas and their clients pass like ships in the night, completely misperceiving each other. The Sherpa/trekker relationship is, as these things go in the world of tourism, an unusually long and intensive one. Even though, as in any person-to-person interaction, only behaviours relevant to the encounter are exhibited - we never play all our roles at the same time - nevertheless Sherpas and their clients do get to know each other over an extended period of time, rarely less than a week, often for a month or more.

Exigencies of living break down what might otherwise be a formal, distant relationship: the Sherpas are in their element, doing well what they have always done naturally - walking, carrying loads, enduring cold weather - all in perfectly acclimatized condition. The Westerners are, by contrast, usually out of shape, tired, plagued by sore muscles and blisters, and gasping for air. Sherpas are paid to be helpful under these conditions, and they are. And they are cheerful, hard working, and anxious to please, so in the end a relationship of trust and respect is built which would be impossible with a guide on a half-day tour of Kathmandu.

Westernization

Are Sherpas being Westernized? By many visible indexes they are. First, they wear Western-style clothing - pants, shirts, down jackets, and climbing or hiking boots. (Women's clothes have not changed from the basic, indigenous Tibetan style, thus conforming to the female sartorial conservatism that has been the rule generally all over South Asia). But it is significant that Khumbu Sherpas wear either Sherpa clothes (even the most well-equipped mountaineering Sherpa will wear the traditional Tibetan coat on ceremonial occasions) or Western dress, but never the Nepali national dress.

When His Majesty's King Birendra visited the Government Yak Farm at Syangboche in 1974, the Pradhan Panchas of both the Khumjung and

Namche Panchayats greeted him with sport coats and neckties, not *daura-suruwal*, the national dress.

Similarly with language: Sherpas recognize the importance and desirability of mastering the national language in both its spoken and written forms. But it is also felt that a Sherpa is putting on airs if he uses too much Nepali in an otherwise purely Sherpa conversation.

Through association with trekkers, as well as extensive travel abroad in the lands from which the trekkers come, there is a wide knowledge of modern hygiene, Western languages (including Japanese), and material culture generally. The tradition of drinking Tibetan salt-and-butter tea has largely disappeared in Sherpa homes, and it is much more common now for Sherpas to drink sugar-tea (because of the high price of butter and the uncertainty of supply of Tibetan tea). Western ways are admired because it is through Western contacts that new channels of mobility and access to power, wealth, and prestige have opened up. Sherpas honor the West because their experience of it has been so overwhelmingly financially positive.

My own view is that matters such as clothing styles and diet are relatively superficial in themselves, and that much more important is the fact that Sherpas have maintained a cultural identity that is strongly and exclusively Sherpa. There is little that is self-deprecating about the Sherpas. Whatever they are, they are mostly proud of it. Even those Sherpas who have achieved the greatest success, through mountaineering accomplishments or university educations, think of themselves uncompromisingly as Sherpas - not as Westerners, or Nepalese (although they are certainly loyal citizens of the realm), but simply as Sherpas.

Part of the reason for this tenacious cultural identity is the mutual admiration society that I have already mentioned. Sherpas are so massively reinforced at every point for being Sherpas that there is every reason not only to 'stay' Sherpa but even to flaunt one's Sherpahood. One might even say that part of the pay Sherpas receive from tourists is pay for being Sherpa, or at least for performing the role that the popular image of Sherpa demands be played - they remain Sherpa because they are paid to be. Nor are the advantages of their enviable status lost on other groups in Nepal. Tamangs, for example, frequently try to pass themselves off as Sherpas, and a process of 'Sherpaization' exists which acts counter to the thrusts of the much-vaunted Sanskritization that has absorbed the upward-mobilizing energies of the sub-continent for millenia.

One example of the reinforcement Sherpas have received for being proud and independent is the fact that in recent years a number of the more successful Sherpas have dropped the suffix 'Saheb' and address their Western clients on a first name basis - something no house or hotel-servant or tour guide in Kathmandu would dream of doing. Westerners often react favourably to being 'just one of the boys' - an equal - even if they are being waited on hand-and-foot. On the other hand,

Westerners accustomed to or expecting more traditional hierarchical servant/master relations are taken aback by the I'm-just-as-good-as-you Sherpa personality.

Because the 'tourist Sherpas' still identify themselves very much as Sherpas, no class of 'marginal men' - people neither fully Sherpa nor Western - has developed, as is often the case in such contact situations. Although the sexual differentiation that exists between Sherpa men and women is being maintained by differential access to education and jobs (there are occasional Sherpani 'cook-boys', but only one Sherpani Sardar so far), the 'tourist Sherpa' is not marginal to his society at all but fully accepted within its fold. Even Sherpas who live ten months of the year in Kathmandu keep their houses and fields and, often, their families, in Khumbu. One Sherpa who has lived in Kathmandu for more than 15 years, ten months of the year, now holds a high and trusted position (chorimba) in the civil-religious hierarchy in his village. He is able to return to his village during the Dumje festival, in early summer, when his presence is most essential. The fact that he is hardly ever in his village does not diminish his status there. On the contrary, his success in the travel business in Kathmandu has endorsed and enhanced it.

Intensification

Rather than Westernization or nationalization, then, there has been an intensification of Sherpa culture. That is, Sherpas have come to value some of their traditions even more than they did prior to the advent of tourism. In religion, for example, although now Sherpas rarely commission the carving of prayers on stones for the prayer-walls at the entrance of villages, there seems to be no lessening of faith in Buddhist doctrine. Some Sherpas claim that interest in religion is deeper than it was before, and some of the most successful and "Westernized" Sherpas are among the most devout.

Religious "strength" is difficult to measure, but clearly interest and participation in the many Buddhist rituals are as strong as ever. Certainly the most educated Sherpas are still committed Buddhists who believe in and rely on their lamas' liturgical and ecclesiastical powers. The Tengboche Rimpoche was able to raise \$20,000 in two days for a new gompa in Kathmandu in 1981. Kalden Sherpa, owner of a flourishing trekking company, in 1963 considered himself Christian, but he is now one of the most generous supporters of Tengboche Monastery; he is personally financing the higher studies of four thawas at this Kathmandu gompa. (Hillary 1964).

Sherpas have not only maintained their cultural identity and intensified it, but they have also contributed to making generally Tibetan life-styles respectable in Nepal, among Hindu and Hinduized Nepalese. In the first place, hero status is accorded anyone who has climbed Mr. Everest - recognition in the press, praise by the Prime Minister, and an audience with him, thus turning the job of high-altitude porter into a distinguished and honorable occupation. Those so honored thus far include 28 Sherpas, one Tamang and one Newar.

Sherpa success at high altitudes coincided with a surge of interest in things Tibetan after the great publicity given the Dalai Lama's retreat from Lhasa in 1959. Then after the 1962 China-India border war, when India placed severe restrictions on travel by foreigners into the Indian Himalayas and closed traditional centres of Tibetan culture, like Kalimpong, to Westerners, Kathmandu became a place not only for foreigners to experience the culture of Tibetan refugees but for Bhutaneese, Sikkimese, and Tibetan nobility and businessmen to live and work. Being wealthier than most Nepalese, they frequented the more elegant hotels and restaurants in their traditional dress, and their costume became identified no longer as the dress of lowly Bhotias but as the normal clothing of wealthy, powerful people.

All these developments combined to contribute to the rise in Sherpa status in the eyes of their countrymen, and the female Sherpa or Tibetan dress changed from an object of scorn, from the Hindu point of view, to high fashion - worn in the fashionable restaurants, hotels and discotheques of Kathmandu, and on board RNAC aircraft on international and domestic flights, all by women who would not have dreamed of wearing anything but a saree a few years before. A telling case in point is a Namche Sherpani who married a wealthy Newar and moved to Kathmandu in the late 1950's. During the first few years in Kathmandu she wore a saree, trying to blend in with her husband's milieu. By the 1970's she had reverted to her Sherpa dress, although this time with a more modish, tailored cut. By the 1980's her tastes had become totally eclectic - sometimes Sherpa dress, sometimes a saree, sometimes slacks or a western dress.

Political Implications

Although Sherpa culture is being intensified rather than adulterated, tourism is nevertheless accelerating the last stage of nation building in what would otherwise still be a remote and inaccessible area. Until 1964, when then Crown Prince Birendra made one of the first landings at Lukla in order to dedicate the new school at Chaunrikharka no high or even middle-level government official had ever visited Khumbu. Now, His Majesty as well as other high officials such as the Zonal Commissioner have visited Khumbu many times. In 1964 Government presence in Khumbu was represented by a Post Office and police checkpost in Namche. By 1978 there had been added two airstrips, a meteorological station,² a Government Yak Farm, village panchayat secretaries from outside Khumbu, a medical centre, a bank providing such services as savings accounts and encashment of travellers' checks, a police checkpost in Thame, and a National Park which includes all of upper Khumbu (excluding, technically, the villages themselves).

Sherpas have viewed most of these institutions as either helpful or harmless. But initially, at least, the primary feeling about the National Park has been one of fear. The main impact of the Park so far has been to enforce strictly the law against cutting green wood for fuel, and since no realistic alternative has been provided Sherpa concern is understandable.³ Much of the fear is based on rumors about even worse

regulations still to come, such as that in the future Sherpas will not be allowed to gather leaf-litter from the forests.

The National Park is in the unenviably ambiguous position of having no authority to control or advise on large development projects sponsored by other agencies (such as the Austrian-aided hydroelectric project near Thame) but at the same time, as the paramount political authority it has had an enervating effect on once strong local institutions.

The traditional Forest Wardens (Shing Nawa) had ceased functioning by the early 1970's (although they are still active in Phortse) as the astronomical sums tourists paid for firewood had led to massive cutting which systematically undermined the Forest Wardens' authority. In 1982 honorary Forest Wardens were appointed from each Panchayat ward, but they have not had much effect because they were given no authority to levy fines. All this is in dramatic contrast to 1964, when firewood was free for the asking to any overnight visitor in Solu-Khumbu.

Fuelwood consumption is strongly influenced not only by numbers of tourists but also by their trekking style. In 1978 70% of Khumbu trekkers were in organized groups, which have their own tents and food, while 30% stayed in local lodges - "tea-house trekkers" as they are known in the trade. The big groups use the most wood because they are big (there are two or three porters/Sherpas for each tourist) and because their Sherpas make their own, usually inefficient cooking fires and keep their clients cozy with bonfires. "Tea-house trekkers" require fewer support personnel and keep warm in the lodges. As year-round lodges have sprung up almost all the way to Everest base camp the composition of Khumbu trekkers has shifted markedly towards the individuals and small groups who patronize them. Kerosene is so prohibitively expensive, compared to firewood, that only hotels and lodges can afford to use it. Moreover, the National Park can monitor fuel use and enforce regulations much more readily in fixed sites than it can among nomadic trekking groups. (Bjornness 1979).

Sherpas say that the National Park is now their Forest Warden. The traditional rule which enjoined Sherpas not to cut green trees applied only to forests near the villages, and the fine for breaking it (a bottle of beer) was mild. The National Park attempts to enforce the rule everywhere, far from the villages as well as near them, and punishment for breaking the law includes heavy fines and imprisonment.

The National Park has an impact even in areas where it does not belong. When the National Park was dedicated, on the grounds of Tengboche monastery, a new trekkers' lodge (built over the objections of the Rimpoche), a chicken was sacrificed - not as part of the dedication ceremonies but by some Nepalese officials on their own. Officially or unofficially, the sacrifice of an animal near a monastery, of all places, was resented by the lamas, who refuse to kill even insects.

The deterioration of local political institutions cannot be explained by the existence of the National Park alone. Even if the local village

Panchayats did not feel preempted by the Park, tourist jobs have lured away virtually everybody with leadership abilities. To serve effectively in the Panchayat it is necessary to be generally resident in the area. But as one influential local leader put it, anybody with any ambition or brains or ability is off working for tourists most of the time, so there are too few competent people left to serve on the Panchayats. The result is that Panchayat members are either capable leaders who are often absent from Khumbu, or residents with little interest in politics, or, in one case, the wife of a local leader who serves as a surrogate for her politically important but frequently absent husband.

Both of these factors - the supremacy of the National Park and the lack of leaders who stay put in Khumbu long enough to take an active part in political affairs there - have led to a fragmentation of village interests, with different individuals or groups promoting separate aims: the Everest-View Hotel, the trekking companies, the Himalayan Trust, the National Park, and so on. Whatever united a village politically in the past seems to have weakened in the face of all the external interests which now assert themselves. This fragmentation of interests is reflected in the lack of consensus on the importance of keeping animals out of the fields of Khumjung described earlier.

Demographic Consequences

The major demographic consequence of tourism is the large outflow of young men from Khumbu for the better part of the year. There are two reasons for this emigration: one is to avoid the inflated social obligations which bankrupt those not involved in tourism (the "social budget" is now estimated to exceed the "domestic budget"). The other cause is simply the motivation to earn the money trekking jobs bring in.

One consequence of the increase in long seasonal absences among the Sherpas is a lower birth rate and a concentration of births nine months after the summer monsoon season (see Pawson 1984). Other demographic consequences of tourism and mountaineering include high mortality rates for young men: from 1950 through 1985, 77 Sherpas died on mountaineering expeditions in Nepal. The great majority of these were Khumbu Sherpas, and the mortality rate among adult males is therefore quite high. But the existence of polyandry (although younger Sherpas now scorn the custom) and easy widow remarriage diminished the effects such deaths might have on the birth rate.

What has made much more difference to the birth rate is the family-planning techniques made available through the Kunde Hospital. Contraception has recreated the relatively low fertility conditions that polyandry had produced before; the former results in fewer children per family, the latter in fewer families.

Again, the rate of adoption of these measures seems influenced by the degree of participation in tourism. In Kunde, with only seven exceptions all fertile women who had living husbands and two or more living children were practicing some form of birth control. Of these 14 had

accepted IUD's, while three were taking pills. By contrast, in Phortse not a single woman had accepted a loop, three had received longlasting injections (Depo-Provera), seven had tried pills but six of these had stopped taking them (some of whom had since become pregnant), and 19 were not practicing any form of contraception. The fact that only seven women were not practicing contraception in Kunde, compared to 19 in Phortse (two villages of about the same size) can be explained by the degree to which the inhabitants of each has been drawn into the modern world through tourism and mountaineering - the economic importance of children declines quickly in an economy based on tourism rather than agriculture or transhumant nomadism.

The Sherpa medical assistant at the Kunde hospital reports that Phortse women are too shy to ask for loops, and are reluctant to ask for any other form of contraception, whereas for Kunde women such devices are accepted as an everyday fact of life. It is true that the hospital is located in Kunde and not in Phortse, but more than mere physical proximity is involved, since for any Phortse woman it is only a two-hour walk to Kunde - a trivial distance by Khumbu standards. It is unfortunate that many Phortse women come within a few minutes of Kunde on their trips to the weekly bazaar at Namche on Saturdays, when the clinic is closed.

A final demographic consequence is that there has been a dispersal of the population to previously unoccupied areas of Khumbu, or to sites formerly occupied only seasonally and now inhabited permanently. One example is the Syangboche area, site of the airstrip which services the Everest-View Hotel. Only one family has moved here on a permanent basis (a recently prospering Kami family from Namche) but many other Sherpas stay in Syangboche for long periods of time at the hotels, lodges, and tea shops that have sprung up there. If a piped-water system is ever devised to supply water to Syangboche (it must at present be carried from Khumjung-Kunde or from a seasonal spring above Namche) the Syangboche settlement will no doubt grow considerably.

Other examples of population dispersion are the entrepreneurs who have opened tea houses and hotels in such places as Phungi Tenga (at the bottom of the hill leading to Tengboche); and at Pheriche, Dingboche, Lobuche, and Gorak Shep - all formerly inhabited only in the summer months but now occupied the year round. A different example of the same phenomenon is the concentration of Sherpas in an area of Kathmandu (Jyatha Tole) now known only half-jokingly as Sherpa Tole.

The Future

The immediate future promises more of the same. If one or another of the dire events mentioned earlier, such as an oil embargo, were to transpire, most Sherpas would be in the fortunate position of being able to return to their traditional means of livelihood; they even state specifically that they would be happy to do so. Whether they really would be happy or not cannot be known before the event, but the more important point is that they have not burned their economic or psychological bridges

behind them. Those who have been educated would have the option of obtaining office jobs in Kathmandu and elsewhere.

The Law of Evolutionary Potential states that the more general an adaptation of an organism or population to its environment, the greater its potential to evolve into something else, whereas the more specialized the adaptation, the fewer the options available for further growth. Such specialized adaptations are inherently fragile, but Sherpas are fortunate in that their future economic options remain open. Unlike inhabitants of other parts of the world heavily involved in tourism, most Sherpas will be able, if necessary, to return to their traditional ecological niche, even if the hotel and shop owners of Namche will have several useless buildings and facilities on their hands.

There is little scope for further tourism growth in Khumbu now, primarily because RNAC is severely limited in the number of tourists it can fly to Lukla. Completion of the Lamosangu-Jiri road has probably brought a few more trekkers, but it has not broken the transportation bottleneck. The number of tourists as of the late 1970's was just under 4,000, up from 20 in 1964, and by 1985 the number had leveled off at about 5,000.⁴ In Namche hotels keep springing up to accommodate the increasing percentage of "tea-house trekkers", even though the number of tourists remains the same. If lodges are overbuilt profits will be split into an increasing number of shares, or less successful businesses will suffer at the expense of the more profitable concerns.

I have argued above that religious belief remains intact, but the population of the monastery at Tengboche has not. By 1978 there were so few monks in Tengboche that the Rimpoche had to import four monks from Thame just to have enough personnel to perform Mani-Rimdu, the biggest monastery celebration of the year. By 1985 the pendulum had swung the other way, as the improved facilities and more solid financial structure of the monastery, due to substantial contributions from foreigners and increased receipts from lodges owned by the monastery or the Rimpoche personally, made the monastic life more feasible for more monks than it had been previously, when each monk had to be self-supporting.

No carved stones for the mani walls have been commissioned for years, and Sherpas say there are fewer readings of sacred texts (a day's reading still costs 9 manas of rice, but 9 manas costs much more now than it used to). Some Sherpas think religion is stronger as a belief system now than it was in the past. I have yet to find a university educated or tourist Sherpa who does not believe in reincarnation or prostrate himself before the Rimpoche to receive his blessing. If the prolonged absence of Sherpas from their villages continues there may come a time when many of them will have had little experience of Buddhist rituals such as Mani-Rimdu. This could result in a weakening of religious sentiment, although so far this has not happened. But a religion like Buddhism requires full-time practitioners to flourish, particularly specialists who can maintain levels of purity and religiosity that lay villagers cannot possibly aspire to. The danger to

Buddhism in Khumbu lies not in the threat from other ideologies - indeed none seem to be even faintly competitive. Proselytizing efforts of Christian missionaries on Sherpa students in high schools elsewhere in Nepal have been ineffectual and even resented. The danger to the practice of Buddhism at its present high level lies in the dwindling numbers of monks in the monasteries (were the pendulum to swing back once again), which could ultimately result in an insufficient critical mass of clergy.

Conclusion

In the short run tourism is enormously popular with the Sherpas of Khumbu. Although an occasional older Sherpa will mutter ominously about what the future may bring, even such dissent acknowledges the mixed blessings that abound. Whatever misgivings exist are overshadowed by the knowledge that most Sherpas have never had it so good. But it is good the way that a honeymoon is good - it's what happens afterwards that is a cause for worry. Returning to the aims of the 5th Plan: In Khumbu the second aim (increasing employment in arts and crafts) is not being accomplished while the third one (promoting regional tourism) is. It is also possible to accomplish both aims (employment has increased, though not in arts and crafts) and still leave a residue of serious problems (e.g. ecological, political) at the local level. One may conclude, in other words, that developmentally the country is fine; it's just the people in it who are experiencing difficulties.

The Tengboche Rimpoche told me that tourists are something like the floods that plague the north Indian states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh: they just come every year and there is really not much anyone can do about it. A dam is a good flood-control device, because it can let out water in carefully controlled ways so that it can be used for constructive purposes - irrigating land, or turning turbines to produce electricity. But if the dam is dynamited, the only result is destruction. Building Lukla dynamited the dam that had held back the tourists.

NOTES

1. Rarely, tourists enter Khumbu from the Rolwaling valley (over the Teshi Lhapcha) to the west; or from the Hongu valley (over the Amphu Lhapcha or Mingbo La) to the east. These are all high and difficult passes.
2. Tilman (1952) reports an Indian-operated rain gauge in Namche Bazaar since 1984.
3. Now that the Park has been proclaimed a World Heritage Site, its authority has been increased.

4. The 4,000 tourist figure is based on records of the Police Checkpost in Namche; the figure of 4,706 given by a Swiss team (see *Tourism and Development in Nepal*, 1978) is based on trekking permits issued, but so many flights to Lukla are cancelled that many treks are aborted in Kathmandu.

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