

## INTERVIEW

**'Nepalese in origin but Bhutanese first'**  
**A conversation with Bhim Subba and Om Dhungel**  
**(Human Rights Organization of Bhutan)**

Michael Hutt and Gregory Sharkey

The political problem in Bhutan that has now led to the presence of over 86,000 Nepali-speaking refugees in Southeast Nepal first began to emerge during 1988 when a census in southern districts began to implement the 1985 Citizenship Act. Various complaints about the census exercise were brought to the notice of the king in a petition signed by two royal advisory councillors, Tek Nath Rizal and B.P. Bhandari. The drafting of the appeal (which has since been widely published) involved no less than eight senior Nepali Bhutanese bureaucrats, one of whom was Bhim Subba, who was subsequently promoted and made Director General of the Department of Power. After public demonstrations across southern Bhutan in the autumn of 1990 and the subsequent government crackdown on 'anti-nationals', Subba defected to Kathmandu in April 1991 and was granted political asylum.

Om Dhungel, formerly an engineer officer in the Department of Telecommunications, left Bhutan in April 1992, allegedly after his parents had been evicted from their home in Chirang after refusing to sign voluntary emigration forms.

Subba and Dhungel produce the monthly *Bhutan Review* which comments, often irreverently, on developments in Bhutan and among the refugees. HUROB (the Human Rights Organisation of Bhutan) is one of three different human rights organisations active on this front: the others are AHURA (the Association of Human Rights Activists) and PFHR (the People's Forum for Human Rights). Rightly or wrongly, HUROB is identified with former bureaucrats and the Bhutan National Democratic Party, and although it has an office in Birtamod, Jhapa, its centre tends to be Kathmandu. Similarly, PFHR is identified with the Bhutan People's Party, and appears to be more active in Delhi and at the UN in Geneva. AHURA has a more visible presence in and around the refugee camps, and claims to be free of political affiliations: it concentrates on casework, liaison with bodies such as Amnesty International, and lobbying. The three approaches are perhaps complementary, although tensions and differences undoubtedly exist between the three groups.

The following discussion took place between Bhim Subba, Om Dhungel, Michael Hutt and Gregory Sharkey on the evening of 10 March 1995 in Kathmandu.

**MH:** What makes Bhutanese Nepalis different from Darjeeling Nepalis or Nepalese Nepalis? Are there cultural factors that make them distinctive or different in some way?

**BS:** I think the major difference is that the Nepalese in Bhutan are by and large from the farming community. In Darjeeling the literacy rate is generally very high and most of the people are now semi-urban dwellers. They have perhaps picked up a certain lifestyle that is not really there in rural Nepal. Now that we have come to Nepal, we realise that Nepalese society has undergone a major transformation in the sense that it has picked up a lot of elements which are not strictly Nepalese. Perhaps it would be unfair to say that the Nepalese Bhutanese are unique, because I think they are more akin to the Nepalese in the eastern hills: I haven't been there, but perhaps the Ilam, Panchthar areas. I think the same thing still exists in Bhutan, mainly because they have not been exposed to the outside world. What was taken to Bhutan in the last century perhaps remains in terms of dress, functions, weddings etc. We have not incorporated ideas from the south, even though the southern part of Bhutan is supposed to be closer to the Indian general environment. I don't think that has really impacted on Bhutanese society. So if you look at a southern Bhutanese Nepalese village today perhaps you will see Nepalese culture as it was in the early 20th century.

**MH:** What about the composition in terms of *jāt* and so on? Is that pretty much the same as you would find in the eastern hills of Nepal, or are there more Tibeto-Burman-speaking groups?

**BS:** In the southern part of Bhutan almost every village seems to have almost all the Nepalese sub-cultures. In fact I was surprised to see somewhere in Sindhu Palchok a village of only Sarkis. In Bhutan we have Rais, Magars, Tamangs, Chetris, Bahuns (Brahmans), Kamis, Damais, Sarkis, all in one village. And we do not have a system of segregation or suppression by supposed higher castes. Again, I think we in Bhutan are fortunate in the sense that we did not take those negative aspects of Nepali culture. He (Om Dhungel) is a Bahun, I am a Matwali. Inter-marriage is common, like, he is married to a Gurung, I am married to a Gurung, we are married to sisters (laughs). And we have another sister-in-law married to a Tamang, another sister-in-law married to a Magar, one sister-in-law married to a Drukpa.

**OD:** My own parents were initially a little bit reluctant when I said I wanted to marry a Gurung girl, but they had no strong objections to it. We are very well integrated in that way.

**BS:** I guess the main reason is that that superiority complex or that the fact that somebody was a higher caste and therefore had an inherent right to suppress - that is not feasible in Bhutan. And this is true of all villages in Bhutan.

**MH:** Have particular castes or ethnic groups suffered more seriously during the recent problems than others?

**BS:** Well, there was a supposed, oft-stated intention on the part of the government to target especially the Brahmans and Chetris. I say 'supposed' because that was what Thimphu wanted people to believe. I was told very often that 'it is these characters who are the likely trouble-makers and we have nothing against Matwali jat' and so on. But this was in effect not true, and we can prove that because we [HUROB] were actually recording the number of

people in the camps by name and by family name. I personally was entering them on the computer, and I can guarantee that out of the first 6,000 or so more than one third were Matwalis. If the government's plan was really true, then that should not have happened. There were fewer Bahuns and Chetris in the initial stages than other sub-categories, mainly because it was a matter of who had the resilience to somehow manage to cling on. And it so happened that many people who were supposedly the targets of the government were not in the first batch of refugees. So that was only something to play one group off against the other.

**GS:** Someone told me this afternoon about an article in a newspaper here which was trying to play up this point. It claimed that it is largely the Brahmans and Chetris, the Parbatiya, who have the greatest sympathy for the refugees, and that the Matwalis don't have much sympathy for them.

**BS:** Actually, one thing we would like to make very clear is that if there are any sentiments in terms of jat or in terms of caste we will have learned them in Nepal. Otherwise in Bhutan, I cannot even think of an instance... Untouchability, of course, that has unfortunately always been there. But generally in terms of a clash, or some problems between, let us say, Mongoloids versus Aryans, that never existed. But now in Nepal people have heard about it and it is feasible that people talk about it.

**OD:** People from outside do go into the camps and try to play up these things.

**BS:** When you say that you were told that there is a greater sense of sympathy from the Aryan side of society, it is likely to be true because in Nepal it seems to be such a big issue that when the Matwalis relate to the problems in Bhutan they see themselves closer to the Bhutanese, the Tibeto-Burman Bhutanese, than to the supposedly larger percentage of Aryans among the southern Bhutanese. Which is not true, actually, because these people do not know the actual percentages. I think in Bhutan there is a larger percentage of Mongoloid Nepalese than Aryan Nepalese, I think that is correct if you put all the castes together.

**MH:** Is this lack of caste consciousness a consequence of your generation becoming rather more Bhutanese and integrating more, or is it something else?

**BS:** Not so much Bhutanese, perhaps, let us say westernised, that would be more fair. One reason is that when people moved from Nepal to Bhutan they moved as equals, so whoever had the ability to clear more land *had* more land. Also, it was not that if you were a Brahman you had the right to go to school and others did not. That system was not there in Bhutan. So because every person of any caste had equal opportunity it was a case of the entire society as a group growing up together.

**OD:** Since the education system started in the early 1960s, we all started at one level, not as different castes.

**MH:** But there were *pāthśālas* (traditional schools) before that...

**BS:** Very few and far between. In fact I studied in the first school in our district, Chirang. For most of the week it was a school, and on Thursdays,

we call it "chanchay bazaar", what is the Nepali word? Yes, *bihibāre bajār*, it was a teashop. And that was the first school.

**MH:** Was that a community initiative?

**BS:** Yes. The *pāthśāla* system, when did that come? I don't know, quite late, I think.

**MH:** I met the pandit from Dagapela *pāthśāla*, and he told me that Lamidara was the oldest *pāthśāla*, established during the 1940s.

**OD:** Yes, Lamidara was the oldest. I went to a *pāthśāla* for a year and then I switched over to school because in the school they used to go for picnics (laughs). So I opted to go to the school.

**BS:** We have studied in Darjeeling, Kalimpong, under the missionaries. As far as our house was concerned it was open house, we could bring anyone inside. It's because we were educated and therefore our entire family could accept it. So it was nothing to do with real Bhutanisation, it was westernisation in concept...

**MH:** Is it possible to delink the issue of the repatriation of the refugees from the question of political change inside Bhutan? Is it conceivable that the present regime could ever welcome the refugees back?

**BS:** If you ask us about whether it is feasible on our part, that is one part of the question. The other part of the question would be whether it would be feasible on the part of the current government to accept such a situation. Those are two different questions. Now from our side, as refugees, it would be I think suicidal for us to take a ticket home until and unless there were minor or, let us say, essential reforms which guaranteed that this thing could not happen again. There is a need for some reforms, though not necessarily of the type that political parties may desire. But to the extent that our rights are protected and that this exodus will not be repeated in the future - we need to ensure that there is that much change. This does not mean that we are trying to overthrow the current government, we are not trying to say that the system that is in place should be replaced by something totally new. But within that system I think what we need is an adequate voice, which is absent at the current moment. And when we say we need a voice, it must be a voice that can be heard. If a representation of 20% or even 100% has no really meaningful say in the legislation, then what is the point?

Now let me take it from the other side. Somehow I do not see the possibility of... of half a solution. Given that we are in a society where 'face' plays a major role, saving face. It's not so much reality that counts, it's perceived reality. To think that the government of Bhutan could say, 'look, we made a mistake, we'll take all of these guys back and everything will remain the same'. No, not feasible. Not because we don't want it, but because they cannot accept it. I mean today there is the government that has been raising hell in the country, saying that these guys are illegal immigrants, we should take them out from the roots. Tomorrow the government cannot be seen to be putting its tail behind its legs and saying 'OK, we'll accept these chaps because there's international pressure'. I wish they could accept that, but that is not feasible. So we have to consider that if there is a solution it will be a solution

with some level of reform. This reform would have to be acceptable not only to us here but to the people inside - western Bhutanese, eastern Bhutanese - who would recognise that these people are here because of these reforms, and these are reforms that we also feel are necessary. In the normal scheme of things this is what would eventually have happened. Therefore the monarchy's role as it is today will have to give way to some extent. As I say, it is not to the extent that the political parties or the people with vested interests inside might desire, and we don't subscribe to the view that there should be major changes. We don't believe it is feasible, we don't think it is advisable, we don't want that.

**MH:** But the trouble is that your demand for repatriation has to include a demand couched in terms of human rights, democracy and so on, so you are rather fulfilling the government's prophecy. You look as if you are dissidents now, not just refugees.

**BS:** No no, we *are* dissidents! Please understand! We would like to make it very clear that if people talk about refugees and repatriation simply from the angle of people suffering etc., that is a major error in their views. We believe that this is not simply a case of people suffering and therefore a need to redress their suffering. It is a case of trying to right a wrong, OK? But in the process, if there are certain threats to another party, it is for us to be compromising. It is for us to recognise that they have as much right to protect their interests as we have a right to demand ours. So now, what is the minimum? We are as concerned about people with vested interests lurking within the southern Bhutanese community as they are, but that does not mean that everyone must suffer. Our position is that if Bhutan is going to survive as a sovereign nation with its current identity and international status there has to be a system which will take into account the views of the southern Bhutanese community, because until and unless they kick out the entire southern population, which is not feasible, this problem will persist. We may be outside, but we will continue to hassle the government, because it is our right to go back. So we are saying that, because we are also scared about our own brethren (laugh) we want to ensure that there is a mechanism which will be a safeguard against people with dangerous designs. We suggest that the system which may appear to be democratic should not be democratic in its complete sense. But we should have a break-up of power blocs - western, southern and eastern - each with 33% of the votes. Then any legislation would only be passed with a three-fourths majority, which would mean that the southern Bhutanese and the eastern Bhutanese combined could not harm the interests of the western Bhutanese unless there were some traitors within the western Bhutanese community. Similarly, the western Bhutanese and the eastern Bhutanese could not gang up and act against the interests of the southern Bhutanese unless I decide to sell out my people and go and join them. So unless there are checks and balances between the three communities we do not see the possibility of political harmony. In terms of cultural harmony, we have already explained that there is no case of real disturbance or interference between the different communities, because the eastern people live in their

area, the southern Bhutanese live in theirs. We are not trying to create federalism in that sense. It should operate as it is doing now. The only thing is the share of people's representation should be such that no community can even by combining with a second community harm the interests of the third community. If that is acceptable to the government I do not see how they can be afraid of southern Bhutanese inundation. So this is our position, we believe this is feasible, and we have always believed that it was something that the government also would have known all along. But they believed that this current situation was a possible solution. This we believe is totally ill-conceived and should never have happened in the first place... Even today, this question of peoples being against each other is still just... How can somebody in Bumthang have anything against a person from, let's say, Lamidara? They have never seen each other, they have nothing... Once we are in urban areas we are friends, the same age group, we have worked together. But in the villages they do not interact in any way whatsoever. There is one other question that many people ask us. They say, 'Oh, but when all these refugees go back there will be mayhem, there'll be murder!' Why should there be? When we go back we will go to a village which has no northern Bhutanese. We were all driven out from areas which were... it's not cosmopolitan, there's no mix, it's not like Kathmandu.

**GS:** Can you go further in drawing a distinction between your claims as dissidents and those of people we can maybe call Nepalese nationalists, who are one of the vested interest groups? There is this perception in Kathmandu that there is Nepalese nationalism in the dissident literature. It's the sort of thing that people on the outside might see and say, 'ah, this is the proof, this plays right into the hands of Thimphu'. Who are the elements that you don't want to work with, that you want to keep at arm's length?

**BS:** I am not saying that any such element exists. What I am saying is if you have a system where you provide for or leave scope for people to fulfill that kind of prophecy, even in the distant future, then you are already asking for trouble. I am not saying that anyone among us has that kind of design. One thing we have to make very clear is that the movement we have today has always been a reactive movement. If it was a political movement it would have happened inside, not out here. Politically conscious people would have had a network, would have started activities within the country. They would not have come out and hoped to go back with democracy or whatever. So first we were refugees. When I say 'we', of course individuals are different, but on a bulk level. And because we were refugees we saw the need to fight for our rights. So we are reacting to government injustice, it has not been a planned, concerted movement to bring political reform to the country. Because we are where we are today, we recognise the need for reforms to protect our interests in future. It is not that we wanted to have the reforms, and therefore became outcasts or were expelled. So I don't think there are any dangerous elements at the present moment, which would want to, as you say, fulfill Bhutanese prophecies or fears. These are misplaced fears on the part of Bhutan, or anybody who sees it in that fashion.

**MH:** Tell us something about western academics and this problem. What coverage has there been, and what are your comments on it?

**BS:** One thing that seems to be of concern to many people, including of course people from our own dissident community, is that we have not received adequate attention. I don't buy that theory. I believe that for a country of Bhutan's size, for its level of economy and political importance, I think we have received adequate attention. The only thing is perhaps that often it has not been of the correct... (laughs) You know, that has been a minor problem now and then. But in general I think we have enough coverage. Perhaps now there is a need to focus on the issues rather than have coverage of 'oh, the poor refugees' or the 'culturally endangered Bhutan'. Both of those are two extremes. We should not be looking at the poor refugees, we should rather be looking at what caused them to be refugees. And it is a far larger problem than it seems if people look at it properly. Today you have here a country saying that for whatever reasons it has decided it does not want a certain section of its people. And if the government of Bhutan tries to argue with that, the very fact that they say people are voluntary emigrants and they have no compulsion or obligation to let them come back in - that in itself speaks volumes. Today it is Bhutan doing it, what if tomorrow Bangladesh decides to say of all those below the poverty line, 'we have no obligation, if we do not want them we will simply kick them out'. We are asking for *major* problems, because nations are not made by boundaries, they are made by people. Bhutan constitutes a nation with a certain number of people, and I think it is very dangerous if a small country like this is allowed to say, 'OK, we don't want one third because for whatever reason we made a mistake in 1958, we should never have granted them citizenship, now we are going to correct that error'. This is what the international community should look at, rather than saying 'oh, 100,000 people are suffering'. Because it is not the issue of 100,000 but the setting of a precedent for much more serious problems. If Bhutan can do it, why not Nepal tomorrow, India the day after?

**MH:** Do you want to talk about refugee unity? It's one thing that everyone points out. As somebody said today, aren't you Thimphu's dream, arguing with one another and forming a new organisation every week?

**BS:** Today, the bilateral talks and the categorisation [of the refugees] are excuses for many governments not to act - they say 'oh, the bilateral talks are going on, let us see what transpires' - all of these are basically excuses. And this talk about refugee disunity, this is another excuse on the part of many governments and agencies. Because, OK, if today we are not united what difference has it made? We are not a party to the negotiations, we are not a party to anything that involves the solution process.

**MH:** But if you were united you might be.

**BS:** Well, the current movement... Actually I shudder to call it a movement, it's not really a movement as such, as I say it's a reaction of people to a situation that has been forced upon them. Anyway, it is such that it has not really called for concerted action as people tend to believe is needed. Yes, if we were talking about an insurgency programme where one had to coordinate

many physical activities and plans, then there would be a need for everyone to sit down together and thrash out details, strategies. But when the only issue at hand is basically to provide information and background documentation, to be able to respond to, typically, refugee-related issues, I somehow do not see what pure unity would do. Of course, if it happens then that is good, and I believe that would be helpful, at least to ensure that people do not have nasty things to say (laughs). But otherwise we are not going to take Delhi by storm or make a major change in Kathmandu. I think this is just an excuse. When there is a need for the groups to come together the situation will force them together. What I would like to emphasize is that forcing people together when the time hasn't come only serves to push them further apart. They will talk about differences because they have nothing else to do. Of course I am not against unity, please note, but I am against enforced unity.

**MH:** Do the human rights organisations have contacts in Bhutan?

**BS:** When you say contacts, I think those are meaningless contacts really, whichever organisation we are talking about. In Bhutan the level of fear is so high that, forget about others, if I go to the border area and I happen to meet my sister she won't recognise me. So what are we talking about, a network of dissidents? No, it is not possible. Yes, by chance we may have a particular individual who might give us a little feedback, but not in terms of an organised information network, this is impossible. People are too afraid to do that. My own sisters would disown me, so forget about trying to get somebody else to give me inside information.

**OD:** Even now we get our information on an individual basis rather than on an organised basis. It is too dangerous for them to do it on an organised basis, because they don't know whom to trust and whom not to trust.

**BS:** I think you might wonder 'what is all this?' Bhutan is so small, everybody knows everybody. You can do things when you are an unknown entity, when you are faceless. But nobody's faceless in Bhutan. You do something, let us say, against the government today. There is every chance of you getting caught. Suppose you are passing some information to him (Om) - maybe in Kathmandu nobody would know because nobody knows either you or me. But, even if it is in Thimphu, if we were doing something like this, everybody would know that those two chaps were together at such and such a time. It is very difficult to do underground dissident activity, and that is why we are out, you know.

In fact in southern Bhutan in 1990, I think you know, the people finally demonstrated against the government policies. It was easy for the government to say exactly which person in which household went for the demonstration, all of them were listed. In one place they actually had a chap with a video camera. So you know, in slow motion - 'that fellow, write down his name'. You just catch one chap and he'll be able to tell you ten fellows, then you catch the other ten and they'll be able to tell you the next hundred. It's a place where anti-government activities are very difficult to undertake. But if it happens on a broad scale...

**OD:** Once it begins I think it will not be able to be controlled.

**BS:** It is beyond control, because everybody will be related to everybody. Whether you are talking about eastern Bhutanese, western Bhutanese, northern Bhutanese or southern Bhutanese, if something drastic takes place the police chief will not be able to catch somebody because he will find that his sister-in-law or his brother-in-law is involved. Rongthong Kunley is the brother-in-law of the present police chief, and he has come here. He is the chairman of the dissident northern Bhutanese political party [the Druk National Congress]. So, you know, it is all in the family.

**MH:** There are several aspects of the refugee propaganda that I always feel uncomfortable about. The main one is this thing about 'Nepalis have been in Bhutan since the 17th century' and the talk about Ram Shah of Gorkha and so on. This shouldn't really form a part of the refugees' case, should it? It seems to me that the Nepalis in southern Bhutan came in 1890, 1900, or whenever. How do you feel about that?

**BS:** We are very uncomfortable with that ourselves. As far as we are concerned, 1958 is the only thing that matters, and it is not necessary to go back to 1624. It is not only irrelevant, it is generally wrong, because not a single family from southern Bhutan would be able to draw their roots from that point. Yes, there may have been people but they have assimilated totally.

**OD:** We can produce our grandfathers sitting in the refugee camps who were born there, and that is good enough, I think. We don't need to go further back.

**GS:** That's right, otherwise you get into the silly, endless back and forth like between China and Tibet, trying to draw something out from the time of Khubilai Khan.

**BS:** The two of us are ex-bureaucrats, so we know that if you speak the truth you must speak the truth. But we have difficulties because some of our friends don't realise that if you undertake one bit of untruth it undoes a lot of your credibility.

**MH:** Are there any other things like that?

**BS:** Oh yes, there's one major thing. Unfortunately, there have been so many newly-born politicians (laughs). As I said, our movement is one where we are reacting to a new situation that has been forced upon us. Some people are now dissidents whereas they were actually farmers in the past. Some people are now dissidents who actually were teachers in the past. Our entire argument is that we are seeking justice because unjust treatment has been meted out to the people of southern Bhutan. Now there are some people, perhaps it is not intentional, perhaps they really believe it, who tend to portray this as 'oh, we were politically more conscious than the rest and so we demanded human rights and democracy and the government kicked us out'. Now that is a major, I mean that is a *lie!* That *never* happened. But if it were true, I think the government of Bhutan would have had every right to do what they did, because these guys would have been politically motivated. Which is absolutely not true. As far as I am concerned, I never wanted any change, because I was very happy with the system as it was. Frankly, under a monarch

in a country where you are not a son of the soil, to be treated with that amount of fairness seemed fine. It was only when evil intentions were introduced that we realised it was necessary to dissent.

**MH:** Why aren't you a son of the soil?

**BS:** I mean it in the sense that for southern Bhutanese 1958 is fairly recent. Of course our children will never see it like that...

**GS:** This distinction might not mean much to you, or to someone sitting in a refugee camp in Jhapa, but in terms of world perception it might be important. To what extent do you think the government's objective was forced integration as opposed to eviction?

**BS:** Perhaps one of the reasons why this policy took the turn it did was because the assimilation was going a bit too fast for their own liking. You see, here was a society that was deliberately kept apart for nearly a century, by government decree and rules and regulations. I entered the northern part of Bhutan after my college degree. I went with a special permit stating that Bhim Subba is a bonafide national and a resident of this block, "thram" number this, and he may be permitted to go to Thimphu without let and hindrance. OK? We were kept separate. We remained separate until 1979 or 1980. There was that National Council for Social and Cultural Promotion, the NCSCP, where they encouraged assimilation. But it was stupid because they also encouraged physical assimilation: for intermarriage there was an incentive, which was nonsense, you know! But within that five years what it basically did was give southern Bhutanese a sense of belonging and they felt more comfortable showing their loyalty. And perhaps this was what was frightening, because they saw this group which was always considered 'outside' suddenly now not only accepting the offer but also accelerating the process. You know, when you talk about the dress and so on, all that took place without so much government intervention. The compulsory wearing of national dress came only in 1989, whereas people were already comfortable with it in the early eighties. So perhaps it was because of the success of integration. *Maybe*. From 1980 to 1985 there was this big programme, then in 1985 it suddenly disappeared overnight without any explanation. Now it is very difficult for us to say why this problem began. The threat has always been there, it would be wrong to say that southern Bhutanese were always welcome, always looked upon as harmless. No, that's not true. From the British days, as far as the northern Bhutanese were concerned, the southern Bhutanese were always considered a threat. If citizenship had not been granted in 1958, then - fine, I would not be making a huge hue and cry. But if in 1958 a decision was taken to consider us Bhutanese, now 30 years later nobody has the right, even god-given, to reverse that. Why was this sudden decision taken in 1988? There is a lot of conjecture about that. But if my house is burgled I can't tell you why it was burgled, you have to ask the burglar.

**MH:** Wasn't it Sikkim?

**BS:** You can consider events in Sikkim as able to influence events in Bhutan, but I would like to give our government some credit for realising that Sikkim was a creation of external forces. It was not that the Nepalese in

Sikkim suddenly overnight took up their kukris and said 'we want this chap out!' If you say that Sikkim can be repeated in Bhutan, the only way I can see it is if these people are also unwittingly playing the same game.

**MH:** But when you start proposing things like power-sharing and more share for the Nepalis and so on they must think 'ah, this is what happened in Sikkim'.

**BS:** No, we never talked about power-sharing and all this...

**MH:** But you are now!

**BS:** Now we have no *choice!* If there ever is a Sikkim-like situation, then as in Sikkim there must be an external hand. I would beg to be corrected, but Sikkim [i.e. its incorporation into India in 1974-5] was not a creation of the people of Sikkim, it was a creation of external forces which set up the situation to enable events to take place as they did. If there is a Sikkim situation in Bhutan, then not only we but the government is being used. I shudder to think that is a possibility, and I hope it is not, but if it is then we are all pawns being moved around on a chessboard... When you talk about these different citizenship acts and so on... The government has never really been comfortable with the southern Bhutanese, and these acts are based on that kind of perception rather than trying to safeguard itself against a Sikkim-like situation. One thing has to be made clear, which fortunately Professor Leo Rose allowed me to interject in New York. He said that the Bhutanese refugees received no sympathy or support from the Gorkhaland people and that was why they moved into Nepal. His point was that these people could not even get support from their own kind. So I said 'precisely, Professor Rose, the reason why we did not receive sympathy or support is that we refused to be a part of the Gorkhaland movement in any form.' The Bhutanese did not even take an interest, forget about providing them with any support, because we found the whole issue out of our interest area. So we provided no support, and when we came out we got that tit-for-tat. Even though we were Nepalese in origin we were Bhutanese first.

