Outside the industrialised west, no-one has to be told to respect their elders. It's simply the way society is organised.

Which is why WWF - World Wide Fund for Nature tries to work with older people in the villages of the rainforests. With WWF's help, they learn to teach the younger members of their communities about conservation.

In Kafue Flats, Zambia, it's Chief Hamusonde (93).

Chief Bakary (78), is our man in Anjavimihavanana, northern Madagascar.

In Ban Chang Sai, Thailand, we invoke the Venerable Papastro Bhikkhu, seventy-three year old chief Buddhist monk.

This isn't just expedience, it's how WWF believes conservation projects should be run.

Before you teach someone, we believe you have to learn from them.

We spend years visiting village after village, talking to the people, listening to them, living with them, understanding how they live their lives.

Only then are we able to gain the confidence of the village elders.

Once they realise we're on their side, our elderly converts promote conservation with a zeal that belies their years.

"Uncle" Prom (68), another of our Thai community leaders, tells us that he frequently gets scolded when he starts telling people in the market that they should leave the forest alone. But he gets results.

Uncle Prom and his fellow villagers recently managed to prevent a new logging concession, and set up a community forest where tree felling is now forbidden.

Ninety-three year old Chief Hamusonde also makes things happen.

Income from the Kafue Flats game reserve in Zambia is funding a school, a clinic and new water boreholes for the local villages.

In Madagascar, seventy-eight year old Chief Bakary's village makes a profit by selling fruit grown in their new tree nursery.

More importantly, Chief Bakary's village now takes fewer trees from the rainforest because the nursery can provide firewood and poles for construction.

Not that we don't believe in catching them while they're young. WWF also organises special training courses to help teachers incorporate conservation into the curriculum.

20,000 primary teachers in Madagascar have already taken part.

And WWF produce teaching aids as well as teachers.

We commission educational factsheets, booklets, posters and videos in over twenty different languages.

These are distributed to schools and colleges all over the world.

If you can help our work with a donation or a legacy please write to the membership officer at the address opposite.

You only have to look around you to see that the world still has an awful lot to learn about conservation.
Christian Qualification

In his brief mention of our newly registered organization ("The Gospel Comes to the Hindu Kingdom", Sep/Oct 1993), Saubhagya Shah writes that "...the terms 'Christian', 'Jesus' or 'mission' did not appear in the registration form submitted by the Witness for Nepal group." We are writing to inform you that Shah has been misled by some mischievous source. By twisting obvious facts, some pathetic elements in the church are always attempting to denigrate service organisations like Witness for Nepal by spreading malicious lies. In future, you should be wary of the particular sources which filled you up on the Witness news.

Since Shah has felt that mention of these terms are prerequisite qualifications for Christian organisations, may we mention that the name 'Jesus Christ' appears two times on the preamble of the bylaws submitted to and approved by the Lalitpur District Office. Similarly, the word 'Christian Isaeus' twice and 'Ekklesia Church' once.

Lokmani Dhakal and Loknath Manaen
Witness for Nepal
Sanepa, Kathmandu

A Bankrupt Faith and Cultural Imperialism

Saubhagya Shah’s piece on Christian conversions in Nepal was informative, thoughtful and well-balanced, considering the sensitive and acrimonious nature of the whole subject. But in order to retain that sensitivity and balance, Shah perhaps had to refrain from probing deeper into some of the issues surrounding religion and missionary work in Nepal. The agenda of both the missionaries and their Nepali opponents are steeped in contradictions which transgress 'religion' narrowly defined. As these issues must sooner or later come out into the open, I volunteer to unlock the pandora’s box with the following thoughts.

A religion that segregates whole sections of its own followers as unclean and untouchable, and on this basis puts severe restriction on their use of religious texts, temples, and in so many other ways socially, economically and culturally discriminates against them, is, by this fact alone, a bankrupt faith. The greatest blight upon the Indic cultures is that of caste. It individually negates every positive spiritual and philosophical virtue that Hinduism as a religion and cultural system can lay claim to.

In India, at least, the modern battle against caste discrimination has a history going back to the early 19th century, when Hindu reform movements formed in pockets in northern India. In Nepal, by contrast, no serious and sustained effort has been made from within the Hindu community to attack and challenge the caste system. No religion can maintain its moral ground and continue to impress newer generations with its spiritual message if it does not address certain contradictions within itself as exposed by the passage of time. Instead of reform, however, Hinduism in Nepal has opted to adopt orthodoxy as the preferred method to deal with challenges.

A nation whose 'official' religion prohibits 15 to 20 percent of citizens of the same faith from openly entering and worshipping in public temples has lost the moral ground to question the intention of non-Hindu preachers, be they Christian, Muslim or Buddhist. In light of the historically multi-faith and multi-ethnic structure of Nepali society, nothing in Nepal is in greater need of purging than the antiquated and dehumanising way in which
Hinduism is publicly and privately practiced. In every corner of rural Nepal today, for example, untouchability is knowingly and openly imposed by the high castes upon the low castes, with the complicity of the state.

Given the long history of humiliation, denigration and public and private discrimination faced by low castes and Tibeto-Burman communities, it is little wonder that the Nepal hills are proving to be the new Bible Belt of South Asia. Humans have an innate sense of justice and equality, and they will use any method or message, spiritual and cultural selves along Western lines. Not only are they saying, “believe in Christ”, they are also prescribing the narrow limits within which Christ ought to be believed.

For example, on the basis of a specifically Eurocentric interpretation of Christianity, missionaries in South India early in this century prohibited the exchange of flower garlands by bride and bridegroom at weddings, and proscribed such “heathen” practices as the wearing of red by the bride, and the playing of Indian instruments at church ceremonies. Thus practised, evangelism became no more and no less than the ideological corollary of the colonial Western mentality that the natives needed the civilising touch.

From every indication, in Nepal too, missionaries are requiring that converts renounce their cultural/ritual and tribal/caste identities, their customs, codes and festivals. But countering the caste system should not require individuals and communities to jettison major aspects of their self-created social and cultural identities. What the missionaries propagate is not Christianity, but an attempt at cultural imperialism. It is not the spread of Christ’s teachings, but the imposition of narrow Western spirituality and cultural identity on a people whose mode of existence is radically different from that which confronted, or presently confronts, Western humanity.

But all this is not liable to deter the missionary, whose chief purpose in life is to see the global proliferation of the cross mounted on high ground. Hinduism, when and where it matters most, is blind and inhuman. Christianity, offered as an alternative in Nepal (with huge, global financial backing), is as blind and operates under equally dehumanising assumptions.

The real losers are the converts who will invariably find that discrimination does not end with conversion; if anything, it will assume an even more pernicious form. They will have lost their cultural, communal/ethnic identity, and their special spiritual practices in exchange for the sanitised and de-contextualised religio-cultural world of Western Christianity. Caste discrimination will be gradually absorbed into the Nepali church, as it has in India. Denominational rivalries will become the surrogates for caste tensions.

Additionally, the converts will have lost any hope of finally breaking into the
Nepali ‘mainstream’, a sociocultural milieu to whose creation they and their ancestors have contributed heavily, and in which they ought to have a rightful place and stake. This, unfortunately, is the irony of conversion to Christianity, a process which, incidentally, this writer does not oppose. What I do feel qualified to do is to call upon Nepal’s native spiritual community — Bons, Shamans, Buddhists, reformed Hindus — and secular agents such as political parties, to carry high and far the flag of social reform and revival as well as values of justice and freedom. Without resorting to the remote and alienating world of Western Christianity, and without privileging a class of people who have no long-term stake in the land (global missionaries), the historically depressed castes and classes in Nepal must empower themselves permanently!

Anup Pahari
Lancaster, Pennsylvania

Religious Double Standards
Saubhagy Shah’s in-depth piece on the activities of Christian missions in Nepal needs to be appreciated. The increase in the number of converts over the last three years alone indicates that the missionaries are doing what they are legally forbidden to do and the Nepali Government is not doing what it is constitutionally required to do.

I have, in my possession, a booklet published by the United Mission to Nepal in 1972 which says, “There are perhaps 500 active Christians in the whole of the country, with about one-fourth of that number being converted, baptized Nepalis.”

Only twenty years later, Shah reports, the number has risen to more than 100,000. Would this increase be possible if missions like the UMN were not involved in illegal proselytising?

But the issue here is not just of it being illegal; it goes further than that. It entails a very fundamental moral question that the missionaries need to ask themselves. Each one of them knows that in the process of luring illiterate Tamangs and greedy Bahuns into the Christian fold, they find themselves condemning Buddhist and Hindu faiths.

Should this be tolerated by the Nepalis?

The West maintains a double standard when it comes to human rights and religious freedom. In the United Kingdom, for example, the Queen is an important religious leader. To the West, this is natural and unquestionable. But when Nepal wants to maintain its age-old Hindu character, they object to it directly. (They are convinced that cultural identity needs to be preserved in Bhutan and Tibet, but the same reasoning does not seem to apply in case of countries like Nepal and Burma.)

Deepak Basnet
Kathmandu

Further the Dialogue
I appreciated Saubhagy Shah’s well-researched and thought-provoking article and would like to further the dialogue on this by offering some comments.

The article’s underlying assumption, that the increase in the number of Christians in Nepal is due to foreign activity, falls short of the truth. Shah presumes that because in other parts of South Asia the Christian Church was started and expanded by Westerners, the same is also true of Nepal. It has to be noted, however, that it was the ethnic Nepalis from Darjeeling who first began Church work in Nepal in the 1950s. HMG/Nepal does not grant visas for foreigners to work with the church and expatriate Christians may not take leadership positions working in development projects, although they can worship with local Christians.

Contrary to what Shah suggests, the church, in Nepal, has grown strong because of its independence from foreign personnel and control and expands due to the enthusiasm of Nepali Christians in today’s democratic context. I believe that their numbers would have increased even if every expatriate Christian had been expelled in the Spring of 1990.

Another troubling presumption in the article that Nepalis turn to Christianity because of “non-spiritual enticement” or, as Minister Rai calls it, “allurement of money provided by missionaries” is condescending towards fellow Nepalis who choose another religion. And where is the proof of such accusations? I often ask for reasons when such suspicions are voiced; they have never been forthcoming!

In fact, the Christian organizations working in Nepal oppose conversion through “non-spiritual means.” A UMN expatriate if proved to have offered a bribe to someone to become a Christian would be sent home.

The Nepali constitution guarantees freedom of speech, press and assembly and allows anyone to share the meaning of personal faith — provided it is done without maligning another’s beliefs.

The term “proselytising” was clarified in a letter requested by the government in 1990 to mean “attempts to convert through coercion or offer of material inducement.” No Christian would approve such activities and I doubt if Shah meant to condone them by suggesting that proselytising be legalised.

The confusion about “conversion” is more to do with conceptual gap in understanding at two levels, than with their linguistic implications in Nepali and English. First there is the relationship between culture and religious beliefs. For many of my Nepali Hindu friends, culture and religion are almost synonymous; being a Hindu seems an important part of being a Nepali and changing one’s religion amounts to abandoning one’s culture.
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(Although, of course, my Nepali Buddhist friends have a different perception).

Worldwide, Christians express their faith in many cultural forms and contribute fully to nation building. (More Christians now live in Asia, Africa, and Latin America than in the traditional Christian North.)

The other conceptual gap deals with the agent of conversion. In Christian understanding, no one can convert another. One can explain personal convictions and even preach persuasively of the love of God, but the decision to follow Jesus can only be voluntary.

Christian acts of compassion express the love of God. A true follower of Jesus, thus, shares with those in need and works with them for their own development. This is done not out of sense of duty, but out of gratitude for the love and grace received from God. Thus, to suggest that social service is only a means to convert, is a distortion of the example of Jesus and the teaching of the Bible.

One of the burdens of identifying with religion is its association with those who have beliefs and practices quite contrary to the central ethics of that religion. I have Hindu friends who abhor what is being done -- in the name of religion -- to Muslims in India and Buddhist friends who totally disagree with the actions of Buddhist clergy against the Tamils in Sri Lanka. Likewise, there have been many violent actions throughout history in the name of the church -- the Crusades for one -- that I would utterly condemn.

Shah's capsule history of 19th century mission efforts in South Asia, too, is quite distorted. Those missionaries disagreed with the earlier Western invasions of the Subcontinent, which sometimes used weapons to force conversions. The pioneering efforts of the last century to establish hospitals and schools were expressions of the love of God, not a mere shift in strategy, as Shah seems to think.

I suggest that Shah study the remarkable growth of the Christian church during the last few decades in places where the government was intolerant and there was no outside support (such as in China and in Eastern Europe) or in other places where there are very few or no Western missionaries.

I agree with Shah that there should be transparency and openness. In UMN, we now include non-Christian Nepali staff at the highest levels, including the UMN Board of Directors. We do have informal links with Nepali churches, as is to be expected of an organization sponsored by 39 church bodies from 18 different countries; one chief characteristic of the Christian church is that it is a universal community transcending human divisions such as race, nation, caste and ethnicity.

Shah's call to "sincerely contemplate the questions of religion, ethnicity and nationalism" is urgent. Worldwide, newly formed nations, as well as the societies which thought they had settled this problem, are struggling to keep the melting pot from boiling over. Can Nepal, then, provide a model for the world by developing a productive balance between human rights for individuals and organizations and the need for some kind of national unity? I hope people of all religion and communities will join in to search for the answer.

Edgar Metzler
Executive Director,
United Mission to Nepal,
Kathmandu

Alliance for Identity
Gopal Gurung's letter (Mail Sep/Oct 1993) reflected his desire to see the identity of Mongols secured in today's Nepal. However, Gurung should have realised that tracing the origins of the word "Mongol" takes us further than Kumaon, Garhwal, or even Rajasthan.

All of us — Bahuns, Chhetris, Newars, Gurungs, Rais, Tharus and other ethnic groups, who have been living in this country for hundreds of years — should come together and try to cultivate the feeling of oneness to work for the development of the Nation. And Mr. Gurung, who seems concerned about protecting democracy, should rather try to mobilise the Nepali nation against outsiders — against the threat to Nepali culture, tradition and identity.

A "blood bath" would have dire consequences. It would leave no Mongols, no Bahuns, no Chhetris and will serve only the purposes of outsiders — for them it would be a scented bath. As Nepalis, we should come together and form a strong alliance to resist the threats to our identity.

P. Timilsina
Gyaneshwor, Kathmandu

In Bad Taste
I recently chanced upon your Sep/Oct 1993 issue. The cover enticed me enough to go through the magazine. I thought, now here is a magazine concerned about the people in the Himalaya.

Excited, I read on.

When I got to page 6 though, I was appalled. There was a trekking agency ad which had the sketch of a young pahadi porter smilingly carrying an extremely pleased, camera-clicking foreigner up a mountain trail.

Was the porter as happy as his smile seemed to suggest? Or was the smile etched on to his countenance later by the trekking agency which, for a neat sum, would like to allure pseudo mountain lovers with offers of human rides?

In your copy, you talk of development in the mountains, your concern for progress of the people who live here. But where do your resolutions stand when you accept such lurid ads? Doesn't it go on to demonstrate that we still view ourselves as load-carrying-primates?

There is no dearth of magazines that unthinkable carry advertisements as blase as this but it was disheartening to see it printed in a magazine like Himal.

Sandeep Bhatt
Alpine Adventure Club,
Gopeshwar, Chamoli, U.P.

Wrong!
Bill Aitken, in his otherwise elegant piece "Fairest of Them All" (Know Your Himal, Sep/Oct 1993), states that Melungise is a "Nepal peak". He is wrong. The massif is entirely in Tibet.

On the next page, the Yeti's knowledge of non-Himalayan mountains seems to leave much to be desired. Kota Kinabalu is a city. The mountain is simply Mt. Kinabalu.

Lalbahadur Limbu
Sinamangal, Kathmandu

Readers are invited to comment, criticise or add to information and opinions appearing in Himal. Letters should be to the point and may be edited. Letters which are unsigned and/or without addresses will not be entertained. Please include daytime contact telephone number, if available.
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Follow-up
The Last Newar of Chuhadi

The Sep/Oct 1993 of Himal had an article on missionaries, which referred to Capuchin priests and Kathmandu Christians who were forced to migrate to Bettiah after Prithvi Narayan Shah's conquest of the Valley. Theodore Riccardi, Jr., of Columbia University provides an account of that relocation in an essay written a few years back in honour of Luciano Potoch, the respected historian of Nepal, Tibet and China. The photograph is by Todd Lewis.

IN 1769, the Capuchin priest, Padre Giuseppe da Rovato, led a small band of Nepali Christians to their new home in the plains of India. Most of them were Newars from Kathmandu Valley who remained loyal to their new religion and to the small group of priests who had tried, in vain as it turned out, to bring Christianity to inhospitable territory. The priests and their converts had been caught in the web of intrigue and warfare that had beset the Nepal Valley for more than a decade. Prithvi Narayan Shah, King of Gorkha, had taken Kathmandu and Patan, and Bhadgaon was soon to fall. It was only with the greatest difficulty that he had been convinced that the Christians be allowed to go. The mission, which had begun in 1707, had come to an end. It was a failure, partly because of Rome's inability to see the difficulties of conversion in Kathmandu and Lhasa and partly due to the political upheaval and military conquest that made it impossible for the missionaries to function.

Led through the mountains by the Italian priest, the Newar converts settled in a small village in Bihar called Chuhadi, near Bettiah, a town that had become, in the eighteenth century, a center of Roman Catholic missionary activity. Little is known of the Newar community over the next two centuries. It is said that they remained apart from the Indian population well into the nineteenth century, that they continued to speak Newari, and that they did not intermarry with other groups until much later.

Therefore, much of the community supposedly remained intact well into this century, when it finally began to blend more and more with the local population.

In December 1978, Todd Lewis and I visited Chuhadi to see if any trace of the original Newar community remained. Unfortunately, we arrived just before the very end. We reached Bettiah by car one afternoon a few days after Christmas. The main church, the Church of St. Rita, so dominates the town that we found it without difficulty, and it was there that we made our first inquiries. A priest directed us to the road to Chuhadi, which he said was about four miles away. The road was unpaved but in good condition and we arrived there at about four o'clock.

At first glance, Chuhadi differed little from the other villages of northern Bihar. It was thick with thatch-roof huts that sat amid planter trees and mango groves. Its one distinguishing feature was the small chapel that stood near its center. The head of the mission, Father Pollard, a Canadian Jesuit from Windsor, Ontario, was outside when we arrived, and he greeted us and offered us tea.

He responded readily to our questions, but he said that he knew little of the history of the Christian Newars. He confirmed that they had remained apart from the local Indian population for a long time, but that they inevitably had begun to intermarry with Indian Christians. Only two members of the community were left—an old man by the name of Eleazar, and his wife, Susannah. We could meet and talk with Eleazar, he said, but Susannah was sick and probably would not want to see anyone, particularly two strange Westerners.

After tea, towards dusk, outside the old man's house, we met Eleazar. He was small and frail, in his late sixties, short even by Nepali standards, his appearance almost archaic, like some portrait of a Newar come to life after two hundred years. I spoke to him in Hindi, since he knew no Nepali or Newari. He spoke softly, but with great dignity. He said that he had been born in 1911. I asked him about his ancestors, and he said that they had come from Nepal. As he spoke he pointed north to the green hills that were visible in the horizon. I asked him about his family, his father and other members of his family, but he volunteered very little. The family had come from Nepal, but they had always lived in Chuhadi. Fourteen families in all had come, but none had ever returned. I asked him questions about the Newar culture and about modern Nepal, but it seemed that he had no clear idea of how Newars and their language could be distinguished from other Nepalis, and he had no knowledge of modern Nepal. His wife, Susannah, was only partly Newar, he said, and she knew less than he did about their origins.

We spoke for a few minutes about the composition of the village—very mixed, he said, Hindus, Muslims, and Christians. He seemed deficient, even fearful, embarrassed by my questions, and I decided not to disturb him any further. I stopped and thanked him. I asked if we could take his picture, and he agreed without hesitation. We thanked him again and returned to the church. Father Pollard then permitted me to look at the baptismal records, but those that were available began only in the 1840s. They contained only Christian names and general occupational designations in Latin such as agricultura, ari, etc. Any original caste or ethnic status was obliterated by the name given during conversion.

Father Pollard said that we had missed meeting Mary Anna, an old Newar woman who had died just six months before our arrival. She spoke Newari and knew more than anyone about the history of the community.

We thanked the priest for his help and took our leave. The winter sun was about to set, and it was almost dark as we left. We reached Raxaul, cold and hungry, at about eleven that night, and shortly thereafter crossed the border happily into Nepal.

Had some historian or linguist visited this village during the previous two centuries, we might have learned something about the Newars of Chuhadi, their memories of the valley they had left behind, and their language. We know only that after their arrival, da Rovato and the priests who followed later tried to help them adjust to their new home. They even composed dictionaries for them in Hindi, Bhojpuri, Newari, and Italian. These and the letters back to Rome are all that remain, however. The human record is gone forever.
What is Nepali Music?

Does music lose its identity when traditional instruments are replaced by modern ones? Or are musical ideas more important?

by Kishor Gurung

While music lovers and musicians may find no difficulty in recognising Nepali music when they hear it, asking them to define it more often than not results in a confused reply. This is not surprising, since a satisfactory definition of Nepali music would have to consider the many sources of musical ideas that are, and have been, available to Nepali composers.

No account of Nepal's art can fail to acknowledge the debt it owes to the diversity among its 19 million people of some 32 ethnic groups, who speak variants of 56 languages and dialects of Indo-Aryan, Austro-Asiatic, Tibeto-Burman and Dravidian origin. In addition, the three primary religions that underlie Nepali thought and ways of life—Hinduism, Buddhism and Animism—are intrinsic to the development of Nepali art forms. The assimilation of themes they have inspired is apparent in stone and wood carvings, metal sculptures, thanka paintings, mandala drawings and architectural designs. Music, dance and drama are rooted in these religions conceptually, metaphorically and in their theoretical development. Hinduism's conceptualization of sangeet (music) is elaborate. In its fundamental form, sangeet denotes vocal music, instrumental music and dance. But, conceptually, it further pertains to paintings and sculpture. A passage from the Natya Shashtra, written around the Third Century BC, highlights this interrelationship between the art forms:

A king, wishing to learn how to sculpt likenesses of the gods, consulted a sage for instruction. "You will have to learn the laws of painting before you can understand the laws of sculpture", the sage advised. "Then", said the king, "teach me the laws of painting". "It is not possible to understand the laws of painting", replied the sage, "without learning the art of dance". "So teach me the art of dance", the king requested. "That will be difficult" said the sage, "as you do not know the principles of instrumental music". The king, by now, was growing impatient. "Then why don't you teach me instrumental music?", he demanded hastily. "But you cannot understand instrumental music", answered the sage, "without a thorough study of vocal music, for vocal music is the source of all Art.

Hindus relate the creation of the very first sound, Nad, to Brahma, the creator of the Universe. Vishnu and Shiva are the two other members of the Hindu holy trinity, personifying the preservative and destructive forces, respectively. Spiritual contemplation of this trinity guides the creativity of artisans and musicians. Swaras (tones) and shrutis (microtones), manifestations of Nad, are described synesthetically as being "pure" or "true", and musicians hold that their proper execution brings one hastily to Brahma.

At the other extreme, Shiva's frightening dance, Tandavnritya, is associated with the destruction of the universe while Vishnu, the preservative force of the Universe and all art forms. Iconography and illustrations associate certain religious figures with specific musical instruments: the sitar (plucked lute), for example, is associated with Saraswati, the bansuri (transverse flute) with Krishna and the ektaara (one-string plucked lute) with Naradmuni. Furthermore, the classification of musical instruments into tata (literally "stretched") or chordophones, susira ("tubular" or aerophones), avanaddha ("covered" or membranophones) and ghana ("solid" or idiophones) is based on principles found in Vedic literature.

Theoretically, all Hindu shashtras (doctrines) trace the origin of raagas to the chantings of the Vedic scriptures, in particular to the Saam Veda. The Vedic chantings are characterised by three tonal divisions called udatta, annudatta and swarita, collectively known as the damaganas. It is believed that samaganas were the basis upon which all swaras, shrutis and, later, raagas were developed. The genre of music that incorporates raagas is therefore, called shashtriya sangeet, a term virtually unknown in the West.
Baki Wanegu

Although the Buddha himself is thought to have considered music as detracting from the religious life, in many Buddhist Asian nations and communities “Buddhist music” continues to influence culture, and Nepal is no exception.

The Mani Rimdu, a 13-act dance drama performed by Buddhist-lamas of Tibetan ancestry, at Tengboche monastery in Khumbu, is but one example. In this play, the “erroneous teacher of Buddhism” is represented by an eighth-Century Chinese philosopher, named Mepshing, a comic character who is ridiculed. By ridiculing Me-Tsring, the masked dancers not only reinforce the idea of superiority of good over evil but also strengthen the common faith that binds people of a displaced culture.

As in Hinduism, some religious teachings can be explained only through music. For example the idea of infinity is expressed by the playing of two cymbals with increasing rapidity; at its fastest, the two cymbals are rubbed together.

The Baki Wanegu, (blowing of horns), is an example of a ritual that has survived from the earlier, indigenous form of Buddhism practised by the Newar communities of the Kathmandu Valley. The performance, which takes place during the holy month of guna, July-August, lasts for eight days and ends with the Matany festival. It is believed that blowing of horns around the monasteries and shrines will bring peace and salvation to the souls of deceased family members. Although Baki Wanegu is a Buddhist ritual, the statues mounted on dha and damkhiin (two-headed drums) are those of the Hindu deities Mahalaxmi and Mahakali, indicating a synthesis of Hindu and Buddhist cultural elements.

Jang’s Music

Between 1715 and 1768, there were Christian missions in Kathmandu Valley but no influence of Western liturgical music has been observed from that period. The promulgation of Western music in Nepal seems to have followed neither in the footsteps of missionaries nor in those of the European colonisers and traders who had so much influence in other parts of Asia. Instead, Western music saw its initial institutionalisation in the military bands of the Nepali Army, during the second half of the 19th century.

While they continued the policy of isolation, the Ranas imported certain Western ideas that had profound influence on music. The Ranas’ political strategy halted colonial aggression and formalised the recruitment of Gorkhas into the Colonial army. This, in part, led to Jang Bahadur’s much publicised tour of Europe in 1850, which was the most important encounter between the cultures of Europe and Nepal until that time.

During his stay in England and France, between 25 May to 12 October 1850, Jang Bahadur attended more than a dozen operas, ballets, plays and recitals. The Nepali strongman’s visit to England was commemorated by various compositions written in his honour such as Kunwar Ranaji Polka, Long Live Jang Bahadur, The Nepalese Prince and The Highland Chief. There is an apocryphal story about Jang Bahadur’s appreciation of Western music. It is said that during an enthusiastic curtain call, Queen Victoria inquired through an interpreter whether the Maharajah had understood the opera, to which he replied that one need not know the language of the bird to enjoy its singing.

Among the prized objects owned by Jang Bahadur in his residence was a piano. The Ranas who followed, and emulated, Jang Bahadur not only owned pianos but learned to play them as well. That the imported pianos were carried by hand, some 200 kilometres between the plains at the Indian border over the hills into Kathmandu, gives some idea of the fascination with which these instruments were once held. The published piano music and books on Western Music imported during the Rana period are still to be found in the collection of the Keshar Library in Kathmandu.

One direct result of Jang Bahadur’s exposure to European grandeur and protocol was his borrowing of the British anthem God Save the King (at that time “Queen”) as the official anthem of Nepal. But, upon complaint by the British Resident, the Ranas decided to replace it with the present anthem of Nepal, Shreeman Gambhir Nepal, which was originally an instrumental piece. It was only in 1925 that a text was set to it by Chakrpani Chalise. The anthem presents itself in a Western musical idiom of four-part harmony (a polyphonic texture of four simultaneous voice parts). This runs contrary to Nepali music, which is characteristically monophonic.

Many questions related to the birth of the anthem remain unanswered. The composer and the date of the composition are unknown. By the time the score was sent to be printed in England, some years had elapsed and the name of the composer was missing from the manuscript. Today, the printed score bears only the name of Chakrpani Chalise. Oral accounts credit A.M. Pathan, Director of Music in the Royal Nepale Army around the turn of the century, as composer. Other names that appear are Ketey and Geye, but much more scholarly scrutiny, devoid of sentimental or political bias, is needed. Based merely on the musical notation alone (voice movements, harmony, cadences and other melodic elements), and not on historical accounts, one can speculate that the anthem was most likely composed by an outsider and not by a Nepali.

In the absence of schools that teach Western music, the demand for musicians who can play Western instruments is partially fulfilled by army musicians. The primary demand for such musicians is in modern songs, or aadunik sangeet.

Modern Songs

The term aadunik sangeet refers to a genre of secular vocal music developed in the 20th century. It is primarily performed in a ishathantara (verse-chorus) form with text in Nepali. Although embedded in romanticism, aadunik sangeet also expresses the sentiments of patriotism and national unity as rastra Raag. Another significant development in aadunik sangeet has been the adaptation of narrative poems into musical productions called geeti nitya.

Typically, vocal melodies are accompanied on the Western harmonium, introduced to South Asia by Christian missionaries. The harmonium imitates the vocal melody but the sustained notes are harmonised by either a major or a minor triad. The rhythmic accompaniment is provided by tabla (drum). The taalas, mnemonic rhythmic cycles, are of equal measure and, generally, in duple or triple meter. The melodic inspirations are particular to each composer, although melodies occasionally arise from lok sangeet, folk songs, or raagas. One popular source has been Raaga Yemen, a heptatonic scale (for example, a seven-note scale using the white keys on the piano keyboard) in which the fourth note is raised a semitone in pitch.

Although the harmonium and tabla function as the primary instruments for both the composers and the singers, in a recorded version the instrumentation is expanded by including such traditional instruments as sitar, bansuri, madal (drum), dholak (another type of drum) and Western instruments such as the violin, piano-accordion, guitar, mandolin, bass guitar and saxophone. The assimilation of traditional and non-traditional instruments gives aadunik sangeet a unique timbre that now characterises the genre.

The development of aadunik sangeet changed course after the revolution of 1951. The Rana government had enforced strict control
and censorship on all publications, including newspapers and even literary works. Immediately following the Revolution, Radio Nepal was established, promising freedom of, at least, artistic expression. As Radio Nepal’s broadcasting capacity increased with the installation of more powerful transmitters in 1954, its reach encompassed not only most of Nepal but also Darjeeling and parts of Sikkim and Bhutan, where the major linguistic groups are ethnic Nepalis. This was a significant development. At the hands of the finest composers, singers and poets aadhunik sangeet manifests contemporary Nepali thought and experience, transcending ethnic, linguistic and political barriers. Unlike lok sangeet, the genre is free of specific ethnic and regional ties thus enabling it to be adapted for the expression of patriotic sentiments in the form of rastriya geyt. Given Nepal’s sply-ethnic character and the fundamentally religious orientation of its folk and classical music, only aadhunik sangeet is able to rapidly absorb changes and adapt itself accordingly. Today, the horizons of aadhunik sangeet has stretched even further to include “rock songs” and “rap”, of Afro-European origins.

Roots in the Soil
Nepal’s wide-ranging ethnic diversity is reflected in its folk music, making it impossible to describe lok sangeet as a homogeneous entity. Judging by the stock on the music-shop shelves alone, it would seem that lok sangeet is most commonly linked with song-forms such as chuute geyt and jhuyaare geyt, generally sung by Gaines, a minstrel caste group, and Tamang selo sung in Nepal. This association not only falsely suggests that lok sangeet is culturally narrow but also obscures the social, ritual and even agro-economic ties of lok sangeet with its people. An example, among the Gurungs and Magar communites, would be the congregation of male and/or female groups at night to sing and dance in the institution known as the Rodighar. This is an integral part of huiripurma, a system of reciprocal exchange of agricultural labour.

Although the ethnomusical research of Nepali music has already begun, there still remains a large corpus of music unstudied, which makes it difficult to discuss musical characteristics in detail. Generally, northern music uses anhemitonic pentatonic scales (fivenote scales whose intervals are the same as, for example, the black notes on a piano keyboard) and circular breathing or overlapping of voices without breaking the continuity of melodies. In addition, texts are set melismatically, such that the pitch may vary within the same syllable. Although the use of pentatonic scales are also found in raagas, it is the performance practice that differentiates the two. Generally, southern melodies are based on heptatonic, rather than pentatonic, scales. A few songs with shamanic chant-like melodies have been released but, in general, no shamanic influence is observed in Nepali music. A glimpse at the repertoire of lok sangeet suggests its vastness.

Chutuke geyt and jihaare geyt are generally associated with the mendicant Gaines, who travel extensively, reaching as far as Assam in India, Darjeeling, Bhutan and Sikkim. In rural areas, cut off by lack of modern communication technology, Gaines function as “living newspapers.” A jihaare geyt can include political satires or crime stories. A major difference between a chutuke geyt and jihaare geyt seems to be in the expression of happiness in the former and sadness in the latter. A unique musical characteristic of Gaines performances is the imitation of taala by the sarangi, which otherwise accompanies the singer’s melody.

The effect is achieved by plucking the strings with the left-hand little finger while bouncing the bow on the strings. The ghanghur (tiny bells), hung at the end of the bow, complement the taala.

Asarey geyt and chaitey geyt are seasonal songs, sung during the months of June-July and March-April. Sorathi, performed by the Gurungs, is an epic song form. The Rateuli is sung by women during a wedding. The text in a Rateuli performance can include obscene and sexual allusions.

Another form of performance, also exclusive to women is Teefi geyt, sung during the primarily Brahmin festival of Teefi. A form of song, which has enjoyed a national appeal in recent years through recordings and live performances is Dohari geyt in which texts are improved to a fixed folk melody called Bhaka. Dohari geyt is a sort of musical contest between a man and a woman (with or without groups). The loser has to acquiesce to the winner, and demands can include even marriage. The repertoire mentioned here is the tip of the iceberg; the vast majority of lok sangeet, especially those sung in the vernacular languages, remain unknown outside of their communities.

The instruments used in lok sangeet include the murchunga (Jaw’s harp) of metal body and bamboo, damphu (frame drum), bansuri (flute), tungna (plucked lutes), chyabrung, dholak (two-headed drums; madal), and sarangi, to name but a few. Those of particular interest include madal and sarangi which have assumed a nationalistic character and are commonly held to be of Nepali origin.

Nothing could be further from the truth, however. The madal is found throughout central India and in Bangladesh, where it is called modal or mondal, and the sarangi is of pan-Islamic origin and exists in many other countries. The concept of Nepali-ness in lok sangeet should be determined by the inner performance details or musical characteristics and not merely by the musical instruments used.

Crisis of Identity
Nepal began to uplift the performing arts after the political watershed of the 1950s. The patronage of King Mahendra, who reigned from 1955 to 1972, was particularly important. The establishment of Radio Nepal in 1951 was followed by that of the Royal Nepal Academy in 1957, the Rastriya Nachghar (now called Sanskritik Sansthan, the cultural institute) in 1961, the Rama Recording Corporation in 1962, the Royal Nepal Film Corporation in 1971, and Nepal TV in 1984. Tribhuvan University has since added a degree course in shastra sangeet. All these institutions are funded by the Government but, as Nepal strives for its place in the modern world after nearly two centuries of self-imposed isolation, her musical development faces several challenges.

While there has been official promotion of the arts, however, the country strives to find a balance between its diversity and the need for a “nationalist” unified identity. It is said that it is this fear of inciting ethnic divisions which led to the ban on the broadcasting of ethnic songs with texts in languages other than the lingua franca, Nepali.

A dha (drum) shield from the Patan gunabaja ensemble depicts the Newar Music God, Nasadoyo, as Mithyanath
Bhaskha. Although there has been some relaxation, in that Radio Nepal has introduced some regional songs in a program called Phulbari (garden), the systematic inclusion of songs representing all ethnic groups is yet to be accomplished. Nepal Television, too, has introduced a similar program (also called Phulbari) but the production lacks authenticity, scholarly scrutiny, and technical layout. In fact, the program shows a lack of sensibility and even respect to cultural diversity which is made the worse by the directness and power of the visual medium.

The official broadcasting policy, which seeks to establish cultural homogeneity (and, through it, national unity) prevents acknowledgement of Nepal's own cultural products. Paradoxically, there is a restraint in the broadcasting of vernacular ethnic songs. Radio Nepal regularly broadcasts Hindi film songs and Indian and Pakistani ghazals, sung in Urdu. The political view that came into force during the Panchayat era (1951-1990) of avoiding the incitement of ethnic tensions by banning vernacular music, seems to persist.

Aadhunik sangeet, on the other hand, faces a different challenge with its penchant for incorporating Western elements to the jeopardy of its further development. Although aadhunik sangeet incorporates aspects of Western music in its use of polyphony (harmony), theory and instrumentation, there are no institutions where one may systematically learn Western music. There is a general resistance to institutionalising Western systems, which is best summed up by the scholar and diplomat, Rishikesh Shah, in his observance of modernisation in Nepal:

On the one hand, there is an intellectual acceptance... of the technological, scientific and intellectual aspects of Western culture.... On the other hand, there is an emotional resistance against the slavish imitation of the West because the Nepalis are conscious of their own ancient heritage of civilisation and values, and also because the West is very much associated in Nepali consciousness with colonial war and exploitation.

The same traditionalism, which in the 18th century resisted Christianity and through it prevented the influence of Western music, is today slowing down the further development of Nepali music by ignoring the scientific and intellectual approach. The view shared by most composers is to adapt aspects of the Western system to local needs. The dilemma faced by aadhunik sangeet in this regard is best illustrated by the challenges faced by the Nepali film industry.

Bombay Mix

Films are a major source of entertainment throughout the Subcontinent and Nepali films, too, on average include five or six songs. But, despite the existence of various musical institutions, Kathmandu lacks technological facility for soundtrack recording and also the type of orchestra desired. Thus, the recording of Nepali films takes place in Bombay, utilising the orchestras there. This is not without its own implications. First, the orchestral timbre results in what is recognised as "Bombay type", similar to that heard in Hindi films. Secondly, all financial benefits of production accrue to the Indian industry. Finally, such a trend not only hinders the aspiration of Nepali artists but also prevents the possible innovation in the use of native instruments in orchestral settings.

While the new Government’s policy of discouraging acculturation in film music is welcome — totally domestic productions enjoy a certain percent tax break — there are simply not enough trained musicians to supply the industry. This is not to mention the shortsightedness of some directors and producers who would probably still favour recordings in Bombay even if they were not forced to. So the trend of recording film music in Bombay continues, denying self-reliance in music.

Most composers believe that native instruments are incapable of meeting the demands of polyphonic orchestral composition. Some feel that native instruments are inadequate in compass and sonority compared to Western instruments. Others argue that the Nepali (Nepaliness) rests in the compositional tools and not in the instrumentation alone. But recent trends in aadhunik sangeet contradict the latter view. There is a growing influence, or even emulation, of Hindi film songs which has not gone unnoticed. In describing the music of Nepal Groves Dictionary of Music and Musicians (1980) notes that "...a continuing Indianization of Himalayan popular and folk music may be assumed". The conscientious effort to retain Nepaliness, which prevailed in the post-Revolution era in aadhunik sangeet, is today overwhelmed by outside influences.

Nor has shahstriya sangeet escaped the pressure to change, as the adaptation of Western violin and harmonium illustrates. The violin originated from the eastern rabab and the harmonium was invented in France in the mid-18th Century. The violin, called beta in shahstriya sangeet, is played sitting down such that the tuning pegs rest on the player's feet, allowing easier execution of gamak (glissando or slide) and shrutis. However, the harmonium, being a mechanical reed instrument that uses a tempered scale, lacks the pitch variants characteristic of shahstriya sangeet and lok sangeet. The point is this: the tempered scale and the limitations of pitch that it imposes, force inner musical characters to adjust. However, this complication is not faced by aadhunik sangeet in its adaptation of the harmonium, because aadhunik sangeet incorporates Western elements in its theory and instrumentation.

Shahstriya sangeet, which shares common roots with the North Indian musical tradition, also faces a musical "identity crisis". In the West, this genre of music is generally known as "Indian Music" or Hindustani Music. Although the use of these terms is justifiable on a geographical basis, as in describing the music within India or in differentiating stylistic approaches, problems arise when defining music within Nepal. The Nepali view is that these terms evidently exclude the Nepali tradition. The term Hindustani Music, for example, will mean the tradition prevalent in North India. And even if one stretches the term to the "Hindustani Music of Nepal" (as distinct from that of Pakistan and Bangladesh) some conceptual complications persist. The word Hindustani originally denoted the earlier formation stage of the country of India, which included Pakistan and Bangladesh, but of which Nepal was never a part. Perhaps the term that more appropriately describes the musical format, without being regionally or religiously biased, is Raaga Music.

Nepali music, thus, is identifiable in its musical structure and the ethnic, philosophical and religious ideas it draws upon. All genres are subject to some change yet they remain identifiable as Nepali music.

The crucial issue for musical development in Nepal is the infrastructure of music education. The inclusion of shahstriya sangeet by Tribhuvan University is a welcome gesture, but it needs further expansion because shahstriya sangeet is essentially performance oriented. A musical education should include both performance training and intellectual study. This will better equip people to understand and conserve Nepali music as well as to cope with that change. Without a well-conceived long-term plan for musical education, efforts to uplift music will be fruitless.

K. Gurung is an ethnomusicologist. He is presently involved in setting up a recording studio, House of Music.
The Goat and the Music God

Each of Bhaktapur town's 200 or so music groups has its own rituals and functions. This is an account of how the members of one such music group tap the divine energy of the music deity Nasadyo.

Text and photographs by Gert-Matthias Wegner

It is almost midnight. The goat has been locked in the potting shed and we are waiting for our drumming students to sneak into the garden and steal the animal for the music God Nasadyo. Ganesh Bahadur and I have been training the six students for the past four months. They are young farmers from our neighbourhood who have almost passed their apprenticeships in dhimay drumming. As with all other forms of traditional Newari music and dance, musical apprenticeship requires the students to be initiated into the cult of Nasadyo, the source of musical knowledge and inspiration. In Bhaktapur, Nasadyo has a destructive counterpart called Haimadyo which is responsible for the mistakes in music. Haimadyo needs to be pacified with regular blood sacrifices lest the music degenerates into cacophony. During the learning period, both Gods reside in a niche in the practising room where they receive daily worship and offerings. Ideally, sacrificial animals are supposed to be stolen by the music students. Nasadyo has a weakness for thieves, it seems. Thus, a good drummer needs to be not only naughty but courageous as well.

It is a peaceful night, everybody is asleep. From the verandah overlooking the quiet garden, Ganesh Bahadur and I pass the time, sipping rice beer from clay bowls. Our dhimay students were too scared to really steal an animal, so we decided to stage it. The goat was purchased in the morning and carefully tied to one of the trees in the garden below our lookout. The students plan to use a small tractor parked by the garden wall as their staircase. It all seems too easy. After our third cup of rice beer, Ganesh Bahadur and I climb down, unchain the goat and lock it in the potting shed. Just to make it a little more real.

While refilling our bowls for the sixth — or was it the eighth? — time, things begin to stir below. The tractor emits a creak and shadows seem to flow over the garden wall. Then, a stunned silence. Eager whispers indicate a crisis conference. Where is the goat? Scouts swarm out to investigate the darker nooks of the garden. Then the bleating of the goat from inside the potting shed. Conspiring with the thieves, silly beast! The door is broken and muffled cries of triumph follow.

Here we interfere. I shout, "Kune su?", Who's down there? and Ganesh Bahadur, at the top of his voice, "Khun vala!". There's a thief! Hectic activity in the garden. The goat scales the wall rather rapidly and lands on someone's head. Neighbours open their windows and join us with stentorian cries. The goat has gone. A final giggle accompanies disappearing footsteps. It will take another two hours before discussions among the neighbours die down and Bhaktapur resumes its slumber.

Flight Paths of Energy

Early next morning, we gather in the practice room. A colourful procession is under preparation. There is to be a band of drummers to announce the event, teachers and students carrying puja plates with various offerings and last, but certainly not least, the goat led by a rope to its final destination, the shrine of Nasadyo.

Every shrine of the music God has at least one hole as the centre of worship, through which divine energy passes invisibly and freely, like music. Strangely enough, there are similar holes in the buildings behind and in front of the shrine, such that flight paths are maintained through several buildings, in some cases even beyond Bhaktapur's boundaries. It is considered most inauspicious to block one of these Nasu holes.

But today, while decorating the shrine with offerings in the prescribed order, Ganesh Bahadur and I block the divine passage with
a sticky mixture of yoghurt and beaten rice. Then I paint the face of Nasadyo on it with red powder and insert three tiny silver eyes. Now Nasadyo is ready to receive his sacrifice. A large knife is placed on the altar and I perform a brief puja, sprinkling water and red powder on the blade. Meanwhile, the goat receives rice grains, powder and water on its head. Everybody is waiting for it to signal its consent to being sacrificed. It has to shake its head and hair in a particular manner before we can touch it. But it doesn’t! Ganesh Bahadur sprinkles some more water. There! It worked.

the music is finished, we are all decorated with great white turbans, red powder and flowers. We begin to resemble happy apparitions.

Meanwhile, plenty of divine power has accumulated in the yoghurt paste which blocks the Nasa hole. It is plucked off and distributed among all as prasad an edible blessing. Everybody feels hungry and thirsty and a preliminary picnic is consumed on the spot before proceeding home in triumph, where a real Newari feast awaits us.

It is the students’ turn to lead the procession. They play — still a bit tense, as everything is new to them — but with increasing joy. Their “coming out” is observed with keen eyes from the upper windows, wherever we pass. The girls of Bhaktapur have a weakness for drummers, and this will no doubt ensure a continuation of this tradition.

The formal apprenticeship ends here, although much remains to be learned, from experience rather than verbal instruction. How to convey joy to a vast crowd during festivals? How to make them all dance? How to unite a bunch of half-drunk drummers and make them play like fire? How to recognise when it is time to pass on your own drum to one of the extras walking with the group and waiting their turn? How to remain in tune with the spirit of the occasion, and how to tap the divine flow of energy that permeates all creative activity?

Immediately, the beast is grabbed, lifted and cut. The blood splashes all over the shrine and our feet. The students carry the body around the shrine, leaving a bloody trail behind them. Finally, the goat is decapitated and the head placed on the altar, a burning wick on its forehead.

The time has come for the musical offering and the students squat in a row, facing the covered drums. Ganesh Bahadur and I offer them each their instrument, while they pay their respects to us and do a small puja for the drums resting on their laps. Some of the students have kept a raw egg ready for this moment. In order to overcome their stage fright, they throw the eggs against the Nasa hole, where its contents cover the offering, upsetting armies of flies which had made themselves comfortable.

The music starts with an invocation, called dyohhaygu, of the music God. Played correctly, the dyohhaygu works like a telephone number, connecting the musicians with their source of inspiration, focusing their energies on its divine flow and uniting them in ecstasy and delight.

The students play the complete repertoire without a mistake while their relatives and neighbours watch and listen with pride. When

Of course, there is much more to tell about Bhaktapur and its various music traditions. What joy, what a blessing to participate in all this! Let us hope these marvellous traditions continue to inspire coming generations. It needs understanding, work and love on everybody’s part, but the rewards are unlimited.

G.M. Wagner is a German ethnomusicologist, presently helping establish a music department for Tribhuvan University in Bhaktapur.
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Where is Shastriya Sangeet?

Classical music managed to escape the court boundaries of the ruling Nawabs and Maharajas in India to delight mass audiences of concerts, television and radio. But in Nepal, both classical music and its players are on their last legs.

by Omar Sattaur and Gert-Matthias Wegner

Leading musicians from India's centres of excellence had for centuries been coveted guests at the darbars of the Nepali kings. Mahindrasimha Malla is known to have invited Muslim ustaads in the early 18th Century to play for him at his palace, and his successors followed his example. By the Rana period, Kathmandu was recognised as an important centre for shastriya sangeet, the classical Hindustani music that is the main subject of this article, and there were frequent exchanges with other centres in the Subcontinent including those at Banares, Darbhanga, Lucknow, Rampur and Calcutta. Ekraj Shamscher, for example, was an accomplished dhrupad singer who, in later years when his voice began to fail, went on to master the raudra vina. Bir Shamscher, a great lover of music and patron to the great Taj Khan and Dunnee Khan, invited India's best musicians to play at a huge music conference at Bagadi, in the Terai, in 1900. The conference is said to have helped in the revival of classical music then sweeping the Subcontinent.

The latter half of the 20th Century, though, has been less kind to music and its artists in Nepal. Indian masters who had settled here returned to India during the last years of the Ranas and during the Panchayat system, shastriya sangeet was pushed into the doldrums. Good classical musicians, today, have either left the country or are scraping a living together by accompanying and doing other jobs as well as making music. The standard of teaching is low and Nepal's most promising students are once more forced to head south for likely gurus. Meanwhile, potential students of shastriya sangeet are being discouraged from studying the genre through anti-Indian feeling and the notion that Nepal has less claim to shastriya sangeet than does India. Yet while shastriya sangeet is declining in Nepal, it continues to flourish in India, and Indian musicians travel the world to play to audiences that are increasingly knowledgeable about the Hindustani classical music tradition. While musicians themselves are partly to blame for the demise of shastriya sangeet in Nepal — through seeking only patronage as a means of survival — its roots lie in the enormous political and economic changes the Subcontinent has undergone since the end of the 19th Century.

Nawabs and Maharajas

Classical musicians regard the last century as the "golden age" of music. They played at the courts of the Indian Nawabs and Maharajas who not only enjoyed shastriya sangeet for its own sake, some of them becoming accomplished singers and players, but also benefited by the refinement and status that such music lent their courts. Each court might employ hundreds of musicians, who enjoyed a pampered life, being both highly respected and highly paid. To reach this zenith of the musical career, a musician had to learn from a master, and finding one was never easy. Allaudin Khan, one of the greatest musicians of recent times and the teacher of Ali Akbar Khan and Ravi Shankar, appeared to have learned mostly by steadfast determination. He ran away from home to study music, first in Delhi and then in Calcutta. His first important teacher, Gopal Chandra Bhattacharji, died long before Allaudin Khan could complete his 12-year apprenticeship. He then decided to devote himself to studying sarod, after being greatly impressed by Ustad Ahmed Ali Khan. Ahmed Ali Khan accepted him as a student but taught only a little. However, Allaudin Khan learned much simply by listening to the ustaad's concerts and practising what he heard. His reward for having learned more than he was directly taught was to be turned out by his teacher.

After much travelling, he arrived in Rampur and sought to become a pupil of Wazir Khan who was, in his time, unequalled in playing the veena. But Allaudin Khan found it impossible even to meet the ustaad. Only by throwing himself before the Nawab of Rampur's carriage did Allaudin Khan obtain the opportunity to play for the Nawab and impress him enough to gain his recommendation and introduction to Wazir Khan. At last he was formally accepted as Wazir Khan's pupil only to serve him for the next two years without receiving any lessons at all! He stayed with, and eventually learned from, Wazir Khan for the next 20 years before settling down in Malhar in 1918, at the age of 56, to teach the local ruler.

The reluctance of masters to take students, and then to reveal all they know to them, is a reflection of the fact that musical knowledge was treated as a commodity which could be traded and therefore had to be jealously guarded. This way of looking at music was particularly strong at the turn of the century when the gharana system of teaching was growing in influence. Gharanas have been characterised as closed groups, largely within families, in which apprentices belonged to a sort of musical guild that offered support and a recognisable (and saleable) style of playing. Gharanas were highly competitive and sometimes used by local rulers as prestige objects. For an aspiring young musician, apprenticeship in a gharana could mean years of servitude and learning simply by absorption — listening to what the players said and how they played and copying it all later — before ever being directly taught music. The system

Music Room at Durga Bhawan, Tangal

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began to fall apart as India moved into the modern world. Today, artists would rarely claim to have been the product of a single gharana. The gharana system did not exist in Nepal.

**Breaking out of Court**

The disappearance of the gharana system is not the only change to have affected the passing on of musical knowledge. As already implied, the "golden age" ended with the demise of the princely courts. In his book, *Hindustani Music in the 20th Century* (Allied Publishers Pvt Ltd), Wim van der Meer outlines the major factors influencing the renaissance of Indian classical music in the early part of this century. After the Indian mutiny of 1857, the British changed their attitude towards local rulers and encouraged them to Westernise and become allies in British rule of India. Some did, giving up their interest in things Indian, including shastriya sangeet but others, notably Maharajah Scindia of Gwalior, Maharajah Sayaji Rao of Baroda, Nawab Hamid Ali Khan and his son Raza Ali Khan of Rampur, continued to support and encourage music and musicians even when they had very little power and influence left. As the princes lost power, they concentrated on the pursuit of the trivial. And as they sank into debauched lifestyles, music sank with them. Musicians found their places of work shifting from princely courts to entertainment houses in the cities and before long they, and their music, suffered the stigma of that decadence.

The end of the 19th Century saw the simultaneous rise of the newly rich, the merchant princes who had made money in trade, and the zamindars, or tax collectors who had settled in as hereditary landlords. Imitating the princes, they became the new patrons of music. Their decadent lifestyles were little different from their aristocratic models and, if anything, music sank further in status. India was changing on other fronts, too, all of which affected society and therefore music. As the British clutched at straws to maintain power, the nationalist movement was on the rise; the Indian National Congress held its first meeting in 1885. By 1900, the main network of railways had been established. Radio was increasingly popular, the film industry was growing and gramophone records were becoming available. Musicians increasingly realised that they could no longer find the same kind of positions as they once held at the courts. Greater mobility from improved transport, presses and broadcasts brought music to a vast public and changed the make-up, aspirations and lifestyle of the modern musician. The film industry in the 1930s was one of the largest employers of the best classical musicians. Although this has changed, All India Radio is still a very large employer of Indian musicians.

For the emerging middle class, who had a European education, music was something to look down upon. The nationalist movement stimulated patriotic feeling and it was only the movement's recognition of the important role that music could play in fostering Indian pride and unity that helped musicians to regain respect. Meetings of the National Congress included classical songs and Gandhi led the Dandi March of 1930 to the strains of certain classical pieces written by Vishnu Digambar Paluskar. Paluskar and another Maharashtrian called Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhanda, led the musical renaissance which was to reach its peak after 1900.

**Musical Missionaries**

Paluskar was a musical missionary, popularising and stimulating interest of music among the middle classes. He played devotional music at temples and personally visited middle class homes to announce his programmes. In 1901, he opened his first
music school in Lahore, followed by another in Bombay a decade later, to spread musical knowledge and understanding. Bhaktchandre travelled extensively and collected a vast body of musical literature and manuscripts from which he published a number of books. Some of these are still source material for music students today. He organised the first All India Music Conference in 1916 in Baroda and followed it with others in Lucknow, Delhi and Banaras. With the support of Maharajah Sayaji Rao of Baroda he reorganised the music school and later went on to open music schools in Gwalior and Lucknow. These schools became models for others to open the doors to mass musical education.

Music had at last escaped the domination of the ruling class and the financially privileged to reach a much wider audience. In 1936, the first tickets for a concert of shastriya sangeet were sold in Calcutta. Later, music clubs became popular all across northern India. The members were enthusiasts who understood the intricacies and subtleties of classical music. They paid an annual fee for the privilege of hearing the best musicians. Non-members were charged an entrance fee. Although the pay was low, musicians were keen to play for such audiences because they were so well understood and appreciated — something rare after the loss of the small, specialised audiences of the princely courts. Today music clubs are still popular and there are music schools and colleges in almost every neighbourhood of the large cities. Music continues to flourish.

Tattered Raagas

In contrast, classical musicians in Nepal earn a living by playing watered down versions of the raagas to tourists who listen between mouthfuls of food in the restaurants of expensive hotels. During the past decade, the ghazal, a musical vehicle for Urdu poetry, has become very popular and groups are to be found at many restaurants in Kathmandu. Those who cannot or would not play at such venues survive by teaching or accompanying. Many of the older musicians barely manage to survive, despite their talent and gifts. A sad example is the former court musician, Shamshu Prasad Mishra, now 76 years of age and the finest tabla player in the country, who can be seen hauling his bicycle uphill the five kilometres or so from his home in order to gain a few rupees accompanying. There is no support for musicians and they find it impossible to survive by music alone.

Shastriya sangeet may have been inaccessible to the common people during the Rana regime, but it flourished in their courts. Since the return of monarchy, however, even this court music-making almost disappeared. There is still token appointment of court musicians, but they rarely play and have few other responsibilities. Music continues to be neglected and so continues to wither. The Ministry of Culture and Education today provides almost no support for classical music. The Royal Nepal Academy has been likened to a tomb — there is so little that is of interest to the living going on within its walls. There are a few cultural scholarships to be won but none specially earmarked for students of music and people in positions of influence in the relevant ministries do not seem to have any interest in music.

Nepal can offer its students two colleges at which to study up to Bachelor level: Padma Kanya Campus and Lalit Kala Campus. There, students can pick up the rudiments of classical music and take examinations set to the standards of Indian colleges. Teachers in Nepal need a Masters from an Indian music college to begin teaching. Yet there are not enough teachers, they are paid very little, and the average standard is very low compared with India. In any case, a college-based musical education is still regarded as just a first step on the road to good musicianship. It has to be followed up by 10 to 20 years of dedicated study and practice with the best masters. Nepali teachers would benefit enormously had they the opportunity to study with ustaads, but unfortunately there is no such scholarship scheme here to encourage such aspirations. And musical ambition in children is discouraged. Music is a dead end job.

The musical education of the public has also suffered. Radio Nepal allocates just 90 minutes per week to shastriya sangeet. Lok sangeet, folk music, gets 8.5 hours per week. In contrast, adhunik sangeet is allocated 11 hours per week. Nepal Television, last summer, virtually stopped broadcasting shastriya sangeet because, it was said, they could find no one willing to attend and record. Homnath Upadhya, a tabla player called their bluff and has been invited to record some programmes. There is little live music to be enjoyed even by those in the capital and major towns but for the majority of the population, who rely on radio, shastriya sangeet is sighing its last notes.

The result is a circle of neglect spiralling towards the eventual death of shastriya sangeet in Nepal. Music, like all art, is organic. The more concerts that are staged, the more music that is broadcast, the more people will want to hear it and the more young people will want to study music. Without a critical number of music lovers, students, teachers, performers and artists of music will simply die.

Fighting against this ignoble end are a few musicians who are using their own money, time and talent to pump life back into Nepali shastriya sangeet. Among them are participants of the Kiratwaar concerts on full moon evenings at Pashupatinath, where young musicians come and play for free. The atmosphere is good and the event looks promising, with the musicians sharing the costs of transport and refreshment. Some musicians open their homes to music groups with the aim of establishing music circles where music can be enjoyed.

If Nepali music is to survive and, more than that, find its rightful place among the many other musical traditions with which it has to compete today, it must first find pride of place in the public consciousness. This means more concerts, more broadcasts and more emphasis in the curriculum of primary and secondary schools and a notation method and systematic teaching of shastriya sangeet. Many more scholarships, to enable study with the best masters for at least five years, are also needed for those of whom shastriya sangeet has touched.

Dhimay drummers play at the final puja marking the end of their apprenticeship
A Life of Music

Krishna Narayan Shrestha is one of the finest living musicians in the Nepali Hindustani classical music tradition. Since in his early twenties, the 67-year-old maestro has won prizes in different Radio Nepal competitions and has been awarded the Gorkha Dakshin Bahu IV. In 1950, he joined the newly established Radio Nepal and rose to the post of musical director before his retirement at the age of 60, in 1987.

Among the more well known of his former students are the harmonium player Govinda Kipu, the dilruba player Uttam K.C., and the singers Bhakta Raj Acharya and Sunita Subba. He took some time off teaching to talk to Himal in his small room, crowded with instruments, at his family home in Patan Sundhara.

It was my father's wish that I learn music. He was inspired after hearing an Indian ustadd who could play many different instruments, like jaltarang and tabla tarang. He came to Nepal to play at Chandra Shamsher’s palace. My father went with my Guru-to-be, Shri Ganesh Lal, to hear him. He was so taken with the ustadd's playing that he told Guruji that my mother was expecting and that, if she gave birth to a boy, the boy would be totally under his instruction.

When I was old enough, my father took me to Guruji — not to learn music for my living, but purely because of his interest in music. I stayed with Guruji until he died, at the age of 72. Even though music was my father’s interest, it eventually became my profession, because I spent so long at it and had so little chance to study anything else.

If I say that Guruji was my greatest influence, people assume I mention him simply because he was my teacher. But he was actually the only person to influence me in Nepal. The reason I say this is because there was no one in Nepal like him. There was no one who could play jaltarang and tabla tarang. (Jaltarang is a range of china bowls tuned by filling them with different amounts of water. When hit, they produce a pure-sounding chime. tabla tarang is a semicircular range of tabla tuned to different pitches such that it is possible to play melodies on them). But whatever instrument you gave him, even if he had never seen it before, he could play it well after an hour of experimenting with it.

I began when I was very young, about nine or so. Guruji always made me sing with him, usually in the morning for half-an-hour to two hours. That continued for two years. After that he introduced the jaltarang, perhaps once or twice a week. Guruji used to say that, whatever instrument you play, whether it is tabla, sitar, sarod, anything, without a background in vocal music there will be no mithaas (sweetness). It seems he was right. If you look at our sitar players today, they have no vocal training and so their playing sounds a little crude. There was none of that crudity in the late Asha Gopal’s playing, though. He was Narayan Gopal’s father and he played sitar and sang beautifully. Others here don’t even know how to play thumri (a light classical vocal style). But it is wrong to criticise an artist. When you criticise an artist it is like kicking yourself.

At that time I was often accompanied by Guruji’s brother, Digumber dai, on harmonium. Sometimes Guruji would play tabla tarang, and I would sing. Digumber dai used to practise constantly, four to five hours at a stretch, to the extent that he did...
not eat enough. In the end he died of TB because he did not eat proper food. In those days, musicians strove to be better players than others around them. Today, *shastriya sangeet* (Hindustani classical music) is vanishing.

**Changing Seasons**

Everything has its time. Different eras bring different custom and different tastes. I believe it would be difficult for a person who has not learned shastriya sangeet to understand it. I don’t know if there is shastriya sangeet in the hills but, in the valley, the Newars practise their own kind of shastriya sangeet. Here it relates to the changing seasons and festivals. Indian shastriya sangeet now heard in Nepal sounds as if it were composed whereas I feel that our traditional shastriya sangeet has been influenced by our folk music. This gives it its Nepali flavour.

Tunes are developed from words and sounds. So, according to the environment, sounds and words are chosen to match and the result is music that is proper for different times of day and for the changing seasons. This music is named accordingly. It seems to me that our branch of shastriya sangeet was composed giving more emphasis to matching words to the environment whereas Indian shastriya sangeet gave more emphasis to matching sounds. But despite these differences, some of the Indian and Nepali raags fall into the same category.

**Shastriya sangeet** is on a much higher level than *aadhunik sangeet* (modern songs). To enjoy it, listeners have to make more effort to go into it and investigate it. Once people do that, they will sink into its depths and cease to care for aadhunik sangeet. Aadhunik sangeet is outwardly exciting, whereas shastriya sangeet is tranquil at its centre. Since aadhunik sangeet does not have the same depth, listeners can enjoy it quickly and easily. What my soul says, if you ask someone listening to light music what they think about it, without thinking they can say “good” or “bad”, because it doesn’t have substance. But they cannot make the same judgement on first listening to shastriya sangeet, because shastriya sangeet has substance.

It has substance because it comprises the efforts of generations and generations of master musicians. Of the four Vedas, music came from the *Saam Veda*. From *Saam Veda*, the old masters developed shastriya sangeet. But it is different with *lok sangeet* (folk music). I believe that lok sangeet, developed naturally. It is the original music of the people which gave the basis to develop shastriya sangeet. But aadhunik sangeet is all mixed up. It is sometimes sweet and sometimes sour, ...it is all mixed up. It doesn’t stand the test of time, whereas lok sangeet and shastriya sangeet were with us from the very beginning and will continue for all time.

Good things need a long time to develop. If there is not enough time, then I believe that good things will not be produced. Today, nobody has time to learn. Time and fashion are always changing; sometimes *thrupad* is very popular, sometimes *khayal* is more popular. Nowadays, *ghazal* is the most popular. These styles were developed by people over lifetimes. Today there are some who continue to sing in these styles but most people believe that life is too short, so they cannot afford to devote 20 to 25 years to developing themselves as artists.

**Five Harmoniums!**

I had been studying with Guruji for about four years when we started travelling in India to give concerts. He took me to many places, wherever he went. I admired the Indian *santur* player, Omprakash Chaurasia, whom I met and played with. I was also influenced by the vocalist Omkarnath Thakur, and the tabla player, Anokhi Lal, after hearing and meeting them. But, to this day, I have never heard anyone play like Guruji did, even in India. His special feat was to play five harmoniums at once. We students used to pump the harmoniums while he had a hand and elbow on each of four harmoniums. The fifth, in the middle, he played with his nose! Have you ever heard of such a thing? Five harmoniums? He demonstrated this feat only once, at Singh Sharnsher’s palace at Thapathali, where the Rastra Bank is now.

Once, in Jhansí, a friend of Guruji’s let us stay with him for one week before asking him to play. Our host would play a piece and then Guruji would reply. But when it was Guruji’s turn, he played a string of off-beat pieces. Pieces with rhythms of 27 beats or 81 beats. It was very difficult, so our host had to stop playing! We travelled to most of the major cities of India. Indians would greet foreign musicians with disregard at first. They would scrutinise the playing for mistakes. The smallest error would lose you any standing. If you made none, and showed that you had something they didn’t have, then they would come, touch your feet and beg to become your students.

But my most memorable concert was in Russia, in Tashkent. A group of us was sent there by the Nepali government. I was the only one versed in shastriya sangeet among them. None of the group knew that I had taken my jaltarang in my baggage. One day, while I was practising jaltarang alone in my room, the manager heard me and came up. He saw me surrounded by bowls which, at first, looked just like soup bowls to him. He liked my playing and asked whether I would give a public performance. I agreed and he managed to get me on TV! In that performance I played jaltarang and Nepali *sarangi*. I think that was my happiest moment. After that TV appearance I was invited to play in many other places. I went to fourteen different states playing my jaltarang. Unfortunately there was no tabla accompanying.

**Revive the Classics**

We should champion the cause of reviving shastriya sangeet in its many different forms. People are different and have different tastes, so they should be exposed to different forms. To like shastriya sangeet you have to understand it, so there should be education also. Students have to be taught well, and in detail. Then each student must teach others. TV and radio people should know about music and try to find good music to broadcast. They should follow the musicians. But, in Nepal, it is not like that. Musicians follow the broadcasters!

Campuses are good but cannot teach to the full extent, unless you have some kind of system like *guru* and *shishya*. Campus students will know about music but they won’t be able to make it. In the campus, students cannot practice enough. In order to practice properly you have to be with the teacher. Many students from the campus come to me to learn because they say they do not get enough time from the campus teachers.

I would really like to teach my children music. I have my books and my instruments here. If I could teach one of my children, I hope they could look after them. I have taught my daughter, Lochana, a little. She likes to sing, and that is good.

This article is from a free translation of K.N. Shrestha’s interview by Mohan Gopal Nyachhyon.
FEAR IDENTIFIES SOUTH ASIANS much more than does their use of masala in food, their common culture or shared history. So writes Amitav Ghosh in his 1989 Sahitya Akademi Award winning novel, The Shadow Lines, where he describes a schoolchild’s reaction to a race riot in Calcutta.

Tublu began to cry. One by one the rest of us gathered around him. At any other time we would have laughed, but now, we listened to him in silence, appalled. He was really crying; we could tell, not for attention, nor because he was hurt. There was an ocean of desolation in his sobs. He cried like that all the way home, for all of us.

It would not be enough to say that we were afraid: we were stupefied with fear. That particular fear has a texture you can neither forget nor describe. It is like the fear of the victims of an earthquake, of people who have lost faith in the stillness of the earth. And yet, it is not the same. It is without analogy, for it is not comparable to the fear of nature, which is the most universal of human fears, nor to the fear of the violence of the state, which is the commonest of modern fears. It is a fear that comes of the knowledge that normalcy is utterly contingent, that the spaces that surround one, the streets that one inhabits, can become, suddenly and without warning, as hostile as a desert in a flash flood. It is this that sets apart the thousand million people who inhabit the subcontinent from the rest of the world — not language, not food, not music — it is the special quality of loneliness that grows out of the fear of the war between oneself and one’s image in the mirror.

“Sustainability” means maintaining the ideological fictions of industrial society, sparing it harmful contact with ecological reality. It also means sustaining the privileges of the rich and powerful. “Survival” suggest not safeguarding the rights of threatened peoples in forests and jungles but the already-rich getting enough money to keep pace with the monetising of more and more areas of human activity. “Defence” is the piling up of weapons of destruction, the manufacture of which actually undermines the most effective defence we have — the body’s immune system, impaired by radioactivity and invisible contaminants. When we hear of our “complex society”, we should not be too intimidated: opacity is not the same thing as complexity. What is meant here is the social fog generated by a division of labour so extreme that we scarcely recognise our own function in it, let alone that of our neighbour. “Efficiency” means the ever more effective meltdown of natural resources into commodities. “Development” means reducing the breath-taking variety of forms of natural wealth in the world into money. “Quality of life” is a genteel semaphore for the maintenance of privilege. “Community” is a neighbourhood of strangers, while “individualism” means the isolated pursuit of the collective illusion of mass markets.

HOUSE BINDING JAP is set out by Gregory C. Maskarinec in an article, “The World As Sound: An Introduction to Jhakri Mantars” in the Himalayan Research Bulletin (Vol X, No 1), in which he discusses the secret formulas (mantars or japs) used by the Kanishmans of West Nepal. Following the jap are Maskarinec’s remarks on how the japs are delivered.

Killing Jama Raj, killing Jama Rani,
killing those who died at the right time,
killing those who died at the wrong time,
killing those hung on a pole,
killing those hung in a noose,
killing those swept off in streams,
killing those fallen from cliffs,
striking the eastern direction,
killing Bhansam Ghost of the Eighty mannd iron rod,
striking the southern direction
killing Kamsa Sur,
striking the western direction,
killing Maiya Sur Demon,
striking the northern direction,
You simply ask to see old things, and in Pokhara, Nepal, a young Tibetan mother produces an old lama bone horn and ivory dorje. In Thimphu, Bhutan, out comes the gold-threaded ceremonial robe of the 15th Karmapa. In Gangtok, Sikkim, a merchant unfurls an ancient sutra entirely printed in gold leaf and silver, now complete with worms eating the handmade parchment. In Darjeeling, India, an entire bone Vajrakailaya outfit suddenly appears, along with an ancient tantric thangka and a large phurba made of crystal, gold, silver, lapis and other jewels.

The agony of Tibetans has apparently mounted to the point where they are selling their soul to survive. Some of the goods were traded by people still inside for necessities trundled over the mountains by interdicted exiles, Sikkimese, Bhutanese and Nepalis. Others come with those who still manage to escape. The extraordinary sutra, I was told, was offered for sale by a lama. He was asking for $10,000.

The law of supply and demand seems firmly in place. During the single week most of the above goods were offered to me—a week that presaged the beginning of the tourist season, I was prevented from visiting two of the region's most important Tibetan Buddhist collections because, in each case, a major theft had taken place the night before.

Officials at the wonderful National Museum in Paro, Bhutan, suspected their own police, while three days later those at the most important Institute of Tibetology in Gangtok, Sikkim, had no idea who had robbed three ground-floor display cases of sacred statues. None of these treasures were by Western standards well guarded. Not to steal is a major Buddhist precept; not taking what is not offered is a basic tenet of daily life.

The Nepalization of these still tender Buddhist areas seems the inevitable cost of letting us outsiders in. We come, we see, we want. Ironically, the day I came down from these mountains to the monotonous flatlands of Bengal, the Dalai Lama was in Calcutta proclaiming to the press and anyone else who would listen that he was no longer interested in the politics of the Chinese in Tibet, but concerned, desperately, with preserving from extinction the cultural heritage and spiritual sanctity of the Tibetan people.

Certainly, this was news. But just as certainly, the news from my own two weeks' experience is that his problems with the continuing Chinese cultural revolution are going to be dwarfed by the revolution of goods and money in the mercilessly greedy marketplace—unless those who want to save Tibet start by spreading and practising its Buddhist gospel of not wanting.
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The Kathmandu Valley seems to be no less fertile for music than for rice. From the musical performances witnessed by the 7th-Century envoys of the Chinese Tang empire to the ubiquitous radio and film songs of today, the Valley has vibrated with music. Indeed, it may be as the poet Chitthadhar “Hriday” claimed, the raagas arrived in the Valley as soon as they had been created by Mahadev.

Certainly, Inayat Hussein Khan and Haider Khan, the famous khyal singers of the Rampur gharana, imported by the Ranas were not the first to sing raagas in Nepal. The earlier Malla kings are believed to have been keen supporters of the fine arts and were sometimes poets and playwrights themselves. Songs sung to various raagas and talas were an important part of dramas that were staged in Malla times. The musical ensemble used for these dramas employed a number of instruments — khi, komcakhi, and dhimay drums, bay flutes and, probably, pvangha trumpets — now recognized as part of the rich musical heritage of the Newars. This heritage also includes numerous songs of various kinds: devotional, narrative, seasonal, love songs, as well as the percussion ensembles that no one can avoid hearing during festivals and the devotional ensembles which need a little more effort to find.

The quality of the Valley’s soil is far from unrelated to its musical artistry. Musical artists can not live from music alone; they need food, clothes and a place to live, and these have to be provided for them in some way. A culture close to bare subsistence cannot spare the large number of working hours needed to support a large-scale communal involvement in music such as that of the Newar culture. Neither can it support musical specialists, such as the classical music uestaads or the modern radio composers. Music needs a surplus of wealth to live from. In various ways, including agriculture, trade and taxes, the inhabitants of the Valley generated such a surplus, part of which was allocated to musical activities.

The guthi system of land endowments has been one method of supporting music. The farmer working the land paid part of his produce to the guthi, which could then be spent on, among other things, employing musicians for its community events. The Ranas could maintain their uestaads by means of their very comprehensive taxation system, implying that villagers in remote areas of Nepal paid for the fine arts of the Kathmandu darbars.

Cultural erosion, the dying traditional arts and the adulteration of music by outside influences are often regarded as the inevitable maladies of a modern Nepal.

But is change always negative or is music merely evolving?

by Ingemar Grandin
Music as Message

A good tune echoes in the mind. That is why, perhaps, governments the world over try to reinforce their ideologies by finding the “right” words for the tune.

One day in August last year, tourists sipping Coca Cola and eating curd at Bhaktapur’s Nyatapola Cafe found a new target for their telephoto lenses. At the base of the famous Nyatapola temple, singers and dancers were taking part in a cultural programme. But this was not just another performance of the Peacock Dance. The tourists were incidental spectators of a show targeted at the Bhaktapur citizen. The songs were about poverty, inequality and development and the show — which was performed in several other places — was presented by Naastriya Janasanskritik Manch Nepal (National People’s Cultural Forum Nepal) which is the cultural wing of the UML, the main opposition party in Nepal.

Music with political messages has long been a tradition in Nepal. The various leftist parties have cultural units of their own, which began operating during Panchayat times. Many composers, song writers, singers and musicians have supported one or the other ideology by putting their artistic capabilities to political use. Among renowned musical artists of this brand, we find Dharma Raj Thapa, whose early songs were said to be overtly political; the late comrade Gokul Joshi who travelled widely in Nepal’s villages; the group Raflmu and the many groups subsequently set up by its founding members — Bedoma Parivar, Sankaal Parivar, Asha Parivar, Indra Sanskritik Samaj.

Like the banners carried at political processions, some political songs are simple and propagandistic, and are sung to simple melodies that are easy to remember. Apparently, such songs were produced on the direct request of party leaders, who probably thought music an effective tool for propaganda. Other artists preferred to elaborate their songs. Though they carry a political message, some couched it in metaphor. Allusions to a high-altitude landscape, tormented by landslides etc., for example, presented no problem for those used to reading between the lines.

These political, or progressive, songs were, of course, not broadcast by Radio Nepal during Panchayat times, nor have they been taken up after the 1990 movement. Nepal TV, on the other hand, seems bent on more independent programming and has featured progressive songs in its musical programmes. Radio Nepal has now relegated many patriotic songs, and even some folk songs, to its store rooms; they are not broadcast anymore as they were too explicit in praise of the Panchayat system.

Musical political propaganda certainly did not begin in the Panchayat times, however. For instance, the songs of the Gaine ministers could be overtly political, commenting upon political events in a way that makes one suspect that the words had been provided by some political actors rather than by the ministers themselves.

But the political use of music goes beyond propagandistic songs. The love songs making up the bulk of Radio Nepal broadcasts during Panchayat times were hardly political, but probably that was exactly the point. Artists with political inclinations either had to keep them out of their songs, or sing them outside the government-supported institutions. This was a hard decision, for most of the musical opportunities in Panchayat Nepal were tied to such institutions.

The rich and diverse musical lives of the Malla kingdoms was one way of making clear to their subjects what glorious society they were living in. In these kingdoms — extrapolating from today’s organisation of Newar musical activities — musical tasks were distributed according to caste and locality, and festivals showed that, despite all the differentiation, society was still an integrated whole. This was one way of telling the subjects how to interpret their society, and to show them their own particular place in it. Similarly, the Ranas import of famous classical musicians from India was a way of demonstrating in both their subjects and visitors from abroad that they were indeed maharajas, part of the subcontinental brotherhood of illustrious princes, and that national borders merely delineated the boundaries of taxation and not of culture.

The Ranas chose a music well suited to their ends. Classical music is equally pan-Subcontinental and has very little to say about ethnic or national cultural differences. With the downfall of the Ranas, objectives were reversed entirely, and cultural differences came to the fore. Post-Rana Nepal has established and supported a large number of institutions that promote music. The policies governing these institutions such as the National Communication Service Plan of 1971, overtly stressed national unity, prestige and dignity. All together, these institutions, which together may be thought of as national stage for music, have promoted Nepali musical artists and created new musical genres, above all the (modernised) folk song and the modern song, while classical music has become relegated to obscurity.

Ingemar Grandin

Call of the Valley

This surplus wealth of the Valley created an array of resources and opportunities that musical artists drew upon. But the supporters of present-day radio singers include not only the Nepali tax-payers who, through governmental budgets, fund various music-related institutions such as the Royal Nepal Academy, the Sanskritik Sanshan, Radio Nepal and others, but also the Japanese tax-payers who provided development aid for the construction of one of Radio Nepal’s recording studios. Thus, the modern-day darbars and guthis and the musical patrons are the Radio Nepal, the Royal Nepal Academy, Sanskritik Sanshan, cultural groups, schools and colleges and recording studios.

Many musical artists earn additional income from these institutions, and some artists even land full-time jobs in them. In addition, an artist can earn income from his musical abilities by creating jingles for advertisements (common on Radio Nepal), performing ghazals at restaurants, giving classical music recitals at hotels, appearing on stage, giving private tuition, or walking down the streets in Thamel selling saranj fiddles to tourists. For a prospective musical artist, then, it makes economic sense to set up shop in Kathmandu.

But musical opportunities do not end with earning money. Kathmandu is where artists can earn their reputation, get their
Music in more concrete form may have also been imported from the south. The Newar scholar Thakurlal Manandhar has, for example, suggested that the dapha was borrowed from Mithila in the north Indian kingdom of Tirhut, with which the early Mallas had regular contact. The Nepal-India musical connections came to a temporary end in the early Shah period with Prithvi Narayan’s decree that no Indian musician be encouraged in his country, under the Ranas, prominent Indian classical musicians were again invited to the palaces.

The more recent modern song broadcast by Radio Nepal during the past few decades have obvious Indian connections. There are songs based on raagas but, more importantly, the whole genre draws upon its Indian counterparts — film songs, light-classical ghazals, and the like. Though there has been a steady influx of musical ideas from India over the centuries, these have mostly become “Nepalised” when utilised by the musical artists of the Kathmandu Valley. In the case of modern songs, the Indian influences have been combined with musical ideas from Nepal’s own regional folk traditions to produce a genre distinct from its Indian counterpart. Although the boundaries are by no means precise, the voices, manner of singing, orchestration, the melodies, the way different instruments are played and, of course, the fact that the singers, composers and songwriters are Nepalis (disregarding the most obvious sign, the language of the lyrics) all contribute to our recognition of Nepali music. Indeed, this distinctness is part of the modern songs’ ideological reason for being. It is almost as if the whole genre is there to say: “this is not India, this is Nepal!”

Musical Independence

In contrast to this classical music resisted “Nepalisation”. This may account for the somewhat ambiguous treatment of classical music in post-Rana Nepal. At Radio Nepal in the mid-1980s, classical musicians had better status, commanded higher pay and had fewer working hours than their colleagues in the folk song department, but still, the actual broadcast time was restricted to 1 hour 45 minutes per week for classical music — as compared to a total of almost 26 hours per week for Nepali folk and modern songs. Too much classical music on Radio Nepal and the message may be interpreted: “this is (part of) India”.

Undoubtedly, classical music has high status and is seen as serious music and a source of musical knowledge and competence. But, outside a small circle of performers and connoisseurs, it is not taken seriously as a genre. Composers, singers and instrumentalists learn from ustads and turn to the raagas and talas as bases for musical composition, to develop their practical artistic capabilities and for a better knowledge of music. In this way, classical music takes on a significance that goes far beyond the admittedly restricted popularity of elaborate saare music. And, after all, this is expected given that shastriya saare, though it is translated here as classical music, actually means “music based on knowledge”.

The musical artistry of the Kathmandu Valley is not confined to palaces, big stage events or recording studios. In patas, attempts, in the streets and on local stages not only in Kathmandu, but also in the smaller towns throughout the Valley, local musical artists go on with their art. For instance, in Kirtipur, with its 10,000 inhabitants, there were in the mid-1980s, 10 dapha groups, six groups singing bhajan hymns to the accompaniment of harmonium and tabla, seven dhimayabha percussion ensembles, and three wedding orchestras of the modern brass band variety. In one of Kirtipur’s neighbourhoods, more than half the men had learned to perform in one or other of these musical traditions. This is a sign of the pervasiveness of Newar communal music-making which has ensured that no part of the Valley would be without its own local musicians. In addition, the town has seen a more recent upsurge in a more specialised...
musical activity. Musicians who have gained their musical competence in traditional Newari genres have given new life to the stage programmes of their own, where modern songs composed by themselves or borrowed from more renowned Kathmandu colleagues and traditional Newari songs (which have been given new texts) are presented along with dances and short dramas. Along with this, new local patrons of music — such as libraries and cultural organisations funded by local householders — have contributed to providing new resources and opportunities for musical artistes.

However, as musical artistes and maybe especially the most dedicated ones, devote more and more of their time to these stage programmes, the signs are clear that the communal involvement in music has lessened. Musical groups have closed down, people have given up performing and many young men never turn up when it is time to learn the traditional genres. As people shift from agriculture to modern occupations, it becomes increasingly difficult to take part in, for instance, regular morning singing in a dapha group. And the young man who spends his morning hours in a college may find it impossible to take part in the tuition session organised by a traditional ensemble.

Progress versus Regress
Will the Kathmandu Valley continue to be a centre for musical art and creativity? The two common ways of interpreting historical processes, the optimistic and the pessimistic, predict radically different futures. The optimist sees history as progress in which society moves from a bad past to a decent present, towards a golden future. In contrast, the pessimist sees history as a regression from a golden past to a deplorable present, where we move towards a future in which things will be still worse. The optimistic view is often encountered among people working in development while the pessimists are found among, for instance, environmentalists (who see the number of species ever declining and pollution ever increasing) or those who worry about problems with young people (“the youth of today is worse than ever before, more prone to violence, drinking, and loose sexual morals”).

The optimist would say that the rough and rustic traditional music of the Kathmandu Valley, as well as the over-complicated classical music, is increasingly giving place to carefully worked-out modern forms of music that combine the best of East and West and correspond to the needs of time. Primitive instruments such as the sarangi, the medai or the bansuri will be replaced by better ones, Western ones, or even sophisticated synthesiser keyboards and drum machines. The pessimist, of course, disagrees. According to them, the valuable traditions of the past are dying out and, in the future, the music of the Kathmandu Valley will just be local versions of Michael Jackson and Madonna. But is there, perhaps, a better way of looking at change?

It was the great German musicologist, Curt Sachs, who said that musical development is never really a development in terms of aesthetic value — it is just change. And, to put the argument in terms of European classical music, no sensible person could possibly argue that the music of Beethoven is better than that of Bach (as the optimist would have it), nor that Beethoven should be better than Bartok (as the pessimist might mistakenly think). Sachs’ view captures the truth about musical development better than either the pessimist or the optimist. The optimists are often found among people attracted by novelty for its own sake, and among those who instinctively feel that change is always development for the better. Pessimists, on the other hand, seem to base their views on objective facts: this or that tradition is vanishing, the level of artistic quality in a particular tradition has clearly deteriorated. The pessimist, though, convinces by comparing past and present on unequal terms.

To his contemporaries, for example, Bach was just one of many composers. To us, he is one of the greatest of all times while his contemporary colleagues, perhaps seen by his time as greater than he, are long forgotten. Along the way, from then to now, the river of time has cleared away all the mud to reveal the pearls. The music of the present, however, is a confusing and ambiguous mixture of mud and mud-covered pearls. No sifting has yet been done.

Muddy Present?
Comparing the shining pearls of the past with the muddy present, one may have the impression that we are sliding downwards towards a gloomy future. The sum total of music produced today appears not quite inspiring and this is as true for the music of the Kathmandu Valley. The artistic music produced by contemporary artists easily disappear in the massive output of new music.

The media are often seen as chief culprits behind the vulgar commercialism and cheap popularity which, according to the pessimistic view, is the most salient feature of the music of today. (This way of describing things, of course, is by no means confined to the

Kathmandu Valley but has been heard everywhere.) But it is precisely this national stage, created by the media, that has enabled artistic music, such as songs by Amber Gurung and sung by Aruna Lama “Sabihe bhanthe layal philosophy”, Ramesh and Manjula’s “Mero sano Muralima” etc. (not to mention the many other fine songs by other musical artistes). Through their musical work, radio recordings, discs, cassettes and stage shows
scene, talented musical artists in Kirtipur and other small towns compose their own songs. While there may seem to be a risk of musical impoverishment considering that the Newari traditional music of the Valley is not maintained, the Valley's musical arts have simultaneously become enriched by what the national stage has brought about. This enrichment does not end with the modern songs.

As a musical switchboard, the Kathmandu Valley has access to various local folk traditions. Consider a folk song such as "Simle mathi ban". We do not need to go all the way to the villages ourselves to hear such songs. People go there for us to collect the songs, or people come from the villages to Kathmandu to sing for us. Once here, these songs may take on a new life in Kathmandu circles, outside their place of origin: they are circulated among Kathmandu musical artists, performed on stage as well as in gatherings of friends, maybe also brought out on a cassette. In the process, Simle mathi ban which has its origins in the Pokhara region and is a part of the local musical heritage, becomes a part of the musical heritage of the Kathmandu Valley.

It is indeed true that many traditional forms of music in the Kathmandu Valley show signs of vanishing. The Valley may continue to nurture musical artistry and creativity without the Newari musical traditions, but, just as the loss of any species represents an irreplaceable loss to the world's genetic pool, the loss of a musical tradition is a loss to the world's cultural pool. But it may be too early for despair for it is a tradition's stock of musical ideas, its distinctive contribution to the musical pool, rather than the way it is maintained that matters. Music will just as surely die if preserved in a museum.

While traditional Newari music such as dapha and dhamay are no longer performed in each neighbourhood, this music may live on, entertained by dedicated musicians who keep the traditions alive. This has many parallels in other parts of the world. In Sweden, the folk traditions that a few decades ago seemed bound for extinction have been revitalised by enthusiastic young musicians who have made folk music not only more dynamic and creative of all Swedish musical scenes today. Very actively, they seek out melodies and tradition-bearers, but they also contribute to the repertoire with new compositions, try new instruments, new ways of crafting, and so on. This revitalisation inevitably brings about change.

There are signs that something similar is happening in the Kathmandu Valley. Several musical artists work dedicatedly with their own traditions, publishing collections of drum compositions, working with performances in hotels, or travelling over the Valley to enrich their repertoire of Newari songs, to be used in their own performances. Also here, artists may continue the tradition by composing new songs. Among these artists, Ram Krishna Dwal has written a large number of new songs in which the music is based on traditional Newari melodies and retain a distinctly Newari musical flavour, and whose lyrics draw upon Newar culture. And the repertoires of traditional Newari genres have a life outside the traditional ensembles. You can hear the melodies of Newari folk and seasonal songs from the stage in the setting of a modern, mixed cultural program or, of course, when there is a classical music recital.

In one classical music sammelan in Kirtipur, the sarod master, Mohan Sundar Shrestha, concluded his raaga recital with an enthusiastic rendering of one of the Newari bosanta melodies, and where Krishna Narayan Shrestha played a version of the Newari folk-song "Rajamati". Incidentally, the sitarist Tarabir Singh Tuladhar has given a 10-minute interpretation of "Rajamati" on an L.P disc brought out by a Western label.

 Alive and Kicking

To give a hopeful interpretation, it may be that the Newari traditions are not so much on the way to extinction as changing in the way they are maintained. The tradition of musical artistry in the Kathmandu Valley has been around for a long time and, as yet, it seems alive and well. Throughout the distinct phases of musical development, musical artists have drawn upon the opportunities open to them and worked creatively and artistically upon the musical ideas provided to them by tradition and borrowing. After all, the most important thing about Beethoven is not whether he composed better music than Bach or Bartok, but that he was given the opportunity to be a composer, rather than to be, say, a chartered accountant.

The conditions that made Beethoven possible are the same that have created the musical artistry of the Kathmandu Valley: scope for musical artists, musical traditions to build upon, an influx of new musical ideas, a gathering of musical personalities, and that part of the surplus of wealth is allocated to intensive music-making. The future of the Kathmandu Valley as a centre for musical creativity depends upon the maintenance of these conditions.

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and sings Newari as well as traditional Nepali Songs

both artists, neither of whom is a Kathmanduite by birth, were attracted by the musical opportunities the city could provide for them and have themselves joined this national stage for music. The musical creativity promoted by the national stage affects also the local musical artists of the Kathmandu Valley. Inspired by their Kathmandu counterparts, and drawing upon the musical ideas current in the national
The Sound of One Mind Working

Tibetan ritual music is not a pastiche of gentle good feeling about the Universe. It is an alarm to the system, waking us up to the vibrancy of the world we are placed in and the prevalence of sound as a means to form our home.

by David Rothenberg

Whatever one’s relation to Buddhism, whether from within or without, the religion appears at once to be admirable. There have been few wars fought in its name; indeed, its teachings seem to aim for a kind of composed peace in the Universe. Though, at times, apparently indifferent to the upheavals of our present world, its visions lie beyond politics. Its aesthetic of calm can prevail behind all that seems to be changing far too often, far too fast.

All this composure can be shattered on first hearing the ritual music of the Tibetan monastic traditions. In the Himalaya, it can still be heard in the gompas hidden away in the mountains. Approach the heavy wooden monastery door, tiptoe so as not to disturb the silence, gently push open the portal and pass through a heavy, muffling cloth. Inside, lit by torches burning on either side of a podium, sits the leader of an assembly, deeply engrossed in a religious text. Hear the faint, low rumbling from two rows of monks on either side suddenly surge to an uproar as they pick up their instruments. Huge, thirty-foot metal horns anchor the sound with a groan as if from the bowels of the Earth, cymbals clang from a crash to a wash, like a wave receding from the shore and preparing to strike, small trumpets made of human bone scream shrilly and large drums beat in rhythmic acceleration, from boom, to bum bum bm bm bbb boom, each instrument with its own rhythm, falling like the leaves of trees that are then blown up into the air as if by sudden gusts of wind, a cacophony of crispness defining the spirit of autumn, the harbinger of winter and the time when snow will drape the valley in a hallowed stillness. At first it is noise, but a din that still understands the rise and the fall, far from the whirring of machines or the honking of traffic. Rather, it is something welling up from the slopes of the mountain, carried down into the winds of the world. The swirls and voices of the spiritual jam session go on long into the night, allowing the sound to overwhelm the players as the candles wear down into darkness.

Crazy Wisdom

Once you too have heard that sound, you will know that it never leaves you, even when all other sounds are shut out. It is the sound of the body working, sensing the world. The sound of the mountain. The path of pure music, before the song, before the chord, before the beginning, middle or end.

The thing is, it’s crazy. It’s a roaring din. Western students of Buddhism are sometimes embarrassed by the racket. This is because it does not immediately reflect the peace they seek. Tibetan Buddhism suddenly seems to be not as contained as outsiders would like. It embraces a kind of crazy wisdom, rich with pungent colour and swirling detail, mandalas of demons and terrors, all to take the individual through violent journeys of self-discovery. Yet that very roughness is all to be found inside us, projecting around us the dynamics of a purely inner struggle. Look what happens when you die; you will have to travel through madness. This is what the Tibetan Book of the Dead advises:

Be not afraid of the brilliant radiances of the five colours, know the wisdom to be your own. The natural sound of the truth will reverberate like a thousand thunders. The sound will come with a rolling echo. Fear not. Flee not. Be not terrified. Know these sounds to be the manifestations of your own inner light.

It is said that the sounds produced by Tibetan chants and instruments are the exaggerated counterparts of the sounds your own body would produce if all external sounds were shut out. “This sound”, Sonam Chojor Geshe, a lama, told me, “will come to you when it is time. Do not waste time looking for it.” Others are less optimistic. The late Gyalwa Karmapa maintained that “only incarnate lamas hear these sounds. They hear them all the time, and see the deities from which they emanate.” Saky Tichen, who has written a book on Tibetan music, was even more restrictive: “Music has nothing to do with man at all. It is for the Gods alone.”

So, which is it to be? Will we ever understand the meaning of such distant and foreign sounds, or will we only hear them as shadows of their total purpose? Music remains beyond words and thus might just be better able to express the states of mind that meditation is meant to produce. Hear the repeating, fading sounds of the cymbals, perishable but never constant. It is perceived but may not be kept. Listen to the deep reverberation of the chant of ancient sutras. Each individual voice produces a chord, a deep bass far beneath the normal human voice, rich with overtones to produce an astounding presence. The text is not so much presented as evoked and camouflaged, penetrating far beyond the words themselves.

A Musical Window

Eleven years ago, I went to Nepal to attempt to learn part of this booming, crashing tradition from within. I studied an instrument called the Gyaling, a hand-held conical horn similar to the Indian shehnai, with seven finger holes and played with a double reed. In the midst of all the gigantic, droning horns and crashing cacophony, this oboe-like instrument plays precise, flowing melodies that seem to both begin and end in the middle. There is some improvisation, but only to the extent of deciding when to change to the next prescribed pattern. Each piece,
said my teachers, could last a few minutes or a few hundred years, depending on how far I wished to get into it.

Yet they laughed at my interest in the first place. "Why," said Lama Sangye Tenzing, of Serlo Gonpa above the village of Junbesi in Solu-Khumbu, "would you come all the way to this country to learn this, another instant spiritual kick. Western composers have not been much more sympathetic; they tend either to appropriate the effect, to try to aim for a deep bass presence of their own or, worse still, to increase their own reputations by mere affiliation. There is, for example, a CD recording of chanting monks with a piece by the American avant-garde composer Philip Glass appended at the end that has nothing at all to do with the Tibetan music.

Last year, a benefit concert for Tibet House was held in New York City. The performers: poet Alan Ginsberg, avant-pop star Laurie Anderson, Philip Glass, and a Tibetan New-Age flautist whose name, I must admit, I forget. It was an all-star cast, assembled to draw crowds and cash. Numerous film stars and other celebrities populated the audience. The performers had never played together, and they did not share enough common ground to impose successfully, as jazz musicians might well have done in the same situation.

Musically, it was a grave embarrassment, though it is always hard to fault something done for a good cause. Even the sole Tibetan participant seemed curiously unauthentic. His music was aimlessly peaceful in a New-Age sort of way, rather than penetrating the depths like the tradition he was supposed to represent. The audience, then, got what they wanted to hear and felt what they wanted to feel. That they had seen some famous people and supported an issue without being challenged by a cultural tradition that is meant to shock us into the exactness of our being. Tibetan music, as a part of the Tibetan world, is not a pastiche of gentle good feeling about the Universe. It is an alarm to the system, waking us up to the vibrancy of the world we are placed in and the prevalence of sound as a means to form our home.

Way of Pure Sound

You have to look way back before Buddhism to find an eloquence that describes what is meant to be heard. In the Nine Ways of Bon, the early religion of Tibet, we find among them the Way of Pure Sound—not music, not noise, but a way of listening to the inside and outside as one.

Water rises from water. There is no way to avoid it.

Wood sprouts from wood. It never really dies.

Add wood to fire and where does that get you?

You only avoid if you keep to yourself.

The way of Pure Sound is the way of change.

Without avoiding; it seeks to accept.

Taking all into friendship, everything is its friend.

With all as your friend, nothing stands alone.

Sky and space, method and wisdom; losing duality, reaching perfection -

Perform a realm of perfect enjoyment.

Music is always said to reach beyond language, so that we may appreciate what we do not understand. Some say that it is the best way to assess distant cultures. But music demands attention. It should be serious, not the background soundtrack to the emotional surge of our lives. Beyond the precision of words, it reveals the precise tones of the soul in the world. Tibetan Buddhist music sets this up religiously as its purpose. No wonder it is hard to listen to, but to live within its world is worth it.

David Rothenberg is a writer and musician. His adaptations of Tibetan music are available on his recording nobody could explain it. He is a professor in the humanities department of the New Jersey Institute of Technology.
A Conspiracy Against Music

A proponent and scholar of traditional music takes pride in Nepal's rich traditions and laments its decline.

by Ramsharan Darnal (as told to Kedar Sharma)

I. Ramsharan Darnal, an member of the Damai caste, whose tradition and identity is in music. The caste system itself has a long history in our country, and is a legacy of a division of labour that was carried out during the Vedic age. This categorisation in time came to be linked with custom and law, and the system was refined with the introduction of customs and laws. Notions such as pure/impure, upper/lower and touchable/untouchable took hold of Nepali society. According to tradition, therefore, I am untouchable.

In this nation of “four varnas and thirty-six jatis” there are many communities whose identity is in music. Kulu, Sarki, Chanaro, Damai, Hulke, Kusule and Kasai are all groups which play various musical instruments, while Kами make them. The Gaine and Badi are proficient at both...they make and play instruments.

With so many communities traditionally engaged in music-making, one can surmise that this was once a profession respected and patronised. But the fact that all communities engaged in music were relegated to “low caste” status says, to me at least, that at some stage in Nepali history there was a conspiracy against music. The slow demise of Nepali music seems to have begun at the beginning of the 14th century, when King Jayastithi Malla of Kathmandu regularised the caste system. Even though there were so many Nepali castes and groups involved in music, the profession slowly lost its ability to provide for economic survival. Each group, therefore, had to adopt a line of work, which is how Damais began to sew cloth as a profession. Today, Damais all over the country are known first as tailors, and they play music almost as a side specialisation. Having a background so steeped in musical tradition, many Damais could have helped in the development of indigenous Nepali music, but the imperatives of livelihood have kept them tied to their sewing machines.

Band Baja

Us artist castes were relegated to the bottom in economic rung, but the society was never able to forget its musical past. Thus, auspicious occasions have always demanded the pancha baja or the naumati baja. Even the most conservative “upper castes” cannot do without the Damais or Kusules. Howsoever much the politics of the day tried to wish them away, the musical castes were never really abandoned by the society itself.

My ancestors came from Pokhara village in the Gorkha principality of the great King Prithivinrjaya Shah. My great-grandfather Santabin arrived in Kathmandu around 1806, as the nagarchi (band leader) in the Bayu Guthi, the religious trust which was established after King Ranabahadur Shah's assassination to provide solace to his soul.

Of Santabin’s four sons, two joined the army as musicians. One of them was my grandfather, whose son (my father) Satyakumar also served in the army as a musician. When he retired, Satyakumar ordered a set of bachhe baja, western band instruments from a firm in Paris known as Cousinon & Co.

That was the time of Maharaj Juddha Shamsheer, and communers were not allowed to play band music. As a result, the expensive instruments had to be put in storage. My father went to Sri Teen Juddha and made the plea: “Either the Government should buy my instruments, or allow the public to hear them.” The Maharaj considered the matter and allowed Satyakumar to play the band baja before the merchant class, but only during marriages and other such ceremonies. I feel that this decision had significance for both Nepali music and Nepali politics.

Luckily, my own family has had better luck than most others in the musical castes. Since the time of my great-grandfather, we have remained immersed in the world of music. My father’s maternal grandfather, Bakhatir Budhasingh, gave the music to Nepal’s national anthem. His sons and grandsons, while in Calcutta, changed their surname from Budhasingh to “Banks”. Bakhatir’s son Pushkali Budhasingh became renowned in the Calcutta music world as a hotel bandmaster, performing under the name George Banks. The famous contemporary jazz musician Louis Banks is his son, whose Nepali name is Dambar Bahadur Budhasingh. By relation, he is my father’s uncle’s grandson, which makes him my bhai.

Not unnaturally, I have been interested in music since childhood. After a few years at Kathmandu’s Durbar High School, I was enrolled in St. Roberts in Darjeeling. But while still at school, I was called over to Calcutta to work with Uncle Pushkali, under whom I learnt to play and perform with the guitar, mandolin and trumpet.

It was in 1957, I came to Kathmandu and began to study traditional Nepali music and instruments. I also became engaged in the recording of songs to which the lyrics were by M.B.B. Shah (late King Mahendra). In 1959, the first anniversary of the Royal Nepal Academy was celebrated with much fanfare, for three days, within the Royal Palace itself. That was when I joined the Academy.

A Country’s Wealth

The Academy allowed me to devote myself to my discipline. I researched music, wrote six books (and have six more yet to be published) and wrote hundreds of articles in the papers. From what I have gathered during my studies, I have come to the conclusion that Nepal has been second to none in its musical traditions. If one looks at the instrumentation, we have in Nepal instruments to represent all the main groups: chordophones such as the sarangi, pibacha, and tponible; aerophones such as bansuri, senhan and mulali; percussion instruments such as jhala, bhusa, mujura, ghanta and murchunga; and membranophones such as chyabrug, madal, dhimay, dhyangro. Even though Nepalis might not be advanced in the use of modern instruments like the xylophone and electronic keyboard, we do have music-makers as ancient as the binayo, which is made from bamboo.

The High Himalayan communities, influenced by Tibetan culture, have their own
variety of musical instruments for social and religious occasions. These include the *ngaha* (a drum that is hung), *Kangling* (sennai), *lalwabaja* (6 to 12 foot long trumpet), *bukyal* (cymbal), *chyot* (drum), *damphu*, *tunga*, *dongchen*, and so on. The Kangling is a wind instrument made from the human thigh bone, and *damanus* can be made from the human skull.

The instrument known in Newari as the kwata is one instrument that is today indigenous to Nepal. The kwata is referred to in Indian dance literature as the Tripuskar — it is a madal with three faces. While in the Ellora caves of Maharashtra, there is a statue seen playing three madals together, the kwata is found not even there. In Kathmandu Valley, Shakya monks rever the kwata, and bring it out only during the Gaijatra and Janai Purnima festivals to call the protective deities. When Lord Buddha was born, according to the holy book *Lalit Bistar*, this was one of the instruments in the orchestra which played from heaven.

A country so rich in instruments will be rich in music as well. We have *raagas* and tunes for every temple, every deity, every occasion, and celebration. During the Rana years, renowned Indian *ustads* such as Taj Khan and Dunde Khan were resident in the palaces of Kathmandu. In 1900, during the reign of Bir Shamsber, a seven-day music festival held in Bagedi in the Tarai achieved musical fame for Nepal. The Bagedi Sammelan, as it came to be known, had established ten modes of music which was much more complex than the ten modes prevalent in the (Bhakti) classical Indian music (sangeet) of the day. Unfortunately, this Nepali innovation was lost in the ensuing years. Had the tradition of Hindu classical music remained strong here, there is no saying what height Nepal would have scaled in the South Asian music world by now.

**Made in Nepal**

Music is a part of culture. Today, like Nepali culture, Nepali music too has succumbed to limitations and exigencies. All our traditions look weak when made to stand up against the razzle dazzle of the "modern". It used to be said that one never changes one's *humi* (the Bahun who does the *homi* and *dumi* (the musician Damai). But today, at a time when the very traditions of humi and dumi are fast disappearing, the question of changing one does not even arise. Even the *panche baja*, the five instruments ensemble which represents the five elements, which is mentioned in the Vedas, is in swift decline. How can we expect our traditional musicians — poor, uneducated and not respected — to cope against today’s electronic instruments and commercialisation?

The lack of a market for good music in contemporary Nepal is such that even the makers of traditional instruments have had to give up their trade. Thus, the descendents of Patan’s Krishnabjabhas, who gained fame during the Rana times manufacturing three sitars, today prefer to work in the more lucrative trade of carpentry. Of the three sitars that Krishnabjabhas made, one is in the Royal Palace, another is with the family of the late Bupapsingh Pradhan, and the third has not yet been traced.

Nepali artists and craftsmen have even developed new instruments, but lacking a market they were stillborn. One such instrument is the Chaturang Baja, which was a combination of three different instruments — the *harmonium*, *tunga* and *swar petika*. It was developed by Patan’s Mohanlal Bahari. Another instrument, developed by Ramchandra Bharati, was the *Manarangi*, which joins the sarangi and the piwacha. This instrument can be found only as part of the Royal Nepal Academy’s orchestra. Another instrument which did not receive just appreciation was the brick xylophone developed by Music Laurate Yagyaraj Sharma Aryal. The same was the fate of the Dhirja Baja, a sort of a congo drum developed by Dhirjal Kulu, Mohanlal Barahi and Ramchandra Bharati continue to work on their trade. They are also master tuners of instruments. But when they depart, there will be no one to take their place.

Babulal Darshandhari, who played thumhali in the Nawabaja orchestra in Patan died a couple of years ago, and now there is no one to play the instrument like he used to. Even though his sons have tried to follow in Babulal’s footsteps, they have not been able to attain their father’s sublime artistry. This might be because they are not into music fulltime.

Actually, the problem with classical music in Nepal is not only a matter of lack of market and patronage. The Kulus, drummakers of Bhaktapur, are in a quandary because they cannot even find the right wood that their instruments demand. They are forced to make dhimey bajas of recycled tin, but then the drums do not have the same resonance of wood. The kulus have now taken to repairing old drums rather than make new ones. Meanwhile, the Shakyas, who excel in making metal instruments, are turning to the more lucrative business of making silver and gold ornaments.

To develop music, we need a national effort, an institutional effort and the effort of families and individuals. Unfortunately, there is little in the form of governmental or institutional involvement, and even the traditions that exist among musician families are today fast eroding. Even what is there is hidden away — for example the musical collection of the Academy is in storage in the NAPA building. There is, finally, an effort to set up a Department of Musicology under Tribhuvan University which is to be located in Bhaktapur. If this succeeds, we will, at least have an institution dedicated to the promotion and study of Nepali music.

But how can I complain about the state of Nepali music when even my own legacy is questionable? Despite my family’s traditions, my own children are not in the musical line. When I see one son an engineer, another an archaeologist, and my college-going son, daughter and daughter-in-law, sometimes I think that perhaps I have done right. But when they complain to me that I have kept them away from music, I feel bad. Perhaps everyone is in a quandary like me. Perhaps the whole nation is in quandary.
Ancient Rhythms and Modern Messages

Ladakh’s Matho monastery stands on a rocky outcrop above the place where the Matho River meets the Indus. It’s winter, and the monastery is packed. People squeeze together in the courtyard and on the flat rooftops, leaning over parapets to catch a glimpse. Suddenly a great roar goes up from the crowd, K’ki so so lha ge lo, “may the Gods be victorious”. Two figures emerge from the main temple, brandishing swords, leopard skins around their waists, running, running. And as they run, drums beat out an insistent rhythm like the pounding of sea surf, rising and falling. Sometimes the figures pause for a moment, screaming a prophecy for the coming year, or slashing arms and tongues with their naked blades. Flecks of blood cover the white scarves, katak, which people have offered them. These are the Gods of Matho, the Rongtsan or “spirits of the gorge”. They were brought here, so the story goes, from Eastern Tibet by the founder of Matho monastery, sworn to protect Matho and Buddhism. They belong to a pre-Buddhist age of Ladakh and Tibetan history when the Gods ruled all; Gods of the gorge, the pass, the village, the hearth.

Dardic Roots
The musicians who drum for the Gods are not monks, but village musicians. And the rhythms are ancient. Mark Trewin, a musicologist from the City University, London, has been studying Ladakhi music since 1985. “The idea that we still find in Ladakh, of playing music to invoke deities and spirits, I think this has much older roots, dating back to an age before the arrival of Buddhism. It was probably regularly used at village level for actually inducing trance, inviting deities to the village.” Trewin believes that the rhythms used in the Matho ceremony to accompany the Gods are similar to rhythms used by the Brogpa, the Dards, probably the original inhabitants of Ladakh, before the arrival of the Tibetans. To beat out this rhythm, Dards still use one of the oldest of drum forms, the barrel drum, a hollowed piece of wood with skin stretched over the ends. The drum is also still used for the New Year ceremony, Losar, in Leh, Ladakh’s capital. It’s also to be found among the Kafirs of northern Pakistan, Nuristan and Afghanistan, believed to be related to the Dards, of pre-Islamic, Iranian heritage.

One of the Matho Gods is sprinting ever faster around the central flag pole in the monastery courtyard. Suddenly the drumming stops. The timing is perfect. He leaps onto the pair of daman, kettle drums, used by the musicians. The rhythms may be Dardic, but these drums date from a later musical phase in Ladakh’s history. They were most likely introduced into Ladakh from Baltistan in the 17th Century when Ladakh was an independent kingdom. According to the Ladakhi chronicles, King Jamyang Namgyal of Ladakh launched a surprise winter attack on Skardu, the Muslim Balti capital of Ali Mir Sherkhan (circa 1595-1616). The attack failed and the King was captured. As part of the peace settlement, Jamyang Namgyal married Ali Mir Sherkhan’s daughter, whose dowry included a troop of Balti musicians. They became the royal musicians of Ladakh, the Karmon. Along with daman, they brought with them a kind of oboe, also to be seen and heard in the Matho courtyard, alongside the drums. In fact, there

by Timothy Malyon
are two kinds of oboe here in the courtyard.
One, the surna, is played by village musicians, the other, the gyaling, now silent while the gods are present, is a purely monastic instrument. Ladakhi monastic music and folk music are separate and have very different origins. The monastic music came largely from Tibet. So, although the folk and monastic oboes look alike, their tuning and tones are very different. The gyaling has a much softer sound, whereas the surna sounds stident, much more appropriate for outdoor playing. Both instruments probably originated from Arabia in the 9th-Century, but reached Ladakh by different routes. The surna came to Ladakh via Ali Mir Sherkhania’s Baltistan, whereas it is generally assumed that the gyaling came from India via Tibet, along with Buddhism.

Blacksmiths and Kettle Drums
The God stands one foot on each kettle drum, screaming out his blessing to the musicians. Then his naked sword falls hard and flat with a resounding thwack onto the drummer’s back. These village musicians are known as Mon, a Tibetan word for people from the southern slopes of the Himalaya, often from Hasmach Pradesh. In many Ladakhi villages, especially those in the Indus valley around Leh, there are one or two Mon families who supply music to the village, for festivals, offerings to local Gods and for visiting dignitaries and parties. They may originally have been wandering musicians who came up from the south, hence their name, and were offered land in return for their musical services. Although Buddhism is not supposed to entertain caste differences and despite the Dalai Lama’s strong condemnation of such discrimination, the Ladakhi Mon are considered, along with the Garas, the blacksmiths, to be lower caste. The Mon still worship a Hindu protective deity, their caste God, Akhen Narayan. In neighbouring Zanskar, according to anthropologist James Crowden, the village blacksmith family is often also the village musician family, underlining the craft origins of the Indian caste system, and the fact that musicians and related craft skills often migrated together - you need a blacksmith to make a kettle drum.

The Indian origins of the Mon have left their musical mark. There’s one characteristic of Ladakhi folk songs which differentiates them from the Tibetan folk tradition and was very likely brought to Ladakh by the Mon. Mark Trewin explains: “If you look at Ladakhi folk song melodies, the way the melody goes up is very much stepwise, from one note to the next, whereas coming down they move in much more elaborate ways, using intertwining patterns. It’s a sort of tumbling on the way down, in Western terms, within fourths, rather than a simple stepwise motion. You don’t find that in Tibetan music”.

There’s another group of Ladakhi musicians who, in caste or class terms, are often considered inferior to the Mon. They are the Bhedas meaning “difference” in Sanskrit. Bheda is also a Garhwal caste word for a family of itinerant musicians and dancers who go from village to village singing and collecting money - exactly what the Bedas do in Ladakh. They almost certainly came to Ladakh later than the Mon, most likely from the Kashmir side, since they are mainly Muslims. Until recently, they were not settled in villages but kept on the move, probably because the Mon had already filled the niche of specialised village musicians. There are still Bheda groups living this itinerant lifestyle in Ladakh. For many, their existence is little better than that of beggars. In recent years, however, especially around Leh, Mon families have sought to escape their lower-caste status by abandoning music as a craft skill. Bheda groups have then moved in to fill the gap and have taken on the role traditionally associated with Mon.

While it is possible to recognise influences that have coalesced to create contemporary Ladakhi music, audibly distinct from the music of its nearest neighbours, the sometimes contradictory intermingling of all these different traditions can create some surprising paradoxes. Mark Trewin came across one example recently.

Every year, Phyang monastery, near Leh, holds a festival at which local Mon as well as monastic musicians play. The lead danam player at this sacred Buddhist festival, who also plays the surna, is in fact a Muslim. Trewin traced this man’s ancestors back through several generations. He was probably a descendant of the troop of musicians who accompanied Jamyang Namgyal’s queen from Baltistan in the 17th Century. These court musicians, Karmon, were given rights to own land in Phyang, and eventually became village Mon after the fall of the Ladakhi monarchy. It’s also not historically uncommon for intermarriage to occur between Buddhist and Muslim musician families, a practice that has virtually disappeared since the communalisation of the late 1980s.

Between Bombay and Leh
The Phyang danam player and his son, one of Ladakh’s finest surna players, have both been employed by All India Radio in Leh. Radio and television, both Indian and satellite, are adding the latest ingredients to the pot already rich with Ladakhi music. Leh Radio has adopted an enlightened music policy. It plays traditional Ladakhi folk music as well as music with more Tibetan folk origins employing the lhimpu (flute) and the damyan (lute); and some music influenced by Hindi films and Western rock.

The best-known modern Ladakhi exponent of this mixed genre, who has received considerable air time on Leh Radio as well as Indian TV is Phonsok Ladakhi, a graduate of the Film and TV Institute of India. He’s a successful actor and singer who divides his time between Bombay and Leh. A cassette he produced some years back of the Buddhist mantra, Om Mane Padme Hum, set to his own Hindi film influenced melody was played incessantly in shops, taxis, buses, hotels, restaurants and guest houses throughout Ladakh. His most recent work, a song of praise to the Dalai Lama, is in Hindi. Phonsok has been able to achieve that hardest of musical goals, to produce songs with messages that also achieve wide popularity. He’s just finished recording a series of songs for the Ladakh-based Leh Nutrition Project, promoting the importance of breast feeding babies, of vaccinating children, valuing girl children, not smoking and valuing local food as against exotic, imported food. Last summer, he gave an impromptu performance in Leh. Outside the tent where he sang was a children’s playground. Children squeezed together on top of a slide to catch a glimpse inside the tent. They knew every word:

Oh my little brothers and sisters of Ladakh, Please listen to the words of your wandering big brother, Learn your ABC, but don’t forget your kha, ga, If you give up your kha, ga, you will lose the heart of your knowledge, Dance the rock and roll but don’t forget your folk dances.
If you forget your folk dances, you will lose the essence of your grace.

That is characteristic of Ladakhi’s musical tradition, to integrate the new into the old. Children are still learning the old dance steps and songs, especially in the villages, despite serious neglect of the Ladakhi language, the kha, ga, in schools. There are some fine Ladakhi musicians, those assembled around Leh Radio for instance, aware of the value of both old and new. All traditions need cherishing and constant renewal if they are not to ossify and die. The children on the picture would suggest this one is still alive and dancing.

T. Malen is a freelance writer and photographer. This article was written by him with information inputs from Ladakhi scholar Tashi Rabgyas and musicologist Mark Trewin.

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Continued massification of the petty peasantry, widespread failure of post-1951 land reform measures, and curtailed resettlement programs of the Bhumihari regime are held responsible for the deprivation of the sub-caste. Ghimire argues that the sub-caste desire to own land in the Tarai because the security provided by state crops and shelters gives them greater freedom in the wage-labour market dominated by the Bhumis and the sub-caste. The other hand, declares them "illegal squatters" representing various interests and tries to evict them through physical violence and other means. Calling the present forest conservation policies which bypass the subsistence needs of the sub-caste a luxury, Ghimire argues that enough land exists in the Tarai to be distributed to the sub-caste in small-holdings. Therefore, he says, Nepal with its increasing population of sub-caste should distribute the productive land of the Tarai in small-hold settlements and grow trees for conservation in the relatively less productive lands in the hills.

Nepal, a Bibliography

Sahari Muktaphadhyaya, editor
determined by Dina N. Wadwal
Shalara Publishing House, Delhi, 1991
ISBN 81 85610 00
Rs 250

Organized under 34 subject headings, this is an annotated bibliography of works published on Nepal mostly between 1951 and 1989. It includes monographs, periodicals and articles mainly published in English and are given. A 38-page index makes it very useful.

Occasional Papers in Sociology and Anthropology
Vol. 3
Gopal Singh Nepali et al., editors
Central Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, 1993
NRS 75 138 5

This is a collection of nine essays. Earlier versions of some were presented at the first national congress of SASCON in September 1992 in Kathmandu. The essays are on Forestry and Farming Systems in the Mid-Hills of Nepal by Kamal P. Upadhyay; "Socio-economic and Cultural Aspects of Ageing in Nepal" by R. R. R. Regmi; "Religion, Society and State in Nepal" by Djap K. Pun; "Community Development as a Route to Rural Development" by Kallathi Pyakurel; "National Integration in Nepal" by Ganesh M. Gurung and Bishnu Shrestha; "The Failure of Confidence Mechanism" by Tuli; and "Building a new American Academic Anthropology" by Thomas Cox; "Afro-American Sociologist and Nepali Ethnography" by Stephen Meekiss and "Case Studies on Domestic Servants: Reflections on Rural Poverty" by Sushobhita Shrestha.

A Himalayan Enclave in Transition: A Study of Change in the Western Mountains of Nepal by Bihari K. Shrestha
ICIMOD Kathmandu, 1993
ISBN 92 5 115 113 0

The author was part of a Royal Nepal Academy team that conducted multidisciplinary research in Dyangc, a village located at the head of the Singi River Valley in northwest Nepal in 1970. Based on fieldwork done two decades later, this study seeks to provide details regarding the "nature and direction of changes" in Dyangc since the first study and documents "how different forces interact with one another at the micro-level to produce these changes." The author hopes that his attempt to develop an "understanding of the dynamic of the mountain environment and its communities" will be helpful in "achiev[ing] the desired development goals in mountain areas of Nepal.

Separate chapters devoted to changes in the economy, forest resources, patterns of long-distance trade and migration, and village politics constitute the main body of this work. An additional chapter discusses "development interventions." Shrestha concludes that population growth in Dyangc has worsened the "already acute problems of shelter and subsistence for most of the village inhabitants." Steps described as "essential" to "enhance the quality of life and of the environment in the region" include "local-level planning," participatory approach to "poverty alleviation programs," so that the poorest of the community gain access to critical facilities, "capital loans for farming," "women's development" with aims for their "empowerment and enablement" "population control," "road artery," "enhancement of farm income and employment opportunities," and "education for children.

Shrestha concludes: "Given the direness of the present situation, possibilities should be explored for attracting and engaging one or more multinational firms to invest in the development of the Kathmandu Valley as a business venture under conditions that they might find sufficiently lucrative.

Water Nepal
Vol. 3 No 2-3, Oct 1993
Ajay Dixit, editor
Water Nepal Conservation Foundation
NRS 100

This issue of Water Nepal, in a new book format, looks at the conflicts in development of water resources between India and Bangladesh, Nepal, India and Bangladesh, Israel and Palestine, and the sharing of Cauvery waters between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu in India. It includes articles on seismic safety assessment of concrete dams, management of a largescale farmer managed irrigation scheme in Nepal Tarai and management and monitoring of community water supply schemes.

Failing Off the Map: Some Lonely Places of the World
by Pico Iyer
Viking Penguin Books, India, 1993
Rs 195

"But lonely places are not just isolated places, for loneliness is a state of mind..." (All lonely places have something in common, if only the fact that all are marching to the beat of a different samba drum.) And many are so far from the music of the world that they do not realize how distant they are. "More than in space, than it is in time that lonely places are often exiled, and it is their very remoteness from the present tense that gives them their air of haughty glumness. The door slams shut behind them and they are alone with colourless and yellowed snapshots, scraps of old bread and framed photographs of themselves when young.

Thus prefaced, this book is an account of Iyer's travels to North Korea, Argentina, Cuba, India, Iceland, Vanuatu, Portugal and Australia. Iyer went to Brazil in 1989 and he writes about flying into Bhutan in the first ever commercial jet-flight, visiting dzongs (the huge white-washed seventeenth century fortress monasteries can administrative centres), visiting Thimphu ("the greatest of all Bhutanese monuments") of living in Thimphu and Paro, of reading Koesel ("a paper mill in niches"), of browsing in the Thimphu public library where, "the shelves were labelled not with the categories of books but with the names of the donors," and of making a successful trek to the Trongsa dzong..."yet what was most surprising about Bhutan was how little really went wrong, how efficiently everything worked. Like the other countries of the High Himalaya, Bhutan had an air of genteel calm that left no room for chaos: The Bhutanese met Iyer unfailingly punctual and unreasonably honest."..."and what impressed me most, the longer I stayed, was not so much the people that they did not know foreign goods..." Iyer writes..."yet what was most surprising about Bhutan was how little really went wrong, how efficiently everything worked. Like the other countries of the High Himalaya, Bhutan had an air of genteel calm that left no room for chaos..."
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Cranes are the oldest bird species on Earth, dating back 60 million years, and the red-crowned still-legged Sarus crane, a subspecies, is the largest of all flying birds. Its days in the Nepal Tarai, however, now seem numbered.

The Sarus is one of the 15 subspecies of crane left today in the world, and is related to the endangered crane species such as the whooping crane of North America and the Siberian crane of Asia. While it is not an endangered species, there are individual populations at risk, including those that inhabit the Nepal Tarai, reports the National Geographic.

Rajendra Siwal, a Sarus specialist, says the bird has already disappeared from Nepal’s eastern Tarai and only 200 to 250 remain in the western parts. Even though the subspecies is highly adaptable to changing habitats, clearing of Tarai wildlands, draining of marshes, and spraying of chemicals to combat malaria in the 1960s, together, have devastated the living conditions of these birds.

The International Crane Foundation, based in the United States, estimates there are 25,000 Sarus still living in India although their numbers are diminishing dramatically everywhere due to pesticides, industrialization, and other human intrusions. It has reportedly disappeared from Pakistan and is all but gone from Bangladesh as well.

Rich Bellfuss, a wetlands ecologist with the Foundation, has been trying to raise money from Buddhist organizations and others to create a wetlands habitat for cranes in conjunction with the Lumbini development project, which is building up the three square miles around the Sakyamuni’s birthplace with monasteries, stupas and parkland. So far, the money has not been forthcoming. The big mammals have overshadowed birds in wildlife planning, says Bellfuss. “They really haven’t focused on birds in Nepal. Tourism is so fantastic for the elephants and rhinos that parks have been set up based on mammals.”

The people of the Tarai look at the arrival of the Sarus as a good omen. Perhaps its disappearance altogether would be ill for the entire ecology.

Out! Out! Potato Blight!

The fungus that caused the infamous Irish potato blight of the 1840s is once again spreading throughout the world and threatening a crop that has become staple in developing countries, say experts. With potato firmly entrenched as staple in the Himalayan region as well, spread of the infestation to South Asia could be devastating to the region’s diet and public health.

The New York Times reports that the fungal disease, known as the Late Potato Blight, has already spread throughout Europe, Russia, and Latin America, and infestations are also reported in potato-growing regions of North America, Africa, Japan and Korea.

“All indications are that this new form of late-blight is spreading around the world, and is more aggressive and harder to control than its predecessors,” says Huben Zandstra, chief of the International Potato Center in Peru.

Says Zandstra, the greatest risk is to agriculture in developing countries, where potato production is growing faster than any other staple crop except wheat. (China is now the largest potato producer in the world.) While modern fungicides could theoretically prevent the new disease, these chemical remedies are too expensive for the poorer countries. Besides, their use could set back efforts to reduce the use of toxic chemicals in agriculture. “Just when people were starting to use fewer chemicals to grow potatoes, this blight will force them to use more,” says one researcher.

Potato late blight is caused by the fungus Phytophthora infestans, which thrives in cool, moist conditions and is spread by contact or wind-blown spores. “This disease is remarkably explosive, it can destroy a field in days,” says a plant pathologist at Cornell University. “An affected field looks like it has been burned.”

Scientists from around the world are scheduled to meet in Mexico in February to set up an international programme to address the problem, and one can only hope that there will be someone there representing the Himalayan potato farmers as well.
What’s Doing in New York?

The Lower Hudson Valley is on the other side of the globe from the mountains of South Central Asia. But then New York City, at the mouth of the Hudson River, is the cultural capital of the world, where no region goes unrepresented.

A quick review of the different cultural activities in the Big Apple during the month of October showed enough of the Himalaya on offer — from film showings to talks and photographic exhibitions. At the same time, it was clear once again that, as is true elsewhere in the West, here too Himalaya means mostly the Tibetan civilization. The rest of the region and its peoples, are absent.

Over at the Jacques Marchais Museum of Tibetan Art in Staten Island (a borough which just decided through a referendum to secede from New York City), photographs of Mustang are on display. They were taken a year ago by four ladies who had trekked up to Lo Manthang.

In an apartment on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, the paintings of Lodoy Sangpo Gangshar (“Himalayan folk painter”), says his visiting card, are on display. Gangshar is a Tibetan refugee — just barely, for he comes from a village a day’s walk north of Syabrubesi on the Marsyangdi River — who was among those picked up in the “immigration lottery” run by the United States Government for Tibetans in Nepal and India. He lives in Oakland, California.

Gangshar’s appealing watercolours make a statement, not of Tibet but of a modernising Nepal, showing paralax-breathtaking views of Syabrubesi (the refugee camp-village where he grew up), carpet washing in Kathmandu, the Trisuli power house, airplanes, and a submarine in Raui Pokhari.

In downtown Manhattan, a Wheel of Time Sand Mandala was being prepared in the lobby of World Trade Center. The Tibetan ritual art was being painstakingly created over a four-week period by monks from the Namgyal Monastery. After it is completed, the mandala will be swept up and the sand consecrated in the Hudson River, on 30 November, according to the Samaya Foundation, which raises funds for the Tibetan cause. The monks’ performance also formed part of a well-orchestrated public relations effort by the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, which runs the World Trade Centre, to attract business after a talent flight due to the massive terrorist bombing of May this year.

In the East Village, a commercial theatre was running the film Baraka, a “documentary about the Earth and the people”, which takes in panoramic sweeps of the natural beauty and human civilization. The very first frame; before even the credits, shows the view of the extreme upper Khumbu, from Chomolongma to AmiDablam, as seen from Tengboche. This is followed by languid shots of devotees in Bhaktapur, walking among mists and temples. The film, shot with specially made wide-format Imax cameras in 70mm, has no narration, only music (including Sufi, Balinese Gamelan, and chanting monks from Dharmsala).

At the other extreme, there was too much narration at a preview of a one-man show called “Psychodyssey” in Canal Street, near Chinatown. The hero promised that the showman, a young American magician, who had trekked with millionaire Dick Bass to Chomolongma Base Camp a few years previously, would have a sort of mixed-media presentation built around his Khumbu trip. What he had on offer, instead, was an amateurish slide show that might well have been entitled: “My hero trek to Mount Everest Base Camp”, replete with reversed transparencies, exaggerated claims, embroidered memory, and foolish talk (including one of “this 13 year old woman who came down from her home at 23,000 feet just to meet me and see me perform.”). The misinformation was near-total, with an image of Shiva identified as the Buddha, and every hulk of a mountain along the Imja Khola trail being pointed out as Everest.

For relief, therefore, one turned into a bookshop, to find that Kevin Bubriski’s picture book “Portrait of Nepal” has just been released. It contains black and white pictures of Humla, Gorkha, Kathmandu and Janakpur. Right off the bat, in mid-month, it received the first place in documentary photography category of the Golden Light Photography Book Awards, ahead of many famous names in the New York photography world. (Some of the pictures can be seen in a photo essay in Himal’s next, Jan/Feb 1994, issue).

There were a few other non-Tibetan happenings, to be sure. The United Nations General Assembly, for example, heard Nepali Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala (who also spoke before the Asia Society, unveiled a B.P.Koirala bust, planted a B.P.Koirala sapling in Central Park, and met with the editors of The New York Times) and Bhutan’s Foreign Minister Dawa Tshering. And the Kashmir issue surfaced again and again at the United Nations, as India and Pakistan raised the pitch of the quarrel.

The Asia Society’s logo, incidentally, is a Kathmandu-crafted bronze lion. Even though the logo is Nepali, however, the Society itself does not “do” Nepal well. Kathmandu, as an important cultural hub of the Himalayan region, rarely figures in the Society’s programmes. A look at the programme for 1993 showed nothing on Nepal (other than the Koirala dinner). A meet-the-authors programme was scheduled for 15 November for the newly released book Tibet: Reflections from the...
Save the Himalaya From Those Who Would Save the Himalaya!

"India for Meet to Save Himalayas," bemoaned a New Delhi headline. "A meeting of environment ministers of the seven Himalayan nations to initiate measures to preserve the ecology and environment of the unique mountain range is likely to be organised shortly at India's initiative."

We have, of course, heard all this before. Every so often, members of the old boy network - retired climbers, theorists manipulating bureaucracy, and politicians in search of fashionable planks - have a hiccupp and remember to chime in with the over-used slogan: Save the Himalayas!

There is no agreement among these proponents what they mean by 'Himalayas'. Some are thinking 'mountaineering'; others 'mass tourism', while others mean only their part of the Himalayas (Kumaon, Garwal, Sikkim), while still others think of floods or deforestation, erosion or cultural loss. Unfortunately, those who fashionably pose by the Himalayas do not have the time to be serious. Quite a few New Delhi babus are involved in freeze-framing the under-populated, backward regions so that they serve as a research subject and a ready-to-go holiday destination.

If only for the duration of a talkfest where Sir Edmund Hillary will be the chief guest, it is attractive to don the garb of Saviour of the greatest mountain chain on Earth. The latest to seek such reflected shine was Kalam Nath, Indian Minister of Environment. Responding to Sir Ed's warnings of Himalayan ecological collapse, the minister made this impromptu call for a meeting of the seven Himalayan countries. They were all at a frothbeard in Delhi, organised by the Himalayan Environment Trust.

There is no reason to ignore a meeting such as the Minister proposes - bringing together Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Burma together to address the issues of mountain environment. But past experience shows that Himalayan breast-beaters tend to concentrate on re-inventing the wheel. And the experience of ICIMOD, notwithstanding the institution's non-performance, shows that India has been the foot-dragger when it comes to regional Himalayan development. This new solicitude, at least, is to be welcomed.

On his most recent announcement, it just does not do for the Indian Minister to recall that he 'spent his childhood in the Doon Valley' and was quite attached to the Himalayas. According to the news report, "He was amazed by the negative development activity taking place in the Himalayas today. During his recent visit to Mussorie, he was shocked to see bus services available by the hour to places which were earlier destinations for trekkers."

Yes, Minister, just let the locals walk to the next valley. And here is a gem attributed to Dr. Karon Singh: "India would have been a different entity without the Himalayas." Uh-uh.

Let us save the Himalaya from those who would save the Himalaya.

Taxol's Failure, Forest's Reprieve

The rape of Himalayan forests in Nepal, Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh can be slowed immediately if a crucial bit of current information can be swiftly shared with those who are actually trafficking herbal contraband. The news is that Taxol, the much-touted cancer drug, is not the miracle cure for ovarian cancer it was thought to be just a year ago.

What this has to do with Himalayan woodlands is that the needles of Taxus baccata ("Tall Patta" in Nepal) is an important source of the drug extract. The Taxol fever that gripped the Western pharmaceutical markets raised the price of the extract to unimaginable heights, and the plant rapidly disappeared from Himalayan slopes.

As the aura fades from the cancer drug, the price of Taxol is bound to come down, and the pressure on this particular forest product will diminish. To speed up this process and to save the trees that are still standing, Indian and Nepali policy makers, bureaucrats, NGOs, activists and journalists must work to get this information out to the merchants and traffickers as fast as possible.

The news of Taxol's poor showing was broken by The New York Times on 7 November, quoting researchers at the National Cancer Institute of the United States. "It is not a cure, it's not a panacea, it's not the penicillin we're looking for," said one. Studies over the past year showed that many women with ovarian cancer did not respond to Taxol, and for those who did respond to the drug, their tumours grew back to their original size within a few months. In addition, it was found that Taxol does not work with colon, prostate, kidney and stomach cancer or melanoma.

What is disheartening news for cancer patients, it turns out, could be good news for Himalayan forests. Speculators must be told immediately that the prices are about to crash!
Iodised Salt for the Nation’s Health

Goitre and cretinism have always been a curse on the Himalayan region, but only recently have we been able to do anything about it.

It is a curse that came guaranteed with geography. Normally, humans get their supply of iodine, which is an essential ‘micronutrient’, from foodcrops: in the Himalayan belt, however, natural iodine in the soil gets washed away easily. As a result, foodcrops are low on iodine and the population does not receive the required dose.

It is iodine deficiency that causes goitre. If the deficiency is severe, cretinism results, characterised by mental retardation, deaf-mutism, and lack of muscular coordination. About 40 percent of the Nepali population is said to be afflicted with some degree of goitre. And it is estimated that four out of every thousand citizen shows symptoms of cretinism. Controlling the Iodine Deficiency Disorders (IDD) is therefore one of the Nepal’s gravest public health challenges.

Since 1973, a unique collaboration of private business and government has been actively engaged in battling the ageold endemic. His Majesty’s Government, the Government of India, and the Salt Trading Corporation have been involved in iodising and distributing salt throughout Nepal’s high himal, hill and tarai districts.

Salt is one commodity that everyone uses. And salt that is iodised is considered to be the most efficient way to get the iodine micronutrient into the diets of the country’s far-flung communities. It has been Salt Trading’s responsibility to ensure that all the salt distributed in Nepal is iodised.

And it has been working. Studies have shown that the incidence of goitre in Nepal has gone down considerably. Whereas 55 percent of the population was afflicted in the 1960s, one study showed that the incidence was down to about 40 percent by 1985-86.

Because iodine tends to evaporate from salt that is in storage for too long, with the help of the Indian Government, Salt Trading has set up three iodisation plants, in Bhairawa, Birgunj and Biratnagar, so as to reduce the time gap between iodisation and consumption. These plants presently iodise up to a quarter of the salt that is distributed in the country, while the rest of the salt comes iodised from India.

Since the last three years, polythene packaging has been used, which eliminates the evaporation of iodine. The Ayo Nun is powdered iodised salt. Since the communities of the high himal prefer to use salt crystals rather than powder, Salt Trading recently introduced Bhanu Nun. This new brand uses iodised crystals of granular size.

We at Salt Trading are committed to ensuring even better delivery of iodised salt to Nepal’s population and the introduction of Bhanu Nun is just one demonstration of this commitment. We are presently engaged in adding three more iodisation plants in the Western Tarai, and by 1994 Salt Trading expects to be iodising all the salt in Nepal itself.

In so doing, we will also proudly continue to be part of this unique experiment in bilateral cooperation between Nepal and India, whose goal is to eliminate IDD in Nepal by the year 2000. This is a programme which is directly helping to raise the standards of public health in Nepal, and saving hundreds of thousands from the curse of goitre and cretinism.

Together with the nation, we look forward to the day when goitre is virtually eliminated from these hills and plains.

Iodised salt is distributed by the Salt Trading Corporation Ltd. both in loose form and in one kg packets. Packet salt is available under the brand names Ayo Nun and Bhanu Nun. An Ayo Nun packet costs four and a half rupees. Bhanu Nun is distributed only in the remote areas at subsidised prices.

GOITRE CONTROL PROJECT
MINISTRY OF HEALTH
(HMG/NEPAL AND GOVERNMENT OF INDIA COOPERATION)

Programme Implementing Agency:
Salt Trading Corporation Ltd. Kalimati, Kathmandu. Tel: 271593, 271014 Fax: 271704
"Mountains Should Come First, Not Last..."

ICIMOD, the Kathmandu-based organization of the Himalaya, is going in for its 10th anniversary celebrations (30 November to 6 December). Over the summer, anthropologist Robert F. Rhoades was selected by the ICIMOD Board to be its new Director, but he declined the offer due to "career timing and personal finance". The Board subsequently chose Egbert Pedneck who had worked in Environment Management and Development cooperation in Asia and Africa. The accompanying article formed a part of "A Vision for ICIMOD", a presentation Rhoades made to the ICIMOD Board prior to his selection, and is printed here with his permission.

The Brundtland Commission Report was eloquent in the way it described a vision of planet Earth, a fragile ball of blue-greenish hues floating in space. It made humans realise the fragility of the planet and the clear limitations that exist to how far we can exploit the diverse biomes which grace the Earth's outer tier.

Unfortunately, the Report did not deal evenly with the Earth's ecosystems. Rather, it highlighted the tropical rainforests, oceans, wetlands, grasslands, deserts, coastal margins, mangroves only once, and that too in passing, did the Report mention what I consider to be the most crucial and most neglected of the world's biomes, the mountains.

This unfortunate omission was not accidental. Defenders of mountains have not been aggressive, persuasive or as articulate as have spokesmen for other causes. Rainforest proponents will not let the world forget that their ecosystem protects literally tens of thousands of plants and animals useful to everyone (chocolate for food, quinine for malaria, permethrin to cure cancer, dieneinon for oral contraception). By contrast, even individual species (snow leopards, pandas, grizzly bears, mountain gorillas, wild potatoes) which depend on the mountain habitats get better world press than the supporting highland ecosystems.

It is time to change this neglect of the mountains and to launch an aggressive campaign to alert the world's citizens and politicians of the stakes if mountains are not protected, and protected now. If Mrs. Brundtland's team had done some homework, it would have discovered some very important reasons why mountains should come first, not last, in the global development agenda.

Take the issue of headwaters. The Amazon river originates in tiny rivulets high in the Andes which, as they rush downwardly, combine and recombine into larger channels to form the mightiest of rivers. Defenders of the South American rainforest argue convincingly that, without the oxygen-producing "green lungs of the earth", life as we know it would not be possible. But you could forget about all those rainforest species if the mountains were not providing a continuous supply of water. Without the Andes, there would be no Amazon. Without the Himalaya, there would be no productive Ganga plain where over 500 million people live.

Biodiversity alone should be argument enough to allocate more support to mountain defense. The great Russian scientist Nikolaev Viktorov was the first to point out that, due to complex ecologies and adjacent zones fostering gene flow, mountains provide the selective pressures for the genetic diversity (wild species and land race) of the major food crops. Agriculture originated in the Andes. Without the mountain context, the future of the world's food supply is endangered. Wheat comes from the Zagros Taurus Arc, maize from the Mexican highlands, and potatoes from the Andes. Many valuable medicinal plants and undemonised crops are also found in the mountains.

Other compelling reasons put mountains up front. If you are a flatlander, mountains come as a bargain, a supplier of low cost (compared to lowland) 'precious' resources: energy, water, minerals, forests, and beauty. The aesthetics of mountains are like magnets attracting tourists, hikers, climbers and nature lovers the world over. Archaeology, art and culture of the great mountain civilisations from the Andes to Central China continue to owe travellers from afar.

But if the positive aspects are not enough, the citizens of the world need to ask the question the other way around: What are the social costs of neglecting mountains, of not having a voice for the mountains?

The costs to national and international bodies are already enormous: poverty, civil unrest, loss of biodiversity, bad downstream effects, illicit trade, pollution, erosion. A few years back, the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) issued a map of critical zones based on a careful study of the world areas which cannot support existing human populations even with high inputs. A quick glance at this map shows that the exception of the African Sahel, where few people live, all of the critical zones are mountainous. Poverty in turn drives mountain people to acts of deforestation, which sets in motion further devastation downstream. Mountains directly affect poor people more than any other ecosystem — except the urban ecosystem — and this alone is an argument to elevate mountains to a priority role on the global development agenda.
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By the time Nepal develops a "national consensus" on how to develop its hydropower resource, and by the time seven people pray the Arun III Project beyond the grasp of kickback merchants and timorous politicians, there will probably be overproduction of hydroelectricity in the Ganga basin and no one will need Nepal's. Bhutan has already cut deals with New Delhi on many of its rivers, and now UNI reports that Himachal Pradesh has signed a memorandum of understanding with six private sector firms to produce a total of 1500 MW of electricity, including 900 MW projects in Kinnaur district and a 231 MW unit in Chamba district ("Baby Arun" in Nepal is to provide a 201 MW). Himachal's Governor Gubash Ahir mentioned at the signing that Himachal had potential to generate 20,000 MW of power, of which only 17.5 percent had been harnessed. Mark this: he said power shortages in India's northern region would be removed with the addition of the 1500 MW to the grid.

How the mighty have come crashing. Once a centre of Mogul call to arms, Naxalbari today is the haven of smugglers feeding the Indian market with contraband consumer goods carried over from Nepal, reports The Statesman. Customs officials say that more than 80 percent of the Naxalbari goods are being smuggled into India in the disguise, mostly as couriers who log electronic keyboards, Chinese toys, and Japanese rice cookers from Muktilah in Nepal, across the Mochi rivert into Punjab in India. A Customs official points out to an unending line of women, all of whom seem to be abnormally well fed. "All of them are good at their trade," he says. The couriers reportedly get 10 percent of the value of the contraband, which is quite a neat, and often enough they have cash and Marx.

The state government of Mizoram has sent an SOS to the central government and the United Nations Drug Control Programme to tackle the drug menace of drug addiction and trafficking. Although more effective drug policies could have led to a reduction of heroin from the Golden Triangle area of southern Burma, young Mizos addicted to heroin are now being sold to makers of drug detoxification facilities, where they are being treated for drug addiction. In 1991 when 91 heroin addicts were arrested in the state capital of Aizawl alone. Meanwhile, to step up inter-

isation efforts, the state authorities have asked the United Nations for vehicles, computers and night vision equipment.

Still on Mizoram, January marks a hundred years of Christianity in the land of the Mizos, and a weeklong Gospel Centenary. Celebration is planned, reports The Telegraph. The New Delhi Government has granted leave to 70 church elders from Burma to come to Mizoram to celebrate this historic event. January 20 is regarded as the day of the advent of Christianity in Mizoram, for that was when a group of British missionaries arrived in Aizawl. Among other things, they translated portions of the Bible into Mizoram using the Roman script, and published the first grammar book and dictionary of the Mizoram language.

Commercialisation of the Himalayas continues apace, and the plains folks are now enjoying the paro passed as the Western tourist destination, reports the I&K Tourism. The ladakhis, to celebrate the centenary of the Ladakh Festival, held in January, the festival has been advertised in the national papers. In the town, on an artist's camp three days of classical dance and music, in which will be led by Kishandas and Sarvajeet. A better title for the festival would have been "Ladakh-Caricatured", especially after one hears that "a mock marriage ceremony" was one of the exhibits. How about "Mock Ladakh"?

Ah, the "Foreign Hand" strikes yet again. It was the foreign hand that was creating disturbances in his idyllic Himalayan state. Sikkim Chief Minister Nar Bahadur Bhandari wrote in a letter in August to Prime Minister Narasimha Rao. Foreigners were deliberately creating instability in the international border state on the controversy surrounding the reincarnation of the Gyalwa Karmapa of Rupchot, Monastery. Apparently, a message from New York was the cause of concern, and constituted "unfair" in the "interests of the state by foreign elements in the name of religion." Not only was this aimed at creating misunderstandings between the State and the Centre, said the Chief Minister, it was also distorting the improved relationship between India and China.

Speaking of corruption, Sabina Seagal of The Times of India writes from Ladakh that the Hemis Monastery "despite being the wealthiest, best-known and biggest gompas in Ladakh, is languishing, largely due to gross mismanagement by its monks and the sullen indifference of the state administration." She reports that the prayer rooms are "martyr" in the main temple that the gold and silver statue of the Buddha is covered with "scarcely a trace of grime and grime" (the latter hand, isn't this how all Tibetan monasteries must be?). Ms. Seagal believes the absence of the head monk, Stagyong Rinpoche, explains the mismanagement. The Rinpoche has spent the last three and a half decades in China, being allowed to return to India only for a month or two years ago, says the writer. "Hemis is headless for all practical purposes."

While the opening up of the remotest parts of Ladakh such as Nubra Valley and Pangong Lake is said to be in the cards, here is a news item that the Indian Home Ministry is even considering allowing tourists into the Siachen Glacier area. The Times of India reports that the I&K Tourism Parvez Dewan is working on the opening up of the Siachen Glacier area. The report says, "The army has already certified that the accessibility to tourists of these areas poses no real security threat."

Himalayan wonders will never cease. In fact, wonders seem to be becoming more frequent, which is great.

The hikers in Himalaya Tourism, not to be left out, are planning an international festival to mark the 25th anniversary of the Taj Mahal. More huts, more yaks, more yaks in the Himalayas.

Sitting at a height of 12,000 feet above sea level, the monastery is surrounded by its walls paintings and known as the "Ajanta of the Himalayas." The P.M. "spoke unbelievable phrases, such as, "We are a great people with a great culture.""

The Dalai Lama constitutes a new power centre in the world, according to a report just released by World Media Coordination, a Paris-based communications network. The report delves beyond the established role of the power centre and its influence on political and financial relations and power, seeking as well as understanding the role of the Dalai Lama as a political and cultural figure in his own right. The report notes that the Dalai Lama's power is based on his role as a religious leader and his ability to mobilise support from both Tibetans and non-Tibetans. It also acknowledges the Dalai Lama's role in the struggle for Tibetan independence and his efforts to promote peace and reconciliation in the region.
From Sikkim to Sukhim

The hill area east of the Kosi river was known as Denzong (valley of rice) to Tibetans. Earlier settlers, the Lepchas, called it Neliang (the country of caverns).

When a Lepcha chief brought his newly wed Limbu wife to his newly constructed bamboo house, she is said to have exclaimed, "Sukhim!"—the new house. This is how the name Sikkim came to be applied to this forested, hilly territory which lies east of Nepal's Limbuwa and west of Lho' mon (Bhutan).

Three Bhoutia lamas came down to Denzong in search of new land and converts. As they could not resolve their separate claims, in 1641 AD, they invited Phuntsi Thondup Namgyal, a local patriarch, to be the chogyal (the one who rules according to the chho, or religion).

The kingship thus acquired was lost by Phuntsi Thondup's 12th descendant Palden Thondup Namgyal in 1975, when Sikkim was incorporated into India.

The eclipse of the Namgyal rule was the culmination of conflict between a distinct but inflated identity of the Chogyal on one hand, and the desire of his subjects (by now overwhelmingly Nepali) to have a more meaningful say in their destiny. Thus, Sikkim lost forever its identity as a Bhoutia principality tucked away in the mists of the Himalaya. And what has emerged is a Nepali-controlled Sikkimese state of India, an entity which has now become the focus of a new series of expectations in the region.

Losing Game
The picturesque contours of Sikkimese history of the last two hundred years reveals a Namgyal dynasty, itself Bhoutia, that was exclusively oriented towards Tibet. The limited affairs of state were run with the help of Magars, Limbus and Lepchas. But the mid 1700s saw the rise of the House of Gorkha to the west and the demanding Deb Rajas in Bhutan, in the East. These developments proved disastrous for Denzong, which suffered invasions and raids from both east and west, and lost large chunks of territory. On more than one occasion, the Namgyal ruling family fled to Tibet as political refugees.

By the last quarter of the 18th century, Sikkim had lost to Bhutan its territories east of the Teesta. (This territory included the Kalimpong area, which was attached to Darjeeling district after the Anglo-Bhutan War of 1864-65.) Meanwhile, the Gorkhali generals Jahan Singh and Kaji Damodar Pandey sacked the Sikkimese capital Rabdantse and took over the right bank of the Teesta, leaving King Tenzing Namgyal a refugee within his own country.

The rise of the British Indian Empire in Muglan to the south complicated matters even more. The British wanted to open up the shortest route between Calcutta and Lhasa, and Sikkim fell strategically in the way. George Bogle, Warren Hastings's envoy to Tibet, was well-received by the Panchen Lama at Tashilhunpo, and the British were keen to remove all the intermediary hurdles between them and the trans-Himalayan trade.

After the Anglo-Gorkha war of 1814-16, keeping in mind the future utility of Sikkim for trade with Tibet, the British restored to the Chogyal the territories vacated by the Nepalis east of the Mochi. By this act, however, Sikkim lost its claims on Limbuwa, and its western boundaries were set in stone.

In 1835, the British managed to secure a lease from the Chogyal for about 138 square miles around the village of Dorji Liang, which surveyors had recommended as an ideal site for a sanatorium for convalescent Europeans. The lease for Darjeeling was set at Rs3000 per annum—this was later raised to Rs6000—but was soon discontinued after Sikkim briefly took captive a team including J.D. Hooker, the famous botanist. As a consequence, Sikkim also lost her territories from the Rumarin and Rungeet rivers in the north and east to the Tarai in the south.

Giving Darjeeling back to Sikkim would restore the historical unity of this region. Old Sikkim was the land of the Bhutias and Lepchas; the future Sukhim would be a Nepali-dominant state of the Indian Union, which would respond to the frustrations of the Nepalis of India and defuse today's tensions.

by A.C. Sinha

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Nepali Inroads

Thus, in the historical shedding of its territory, Sikkim lost the Darjeeling enclave as well. In Darjeeling, the British went out of their way to induce colonials, traders, labourers and craftsmen to move in. And so there were immigrants from Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan, as well as a large number of arrivals who were fleeing feudal situations in those countries.

The Sikkim Durbar did not appreciate the prosperity and phenomenal growth of Darjeeling. This was particularly true of the Kazi courtiers, because the Darjeeling area had originally come under them. When disgruntled Kazis kidnapped some Darjeeling residents, the British despatched a force of 1200 to Tamlong, the capital, and were later able to extract a 23-article treaty which turned the Chogyal into a British-dependent Maharaja.

Within a few years, the Nepali-speakers of Darjeeling began to move across and settle in Sikkim's hills. Two Newar brothers were even granted a lease of land in 1867 by Sidkeong Namgyal, the then ruler of Sikkim. Nepalis found the Khansarpa Kazis, the Phodang Lama, and the Khansarpa Dewans (the two influential councilors of the royal court and ancestors of Lhendup Dorji Kazi, the first Chief Minister of Sikkim) as reliable advocates of immigration.

John Claude White, who was appointed Political Officer in June 1889, virtually took over as ruler of Sikkim. The Chogyal was provided with a monthly allowance of Rs 500 and kept in confinement with a small retinue in Darjeeling and Kurseong. Under White, the administration, economy and infrastructure were restructured, and large numbers of Nepali immigrants were welcomed in.

The Nepalis' loyalty, perseverance and mercenary character endeared them to the British, who had become exasperated by the Tibetan punctiliousness of the Sikkimese elite. This bias against the Sikkim Durbar shows through in the Sikkim Gazetteer, whose celebrated author, Herbert Risly, predicted in 1894 that the khukuri would replace the prayer wheel in the Himalayan region.

Five decades of British control saw the Nepali trickle turn to a flood and the Lepcha-Bhutia community reduced to half the size of the Nepali-speakers. Their numerical superiority did not, of course, mean that the Nepalis were also politically powerful. As the British developed Gangtok, Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Kurseong, the Nepalis served as the underdog and the beast of burden.

The deliberate British policy of encouraging Nepali migration also had another motive. Because of the uncertainties of recruiting soldiers from within Nepal, the colonisers set about creating "soldier farms" — large Gorkha settlements in Dehradun, Darjeeling, Kurseong, Shillong and elsewhere. The less fortunate among Nepalis became herdsmen, while others found work with the coming of tea plantation and an organised forest department.

By 1872, Nepalis constituted 34 percent of the district of Darjeeling population, which totalled 94,712. A century later, in the 1980s, Nepali-speakers made up 90 percent of a population of a million.

Dorje Liang

The Darjeeling enclave was enlarged in 1854 by annexing territories so that it extended from Mechini to Teesta and south to the Tarai, with the Kalimpong sub-division added after the Anglo-Bhutan war. From 1868 to 1905, Darjeeling was one of the districts of the Rajshahi Division of the Bengal Presidency. It was later tagged to the Bhagalpur Commissionary, until a separate province of Bihar and Orissa were created in 1912 and then again to the Rajshahi Division, continuing to be with it up to 1947 when it was made into a district of Jalpaiguri Division of West Bengal in the Indian Union.

After Indian independence, Darjeeling remained with Bengal as a 'Hindu-majority' district. The All India Gorkha League demanded its separation from Bengal and at one point even suggested its integration with Nepal. Somnath Lahiri, the only communist representative in the Indian Constituent Assembly, was agreeable to the formation of a separate "Gorkhasthan" for the hill people, and the two communist parties of India raised the issue of autonomy on the plea that the Nepali language was separate from Bengali.

In 1946, the Sikkim Durbar hired Indian advocate D.M. Sen to draft a memorandum for the return of Darjeeling — a demand which was ignored by the British Government. A feeble voice was also raised in 1966 by the royal consort Hope Cook Namgyal, for the revocation of the Darjeeling grant.

The demand for Darjeeling's restoration was rejected by both Calcutta and Delhi, but the loudest protests were heard from Darjeeling itself, where the Nepali settlers claimed that the prosperity and development of Darjeeling were the result of their sweat and toil.

After the partition of the British Indian Empire, West Bengal was confronted with a massive human migration from East Pakistan. The Bengali refugee settlement became the first priority of the state Government. Thus it could do very little for investment in industrial and power sectors and lost its primacy as an industrial state of India. Extreme Marxist adventures launched in Naxalbari worsened the urban industrial unrest of the 1960's and the India-Pakistan war of 1971 which resulted in the emergence of Bangladesh, brought even more Bengalis to West Bengal. The predominantly Nepali Darjeeling was, thus, nowhere in the scheme of priorities and became subject to neglect, exploitation and internal colonisation.

The situation in the Darjeeling hills, therefore, became gradually depressing. The locals faced a continuous crisis of identity, in language alone — having to deal with Nepali, Bengali, Hindi and English — because they were Nepali speaking residents of a Bengali medium state, in the nation-state of India. As Indian Provinces are organised on linguistic principles, the relatively small number of Nepalis in Bengali speaking West Bengal invariably found themselves ignored for a meaningful public role.

It was out of desperation, therefore, that the Nepalis turned to the northeastern states, where the situation was favourable enough for them to find sustenance. Of late, however, even this safety valve is unavailable. There has been a rise in ethnic assertion in the Northeast, leading to a movement against the so-called foreign nationals.
State Criteria
The Indian National Congress had committed itself to reorganise the British Indian provinces on the principle of linguistic affiliation. Thus, the All India Gorkha League demanded the separation of Darjeeling and the Duars from West Bengal into a separate Gorkha state. In 1956, the State Reorganisation Commission did not consider the Gorkha League demand as territorially viable.

The Indian states were carved out mainly according to the linguistic principle, but historical antecedents and geographical contiguity were also kept in mind. Thus, the United Provinces and Rajputana were turned into Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan respectively, and Koch Bihar was attached to West Bengal, while Tripura remained distinct. However, within less than a decade ethnicity came to be recognised as a criterion — with the formation of Nagaland, followed by Meghalaya and Mizoram.

Meanwhile, in adjoining Sikkim, the Namgyal dynasty continued to rule over its increasingly restive majority Nepali subjects. As early as 1948, the Sikkim State Congress had started a movement on a three-point programme that demanded merger with India, establishment of a popular government, and abolition of zamindari. The merger with the Indian Union finally came about in 1975, and since then the state has been effectively under the control of the dominant Nepali-speakers.

Nepali Homeland
While the Nepalis of Sikkim had been able to usurp power in Sikkim, throughout the 1980s Nepali-speakers in the rest of India, and most particularly in the Indian Northeast, began to feel increasingly threatened. A number of Nepalis from Nepal and Indian Nepal were evicted from Assam and Meghalaya, where there was a rise in ethnic assertion and movement against "foreign nationals". The refugees turned westwards along the Duars, to areas which had a Nepali concentration, where they expected a sympathetic response and support.

Many of the Northeast refugees had snapped all ties with the "mother country", and so Nepal held no attraction. Sikkim was already saturated with the Nepalis. Bhutan had a strict policy of restricted entry to immigrants. In such a situation, the three districts of northern West Bengal (Koch Behar, Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling), which were already reeling under the influx of Bangladeshi refugees, had to act as hosts.

It was natural for the Indian Nepalis to feel uncared for, and the belief began to take hold that they must have their own homeland within the Indian Union. What emerged was the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF), a movement to carve out a distinct Nepali-speaking state within India, led by Subhas Ghising, an ex-soldier. The movement turned violent within no time, and the normal life in North Bengal, particularly Darjeeling, was completely derailed.

A tripartite agreement between the Delhi Government, West Bengal and GNLF led to the establishment of the Darjeeling Hill District Council in 1988 but it was hardly the Nepali homeland that had been sought. What has happened is that Nepalis have been divided into a number of factions working at cross purposes. Ghising's insistence that "Gorkhalis" is a language of ethnic Indians distinct from Nepal — a philologically untenable concept — served further to confuse and divide Indian Nepalis. This division and confusion is clear from the fact that the Nepali opinion leaders in India have not found it convenient to protest the eviction of Lhoshampara refugees from Bhutan that took place over the last two years.

A decades-old demand of Indian Nepal has now been met with the constitutional recognition of Nepali as an Indian language, but this hardly means that the lot of ethnic Nepalis has changed, or that they feel more secure in the Indian Union. The GNLF was supposed to herald a new beginning, but today the situation of the Darjeeling hills is quite dismal. No centre of higher learning or research and no significant industrial venture have been built in the last four decades. Meanwhile, the profits from the tea industry are not reinvested here, but continue to be siphoned out of the hills. The rate of unemployment in this most densely populated of hill districts is at an all time high.

Meanwhile, the spectre of "Maha Nepal" has been raised by motivated individuals, it seems, with a view to diverting the attention from the natural aspirations of Nepali-speakers in India to assert an identity and develop a base as part of the Indian nation-state. Is there a way out for Indian Nepalis in this confusing scenario?

The Indian Nepalis
The Indian Nepalis are at times confused with Nepali foreigners and, not infrequently, they have to suffer physically and economically because of this overlapping identity. Time and again, they ask themselves, "Are we really Indian citizens?"

One can of course sympathise with the handlers of the Indian Union, who fear that allowing the creation of a small state of Gorkhaland on an ethnic basis would be akin to opening a pandora's box. Meanwhile, there are also the West Bengal authorities playing on Bengali emotions by pointing out that GNLF plans would lead to the secession of Darjeeling.

While the Bengalis fear that Darjeeling would spin off their state, Nar Bahadur Bhandari would not like to see a merger of Darjeeling into his state, Sikkim. Where do we go from these divergent stands?

It is a fact that, for the sake of peace and security in the Indian Union if nothing else, the extremely vulnerable position of Indian Nepal must be rectified. The recognition of Nepal in the Constitution was a step in that direction, but does not go far enough. Precious time has been lost trying to shift blame from one to another, and the hour has come for serious people to take bold decisions.

Possibly, history provides the answer. If Darjeeling and Sikkim were to be united, as they were in the past, it would create a Nepali-majority state that has economic clout, with culture to match. The historical partitioning was hardly strategic and had to do with the British need for a sanatorium in the hills. On the other hand, Darjeeling and Sikkim share the same history and geography, and today they also share the same language and ethnicities.

A good-sized state of "Sukhim" would save New Delhi the embarrassment of creating a tiny new state (Darjeeling) on ethnic and linguistic principles. Secondly, West Bengal will not be divided for creating a new state within West Bengal — it got Purulia from Bihar in 1956 and should have no objection to parting with a non-Bengal district. Thirdly, the Indian Nepalis will have a strong and viable state as the champion of their language, culture and overall identity. Fourthly, a stable, dedicated and satisfied Sukhim between Nepal, Bhutan, Tibet and Bangladesh would be
Fear of Big Sikkim

The perceived dangers of a “Greater Sikkim” are discussed by Mohan Ram in a recent article in the New Delhi Pioneer, excerpted here, whose starting point is the constitutional recognition given to the Nepali language in India.

Sikkim’s new status, as a linguistic state of Nepal, gives a new edge to the hitherto nebulous demand for a “Greater Sikkim” encompassing the adjacent Nepali-speaking tracts of the former kingdom which became a part of India under controversial circumstances.

Eyebrows were raised at the Foreign Correspondents Club of South Asia in New Delhi late in May when Bhutan’s Foreign Minister, Lhakpa Dawa Tshering, said in answer to a question that the “Greater Nepal” demand of a Nepal extending to the Nepali-speaking tracts in India (Sikkim, Darjeeling and Kalimpong), was a myth with no basis in history. But he hastened to concede that a demand for “Greater Sikkim” would be a greater threat to Bhutan than the “Greater Nepal” idea.

Lhakpa Tshering, during his talks with the Indian Government last May, passed on a four-page pamphlet, “The Voice of the Oppressed People of Bhutan”, which amounts to an open call for a Greater Sikkim.

It says: “The Gorkha people of southern Bhutan must unite and fight for our rights. We, the Gorkhas of southern Bhutan, are not only the majority but we also have 17 million brothers and sisters in Nepal and over 10 million living in India. Unless the majority, Drukpas, native Bhutanese, come to their rescue and immediately undo the damage and great harm they have done to themselves, there is every possibility that the borders of the Gorkha State of Sikkim and the adjoining districts of Kalimpong and Darjeeling can easily be extended across the whole of southern Bhutan. Then, instead of Bhutanisation of southern Bhutan, we may see the day when the minority is Nepalised by the Gorkhas of southern Bhutan.”

India and Bhutan seem to share the concern over the implications of a Greater Sikkim demand. The implications of such a demand was discussed at a high-level conference called by the Union Home Ministry in 1992, because a Greater Sikkim, though no challenge to India’s sovereignty like the Greater Nepal demand, had implications for the security of the Northeast.

On the surface, the Greater Sikkim demand amounts to a rational reorganisation of the states to conform to the linguistic principle. If Sikkim is accepted as a Nepali-majority, Nepali-speaking state with Nepal as its official language, there is no logic in denying merging the adjacent Nepali areas (immediately, Kalimpong and Darjeeling and the Dooras) into a single Nepali entity.

Thus far, the political competition between the Sikkim Chief Minister Nabarangdhar Bhandari and the Gurkha National Front leader, Subhash Gheisang, who began a demand for statehood for Darjeeling region and settled for much less, within the confines of West Bengal, has relegated the Greater Sikkim demand to the background.

But if the demand picks up in Bhutan and gains momentum in India, and in the unlikely event of the rivals, Bhandari and Gheisang, finding a common wave-length, both New Delhi and Thimphu would have to respond with some seriousness to the challenge.

Bhutan’s concern is more fundamental. A Greater Sikkim is a more immediate possibility than a Greater Nepal. Both mean a threat of Nepali pressure on Bhutan’s southern border in the form of a renewed influx and a Nepali bid for political power in Bhutan on the lines of the unobstructed takeover in Sikkim.

In New Delhi’s thinking, Bhandari and Gheisang have to be kept apart at all costs because something more than an enlarged Nepali-language state is implied by the Greater Sikkim state. The real threat is the vital Siliguri corridor close to the China border which is the vital link between the Indo-Gangetic plains and the Northeast.
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During the four decades of international assistance and development programmes in the Himalaya and adjacent mountain regions, amidst failures all around, some projects have received high praise. With this look at the AKRSP in Chitral and Gilgit, Himal begins an occasional series, "Questioning Success", to see what makes for success, and the prospects for reproducing success.

by Thomas Hoffmann

Celebrating his 75th birthday in 1940, Aga Khan III weighed himself against a load of gold and jewellery and donated the treasure to start an educational programme. That act of philanthropy marked the beginning of the Aga Khan welfare activities in a corner of the Central Asian highlands — today's Northern Areas of Pakistan, which has a large population of his followers, the Ismailis.

With its focus on education, the Switzerland-based Aga Khan Foundation established more than 150 schools in the Northern Areas. Most were for girls, as existing governmental schools served only boys, according to prevailing Islamic tradition. In 1960, the Foundation began public health-related activities in Chitral, extending it to Gilgit a decade later. The health programme, like the Foundation's work in education, tried to complement government activities, filling in the gaps in delivery. Again, the health programme targeted to serving women's needs.

In 1980, the Aga Khan Education Service was joined by the Aga Khan Housing Board, which concentrated on construction work and training local people in the crafts. The Foundation's work came full circle in the December of 1982, with the establishment of the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP), whose mandate was to generally provide rural development services as a non-governmental and non-denominational undertaking.

"The proclaimed task of this newcomer organisation was to help improve the quality of life of the villagers of Northern Pakistan," says Shoaib Sultan Khan, who served as General Manager of AKRSP for many years and has now been asked by the Islamabad Government to take the AKRSP concept "to scale" nationally (see Himal, Jan/Feb 1993).

From its base in Gilgit, the capital of the Northern Areas, AKRSP directs, supervises and coordinates an ever-larger network of projects, covering nearly the entire high desert which forms the Pakistani part of the former Jammu and Kashmir. These are the old districts of Gilgit, Chitral and Baltistan, with a combined population of about 800,000 in nearly a thousand villages. The economy is almost entirely subsistence farming, and 90 percent
Great Game

In all its work, the AKRSP tends to be “remarkably successful”, as attested by evaluation reports of the World Bank as well as of the German Ministry of Economic Cooperation. Success is measured in the number of village organisation and their membership size, rise in community savings and per capita income, and the rate of project completion, which is exceptionally high in the Northern Areas. It is clear that AKRSP’s focus on filling the gaps in development delivery has avoided duplication and done away with needless acrimony that might have arisen with other agencies.

What is the secret of AKRSP’s success? What does the Project do differently from most other development programmes in the mountains and plains of South Asia? Siegfried Schoner, an expert with the German Institute of Economic Research, points to the unprecedented religious legitimacy that the Project has in the Ismaili community, which is quick to accept it. Thus allowed to function as a successful demonstrator, the Project’s activities tend to be easily accepted by the Shias and Sunnis as well.

This process is also made smooth by the Project’s non-denominational approach, which allows all Islamic communities to take part, and because of the participatory decision-making that is encouraged. Finally, the multi-ethnic composition and reliability of the AKRSP staff contributes to positive results. The final proof of acceptability was provided recently when even the Sunnis of Astor valley at the foot of Nanga Parbat, who had till recently been wary of AKRSP, demanded the project’s help.

In evaluating AKRSP’s work, it helps to remember that its financing is independent of the Pakistani Government exchequer. Besides the Aga Khan Foundation, the Project receives generous support from donors such as the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the British Overseas Development Administration (ODA), the Dutch Government and the German Adenauer Foundation.

CIDA alone transferred about Pakistani Rs 20 million to AKRSP, and the Dutch Government and ODA each give about Rs 16 million annually. Add to this other sources as well as the Foundation’s sizeable contribution, AKRSP’s yearly collections total more than Rs 100 million, or almost US $ 5 million. Financial solvency seems to have a lot to do with the continuing success of AKRSP even as numerous equally well-meaning projects elsewhere in the mountains are moribund or have collapsed. Availability of cash has made an important difference for AKRSP. Among other things, it also allows the Project to run its own helicopter service, connecting the Gilgit headquarters with the project area as well as Islamabad, bypassing landslide prone highways and notoriously unreliable PIA flights.

Integration or Entanglement

The Project’s principle strategy of economic integration has generally gone unquestioned. Whether to call a development project “successful” depends first upon one’s understanding of ‘development’. If the villagers’ cash liquidity and growth-orientation are to be the tests, then AKRSP is taking huge strides towards fulfilment. In fact, the transition of the Northern Areas into a cash economy is progressing, with Gilgit, Chitral and Baltistan rapidly becoming part of the larger Pakistani and international marketplace. The question, then, is whether this economic integration or an entanglement that only creates new dependencies for the local inhabitants.

A AKRSP social organiser, talking to a community group, might sound like this: “Why grow wheat and maize? You should use your land instead to grow marketable produce such as potato seedlings, vegetables and dried apricots. Grow cashcrops, sell them at the
bazaar at Gilgit, and use the money to buy the grains that you used to grow before. You should produce what you can produce best according to the natural and social conditions of your area. You will find there is still money left after you have bought the amount of grain you formerly harvested from the fields. The remaining money can now be used to buy clothes, school materials for your children..."

The invitation is to participate in the new Great Game known as the World Market, to act upon the principle of Comparative Advantage. Forget about subsistence farming and welcome to the cash economy — this is AKRSP’s economic message.

In making its strategy, the Project was obviously influenced by the completion of the Karokoram Highway in the late 1970s, connecting down-country Pakistan with the highlands of the north. Following through on its message, AKRSP encourages communities to save part of their cash income, organises bulk purchase of fertiliser and other essential goods, and propagates market strategies.

There are hazards to such a plan of action which have not been properly analysed. The security of the family’s nutrition from its own fields is being given up for the benefit of the marketplace. A double-dependency is being created. On the one hand, the Northern Areas farmers must be sure that they will in fact find a sustained demand for their products and a guaranteed minimum income level. It is not clear that such guarantees are feasible.

On the other hand, the supply of Government-supplied subsidised food from down-country must be reliable, as food shortages could quickly lead to famine conditions. Given the road situation on the Karokoram Highway, this dependence on down-country begins to look risky. In a way that was never true before, the health and well-being of the population of the Northern Areas will begin to depend on drought and flood conditions on the Punjab plain.

AKRSP is hardly a failure, especially when compared to so many other attempts at integrated hill development. At the same time, the jury is still out on the Project and awaits a better definition of how one measures ‘development’, and hence a ‘development project’. Does one deal with reality, or simply the ideal. Perhaps it is, as Voltaire had Candide say, "...the best of all possible worlds" — the best of all possible development strategies. Measured to that ideal, AKRSP — the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme — loses some of its glamour.

T. Hoffmann worked in the Northern Areas in 1991 and is presently studying migration in eastern Nepal.

INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL OF FILMS/ DOCUMENTARIES ON THE HIMALAYA AND ITS PEOPLES

The range and diversity of Himalayan film-making will be on view at Film Himalaya 1994. This international festival of Himalayan films and documentaries will bring together connoisseurs and critics from South Asia and overseas for three days of screenings and discussions. For film-makers and film-watchers alike, Kathmandu is the place to be from 18-20 February 1994.

Entry Procedures: Films that are entered for screening in Film Himalaya 1994 must deal with the Himalayan region (which encompasses the region from Afghanistan to the Indian Northeast, including Nepal, Bhutan and Tibet), or have specific relevance to the Himalayan population. The subject area can range from culture and history, to adventure, tourism, ecology, development, politics, ethnology, archaeology, etc.

Film Himalaya will accept entries ranging from short television spots to full-length documentaries or features. Entries which are not in English should be subtitled, although some exceptions may be made. Entries in good quality VHS (PAL, SECAM, NTSC) are preferred, but provision will also be made for celluloid presentations. All entries must reach the Festival office in Kathmandu by 12 December 1993.

Entry forms (for sending in entries) and registration forms (for attending the Festival) can be ordered from the Festival office in Nepal or from the international contact persons. Please note that entry as well as participation is free of cost, and the Festival is not competition-oriented.

FILM HIMALAYA 1994 FESTIVAL

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Abominably Yours,

The fluted ridges of the Honju peaks are as aloof and spectacular as ever, and the translucent seracs on Baruntse glow blue in the sunlight. But this scenery masks a deep turmoil caused by the new environmentalism that is sweeping the mountains like a westerly jet stream. Yes, recession has hit the Barun. Joblessness among high Himalayan primates and lesser mammals is at a all-time high as the Government’s new anti-litter regulations begin to bite.

Expeditions have become politically correct. They are leaner and don’t leave any valuable litter behind. Many have started retrieving even cola cans and ketchup bottles back to Kathmandu, depriving the region of a major source of aluminium and components for kerosene lamps. Oxygen bottles, the preferred gong for school bells across the eastern hills, are getting harder to come by and no more climbing ropes for Seduwa’s yak pens.

Proliferation of trekker latrines have deprived vegetation on either side of the trails of vital nutrients, stunning the vegetation and setting off an ecological chain reaction that is affecting biodiversity — particularly some rare species of Himalayan dung beetles. Marmots that collected expedition crumbs are burrowing deeper this winter and growls are going hungry.

More mountaineers and trekkers are getting lost in the green-vegetation among them have been trapped in dense jungle. Today, trekking guides tell hikers to keep the mountains visible in the same shape they found it — mired in poverty. Leave nothing but footprints, take nothing but fotos, they say. That is exactly what we did all over Shipton Lu and look where it got us.

With unemployment among elusive primates rising, many have been leaving for the bright lights of faraway Kathmandu. Some take the high and wild passes of the Khumbu, into the Rolwaling scattering footprints all across Tashi Lapcha Pass, across into Langtang to approach the city from the north. The more desperate ones lie at the end of the grass strip in Tumlingtar and hitch a ride on the landing gear of Twin Otters on takeoff.

In the city, they hang out with relatives at the Yeti Travel Agency or the Yeti and Yak Hotel. For the familiar whiffs of home, they dine on Yeti Loaf or suck on a beer at the Rum Poodle while flipping through recent issues of Yeti Flight Tails.

would never expose her paws to just anyone — particularly not to gambling misanthropes with wallets stuffed with black cash accompanied by their squaws and hordes of rowdy offspring.

Last time I saw her was after a bash thrown by the men from the ministry from resources made available through a grant from the Global Environment Facility (always wondered about that one. Why facility? “Excuse me, sir, would you be kind enough to direct me to your Facility?”). Later, at Himalchuli we saw Gori dancing daintily to the tune of ‘Jaun Jaun Railayma’. In economic hard times, hominoids will do almost anything including croon easy to digest doses of culture to Development Tourists.

Finally, it can be revealed: Gori is actually a SPY. She is the Manthari of Sustainable Development. Even while she dances for inebriated development merchants who have just signed rich irrigation contracts, she is carefully collecting data on who got the pay off and how much. With tiny microphones hidden under her arm-pit, Gori pirouettes past diplomats planning ways to sabotage 767 lease agreements as they gnaw their Naram Chaha and Sande ko Sukuti.

During intervals, Gori is in the corridor jotting down what she overheard the Aursacan Appraisal Team tell co-conspirators on ways to muzzle the media and minimise fallout from soft social issues. She digs through the noise of Teutonic turbinists manufacturers loudly slurping soup to discover who got the grease. She tunes in her remote-sensing antennae at wired consultants for geographical information systems as they dip into plates of Palak Jhinga.

One day, Gori says, she will write a book about how she fled recession to go undercover in Kathmandu — about the lords of poverty who spend one dinner what a Khotang farmer would take more than a lifetime to earn. The book will be called ‘The Spy Who Came In From the Snows’.

One of our sisters is immortalised in bronze in a rather accurate reproduction of a Royal Nepal Airlines stewardess outside company headquarters. She poses, with a tray of chianti bottles and long tall glasses, upset at an imaginary passerby who dared ask: “Can I please have some more?”

Other Barun refugees who migrated to Kathmandu and survived the first few days of breathing all that diesel have gone on to do well for themselves.

Take my albino cousin from Olangchunggola, Gori, who is now an entertainer at Himalchuli Restaurant. Gori was always a good girl, she was, and...
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