The Kathmandu Valley Towns
A Record of Life and Change in Nepal
THE KATHMANDU VALLEY TOWNS
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A Record of Life and Change in Nepal
by Fran P. Hosken

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To the people of the beautiful Kathmandu Valley and their future
1. Map of Kathmandu Valley by Danish architects' group.
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The purpose of this book is to serve as a record of the Kathmandu Valley towns of Nepal and their inhabitants. Undisturbed by Western interference, the Newars, the dominant, highly skilled population group of the lovely cultivated valley, for many centuries built their sophisticated urban settlements filled with beautiful religious monuments. The few Western artifacts that were imported after the middle of the nineteenth century were for the sole use of the ruling families, and the people themselves had almost no contact with the Western world.

Even now the traditional interaction between this agricultural society and its unique man-made environment is largely still intact except in the capital city of Kathmandu, where change becomes more visible every year.

This question must be raised from the beginning: Who benefits from change? Can development and modernization, now being imported from the West, and governed by drastically different concepts of value, really improve the standard of living of an ancient society whose cultural achievements are only beginning to be understood? No matter how well the proponents of change may be motivated, before plunging headlong into modernization, as has been done in so many parts of the world, it behooves them to take a long and thoughtful look.

This book undertakes to observe and to record what there is: to examine the existing scene from an onlooker’s point of view and to seek some explanations for what is observed. Perhaps the book should have been written ten years ago, when change was not yet really visible even in the capital of Kathmandu. At that time, development and foreign aid were not questioned. On the contrary, the only question was how to move faster, and there was hardly any critical examination. No one doubted the beneficial results.

I hope, however, that the book will make a contribution by being published at a time when in many countries the world over, and especially in Asia, the goals and means of development are being actively re-examined. Many people are beginning to look inside their own countries rather than only to the West.

Great disillusionment with development programs can be found everywhere. Too often these programs favor only the rich and support elitist governments while increasing the gap between the rich and the growing number of the poor. For the first time in its history, the foreign-aid program was defeated in the United States Senate in 1971 and survived only after some unsatisfactory compromises.

Since then, unfortunately, nothing very much has changed on the policy level. But there is a general recognition of the problems and a heightened awareness that modernization and development constitute a far more complicated and slow process than anyone imagined.
Most of all, they require a thorough knowledge of each society and country, which often precludes the wholesale transfer of technologies and economic initiatives, although this is done time and again with disastrous results. The direct involvement of all the people in their own modernization and development is essential if indeed they are to improve their lives. This requires time and grass-roots organization. If nothing else, the failures of the recent efforts have shown the futility of achieving improvement by superimposing development from the top. It just does not filter down.

A recent book by Edgar Owens and Robert Shaw, *Development Reconsidered*, lucidly puts forth not only much valid criticism but indeed suggests positive remedies in many areas: “Thus far United States assistance has not succeeded in getting at the heart of the human problems of development because we have relied too much on our riches and our military might. We have tied ourselves too closely to ruling groups that use United States support to bolster government by benevolence. We have tried too much to export our political forms to other worlds.”

My own experience in developing countries all over the world as a journalist and specialist in urbanization, housing, and urban-economic development confirms in every way the important statements of *Development Reconsidered*. I have witnessed many times in the field what Owens and Shaw both learned firsthand and are able to support with figures and statistics.

In Kathmandu and Nepal these findings are eminently true, except that there is still time to change before too much damage is done. Because Kathmandu was closed to the West until 1951 and because the geographic conditions and lack of any institutional or communication system have made it unusually difficult to proceed, development has only just begun to affect a very small top layer of the people. Therefore it is still possible to change the direction and priorities of development and to re-examine its basis as well as its goals.

This book, by observing the life of the people and their everyday environment, will, I hope, provide some insights and clues. Yet it must be clear that such observations cannot serve as a substitute for a study in depth, which must be undertaken at once to make human development the basis for sound modernization. In Chapter 6, the existing situation and parameters are presented and discussed.

There is nothing more difficult for those living in a familiar environment steeped in ancient traditions than to make a true appraisal of the values of their inheritance. Unless these values are carefully guarded against destruction, modernization will sweep everything away, the positive along with what needs to be changed. The Kathmandu Valley’s culture and history and especially their physical expression, the towns and temples, buildings and monuments, must be seen and evaluated from a broader world perspective rather than from the local and familiar one. Only in this way can a true appraisal be made.

Though I have seen, studied, and photographed cities, towns, and villages all over the world, and the people who fill them with life, the quality and the beauty of the Kathmandu Valley stand out. One cannot help but be captivated—and moved to joy and admiration.

What I managed to capture on film, I hope, help in telling this story to those all over the world who share my respect. And I hope it will show those who live in the lovely Kathmandu Valley and who are concerned with decisions about the future the importance and true value of their inheritance, for it is they who have to take the initiative and preserve what they take for granted and what they therefore may regard as commonplace.

A great deal more research needs to be done pertaining to the built environment, although a catalogue of the principal monuments was recently completed by the Department of Housing and Physical Planning in Kathmandu. In contrast with the Western world, where historic buildings and monuments are treated with reverence and also with a hands-off attitude, the monuments and buildings in the Kathmandu Valley, no matter how exceptionally fashioned, are part and parcel of the people’s lives and are used by everyone. Magnificent statues serve to hang laundry, crops are laid out to dry on stupas and temple steps, barbers use the pedestals of pagodas to cut their customers’ hair. Carved stone elephants and lions are used by children as playground devices. Life and the environment are still one, with no artificial barriers. Exquisitely decorated religious monuments are continually worshiped, which means that oil, rice, grains, flower petals, and colored powder are constantly rubbed or poured over them.

But while the artistically outstanding monuments have attracted the interest and research of some art historians, the everyday buildings, and especially the highly de-
veloped house forms of the Newars, have yet to be researched, historically documented, and compared with those of other peasant cultures. The work of the group of Danish architects that is discussed in part in Chapter 4, "Towns and Housing," is most valuable here. But much more needs to be done, especially in tracing the historic development of the Newar houses, which are so different from those of other Asian peasant cultures. The house forms and settlement patterns of a society are indeed its most immediate cultural expression and the physical manifestation of its way of life. Yet houses seldom get the attention they deserve.

Certainly the Kathmandu Valley towns and villages and houses of the Newars are a most important cultural expression and need to be studied much more. The observations and illustrations presented here can only serve to outline the parameters. Also much work needs to be done to document the interdependence of the traditional agricultural-religious cycle with the housing and settlement patterns that have evolved over centuries. A remarkable balance still exists between the people and their built environment—a balance that has been utterly disrupted in the Western world by industrialization and transportation and especially by cars. It is imperative to find other solutions in Kathmandu.

Change and modernization affect first of all the house forms and settlement patterns of any given culture. This certainly is true in the Kathmandu Valley, as is pointed out in Chapter 3, "Everyday Life," in Chapter 4, "Towns and Housing," and in Chapter 6, "Continuity and Change." Therefore a study of the housing and settlement conditions should be made, not only as a historical record but also as a means of drawing important conclusions for modernization. The indigenous building forms have admirably served the valley inhabitants in the past and are a sound basis for the future. To discard them in favor of imported foreign ideas, as has recently begun to happen, is a threat to the ecological balance and cultural continuity.

Finally, urbanization has become the most critical modern phenomenon worldwide and spells both degradation and ecological doom. Urbanization has only just begun in Kathmandu, the capital, which is a magnet for people from all over Nepal. Urbanization, due to the population explosion and agricultural mechanization, is creating enormous misery in the developing world—for instance, in neighboring India. It has created appalling living conditions for the millions of unskilled rural immigrants who are pouring into the cities in search of a better life and jobs. Yet modern automated industry transferred from the Western world has no use for unskilled labor.

The urban newcomers everywhere live in an increasingly polluted, overcrowded, and unhealthy environment and have no control over their lives. Urbanization is one of the most fundamental changes in history that we are witnessing today. As the economist Barbara Ward has noted, while until recently and throughout history most people lived in rural areas, by the year 2000 we shall have become a predominantly urban world—a fundamental revolution in the condition of life. Population growth, urbanization, change, pollution, and degradation are a chain reaction that is seemingly inevitable and is picking up speed everywhere.

Fortunately the Kathmandu Valley and Nepal are as yet quite out of the desperate stream of these developments, which in many countries are threatening social and economic stability. A concerted effort must be made now to control population growth and immigration into the towns and cities in order to prevent human and environmental debasement through haphazard development. The critical time is now. Kathmandu City, as the pictures here show, is already beginning to show many adverse results of uncontrolled and misdirected development.

The United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, held in Stockholm in June 1972, was the result of worldwide concern to prevent further degradation of the natural environment and to take steps against industrial pollution and the reckless depletion of resources. The future of human settlements and the preservation of historic indigenous environments was discussed and supported. A statement of the nongovernmental organizations to the plenary session of the conference clearly enunciates this by proposing general land-use policies that "preserve and maintain outstanding architectural monuments, archaeological sites and areas. . . ."

Another recurring theme at Stockholm was that developing countries should learn from the terrible environmental mistakes made by the developed world and avoid the one-sided push for industrial and economic growth that has poisoned and polluted the environment and utterly
debased the quality of life in many parts of the urbanizing world.

The Kathmandu Valley is an area that needs special attention and respect because, as I hope is shown in these pages, its indigenous cultural, artistic, and human contributions immensely enrich our world. These assets should be preserved, not only for the people of the valley but also for the world in general, for they are truly an expression of the genius and imagination and diversity of human-kind.

On my two visits to Nepal, I, like many others, came under the spell of this enchanted valley and its smiling, happy people. These pictures can convey but a pale image of the vibrant reality of the life there—a life that is joyfully celebrated in the worship of the many gods. I only hope that readers will find in these pages some of the enjoyment that I felt in observing this life and the towns in which it is lived—a scene that, once experienced, creates the longing to return.

This book would not have materialized without the help and contributions of many people, most of them anonymous, who figure in its pages. To them and to their future, it is dedicated.

Without the help of my guide, Mr. Mukunda Raj Aryal, a thesis student of fine arts at Tribhuvan University of Kathmandu, I should never have been able to see what I did. Thanks to his assistance and constant interpretation, I learned much about the people of the valley and their enchanting towns and settlements. Mr. Aryal’s patience and knowledge have contributed greatly to my understanding of a culture that must be approached with respect, admiration, and humility—and about which I hope to learn much more.

Then I must express special thanks to Mr. Carl Pruscha, fellow architect and United Nations Consultant to the Department of Housing and Physical Planning of His Majesty’s Government, Nepal. His excellent work in Kathmandu is documented in *The Physical Development Plan for the Kathmandu Valley*, which is quoted frequently in this book. I must also thank the Department of Housing and Physical Planning and in particular its director, Mr. Gauri Rimal, for his cooperation and the use of some of the plans reprinted here.

But I owe more than I can acknowledge to the work of the eight young Danish architects who so graciously permitted me to publish their drawings and use their research. Mr. Hans Haagensen, the spokesman of the group, who all lived in Bungmati village for seven months, shared with me his observations and his sympathy for a people who are being propelled into a future they cannot imagine and do not control. The outstanding work of the Danish architects, I believe, will greatly enhance the understanding of the reader, who, I hope, will share my respect for the achievements of the people of this ancient Asian valley.

Finally I wish to thank the many officials in Kathmandu whom I had occasion to interview. My publishers’ patience was remarkable, especially that of Mr. Ralph Friedrich, who worked with me by correspondence halfway across the world. Though I am grateful to all those mentioned and many more, they are in no way responsible for what I have expressed in the book.
2. Swayambhunath Stupa.
4. Children at stupa, Kirtipur.

5. Children at temple, Bhadgaon.
6, 7. Market square and Bhairava Temple, Bhadgaon.
1. INTRODUCTION

The Kathmandu Valley, with its rich fields, its magnificent stupas, temples, and pagodas—reflecting the grace of the Himalayan pines—its ornate palaces, and its sophisticated brick towns begun many centuries ago, seems an exotic paradise at first sight.

Black Bhairava sternly watches over the people in Kathmandu’s Durbar Square to see that no one cheats or tells a lie. The huge Bhairava figure was put up near Kathmandu’s palace by King Pratapa Malla, who ruled in the middle of the seventeenth century. Bhairava, who is a form of Shiva and is meant to inspire fear, has many temples and statues all over the valley. But the Kala (or Black) Bhairava of Kathmandu has a special history. Even now, to settle a dispute, people say: “Come and repeat it in front of Black Bhairava, if you dare.”

A long time ago, the water system in Kathmandu began to fail because the Vishnumati River was drying up. Finally the king sent his engineers to follow the river upstream to see why no water came. They arrived at the place where the water stopped and dug a hole. There they discovered a very large rock with the carved image of Black Bhairava blocking the flow of the water. So the men removed it and took it to Kathmandu, where they set it up in the center of town to watch over the people. Bhairava’s large eyes looked straight at the seat of the chief justice across the square. Nobody within his sight could tell a lie on pain of death. Soon Bhairava took a terrible toll from the people. The king and the chief justice finally decided they could not allow so many people to die for minor offenses; so they built a Shiva temple facing Bhairava. He no longer can see the people across the square, for the temple is in the way, and his eyes are fixed above the crowd below. But Bhairava and the many other deities and gods that inhabit the prolific pantheon of the religious culture of the Kathmandu Valley are still an all-important power in most people’s lives.

The first time I visited Bhadgaon, the largest town in the eastern part of the valley, the bright afternoon sun warmed the red-brick buildings and made the intricate gold decorations of the temples and the palace shine. The market square with the big Nyatapola and Bhairava temples was still full of people. A small band of young musicians with crude wooden fiddles and bamboo flutes began to play and sing. Women carrying their large clay and brass water pots to and from the fountains watched me guardedly. The stone animals that line the steps of the Nyatapola Temple cast long blue shadows onto the brilliantly lit square. It all seemed quite unreal, as if by some magic I had been moved into the past by several hundred years. The spell of the magnificent ancient environment was reinforced by the joyful song of the smiling musicians. It seemed like coming upon a long-forgotten
paradise far removed from the rush of the Western world. Then the song was over, and suddenly the spell was broken by the young musicians rushing at me crying: "Rupee, rupee!"

THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

The Kathmandu Valley is an oval-shaped, rice-growing bowl, surrounded and protected by mountains on all sides. Some 4,000 to 5,000 feet above sea level, it is drained by two main river systems: the Bagmati and the Vishnumati, which are united south of Kathmandu. The Bagmati then turns south and leaves the valley through the Chobhar Gorge and eventually becomes part of the Ganges River system.

The Kathmandu Valley has an area of three hundred square miles and a population of about 500,000 people. It is the most developed area of Nepal, and it occupies a strategic location between China and Tibet in the north and India in the south. The valley is just a small part of Nepal, but it is its cultural and political center and thus a magnet for people. This may well become its doom.

Nepal, with a population of more than eleven million people (estimated), is about five hundred miles long and a hundred miles wide and has the shape of a rectangle. It can be divided into three climatic areas: the hot, tropical, fertile Terai that borders northern India and is part of the Ganges Plain; the mountain valleys in the middle, such as the Kathmandu Valley; and the highlands, which are sparsely settled and terminate in the Himalayas, whose peaks are permanently covered with ice and snow. Given the geography of Nepal, many tribes and villages have little or no regular contact with Kathmandu even now. The notion of nationality is strange to some of the independent people and tribes that live in distant parts of the country. The Western world is strictly outside their experience. Even now, in the remoter areas of Nepal, trade is often limited to basic necessities, such as salt, and many people do not take part in the money economy.

Kathmandu, the capital, is officially classified as a city and has given the valley its name. Until the conquest by the Gorkhas (or Gurkhas) in 1768–69, the Kathmandu Valley was Nepal. Prithvi Narayan Shah of Gorkha, after invading the Kathmandu Valley in 1768, continued his conquests until he occupied the whole territory of present-day Nepal and more.

The Kathmandu Valley until quite recently was an agricultural world by itself, always self-sufficient, often flourishing, and naturally isolated by impassable mountains in the north and by malaria-infested jungles in the south. More recently, in the nineteenth century and until 1951, Nepal was deliberately isolated from Western influences by its rulers, and very few Europeans were allowed to visit even Kathmandu.

Yet because of its location on one of the main crossroads of Asia, it was also a flourishing trade and cultural center throughout history. The success of its merchants can still be seen in the buildings of its towns. The mixture of its people reflects not only the coming and going of many traders, often from far away, but also the many migrations and conquests of Asia, for it was the protected Kathmandu Valley that often became the goal of refugees, especially from India.

The valley is favored by an excellent climate and high fertility. The terraced fields, so lusciously green during the wet rice season, are crowned by thick white monsoon clouds. In the dry time of year this scenery gives way to a yellow, green, and brown bucolic landscape against a brilliantly blue sky etched with the snowy peaks of the mountains.

Most of the people of Nepal, or some ninety-seven percent, are peasants and make their living entirely from the land. The vast majority depend on an agricultural subsistence economy. In the Kathmandu Valley, however, dependence on agriculture is considerably less, although practically every family is even now in some way still connected with the land. Throughout history, farming of the fertile valley has been the main occupation of the people. Farming is highly developed to produce excellent yields, and irrigation has been practiced for centuries. But only hand tools are used, and these are of the most basic kind. In Chapter 3, "Everyday Life," the indigenous customs and culture of this agricultural society are further discussed.

THE MAN-MADE ENVIRONMENT

The Newars form the largest group of the multiracial Kathmandu Valley population—some forty-five percent—and they are responsible for the artistically sensitive design and construction of the urban brick settlements, which are still in use today. The high point of their
creative building activities was reached under the Malla kings, who ruled in the Kathmandu Valley from the thirteenth to the eighteenth century.

The settlements are compact, concentrated, and quite medieval in appearance, although many now have some electricity. That an agricultural society achieved the unusually refined urban quality of the Newar settlements has been explained in part by the need to preserve agricultural land in the valley, which was densely populated throughout recorded history and probably a long time before that. In many cases, land that cannot easily be used for cultivation—for instance, on the tops of hills—is used for the towns.

The towns are not much larger than villages, except for the city of Kathmandu itself and neighboring Patan. Their layout, their plans, their street patterns and squares, the housing, and the relationship of narrow streets to open areas reveal a superb sense of design, a mastery of materials, and a highly developed craftsmanship.

The buildings are mostly of handmade fired brick and have wooden roofs covered with tile or straw. Often stone is used for the many ornate temples and richly carved and decorated monuments. Many of the ancient narrow streets paved with brick and stone are still in use, although damaged by time. Numerous fountains, water tanks, and paved market squares, sometimes hundreds of years old, still serve the present inhabitants.

The settlements located along the trade routes between Tibet and India were flourishing commercial centers that, compared to the rest of the world at that time, enjoyed a very high standard of living and well-being during most of the Malla rule. The man-made environment—the towns and their design and the way the houses are built—is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, "Towns and Housing."

The richly decorated palaces of the Malla rulers still dominate the Durbar squares of the three principal towns: Kathmandu, Patan, and Bhadgaon. Besides the temples and religious monuments, the palaces are the most prominent buildings of these towns, the visible expression of the power of the kings.

After Prithvi Narayan Shah had conquered and again unified the valley, he built for himself, as a symbol of this unification, an addition to the Malla palace in Kathmandu. For this purpose, he recruited the best Newar craftsmen from the three Malla kingdoms.

This extensive palace addition, however, also marked the beginning of the decline of an era of great indigenous artistic expression. The Newars' unique quality of building and artistry that flourished under the Malla kings gradually lost the rulers' support. In the nineteenth century, the Tibet-India trade routes going through Nepal also began to lose importance because of the consolidation of British rule in India. The income and wealth of the Newar towns declined, and building activities decreased. After the middle of the nineteenth century, the Rana rulers, the hereditary family of prime ministers, began to import European building styles. Following a visit to Europe by Jang Bahadur Rana in 1850, French Renaissance palace architecture was brought to Kathmandu.

Another addition to the old royal palace in the center of Kathmandu was built by the Ranas with pseudo-Renaissance columns and stucco decorations all painted white. This new wing was stuck onto one of the wonderfully carved original towers, thereby obliterating one of its façades. At present, the palace in the center of Kathmandu is an astonishing architectural mixture. There are the intricately decorated brick-and-wood Newar buildings, created during several centuries of Malla rule; then the additions built by Prithvi Narayan Shah; and finally the whitewashed wing of nineteenth-century imitation French Renaissance classicism facing Kathmandu's busy market square.

The largest of the new palaces, the Singha Durbar or Lion Palace, was built by one of the later Rana rulers on the outskirts of Kathmandu, influenced by the palace of Versailles. This nineteenth-century imitation French edifice, which was destroyed by fire in July 1973, had over one thousand rooms and was built for the private use of the ruling Ranas, their wives, and concubines. It was so large that in recent times it housed most of the offices of the government. Several smaller palaces built by branches of the Rana family can be found on the outskirts of Kathmandu.

RELIGION AND ITS MONUMENTS

Religion is the anchor, basis, and regulator of this society. The physical expression of religion is omnipresent in the man-made environment. Nepal today and through history has been a Hindu kingdom. But the historical Buddha was born in Lumbini in the Terai in the south
of present-day Nepal. Most of the people practice Hinduism now, but they also worship at Buddhist stupas and shrines. Not only have Buddhism and Hinduism become entwined, but worship of a variety of new joint deities has also evolved. Numerous different incarnations of the gods require attention at different times of the day and year, according to a complicated calendar of movable feasts. There are also all kinds of demigods as well as good and evil spirits that continue to live in the customs of the people. This prolific pantheon is handsomely represented in an abundance of sculptures, monuments, chaityas (shrines in stupa form), figures, decorations, and even vessels and stones. Splendidly ornamented temples, high-tiered pagodas, and whitewashed “Kathmandu stupas” with their watchful eyes and golden crowns decorate every village and town. Many monuments are dedicated to the gods most important in an agricultural society: those dealing with fertility and rain. The guthi system, which is discussed in Chapter 3, supports the temples and festivals. The traditional extended family is still the center of the religion-based social customs, and age is the object of reverence and respect. Old people enjoy a special position of privilege and preside at family festivals that all have religious overtones.

It has been said that the shape of the pagodas so prevalent all over eastern Asia was first developed in Nepal. This form is supposed to have been inspired by the Himalayan pines. The graceful silhouettes of tiered pagodas dominate many of the Kathmandu Valley towns and accent their skylines. Stone temples showing South Indian influences and many typical indigenous Kathmandu stupas and chaityas decorate carefully proportioned town squares.

Buddhist monasteries, their paved courts filled with sculptures, memorials, chaityas, religious symbols, and figures of all kinds, are scattered throughout the larger towns. Huge fierce-looking temple lions or dogs often guard their doors. The famous stupas of Swayambhunath and Bodnath, as well as the most sacred Hindu temple of Pashupatinath, attract streams of pilgrims from far away who often stay for days in the vicinity of these shrines.

In 1934, a major earthquake shook the entire Kathmandu Valley and did enormous damage. Many old temples collapsed; some were rebuilt, especially in Patan, but others were never reconstructed, and only a few pictures of the lost buildings still exist. Even now one can still see cracks in the brickwork of many buildings that are the result of the earthquake. The temples and monuments that were rebuilt after the 1934 destruction fortunately followed traditional methods and models.

The chapter “Festivals and Religious Life” shows the primacy of the gods over the people’s lives and the importance of the religious monuments.

PRESENT-DAY PROBLEMS

After the 1951 revolution, which removed the Rana usurpers and restored King Tribhuvan to his legitimate rule, more and more people from the West came to Nepal. They greatly admired the art treasures, the towns, the temples, and the Newar architecture. One side effect was that large quantities of Newar art—called Nepalese art abroad—were sold to avid collectors. Although by now all exports of antiques have been stopped, many old buildings are lacking sculptures or carvings that were removed and sold abroad.

Recently many people, especially in Kathmandu, who can afford to modernize their houses have begun to tear out the old intricately carved wooden window frames and screens that are typical of Newar buildings. Instead, imported glass panes set into cheap commercial frames are used. There seems to be little appreciation of the beauty of the traditional architectural heritage. It is, after all, what the people have always known and today consider out of date. To many, commercial imports from the West, no matter how poorly made, seem more desirable.

Building, particularly in Kathmandu, now follows entirely foreign ideas, using methods and materials imported from India. Instead of brick and wood, imported cement is preferred. A cement plant is under construction and will start operating about 1974 or 1975 to replace high-priced imported cement. But many people fear that this cement plant will pollute a large area of the valley and damage crops in its vicinity.

Bricks are manufactured now to uniform standards by a new Chinese-sponsored plant that produces bricks more weather-resistant than the handmade kind. These hard bricks can be used without the recently introduced cement cover, which not only cracks but also grows an ugly black fungus during the monsoon.

Unfortunately it has become the fashion to plaster over the handsome old brick walls to make them look
new. More and more buildings are being renewed in this way, especially in the center of Kathmandu. To enlarge buildings, upper stories built of cement with commercial window frames are added.

Recent office buildings are bigger and higher than many of the old temples and pagodas of Kathmandu. They are greatly admired by all the Nepalese who visit their capital. Telephone poles and electric poles are everywhere. Wires like slash marks crisscross the graceful tiered pagoda roofs, and huge transformers are often installed even on temple roofs. The traditional skyline of red-tile roofs is being destroyed by new higher buildings.

Some attempts have been made to copy traditional buildings by using imported materials. Predictably, the results are poor, since the imported architects frequently misinterpret the local traditions. For instance, cheaply made plastic decorations, imitating the old woodcarvings, are used on a prominent new office building in Kathmandu, or genuine old window frames are used to decorate new construction. But the combination often turns out to look fake. At present the population of the city of Kathmandu is growing rapidly because of the growth of the government. New homes are being built on the outskirts of the city by those in high administrative positions, who prefer white stucco bungalows, copied from those of India. These dispersed houses waste precious agricultural land and represent a total break with the local building traditions and the past. Unfortunately the new living patterns set the pace for private residential development. The traditional building skills appear to be lost for lack of use.

But what is really needed, a modern water-supply and sewage system, street paving and drainage, seems strictly beyond the capabilities of the government and all the foreign-aid programs combined. To really accomplish modernization, the urgently needed urban infrastructure, especially a dependable water-supply and waste-disposal system, will finally have to be built. To date, these basic requirements of modern living have been almost totally neglected. Yet every day more people come to Kathmandu, making the sanitation problems ever more urgent and damaging the historic environment. The rapid increase of population in Kathmandu City results mainly in the overcrowding of the oldest and most unsanitary buildings and neighborhoods. The chapter “Continuity and Change” deals with the problems of development.

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

How will the people of the Kathmandu Valley accommodate their own very special environment to the needs of the future? How will they deal with change?

The process of modernization can be effectively guided by first adapting the inherited environment to new uses. Building and rebuilding is a continuous process that can be observed in old towns everywhere in the world. Most of the Kathmandu Valley still reflects a traditional society and religious culture. Modernization, as might be expected, is beginning to become visible first in the capital, and what happens in Kathmandu influences the rest of Nepal.

The Physical Development Plan for the Kathmandu Valley, prepared by the Department of Housing and Physical Planning of His Majesty’s Government, first published in 1969, and further developed since, proposes many positive steps. It initiates the creation of historic zones in the city of Kathmandu and the other major towns and outlines a formula for the preservation of historic monuments. A process of balanced growth is proposed, based on the social, economic, and physical data set forth in the plan. In turn, this plan for the Kathmandu Valley should serve as a model for other regions of Nepal by suggesting a framework for coordinated development.

Economic and physical development are coordinated in the Fourth Plan (1970–75), the economic development plan prepared by the National Planning Commission of His Majesty’s Government. This is an important step in the right direction, since economic objectives usually take priority over physical development.

But sound modernization can result only when the people fully participate in the process of change. And only if tangible and visible improvements are achieved will the majority become interested in participation. In no area can change be demonstrated and understood as readily as in the physical environment. The modernization of the physical environment mostly precedes the much slower modernization of social institutions. A new approach, requiring education and social change, can often best be demonstrated visually by physical innovation. In turn, new attitudes established now will set the direction for future modernization, until finally a process of development is established.

Therefore the kind and quality of building that is going on in Kathmandu now may well become crucial for future
development. The valley, by virtue of its geography, is subject to air pollution and is in great danger. Growth—that is, one-sided economic growth—has proved in many developing countries to be a limited goal, creating many new problems while failing to improve the life of the majority. Kathmandu faces these problems now. It also faces the danger of destroying its matchless historical monuments, its agricultural resources, and the unique traditional urban building patterns that are in harmony with the natural environment.

Tourism is at present the largest and most promising growth industry in the Kathmandu Valley. Tourism produces a quick return, much foreign exchange, and many new jobs. It also establishes the need to protect and preserve the historical environment, which is a primary economic asset to attract tourists from all over the world. Therefore a carefully directed development of tourism going hand in hand with preservation and restoration of the architectural environment could well be one positive road into the future. Economic development and tourism are discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

Despite its long physical isolation, Nepal is at an important crossroads of Asia and shares two long borders, one with China and the other with India. Neither the mountains in the north nor the jungles in the south offer much protection now. The economic and social penetration from the West knows no physical barriers and few political ones. Ideas and information travel around the world with the speed of sound.

When strongly held ideas and opposite cultures meet, they need not destroy each other or the unfortunate people who are caught in the conflict that results, even though history is full of examples of this. Another route is one of cooperation and sharing. In turn, past and future can be reconciled in the present by adapting innovations creatively and by preserving the values of tradition without destroying their sound base. This requires great leadership and understanding of the values that are involved. It also requires a pragmatic approach, step-by-step implementation, and constant adjustment of planned change so that the majority of the people are not left behind. This book tries to focus attention on both and on ways to combine tradition and change.

The inhabitants of Kathmandu and of all Nepal will have to work out their own relations with the West and with the powerful neighbors on which the country is dependent, for Nepal has no industry and no access to the sea. Given its location, it will have to decide its own priorities, its own political future, and its own rate of change, as well as what is important to preserve.

Now, more than two decades after the country was opened to the West, change is beginning to affect the environment drastically and touch the lives of increasing numbers of people. But the bountiful nature of the valley is still in balance with its inhabitants, their buildings, and their settlements. They still form a whole. This is what our industrial world has lost, and this is the great treasure of the Valley of Kathmandu.
11. View over roofs of Patan.
13. Town center, Kirtipur.
15. Traditional Newar housing, public square, Sankhu.
Squares in the center of town: Durbar Square, Bhadgaon.
17. Shiva Temple and market, Durbar Square, Kathmandu.
18. Royal bath, Patan.

19. Entrance to royal palace, Patan.
20, 21. "Kathmandu" stupas on road to Bodnath (left) and in Bodnath (right).
22. Stupa Shree Ghahh
Bihar, Kathmandu.
26. Market and Durbar Square, Kathmandu.
28. Royal palace viewed from Durbar Square, Patan.
30–34. The very urban quality of the Newar towns.
49. Machendranath Temple, Bungmati.
2. THE TALE OF HISTORY

The history of Nepal is still in the process of being researched and written. While some carefully documented historical accounts have been prepared, much more remains to be done. What is available is often richly embroidered with tales and legends of all kinds, frequently influenced by fanciful religious beliefs. Fact and fiction are hard to separate. Yet for the purpose of gaining some understanding of the culture and ideas that formed the man-made environment, the tales and folklore that are the living history of the people are as important as cold, documented facts, especially since the vast majority of the people do not read or write. The stories are their only reality and living connection with history. The delightful imagination that created many of the legends certainly is a fact that must be reckoned with in any attempt to learn about the people and the environment they have built to support and express their society and way of life.

ANCIENT LEGENDS AND BUDDHIST CULTURE

The historical accounts of the Kathmandu Valley go back thousands of years to ancient Buddhist and Hindu legends. According to these, the valley once was a huge round lake. This lake, the Buddhists say, was inhabited by holy Nagas, or serpent gods, including Karkot Raja, king of serpent deities, who is said still to dwell in Taudah Pond beyond the Chobhar Gorge, through which the Bagmati River drains the valley to the south. In ancient times, many pilgrims, mostly ascetics from India, came to visit the lake that filled the Kathmandu Valley. One, the Bodhisattva Manjusri (or Manjushree), is said to have come with his followers from China to worship the radiant flame of Lord Swayambhu, the God Supreme. With his scimitar, Manjusri cut an opening in a low hill south of the lake, creating the Chobhar Gorge, and thus he drained the waters. He left his followers to settle the valley, and before he departed he made one of them king.

The Hindu legends say that Vishnu, with his discus, cut a passage through the mountains to drain the lake, creating the Valley of Kathmandu. Geological findings, the fertile valley floor, and, the abundance of clay suggest that the legends are true: that a lake once covered the valley floor.

The Swayambhunath Stupa is on a hilltop a few miles west of the center of Kathmandu. Erected by Buddhist saints over two thousand years ago, the dome is said to protect the Divine Light of Swayambhu, the Self-existent One, the God Supreme. It is thought that in ancient times the holy men and pilgrims who came to the lake that then covered the Kathmandu Valley saw a brilliant radiant flame emanating from a lotus blossom. This indicated to them the location for the stupa. After the waters had left...
the valley, they built the Swayambhunath Stupa in that place.

Over the centuries, thousands of pilgrims came annually to worship at the famous shrine. Until recently, they had to climb a steep flight of three hundred steps to reach the stupa platform. Now a road has been built. The main stupa is surrounded by dozens of smaller ones, also called chaityas, and all kinds of family memorials that are richly carved and decorated. A metal fence encloses the huge white base of the main stupa, with rows of much-used prayer wheels on every fence post. Two large temple lions guard the access to the stupa from the main stairs. Between them, an enormous metal thunderbolt, called a bajra (vajra), faces visitors and pilgrims who ascend the steep steps. The bajra symbolizes the gratefulness of the Buddha to Indra, the king of the Hindu gods, who came to rescue him with a thunderbolt when he was attacked by demons.

To either side of the stupa and facing the main access to the platform are two smaller temples, Tra Tapa Pur and Annanta Pur. Two fierce-looking temple wardens protect the entrance to the platform of the stupa. But—so one story says—the wardens are not there to keep anyone out but to prevent the Lord Buddha from leaving the Swayambhunath Stupa. The Tibetans, the story goes on, offered the Buddha a new and richer temple if he would come to Tibet. The people of the Kathmandu Valley did not want him to leave; so they stationed the two soldiers as guards next to the stairs.

The stupas of the Kathmandu Valley are unique in their shape and symbolism and quite different from those in Burma and Thailand and other parts of Asia. The white-washed hemispheric body is crowned by a square-based tower with a pair of slanted eyes painted on each of the four sides. Above the four pairs of pensive eyes is an elongated gold crown made of thirteen rings topped by more decorations and prayer flags.

Every stupa in the Kathmandu Valley must have five elements. First, each must have prayer wheels all around its base. Next, there must be a solid white dome forming the base, the symbol of the womb of the mother of the Buddha. Third, the stupa must have two eyes to represent the sun and the moon, the local explanation being that these are the ever seeing eyes of Lord Buddha watching over Nepal and its people so they do not misbehave. Between the eyes is a round third eye: a raised circle, the peace symbol of the Buddha, also said to represent his purity. A decoration that looks like a question mark between the eyes represents the flame of the Buddha's knowledge. Another version says that this decoration is the shape of the spinal column of a man in meditation—a divine quality. Only by meditating can purity, symbolized by the third eye, be gained.

The fourth element needed for each Kathmandu stupa is the “thirteen steps of becoming pure.” These steps are symbolized by the thirteen rings above the square tower with eyes. The fifth element, a sort of crown at the top above the rings, stands for the end of sorrow and the attainment of Nirvana, a state that can be achieved in one’s lifetime, according to Buddhist belief. Prayer flags of all kinds are usually attached to the top of a stupa and can be seen from far away fluttering in the wind.

The Swayambhunath Stupa is surrounded by numerous religious buildings and houses that are the homes of many monks and their families, including some who have recently fled from Tibet. Small monkeys play and run around the many smaller decorated stupas and monuments looking for food. Children find the paved platform of the stupa a good place for their games. There are always groups of Buddhist visitors and pilgrim families from all over the country, from India and beyond.

Gautama, the historical Buddha, is said to have been born in Lumbini in the Terai in 536 B.C. He visited and preached in the valley during the fifth century B.C. A memorial pillar erected in 250 B.C. by Emperor Ashoka of India, a patron of Buddhism, was found in Lumbini. Buddhist missionaries sent by Ashoka also came to the valley, and most inhabitants of the area became Buddhists as a result. The four ancient stupas of Patan are said to go back to Ashoka's time. According to Toni Hagen, the Swiss geographer and expert on Nepal, these four monuments are not actual stupas, which are erected over relics of the Buddha, but are chaityas representing the four ages of the world. D.-R. Regmi, the Nepalese historian, says the main difference between a stupa and a chaitya is that the latter does not contain a relic, nor is it associated with the memory of any Buddhist saint or preacher.

By the end of the third century B.C. some of the famous Buddhist stupas of the valley had been built. Besides the hilltop stupa of Swayambhunath, the stupa of Bodnath (or Baudhda) attracted pilgrims from far away. There a circular town grew around the huge circular stupa base.
Several monasteries next to the Bodnath Stupa house Buddhist monks, including at present also Tibetan refugees. The Chini Lama, who claims to be the Dalai Lama’s representative in Nepal, lives in Bodnath in one of the old houses facing the stupa, where he makes a living by selling Tibetan rugs and antiques.

Buddhism was the original faith of the valley and its cultural base. From a variety of records, including accounts of Chinese travelers, it is apparent that the Kathmandu Valley developed very early, no doubt because of its excellent climate and fertility. According to The Physical Development Plan for the Kathmandu Valley, a relatively advanced stage of urban culture was reached very long ago in the early established towns. Religious motives were the reason for the towns. Many Buddhist monasteries called bahal or vihara were built. Such a monastery usually consists of a temple facing a square courtyard surrounded by buildings used by the monks. The courtyard is often filled with a number of chaityas, or small shrines. Other courtyards connected with the main one provide more housing.

The shape of the typical family compound, housing the traditional extended family, is similar to that of a bahal with a chaitya for family worship in the center of the court. The bahal building form is the basic unit of the Newar towns. Studying the recently made plans of the towns, one can readily discern these groupings, which are repeated over and over throughout all settlements and result in closely concentrated building patterns.

THE ORIGINS OF THE PEOPLE

The people of the Kathmandu Valley are a mixture of many different Asian groups and tribes, since for centuries the valley was a political and religious refuge, as well as a trade center between Tibet and China in the north and India in the south. Because the valley was always fertile and wealthy, it became a cultural center and a center of attraction for people of different origins very early in its history.

The most important population group in Nepal today—numerically, socially, and politically speaking—is composed of Indo-Aryans from northern India. There are also numerous tribal groups of Mongolian origin from east and southeast Asia (Burma), as well as Tibet and the north. Toni Hagen, who has traveled all over Nepal for many years and who knows this beautiful country better than anyone else, including most Nepalese, divides the people into Tibeto-Nepalese and Indo-Nepalese groups. He names some twenty-one distinct tribes. Many of the tribes or groups do not even understand one another’s language.

The historian D. R. Regmi believes that the people who first settled in the valley about the seventh century B.C. came to Kathmandu via northern India but were of Tibeto-Burman origin. The next group, the Kirata tribes who arrived from the seventh century B.C. to the second century A.D., also came from northern India through the Bagmati River valley via eastern Nepal.

The Newars—who still form the largest population group of the valley, have a language and literature of their own, and are the originators of the towns and culture—are a mixture of both population groups. They are considered the aboriginal inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley, who have changed their appearance through intermarriage with Indo-Aryans. The last census found that in the Kathmandu Valley over half the people speak Newari, over forty percent speak Nepali, and five percent speak Tamang.

Recorded history says that the Newars were ruled by a succession of Indo-Aryan kings, such as the Licchavis and, later, the Mallas. The Malla rulers, who became completely absorbed into the Newar culture of the Kathmandu Valley, are considered to have been high-caste Newars, although they practiced the Hindu religion. Yet Buddhism was the predominant religion of the Newars during the Malla rule. In fact the two religions complement each other and frequently share temples, shrines, and deities, besides adding new joint gods. There are also tantric elements and animism in the rich religious life that dominates this society.

The caste system was brought to the Kathmandu Valley and Nepal in ancient times by the Indo-Aryans and has been reorganized several times. The Hindu Shah kings of Gorkha, after conquering the valley in 1769, took over the highest castes, and the Newars were classified as the largest caste of Nepal within the new system. But it should be made clear that when one speaks about the cultural and artistic achievements of the inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley, the Newars are the population group that made these contributions. The Newars built the towns, the palaces, and the multitude of religious
monuments for Buddhist and Hindu worship. They also achieved a remarkable synthesis of these two dominant religions by physically representing in related ways the most fanciful and imaginative mythology of gods, demi-gods, and good and evil spirits of every kind.

HISTORICAL TIMES

The Licchavi Period: Third to Twelfth Century. The Licchavi period is generally considered to be the first historical age of the valley. The Licchavis came from northern India, whence they were driven out at the end of the second century. They gradually conquered a good deal of territory, including the Kathmandu Valley, and they brought with them people of all castes from northern India. During their rule, the Kathmandu Valley prospered. Trade and commerce was expanded, and agriculture, art, and architecture flourished.

Records show that in the seventh century a Buddhist princess of Nepal was married to the king of Tibet, who simultaneously married a Chinese Buddhist princess. The two queens converted the king of Tibet to Buddhism, a step that strengthened Tibet’s ties with Nepal. During the Licchavi period, trade was highly developed, primarily with Tibet and also with China, which was one of the most prosperous nations at that time. The people of the valley became wealthy. Irrigation was introduced, and agricultural production was thereby increased. According to The Physical Development Plan for the Kathmandu Valley, the rulers understood the importance of supporting agriculture, although trade was the foremost economic concern. The country enjoyed a monopoly on trade passing between Tibet and India.

The town of Devpatan had been established before the Licchavis came to the valley. They made it their capital and erected their palace there in the sixth century A.D. Several villages were built on the river banks, including one on the route to Tibet on the site of present-day Bhadgaon. The township of Sankhu was established on another road to Tibet. Toward the end of the seventh century, Patan was laid out on the site of the four old Buddhist stupas that are said to go back to Ashoka. Later it was enlarged into a compact town.

One of the later Licchavi kings established a town on the bank of the Vishnumati River, where several villages already existed. It was called Kasathamandap (literally, “the wooden building”), or Kathmandu, having been named after a large building constructed from the wood of a single tree. Kath means “tree,” and mandu is “house” in Newari.

Another account of the city’s founding is that Lakshminarasimha Malla built the Kasathamandap, a wooden temple that gave the name Kathmandu to the city of Kantipur. In fact, until the sixteenth century, Kathmandu was frequently called Kantipur. The Kasathamandap Temple, which is in the center of present-day Kathmandu, is considered to be the oldest wooden building anywhere in the world.

Both Hinduism and Buddhism flourished, although the kings were followers of Shiva and Vishnu and the Hindu creed. The social organization was basically a Hindu caste system, with shared Buddhist and Hindu deities. As the valley was increasingly prosperous and therefore desirable, it became a target for neighboring rulers and invasions of conquerors. As a result, political unrest grew.

The Malla Rulers: End of Twelfth Century to 1769. At the close of the twelfth century, the Malla dynasty emerged. (Some inscriptions with the name Malla have been found to go back even earlier.) This dynasty, which finally came to rule the valley, is said to have come from India, fleeing from the Mohammedan invasion of that country.

The word malla in Sanskrit means “wrestler.” One source says that the favorite sport of King Ardeva of the Thakuri dynasty was wrestling and that one day, while engaged in this sport, he was informed about the birth of a son. He promptly called the boy Malla, and from then on, it became the surname of all his successors.

The history of the valley is richly embroidered with stories that have been handed down in many different versions. These stories dwell on political events, religious beliefs, and the creation of the many handsome monuments of the ubiquitous gods.

The Mallas presided over a flourishing realm for over five hundred and fifty years and gave the Kathmandu Valley stability and prosperity to develop its unique culture, especially before it was divided into three kingdoms in 1482. They introduced many useful innovations, including new crops, various fruits, maize, and chilies, the last of which were exported in large quantities to India. Bright red chilies can still be seen today drying in the paved
village squares and streets or hanging from the rafters of the wide projecting roofs, adding spots of color to the narrow alleys. Trade with both Tibet and India provided a base of prosperity for the towns. Raw materials from other parts of Nepal were brought to the valley and made into exportable goods by the local craftsmen. There was a flourishing cottage industry. Many families had hand looms, and a strong textile industry grew. Goldsmiths and silversmiths fashioned exquisite jewelry as well as decorations for temples and monuments.

During the long and successful Malla period, Buddhism, which had been the religion of earlier rulers, was the faith of the majority of the people. Although the Malla rulers practiced Hinduism, they also contributed to Buddhist shrines. The two religions supported each other's beliefs. There are counterpart gods as well as counterpart castes, and Hindus come to Buddhist temples to worship and vice versa. Swayambhunath, the foremost Buddhist stupa in the valley, also has a Hindu temple dedicated to Sitala, the Hindu goddess of smallpox, to whom both Hindus and Buddhists pray for protection. Only Pashupatinath, the most holy Hindu temple, restricts worshipers in the main sanctuary to those of the Hindu faith. Religious festivals, which are liberally distributed throughout the year, are occasions for everyone to celebrate, including the royal family. The migration from India of high-caste Hindus, especially Brahmins, from the twelfth to the fifteenth century greatly influenced the later development of the valley. Even now Brahmins proudly trace their ancestry to their Indian forefathers.

During the Malla rule, Mohammedanism was also peacefully accepted, and there are still some Moslems in the valley today who can be easily identified by their turbans. Jesuit missionaries also came to preach and settle in Kathmandu under the Mallas. But, after the Gorkhas conquered the valley, Prithvi Narayan Shah ordered all Christians and especially missionaries to leave: “First the Bible, then the trading stations, then the cannon.” Thereafter no Westerner or Christian, except, later, the British Residents, was permitted to come to Kathmandu.

During the Malla time there was an extraordinarily prolific building activity in the Kathmandu Valley, if one considers how small the area really is and how relatively few people lived there. Most of the religious monuments, palaces, and decorated houses that today are so greatly admired were built during the Malla rule. The skills of the Newar craftsmen developed over centuries and achieved a great flowering under the later Malla rulers. The perception of scale and space, the grasp of form and perspective, and the sense of rhythm and design displayed by these craftsmen are unique in their perfection. Yet the first plans of the towns were drawn quite recently and made by actually measuring the buildings, streets, and squares and by aerial photography. To my knowledge, no old plans drawn to scale have yet been found. The urban design of the towns is discussed in detail in Chapter 4, “Towns and Housing.”

The Malla period is divided, as is traditional, according to rulers. Here it seems practical to mention but a few who made special contributions in the areas of cultural interest and building.

The town of Bhadgaon was established on the route to Tibet in the middle of the thirteenth century by Ananda Malla. Jayasthiti Malla (1382–95) appears as a great patron of the arts and a reformer. He standardized weights and measures and assessed the value of the land and buildings in the valley. He initiated reforms in the punishment of criminals and introduced fines. He also regulated the people by means of strict orthodox caste laws. The Buddhists were classified into eighty-five Hindu castes according to their trades. The Buddhist monks were encouraged to marry and live with their families in and around the monasteries, as monks continue to live today.

Yaksha Malla (1408–82) ruled for over forty years and expanded his territory as far as the Tibetan trade town of Digarchi in the north and the Ganges in the south. But he also divided the kingdom among his three sons before his death in 1482, and this division caused a great deal of turmoil, eventually bringing about the end of the Malla rule. One fortunate result, however, is that instead of one palace there are now three. The largest one is in Kathmandu, of course. The one in Patan, dominated by a large pagoda-shaped tower facing Durbar Square, has a series of wonderfully decorated courtyards, including one with a sunken stone bath or pool. Then there is the brick palace with fifty-five windows in Bhadgaon, each window frame most beautifully carved. Its Golden Gate is a masterpiece of fine artistry.

Facing each of the palaces in Kathmandu, Bhadgaon, and Patan is the golden statue of a Malla king sitting high on a stone column, flanked by his two much smaller queens. All Malla kings had two queens whom they
married the same day, a practice continued until quite recently by the Shahs.

King Yoga Narendra Malla, who ruled in the early eighteenth century over Patan, was greatly loved by the people. His golden image, sitting on a stone column that stands on Patan’s Durbar Square, faces the high, pagoda-shaped tower of his beautiful palace. His figure is protected by an aroused cobra, a symbol of his power and prosperity, and he is accompanied by his two queens. Poised on the king’s head is the figure of a small bird, which is an unusual addition to a king’s monument. The people say that this beloved ruler is not really dead, or else the little bird on his head would fly away. The window of his bedroom in the palace tower, which he faces, is always kept open so that he can see inside. One door of the palace is never shut, because, the story goes, one day he may want to come back to his home and his own room. Part of the matchless palace of Patan is now used to garrison troops, but the soldiers, like those everywhere else in the world, have little respect for their environment.

A monetary system and coinage were introduced after the valley was divided. Nepalese coins were also used in Tibet, a practice that was profitable for Nepal. Commercial facilities continued to grow, cultural development made new strides, and the arts flourished under the Malla rulers of the three kingdoms. Their names are too numerous to mention here. The history is most complex, and much of it is still being researched and established from inscriptions and documents.

D. R. Regmi, in his account of medieval Nepal, writes that the political conditions of that period were marked by quarrels and intrigues between the rulers that occasionally led to civil war. The mass of the people had a hard time supporting the life of pomp and splendor of the courts as well as the fighting, which often resulted in plunder. Despite the unrest and the progressively deteriorating economic and political conditions, the arts and crafts continued to flourish under the patronage of the divided rulers. The rivalry between the three kingdoms also caused the towns to build walls and to create close settlement patterns for defense. Several of the towns still have gates today—for instance, Bhadgaon, Sankhu, and Patan.

Jayaprakash Malla, the last Malla king of Kathmandu, came to power in 1732. He had trouble with his courtiers, who tried to get rid of him. There also were rivalries with the other Malla rulers of the valley. Finally, the neighboring king of Gorkha invaded the valley, summoned by the Malla king of Patan.

The Shahs of Gorkha. According to legend, the little town of Gorkha, some forty air miles from Kathmandu, was founded at the foot of the holy castle of Gorakhnath. A tribe of Rajput Kshatriyas had come there earlier, driven out of India by the Moslems. They conquered Gorkha in 1559, and there they settled and ruled.

In 1769, after long fighting, Prithvi Narayan Shah of Gorkha conquered all three Malla principalities and unified the Valley of Kathmandu. Despite the fact that the Newars were said to be of peaceful character and not interested in warfare, the Gorkha king had a difficult time conquering the valley. Especially Kirtipur, a hilltop town not far from Kathmandu, held out for a long time and was conquered only through a trick. Once before, in 1763, Marbhupal Shah, the father of Prithvi Narayan, had tried to invade Kathmandu but was badly beaten by the Mallas.

Prithvi Narayan did not stop with the Kathmandu Valley. He continued his conquest until at the time of his death in 1775 all of present-day Nepal and more was incorporated in his empire. Considering the geography of most of Nepal, the rugged foothills of the Himalayas, this conquest, at that time, was truly a remarkable feat.

Nepal under the Shah kings later moved unsuccessfully against Chinese sovereignty in Tibet (1788–92) and also tried to fight the British in northern India, with poor results. But the expansion and conquests of the Shahs continued, and at one time, the territory of Nepal included Sikkim and much more of the Terai, the fertile area adjoining India.

While the Newars had no match anywhere in Nepal for their high cultural and architectural achievements and their ability to trade, the Gorkhas distinguished themselves by their abilities as warriors. The British discovered this in the war of 1814–16, which ended in the Treaty of Friendship of 1816 and the acceptance of a British residency in Kathmandu. A pro-British change in Nepalese politics was another long-range result. When the Sepoy Mutiny broke out in India in 1857, Nepal offered to send troops to help the British. After that, the Gurkha (Gorkha) Brigade, as it is still called, of the British army was formed. The Gurkha soldiers participated in both world wars as mercenaries of the British and became famous for their
fierceness. At the end of World War II, there were forty-five Gurkha battalions in the British army, and many had greatly distinguished themselves. The British did not recruit Newars because it was said that they did not fight as well.

At present there are Gurkha mercenaries in both the British and the Indian armies—an arrangement that is most important to Nepal from an economic point of view. For a long time, the Gurkha soldiers provided Nepal with its largest source of foreign exchange. Often the retired Gurkha soldiers, who are paid a pension by the British, come back to their villages, where they are the only members of the community with a money income and the ability to read and write. Many of them become school-teachers, teaching village youngsters the three R’s, usually the only schooling they receive.

Prithvi Narayan, after his conquest of the Kathmandu Valley, also turned his attention to improving the trade with Tibet and to the development of local industry. An army-based feudal system was created whereby successful army officers became feudal lords with broad powers to keep order and to collect taxes for remission to Kathmandu. Large parcels of land were distributed to officers and victorious commanders. The king also appropriated a considerable amount of land for himself and his family. From this land, which was cultivated by tenant farmers who had to contribute their labor, the kings supplied their own households. Even today, the king and other members of the royal family have very large private land holdings and huge estates for their exclusive use.

Many of the land holdings given to army officers and to those who had rendered useful services to the king were birta, or tax-free estates. The birta system, which was introduced by the Gorkhas, supported the feudal land-holding patterns that disenfranchised the people.

The Newars accepted the new rulers without much protest, although the Gorkhas were very different from previous conquerors who had been assimilated in due course into the highly developed Newar culture. The Gorkhas, as a minority, remained apart, and the Newar culture continued undisturbed, although unsupported by the ruling families. Prithvi Narayan had the palace at Kathmandu rebuilt for himself by Newar artists and craftsmen from all three Malla kingdoms, but this was the last major royal support for indigenous building activities.

The new rulers were soon occupied with family feuds and political struggles in which the majority of the people had little part. The everyday life of the peasants was hardly affected at all and did not change from its traditional medieval ways until quite recently.

During the first part of the nineteenth century, the internal political conditions at the palace grew increasingly confused. There were continuing violent power struggles between the king, the crown prince, the two queens and their offspring, the commander-in-chief, the prime minister, courtiers, and the heads of important families. The king, besides having two official queens, had numerous children by concubines living at the palace. The same was true of other important men close to the court. The succession arrangements were therefore most important. Often the only way to power was by doing away with those ahead in line.

The same names of noble families occur again and again throughout the nineteenth century and up to the present. Numerous branches were added to each family, composed of the offspring born of several wives or recognized concubines.

**The Rana Rule.** The Gorkha prime ministers began to play an increasingly important political role—a development that frightened King Rajendra Bir Bikram Shah into having his own prime minister assassinated in 1845. This marked the beginning of a series of events that led to the notorious midnight massacre in the courtyard of the Kathmandu Palace: the Kot Massacre of 1847. Most of the leading nobility of Nepal who had been invited to a party in the palace were slain on that occasion, and the king fled to the British residency. The victor in this power struggle was Jang Bahadur, a young army officer originally selected by the king as the assassin of the prime minister. Jang Bahadur himself now became prime minister, the title having been conferred on him by the queen. He added the title Rana to his name, claiming that he was a descendant of a royal house in India, and he and his seven brothers promptly took over the entire government. He then proceeded to crush any opposition to his power.

Jang Bahadur ruled Nepal for thirty years and arranged to have the office of prime minister made a hereditary prerogative of the Rana family, which was given a social status equal to that of royalty. He also decreed that the line of succession would be from brother to brother, with the sons of the oldest brother next in line. His purpose
was to insure the existence of a mature ruler at all times.

After Jang Bahadur had come to power, various intrigues by the queen ended in the exile of both king and queen and the elevation of the crown prince to the throne—with British endorsement. This event led to the dependency and ultimate imprisonment of the Shah kings by the Ranas, who in fact became the real rulers. But the Ranas were sufficiently clever not to do away with the royal house entirely, for the people attributed divine powers to the king, just as they do today.

To fortify the future of his line, Jang Bahadur also saw to it that three of his daughters were married to the king’s oldest son and that his eldest son was married to the king’s daughter. He and his brothers, having numerous wives, all fathered a great many children. Jang Bahadur most carefully codified the succession, including the hereditary title of maharaja for his family. But as soon as he died most of the male members of his family began to compete for power. This power struggle frequently led to violence, which was the predominant feature of all political life in Nepal until 1951.

The Ranas continued to arrange the marriages of future kings as early as possible. King Tribhuvan, the grandfather of the present king, was married to two young girls when he was thirteen. His oldest son, King Mahendra, was born when his father was only fourteen years old. King Mahendra, who died in January of 1972, was also married to a Rana princess, the first king not to marrying two wives simultaneously.

Jang Bahadur was the most impressive political figure of Nepal in his time, a fact that the British were quick to recognize. Queen Victoria invited him to make a state visit to London in 1850, and for this occasion he assumed the title of maharaja. He and his considerable retinue were the first Nepalese ever to travel to the West. He was duly impressed with British power, which was one reason why he had been invited, and he realized that it was quite hopeless ever to try to fight the British in India.

Although Jang Bahadur never learned to read and write, he had the opportunity to see Western institutions on his trip through Europe. After his return he made some important changes in the theretofore quite medieval Nepalese code of law and punishment. He also discouraged suttee, the self-immolation of widows, and came out against slavery, although that institution was not abolished until 1924. Yet despite his friendship with Great Britain, neither he nor his successors permitted any Westerners to come to Nepal, except the British Resident and a few of his friends.

On his trip to Europe, Jang Bahadur also visited France and was greatly impressed with the amenities of Western life. From then on, the Ranas began to import Western products of all kinds, from clothes to furniture and even uniforms, for their own pleasure and benefit. The long-range influences of this fateful voyage are highly visible today in Kathmandu’s various “improvements,” particularly the imitation French Renaissance palaces built by different branches of the Rana family.

Chandra Shamsher Rana constructed the most imposing edifice of this kind, the Singha Durbar, or Lion Palace, so called because of the huge figure of a Nepalese temple lion that crowned the balustrade above the colonnaded pseudoclassic entrance porch. The more than one thousand rooms of the whitewashed palace were arranged around numerous courtyards. In recent years, until its destruction by fire in July 1973, the Singha Durbar housed government offices. Some of the smaller Rana palaces built by different family members on the outskirts of Kathmandu have ballrooms decorated with imported French Rococo ornamentation interpreted and supplemented by Newar imagination with quite unexpected and delightful results. Some of the palaces are still privately owned. Others are used by the government, and one has been made into a hotel.

But because of this turn toward the West and its cultural and architectural influences, the Ranas neglected the indigenous artists and failed to support the traditional Newar building forms and craftsmanship.

Chandra Shamsher Rana, the builder of the Singha Durbar, ruled from 1901 to 1928, a record length of time and a tribute to his cunning in the retention of power. He was the first Rana to have a formal education—at the University of Calcutta, where he also learned English. He ruthlessly amassed enormous personal wealth. To keep himself in power, he reorganized the very prolific Rana family into different classes of Ranas, consolidating the “Rana organization,” which became all-powerful in setting the direction of future Rana rule.

During his regime, electricity was brought to Kathmandu—that is, electric lights were installed in the Rana palaces and a few other important buildings. All kinds of Western luxuries, including entire crystal chandeliers, were brought
across the mountains on the backs of porters. Some telephone lines were installed in Kathmandu, and the streets around the palace were paved. Vaccination and some medical care from the West were introduced. But all the innovations were for the benefit of the Ranas and a few chosen families close to the court. The typical Victorian life style of the ruling families can be seen in the pictures and mementos of that time displayed in the Museum of Kathmandu. The portraits of important courtiers in imported uniforms reflect an amazing combination of Victorian military splendor with Asian lavishness and pomp.

Slavery was abolished in the 1920s, and the first college for the leading families was built. Chandra Shamsher tried to keep new ideas and change from the people, including all communication with the West, for he realized that this would threaten the Ranas’ absolute authority. The Shah king was a virtual prisoner in his own palace, which he rarely left and only with permission of the Ranas.

Many of the kings during the Rana rule ascended the throne as minors. If they ever showed any interest in politics, they were made to abdicate in favor of a minor son. The majority of the people, all peasants, were nothing much more than slaves of a regime that was run exclusively for the benefit of the Ranas and a few powerful families serving them. Any attempt to modify the completely authoritarian rule on the part of any Rana prime minister was always stopped by the powerful conservative branch of the Rana organization, which forced the resignation of those who tried to introduce reform.

No newspapers were published in Nepal, and none were imported. Besides, very few people could read and write. Radios were forbidden until 1946. All attempts at free expression in the arts and literature were discouraged. Neither public education nor a public library existed.

The birta system of land tenure kept the majority of the tenant farmers in permanent servitude, just barely able to retain enough from what they grew to feed themselves. Life had become more difficult for the greatly impoverished majority since the time of the Malla kings, when trade and cottage industry had flourished and when the rulers supported the local arts.

**Revolution and Governmental Changes.** Attempts were made in 1948 to carry out certain reforms, for time was clearly running out. India had declared its independence, and with that the British support for the Rana rule evaporated. The situation in China was also changing. In 1949, the Chinese People’s Republic took over the mainland and declared its intention to annex Tibet, which it did in 1950. After that, trade became irregular, and all Nepalese merchants were asked to leave Lhasa. Thousands of refugees from Tibet came to Nepal as a result of the Chinese takeover. Many were finally settled in the Kathmandu Valley, where they were helped to establish their traditional Tibetan craft industries.

Relations between Nepal and the People’s Republic of China were formally established in 1956, and the status of the undemarcated 650-mile Sino-Nepalese border was finally settled by treaty in 1960.

In 1950, in a futile attempt to save the deteriorating internal situation, Mohan Shamsher Rana, the fourth prime minister since the death of the powerful Chandra Shamsher in 1928, tried to implement a constitution. After India had achieved independence, Indian Prime Minister Nehru had suggested to the Rana rulers that they introduce some democratic measures, but what they did was too little and too late.

At the end of 1950, with the encouragement of Nehru, King Tribhuvan, the legitimate Shah king, fled his palace imprisonment. Pretending to go on a tiger hunt, he first sought refuge at the new Indian Embassy of Kathmandu in an escape arranged in the best international-spy tradition. Then he was taken to India in an Indian Air Force plane. With the northern border in Chinese hands, India wanted a stable government in Nepal. King Tribhuvan, with the leaders of the Nepali Congress Party, who had fled to India earlier, returned to Kathmandu with Indian support in February 1951, and a royal proclamation was issued terminating the Rana rule. Yet the queen was a Rana princess, and even today the Ranas retain a good deal of their property and land and some of their influence.

The king formed a coalition cabinet, which included some Ranas with greatly reduced powers and Congress Home Minister B. P. Koirala of the important Congress Party, which stood for change. This first government lasted only six months. It was the beginning of a series of experiments in the attempt to modernize the country and create a stable government.

In 1955, King Tribhuvan, who was greatly loved by his people, died of a chronic heart ailment in Switzerland, and Crown Prince Mahendra came to rule. In contrast...
with his father, he was interested in controlling the government himself. King Mahendra tried to institute different cabinets, alternating this sort of rule with direct rule. Finally in 1959, general elections were held, the first in Nepalese history. The promise made by King Tribhuvan after the 1951 revolution to create a democratic constitutional monarchy was carried out by King Mahendra, his son, in these elections. The Nepali Congress Party won two-thirds of the seats in the lower house, or a safe majority to govern until the next general elections, planned for 1964. B. P. Koirala, the leader of the Congress Party, started to implement the party’s moderate social-democratic program. In this brief period of parliamentary government, an elected group of men for the first time in the history of Nepal tried to guide the government toward social reform and greater involvement of more people in sharing the responsibilities.

In late fall of 1960, King Mahendra had the Nepali Congress ministers arrested, dismissed the parliament, and abrogated some sections of the 1959 constitution. The king assumed direct rule and again began to experiment with different forms of government, always keeping the central role for himself as monarch. He claimed that under a parliamentary system reform did not proceed fast enough. Nepalese opposition leaders went into exile in India. Disorders and protests broke out in Kathmandu. In 1962, the border war between China and India put a stop to the protest against King Mahendra’s absolute rule because India was determined to keep Nepal quiet and in control.

King Mahendra initiated the present panchayat system of government in 1962. It stipulates that the king is to retain the central power, assisted by a national panchayat, or council of representatives. King Mahendra claimed that the panchayat system of government was more in keeping with Nepalese traditions than a Western parliamentary government. At present, there are about 3,600 village and 14 town panchayats, which in turn are represented in the 75 district panchayats, and 14 zone panchayats. These are finally represented in the national panchayat. Only the village and town panchayat members are popularly elected. Every Nepalese citizen over twenty-one belongs to a panchayat. The panchayat system, whose members are in part appointed by the king, derives its power directly from the palace. In turn, it is in the palace that all the initiative is based.

King Mahendra, who died in January of 1972, made Nepal into the most absolute of all monarchies in the world. He enjoyed great prestige among his subjects. The long traditions of royalty were with him, and in Nepal the Shah kings are considered descendants of the gods. The truly enormous personal wealth of the kings and all the members of the royal family and their personal connections with the Ranas, most of whom are living in Nepal and are immensely wealthy, are never mentioned.

In the summer of 1970, the absolute power of King Mahendra was further strengthened and confirmed by a series of dismissals of many men in high government posts who were interested in change. Then, on January 31, 1972, His Majesty King Mahendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev suddenly died of a heart attack. His son ascended the throne and assumed the rule as King Birendra Bir Shah Dev.

In the final analysis, the future of Nepal depends on the political situation. Nepal maintains neutrality, but it is clear that, located between China and India, its very powerful neighbors, it is dependent on both—on their aid and their trade. No two countries are more diametrically opposed in viewpoint, attitude, inheritance, and political organization than China and India. Nepal traditionally and historically has been the go-between of these two mighty neighbors, protected in the past by barriers that no longer exist.

The future of the people of the Kathmandu Valley and of all Nepalese, who are a mixture of many Asian peoples, depends on their skill as intermediaries, interpreters, and peace agents, especially between north and south. Throughout history, Nepal has been a bridge between these two most important cultures of Asia. But the country’s mission today extends beyond that: to form a bridge between East and West.
54. Kathmandu.
55-57. Traditional architecture.
58, 59. Royal palace, Patan.
60-64. "Kathmandu" stupas.
Hinduism and Buddhism created a profusion of beautiful monuments.
72. Temple court, Durbar Square, Patan.
74. Dattatraya Temple, Bhadgaon.
75-77. Swayambhunath.
78, 79. Struts and detail of gate, royal palace, Patan.
80, 81. Court and bath, royal palace, Patan.
82–86. Court and bath, royal palace, Patan.
88. Memorial to King Yoga Narendra Malla, royal palace, Patan.
89, 90. Gate, royal palace, Patan.
95-97. Carved struts and other carvings, royal palace, Patan.
103. Durbar Square and royal palace, Bhadgaon.
109. Temple, royal palace, Kathmandu.
110. Basantapur Palace viewed from Durbar Square, Kathmandu.
111–16. Interior views and towers, royal palace, Kathmandu.
118, 119. Towers, royal palace, Kathmandu.

120. Court, royal palace, Kathmandu.
126. Monastery court, Patan.
139. Singha Durbar, Kathmandu.

140. Gaddi Baithak, Rana Palace, Kathmandu.
141. Modernization of Kathmandu: new market.
Durbar Square market, Kathmandu.
3. EVERYDAY LIFE

From the highest pedestal of the three-tiered pagoda in Kathmandu’s Durbar Square, one can survey an incredibly gay, lively, changing, and ever moving scene. Shoppers, street vendors, porters with enormous loads, tourists, peddlers, and hippies share the space with cars, bicycle rickshaws, motorcycles, tiger-striped taxis, and once in a while a large bus. Buddhist monks in saffron or rust-red robes, barefoot countrywomen in their black saris with babies strapped to their backs, police in khaki shorts, men in the traditional white pants carrying umbrellas, peasants with baskets loaded with goods on their backs—all these compete for room. In between, hundreds of ragged barefoot children run and play happily around the many shrines and monuments or hopefully look for a gift from the peddlers and the market booths. It is a scene of immensely colorful confusion presided over by the figures of Shiva and his consort, Parvati, who look down from an upper window of his temple, watching the people and activities in the market square.

LIFE IN THE STREETS

Buying and selling is a never ending activity, especially in Kathmandu, the market center of Nepal. Today tourists also come in ever growing numbers, easy targets for vendors of gifts, trinkets, and souvenirs of all kinds.

In the market squares of the Kathmandu Valley towns, the principal products sold are food—mainly fruits, vegetables, and cereals grown in the valley’s fertile fields—together with some basic necessities and tools. There are special markets for goats and sheep. In the lovely old market square of Bhadgaon one can watch men spend much time in earnest discussion over the animals they have brought. Many streets are lined with baskets full of live chickens for sale in front of the open shops.

Pottery is made in certain villages and towns and sold there in pottery markets and shops. Thimi, on the road between Kathmandu and Bhadgaon, is a village almost entirely devoted to making pottery and other earthenware products, from water containers and jars of all kinds to clay elephants. Pottery making, like most of the trades, is a hereditary occupation and is still regulated by the caste system.

Everyday life in the Kathmandu Valley is carried on in the streets. The climate is never so harsh as to keep people indoors, for even the monsoon rains seldom hide the sun for any length of time, and the overhanging eaves of the houses protect the narrow streets. The altitude of the Kathmandu Valley (4,000–5,000 feet) makes it a healthy, invigorating place for the people, who spend much of their lives outdoors and in the fields. People are almost constantly on the move between towns and villages. The town...
AGRICULTURE: TOOLS, CUSTOMS, RITUALS

The fields that surround the villages are meticulously tended, and not a piece of land is wasted. Different crops are grown the year round on the same land. For thousands of years the fertility of the Kathmandu Valley has fed the people very well. A black clay called *kalimati* is used for fertilizer, in addition to animal and human excrement.

The Newars do not use plows. They even work the large fields on the valley floor entirely with the traditional hand hoe, known as a *ku* in Newari and as a *kodalo* in Nepali. While the Gorkhas, Magars, and other peasant tribes of Nepal have always used plows and animals to help them cultivate the fields, the Newar farmers were not allowed to do so on pain of excommunication from their caste. To this day, the Newars will not violate these rules.

Traditionally, wheels are used only on the decorated carts pulled in religious processions—for instance, the wagon used to carry Machendranath, the god of rain and fertility, during his festival each spring.

Sickle s are employed to harvest the grain. Agricultural methods and everyday life in the villages and towns have remained the same for hundreds of years, and even now little change can be observed.

The Newars are highly skilled mixed-crop farmers. The intricately terraced fields on the hillsides are irrigated and flooded during the monsoon. Especially when they are green with rice, they look like meticulously designed and engineered works of art—a monument to Asian craftsmanship and patience.

Newar farmers are called *jyapoo*. Many do not own enough land because of the small holdings per family and are also tenants, which means that they must give half of their crops to their landlords. Some of their family members try to get jobs in Kathmandu or in the nearest town. Their earnings are necessary contributions to the family group. The traditional extended family is still intact, especially in the villages, and is the chief source of social security and stability for all its members. Many peasants have a family member working in India who generally sends most of his cash wages home. This is important not only to the family or village involved but also as a source of much-needed foreign exchange for the national economy.

Since the majority of the people are of the Hindu faith, cows are treated with the traditional respect. This creates severe limitations on their usefulness, especially for dairy farming, which in the mountains could be an excellent source of food and income. A Swiss aid program is now concerned with teaching cheese making and animal husbandry to help bolster dairy farming within the confines of religion. In general, animals enjoy a very special place, since after all they are believed to be reincarnations of people. For this reason the Newars do not use animals for plowing, for pulling wagons, or for carrying loads.

The peasants are busy with agriculture the year round, planting several different crops simultaneously during the dry and wet seasons. Innumerable rituals and feasts of all kinds are tied in with the agricultural work, even more varied and diverse than the celebrations that are still

squares and streets, with open shops, are always full of visitors, all of them on foot.

The old paved streets and squares of the Newar villages and towns are used to spread the crops out to dry and later to thresh them with long sticks in old traditional ways. The different crops that are grown the year round are rice and cereals of all kinds, a great variety of legumes, fruits, and vegetables, including potatoes, onions, and chilies. Chains of red chilies and white onions can be seen hanging outside many of the upper-story windows under the overhanging eaves.

Women spin wool in the streets. The laundry is washed at the public fountains and water tanks in the town squares, where women and children also bathe and young girls help each other wash their long hair. Children pursue their games everywhere. They play with balls or skip rope around the stupas and on the paved temple squares, or they use the ancient stone figures and monuments for climbing. Small girls can be seen bringing frequent offerings of rice grains, flower petals, oil, and red ceremonial powder to the many images of the gods. Older children take care of their younger brothers and sisters. In the villages and towns of closely built houses everyone uses the streets as living rooms.

Smoking is an almost constant habit of everyone. Even small children often smoke. Many people make their own cigarettes. Smoking of hashish is a privilege of the old, who are greatly respected by their families. Large carved pipes are used for smoking hashish, which is readily available in every market. Much like all agricultural products, it is very cheap.

AGRICULTURE: TOOLS, CUSTOMS, RITUALS

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observed by other peasant societies in many other parts of the world. While rituals connected with the fertility of the land or with the all-important rainfall, as well as harvest celebrations of all kinds, are traditionally observed among the peasants of Europe (for instance, Austria, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia), the rituals that evolved in the Kathmandu Valley are among the most intricate and are closely linked to religious beliefs and the caste system. Christianity in many parts of the world changed and redirected many of the ancient peasant rites. But Christianity was never allowed to infiltrate Nepal, and the continuity of the entwined Buddhist and Hindu beliefs reinforces the agricultural work and festival cycles that are firmly anchored in the family and caste system. The cohesive interdependent social and agricultural framework is still intact.

CRAFTS AND INDUSTRY

All kinds of handicrafts are practiced. The peasants themselves make most of the everyday articles they use. Until quite recently, very little was imported, and even now what is brought in from the outside world is far too expensive for the average peasant family. Trades such as carpentry, pottery, house building, and metalwork are hereditary occupations.

Since the Newars never use wheels, porters form an important part of the working force. They have their own caste and still transport most of the goods to remote areas. In every market square they wait to carry loads. The large baskets they use are woven of bamboo, which is plentiful in the region. Loads are carried on the back by means of a special strap across the forehead. The peasants, both men and women, carry such baskets to market loaded with all kinds of goods. At times even children ride in them. In addition to the single basket, the Newars also carry loads in two baskets balanced by means of a pole carried on the shoulders, called a kharpan. This method of carrying is used in many parts of Asia, including China and Indochina, but never in India. The Newars are the only people in Nepal to carry loads with kharpons, which are not used by any other population group.

A flourishing cottage industry, including weaving, that in the past, and particularly under the Malla kings, enriched the whole country by export completely collapsed and vanished with the introduction of cheap industrial products from India. Lately a great effort has been made to revive some of the traditional occupations. The Japanese aid program—since the Japanese have much experience in cottage industry—is in part devoted to this effort. The Tibetan refugees have been encouraged to support themselves by continuing to make their traditional products, notably textiles, for the tourist and export market.

Traditional metalwork, jewelry, masks, and decorations for festivals are made in certain areas, especially in Patan. But the workmanship is rather crude compared to the skills that created the works of art of the past.

THE CASTE SYSTEM

The Newar caste system is based on hereditary trades and crafts, and these determine its divisions. The highly skilled Newar craftsmen who built the Kathmandu Valley settlements were themselves born into a craft, which they practiced and perfected. This hereditary system is in some ways reminiscent of the European medieval guilds. The artists and skilled craftsmen must have enjoyed status and importance, considering the many monuments and the lavish use of decorations and sculptures everywhere, yet they were relegated to the lowest castes. Their position was not unlike that of artists in medieval Europe, who, although highly praised and invited by kings to work for them, enjoyed no social standing until the Renaissance.

After Prithvi Narayan Shah of Gorkha invaded the Kathmandu Valley and removed the three Malla kings, the warlike qualities of the Gorkhas became the admired model. The Newars, who loved peace and art and had become prosperous through trade, were relegated to the lower castes. The Shahs were Hindus and brought with them their own caste system, which they superimposed on the Newar castes. The combination of the Gorkha-Hindu caste system with the Newar “trade” caste system produced some sixty-four different castes and even more subcastes. Most of the Newars were Buddhists. But instead of engaging in religious strife, both religious groups peacefully coexisted. Together they enlarged and amplified the religious activities and festivals. The religious and trade caste stratification is supported by a carefully regulated family system that permits almost no social change and very little mobility, especially for the lowest castes.
Chaotic political conditions soon followed after the death of Prithvi Narayan Shah in 1774. Endless palace intrigues, murders, massacres, and plots of all kinds pre-occupied members of the small upper-caste ruling class in Kathmandu. Since each ruler had at least two queens and many sons, there was a continual power struggle. But the vast majority of the people, illiterate and shut off from the rest of the world, were firmly controlled by the feudal and caste systems, which reinforced each other. They were kept busy growing enough food for their own survival and took no interest in the bloody quarrels of the few ruling families, from whom they were strictly separated by caste rules. The only contact between the rulers and the majority of the people (mostly peasants and from the lower castes) was through the tax collectors. Therefore the majority of the people habitually distrusted all government, as, for the most part, they continue to distrust it today.

The price for flouting the caste rules is prohibitive even now. For instance, marrying someone of one’s own choice outside the limits set by caste results in exclusion from the family system. For this reason even the university-educated young people in Kathmandu follow traditional social rules.

Everyday life is regulated according to what pleases the gods and by the observation of innumerable complicated rituals. Most of the people never question what has been decided for them by the elders or priests, no matter what their education. The vast majority accept all the traditions, and it never occurs to anyone that there might be alternatives or that one could question one's station in life. One is born to live one's life in certain prescribed ways that have been ordained by the gods. Social change is still entirely beyond the experience of all except a very few persons of great wealth and power who frequently travel to the West and who have adopted Western customs. But they belong to an international society more than to Kathmandu or Nepal. Even though the legal base of the castes has recently been abolished, there is nothing to take its place in the life of the people, and the very idea of change is against all religious beliefs. The chapter "Festivals and Religious Life" describes the all-important relationship between the gods, who dominate every phase of life, and the people, who must serve them continually to keep them favorably disposed. Festivals in honor of the gods are one of the most creative outlets of the people—

events in which everyone, regardless of the rigid caste structure, has an active part.

COSTUME

The traditional dress of the Newar women is a black woven sari with a red border, now made chiefly of cotton. The women also wear long-sleeved blouses and over these, especially if it is cold, a quilted shawl, or ga. The sari, known as a parsi in Nepal, used to be made of forty to fifty yards of material in order to have many pleats, but this quantity was reduced to less than half and lately to the usual six yards, the same as in India. The ends of the sari are often wrapped around the waist instead of being thrown over the shoulders and head as in India. At times one can see the saris fluttering in the wind like long flags, hanging to dry from the top-floor windows of the high village row houses.

The men traditionally wear white or light-colored cotton pants called surawa. These garments are tight at the ankles and very wide at the waist and are tied around the middle with a string. A long-sleeved buttonless shirt of the same materials, with a high collar tied at the side, is worn outside over the pants. This shirt often reaches almost to the knees and is called a lan or a labeda in Newari. A long piece of cloth is wrapped around the waist, and into it is fastened the traditional knife, or khukuri. A western-style coat or waistcoat is worn over the shirt in town or for special occasions, and then the waistband is omitted. A cap, called a tapali, is worn all the time: it is rimless and black or of a light-colored patterned fabric. This completes the traditional costume of men.

The children wear almost any kind of clothes or no clothes at all, weather permitting. The porters and some of the villagers wear one long piece of cloth wound many times around their middle. Into this they slip all their possessions, including money, tobacco, food, a pipe, a knife, and the like. Most have some kind of shirt, but their legs are always bare. Shoes are seldom worn, except in town. Instead of saris, young girls often wear long pants, as in India. Western dress, mainly Western shirts, is increasingly worn, especially by children. But girls, once grown up, never wear Western clothes in public.

The women like to wear all kinds of jewelry, and for festivals they wear everything they own. The traditional ear ornaments, besides the usual bangle earrings, are a
series of small gold rings worn in the perforated edge of the ear. All women have long hair, usually worn in a bun when they are married, while girls’ hair is braided, much as in India.

The colored marks worn on the forehead are religious decorations and are painted on when people visit temples or shrines. Some women put black around their small children’s eyes to keep evil spirits away.

SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

The social institutions of the Newars and all Nepalese are based entirely on the family. It is the foremost duty of every family member to contribute to his family group, who in turn take care of him. The family is the chief social-security and insurance system.

In Nepal: A Profile, Dr. M. Mohsin writes: “An individual is not regarded as a social entity independent in himself. Even in urban areas or the highly urbanized communities of the Newars, the joint family is the centre of gravity. It finances the upbringing and education of its members, who are morally and socially bound to lend their financial support to the family later. For most of his social existence he is tradition-bound. He is trained by his parents from an early age to play the prescribed role which his station in life demands from him when he comes of age. He has his obligations to his parents, to his ancestors, to his community. These obligations in fact govern and regulate the whole gamut of an individual’s social existence.”

Special customs, rules, and traditions surround every human and family occasion, from birth to death. Marriage partners are selected by the parents, preferably from the same or a related caste. The traditional marriage rituals of the Newars differ from those of other Nepalese population groups. Every Newar girl—so Gopal Singh Nepali states in his book The Newars—is married to the god Narain in a special ceremony when she is still a child. Thereafter she is always considered to be a married woman, even if her real husband dies. It is essential for everyone to be married, because marriage usually means an addition to the labor force and the family through the production of children. For a woman to be married to the god Narain gives her a certain amount of flexibility in her worldy marriage—that is, she can get a divorce and remarry because she always remains married to Narain.

Food and eating regulations dominate a large part of everyday life and are particularly strict in the highest castes. Only members of the same caste can eat together. Boiled rice, or ja, cannot be shared except with the immediate family and must be prepared according to special rules by a member of the family. Beef, of course, is never eaten. Orthodox Brahmins, the highest caste, must exist on a very limited diet that often impairs the health, especially that of small children.

In order to provide the opportunity to worship and to eat according to the prescribed rules, government and other offices do not open before ten in the morning. The morning ritual must be carried out before going to work, and this means rising at dawn. Restaurants exist mostly for tourists and visitors. Even if a Nepalese might consider breaking the strict food laws, he usually cannot afford to buy a meal. As a result, restaurants cannot survive on local customers. Tea with milk and sugar is frequently served to visitors in government offices, but never food, and lunch as a social occasion does not exist.

THE GUTHI SYSTEM

Family get-togethers and festivals are supported by family guthis, or endowments, which consist of the income of jointly held land. The members of the often very large family groups come together for celebrations once a year. Considering the number of people involved, the expense of such festivals would be prohibitive. Therefore the family guthi takes care of it. The historian D. R. Regmi claims that guthi organizations are already mentioned in early Malla times as an integral part of the social fabric of the valley. There are guthis for many purposes apart from celebrations. There are burial guthis, and in times of great distress a member can turn to the guthi organization for help. The guthi is thus an integral part of the family social-security system.

The guthis also maintain the temples and monasteries with the income from land owned by the temples and farmed in part by labor contributed by guthi members. Tribhuvan University, on the outskirts of Kathmandu, is maintained by the income of agricultural lands that the university owns as endowment to cover running expenses—a modern use of the guthi system.

Those who run the guthi organization or the pujari, the worshiping authority of the temple, are responsible
for the temple’s upkeep and for arranging all religious ceremonies, celebrations, and festivals. The guthi organization is headed by a thakali, or guthiyar, an office awarded on the basis of seniority and respect. The thakali, or guthiyar, is responsible for administering the guthi and can use the surplus income for himself.

EDUCATION

A closed society still prevails despite great efforts to broaden education. Tribhuvan University largely educates upper-caste young people in the humanities. The attainment of engineering and mechanical skills, though desperately needed, conflicts with the caste regulations. Those from the lower castes are unable to get into the university because financial and social barriers are too great. Even if lower-caste members receive grants to study, which are available, they lose contact with their families and are therefore reluctant to go.

People of the highest castes with unusual ability are at times sent to study in the West. Upon their return they are required to go through special purification rites and penance in order to cleanse themselves and become once more acceptable to their families. The elders of the family decide what the penance is to be, and it usually includes fasting. Because beef-eating Westerners are considered by many to be polluted, association with them contaminates an orthodox Brahmin. It is also out of the question to allow such persons into one’s house, let alone to eat with them, even if one has lived and studied with them at a university in the West.

Since to use one’s hands or perform physical labor is undignified and strictly for the lower castes, a Brahmin and an educated man cannot do physical work. This prejudice has the most unfortunate consequences when it comes to modernizing a society. New methods—for instance, in agriculture and numerous other occupations, particularly those involving technical and engineering skills—can be taught only by demonstration, above all to people who cannot read and write. But when the educated turn away from the vocations and are barred by caste rules from pragmatic teaching methods, change is difficult to achieve. The higher a man’s position and education—for example, that of a man in a policy-making department of the government—the less he is inclined to become directly involved in actual doing.

Few educational institutions existed before 1951, nor were there any public-education programs. The government has set as a goal that all children are to have a primary education by 1980. In the Kathmandu Valley alone, this means 115,000 pupils, and it presents a challenge to change traditional teaching programs bound to special school buildings. Instead, education should involve the whole family, since over ninety percent of the people can neither read nor write.

Higher education already shows distortions in comparison with need. There is an oversupply of university graduates in the humanities who cannot find employment because government can no longer absorb them and because there are few job alternatives. Yet people trained in skilled jobs are very scarce. Kathmandu, as the most highly developed area, is where every educated Nepalese wishes to live. Teachers are needed most in the areas remote from the capital, even now only reachable by walking, sometimes for weeks. The same is true of other professional jobs.

THE REAL PROBLEM OF CHANGE: A LOOK AT KIRTIPUR

Kirtipur is one of the oldest and most interesting Newar towns, only a few miles from the center of Kathmandu. Located along the ridge of a hill above the growing Tribhuvan University, Kirtipur became famous for its long resistance to the conquest of the Gorkhas. Even now there is no road to the town that can be negotiated by any vehicle. The only way to get there is on foot along steep, narrow paths. Many of the men of Kirtipur have jobs in Kathmandu and walk up and down the hill every day. The women are left to do the chores and carry everything they need, including firewood, up the steep hill.

Why don’t the people of Kirtipur build a lift of some sort to pull up the heavy loads? All that is needed is a rope, a few pulleys, and some posts. The simple mechanical principles of ropeways are known to the inhabitants. There are many ropeways in Kathmandu built by aid programs, since this is the easiest way to transport goods in the mountainous terrain.

I asked many people this question, because a lift would save much hard work and would be so simple to build. “Well, it would cause great difficulties among the people. Who would tend such a lift? Who could keep it up?”
hedged in giving their answers. "There is not enough money to buy the pulleys." "The people are not used to working together." "Why should they do it? They are quite happy carrying the loads." "What else would the women do? If they don't work, they will quarrel." "If they want a lift, they will build one. Apparently they don't." "They are used to carrying things; so why change? There is no reason to change."

There is no reason to change. Why save labor? Labor is the only commodity that is plentiful. The story of Kirtipur is the story of why it is so very difficult to initiate something new, for what to a Westerner seems most desirable, to save labor or oneself, has little value in the eyes of this society.

Mechanical devices to save labor are not used, not because of the mechanical principles or difficulties involved, but mainly because, in the view of the people, there is no need for them. To save labor or time is a concept that is quite foreign here. The agricultural production cycle based on subsistence farming and closely integrated with the social and religious caste system would be disrupted by introducing labor-saving devices.

COMMUNITY NEEDS AND ORGANIZATIONS

Even today Kathmandu has no reliable water supply, although the valley is surrounded by mountains on all sides. Despite aid programs of every kind, which have expended enormous sums of money, there is still no sewage or drainage system in the capital. A communal effort is required to build these, quite aside from financial support. Numerous intestinal diseases, including dysentery, cholera, and typhoid fever, afflict the people and kill the children. They are the result of infected water, the absence of any environmental sanitation, and the habit of defecating in the streets and into the water supply. Instead of being used to purify the water and improve sanitation, millions are spent on vaccination, immunization, and medicines against water-carried diseases.

In many ways, it is a problem of enlightenment. How do you explain to a mother that the water she has always been drinking is infected and most likely a carrier of serious disease? How can you tell her that her baby may die if he drinks it? She is convinced that the life of her child is in the hands of the gods. They decide whether the baby lives or dies. And what the gods decide is always for the best. She can worship the gods and bring them gifts so that they will protect her child. But the idea that the cause of the baby's illness is in the water means nothing at all to her.

Most of the towns and villages use large tanks of stagnant water as their chief source of supply, some of them built hundreds of years ago. Women wash clothes in these tanks, people and animals use them for bathing, and one can observe pots and dishes being rinsed—all in the same filthy tank, which often has no drain or a continuing source of fresh supply.

Thus health conditions are often deplorable, notably in the very densely settled towns. In some parts of Kathmandu, the most elementary sanitary facilities, such as latrines, do not exist. While this absence does not matter greatly in a village surrounded by fields, in a densely populated town it is critical. Infant mortality is still very high, and medical help is usually not sought until too late. Overcrowding makes living in the towns, especially in Kathmandu, a greater health hazard, despite the availability of medical care, than isolation in the countryside.

The organization of a reliable water supply and its regulation and distribution for land irrigation is of vital concern to an agricultural society. It also provides an insight into the community organization and its vitality.

In the Kathmandu Valley, irrigation goes back to very early times. It is mentioned already during the Licchavi period, or before the twelfth century. According to some researchers, royal irrigation works were built in the seventeenth century. For example, water was brought to Bhadgaon by means of raj kulos (literally, "king's channels"). The Kathmandu Valley Plan states that more raj kulos were dug in the nineteenth century to secure an adequate supply of water and that irrigation for agricultural purposes was improved. There are some old documents showing that people had to pay for water and did so by keeping the channels clean and in good order. There were even channel-cleaning festivals.

One can observe today in several towns what must once have been some very elaborate water systems. For instance, Sankhu and Bungmati have depressed paved waterways at the sides of their paved streets. In Sankhu, one such waterway, in part covered, is still in use. But most of these channels are now dried up and filled with debris. It would not take much effort to repair them and restore
them to active use. Repair work could improve the sanitary conditions of the towns at little cost, even without building expensive new waste-disposal systems. Many channels used for irrigation of the fields are at the edge of settlements or only a short distance away. It would be relatively easy to divert part of the water through the town or to connect the existing stagnant tanks with a supply of fresh running water.

Nepal is also in urgent need of bridges and roads to connect the isolated villages (as opposed to major arteries constructed by foreign aid). Yet this requires a kind of cooperation that is not common among the people of the country.

Until 1951, the majority of the people had no experience with institutions that are related to service in any way. Their only institutional experience, as far as the government is concerned, is negative. Government is mistrusted by the independent peasants, who traditionally rely on themselves and their families. At present there is little that any modern institution can do to visibly improve the peasants’ lives.

It has been the experience of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) that to offer improved seeds to peasants and farmers is not enough despite impressive harvest records elsewhere. Only when actual results could show locally at least a doubling of the harvest were the peasants convinced. Their reluctance is justified, for if a crop fails, the life of the whole family is endangered. Miracle seeds have been successfully introduced and generally accepted in the Kathmandu Valley. But to produce more than what a family or a village needs creates new problems and disrupts the balanced economic-social-religious cycle of the whole community. The guthi system provides an excellent method for dealing with communal needs that could well be expanded to wider social uses. Such an expansion would require a consistent educational effort as well as the identification of improvements that seem most important to the people themselves.

The village and town panchayats described at the end of Chapter 2 might be well suited to supply the needed community base. The panchayat system is built upon decentralization of decision making by relegating it to the village and community level. It is unique in that it could truly accommodate the different needs of the very different groups of people and tribes who make up Nepal. In actual practice, however, there are monumental social and psychological barriers against its success. Centuries of feudal rule and religious fatalism have put the power of the gods and the king firmly against individual initiative and change. The panchayat system of government requires personal and community initiative if it is to succeed in improving the life of the people. Yet the same people who are supposed to take this initiative are traditionally unable to exercise their own preference in a matter as basic as choosing a wife or a job. In order to successfully cope with modernization, it will not be enough to create a flexible administrative system. All people and families must recognize that it is decidedly in their own interest to change.

Change means little unless it can truly improve the everyday living conditions of the majority of the people. It must produce a more rewarding life for those who make the effort to learn and to change their own ways.
146–48. Market squares in Kathmandu (top left) and Bhadgaon.
158–61. Crops spread on town square; women of Kirtipur; washing clothes at fountains.
165–71. Life in the streets.
183. Durbar Square, Patan.
184–89. Life in the streets.
191–94. Street scenes.
195-97. Market scenes in Patan (left) and goat market in Bhadgaon.
198–205. Everyday life and activities.
243. "Kathmandu" stupa, Patan
4. TOWNS AND HOUSING

The towns, villages, and houses of the Kathmandu Valley built by the Newars are among the most beautiful indigenous settlements in the world. The mastery of urban design and space and the fine craftsmanship of the sophisticated buildings and monuments reveal an artistic imagination and a social understanding that are not only rare but are also limited to the Kathmandu Valley and the Newar people.

Hopefully this book, by showing to more people the life, culture, and building traditions of the Kathmandu Valley, will convince its own inhabitants of the treasures they take for granted and will show decision makers the need to preserve what there is. Furthermore, modernization must be undertaken by reviving and building upon the indigenous achievements, particularly in this remarkable valley, where a still beautifully balanced way of life is in harmony with the ecology of the environment.

URBAN DESIGN

The towns and settlements as they appear today were mostly built under the Malla kings after the valley was divided. The compact, closely built houses, shaped into dense urban settlements, have been explained in various ways. The need to preserve agricultural land is one reason given for the concentrated building patterns, frequently seen on the tops of hills, where nothing can be grown. Kirtipur and Sankhu are located on the ridges of hills, as are the village of Thimi and part of Bhadgaon. The three major towns, Kathmandu, Patan, and Bhadgaon, are on the high banks of rivers. Another reason for the close building patterns of the towns is said to have been the need for protection as a result of the rivalry between the different Malla rulers. Many of the towns were fortified. More dispersed rural-settlement types were introduced by other tribes and Indian immigrants, as well as by the Gorkhas, after the Shahs conquered the valley.

The Kathmandu Valley Plan states that most of the man-made environment of the valley we see today was built by the Newars during and after the time of the later Malla kings, although the design of the buildings and the construction methods go back to earlier times. Most of the settlements and towns were founded in the early Malla period.

Urban design and street patterns are similar in villages and towns. Newar villages like Thimi or Bungmati, for instance, are not only compact but also have narrow streets formed by three- and four-story houses presenting a continuous façade. Some areas are reminiscent of old Mediterranean towns. Yet the settlements of the Kathmandu Valley were built by people who did not know that Europe existed. Their civilization and their way of life...
were probably far ahead of most of European urban development of the same time. The Newars attained a cultural and creative expression in their towns and monuments that reflects great skills no doubt developed over long years.

The urban design of the towns and villages, the relationship between the narrow streets and open spaces, the placement of houses and monuments tell of a remarkable understanding of visual and functional principles, related to social needs. The Newars were master builders, and their handling of space and scale and of the arrangement of buildings within a square for greatest visual effect is extraordinarily skillful and sophisticated.

Walking through the towns, one is constantly surprised by the new, unexpected vistas. There is a succession of decorated entrance doors, neighborhood shrines, rest houses, and small open spaces punctuated by fountains or chaityas. There are unexpected crossroads and views into courtyards. There are small temples set back from the street and larger open squares filled with stupas. Broad pagoda pedestals are used for anything from drying laundry to displaying merchandise. Open shops, spilling their goods into the streets, occupy the ground floors of many row houses. Every bit of space is used, and the entire area is usually crowded with people who carry on their everyday activities and much of their life right in the streets. Countless curious children come out of the tall houses whenever something unusual occurs. On my way through the towns, I was often followed by dozens of eager children who wanted to be photographed.

The builders of these towns created an environment so rich and varied that one must walk slowly to perceive its plan, hidden by innumerable fascinating details. The densely inhabited, closely built row houses are juxtaposed with generous squares full of temples, monuments, and pagodas. There are also open areas for water tanks or ponds. Some towns have a tundikhel, a large open space at the edge of the settlement serving communal purposes of all kinds. The tundikhel of Kathmandu is within a few minutes' walk of Durbar Square.

The buildings and the urban environment in the Newar towns and villages have been shaped by the activities of the people over a long period of time. Temples, monuments and festivals; houses, streets, and people with their animals, artifacts, and tools; market squares for buying and selling—all these have become an inseparable whole. A detailed record of the street patterns, squares, and buildings of the towns is only now being made by the Department of Housing and Physical Planning, to designate historic areas for special protection.

The streets open up every so often into small squares, sometimes with a fountain from which the women of the neighborhood fetch water. Some old beautifully decorated fountains are below street level. They have handsomely carved fountainheads that pour a steady stream of water into stone basins where children play and women wash.

Rest houses, or patti, are often built on street corners or fronting on squares. A typical rest house is a raised platform, usually with elaborately carved pillars supporting an overhanging roof. Some rest houses have a second story with the characteristic carved window frames and screens. People gather on the platform of the patti after work or during the daytime, just to sit and talk. Sometimes women hang laundry between the carved and decorated pillars, or old men from nearby gather for a smoke.

Along the streets are a variety of memorials, carved reliefs, and statues dedicated to certain gods. Shiva's elephant-headed son Ganesh, the protector of house and home, has a memorial on every other street. Pavement decorations, religious symbols, and protective doorway images are distributed throughout the villages and towns.

The streets themselves are used for a variety of activities, including spinning; the sorting, drying, and threshing of crops; and the washing and drying of laundry. In fact, streets are communal living rooms, as well as workshops and selling space. Barbers serve their customers in the street, shoes are repaired in the middle of the road, clay pots fresh off the potter's wheel are drying all over some squares, and most merchandise for sale is displayed out on the street or hung all over the exterior walls around the open shops. Children jump rope and play games, while baskets full of live chickens are lined up along the side of the road. Outside the third-floor windows of the tall houses, cooking utensils, bags of potatoes, onions, flowerpots, and numerous other things are hung from the struts supporting the overhanging roofs. Many window frames are elaborately decorated and carved with ornaments and animals and sometimes figures or heads. Wooden screens fill the window spaces, since glass was unknown in the past and even today is imported, being used only in Kathmandu and Patan.

Many of the narrow paved streets have raised sidewalks and depressed gutters that carried water in the past.
Behind the uninterrupted row of houses, which share partition walls, are courtyards reached by passages through the houses facing the street. The courtyards, in turn, are surrounded by more buildings, serving one large family group. A typical family group consists of the parents and all their unmarried children, the married sons and their families, and often also grandparents. The family, a survey has found, may consist of six to thirty people. In the center of the typical small court is a decorated chaitya. The court itself is used by all the family members as outdoor living space for all kinds of work and for the drying of crops. This characteristic grouping of buildings is repeated over and over. Its form is derived from the traditional bahal, the Buddhist monastery.

A traditional Buddhist monastery is organized around a central courtyard filled with numerous small chaityas and other religious monuments. The main temple is on the side opposite the court entrance and is surrounded by buildings used by the monks for teaching and for housing their families. These old monasteries were formerly centers of Buddhist learning, manuscript copying, and bronze production.

When the Shah kings conquered and unified the valley in 1769, the monks were ordered to marry, and at present many of the monastery buildings are inhabited by the families and the large numbers of descendants of the monks. Children frequently play games in the paved courts leading to a succession of large yards surrounded by brick row houses. Many monasteries find it difficult to provide for the upkeep of their beautiful temples and monuments. Patan, for instance, has several magnificent old monastery courts, filled with a great variety of sculptures, small stupas, and decorations of all kinds.

The Malla palaces show the same compactness in design as the other areas of the towns and are in fact part of the towns. They are laid out around a series of courtyards and are distinguished from other buildings by their towers and their magnificent carvings; by the handsome, often gilded, decorations; and by their elaborate window frames and screens. But in essence they follow plans similar to those of the bahals.

THE TYPICAL NEWAR HOUSE

The houses that so closely line the streets in the Newar settlements are all built of handmade red brick, but they vary greatly in quality. Some have beautifully carved wooden window frames. Others are quite plain. But all houses follow similar plans and are closely related in scale and height. One can hardly tell where one house begins and the other ends, since they form a continuous facade toward the street.

The typical Newar house consists of a ground floor that is sometimes open on the street side and can contain a shop if needed. The shop is no more than an opening in the wall of the house toward the street. In farmers’ houses, animals and farm equipment may be kept on the ground floor.

The floor above is occupied by bedrooms. The parents and the smaller children sleep there, usually on mats and bedding spread on the floor every night. A big wooden chest, the bride’s dowry, is the most prominent piece of furniture. The windows are small and are latticed for privacy. Ladder-type stairs connecting the floors are built along one side wall in each house. Visitors are taken to the second floor, where straw mats are used for seating. If the family has a hand loom, it is kept on this floor and usually placed near the windows for light. Paddy is also stored in this room in specially woven matting.

The third floor, usually the top floor, is the kitchen, or rather the special place devoted to food preparation. Boiled rice, or ja, which is the staple food of the Newars and is subject to special religious regulations, is prepared here. Prescriptions for cooking rice and handling it are connected with the caste system. Only people of the same caste and frequently only the same family may eat ja together. There are specific rules about the utensils used for rice and about who may touch them. The top floor of the house also has a room or an area devoted to worship: an essential feature of the Newar house. Some houses, generally only in the towns, have a fourth floor. In that case the top floor is used for cooking. Since there is very little space, many things, including pots and pans, bird cages, baskets of food crops, chilies, potatoes, and flower-pots, are hung from the top-floor windows or stored outside under the overhanging eaves.

The Newar houses have no chimneys. The smoke from cooking on the top floor escapes through an opening in the roof covered with a special rounded tile to keep the rain out. Looking over a town from a roof terrace, one can see these curved tiles distributed over the surface of the pitched roofs, often a block long, covering a whole row of
houses. Many of the houses have open terraces and balconies off the top floor, usually decorated with flowers, where women do various chores, tend their babies and small children, or take sun baths. The custom of sunbathing by both mothers and newborn babies is observed everywhere.

The Newar houses are always built of red brick, mostly made of clay taken directly from the fields. Brickmaking is a universal occupation. Most of the bricks used on exterior walls are baked, but they are still subject to damage by the heavy monsoon rains—hence the wide eaves of the roofs. In the case of four-story houses, which are built mainly in the towns, an intermediary roof often protects the third-story windows and the walls below. The overhanging roofs also shelter the much-used sidewalks from the monsoon rains.

The roof structure consists of carefully made wooden joists and framed construction covered with tiles, which overlap to keep the rain out. The floors are of packed earth and mud plaster over wooden joists and narrow planks.

An additional coat of mud and red earth is laid as part of a purification rite. House construction, of course, is connected with many ceremonies designed to gain the favor and the protection of the gods. (See drawings on pages 313–321.)

Most houses have three parallel bearing walls. The middle one is the backbone of the house and is made very thick (1.25 feet) as a protection against earthquake damage. The foundations go deep. The exterior brick joints are pointed, but the red brick is traditionally left exposed.

The windows in Newar houses serve as the means of showing off all the artistry and skill and imagination of the craftsmen who build the houses. The second-floor windows are usually small and are screened to provide privacy for the bedrooms. The screens, made of wood, can be folded up against the ceiling. Recently curtains have come into use to cover the open window areas. The third-floor windows are the ones that are carved with all kinds of abstract and animal decorations. Peacocks, other birds, and snakes are often represented, since they have special religious significance. Frequently three windows are joined together and projected forward like a bay window. The wooden window frames are inserted in the brick-wall openings, sometimes covering a considerable area of the wall.

The once wealthy towns on the trade routes to Tibet—for instance, Bhadgaon and Sankhu—have large numbers of carved windows of extraordinary diversity. Some are hidden in courtyards and side streets and are still in excellent condition. But many others show signs of damage, with carvings worn off, while the brickwork is crumbling. Unless they are repaired now, they will be entirely ruined in a few years.

OTHER HOUSE FORMS

The more scattered settlements, consisting mostly of thatched two-story buildings—the parbate houses, as they are called—are built by other population groups and tribes. The houses are plastered and painted with red or brown soil or sometimes whitewashed. The free-standing main house often has an open porch along one side and is usually separate or loosely connected with smaller buildings. The kitchen is on the ground floor away from the entrance or slightly elevated. The rules about food and cooking are as strict as the ones observed by the Newars. There is no chimney in the parbate house, and the smoke has to escape from the small ground-floor windows.

The settlements of parbate houses are reminiscent of peasant villages in other parts of the world. The houses themselves are far less elaborately built and differentiated as to functions than are the highly developed and sophisticated Newar houses, which express an extremely organized way of life.

In the larger towns, notably in Kathmandu and Patan, one finds town houses with distinctly nineteenth-century European details—houses apparently built or modernized under the influence of the imported Rana palace architecture. One can encounter all kinds of Western classical ornaments, pilasters, and columns, including figures that resemble Renaissance angels (or their nineteenth-century copies) above doorways and windows.

While these are purely superficial exterior decorations, the Rana preference for building free-standing palaces surrounded by private gardens, encircled by high walls, has unfortunately had a great influence on land-use patterns. The recently imported house forms from India, mentioned in the Introduction, combined with the Rana-period building patterns, have motivated the construction of a rash of free-standing stucco-covered bungalows all
Three of the towns of the Kathmandu Valley are the largest settlement in the eastern part of the valley. Outskirts seventy percent of whom are Newars.

Next in size is Patan, or Lalitpur (page 307), with about 45,000 people. Eighty percent of whom are Newars. Patan is only a few miles from Kathmandu, and the outskirts of the two towns are beginning to meet. Patan has a beautifully designed Durbar Square with a collection of temples and pagodas that are uniquely beautiful and richly decorated.

The third city is Bhadgaon, or Baktapur (page 310), the largest settlement in the eastern part of the valley, about twelve miles from Kathmandu. Bhadgaon has 35,000 inhabitants, ninety-eight percent of whom are Newars. Bhadgaon is still a world apart from Kathmandu, though now connected by bus. Besides the beautiful Durbar Square it has several other squares with famous temples, including the highest pagoda in the valley: the famous Nyatapola Temple, which can be seen from a distance over the roofs of the town.

These three cities became the centers of the three Malla kingdoms after King Yaksha Malla had his realm divided among his sons at his death in 1482. Each city has a large Malla palace facing its Durbar Square, which is filled with temples, pagodas, and monuments. The closely built-up urban areas around each palace are unbelievably densely populated, despite the fact that most of the surrounding houses are only three or four stories high.

There are many smaller Newar settlements classified as towns, but they are not much larger in size than villages. Nevertheless, they have the same distinctly urban character.

Kirtipur (page 309), in the long history of the Kathmandu Valley, had a powerful position and is especially known for its resistance to the conquest by the Shahs. It can only be reached on foot, since it is located along the ridge of a steep hill that can be seen from Kathmandu. It has more than 7,500 inhabitants, ninety-three percent of whom are Newars. Many male family members who live in Kirtipur work in Kathmandu, which is less than an hour’s walk. Besides agriculture, weaving is one of the traditional occupations, and many families have looms.

Kirtipur, so close to the busy capital, yet without cars or vehicles of any kind, seems of a different time and age, peaceful, serene, and remote. Below the ridge on which the town is perched, the new buildings of Tribhuvan University are spread out: the largest institution of higher education in Nepal.

Kirtipur has a magnificent paved temple square in the center of town, where the temple of Bagh Bhairava, the fear-inspiring god, a form of Shiva, attracts many worshipers from all over the valley. Ancient weapons decorate the temple roof. Next to the temple square is a large tank full of stagnant water, which is used by the women to wash clothes. Kirtipur also has a beautiful old Kathmandu stupa located on one of the highest points of the ridge.

Sankhu (page 308) has a population of about 4,500, of which ninety-five percent are Newars. It differs from most of the other towns because its temple area is outside the town—in fact, outside an actual town wall and gate, both of which indicate that Sankhu was once fortified. The town is located on one of the main trade routes to Tibet, northeast of Kathmandu and at the edge of the valley, and can be reached only by jeep. Today it is in very poor condition and clearly has seen better times. The loss of trade with Tibet severely damaged its economic viability.

The number of lavishly decorated brick houses, with magnificently carved window frames of typical Newar craftsmanship, and the street paving, now badly damaged, are signs of a prosperous past. Some of the large houses surrounding the market square must have been built in the nineteenth century, judging from the imported Victorian details, which no doubt were copied from the Rana palaces. In other words, the town must have flourished until fairly recently in order to have been able to build houses of this type. At present, however, many of the once beautiful buildings are in bad repair, and the town, which is too far from Kathmandu for the people to commute on foot, seems to belong entirely to the past.

Bodnath, or Bauddha (page 311), is of special interest because of its ancient stupa, which forms the center of the town. Four stairways built into the sides of the very large base of the stupa can be climbed to reach the large white...
hemisphere crowned by the tower. It is a most impressive monument, second only in religious importance to the Swayambhunath Stupa. Bodnath is a center for pilgrims, and many monks, including some from Tibet, live in the buildings surrounding the stupa. The plan of the town is circular and consists of not much more than a double row of houses surrounding the huge white base of the stupa and following the road that connects it with Kathmandu. The people who live here derive their living from both religion and agriculture, and only about a third are of Newar origin.

Around the temple of Pashupatinath, the most sacred Hindu center of worship of Nepal, a settlement of more than 2,000 people has grown up. Pilgrims come here in large numbers and often stay for some time in the vicinity of the temple. Many devout Hindus from Kathmandu walk to Pashupatinath every day to worship early in the morning before going to work.

Thimi, a small town on the road to Bhadgaon, is known all over the valley for its pottery. Part of the town developed along the road where one of the most used bus lines of the valley now operates. Thimi Village is a short walk from the main road across the flat fields. It is built in typical Newar fashion along the ridge of a hill. The village consists mainly of one long street, with a continuous row of three- and four-story brick houses on both sides. A square filled with chaityas and religious monuments and a large water tank are the chief public facilities of the village.

Bungmati (pages 312–21), located south of Kathmandu, is known all over the valley for its Red Machendranath Temple. More than two-thirds of its inhabitants are Newars, and its buildings are decidedly characteristic of Newar craftsmanship. The layout and design of the village are typically urban. Although Bungmati has always had some sort of road for the purpose of transporting the Red Machendranath image at festival time, it is too far from Kathmandu to make daily commuting (on foot, of course) practical. For this reason the majority of its inhabitants are peasants and work in the surrounding fields. Bungmati is analyzed in detail in the latter part of this chapter, thanks to a study by a group of young Danish architects.

Nilakantha became a settlement because it is the site of a shrine built around an image known as Vishnu on the Water. Pilgrims visit this shrine the year round and particularly during the annual festival. But Nilakantha is not a typical Newar township. The scattered groups of houses in the area are peasant settlements built by other Kathmandu Valley population groups.

Katuje is another village near Bhadgaon in the eastern part of the valley. It consists mostly of scattered two-story thatched houses and is characteristic of the scattered settlements all over the Kathmandu Valley that were built by other tribes, by Indian immigrants, and by the Gorkhas after 1769.

In many parts of the valley one can find groups of farms and clusters of mostly thatched buildings. Many such communities date from ancient times, and their history remains to be explored. These typical peasant settlements, built by different peoples and tribes, are quite distinct from the towns and cities, which only the Newars built. They are much more like farming communities in other parts of Asia and peasant settlements all over the world.

Photographs of the above-mentioned towns and villages are used throughout this book. There are, of course, many more settlements that could not be included, but the ones shown are representative of the house forms and settlements and towns that make the Kathmandu Valley so different from any other area in Asia and the rest of the world.

**BUNGMATI: A TYPICAL NEWAR COMMUNITY OBSERVED**

Bungmati (pages 184–201), a Newar town of about 3,000 people some two hours’ walk south of Kathmandu and Patan, was the object of an extensive seven-month study by a group of eight young Danish architects during 1967 and 1968. They made a survey of all the buildings, drew exact plans of the town and the buildings as well, and studied their layout, urban design, and construction. They related this physical study to a survey of the occupations, activities, and social institutions of the people, which they observed and systematically recorded from day to day by living and working in Bungmati.

The results of this extraordinary work of the young architects were displayed in an exhibition in the National Museum in Copenhagen, mounted by its director, Werner Jacobsen, who is an expert on Nepal. He also wrote the introduction to the museum publication *Landsby i Nepal* (A Village in Nepal). This booklet, describing the work
of the Danish architects in Bungmati, unfortunately has appeared only in Danish so far.

With the permission and cooperation of the group, which included Inge Alstrup, Freddy Avnbj, Carl Herforth, Kirsten Knudsen, Ny Lots, Jorgen Thomsen, and Jens Waerum, and with the help of Hans Haagensen, their spokesman, I am showing some of their work here. There is much more, of course, that cannot be shown in this book but is of great interest not only for the professional architect but also for all those interested in a sound approach to modernization and development based on the indigenous and traditional values of the people of the Kathmandu Valley. Readers who desire additional information should write to Mr. Hans Haagensen, Department of Town Planning, Royal Danish Academy, Kgs. Nytorv 1, Dk. 1950, Copenhagen K, Denmark.

The housing and buildings and urban design of the Newars has never been studied in such detail from an architectural and a social point of view. Nevertheless, there is a great scarcity of documentation. Except for the work published in the Kathmandu Valley Plan, little is available, in particular about the relationship of the people to their self-built housing and the everyday environment. Yet the building of their unique towns and settlements is probably the most important single expression of the Newar civilization of the Kathmandu Valley. Today many of the skills, the craftsmanship, and the creative ability have dried up from lack of use over several generations. During the last hundred years of Rana rule, the Newar artistry and craftsmanship, most notably the indigenous building activities, lacked all official support.

The group of Danish architects chose Bungmati because it is predominantly inhabited by Newar families and is a typical Newar settlement. The town, located on a plateau that cannot be easily farmed, is surrounded by elaborately terraced, irrigated fields. Terraces like these, which represent the labor of centuries and cover large areas of the Kathmandu Valley, have quite transformed the natural landscape and are a monument to Asian patience and ingenuity. They are essential for irrigation and the growing of rice, the staple food of all the population of the Kathmandu Valley and most of Nepal.

Bungmati is densely built in an interconnected pattern of narrow streets with three- and four-story houses. The stone-paved main square is higher than the general level of the town, which surrounds it on three sides, and can be reached through a lion-flanked gate. In the center of this square is the magnificent Red Machendranath Temple, built in South Indian style. The Red Machendranath image of Bungmati is the one taken to Patan for the spring festival and, for a week, is pulled through the streets of Patan in a specially decorated wagon.

Machendranath is the powerful god of rain and fertility, all-important to the agriculture on which the valley depends. Bungmati’s Red Machendranath is especially revered. A roadway of sorts that can be negotiated by car in good weather connects Patan with Bungmati, for it is needed to transport the Red Machendranath.

About 400 families (approximately 2,000 people) of the town are Newars, according to the studies made by the Danish architects. The Bungmati village panchayat consists of about 3,000 inhabitants, of which one third are mountain people (Tamang and Chetri) who live on the outskirts of the village.

The site plans of the family housing compounds reflect the original design of the monasteries. Each compound consists of a main house—part of a row of houses that face the street—and a courtyard with a chaitya surrounded by buildings on all sides. The court is an outdoor living room and work space for the whole family. This basic pattern is repeated over and over throughout Bungmati and all Newar villages and towns.

Almost everyone in Bungmati is occupied with farming, but many men have side occupations as well, and these are regulated by castes. In a word, a man is born into a caste and an occupation that his father held before him and his son will hold after him.

Bungmati has fifteen different castes, but half of the population belongs to either the priest or the farmer caste. The town is practically self-sufficient, relying on subsistence farming. Consequently, there is very little money in circulation. The village panchayat has certain judicial and executive powers, but very little economic strength, since there are practically no taxes, and its revenues are therefore almost nonexistent. What consumer goods are needed are bought in Patan or Kathmandu or from outside merchants who come to the village market.

The traditional family structure in Bungmati is still intact, but it is beginning to be threatened. The Danish architects found. Everyone who is related directly or by marriage lives together in a family compound. The family also functions as a social-security and welfare system. It
is the duty of every member to contribute to the support of the family group. The old in Bungmati, much as in the rest of the Kathmandu Valley, are respected, privileged family members. Their advice is sought, and they are supported by their family groups.

In the typical farming family the father does the field labor and has a side occupation as well. But he still has a good deal of free time. His wife is almost continuously pregnant and therefore cannot always work. But she does the housework, assisted by a grandmother or a daughter who also helps in the fields. The children have minor chores until they are ten or twelve, when they begin to work in the fields. Since their attendance at school would mean a loss of labor, many of the children—the girls in particular—do not go. In any case, it is only quite recently that schools have been established in most villages, and they cannot accommodate all the children.

Sometimes several families work together, chiefly in planting rice, which is a responsibility of the women. Rice planting has the character of a celebration, with the women dressed up and wearing flowers in their hair. Most families own their houses and a small plot of land but also work as farm laborers or tenant farmers. Though the peasants produce excellent yields even without the new “miracle” seeds (which, however, are also used) their methods and tools remain primitive. There are no labor-saving devices.

The group of Danish architects observed that the fertilizer is mostly human excrement and that there is a total absence of environmental sanitation in Bungmati. This they found hard to explain, considering the other achievements of the Newar civilization. The result is the prevalence of a whole list of preventable diseases. Although in a village like Bungmati the absence of latrines and of any waste disposal does not create the same difficulties as in the larger towns, there is almost universal dysentery. As stated in Landsby i Nepal: “The most peculiar thing about the Newar houses is the almost total lack of sanitary installations, which is a paradox in the otherwise high material culture. There are no real sewers, only drains, which are sometimes beautifully made. Behind every house is an open dunghill with thousands of disease-carrying flies.

“There are many serious intestinal diseases, including cholera and typhoid, besides elephantiasis, gray cataract, numerous skin infections, and tuberculosis. Although most women are pregnant most of the time, the infant mortality is still so high that population growth is small. There is a village clinic in Bungmati to which a doctor comes once a week, but the people generally prefer to pray to the gods in matters of medicine. Besides, they distrust everything that looks official.”

In spring, when I visited Bungmati, the streets were being used to dry, sort, thresh, and store the all-important crops. Apparently every family was using the streets for these purposes. All over the central square, where the Machendranath Temple stands, such crops as millet, peas, corn, and others were spread on mats or even on the bare stone pavement. At the fountain opposite the temple, women were washing clothes, which they hung to dry all over the stupas and chaityas surrounding the main temple. People were continually walking through the square, and a group of men sat and talked in the shadow of the temple porch. Some twenty children, mostly boys, with some books and papers, sat cross-legged in a row on the floor of the covered entrance gate of the square. This was school.

The houses that surround the square form an almost continuous red-brick enclosure three or four stories high. While in Bungmati, I was invited to visit the house of a Newar family of the peasant caste. The interior of the house was simple and clean, with dirt floors and white-washed walls. Furniture in the Western sense does not exist, and straw mats are used instead. Kitchen and other household equipment is very simple, and earthenware pots are used for many purposes, as are baskets and straw mats that are made by the people themselves of readily available materials.

The ceilings of the houses are relatively low, and door openings are not scaled to Western dimensions. The average height of the Newars—in fact of most Nepalese—is only five feet three inches, or several inches below that of the average person from the West. Westerners, especially young people, often seem entirely out of scale in a Newar house. In the streets, they can be seen towering above the crowd.

Steep ladderlike stairs connect the floors of the Newar house, and since the kitchen is on the top floor, all the food, water, and firewood has to be carried up the stairs. There are windows on both sides of the rooms, front and back, giving adequate light and air. The side walls, where the house usually joins a neighboring one, are solid brick.

The Bungmati study confirms that the average villagers
live by subsistence agriculture and have practically no money. But they have a rich religious and social life, a family system that offers security, and a village where they belong, and they are usually members of a guthi. The Danish architects in their survey of Bungmati also found seven tea shops in the village that serve as social meeting places. Besides, there is the early-morning market in a square at the edge of town, to which people and merchants from outside Bungmati come. The market, as it is everywhere else in the world, is also a social meeting place.

Of the Bungmati festivals the Machendranath Festival is the most important because it centers on the unique Red Machendranath Temple at the heart of the village square. (The festival is described in Chapter 5.) The Machendranath guthi takes care of all the arrangements for this festival, and there are other guthi for other festivals.

Above all, the villagers have enough to eat, barring some terrible natural disaster, but of course they must work hard to grow what food they need. Still, the soil is rich, the climate is healthy, and they do not depend on a market price. They are mostly self-sufficient and use most of their food crops for their own purposes instead of having to sell them at a price they cannot control and having to buy inferior products at a higher price or go hungry, as has happened in many countries where a limited or one-crop market economy has been introduced in the name of development and modernization.

The peasants in the Kathmandu Valley have serious problems, of course—particularly problems of health. But they do not suffer from hunger or deprivation in spite of having no money. The Danish architects found that there was no talk of poverty among the people in Bungmati. To one who observes their everyday life, the families seem infinitely better off than the comparable Indian villagers. Even though the per capita income of the average Indian is much higher than that of the average Nepalese, if we judge by official Nepalese statistics, it should be remembered that statistics in Nepal are likely to be entirely unreliable, since the peasants, in their distrust of the government, conceal information.

_Landsby i Nepal_ states that the people of Bungmati are also skeptical of the government-established schools. To provide a substitute for schools, a group of young people who had acquired a high-school education elsewhere returned to the village and formed an organization—the Saulah Organization, as it is called—that has successfully taken over the educational activities of the community. They also organized adult-education programs and a library.

Firsthand research, direct observation, and work of the kind undertaken by the group of Danish architects are especially important for those really interested in the life, environment, and betterment of the people. It is this kind of research that is needed to make aid programs effective and to initiate viable change.

**CONCLUSION**

Despite the reasons generally given, and quoted as well in the Kathmandu Valley Plan—mainly the scarcity of agricultural land—the fact that the Newars built their towns so very differently from those of all other Asian cultures and settlements has not been explained satisfactorily. How did they develop their unique building methods, the very distinct plans of their high and narrow houses, which are almost the opposite of those of other peasant societies? The towns seem to be designed with a real understanding of urban space. The Newars are masters in arranging streets and in creating visually and socially effective squares, in getting attention for a temple, and in putting a monument in just the right place.

Or did it just happen? Certainly the Durbar squares of Bhadgaon, Kathmandu, and particularly Patan seem most carefully designed for successful interaction between people and the environment, and their temples are placed for the greatest visual effect. The square of Bungmati, dominated by the imposing Machendranath Temple facing the lion-guarded gate, with stupas and the fountain in strategic positions, is a beautifully designed, eminently successful urban space. This, in a village of 3,000 people living by subsistence agriculture, is an amazing achievement.

The understanding of the materials used—the combination of brick and the carved wooden window frames and struts—is unique. Most of all, the development of the religious architecture—the high, tiered pagodas, the golden-crowned stupas with their slanted eyes, the decorated chaityas, and the abundance of stone and metal sculptures and reliefs—reveals a building and artistic skill and a tradition that do not exist in any other peasant society and are at the same time very different from those in the neighboring cultures of the Kathmandu Valley.
While similar religious architecture flourished in other parts of Asia at different times, the everyday living arrangements, especially the housing, the town layout, and the urban design characteristic of the Newars, cannot be found anywhere else and seem specifically tied to that people. Yet even now the population of the Kathmandu Valley is only 500,000, and a little less than half of the people are of Newar origin. The Newars also followed their building traditions wherever they lived outside the valley. In Pokhara and other towns where Newar traders settled, some typical high Newar brick houses can be found.

At present much of this understanding and talent and craftsmanship seems forgotten. In Kathmandu, which sets the pace for the rest of the valley and all of Nepal, ugly, modern imitations go up everywhere, complete with imported commercial glass and window frames. The handsome traditional brick buildings are being covered with cement to make them look “new.” Neither the use of brick and wood nor the settlement patterns of the Newar towns should be abandoned. They can be developed to fit present-day needs without destroying the beautiful existing environment.

The question is, What will become of this in many ways still medieval village society that has shaped these towns? Its man-made environment is based on a social and religious organization vastly different from that of the West and on a family system that supports the social and religious one.

The building of housing and settlements is the physical expression of each society. Therefore, in the past, it was vastly different in different parts of the world. But the Western industrial economy and society, with their new technology, have taken over most of the world. Consequently, the Western building forms are penetrating everywhere.

Many changes are urgently needed in the Kathmandu Valley. But the building tradition of the Newar culture is a model of harmonious adaptation of the man-made environment to the natural ecology. Over generations this culture has developed a successful symbiosis that can serve as a model for its economical use of resources and land. The indigenous agricultural development, the traditional house forms, the urban design, and the artistry of the Newars form a successful environment for the social-religious-family system, which is still whole. This balance between environment and people must be preserved and should form the basis for the modernization of the life of the valley.
250. Sankhu.
251, 252. Window carvings
256-59. Sankhu.
260–66. The urban quality of the Newar settlements.
276-81. Windows of Newar town houses.
284. Plan of Bungmati by Danish architects' group. Temple Square at top.
297, 298. Street leading to Temple Square, Bungmati.
299. Market square at edge of town, Bungmati.
303. Plan and section of Prem Lal's court, Bungmati, by Danish architects' group.
307. Perspective section of Newar house by Danish architects' group.
308, 309. Drawings of streets in Bungmati by Danish architects' group
314–15. Typical parbāte houses of non-Newar population groups.
316–18. Typical parbate houses and layout plan of parbate house.
319. Building a traditional village house.
320-23. Villages and housing of non-Newar population groups.
324. Repairing a house and adding a story, Patan.
325, 326. Roofs and terraces, Patan.
327, 328. Roofs in Bungmati.
331–33. Town gates, once fortified, in Sankhu (top) and Bhadgaon (bottom)
334, 335. Paved streets and squares need repairing. Bathan (top) and Bhadgaon (bottom).
336, 337. Rest house and water channel, Sankhu (below); fountain, Bhadgaon (right).

338–40. Channel near Nilakantha (top); fountain and channel in Sankhu (bottom).
Watching over the people of Kathmandu.
5. FESTIVALS AND RELIGIOUS LIFE

In the Kathmandu Valley, festivals, religion, and social life have become an inseparable whole, expressed in the building of innumerable temples and religious monuments dedicated to a great variety of deities. Many legends and stories, possibly more imaginative and romantic than the mythology of any other people, are tied to the images and buildings and enrich the elaborate rituals of festivals.

Buddhism was practiced in the Kathmandu Valley from earliest times on. The Buddha himself is said to have come to Kathmandu to preach, and later, in Ashoka's time, the majority of the inhabitants turned Buddhist. A constant stream of immigrants from India over many centuries brought Hinduism. Many of these immigrants were of the upper castes, and Hinduism was and still is practiced by most of the influential families in Nepal. The Malla kings were of Hindu faith, and so are the Shahs. But both royal families always donated liberally to both religions. The Newar culture and society have always been tolerant. New joint deities and local religious personages evolved, and the people worshiped at many joint shrines. Festivals, regardless of what religious origin, are celebrated and enjoyed by all.

OCCASIONS FOR FESTIVALS

Festivals in the Kathmandu Valley are an all-important part of life, and practically all of them have a religious purpose. While the Western calendar has been officially accepted, the traditional calendar includes innumerable religious feasts, liberally distributed throughout the year, many with movable dates. Some of the important festivals, like the one in honor of Machendranath, the god of rain and fertility, go on for a whole month. The life of the people follows the festivals. Most work comes to a standstill during the important celebrations that must be observed by all, on pain of offending the gods. The big feasts are centered around specific gods and images or temples and are celebrated either nationally or throughout the Kathmandu Valley. There are also numerous local festivals in which only the people from the immediate area or village participate.

Families and other groups from all over the valley and beyond make pilgrimages to certain shrines at special times of the year or on special occasions. For instance, at Swayambhunath or at Nilakantha one can often see large family groups celebrating and worshiping together. Some have come quite a distance and stay for several days. The temples often have quarters where pilgrims can rest, stay, and even cook their meals. Monasteries near the Buddhist temples, which formerly housed the celibate monks, now house the families of the monks and pilgrims as well. Pashupatinath, the most holy Hindu temple, is to
the Nepalese of Hindu origin what Benares is to the Indians.

There are festivals to celebrate the birthdays of Lord Buddha and Lord Krishna, as well as the birthdays of the kings, including King Tribhuvan, who liberated the country from the Ranas, and Prithvi Narayan Shah, who conquered and unified the Kathmandu Valley two hundred years ago. There are also celebrations of Mother’s Day and Father’s Day, which have quite a different meaning from that of their Western counterparts. In addition, all ancestors enjoy special veneration by their descendants.

Many celebrations culminate in pageants and all kinds of dances, with people dressed in magnificent costumes and masks. Floats, symbols and images of various gods, and huge, elaborately decorated wagons are pulled or carried through the streets, followed by tremendous crowds. The masks worn by participants in the dances on festive occasions, many representing the images of gods, such as Bhairava or Ganesh or Hanuman, are made the year round at special mask shops. Similar masks are also now made for the tourist trade.

Many festivals in honor of certain gods or groups of deities take place simultaneously in different towns and localities, with slight local variations. All kinds of special foods are prepared ahead of time, offered to the gods, and in the end eaten by the celebrants. Flowers and flower petals, rice grains, colored ceremonial powder, and oil are brought to the images of the gods and used in the celebrations. Dots of bright color are daubed on the foreheads of worshipers at festivals to identify them as participants. Music contributes to the celebration. There are walking bands with flutes, cymbals, and drums.

Animal sacrifices are still customary. At the Dakkshin Kali Temple, a few miles from Kathmandu, regular sacrifices of chickens, goats, sheep, and other animals are conducted by local priests on behalf of the pilgrims. The sacrifices take place on Saturdays at the open-air shrine located at the bottom of a river gorge. The stone images there are sprinkled with the animals’ blood, and the carcasses are then taken home, cooked, and eaten.

Annual family festivals are celebrated at outdoor family shrines, where the often large groups of relatives meet for a feast once a year. The participants bring food as well as animals, such as goats, for ceremonial sacrifice in front of the outdoor family altar. The animals are then prepared and cooked on the spot and become the main course of the family feast. Enormous amounts of food are consumed, and the celebration, which is accompanied by music contributed by family members who bring their own instruments, is completed with rice wine and marijuana. Besides these festivities, special family occasions like weddings, births, and deaths are observed according to ancient social and religious rules. The importance of the family system to the religious-festival cycle—and vice versa—can hardly be overestimated. Together with the agricultural cycles, they form a cohesive social pattern that is mutually reinforced and entirely resistant to change.

A complete year-round list and descriptions of the festivals are given in the excellent new book The Festivals of Nepal, by Mary Anderson. From personal observation during her five-year stay in Kathmandu and from extensive research, she has created a unique illustrated account of the way the festivals are celebrated and the elaborate mythology that forms their background.

All the religious festivals and the large family celebrations are supported by the respective guthi organizations through the guthi system of land endowment. The guthi organizations, of whose broad social importance we have already taken note in Chapter 3, are responsible for organizing and financing the feasts.

THE MACHENDRANATH AND KUMARI FESTIVALS

The Machendranath festival, celebrated for a whole month during the spring, is one of the major festivals of Nepal. Machendranath, the god of rain and fertility, has some of the most beautiful temples of the Kathmandu Valley dedicated to him. In an agricultural society, he is of primary importance to the people, who depend on his favor to bring them the indispensable monsoon rains. The priests and astrologers have always played a key role in setting the dates for his festival and others. The priests also determine the beginning of rice planting and other phases of crop production, integrating the agricultural cycles with the religious ones. The Machendranath festival, in which everyone participates, regardless of religion or caste, consists chiefly of pulling a large, decorated wagon with wooden wheels and a very high pointed roof through the main streets of the towns. Each day the wagon is moved a certain distance on its prescribed path.
Patan is the main site of the festival. A week or more is spent in decorating a huge wagon on the outskirts of town near one of the old stupas of Ashoka. A similar but smaller wagon is prepared near the temple of Machendranath in Patan.

The image of the Red Machendranath of Bungmati is brought to Patan for the occasion. After a great variety of rituals and preparatory celebrations, it is put into the larger wagon, while the smaller one is occupied by an image popularly known as the son or daughter of Machendranath. One wagon is pulled to meet the other, and finally both, precariously lurching, are pulled through the narrow main street, mostly by hundreds of young boys, accompanied by an uproar of shouting.

Priests ride in the boxlike structure of the Machendranath wagon, which is decorated and beribboned and has its peaked top wound with green fir branches. Long ropes are used to hold the unstable, high peak in place. Thousands of people follow the two wagons through the streets to the accompaniment of bands, while hundreds more watch from the windows of the houses and from the roofs. At the end, preceded by many rituals, the shirt of Machendranath is displayed by a priest.

Although this is a Newar and Buddhist festival, all the inhabitants of the valley worship Machendranath, and therefore it is virtually a national festival. After it is over, the Red Machendranath is returned to his temple in Bungmati.

But the most unusual festival is that of Kumari Devi, the Living Goddess of Kathmandu, in which the king participates to pay his respects to the young goddess. The Kumari Devi is selected from among several suitable baby girls and is brought up in a distinctive fashion for her role as a goddess, which ends with her maturity. She is installed in a beautiful palace of her own on Durbar Square in Kathmandu. Once a year, to receive the adulation of the people and the king, she is drawn through the streets in a special wagon, with two gods, Ganesh and Bhairava, each in his own wagon, accompanying her.

The festival in honor of the Kumari continues for days, involving many different rituals that include a traditional performance by masked dancers in front of her palace. But the young girl goddess, who is credited with the power of telling fortunes, has to spend her childhood alone and shut away from other children. She can be seen occasionally, all dressed up, at one of the elaborately carved windows of the palace court. Once she reaches puberty, she goes back to her village, handsomely rewarded. She may get married, but even though she is rich as a result of her having been the Kumari Devi, she has great difficulty in finding a husband in a society where marriage is essential, for any man she marries is supposedly destined to die in a short time.

The living-goddess cult goes back to one of the Malla kings, Jaya Prakash, who ruled in Kathmandu from 1740 to 1750. At that time, the story goes, a Vanra girl claimed that she was possessed by the spirit of Talleju, the divine mother goddess and patron deity of Nepal and its royal families. But the king did not believe the girl and ordered that she be banned from the town. That night one of the queens was seized by fits and declared that the spirit of the goddess had entered her body. The king became frightened, offered to worship the exiled girl, acclaimed her the Living Goddess Kumari, and instituted an annual festival for her. From then on, a Vanra girl has regularly been chosen to become the Kumari of Kathmandu.

**PRINCIPAL CULTS AND DEITIES**

Without at least an acquaintance with the gods and the religious structure and beliefs—the other, equally important building block—this society cannot be understood. The prolific pantheon of the Newars and of the Kathmandu Valley is all-pervasive and all-embracing. It dominates the life of everyone, and it finds expression both in the architecture and in the festivals.

Buddhism flourishes in the Kathmandu Valley and is the traditional religion of the Newar people, although their rulers have been mainly of the Hindu faith. For the Buddhists, the most important deity of the Newar pantheon is Adi Buddha. For the Hindus, the leading god is Shiva, the creative member of the Hindu triad. Both gods are venerated at countless stupas, temples, and shrines throughout the valley and are represented in many different ways.

Adi Buddha, the Self-existent One called Swayambhunath, is believed to have appeared first on the water of the lake that is said to have covered the valley at one time. He manifested himself there as a flame in a lotus flower and is worshiped in that form. The Swayambhunath Stupa was built for him.

The Hindu triad—Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva—is wor-
shiped in many different forms, among which the most notable is the lingam, symbol of fertility. Pashupatinath is the most important Shiva temple in the valley and the most holy Hindu shrine of Nepal.

Ganesha, Shiva's elephant-headed son, is represented with great frequency and has innumerable shrines as a protector of house and home. Garuda, the messenger of Shiva, can be found handsomely represented in the Durbar squares of Kathmandu, Patan, and Bhadgaon. Hanuman, the monkey god, has numerous images. Indeed, one encounters everywhere the handsome sculptures and representations of the many gods and their different incarnations as well as their guardians and symbols: threatening soldier temple wardens, huge fierce lions, snarling dogs, elephants, bulls, snakes, and others.

Besides Buddhism and Hinduism, tantric teaching, which goes back to ancient pre-Vedic times, has had its influence on the religious practices and mythology of Nepal. Tantrism also reduces the differences between Buddhism and Hinduism by creating new deities that are worshiped in both religions. But intermarriage or eating together does not occur between people of different faiths any more than between people of different castes.

The erotic carvings of many temple struts are considered to represent tantric rites. They have numerous different explanations, none of which are very convincing. The explanations range from the supposition that they are sex representations of certain tantric cults to the belief that they were commissioned by a king who wanted to stimulate the birth rate after a great loss of life from the plague. One theory is that the depiction of sexual activities keeps lightning from striking the temples, but recently lightning rods have been added as well. Despite all this, a temple on Kathmandu’s Durbar Square was hit by lightning during my visit. This event was reported in the paper, but no explanation was supplied.

Animism is an active part of many religious practices in the valley. Cows, of course, are sacred to all Hindus and all Nepalese. This belief has created a barrier to rational animal husbandry, which otherwise could flourish and thereby improve the lives of many people, much as it does, for instance, in the mountain valleys of the Alps.

There is a snake (naga) cult among the Newars, and numerous animals have a special place in the pantheon, such as frogs, dogs, elephants, and crows. The Naga deities are of particular importance because they are said to have lived in the lake that originally covered the Kathmandu Valley. Legend says that after Manjusri (or Vishnu, in another account) drained the lake, Karkot Raja, the king of the Nagas, went to live in a pond that still exists in the south of the valley.

Certain trees, rivers, tanks, and streams are sacred to both Hindu and Buddhist Newars. Stones have certain powers and are built into piles. Spirits and ghosts roam about at night. There are spirits who dwell at the crossroads and spirits who are responsible for the sickness of children, particularly Ajima, who is also the goddess of smallpox.

Pretas, or spirits of persons who have died, and other ghosts haunt houses. All kinds of charms and amulets are worn, most notably by children, to ward off evil spirits. Some mothers line the eyes of babies with charcoal to keep evil away. There are witches called boxis who seem to have quite similar powers to those attributed to witches in Western mythology.

All the deities and spirits are venerated, either for protection or for material benefits. Each one has specific powers, and many of them play a role in everyday life. Consequently, their blessing or favor must be asked for again and again. Neglecting them is bound to create trouble, as countless stories affirm—tale after tale in which a god’s wrath is aroused by neglect or jealousy, with terrible results for the people.

Protection of all kinds, such as for one’s house, one’s children, or a specific enterprise, is sought. The relationship between the people and their gods is quite pragmatic and problem-oriented. Everywhere one can observe adults and children constantly showing respect for the gods by bringing their images rice, colored ceremonial powder, flowers or flower petals, and oil.

**IMPORTANT TEMPLES AND SHRINES**

Devout Hindus go daily at dawn to worship at the shrine of Pashupatinath, often walking a distance of many miles. Even now it is the goal of every notable Nepalese to be cremated after death at Pashupatinath, on the bank of the Bagmati River. King Tribhuvan, who died in 1955 in Switzerland, was flown back to Kathmandu to receive the last rites in a long, elaborate ceremony at Pashupatinath, where his body was cremated.

The Bagmati River emerges from a gorge just above
the temple, and its water is considered as holy as that of the Ganges is at Benares. Bathers can be found at all times on the long stairs that lead down into the river from the temple pedestal. The temple itself may be visited only by Hindus. But the temple compound and the ghats, where the dead are cremated on huge wooden funeral pyres, can be seen from across the river.

On the opposite bank from the temple, which can be reached by a stone bridge, are rows of small shrines built by different noble families and dedicated to Shiva, enclosing the holy lingam. More mausoleums of brick and stone, adorned with all kinds of sculptures, stand on top of the hill in a beautiful park facing the main temple. Hermits, their emaciated bodies ashen gray, sit on the terraces along the river, while monkeys climb around the balustrades of the stone bridge.

A shrine that attracts many pilgrims the year round and many more at festival time is that of Nilakantha Budha, which literally means “blue-necked old man.” Nilakantha Budha is a huge stone image of Vishnu lying on a cushion of serpents in a water tank. The figure is supposed to date from the seventh century and is said to have been uncovered in a field by a farmer. Although thousands of people come to worship at this shrine, it is out of bounds for the king. For this reason two other similar but smaller statues of Vishnu lying on a snake cushion in the water have been made. One is in the Balaju Garden on the outskirts of Kathmandu, and the other is in the palace grounds, both located where the king can visit them at any time.

The shrine of the blue-necked Vishnu on the Water, as the image is popularly called, is in a village some distance north of Kathmandu at the foot of the mountains at the end of the valley. The pool is surrounded by a fenced, paved area with a gate guarded by stone lions. The shrine area is always full of people. Pilgrims, some with their entire families, sit in the shade in the paved area or wait to go down the steps to the water to worship by throwing flowers, garlands, and rice over the huge Vishnu figure. Monks and holy men sit by the side of the pool in meditation, and women offer worshipers colored ceremonial powder to daub on their foreheads.

There are many stories connected with this shrine. One of them relates that in an age long past the demons and the gods had a dispute that could not be resolved. To settle it, a gigantic cobra was laid across the top of a hill surrounded by the ocean and a tug of war ensued, with the demons pulling one end of the snake and the gods the other. During the struggle the hill was displaced, and from the water below the beautiful daughter of the ocean arose. She was asked to settle the argument, and she chose the gods. Vishnu married her, and she became the goddess of wealth. But the demons were angry and pushed aside the head of the cobra, whereupon gas came out of the ocean, and the cobra’s venom was released, killing the demons. The gas and the venom mingled together and spread throughout the world, bringing illness to all human beings, and eventually rose to heaven, so that even the gods became frightened. To save the world, Vishnu drank the venom, but it made him intensely hot. His neck became blue, his blood began to boil, and his eyes turned red. To cool his burning body, he lay down in the water, surrounded by the cold cobra that the gods and demons had used in their tug of war. And so it is that today a wet cloth, which is renewed every hour, is put on the head of the blue-necked image of Vishnu to keep the god cool.

There are numerous versions of this legend, and countless other stories with many imaginative variations are told about all the images, temples, and shrines of Kathmandu. These are often embroidered with what seem to be realistic details, but realism and cause and effect in the Western sense mean nothing to most of the people of the valley. There are said to be some 2,700 temples in the valley, representing many different gods and a variety of human needs and interests: a reality far more important to those who share this environment and its beliefs.

Bhairava, or Bhairab, a manifestation of Shiva, has many temples and monuments. The most terrifying figure of this deity is the Black (Kala) Bhairava next to the entrance to the Hanuman Dhoka Palace in Kathmandu. Black Bhairava stands on the body of a demon. His wide open eyes stare straight ahead, while four of his six hands hold a trident, a sword, a human skull, and a chakra (discus). Bhairava literally means “awe-inspiring,” and the god is meant to inspire respect and fear. There are eight different Bhairavas venerated in the Kathmandu Valley, including the ones who are said to drive the wheels of the Machendranath wagon.

Bhadgaon has a large Bhairava temple on the market square next to the famous Nyatapola, the five-tiered pagoda, tallest in the valley, built by King Bhupatindra Malla in 1708. King Bhupatindra, who ruled in Bhadgaon, can be seen in effigy sitting on the large monolith facing
his magnificent palace on Bhadgaon's Durbar Square. The story goes that Bhadgaon (gaon means "village") aspired to be called a town, or Baktapur (pur means "town"). In order to gain this status, the people decided to build a second and larger temple in the market square, and the Nyatapola pagoda was built. But the Bhairava to whom the existing temple in the market was dedicated was jealous, and he began to kill the people. The king became worried and tried to find out why so many people were dying. When the king enlarged the Bhairava Temple, the god was satisfied, and the killing stopped.

Bhairava has other images and temples. A Sweta, or White, Bhairava figure stands not far from the Black Bhairava image near the palace in Kathmandu. The Sweta Bhairava has a huge face so terrifying that it is kept concealed by a lattice. Akash Bhairava, who has a temple on Indra Chok, the main shopping street in the old center of Kathmandu, is supposed to be the guardian of this area. In Kirtipur is the sixteenth-century temple of Bagh Bhairava, where old weapons are displayed on the temple roof. Bhairava festivals are organized to placate the god, and on these occasions ornamented Bhairava heads are displayed to inspire awe and fear.

CONCLUSION

There are so many festivals, shrines, and gods that their variety and sheer numbers are overwhelming to the Western mind. The religious diversity and tolerance also includes Islam, and one can occasionally see some practitioners of that faith in the streets. Only Christianity was forbidden by the Shah kings, starting with Prithvi Narayan, who banned all Christians and especially missionaries from the valley. No Christians were permitted to enter the country until 1951, except for the British Residents.

The festivals and the much-celebrated gods are the creative expression of the religious organization of the people. They represent the reality of their beliefs. The culture of the Kathmandu Valley supports the integration of the individual with a society that is still strictly regulated and stratified by the caste system.

The gods, who so very greatly influence everyday life, have a special relationship with the people. There are countless special-purpose deities that can be persuaded with presents or prayers to do what the people ask: give protection or render particular services and favors. The attitude toward religion is a pragmatic one: the gods can be pacified and persuaded to help one with his own tasks. Each god takes care of a specific concern, but the problems, of course, are entirely those of men.

The belief in the supernatural is an all-pervasive fact of life that dominates logic and reason. Cause and effect, which are so clearly connected in the Western mind, do not follow one another unless it pleases the gods. There is nothing in the experience of the average person that would lead him to question this tradition.

This question one cannot help but ask: What can take the place of these festivals, religious institutions, and customs once Western values and their stress on individuality and competition destroy the all-important family and religious base? Each family member now enjoys the assurance that his work and his contribution are needed and wanted and that in the scheme of this world ordained by the gods he has a place. The astonishingly rich and varied religious life and festivals, which are truly enjoyed by all the people, compensate for many hardships. There are no social practices in the West that could possibly make up for their loss. Therefore those who work for modernization must take care that the innovations they introduce, no matter how beneficial, do not destroy the social-religious base of the festivals, for the very self-reliance and cohesion of this society depend on these ancient religious celebrations. While the caste system, which has been abolished officially, separates the people, the festivals are jointly celebrated by all and are a most important unifying force.
351. Family festival, Kathmandu.
352–54. After the ceremonial sacrifice of goats, they are prepared and cooked for the feast.
355-57. Family and community festivals.
358, 359. Worship at Swayambhunath.
360. Machendranath wagon, Bhadgaon.
369, 370. Worship and pilgrimages.
371, 372. Family festival.
373–75. Machendranath Festival, Patan.
Machendranath Temple, Kathmandu.
382. Black Bhairava, Kathmandu.
389–94. The beautiful artifacts of the prolific Newar pantheon are present everywhere.
Vishnu on the Water, Nilakantha.
403-6. Religious monuments.

422, 423. Temple details: Pashupatinath (left) and Nyatapola, Bhadgaon (below).
431–33. Religious monuments are part of everyday life.
434. Shiva and his consort, Parvati, watching over a Kathmandu market square.
435. The spreading city of Kathmandu.
6. CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

The question that has been raised so often, especially about the countries of Asia with ancient cultures of their own, no doubt by now has occurred to every reader: Do the so-called blessings of Western civilization and technology really improve the lives of the peoples of the developing world? The Kathmandu Valley had a highly developed civilization and culture when much of the Western world was a wilderness and technology not even a dream. Toni Hagen had countered this question with: "It is wrongly formulated. The people of developing countries, including Nepal, want to share the fruits of Western civilization and have every right to do so. We must reduce their difficulties and keep in mind that this is a two-way street. We have so much to learn from their philosophy of life, and we should approach them not only with an open mind to initiate change and development, but with humility and respect for their values, humanity, and creativeness."

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In Nepal, the task is to come to a satisfactory resolution between the family traditions of the past, the social and religious demands of an ancient caste society, and the open competitive individualism based on mobile modern technology and economic imperatives. Perhaps this is an impossible goal. From the viewpoint of the average peasant family, and put into everyday and realistic terms, it means first of all to improve health care and to provide new choices and a broader base for economic security. Fundamental to these two achievements are such things as a reliable water supply, medical aid, a better diet, and literacy. And it means effective population control from the start. Education, of course, is the most important means to all these ends.

Nepal’s geography and its location as a landlocked country at the foot of the highest mountain range in the world may turn out to be the key to the future as well as being the determining factor of its history. Nepal is unique among developing countries, since it has never been a colony. Instead, as stated earlier, the country was completely closed to the West by its rulers to maintain its feudal subjugation, virtually as a privately owned domain. To catch up with hundreds of years of development is a seemingly impossible task, given the geographic handicaps of Nepal. An even greater challenge to development is offered by the social conditions and the economic prospects, considering the absence of any organized institutional base or communications system before 1951. Everything had to be started at once: a communications system—telephone, radio, roads, aviation; education and schools; organized health care and hospitals; a money and a bank-
ing system; and much more. Land reform, although legal-
ized, has been only partially carried out, and tax collect-
on, as in most developing countries, is deficient.

The first four-year economic development plan relied
on foreign aid for eighty percent of its needs. The fourth
plan (1970–75) still depends on aid for sixty percent
of its capital. Besides that, it is an admitted fact that the
economy at present is not growing measurably and that
the goals of past economic plans have never been
reached. In a word, from any point of view, the economic
position of the country is most precarious.

Trade. Nepal's aspiration to gain a share of the world
market seems all but hopeless, considering its location
and its complete dependence on India, specifically Cal-
cutta, for a harbor. India virtually controls all that is shipped
in and out of Nepal; transit and trade negotiations are
lengthy and difficult; and a great deal of merchandise is
lost on the way. Trade with Tibet, which historically used
to be so profitable, no longer exists.

Foreign Exchange. Most of the foreign exchange that
the country so urgently needs, since it has virtually no
industry, comes from foreign aid. Other sources are the
mercenary soldiers, who serve in the British and Indian
armies, and the Nepalese who work in India and send
most of their wages home to their families. Wages in
India are higher than in Nepal, although very low by
Western standards. Nepalese are in demand in India for
many services. Finally, in recent years an increasing amount
of foreign exchange has been earned by the growing tour-
ist industry. Tourism is almost entirely centered in the
small area of the Kathmandu Valley, and, while it is im-
portant to the economy of the valley, it is as yet relatively
insignificant from a national point of view.

Population. Although there is a family-planning program,
which began in 1958, the number of children is bound to
increase in the next ten years because of improved health
care. At present, infant mortality is still very high. After ten
years of aid programs, life expectancy was raised to an
average of twenty-nine years. The large numbers of
children one sees everywhere seem well fed, lively, and
happy. Quite certainly most of them will produce children
of their own in ten years or less. The population increase
of Kathmandu and Patan combined was over thirty per-
cent between 1961 and 1970. This rate is bound to rise,
and careful plans should be made now to control popula-
tion growth, for such control is the sine qua non for
success in any other area.

Pollution. Because of the bowl shape of the valley, air
pollution from cars and industry is a growing danger.
Immigration into Kathmandu, together with its product,
urbanization, is only just beginning, since the roads that
will connect the city with the rest of Nepal are still not
completed. Once they are in use, many more people will
start coming to Kathmandu, thereby vastly increasing the
pollution problem.

Sanitation. The old town centers, chiefly of Kathmandu
and Patan, are very overcrowded, and new immigrants
are moving into these areas. In the absence of any sewage-
disposal or drainage system, sanitary conditions, which
are already bad, are getting worse and are damaging the
environment and the buildings, besides threatening the
health of the people. Alleys and courtyards are frequently
filled with dirt, offal, and debris that have collected for
years. But the precondition for any urban improvement is
public investments in sewer systems, water supply, drainage, and the paving of roads. Unless the infrastruc-
ture and services are taken care of, nothing else can
cosibly succeed. Despite twenty years of aid programs
of all kinds, this most basic need has not been dealt with,
and only now is a survey of the water requirements of
Kathmandu being conducted by the World Health Or-
ganization of the United Nations.

The Modernization of Attitudes. Modern ideas have
barely begun to be accepted, except by a very few: the
top layer of society, who travel and study abroad. Yet
these people, many of whom are Brahmins—the most
privileged and most educated caste—are also frequently
the most orthodox and the most strict in the observance of
the caste rules. Although recently deprived of their legal
base, castes closely circumscribe everyone's life: the
possibility of change is not really recognized, for it might
offend the gods.

An excellent case study of the problems of aid pro-
grams in Nepal was published in Great Britain in 1965 by
Eugene Bramer Mihaly: Foreign Aid and Politics in Nepal,
covering the crucial years 1951–62. During that period,
the foundations were laid for present-day and future developments. The author concludes that aid programs are by and large built on the belief or assumption that people in traditional societies are ready and eager to change, that they are being swept by a “revolution of rising expectations.”

Mihaly states that the Western belief that Nepal was ready for social, economic, and political change was quite erroneous. “The majority of Nepal’s inhabitants were unaware that a way of life different from their own even existed,” he says. “Those who were aware either refused to believe that change was possible for them or they had a vested interest in the status quo. Most of the peasants, who comprised about 95 percent of the population, lived at such a low standard and were in the grip of such an iniquitous land-ownership system that their interest in the world beyond the village boundaries was minimal. To them the prospect of change involved unacceptable psychological and material risks. Peasants who owned lands and made up the power structure in village life looked upon practically any innovation as a direct threat to their position.”

The Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal, in The Challenge of World Poverty, agrees with what Mihaly says and goes on to state: “The theory [of rising expectations] . . . had an optimistic start. When the impoverished masses were touched by the rising expectations, it was believed that the new hopes would bring them to change their world outlook, inspire them to modernize their life and work and bring about development.”

The theory that masses of people are eager to change or expect that the West, which they do not know and cannot imagine, has anything to offer to them is entirely fictitious. It reflects the attitudes of the aid givers, who in many cases have no direct, firsthand knowledge of the people or countries they propose to aid.

The group of young Danish architects who actually lived in the village of Bungmati for seven months reached the conclusion that the people do not consider themselves deprived or poor, but that they are self-reliant, have family support, and enjoy a place where they belong. And they have a rich social life. Certainly their highly developed farming methods provide for them a diet that is varied and plentiful. But their work and their taxes support the government and the towns, which give them little or nothing in return.

**THE STATE OF THE ECONOMY**

**Agriculture and Forestry.** The basis for positive change, as far as a peasant society is concerned, not only in Nepal but the world over, is land reform. While land reform was stressed in the past by all Western aid-giving countries and by the United Nations, lately it seems to have been quite forgotten. Only Gunnar Myrdal, in his *Asian Drama* and many of his other publications, emphatically confirms the need for land distribution as a basis for development. In a word, those who work the land should own it. But overall, actual land distribution has not taken place, despite political claims.

In Nepal, it is true, the birta system has been abolished. Birta, as we have noted, were the tax-free holdings that were given by the Gorkha kings and Rana rulers to “deserving” officers and courtiers. These lands frequently were cultivated by forced labor.

The Rapti Valley, a malaria-infested area, was recently reclaimed by a spraying program financed mainly by the United States, and areas of this land were distributed to peasants. But few of them could afford the great investments required to open up virgin land, and in the end wealthy landlords benefited once more. Land-ownership patterns—for instance, in the fertile Terai and other areas—have not materially changed, and an exploitative tenant system is still widespread.

A good deal of the agricultural production from the Terai region goes to India, for the border is long and open and cannot be controlled, and thus many of the Indian rupees earned do not benefit the national economy. The rice crop from the Terai has a potential market in Nepal’s highlands, where it is needed, but transportation to the north is very difficult.

The slopes of the hills and mountains surrounding the Kathmandu Valley are covered with forests that are gradually being cut back. Wood is used extensively not only for building but also for fuel. Men and women from the villages can be seen in all the markets with heavy bundles of wood for sale. Although kerosene is now being used in many households, it has to be imported, and wood is still used extensively for cooking. The forests of the surrounding mountains will not be able to continue to supply fuel for the growing population of Kathmandu. A conservation and forestry program should be started now before any more damage is done.
Conventional economists consider subsistence farming a condition from which the farmer must be helped to a market economy or what is called a “better life.” (The only necessity that the Nepalese peasants cannot produce themselves is salt, which they obtain by barter.) But Toni Hagen points out in his book on Nepal that there are different conditions of subsistence farming, depending on the water supply, irrigation systems, crop rotation, fertilization, and other factors. While the subsistence farmer has little or no cash to buy industrial products, he enjoys independence from market-price fluctuations, he does not need transportation, and political upheavals do not affect him materially. To the peasants of Nepal, for instance, government and nationality have little meaning, except that they all revere the king. In fact, a subsistence farmer enjoys relative stability, a varied diet, and control over the agricultural production cycle and therefore over his life. And he lives in a healthy pollution-free environment.

The question about change must be asked at the level of the independent subsistence farmer. In the Kathmandu Valley, farming is a year-round occupation. Outside help is needed before any real choice can be made. In order to change agriculture from subsistence farming to market farming, roads and means of communication are needed, and these, of course, the farm families cannot provide for themselves.

A farmer, once he enters the market economy, usually finds that it is impossible to go back. The peasant families, however, cannot break out of the cycle that keeps them working just to grow enough to survive without outside help. A choice must be made available through aid programs, but the decision to change is the prerogative of each family group.

**Business and Enterprise.** An industrial park has recently been opened in Balaju, just outside of Kathmandu. Previous attempts at industrialization, begun during World War II, mainly in the Terai, failed after the war, when it became necessary to produce competitively. The recently established industries, mainly around the city of Kathmandu, concentrate on producing “import replacements.” That is, they manufacture those products that are in greatest demand and can be readily made locally. For instance, there are a shoe plant, a brick works, a cigarette factory, a sugar-and-sweets factory, and plants producing all kinds of metal parts. A cement factory is being built and will be in production by 1975. Paper and textile mills are also planned.

The main problem for consumer-products manufacture is the scarcity of money. While the Industrial Development Corporation, financed by the government, is trying to support the creation of new industry through private enterprise, the number of consumers is as yet too small. There is just not enough money in the hands of the vast majority of people to buy anything but what they most urgently need and cannot make themselves. Agricultural products and food are very cheap, and as a result, the peasant farmers simply do not earn enough cash to buy any manufactured goods that reflect the cost of imports or machines. It is also very difficult to establish competitive production with India, which is, by comparison, highly industrialized and can manufacture consumer products very cheaply.

For a landlocked country like Nepal, the shipping and transportation problem is of overriding importance as far as the economic success of the country is concerned. In fact, the establishment of any industry meets great barriers, because infrastructure and trained help are lacking and all machines and equipment must be imported at great expense. Since practically all overseas supplies come through the Calcutta harbor, India virtually regulates what goes to Nepal and at what price. The looting of shipments is another hazard. Therefore the Nepalese have very limited investment opportunities, and what local capital is available mostly leaves the country for investment abroad.

Based on abundant natural resources, electricity is the industry with the greatest growth potential. Its export, however, is limited to India. While India needs electricity, it is hesitant to be dependent on Nepal, which at any time could shut off the power supply. The production of electricity, specifically the building of dams in the mountains, requires heavy investment, the importation of generators and other equipment, and time for development. According to Toni Hagen, potentials for the generation of electricity have been extensively surveyed, and some facilities have been built, but much more needs to be done in this important area.

The largest enterprise as far as employment inside the country is concerned is government. But in the absence of sufficient tax income, government and administration must be supported by aid. At present, there is almost no
other white-collar employment available. Practically all the university graduates must look to the government for jobs.

Tourism. The most promising business by far for the Kathmandu Valley is tourism, which not only earns ready cash and foreign exchange but also is independent of import regulations, trade agreements, and the costly transportation of goods. Tourism employs large numbers of people who earn real wages; it creates many different jobs and generally stimulates the economy. All the recent developments in international transportation and aviation greatly support the development of tourism in Nepal, which only quite recently was much too far away for most travelers. From fewer than 2,000 visitors in 1958 and practically none before that, 1970 saw 50,000 tourists, and their number is increasing so rapidly that hotel construction cannot keep up.

Tourism has only just begun to reach the most accessible places in Nepal, mainly the Kathmandu Valley and Pokhara. Most tourists have little opportunity to get into the mountains. Although Himalayan expeditions can be regarded as a lucrative economic enterprise from Nepal's point of view, even the more limited aspirations of most mountaineers cannot be taken care of as yet for lack of accommodations, transportation, and communication in the beautiful highlands and mountains.

In the Kathmandu Valley, unless the existing physical surroundings—the historic towns and monuments—are protected and repaired, they will be irretrievably lost in a period of rapid development. And with them the most unique cultural and economic asset of the country will be lost. Labor is still very inexpensive in Nepal. The repair and preservation of buildings requires much labor and relatively few materials. It also creates many jobs and could teach many people the old and now forgotten skills that built these temples, monuments, and towns. The creation of employment through renovation programs would be another important contribution to a soundly based tourist program. The income from tourist entrance fees could be used to maintain and repair the monuments, as is done in other parts of the world.

The Physical Development Plan for the Kathmandu Valley proposes to create a number of historic districts. It states, under the heading "Special Purpose Zones": "The fundamental principle of development of a historic district will be the preservation of its unique character in terms of style, scale, building materials, and activities." A proposed zoning map for Kathmandu is included in the plan, as well as proposals for other towns and densely settled areas. Recently an inventory of historic architectural monuments was prepared and documented as a basis for a viable national conservation policy. Positive incentives are also needed and can take many forms, such as reduction of taxes or outright contributions for maintenance of historic buildings and areas.

The intelligent development of tourism in the Kathmandu Valley, safeguarding its twofold base—the beauty of the natural environment and the quality of the historic towns and art treasures—offers assured economic success. Income from the development of tourism, including income from a tourist or hotel tax, could also produce enough immediate extra cash to cover expenses for the urgently needed human development programs, such as community health services, literacy training, and education. Several recent studies concerning the development of the tourist industry propose the financing of tourist facilities through aid programs. Such an arrangement would open a broad range of diversified investment possibilities in this promising growth area. But ownership of hotel and tourist facilities, which at present is almost entirely controlled by members of the royal family, must eventually be diversified.

The protection, preservation, and rehabilitation of historic monuments, so essential if tourism is to succeed, have been carried out successfully in many old cities in Europe. For instance, the skyline of Rome is protected; high-rise buildings may only be built outside the historic city. Many old towns in Switzerland and Germany have strict regulations pertaining to advertising signs, neon lights, and the height of new construction, as well as the materials used. Cars are being increasingly eliminated from streets in city centers, which are then turned over to pedestrians.

In a developing country like Nepal, such guidelines or rules may seem out of place in the struggle to achieve economic viability and growth. But the point is that the historic environment and monuments and the quality, beauty, and diversity of the old towns offer the best existing means, through tourism, to create economic independence, as well as many more jobs. This does not mean that other kinds of economic development, such as
agricultural diversification, the building of dams for generating electricity, mineral exploration, and especially road building, should be neglected.

FOREIGN AID

In 1951, after the country was abruptly "opened" to the West, modernization and change were made the goal of government policies—an action that represented a complete reversal of former policies. Since then Nepal has become the recipient of more "aid" from practically all the developed countries of the world, as well as from its neighbors, than any other country of its size.

The reason is Nepal's location, as pointed out by Pashupati Shumshere Rana, director of the Center for Economic Development and Administration (CEDA), which was established in Kathmandu in the late 1960s, with Ford Foundation help, to train government employees: "We have struck political oil by our location between China and India; the result is a lasting flow of aid." Pashupati Shumshere is an Oxford-trained economist who is also the grandson of the last Rana prime minister and might have become the Rana ruler of the country except for the revolution of 1951.

Aid Programs. One of the chief purposes of aid programs is to develop the infrastructure, especially transportation, and institutions that will make economic investment profitable for private business and foreign investments. Another is to create political stability.

The largest donor of aid is India. Traditionally, Nepal's political refugees have gone to that country, which also has a direct interest in Nepal's stability and political future as a buffer state. Politically, Nepal is an unaligned country. It maintains relations with all Western countries, with India, with Russia, and with China. As a result, there are active aid programs with all these countries, but the programs are not coordinated at all.

A number of industrial plants have been established with the help of aid programs: the brick works and shoe factory with Chinese aid and the cigarette factory with Russian help. The projected cement plant has several donors, and more aid is planned. Some of the difficulties involved in establishing self-supporting industries have been discussed earlier in this chapter. The establishment of industrial plants is not only a highly visible form of aid; it also creates jobs, and its products are another bonus to the donor.

China is also supporting a department store where many Chinese-made basic consumer products are sold very cheaply, such as soap, kerosene stoves and kerosene, cotton yard goods, matches, and numerous other items. But Nepal also harbors 50,000 refugees from Tibet, and the traditional communication with the north is limited.

The Tribhuvan Raj Path to India, the first and most important transportation link with the outside world, was built by the Indian army and opened in 1956. It has been maintained by India all these years because Nepal cannot afford its upkeep, mainly for the reason that it is often damaged during the monsoon. While it is used to capacity, it is often partly closed, despite very high maintenance costs.

Chinese aid has built two main roads. One of these, running to Kodali on the northern border, Nepal also finds too costly to maintain, and it is hardly used at all. The other road, which was recently completed and runs west to Pokhara, should get more use, including some by tourists. But to spur economic growth along a road, ancillary and additional investments are needed, and these have not yet been made.

Road building is also a highly visible and necessary form of aid, and therefore road-building projects are supported by many aid programs, as well as by the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (the World Bank). But additional investments in regional economic development are needed to make roads useful to the people. Roads alone cannot promote development, and they cost a great deal to maintain. This has been the experience of many developing countries that were persuaded to build roads.

At the present time, a vast road system designed to open up the rest of Nepal and especially to connect Kathmandu with other areas of the country is under construction and already partly in use. Different sections are financed by different countries, including Great Britain and the United States. The main highway running the length of the country is located in the south in the flat Terai, where road building is relatively easy. To build a road through the middle of the country or through the mountains would be too difficult, expensive, and time-consuming. North-south feeder roads are planned and are being built at strategic points to connect towns and valleys in the
mountains with the east-west highway. The strategy, according to the National Planning Commission of Nepal, is to establish economic growth poles or growth centers in conjunction with the north-south roads and thus to support regional development, with coordinated transportation.

Air transportation inside the country by helicopter would seem an obvious answer, considering the difficulties in building roads in the mountains. But helicopters made available by the United States, although much faster than any other means of transportation, are still much too expensive to be considered for use in anything except emergencies.

There are more airports now, and air transportation, using small planes, is available to a growing number of areas of Nepal. The main problems are the weather hazards in the mountains and the complete unreliability of schedules, due in part to the absence of telecommunications. Even on the international routes, air traffic is frequently erratic, and since there is no radar even in Kathmandu, air travel is restricted to daytime flights. All air transport is limited to a small number of wealthy Nepalese and to tourists and other foreigners. Air freight is very expensive. Although air transportation can avoid the shipping and transit complications with India and especially Calcutta harbor, India must agree to flights over her territory in the case of air shipments traveling the international route via Bangkok.

Inside Nepal and especially in the Kathmandu Valley, aerial cables and ropeways, some built by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), have greatly facilitated the transport of goods.

Telephones exist so far only in Kathmandu, and communication is a great problem. Telecommunication programs, which will expand the telephone system, are being financed by the United States and the World Bank through the International Development Agency (IDA) and are under development for all major population centers in Nepal.

The Misdirection of Aid. The thrust of all aid programs is to show tangible results or visible improvements as quickly as possible for political reasons. Investments in much-needed social programs and education do not show, and therefore they have low priorities. Development programs must also contribute to GNP growth or show economic gains that can be quantified under the heading of economic performance. Furthermore, since foreign currency is needed to buy industrial products, preferably from the donor countries, export-producing investments are preferred.

The main problem with evaluating economic performance purely by GNP growth is that this takes no account of social and human investments, such as education, health care, and all child-related programs, or housing and such matters as a water supply and sewage disposal. All the above require large investments, and it may take years until measurable economic returns accrue, if at all. As a result, many developing countries are pushed into programs that show immediate economic returns that in the long run may not only be undesirable but also even have adverse results for the majority of the people. Or the programs favor profit-oriented private investment that benefits the small upper class and foreign investors; a course that further increases the gap between rich and poor. In a country as completely isolated for practically all its history as Nepal was, and a country that has virtually no institutional base, it is especially important to invest in human development, which eventually is the soundest basis for economic success.

The foreign officials involved in aid programs know at best a few of the upper-class government officials who have received a Western education. Frequently the aid givers do not know how the majority of the people live, let alone what their aspirations are. The foreign technical consultants, often highly paid academics, for the most part spend only a few days or weeks in the country.

Western experts, mainly economists, rely heavily on statistics, research, and information collected by the governments of the countries involved. But the question of how a developing country is to produce accurate information if vast numbers of its people are illiterate or lead a migratory life is apparently never asked.

The World Bank's initial study of Nepal, on which investments of millions of dollars were based, was made by a team of five full-time and two part-time bank members, all economists, including one agricultural economist as consultant. The mission spent about three weeks in Nepal in 1969. Can anyone really evaluate the economy and development potential of a country with Nepal's geography and diversity of people in three weeks? Not a single person on the team was an expert in human or
social development. Yet here, as everywhere else, the World Bank's reports and investment patterns greatly influence all other aid givers and private investments from abroad. It is not surprising that many of the aid programs benefit mainly a very small upper class. In many cases, aid programs ignore the life of the very large poor majority, which becomes progressively worse. Migration to the cities—caused by the mechanization of agriculture—lack of employment in urban areas, and pollution have frequently increased the problems of the poor: the results of misdirected development.

Another problem, also pointed out by Toni Hagen, is that many foreign advisers and specialists can write reports but do not know how to do things in practice, especially when it comes to farming or building or where practical experience and demonstrations in the field are needed.

The aid givers have one of two motives, depending on the country's priorities: either political influence or profitable economic investment. Frequently they have both. This kind of motivation has been shown in the studies made concerning Nepal, in which it can be observed as the rationale of most aid programs by all the different countries involved. Aid programs began in Nepal only after 1951. That is, most aid-giving countries had plenty of experience in other parts of the world and could have learned from that. But they did not. Switzerland is the one exception, and Switzerland is not politically motivated. By taking more time, lasting improvements were achieved for many people, especially the peasants, who are directly involved.

Physical development plans of one kind or another made with the help of foreign professional consultants can be found in all developing countries, financed in part by the countries themselves. Few of these plans are implemented, since they fail to deal with the political realities and the existing power structure.

The speedup of one-sided, misdirected development that does not succeed even by its own limited standards of GNP growth can only increase the difficulties of growing numbers of poor disenfranchised people around the world, while a very small upper class is getting richer everywhere. Without investments in people, development cannot possibly succeed. And this requires a fundamental reorientation of all aid and World Bank programs throughout the developing world and also in Nepal.

Yet even today in the Kathmandu Valley, the most advanced area of Nepal, life in the villages has hardly begun to be affected by the outside world. In other words there is still time to redirect the priorities.

**PROPOSALS FOR NEW DEVELOPMENT**

The Physical Development Plan for the Kathmandu Valley lists specific objectives as part of its recommendations concerning future development. The first three are as follows:

1. To preserve the historic and present image of the valley.
2. To preserve valuable agricultural land.
3. To develop an efficient transportation system for the valley.

One important proposal recently made is to develop a new town next to the Kathmandu-Patan urban centers in order to decongest the old centers, which are becoming thoroughly damaged by overcrowding, and to rationally channel and concentrate the new growth instead of spreading it piecemeal all around the Kathmandu-Patan area and into the best agricultural land on the valley floor.

The new town would channel the new growth into one area, with shopping and services and new commercial construction. This would eliminate a lot of wasteful roads resulting from sprawl, save much agricultural land, and create better, less costly living and housing conditions. It also would give the historic center a chance to be renovated without great population pressure and without imposing incompatible modern construction on the town center, which is clearly unable to accommodate the traffic and the business generated by new office developments. The office blocks recently built in Kathmandu with imported materials and construction methods are out of scale and out of tune with the historic environment.

It was Carl Pruscha, the United Nations consultant to the Department of Housing and Physical Planning, who suggested the idea of building a new town—a measure that would take care of both historic preservation and the organization of growth in a planned way, saving the agricultural land.

Other historic towns have successfully dealt with this problem—for instance, Siena, in Italy, a medieval town of unmatched quality and beauty. Siena is the seat of the famous Cathedral of Siena and the Palio, the horse race
that takes place annually on its medieval town square and is a great attraction for tourists from all over the world. There is no room for cars in the old center, and certainly not for any modern high-rise buildings.

When railroads were first built, in the nineteenth century, the new station of Siena had to be located outside the historic town for lack of room. A new town grew up around the railroad, separated geographically and visually from the historic one. The new town has been expanding, with all modern facilities, new housing, and commercial and industrial development, and without disturbing the historic one. Yet the two complement each other.

The historic town has lost nothing in activity. It is still the traditional regional market center and is alive with visitors, sightseers, specialty shops, and administrative and commercial activities. The medieval city hall, the cathedral, and the market square are centers of activity. The old town is preserved as a historic monument, and many people prefer to live there, while others like to live in the new town, which offers quite a different environment, modern living accommodations, and new commercial enterprise. The two towns are connected by new roads, the distance of a short bicycle ride.

The Kathmandu-Patan area could develop along similar lines. Since the publication of the *Physical Development Plan*, further plans are under way for the necessary controls, the road network, and the establishment of the legal framework of special-purpose zones, historic districts, and recreation zones. Kathmandu, by implementing controls and guiding its own future, can yet control its destiny if the right decisions are made now. But time is running out, as can be seen by the new building activities and developments in the center of the city.

Moreover, any new urban development in the Kathmandu Valley should profit from the indigenous concentrated Newar settlement patterns. This would allow modern transportation access to concentrated residential areas, while keeping motor traffic outside of the pedestrian communities. Brick buildings similar to the row houses of the Newars, but with modern mechanical improvements, are infinitely more suitable in the climate and environment of Kathmandu than imported Western or Indian house forms.

Kathmandu also has the advantage of being able to learn from the mistakes the capitals of other developing countries have made. Many of these cities are overwhelmed by completely haphazard immigration and growth, which threaten the economic future of millions of people who cannot find jobs after leaving the land. Cities all over the world are now working on decentralization plans. From Seoul to Cairo, from Caracas to Teheran, such decentralization plans have been made—mostly too late.

**THE URGENT FUTURE**

The question that finally must be asked again is this: What can the West offer to the inhabitants of Nepal, and particularly of the Kathmandu Valley, who have lived the same way for thousands of years and have developed a remarkably self-sufficient and stable way of life? Most of them do not have any use for Western technology. Unless we can help solve their human problems, such as providing health care, means of population control, and the kind of education that will enhance rather than disrupt their way of life, we are not really solving any problems but, instead, are creating more. Unless we address ourselves to the human problems of Kathmandu, we cannot solve those of Nepal or the developing world. The challenge for the people of the Kathmandu Valley is to build their own future based on their own past and their own values and roots, using, where needed, the technology and ideas of the West.

The results of the “first development decade” of the 1960s, as enunciated by the United Nations, are in by now. They show that economic growth is stagnant in most developing countries all over the world, especially in Asia, although, as we have noted, the GNP measurements used can hardly reflect the well-being of the people. With a few exceptions, the economic growth projected by the aid-giving countries and planned by the governments of the countries involved has not been achieved. Worse than that, human misery and malnutrition have expanded practically everywhere; illiteracy and unemployment have increased; and population growth is out of control. Immigration into the cities and urbanization proceed at enormous speed, creating human degradation and ever more chaotic pollution of the environment. The United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, held in Stockholm in June 1972, took some initial steps to confront these problems on a worldwide basis, but for many developing countries it is too late.
Nepal and, in particular, the Kathmandu Valley have traditionally been self-sufficient, chiefly in agricultural production. Development as yet is far behind that of most of Asia. This may be fortunate for Nepal, because the aid-giving countries, the international agencies, and, most of all, the developing countries involved must critically re-evaluate aid programs.

The one-sided goals of aid programs in terms of building infrastructure to make it profitable for foreign investors to set up industries must be scrutinized in terms of improving the life of the majority. The transplanting of technology has failed or created more inequality. The deteriorating conditions in developing countries cannot become better by the increase of politically oriented aid or larger investments by the World Bank. More of the same will produce only more dismal results.

The history of the lovely Kathmandu Valley has left the present generation with an extraordinarily rich heritage. It has also left them with the most difficult dilemmas. The people have inherited a magnificent man-made environment built by long artistic tradition, yet much of its human base and the craftsmanship and skills have been lost. The inherited temples, towns, and works of art are monuments of great beauty and imagination, but they require large investments for maintenance and upkeep if they are to be preserved. The people have a strong social tradition anchored in religion that prescribes every detail of living and has a place for everyone, but outside the traditional family system, communal arrangements are weak and cooperation is often entirely lacking. The people have evolved a rich, religious life, festivals, and celebrations that relieve the endless drudgery of farming, but labor-saving devices are not used because of religious taboos and ceremonies that prescribe traditional methods. The relationship between cause and effect is not recognized, since it cannot be reconciled with the wishes of the gods, who still dominate every phase of the everyday life of most people. Nepal has a sophisticated literature, but most people today cannot read or write. A very few have unlimited wealth and a great deal of power, but most have very little choice in making decisions about their own lives. Nepal has never been under colonial rule, and this is most important for the present independence and self-confidence of the people. Yet their own rulers have until quite recently stood in the way of all improvements and modernization.

The long isolation and feudal rule are still a vital part of the present. The future holds accelerated change. Modernization is urgently needed. The responsibility of the present rulers is to set the priorities and to organize change in a coherent way for the benefit of all. The future of Nepal, in order to be soundly based, must be built upon what is positive from the past: Nepal’s physical artistic heritage.
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