BHUTAN: PERSPECTIVES ON CONFLICT AND DISSENT

edited by

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Frontispiece: Traditional enemies - the garuda and lion, conch and makara, otter and fish - crossed into three allegorical hybrids representing 'The Conquest of Discord' (*mi-mthun g.yul-rgyal*).
Drawing by Robert Beer.

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Introduction

Bhutan, a Himalayan Buddhist kingdom the size of Switzerland, rises like a staircase from the plains of northeast India to the high plateau of Tibet. Topographically, it can be divided into three regions from south to north: lowland, hill and mountain. Bhutan does not have an extensive lowland belt: the hills rise steeply from the North Indian plain, and the borders of West Bengal and Assam are rarely more than a few miles from the foot of the hills. The southernmost region is traditionally known as the Duars, from the Sanskrit *dvara,* meaning "door". Bhutan's foothills are somewhat higher than Nepal's, and here a Tibetan-derived culture has permeated further south, down through the hills and high mountains of Bhutan's northern quarters. On an administrative level, Bhutan is divided into districts called *dzongkhag,* sub-districts called *dungkhag,* and "blocks" of villages called *gewog.*

Bhutan did not subscribe to the doctrines of economic development or confront the political uncertainties of the world beyond its foothills until the reign of the third Wangchuck king (1952-72). The country was politically unified by the Shabdrung, a Buddhist lama of the Drukpa Kagyu sect who fled from Tibet in 1616. From the 17th century until the early 20th, successive Shabdrungs were the nominal heads of a system with both temporal and spiritual authority, though they lost much of their temporal power to feuding district governors. In 1907, the office of the Shabdrung was eclipsed when Sir Ugyen Wangchuck became the first king, with the approval of the British, whom he had supported during their incursions into Tibet.[1] Since 1907, Bhutan has been ruled by four kings of the Wangchuck line: the present king, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, has reigned since 1972. The last properly recognised incarnation of the Shabdrung died in 1931.

Bhutan's inhabitants call the kingdom "Druk Yul", the Land of the Dragon, after the Buddhist sect that first united it. Consequently, the Buddhist peoples who inhabit its highland areas are known collectively as "Drukpas". Some nineteen languages are spoken in Bhutan as a whole, and three main groups of peoples — the Ngalop in the west, the Sharchhop in the east and the Nepalis in the south — comprise perhaps 85% of the total population.[2] Central Bhutan is home to a

number of other ethno-linguistic groups, among whom the Bumthap (the people of Bumthang) and the Kheng are numerically the most important, and all over Bhutan there are pockets of minority peoples who speak languages such as Lhokpu and Lepcha. The Sharchhop and the people of central Bhutan were conquered by the Ngalop, who came under the cultural influence of central Tibet early on in Bhutan's history. The Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism remains important in central and eastern Bhutan, while the Drukpa Kagyu school dominates in the western dzongkhags. Despite these minor sectarian differences, the Buddhist peoples of the north present a fair measure of cultural unity as "Drukpas" who profess the same broad faith and speak closely-related languages[3], though the Ngalop tend to dominate politically and their language, Dzongkha, is promoted as the national language. The Nepali-speaking people of the south were settled in Bhutan from the late 19th century onward. Most practise Hinduism, though some are Buddhists, and although they originally spoke a variety of languages, the Nepali *lingua franca* has displaced these, as it has elsewhere. British records appear to be the only sources that shed light on the origins of Bhutan's Nepali population, but the documentation in these sources is somewhat random, because British officials visited Bhutan at irregular intervals and tended to pass quickly through its malarial lowland strip. That Nepalis first entered Bhutan in significant numbers sometime during the late 19th century is generally accepted, bar a few quibbles about the precise date of first entry.[4] However, a contentious question concerns the proportion of the southern Bhutanese population that can trace its presence in Bhutan to this initial migration, and the proportion that came later, particularly after the crucial year of 1958.

Leo Rose has described Bhutan as "about as "data-free" as it is possible for a polity over three hundred years old to be."[5] Before 1969, estimates of Bhutan's population varied between 300,000 and 800,000. In 1969, a census revealed a figure of over one million, a figure that the Bhutanese government "delightedly announced to the world".[6] This figure was subsequently adjusted to 930,614, of whom 57% were said to reside in eastern Bhutan, 28% in western Bhutan and 15% (137,518) in the south.[7] Nowadays it is admitted that the figure of one million was notional, and was settled upon when Bhutan applied for United Nations membership.[8] In 1990, the king announced in an interview to a Calcutta magazine that the total population of Bhutan was

actually 600,000.[9] Although some school textbooks still give totals of over a million, the new figure has become the conventional wisdom and appears in the seventh Five-Year Plan documents. Unfortunately, no breakdown of this figure on the basis of region, sex, occupation, language, religion etc. is generally available. It is probable that none of the main ethnic groups is in a majority. Estimates for the Ngalop vary from 10% to 28%, for the Sharchhop 30%-44%, and for the Nepalis 25%-53%. Demographic statistics are controversial in Bhutan at present, and all such figures should be treated with caution.

Bhutan's Buddhist culture evolved over the centuries and developed its own distinct characteristics. Nonetheless, its founding principles came originally from Tibet, borne first, according to local legend, by Guru Rimpoche (Padmasambhava), and later by successive lamas from the north, including the Shabdrung himself. Therefore, it was toward Tibet that Bhutan was orientated until the early 20th century. The majority of the kingdom's trade was carried out over the Himalayan passes to the north, and the south of Bhutan, bordering the Indian plains, remained a hinterland behind the rulers' backs. This remained the case until the British began to make their presence felt and Bhutan had to begin to reorientate itself.

Bhutan's monarchy is unlike those of most other monarchical states. The first king was elected in 1907 by the civil and religious elites, who swore a legally-binding oath of allegiance to the ruler and his heirs, but until the coronation of the third king in 1952 powerful families continued to govern the districts, with little interference from the centre. This flexible arrangement could not ensure Bhutan's survival after India's independence and China's invasion of Tibet, and the third king began a process of gradual modernisation that has continued to this day. In 1953 a National Assembly *(Tshogdu)* was created, and has met once or twice a year ever since. Local elites began to be replaced by centrally-appointed officers, many of whom had been drawn from humble backgrounds and sent for education to India. In 1958 the Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru visited Bhutan for the first time, offering Indian development aid and urging de-isolation, and in 1959 the Chinese crackdown in Tibet pushed Bhutan further towards India.

In a treaty signed in 1910, Bhutan had agreed to accept British guidance in its external relations and the British had promised not to interfere in Bhutan's internal affairs. In 1949 a similar agreement was

formalised with independent India, and the relationship has been an intimate one ever since. Bhutan's emergence into the wider world has been marked by pragmatism and caution, but since the 1970s there have been signs of a desire to move out a little from under India's wing. Caution is also evident in Bhutan's efforts to earn the maximum amount of foreign currency from the minimum number of tourists.

The Political Crisis

Bhutan is very often portrayed as a kingdom that is moving cautiously and pragmatically out of its medieval isolation into the modern world, while maintaining its unique culture and way of life intact. However, since 1990 it has been engulfed in a growing political crisis. This has led to the presence (in January 1994) of over 80,000 refugees in UNHCR-administered camps in Nepal, to insecurity and violence in southern Bhutan, and to the growth of a dissident movement led by southern Bhutanese in exile who are demanding radical changes in the kingdom's political system. To attempt to understand how this has come about, it is useful to consider the issue within broader parameters.

The positions of the lines that divide one nation-state from another in South Asia in the late 20th century are the legacy of colonialism, and of the various kinds of nationalism ("the desire of a nation to have a state of its own"[10]) that brought the colonial period to an end. Many of the nations created by postcolonial nationalism are still seeking to define themselves. In India, for example, the existence of a secular nation-state glosses over a host of nascent or assertive sub-nationalisms that are based on differences in language or religion, to name but two variables. This is perhaps to be expected in a nation that comprises over eight hundred million people; what is surprising is that similar fissures, either actual or potential, exist in the smaller states that neighbour India.

Concomitant with the emergence of new nation-states, there has also arisen a phenomenon that has been labelled "nationism" and defined as "the desire of a state to have a nation of its own".[11] That is to say, the state seeks to create in reality what has up until that point existed partly, to use a fashionable term, as an "imagined community".[12] The government of newly-independent India sought to submerge regional and sectarian differences in a secular whole with Hindi cast in the role of national language. Similarly, every government of Nepal

since its unification in the late 18th century has promoted Nepal's identity as a Hindu kingdom and extended the range of the Nepali language. Every state in South Asia has promoted a set of cultural values in an effort, first, to mould its disparate peoples into a unified nation and, second, to distinguish that nation and its culture from those that border it. These two aims have been summed up with regard to language as "internal cohesion" and "external distinction".[13] Thus, India promotes a Sanskritised Hindi written in the *devanagari* script while Pakistan fosters a Perso-Arabicised Urdu, despite the fact that at the spoken level both languages remain mutually comprehensible.

Before the development of modern nationalism in South Asia, the Himalayan region contained a long chain of petty kingdoms. From time to time, one or another of these kingdoms would become more powerful than its neighbours and would expand, but usually this process was followed by a pattern of political fragmentation. After Indian independence, Bhutan and its neighbour, Sikkim, were the only two states in the subcontinent that continued to be ruled by kings and associated elites of Tibetan origin and to maintain a national culture based on Tibetan Mahayana Buddhism. In 1947 both kingdoms were confronted by the task of establishing a distinct cultural identity and right to nationhood. For Sikkim, it proved impossible. The indigenous Lepchas had long been dominated and outnumbered by immigrants: first by the Bhutias of the ruling class, and subsequently by Nepali-speaking cultivators from Darjeeling and eastern Nepal, whose settlement was encouraged by the British, and who already formed a majority in 1891. The Tibetan culture of the elite was increasingly unrepresentative of the population as a whole, and in 1975 Sikkim became a state of India. Bhutan, however, succeeded in maintaining its independence, and its future status as the last bastion of government-sponsored Mahayana Buddhism seemed secure.

As the 20th century draws to a close, Bhutan's future looks less certain. Though ruled by a primarily Ngalop/central Bhutanese elite, its small population (as mentioned above) is more diverse than is often supposed. Critics of the Royal Government's current policies claim to discern a rift between the Sharchhop of the east and the Ngalop of the west, based on the political dominance of the Ngalop and on alleged economic inequalities between west and east.[14] However, any *cultural* differences that might exist between these two communities are less im-

portant than those that exist between the Buddhist peoples of the north and the Nepali-speaking, mainly Hindu population of the south.

"Nationism" seems to have come late to Bhutan, and to have had tragic repercussions. Until recently, Bhutan presented a rare South Asian example of harmonious co-existence, and it is still not clear that its current problems stem from an inevitable clash between ethnic groups and cultures. The government's drive for "Bhutanisation" strives for internal cohesion — uniformity of costume, an enhanced role for Dzongkha as national language, fewer foreign workers, and so on — and for external distinction on the premise, as expressed by the king, that "we are a small country between giant and powerful neighbours; we have no resources, we have only our culture and identity."[15]

Bhutan's sixth Five-Year Plan (1987-92) included a policy of "one nation, one people" and extended the range of the code of traditional Drukpa dress and etiquette called *Driglam Namzha*.[16] The dress element of the code required all citizens to wear the *gho* (a one-piece tunic for men) and the *kira* (an ankle-length dress for women) on ceremonial occasions and in official contexts, but the rule was applied over-zealously at first, to the extent that many southern Bhutanese could not venture out of their homes in their everyday attire without facing the prospect of a fine or imprisonment. Then in 1989 the teaching of Nepali was discontinued in Bhutanese schools. According to the government, this was made necessary by the introduction of a new primary curriculum, but it added to the southerners' sense of cultural marginalisation.

Writing in the mid-1970s, Leo Rose suggested that problems might arise from the presence in southern Bhutan of a large unintegrated Nepali population: the Bhutanese government's policy of restricting the Nepali Bhutanese to southern Bhutan "populated the area of Bhutan most susceptible to rapid economic development and to ideological penetration from India with a community that had not been integrated, either socially or politically, into the broader Bhutanese society."[17] In previous centuries, Bhutan's "nationism" aimed at distinguishing it from Tibet. Thus, there was hostility to the Gelugpa sect that held temporal power in Tibet until the Chinese invasion. With the submersion of Tibet in China and Bhutan's consequent sudden reorientation southward, there came the perceived need for Bhutan to distinguish itself from its neighbour to the south. The regions of India that

border Bhutan, particularly to the southwest in the Darjeeling district of West Bengal, are populated predominantly by Nepali-speakers. The somewhat precarious position of Indian Nepalese under the 1950 Indo-Nepal Treaty has made this community politically assertive in recent decades.[18] The Nepali Bhutanese have been less quiescent than their Drukpa compatriots, and have a history of political activism, albeit on a small scale, that dates back to the Bhutan State Congress agitation of 1952-4. However, the Bhutanese government granted full citizenship to its Nepali population in 1958 and then pursued a policy of gentle integration, recognising and tolerating cultural differences in the south. The policy of educating southerners and absorbing them into the administration met with considerable success.

In 1985, however, a new Citizenship Act imposed stricter conditions, and these bore heavily on Nepali Bhutanese. According to the government, a survey of the south had detected large numbers of illegal immigrants. A census began to "identify Bhutanese nationals" in the southern districts in 1988, and led to unease because, according to refugees and exiles, excessively strict standards were set for documentation.[19] Dissent began to grow in the south because of what was perceived to be an attempt by the government to force out Nepali-speaking citizens, and to impose the Drukpa culture. In July 1989 a small group of dissidents, led by an erstwhile Royal Advisory Council member, Tek Nath Rizal, formed the People's Forum for Human Rights (PFHR) in Nepal, and between October and December 1989 forty-five people were arrested for writing and circulating "seditious pamphlets". Six were held for between 26 and 28 months before being released. Rizal, who was arrested by Bhutanese security officials in Nepal in November 1989, was sentenced to life imprisonment in November 1993. Three days later he was promised an amnesty by the king, but this was not to be granted until the refugee problem that had developed since his incarceration had been resolved.

The Bhutan People's Party was formed by Nepali Bhutanese in India in June 1990. With the PFHR, it organised mass public demonstrations against government actions in southern Bhutan in September and October 1990 that were unprecedented in the kingdom's history. After the demonstrations, the Bhutanese army and police began the task of identifying participants and supporters, who were categorised as "anti-nationals" (*ngolops*— literally, "rebels") and the flow of refugees began,

reaching a peak in May 1992, during which month 11,000 arrivals were recorded in the camps in Nepal. The refugees brought with them many allegations of torture, brutality and rape.

The Bhutanese government refuted the refugees' allegations and argued that it faced a problem of terrorism in southern Bhutan. As the refugee camps began to grow in 1991, Bhutan disclaimed responsibility, arguing that the people in the camps were illegal immigrants, Nepali nationals, migrants from India, or southern Bhutanese who had left voluntarily. It cast doubt on the authenticity of the citizenship documents still held by many camp residents, and expressed the fear that sinister motives were afoot to turn Bhutan into a Nepali-dominated state. Representatives of Nepal and Bhutan met on several occasions to discuss the problem, but their discussions were either fruitless or ended in acrimony.

The first breakthrough occurred in July 1993, when a Nepali government delegation visited Thimphu. In a joint communiqué, the two countries' Home Ministers announced that a joint committee would be set up to "determine the different categories of people in the refugee camps who are claiming to have come from Bhutan", and to arrive at a "mutually acceptable agreement on each category to provide a basis for the resolution of the problem". The Bhutanese have stated "the Royal Government of Bhutan will accept full responsibility for any bonafide Bhutanese national who has been forcibly evicted from Bhutan." But clearly many matters still need to be clarified if the problem is to be resolved, and several subsequent bi-lateral meetings have been concluded with no visible improvement to date.

The London Conference

> The tragedy is, of course, that the Minister and his ideologues are right: Bhutan faces acute danger from demographic pressures from the plains, and at the same time incidents of horrific violence are continuing. But they need to encourage debate not rhetoric to solve this, and the greater number of dispassionate scholars whom they can get involved the better.[20]

> The complexity and magnitude of Bhutan's current crisis emerged as the most vital issues at a two-day seminar organised by the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, last week.....The SOAS seminar on Bhutan was widely seen as a success, especially in its context as the first international seminar on Bhutan.[21]

Regardless of its immediate fallout and the time taken for the eventual resolution of the current crisis in the kingdom, there is no doubt that in the days ahead the recently concluded Bhutan Conference.....will be looked back upon as the first healthy step in the process of finding a lasting solution.[22]

The idea of a conference was suggested by three Himalayan Forum seminars on Bhutan at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London during late 1991 and early 1992 which attracted great interest. Bhutan remains little-known, and the subject of considerable curiosity. In a situation in which some portion of the population has fled or been expelled, but in which basic population data are not available, claims can be made on both sides of the argument which are difficult to evaluate.

On 10th September 1992, concluding a lengthy discussion of the southern problem, His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck declared, "We don't need praise. Praise will not help us. We need criticism, we need advice. It is a question of national survival, and we must not be adverse to criticism. We are an adaptable people". Six days later, an elderly Lhotshampa farmer in Damphu, Chirang, announced, "I'm not leaving, whatever happens. The police can beat me up as much as they like, I'm staying. My son has gone to [the camps in] Jhapa, but I'm staying. I am dumb. Ask the Mandal why he's sending the people away without compensation, just ask him that." Because most analyses of the causes and nature of the crisis had been informed and influenced by either one or other of these very different perspectives, it was felt that some dispassionate scrutiny of the situation by academics and journalists might be both constructive and timely.

It was hoped that it might be possible for both the government and the dissidents to be represented, but in the event the Royal Government felt itself unable to countenance discussions with its opponents. A choice therefore had to be made by the convenor between a conference at which the dissidents' point of view was presented but not the government's, or vice versa. Eventually, the decision was taken to bow to the government's diplomatic sensitivities. Therefore, the conference was attended by Dasho Jigmi Thinley, then Secretary to the Ministry of Home Affairs, but not by any representative of the opposition in exile. Nonetheless, "according to neutral observers, this did not result in a one-sided presentation of rhetoric and the meeting in fact generated substantial and substantive debates and discussions".[23]

The conference was attended by 120 people. They included academics, journalists, representatives of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, the United Nations Development Programme, Voluntary Service Overseas, the World Bank, donor agencies from New Zealand and Holland, the Royal Nepalese Embassy and the Indian High Commission in London, and Amnesty International. Of the two central themes of the conference (Bhutan's cultural heritage and its present political crisis), various aspects of the crisis tended to dominate discussions. Since this was the first international conference that has ever focused on Bhutan, and the first occasion on which such a gathering had ever discussed the highly contentious political issues, there seemed to be a general consensus that this was appropriate.

The less contentious cultural papers provoked interesting and constructive discussions. They demonstrate the extent to which Drukpa culture is still rooted in the soil of northern Bhutan and in firm continuity with the past: each of these papers conveys the textural richness of the Bhutanese landscape and the lives that are lived against its backdrop, whether this is with reference to cloth, religious practice or architecture. The idea that Drukpa culture is monolithic and unchanging is challenged by the existence of what Michael Aris has termed "alternative voices" — local variations of ritual customs, changing textile fashions, the evolution of vernacular architecture and the like. There were also several other important papers on aspects of development in Bhutan: on language policy, the growth of diplomacy, and decentralisation. All of these papers will appear in a separate volume entitled *Aspects of Culture and Development*, edited by Michael Aris and myself.

The discussion of the political issue was dominated at first by the government's view, presented by Dasho Jigmi Thinley. Dasho Thinley's paper, along with those presented by Kinley Dorji and Karma Ura, was published by the Royal Government of Bhutan in a booklet entitled *Bhutan: a Traditional Order and the Forces of Change — Three Views from Bhutan* in May 1993. Dissenting views were less thoroughly propounded in the papers presented, but the debate that took place over the two days meant that both sides of the argument were presented less dogmatically by the end of the conference. Rachael Reilly, who had worked in the refugee camps in Nepal, gave a brief impromptu presentation and answered questions. I am grateful to her for setting out her views on paper. I am also grateful to Christopher Strawn for subse-

quently offering a paper which is based on several months of research in Nepal and interviews with leading exiles. This paper is included here for the purposes of balance. The contributors to this volume do not speak with one voice; there are few readers who will not be discomfited or confused by some of the views and contradictions contained within these pages.

The conference was addressed early on the first morning by Michael Aris, whose adventurous paper set the tone for much of the rest of the conference. Aris views the issue of conflict resolution in Bhutan from an historical perspective and describes several instances in which conflicts have been resolved through resort to traditional means. He argues that Bhutan's rich heritage contains resources that have not been fully utilised in the recent past, and concludes that the lessons he draws from a final example of unsuccessful conflict resolution "can surely be applied a little further south too".

Dasho Jigmi Thinley's essay can be regarded as an authoritative statement of the Royal Government's position on the "southern problem" as of March 1993. It deals first with the historical background to the presence of Nepali-speakers in Bhutan, and argues at length that they are comparatively recent arrivals. The essay then goes on to describe in detail the way in which the government sought to integrate the southern population, and how, in the government's view, the crisis first emerged. Several other contributors to this volume take issue with some of the arguments pursued in this essay, though Brian Shaw's robust and combative paper is perhaps more controversial. Readers should also note and assess the sense of betrayal and bewilderment with which Dasho Thinley's essay, and the essay by Kinley Dorji that follows, is tinged. The uprising in southern Bhutan is described as if it were unexpected and largely unprovoked. It stems from demographic and political forces outside Bhutan's control, and Bhutan is surrounded and imperilled. This is, broadly, the view from Thimphu.

Christopher Strawn and Rachael Reilly paint a different picture. Both have spent time in the refugee camps in Nepal, and Strawn has also interviewed leading dissidents in Kathmandu. Reilly describes the situation in the camps in early 1993 and disagrees with some of the assertions that emanate from Thimphu about the refugees' origins, status and activities. Strawn analyses the trends in government policy in Bhutan that he believes led to the growth of dissent in the south, and

in an important section of his essay he describes the series of events that, according to his refugee sources, led to the arrest of Tek Nath Rizal. This then is broadly the view from the camps: unfair demands were made of the southern Bhutanese, and when they protested they were forced out of Bhutan. The two sides of the story are difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile.

It has been argued in some quarters of the South Asian media that the creation of a "Greater Nepal" is a political objective for various parties, and it seems that the notion has been given credence at times within Bhutan. Kanak Mani Dixit discusses the likelihood of such a conspiracy existing, and examines the likely conspirators. It is notable that the spectre of "Greater Nepal" appears of late to have been laid to rest, and this paper, which appeared in *Himal* magazine in May 1993, may perhaps have played some part in this.

The Bhutanese media tend to portray the Druk Gyalpo as a moderating and restraining influence on a National Assembly that would, if permitted, authorise very extreme measures indeed against the southern Bhutanese. Critics in exile argue that this is a charade and that extreme measures have already been taken, regardless of the king's public pronouncements. Leo Rose examines the position of the monarch in the Bhutanese political system, and argues that the king is a genuine and active participant in policy debates, though not an absolute ruler in theoretical or legal terms. There are nonetheless instances of the king actually vetoing divisive legislation: the most important example (the call for a renewal of oaths of allegiance) is highlighted by both Rose and Aris. The significance of this may be lost on the outside world, whose understanding of Bhutan remains limited. The foreign media either ignore Bhutan, or else they report the current political situation without the background information that would enable them to assess government and refugee statements: Nicholas Nugent describes this problem

AC Sinha's summary of Bhutan's history and current dilemmas reflects a final viewpoint: that of the Indian scholar. His final words, expressing the hope for a regional consensus on ethnic policy, are a fitting conclusion to this volume. I too hope that this book will contribute to a better understanding of Bhutan and the refugees in Nepal and perhaps, in some small measure, to a solution of their problem, however it might be defined.

Acknowledgements

Thanks must be expressed to the British Academy for funding a visit to Bhutan and Nepal in 1992 during which the foundations for this conference were laid. I am grateful to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Royal Government of Bhutan for hosting my visit to that country — and particularly to His Majesty the Druk Gyalpo Jigme Singye Wangchuck, the Foreign Minister Lyonpo Dawa Tsering, Mr. Sonam Tenzing and Mr. Chhimi Wangchuck. Members of the Human Rights Organisation of Bhutan, currently in Kathmandu, provided further insights and advice. My thanks to Mr. Om Dhungel and Mr. Bhim Subba.The conference itself was financed by grants from the Nuffield Foundation and the Research and Publications Committee of the School of Oriental and African Studies. The attendance of delegates from Bhutan was facilitated by the UNDP in Thimphu, and Mr. Kanak Mani Dixit's attendance was funded by the British Council in Kathmandu. My thanks to Mr. Terence Jones of the UNDP and Mr. Richard Hale of the British Council. The conference was held under the auspices of the Centre of South Asian Studies at SOAS and I must thank Dr. Peter Robb, Mrs. Janet Marks, Mrs. Susan Madigan and numerous colleagues and students for their support and assistance.

All opinions expressed in this volume are those of the individual authors.

Michael Hutt
London 1994

[1] This is of course a simplified summary of a very complex historical development, which has been dealt with in greater detail and with far more authority by Leo Rose *(The Politics of Bhutan*, 1977), Michael Aris *(Bhutan: the Early History of a Himalayan Kingdom*, 1979) and AC Sinha *(Bhutan: Ethnic Identity and National Dilemma*, 1991). My thanks to Michael Aris for his helpful comments on an earlier draft of this summary.

[2] The terms *Lhotshampa* and *Sharchhop* mean 'southerner' and 'easterner' respectively and are not ethnonyms as such. Most of the Sharchhop speak Tshangla, a language that remains largely unanalysed.

[3] On this point, see the letter from Dasho Thinley Gyamtsho headed "There are only Drukpas" in *Himal*, Sep.- Oct. 1992, pp. 4-5.

[4] Some of the dissident literature, to which Dasho Jigmi Thinley alludes indirectly, suggests that Nepalis first entered Bhutan after a treaty was finalised between the Shabdrung and the King of Gorkha in the 17th century. It is known that Newar artisans from the Kathmandu Valley kingdoms came to Bhutan during the medieval period, because of their reputation as metalcasters and creators of sacred images. However, these movements of people have very little bearing on the current crisis, since the numbers involved would have been small.

[5] Rose, op. cit., 1977, p. 11.

[6] Ibid., p. 40, f.n. 14.

[7] Ibid., p. 41.

[8] See Mark Bray and Tenzin Chhoeda, "The implications of size for educational development in small states: the case of Bhutan". *Canadian and International Education*, 21.2 (1992), p. 6. With regard to the subsequent revision of the population figures, Bray and Chhoeda remark, "the story is thus an instructive example of the effect of international politics on the ways that small states may present themselves."

[9] *Sunday*, Oct. 28 - Nov. 3, 1990.

[10] Malcolm Yapp, "Language, religion and identity: a general framework." In David Taylor and Malcolm Yapp (eds.), *Political Identity in South Asia*, London, 1979, p.5.

[11] Ibid.

[12] See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*. London, 1983.

[13] Einar Haugen, "Dialect, language, nation." *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 68 (1966).

[14] The *Bhutan Review* in January 1994 reproduced the text of a booklet allegedly circulated to members of the National Assembly at its 72nd session in July 1993, which expresses "suppressed Sharchop sentiments".

[15] A view expressed during an audience with His Majesty on September 10th 1992, subsequently published in *Himal*, Sept.- Oct. 1992, pp. 5-6.

[16] The Driglam Namzha code is said to date back to the time of the first Shabdrung. The term translates roughly as "The Fundamentals of Discipline" and in its original form the code related solely to issues of monastic *vinaya*. It would perhaps be misleading to state that the code was "introduced" to Bhutan as a whole by the Five-Year Plan, since it must have been observed to some degree, at least among monastic communities in the north, for centuries. It is more

accurate to state that the code was "reinforced" in the north, and greatly extended to cover *all* forms of correct behaviour in official contexts. In the largely Hindu, Nepali-speaking south, however, it had very limited currency; here, it would be true to say that Driglam Namzha was "introduced" or, as the dissidents might have it, "imposed".

[17] Rose, op. cit.p. 47.

[18] See Tanka Subba, *Ethnicity, State and Development. A Case Study of the Gorkhaland Movement in Darjeeling*. New Delhi, 1992.

[19] A "census" in the Bhutanese context does not appear to be a nationwide exercise undertaken in order to construct a statistical profile of the population present, like the decennial censuses conducted in, for example, India and Nepal. The 1988 census was conducted only in the southern districts, and subsequent surveys have taken place in the south. For instance, the December 25 1993 issue of *Kuensel* carried an announcement of an "annual census" of Samtse (Samchi) dzongkhag, which was to commence in January 1994, with the warning "those who have not attended their census last year and should fail to attend this time as well, the Tshogpas will be constrained to delete their names from the census record."

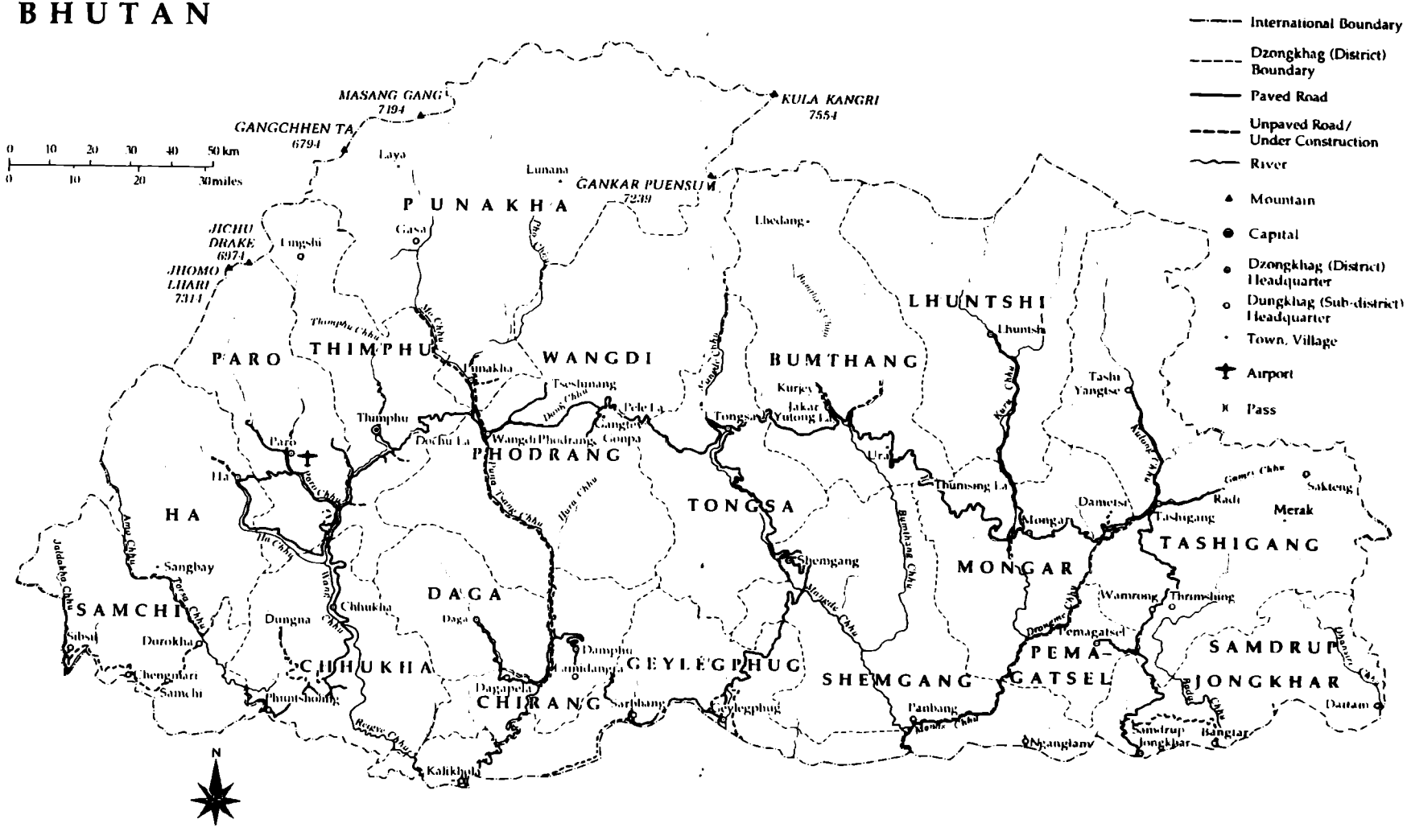
[20] Robbie Barnett, concluding a report on the conference in *Himal* April/March 1993, p. 21.

[21] *Kuensel*, 3rd April 1993.

[22] Editorial, *The Bhutan Review*, March 1993.

[23] Ibid.

BHUTAN


International Boundary
Dzongkhag (District) Boundary
Paved Road
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River
Mountain
Capital
Dzongkhag (District) Headquarter
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Conflict and Conciliation in Traditional Bhutan

Michael Aris

It is the plea of historians that the lessons of the past are sometimes useful in facing the problems of the present. Few who have followed the course of recent events in Bhutan would deny that the problems that have occurred in the south of the country with the Nepali population constitute a major crisis which has so far eluded all attempts at finding a durable solution. It may therefore be helpful to pause and reflect on how, faced with intractable problems in the past, the Bhutanese developed their own methods of conciliation in dealing both with internal and external threats to peace and stability. It should cause one no surprise to discover that the ethos and mechanisms of peace-making are to be found both at the level of the state (the theocracy of the past and the monarchy of the present) and at the level of society (the individual community or family). The traditional methods of conciliation I hope to discuss are still readily available either to avert the threat of violent conflict or to bring to an honourable settlement a conflict that has already started or got out of hand.

The alternative method of dealing with a problem, that is by the application of coercive force, is also available now as it has always been in the past. The history of Bhutan, like that of most states, is littered with stories of violence used as a political weapon. However, it is accepted without difficulty by many in Bhutan that violence at best provides only an interim solution and at worst merely provokes a cycle of further conflict. This viewpoint after all accords not only with Buddhist doctrine on the fundamental need for harmony in human relations but also with the "modern" perspective of the growing number who have received their education abroad. Nevertheless, in the context of the present troubles this attitude does not yet appear to have been articulated strongly enough to counter the all-too-easy justifications for methods which make no use of the traditional skills of peace-making, particularly those which depend on the art of soliciting or offering mediation.

To offer perspectives on this theme from the safe distance of history is of course a much easier and more comfortable matter than the real search for peace on the ground, where pressures and currents are more diverse and complex than the outsider can ever imagine. Nevertheless, the exercise may be of some use for establishing a few of the basic patterns and principles of the past which have relevance for the present.

Religion, violence and the state

Let it be admitted that traditional attitudes in Bhutan on how to attain peace are at once more complex and ambivalent than one might at first be led to expect in a country where Buddhist values are so highly regarded. On the one hand the doctrine is crystal clear: alone among sentient beings, man has the chance to win the peace of enlightenment by taming his emotions and cultivating compassion. It is his duty to encourage others towards this path too, whether as fully ordained monks or as laymen. On the other hand, the Tantric teachings and methods absorbed into late Indian Buddhism, and exported to Tibet and thence to Bhutan, make use of violent ritual means of a symbolic and magical nature. These are directed either internally towards the defeat of the notion of the "self" as the primary cause of all suffering, or externally towards conquering the forces which are seen as hindering the Buddhist teachings.

The religious rituals of violence performed not only in Bhutan but in all Lamaist societies appear last in a descending, fourfold hierarchy traditionally enumerated as "peaceful, enriching, powerful and violent" (*zhi rgyas dbang drag*). It is with conscious allusion to this scheme that the antonyms of peace and violence are joined in the stock compound term *zhi-drag* ("peace-violence"), which is used in bureaucratic language to refer to the civil and military authorities of Bhutan. (The term in fact derives from Tibetan usage.) The civil administration is therefore known as "The Peaceful" (civil servants are called *zhi-ba'i gzhung-g.yog*, literally "government servants of peace") and the army is referred to as "The Violent" (soldiers are *drag-po'i dmag-mi*, "the violent men of war"; military headquarters are *drag-po'i lte-ba*, "the centre of violence", and so forth). Like the "peaceful and wrathful deities" (*zhi-khro*) who are an inseparable unity in every person's psycho-physical make-up, the two wings of government are supposed to be held in a kind of balance. There are loud echoes here from other unitary dualisms such as *chos-*

srid ("the sacred and secular spheres"), *srid-zhi/'khor-'das* (samsara and nirvana) and the like.

The distinctive Tantric idea implicit in the theory of government which accords due place to violence derives from the notion that negative emotions can be used to spiritual profit if they are observed, tamed and turned. It is a recognition of the totality of man's essential nature, a bundle of conflicting emotions and qualities which can be controlled and directed to transcend its flaws and attain true enlightenment. But is the process which achieves this an internal, yogic method which properly uses violence in symbolic and sacramental terms alone ? Can the process be externalised magically to bring about physical change in the world we inhabit ? Or should it be directed both inwards and outwards at the same time ? Any answer is bound to be hedged around with qualifications that raise controversy.

Certainly it was deemed heretical to accord a literal interpretation to those Tantras which exhort both sexual union and violence. And yet the Buddhist monk who assassinated the last, anti-Buddhist king of Tibet, Langdarma, is celebrated and given high honour in all traditions of Northern Buddhism, not least in the local branches of the Drukpa Kagyupa and Nyingmapa schools of Bhutan. The monk in question is supposed to have committed murder for the ultimate benefit and protection of the Buddhist teachings and in a state of enlightened compassion which ensured the "release" of his victim. The motivation is held to have justified the deed. I have no doubt that a careful study of the historical circumstances which gave rise to the "invented tradition" of the monk-assassin would show that it was formulated many centuries later in an age when monastic schools, under the patronage of the lay aristocracy in Tibet, had become deeply embroiled in secular conflict.[1] The model was naturally assimilated in Bhutan where the Black Hat (*Shwa-nag*) dancers who portray the assassin still provide, as they do throughout the trans-Himalayan region, a kind of justificatory precedent for the use of violence in defence of the Buddhist state. I remember my own surprise in the 1960s when I witnessed fully ordained monks of the state monastic body receiving formal military training at Punakha at a time when invasion from the north was reckoned a real possibility.

Even the most cursory reading of Bhutanese history would reveal any number of parallels to that strange spectacle, so contrary to our ex-

pectations. The term *grwa-dmag* or *ser-dmag* (monk-soldier) is in fact a well-known expression both in Tibet and Bhutan, and numerous cases could be found in the Bhutanese past of monks acting as commanders of troops. That we are on rather unsteady ground here is revealed in the way some monks who participated in the Lhasa revolt of 1959 are said to have been particularly careful to return their monastic vows before they took up arms. The same doubts and inhibitions must surely be felt by some of the clergy in Bhutan, for the very notion of the fighting monk must always remain a contradiction in terms.

Yet it is my impression that the paradox is now hardly felt, so deeply fused and intermingled are the norms of church and state in the historical consciousness of the Bhutanese. One of the most apt and powerful symbols of this fusion is seen during the state festivals in the portrayal of the ancient monk warriors of the Drukpa school and their beautiful, slow-moving performance of the *chos-gzhas* ("The Dharma Song"). The state is still today presented as the church triumphant under the motto of "The Glorious Drukpa Victorious in All Directions" (*dPal-ldan 'Brug-pa Phyogs-las rNam-rgyal*). A careful analysis of the monastic curriculum would probably show that violent rituals to protect the state remain the principal activity of the state monks, as if they were still engaged in warding off the Tibetan and Tibeto-Mongol invasions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The temporary reversals of the British at Dewangiri in the Anglo-Bhutan war of 1865 are still ascribed as much to ritual magic as to force of arms. All the insignia of the modern military in Bhutan are copies of the ritual weapons of Tantric Buddhism.

When the Buddhist teachings (*bstan-pa*) are invoked as the norm that must be fostered and protected, the term seems to be used invariably less to refer to the doctrines of the Lord Buddha *per se* and more to the specific and local tradition of his teachings which have conferred power and authority on the state. In the transition from theocracy to monarchy there has been total continuity in the function of the state as the protector of these teachings and in the way legitimacy and authority is derived from them.

It is clear, then, that powerful emotions can be unleashed in Bhutanese society when precedents and justifications are invoked in favour of violent means, ritual or otherwise, to protect the state from perceived dangers. These same emotions were at work in fostering po-

litical unity in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but they also served to encourage local factionalism and regional strife in the nineteenth century.

Today we are witnessing a form of ascendant, even militant nationalism in which many complex forces are at work. Some may be the result of infection from what looks like a world-wide reversion to nationalism and tribalism, fostered locally by a deliberate government policy aimed at cultivating an official ideology of national identity. This finds expression in the recently introduced requirement to swear oaths of allegiance, observe a traditional code of dress, adopt the deferential ceremonials of the court, and learn the correct idioms of the court language of western Bhutan. A less prescriptive and more spontaneous feature of the present situation has been the apparent ease, even alacrity, with which many Bhutanese of the north have turned to what they perceive as the justified means of protecting their threatened heritage from incursions and acts of terrorism in the south. These latter are bound up with uncontrolled demographic forces and with political and ethnic turmoil in the subcontinent as a whole. The response from the north has ranged between the sober and restraining policies of the king to the alleged torture and rape of ethnic Nepalese by the Bhutanese armed forces as documented by Amnesty International. The so-called "push and pull" factors operate in classic combination to cause the exodus from the south. Meanwhile no serious attempt appears to have been made to find a solution to the many-sided crisis by negotiation, compromise or mediation. [2]

Fully-developed world religions and the civilisations they sustain can accommodate contrary viewpoints and opposing methods in a composite, all-embracing whole. Religions are ultimately human institutions — of divine origin perhaps, but serving a multiplicity of human needs. Ultimately it is a question of the selection, conscious or otherwise, of those strands which appear to suit one's purpose or temperament. There can be few world religions where the option for peace lies closer to hand than in Buddhism, even in so developed a form as the one which flourishes in Bhutan. In what follows I take the Buddhist attitude to peace and the sanctity of life as axiomatic. It is rather the political and social expressions of the axiom that concern me.

Mediation as a means of political conciliation

One of the most potent origin myths current in Bhutan centres around the archetypal figure of Padmasambhava, the eighth-century Tantric sage from the Swat valley in present-day Pakistan who tends to supplant even the Buddha Shakyamuni as the object of primary reverence. The focus of a complex cult, Padmasambhava is credited with the subjugation of local deities throughout the region. The legend which associates him most closely with the area of proto-Bhutan (known then as Mon) casts him in the role of grand mediator between the conflicting forces of Mon and India.

In the story of the Sindhu Raja, which has come to form part of the standard history of Bhutan, Padmasambhava is invited to Bumthang to cure the Raja of a fatal illness whose ultimate cause is the protracted struggles the Raja has been waging with King Nauché of India.[3] The happy conclusion of the story finds both sides summoned by the guru to neutral territory on the frontier of Mon and India (actually in the present-day village of Nabzhi). The kings are reconciled. In the presence of the divine mediator an oath of peace is sworn on a pillar erected for this purpose. Henceforth the troops of both sides will not trespass beyond the pillar. All return in peace to their own countries.

The story at once illustrates and gives divine authority to the well-established mechanism of settling disputes by mediation. In this narrative the mediator, who must of necessity be impartial, is sought outside the communities that are party to the conflict. The greater the prestige of the mediator, the greater the chance of a true settlement. In fact the classical term for an intercessor or mediator is "one having face" or "one having a great face" (*ngo-can* or *ngo-chen*) who is "entrusted" (*'chol*) with the matter at hand. In Bumthang today the colloquial term is "one having great face and great merit" (*ngo-chen bsod-chen*). The prestige of the mediator can also derive from his wealth, as we find in the 1729 legal code of Bhutan in the phrase "possessing wealth and having face" (*nor-yod ngo-can*), that is to say "a rich and important mediator".[4] When such a person acts less as a go-between or impartial adjudicator and more as a powerful supporter or patron, the term *'go-'dren* (or *mgo-'dren*) is more appropriate. The settlement thus reached by the efforts of the mediator or patron, confirmed by a written contract that usually contains a sworn oath, has a binding quality that must not be contravened. Penalties for contravention are normally stipulated. The former

enemies at Nabzhi swore that their heartblood would be transferred magically to the field where they took their oath if they contravened (*'gal*) its terms.

This method of conciliation, which is found throughout the trans-Himalayan region, was peculiarly well-suited to societies lacking a universally accepted and supreme authority and in cases of conflict between neighbouring communities or individuals of roughly equal power. In the patchwork of varied polities forming the eastern Himalayas before unification, this path to the restoration of peace was in all likelihood the only one available.

The source which best illustrates the process of mediation actually at work in the century before the unification of Bhutan is the chronicle of the Humrel family of Paro entitled "A Brief Account of the Lives of the Perfect *Siddhas*, the Drungdrung of Humrel, Father and Sons [entitled] The Necklace of Jewels".[5] Although this chronicle of the family which was to become the first Shabdrung's foremost allies in the valley was composed in 1766 by one Kunga Wangchuck (alias Ugyen Tshewang), it drew on a wealth of primary sources dating from much earlier periods preserved in the family archives. The most valuable of these sources for our purposes were "the contracts [drawn up by our] successive ancestors" (*pha-mes rim-pa'i ... gal-yig*, fo. 70b). The word for 'contract' here, *gal-yig*, would suggest "a document listing the punishments to be incurred for contravention (*'gal*) of its terms". It is cognate to, and in all likelihood provides the etymology for, the more common words for contract, namely *gan-yig* , *gan-tshig* and *gan-rgya*. The latter, which conveys the idea of the binding or "sealed" (*rgya*) nature of the written contract, is the term still used today both in speech and writing.[6]

A clear pattern emerges from the text. In the many cases of civil conflict (*nang-zing, nang-'khrug, 'khrug-zing, sde-gzar* etc.) which characterised this period, the hereditary lamas of the Humrel family were frequently invited by one or both sides to use their influence in drawing up a lasting settlement. Complex issues might involve the joint efforts of a number of "harmonisers" (*'dums-mkhan*) before a "grand harmony" (*'dums chen-po*) was reached. After one such settlement the disputants "came to love each other and later [their families] were even joined in marriage" (fo. 16b). A marriage could be specifically contracted by mediation to forge common political allegiance"(*srid-phyogs gcig-pa*, fo. 39a).

The male relatives and monastic disciples of rival lamas seem to have taken to arms frequently as "family soldiers" (*gnyen-dmag*) or "monk soldiers" (*grwa-dmag*). When the cause of conflict is ascribed to religious difference (*grub-mtha' mi-gcig-pa*, literally "different philosophical systems", fos. 13b, 40a, 57b), we can be sure it was not doctrinal controversy but rather the secular power of the religious nobility and their sectarian affiliations which were at issue. The conflicts are also ascribed in general terms to the alleged "barbaric nature" (*kla-klo'i rang-rtags*, fo. 13b) of the people.

On all occasions of settlement, gifts had to be presented by both sides to the mediating lama, who bestowed his own gifts when the case was settled. The growing power and influence of the Humrel family was not only used in this way to conciliate blood-feuds (*'khon-gzhi* or *sha-'khon*) but also divisive questions relating to taxes (*khral*) and corvée service (*'ul*) owed to the lamas by their lay patrons. At least one passage makes the reciprocal relationship of the priest and patron (*mchod-yon*) very clear: in return for the tax and labour of his patrons the lama was to perform annual rites for their benefit, and this arrangement was "bound in a contract" (*gal bsdam-zhing*, fo. 24b).

The original contract negotiated by a certain Chojé Rikye of the Humrel family is given in full (fos. 51b-52a). It was drawn up in a convocation of all the village elders from communities subject to the Humrel family in order to apportion between them the obligation to build new religious structures, render tax and corvée labour, and pay restitutions in cases of murder — all potentially divisive issues. The document, which is entitled "The Contract of Co-mingled Welfare" (*gal-yig skyid-sdug gcig-bsres*), begins with the words: "At this time of civil strife (*sde-gzar*) in the Southern Ravine Country (*lHo-rong lung-pa*), in order to combine (*gcig-'thams*) the welfare (*skyid-sdug*) of all priests and patrons (*mchod-yon*), from now on for as long as possible [the following agreement is made] ...".

On one occasion we find the lama apparently combining the roles of judge and intervening patron in the phrase "[passing] judgements on legal disputes, [acting as] the patron [who mediates] and so forth" (*kha-mchu'i gcod-rgya 'go-'dren sogs*, fo. 18a; similarly *sbyin-bdag-gi 'go-'dren gcod-rgya sogs*, fo. 57a). Once, when two rival communities are brought together, the term "knot"(*'ching*, fo. 13a) is used for the settlement: in

later history, as we shall see, it is found with the sense of "an international treaty".

The chronicle is particularly interesting for its evidence on the nature of the transition from the political fragmentation of rival ecclesiastical powers to the creation of a united state under the Drukpa school in the first half of the seventeenth century. The skill and authority of the founder of the state, Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, who appears in the text as a kind of grand adjudicator, was crucial to this process. The Humrel family not only gave him their valuable support by offering him land for the regional headquarters of the new state in Paro Dzong, they presented him with their own most intractable feud for settlement. Druk Samten, chief incumbent to the Humrel family estates, sought the Shabdrung's support in a long dispute with his relatives which had begun with casual insults exchanged between two branches of the family. The favour shown to him by the Shabdrung in settling the dispute brought him immense authority, and he in turn used this to settle the feuds of others or to provide a refuge to those engaged in such feuds. To cross the main bridge over the Paro river and arrive at Druk Samten's home, safe from one's enemies, was said to be "like arriving at the Island of Liberation" (*Thar-pa'i-gling*, fo. 55b).

The victorious struggles waged by the first Shabdrung against five groups of lamas who opposed his ascendancy in western Bhutan form part of the historical legend of this founder of the Bhutanese state. However, in reality there was a strong element of voluntary submission to his rule, partly since it offered the chance to bury the disputes of the past. This is borne out not only by the account of a Portuguese Jesuit who came to know him well,[7] but also by a revealing passage in the Humrel chronicle (fo. 57a-b) which recounts an undated episode that occurred late in the Shabdrung's life on one of his visits to Paro. All the public came to receive his blessings and in a speech the Shabdrung "... declared: 'Till now in the South feuds (*'khon*) have swept along, and these have included civil strife (*sde-gzar*) and internecine troubles (*nang-'khrug*) on account of the different philosophical systems [upheld by rival families], the casting of magical weapons (*gtor-zor*) at each other and so forth. From today onwards all this has been cleansed and purified'. Saying this, he blessed them all as a single family (*thams-cad rigs-gcig-tu byin-gyis brlabs-shing*) and established them on the path of maturation and release. The resulting joy was unsurpassed." Doubtless

there is an element of bias and hagiography here, but the passage carries a tone of genuine credibility too.

The first Shabdrung also seems to have been aware of the possible advantages of mediation in calling for a settlement to some of the protracted disputes he himself had become involved in, not least the disputed recognition of his own status as the incarnation of Pema Karpo (1527-92). This appears to have been resolved by the mediation of the Tenth Karmapa lama, Chöying Dorje, in a pact which required the Shabdrung to pay a tribute or tax in rice to the Tsangpa authorities in Tibet in return for their recognition of his status. At best it secured only a temporary truce, for with the downfall of the Tsangpa rulers in 1642 and the triumph of the Gelukpa school headed by the Fifth Dalai Lama, the enmity between the emerging Drukpa state and Tibet flared up again. Two years after the first, and as usual unsuccessful, invasion by the Gelukpa troops in 1644, peace was negotiated by the Panchen and Sakya lamas. The captured Tibetan commanders were returned to Tibet after making a humiliating obeisance to the Shabdrung, and the Bhutanese rice tribute was restored. But again the settlement proved to be of a temporary nature.[8]

The Bhutanese state was created as much by the determined repulsion of external invasions as by the steady extension of its domestic power by force of arms and diplomatic skill. It is a testimony to the strength of its developing institutions that they could survive the serious threat posed by continuous problems of succession after the death of the first Shabdrung. The degree to which skillful mediation and compromise played a role in the survival of the new state does not really come to light in the sources, which are coy and restrained on most issues of politics.

Mediation and the Bhutanese theocracy: four brief case histories

The theme of mediation re-emerges in full vigour in the heyday of the theocracy during the eighteenth century and at its close in the early twentieth century. On at least two important occasions conciliation was successfully sought by appeal to various external authorities, including the Tibetan government in Lhasa, the Chinese imperial court in Peking, and the Panchen Lama in Shigatse. One of these was intended to bring to an end a civil war in Bhutan, while the other was aimed at averting an external threat to Bhutan from British India. On

two other occasions the Bhutanese state took the initiative to organise its own peace missions aimed at resolving Tibetan conflicts, one the product of internal strife, the other the result of foreign intervention. These four major diplomatic initiatives and their consequences can be briefly summarised. In every case they followed or coincided with unsuccessful attempts to settle matters by force of arms.

(I) The first forty years of the eighteenth century saw rival factions in western Bhutan supporting no less than five alternative "successors" (*rgyal-tshab*) of the founding Shabdrung.[9] Each faction sought hegemony over the theocracy by advancing the claims of his candidate as the "true" incarnation of the founder. The extremely tangled embroglios of the period came to a head when one side appealed in 1730 to the Tibetan ruler Pholhané (r. 1729-35) for military assistance. This resulted in the only successful invasion of Bhutan by Tibet, the last that ever occurred. The campaign was in fact brought to an end more by an appeal for peace issued by the leading Tibetan lamas of the day than by outright conquest. A temporary truce provided for a division of the country into two states, each with a rival incarnation at its head to justify its legitimacy. Both sides then appealed in 1733 to the authorities in Lhasa, one side to the Tibetan ruler Pholhané and the other to the Chinese amban. A ceasefire was established by Sino-Tibetan mediation, and both sides were then authorised to submit the case to the emperor. Emissaries from both sides were duly despatched to the imperial court in Peking in 1734. Final peace was secured not only by imperial arbitration but also by the convenient death of some of the main Bhutanese protagonists in the conflict. The settlement was instrumental in reunifying the country under one theoretical head of state, the "mind incarnation" of the founding Shabdrung (the 'Dharmaraja' of British records). The submission to Chinese mediation entailed a temporary and very theoretical loss of ultimate sovereignty. At the same time it led to the establishment of formal diplomatic relations with Tibet that helped to guarantee the fact of Bhutanese independence.

(II) The Tibetan ruler Pholhané was succeeded as "king" by his son Gyurmé Namgyal (1747-50), an atrocious figure who has been called "the Tibetan Caligula".[10] It was to intervene in a bitter dispute between this Gyurmé Namgyal and his elder brother Yeshe Tsheten, the military

commander of western Tibet, that the 13th Deb Raja of Bhutan, Sherab Wangchuck (regn. 1744-63), planned and brought into effect an elaborate peace mission, hitherto unnoticed by modern historians. We read in the account of Sherab Wangchuck's virtuous deeds[11] that "... he had the idea of organising a treaty for the sake of protecting many sentient beings in China, Tibet and Hor, these three lands, from intolerable suffering and to guard from injury the Teachings of the *Jina* [the Lord Buddha] in the Land of Snows" (fo. 51a). In 1750 the Daga Pönlob of southern Bhutan was commissioned to head the mission. He was accompanied by other officials and three hundred attendants bearing a huge array of lavish gifts to win over the Tibetan authorities to a plan for peace. The account of the mission claims a total success for it ("... from the power of virtuous aspirations the matter quickly turned to peace", fo. 51b). However, the true facts were very different. The feud, unabated, resulted in the murder of Yeshe Tsheten by his brother, who was himself put to death by the two Chinese ambans. They in turn were killed by the Lhasa populace. The resulting disturbances played into the hands of the Chinese emperor, who was able to give final shape to the Chinese "protectorate" in Tibet which lasted in this form till 1912. Although the unqualified success claimed for the 1750 peace mission in the Bhutanese source must clearly be discounted, it stands as evidence of the confidence, maturity and independence of the Bhutanese state in the middle years of the eighteenth century. The long and stable reign of Sherab Wangchuck during which the initiative took place marks the highpoint of the theocracy as it established cordial diplomatic relations with neighbouring states on all sides.

(III) This happy state of affairs was not to last for long. Bhutan's steady encroachment into the affairs of Cooch Bihar, culminating in the posting of a military force there in 1765, and its entanglement in the problems of succession to the throne of that state, brought it into direct conflict with the rising power of the British East India Company in Bengal. The British took up the cause of Cooch Bihar and in 1773, with a battalion of native infantry, repelled the Bhutanese forces from Cooch Bihar and captured two border forts built in territory over which the Bhutanese had won various rights. The Bhutanese, fearing further British encroachments, interceded with the Panchen Lama of Tibet to mediate on their behalf with the British. The Nepalese under

Prithvi Narayan Shah also encouraged the lama to intervene, hoping to contain possible British expansion into their territory. There followed the Panchen Lama's famous letter to Warren Hastings, who moved quickly to seize this opportunity to open relations with India's northern neighbours. The Anglo-Bhutan treaty of 1774 resulted from the Panchen Lama's intervention. There followed four British missions to Bhutan led by George Bogle in 1774, Alexander Hamilton in 1776 and 1777, and by Samuel Turner (accompanied by Samuel Davis) in 1783.[12] The first and last of these missions had as their main object the opening of relations with Tibet, but their route took them through Bhutan, where negotiations on trade and other matters were concluded. The sympathetic and revealing accounts of Bhutan in this period left to us by Bogle, Turner and Davis stand testimony to the success with which the state of Bhutan turned from armed conflict to mediation and diplomacy in this period.

(IV) The inherent weaknesses and instabilities in the theocracy dominated the whole of the nineteenth century. The problems of succession to the throne of the Shabdrung were overshadowed by rivalry for the position of his nominal appointee, the Druk Desi (or Deb Raja), and the provincial governorships. The whole century is marked by civil wars and growing conflict with British India. A proper study of the period is hampered by a paucity of indigenous sources, but a general impression is gained of repeated attempts by senior monks to intervene and mediate in the endless disputes. Sometimes they achieved temporary success, but not in any way that affected the structural tendencies to factionalism and strife. Locked in perpetual conflict, the state turned in on itself in a way that made external diplomacy virtually impossible.

The Anglo-Bhutan War of 1864-5 provided a critical watershed in the fortunes of the state. The defeat and capitulation of Bhutan paradoxically turned to its ultimate advantage by helping to consolidate relations with the only regional power capable of influencing a permanent settlement. The main antagonist of the British, the Tongsa Pönlob Jigme Namgyal, survived the defeat to become the strong man behind the central government, appointing a succession of his own men as Deb Raja, having held that position himself in 1870-3. By the time his own son, Ugyen Wangchuck, came to maturity after taking part in and

surviving further plots, everything seemed to be conspiring towards radical change.

Unquestionably it was the decisive role which Ugyen Wangchuck assumed in the eyes of his own people as a grand mediator between the British and Tibetan authorities during the Younghusband Mission to Lhasa in 1904 which won him enormous prestige within Bhutan and critical support from the British, sufficient to enable him to realise his ambition of becoming the first hereditary monarch, the Druk Gyalpo. A popular verse epic (*blo-gsal* or *blo-bsral*) was said to survive in an oral tradition some years ago, eulogising Ugyen Wangchuck as the great peace-maker, but if still extant it has yet to be recorded. The reality is a little different because in fact the British encouraged him only to use his good offices towards a peace settlement rather than allow him to act, as he clearly wished, as an independent mediator.[13] This distinction, however, must have been quite lost on Ugyen Wangchuck's future subjects, who saw in him the chance to put behind them the crumbling edifice of the theocracy and its incessant feuds.

The contract of monarchy

It is surely significant that the document of 1907 which empowered Ugyen Wangchuck as the first king was styled a "contract" (*'gan-tshig*).[14] It is essentially the same term found as *gal-yig* in the Humrel chronicle, where it applied to the contractual resolution in written form of those local conflicts which had brewed for so long in western Bhutan before the arrival in 1616 of the first unifier, Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal. The contract of monarchy was intended above all else to achieve lasting peace.

The 1907 document revealed, in summary, "the purport of this contract, drawn up in firm conclusion, containing a unanimous agreement by all officials and subjects which is not to be altered" (*dpon-'bangs tshang-ma mgrin-gcig blos-blang mi-'gyur-ba'i 'gan-tshig mtha'-btsan-du 'jogs-don*). All those who applied their seals to the contract "placed their oaths as witness" (*dam-tshigs dpang-por btsugs*) to "render service and honour to the king who has been installed on the Golden Throne and to the succession of his royal heirs" (*gser-khri mnga'-gsol bgyis-grub-pa'i rgyal-po de-rang dang / de-yi gdung-brgyud rgyal-'dzin rim-pa-la ... zhabs-tog snyan-bkur zhu-rgyu*), failing which they would be "expelled from the common fold" (*dmangs-kyi khyu-nas phyir-'bud bya-rgyu*).

Many factors were at work in the evolution of the Bhutanese monarchy, but what made it a credible working institution was its earlier success in resolving external conflict, albeit symbolically, in a way that encouraged it then to function as internal conciliator. In the final settlement which perpetuated and legitimised the monarchy, the Bhutanese turned right back to their own traditional methods of peacemaking by freely and rationally negotiating a binding contract. The story of how this was achieved has not yet been properly revealed, but what is sure is that until very recently, with the exception of a few sharp troubles of a contained and limited nature, the settlement of 1907 achieved the effect intended by all. More than eighty years of relative peace and stability were to follow, quite unlike anything that had come before.

In the meetings of the National Assembly in 1991 and 1992 a popular call was heard for a formal renewal of the contract as a kind of symbolic or mechanical device to restore peace and stability.[15] We can assume that the debate, if allowed to continue, would have focused on the issue of whether the contract could be imposed on or withheld from the ethnic Nepalese in the south. In either case the contract would thereby lose its primary character of a voluntary undertaking entered into by free negotiation. As it turned out, the king himself firmly rejected the proposal as unnecessary, preoccupied as he seems to be with the search for a more integral solution to the current crisis.

Mediation in law and society

The vicissitudes experienced by a state in dealing with major conflicts at the domestic or international level are generally a mirror of what happens in that society at the most basic level of the community or household. Thus a traditional method of pursuing or settling antagonisms in the village or family is likely to provide a ready model for the state itself to adopt or alter to its purpose. A full treatment of the theme at issue would therefore have to take into account the common experience of ordinary Bhutanese as they deal with perceived threats from their immediate neighbours, from malignant spirits and from other potential sources of danger, including the state itself. A full study would have to take into account many variables, not least the local and regional differences in the operation of unwritten customary law, and the relationship between customary law and the codified laws of the

state in any given period. What follows are merely a very few random hints and pointers to the need for fundamental research.

The aspect of the theme which interests me is again that same one of mediation leading to peaceful resolution in the form of a binding written contract which we observed in the operations of the state. Since, as noticed above, this first became apparent at the village level in the sixteenth century before the central state came into being, and because it still has a life and vigour of its own in the late twentieth century, with potential relevance for the settlement of present difficulties, a very tentative and preliminary notice may be useful here. Detailed research in the legal anthropology of Bhutan that makes full use of both oral and written sources of information is what is really required to evaluate the theme in the context of common strife.[16]

The Bhutanese legal codes presently available to me are the one promulgated by the tenth Deb Raja Mipham Wangpo in 1729,[17] the modern laws pertaining to land, marriage and the police passed by the National Assembly and printed in 1980,[18] and the principal legal code of modern times known as the *Khrims-gzhung chen-po*.[19] The material to hand is sufficient to show that the state traditionally only intervenes in criminal cases or else in civil cases brought to it when all efforts at mediation by customary process outside the courts have failed. In some of these texts the principle of mediation is barely enunciated because it appears to be taken for granted, but the *Khrims-gzhung chen-po* of modern times devotes a whole chapter to it.[20] What follows is based partly on the provisions of that chapter and partly on oral information supplied to me by informants with direct experience of the law.

Formal litigation (*kha-mchu* or *rtsod-gzhi*) is costly and there is a certain stigma attached to it. A dispute can instead be put to a respected and independent figure for adjudication. This is the *ngo-chen* or *'go-'dren*, either lay or clerical, referred to in classical language. Sometimes high-status intermediaries (*bar-mi*) will liaise between that person and the parties to the conflict. More formally, a case can be put to a village headman to negotiate a compromise settlement outside the court system. In fact the task of adjudication seems to be recognised as one of the headman's main duties. Less clear is the question of whether he can properly receive the gifts and hospitality traditionally owed to the adjudicator and intermediaries.[21]

The whole aim is to forge a settlement or accord (*grigs-kha, 'cham-*

kha, bsdums-grigs, 'khon-bsdums, mthun-lam etc.) that will last. A contract (*gan-rgya*) is drawn up and formally signed by the disputants and countersigned by those who have taken part in the settlement. It will usually contain provision for a pledge or stake (*'ba*) which is to be forfeited if a statement is proved false or if the terms of the contract are contravened. The terms *'ba'* and *gan-rgya* are therefore commonly heard together in the compound form *'ba'-gan-rgya*. Such private contracts in settlement of a dispute are formally accepted in courts of law, where they seem to carry an authority equal to those contracts negotiated or imposed in the courts themselves.[22] Thus a pledge contained in a private contract can be upheld and recovered in court, though that would happen only when a party has failed to honour the pledge outside the court.[23]

The process of formal litigation in a court of law therefore represents the total failure of the community itself to effect a settlement. Even in a court the tendency is always to reach a settlement by amicable compromise rather than by decree.

In its handling of civil cases the modern legal system of Bhutan evolved in the 1950s as a delegation of the king's powers of adjudication, which naturally superceded those of all others operating under customary law.[24] Prior to the introduction of the court system under the third king, royal secretaries and courtiers were normally assigned the task of resolving disputes. Each side would make a formal submisson in writing upon which the arbitrators would enter their detailed comments. All documents were presented to the king for his verdict. The cases of wealthy and important persons against whom civil charges had been brought seem to have been deliberately delayed or prolonged as a means of bringing them to heel. In cases when an emissary of the king was despatched to deliver a summons or hear evidence, he had to be royally entertained. The convention of "legal hospitality" is still remembered from the time of the second king, when cases proceeded far into the night after those deputed to arrange a settlement had finished their daytime duties at the royal court.

The use of mediation after the introduction of the court system in the 1950s is well illustrated in the case history of one of the longest, most contentious disputes, whose origins go back to a much earlier period of history. It may indeed have been the territorial ambitions of the local ruler of Ura, known as the Black *gDung* of Ura (*U-ra gDung Nag-*

po) just prior to the unification of the seventeenth century which secured traditional grazing rights for the Ura pastoralists in the region of Ngangla Kharchung, two days south of Bumthang in the area of Mongar (previously known as Shungkhar). These rights have long been contested by the people of Ngangla Kharchung, who regard the annual arrival of people and cattle from Ura as an invasion of their own territory. The bitter conflict, as yet unresolved, is a clear reflection of a continuing struggle over limited natural resources between the highanders and lowlanders of central Bhutan.

The first written records of the dispute are said to date from the early years of this century during the reign of the first king, Ugyen Wangchuck. However in modern times it surfaced first in the National Assembly of 1959. The Ngangla Kharchung people (deliberately ?) misunderstood the inconclusive discussions in the Assembly to favour their position and so they took over the disputed land. In 1960 a commission of enquiry went against them. There followed a military expedition from Thimphu to evict them and twelve of their number were imprisoned in 1961 for two months. Even these measures failed to settle the case, which was formally revived in the National Assembly of 1965. A further commission of enquiry was established, headed by Chimi Sedo of Paro, a person with very considerable powers of oratory and persuasion. The prestige of Sedo for his great skill in conciliating the most troublesome cases was said to equal the total weight of the National Assembly itself. Under his direction five days of intensive mediation in Bumthang led to a compromise settlement, but it was not to last. Violations of the agreement were committed by the community of Ngangla Kharchung, and so the whole matter was resubmitted to the king in 1966. It was ordained that a cadastral survey would finally settle the matter, but the official who headed it, Tamji Jagar (the future Home Minister), declared that the conflict was so complex it would have to be settled by the High Court in Thimphu. A hearing of five months in 1968 went against Ngangla Kharchung once more, but the community later claimed to have lost the copy of the contract (*gan-rgya*) containing the verdict they had been compelled to sign. The principal members of their litigation team were in any case too embarassed to return home, and one Chophela stayed away for twenty-one years. Police were despatched from Lhuntse to evict the settlers, destroy the buildings they had erected and return the land to the use of the Ura

people. The situation remained fairly peaceful till 1976 when Chophela, who had meanwhile taken employment as a herdsman with the Queen Mother, reopened the case in the High Court with apparently fresh evidence to hand in favour of the Ngangla Kharchung people. By 1978 a new inspection of the land had failed to uphold his claim. Yet again the verdict, reached after three months of deliberation, went against Ngangla Kharchung. Chophela, however, as representative of his community, refused to sign the new contract drawn up in settlement by the High Court. He resubmitted the whole matter to the king, who in turn forwarded it to the Royal Advisory Council for investigation. As far as can be ascertained, the whole case is still unsettled.

This long and convoluted story, though by no means typical, can be taken as a parable of the state's relative impotency in settling conflict when clever mediation fails to produce an agreement acceptable to both sides. The difficulties in this case are particularly compounded by the involvement of whole communities rather than individuals. The imposition of any number of official verdicts and decrees, even by the use of coercive force, have failed to end the matter. The way in which the case has ended up in the Royal Advisory Council would seem to imply a recognition of this basic fact. The door to diplomacy and tact, negotiation and mediation, lies open once more, and not only on the issue of a few square miles of pasture in central Bhutan. The lessons of this story can surely be applied a little further south too.

[1] On the fundamental lack of historicity in the legend of king Langdarma, see especially Samten Karmay (mKhar-rme'u bSam-gtan rGyal-mtshan), 'bTsan-po lha-sras dar-ma dang de'i rjes-su 'byung-ba'i rgyal-rabs mdor-bsdus' (The *bTsan-po* Prince Dar-ma and a brief genealogy of the kings who followed him), *Krung-go'i bod-kyi shes-rig* (China Tibetology), i (1989), pp. 81-103.

[2] Since these words were written the Bhutanese and Nepalese authorities have begun a reglar series of ministerial meetings aimed at finding a solution to the problem of the ethnic Nepalese refugees from Bhutan.

[3] For the standard version of the story attributed to Pemalingpa (1450-1521) and my analysis of its antecedents, see Michael Aris. *Bhutan: The Early History of a Himalayan Kingdom.* Warminster, 1979, pt. 1 ch. 2, pp. 43-59, and notes on pp. 296-300.

[4] See Michael Aris. *Sources for the History of Bhutan.* (Wiener Studien zur Tibetologie und Buddhismuskunde, Heft 14, Vienna, 1986), III, pp.136-7.

[5] Kunga Wangchuck (alias Ugyen Tshewang), *Grub-mchog hum-ral drung-drung yab-sras-kyi rnam-thar mdo-tsam gleng-ba rin-chen do-shal* (1766, 71 folios). I

am greatly indebted to Gene Smith for allowing me to consult his transliteration of the text. Another copy in 77 folios with the variant reading of *rin-po-che do-shal* in the title was preserved in the Humrel temple when I lived in Paro in the late 1960s. This important text would certainly merit careful editing and study.

[6] On the great antiquity of the use of contracts in Tibet (from where they must have been diffused to Bhutan and other parts of the Tibetan cultural empire), and concerning the undoubted Chinese influence on the content and structure of the early contracts, see Tsuguhito Takeuchi. "On the Old Tibetan Sale Contracts'. *Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the 5th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Narita 1989*, 2 vols. Narita, 1992, ii, pp. 773-92.

[7] In his account of 1627 Estevão Cacella wrote that the Shabdrung was "proud of his gentleness for which he is highly reputed", and he explained "the liberty which there is in this kingdom ..., and the people have a very voluntary subjection to their king [the Shabdrung] without any obligation on their part to refer to him or without any obligation to follow his doctrine". *Sources for the History of Bhutan*, pp. 173, 180.

[8] See Aris, *Bhutan*, pp. 223-6.

[9] The best study of this most confusing of periods is to be found in the unpublished thesis by Yoshiro Imaeda. "La constitution de la théocratie 'Brug pa au dix-septième siecle et les problèmes de la sucession du premier *Zhabs drung*" (Doctorat d'Etat es lettres et sciences humaines, Université Paris 7, 1987, 2 vols.). See especially i, ch. 6, pp. 187-230.

[10] See especially Luciano Petech. *China and Tibet in the Early XVIIIth Century: History of the Establishment of a Chinese Protectorate in Tibet.* 2nd edn., Leiden, 1972, pp. 198-235.

[11] Yönten Thayé (13th Head Abbot of Bhutan). *Chos-rgyal chen-po shes-rab dbang-phyug-gi dge-ba'i cho-ga rab-tu gsal-ba'i gtam mu-tig do-shal* (xylograph in 95 folios), reprinted in *Masterpieces of Bhutanese Biographical Literature.* New Delhi, 1970, pp. 431-617; see esp. pp. 528-30 (fos. 50b-51b), transliterated in the Appendix below.

[12] For the major accounts of these missions, see Clements R. Markham (ed.) *Narratives of the Mission of George Bogle to Tibet and of the Journey of Thomas Manning to Lhasa* (London, 1876); Samuel Turner, *An Account of an Embassy to the Court of the Teshoo Lama in Tibet; Containing a Narrative of a Journey through Bootan* (London, 1800); Michael Aris, *Views of Medieval Bhutan: The Diary and Drawings of Samuel Davis, 1783* (London and Wasington D.C., 1982).

[13] See especially Manorama Kohli, *India and Bhutan: A Study in Interrelations, 1772-1910* (New Delhi, 1982), pp. 160-5. Younghusband himself claimed that Ugyen Wangchuck had been "highly instrumental in in effecting a settlement" with the Tibetans: *ibid.*, p. 164.

[14] The contract is reproduced in facsimile in John Claude White, *Sikhim and Bhutan: Twenty-one Years on the North-East Frontier, 1887-1908* (London, 1909), facing page 226. White's translation needs to be treated with caution.

[15] See for instance *Kuensel, Assembly Supplement*, 14 Nov. 1992 (*Proceedings and*

Resolutions of the 71st Session of the National Assembly), no. 17, "Proposal to Reinforce the Historic Genja of 1907 which Established the Institution of Hereditary Monarchy in Bhutan", pp. 14-15.

[16]Such a study for Tibet is now available in the thesis by Rebecca Redwood French, "The Golden Yoke: A Legal Ethnology of Tibet pre-1959" (Ph.D. thesis, Yale University, 1990, 2 vols.). See in particular the sections in vol. 2 on "Judge-at-Home Procedure" (pp. 506-7), "Conciliation Procedure" (pp. 507-10), and "Other Out-of-Court Procedures" (pp. 510-11).

[17]See Aris, *Sources for the History of Bhutan*, Text III, pp. 121-68. A few of the codes drawn up by those Deb Rajas ('Brug sde-srid) who preceded or followed the tenth in the line are likely to have survived but have not yet come to light.

[18]*Sa-yi khrims-yig* (Thimphu, 1980); *gNyen-'brel-gyi khrims-yig* (Thimphu, 1980); *'Gag-pa'i khrims-yig* (Thimphu, 1980). These volumes are parts *ka*, *kha* and *ca* respectively of the *'Brug-gi khrims-gzhung*.

[19]The full title is *lHo tsan-dan bkod-pa'i zhing-gi khrims-gzhung chen-po* ("The Great Legal Code of the Southern Heavenly Field Arrayed with Sandal Wood"), distributed by the Royal Civil Service Commission, Thimphu. The introduction provides the additional sub-title *'Dod-don kun-gsal me-long* ("The Mirror in Which All Desires Are Clarified"). I am not sure when it was first promulgated or if it has been subsequently revised.

[20]*Ibid.*, ch. 11, pp. 116-18: *'Khon-pa nang-bsdums dang 'khon-bsdums gan-rgya phung-dkrogs mgo-bskor-bcas-kyi skor* ("Concerning the Internal Settlement of Feuds and the Matter of Contracts, Despoilation and Cheating etc. in the Settlement of Feuds"). The first two clauses of this chapter (*da* 3-1,2) make it clear that cases (*rtsod-gzhi*) arising from contravention of government edicts and from theft and murder can only be settled by a court of law and not by "privy discussions held within[a household]" (*nang-kha nang-du lab-pa*) or by "settlements of mutual accord arranged through intermediaries" (*bar-mi-nas bsdums-grigs bzo-ba*). Any other matters can be settled by such means.

[21]The law (*ibid.*, p. 116, section *da* 3-3) now stipulates that an intermediary is only allowed to receive a "reward for mediation" (*bar-gzan*) in cases brought to proper settlement through his efforts and not if these are unsuccessful. Such rewards are limited to 20 rupees, though I expect this sum has been subject to inflation. The term for the reward indicates that it was once payable in the form of food (*gzan*).

[22]It is clearly stated in the modern code (*ibid.*, p. 116, section *da* 3-5) that when private settlements reached outside a court of law become the subject of litigation, their terms and provisions are to be upheld unless they contravene the law or were effected by the unfair compulsion of intermediaries.

[23]"The recovery or forfeiture of loans (*byulon*) and all other matters specified in [private] contracts resulting from the negotiation of intermediaries are to be given due recognition [in courts of law]": *ibid.*, p. 117, section *da* 3-6.

[24]The information contained in this and the following paragraphs was kindly provided by a Bhutanese informant who prefers to remain anonymous.

Appendix: The Bhutanese Peace Mission to Tibet of 1750

Excerpted from Yon-tan mTha'-yas, *Chos-rgyal chen-po Shes-rab dBang-phyug-g dge-ba'i cho-ga rab-tu gsal-ba'i gtam mu-tig do-shal* (Account of the virtuous deeds of Sherab Wangchuk, 13th Deb Raja of Bhutan, regn. 1744-63), fos. 50b-51b [repr. in *Masterpieces of Bhutanese Biographical Literature*, New Delhi, 1970, pp 528-30].

// gnam-lo [rab-smyos zhes-pa lcags-pho-rta lo = 1750] de'i nang-du / Bod-rje Da-las Bha-dur dang sTod sgar-dpon Gung Ye-shes Tshe-brtan sku-mched gnyis thugs-nang ma-gshin-pas zing-rkyen gzhi-tshe-tsam byung nye-bar / Bod-rje Da-las Bha-dur-nas (51a) bden-rdzun-gyi gnas-tshul bka'-khra zhib-mo byung-bar / rGya Bod Hor gsum-gyi sems-can mang-po'i 'jigs-pa mi-bzad-pa dang / Gangs-ri'i ljongs-kyi rgyal-ba'i bstan-pa-la gnod-pa bsrung-ba'i phyir / chings-mdzad-pa'i dgongs-pa shar-nas / Dar-dkar dpon-slob-pa / bka'-blon che-rim-gyi g.yog bzhun rags-bsdud-kyi nang-gzan sum-brgya skor dang-bcas rdzong-brda mdzad-par / rGyal-dbang-rtse'i zhabs-pad-du / 'go-snam ljang yugs sogs le-tshan mang-po ma-tam sum-brgya'i 'gong / bKra-shis-lhun-po Pan-chen rin-po-cher / rgya-phyings sngo-bsangs yugs-gis gtsos zong sna-tshogs-la ma-tam sum-brgya nyi-shu rtsa-drug-gi 'gong / Sa-skya gdung brgyud rin-po-cher ma-tam brgya-tham-pa'i le-tshan / Grub-dbang rin-po-che ma-tam nyi-shu-rtsa-bdun-gyi le-tshan / Bod-rje Da-las Bha-dur-la gser-tam gcig / rgya-tam tham-pa / rgya-phyings yugs sogs zong sna-tshogs bcas ma-tam lnga-brgya'i 'gong / Gung-la-yang de-mtshungs / Se 'Bras dGe gsum-gyi bla-ma spyir / rgya-phyings lung-ha-yug sogs-kyis gtsos zong sna-tshogs bcas ma-tam sum-brgya-dang-nyi-shu'i 'gong / sras-mo bDe-ldan sGrol-mar ma-tam brgya-tham-pa'i le-tshan / bka'-blon bzhir ma-tam nyis-brgya-dang-lnga-bcu-nga-bdun-gyi le-tshan bcas 'bul-gnang dang / dpon-slob rang dang / nang-gzan mams-la gong-sa'i phyag-mdzod-nas dngul-rkyang ma-tam stong-phrag bzhi-dang-(51b)-bcu-bdun / rlon-cha'i rigs rdzong-kha so-sor bkod-nas gnang-zhing / gzhung-sa-nas me-mda' bcu-tham-pa / rdzas-dos gnyis / mde'u nyis-brgya / sPungs-thang / bKra-shis-chos-rdzong / sPa-gro / bKrongs-sa / dBang-rdzong mams-nas me-mda' lnga-lnga / rdzas-dos re / mde'u brgya-tham-pa-re bcas bkod-nas gnang-ste / mgo-zla'i [11th month] nyer-lnga-la gdan-sa chen-po sPungs-thang-nas bteg-ste / rgyal-zla'i [12th month] nyer-lngar Chos-'khor lHa-sar 'byor / thugs-bskyed mam-par dkar-ba'i mthus 'phral-du bde-'jam-la song-nas / dbo-zla'i [2nd month] nyer-gsum-la sPungs-thang bDe-ba-can-du slar 'byor / g.Yul-rgyal mgon-khang chen-mor btang-rag-gi bskang-ba rgyas-pa / mnga'-gsol snyan-dar / tshogs-'khor gzab-ma dang-bcas bsgrub-cing / bde-yangs chen-mor chos-rgyal-nyid gser-khri'i dgung-la phebs-par / Gangs-can bla-ma so-so'i bka'-tham / Bod-rje bka'-blon dang-bcas-pa'i phyag-tham gnas-tshul khyad-nor mang-po dang-bcas-pa dang / Dar-dkar dpon-slob 'khor dang-bcas-pas 'bul-dngos mang-po dang-bcas-te mjal-phyag zhu-ba'i thog / rGya-ja'i btung-ba / mtshar-zas sna-tshogs-pa'i ston-mo rgyas-pa bcas / Dar-dkar dpon-slob-la legs-dar gsum-mdud / zhwa gos lham gsum / rta-sga 'khor la-sogs-pa dang / nang-gzan so-sor legs-dar gnang-sbyin gya-nom-pa stsal-nas gzengs-bstod-pa'i phebs-sgo yang legs-par gnang-ngo // skyes-bdag ces-pa lcags-mo lug-lor [1751] / ...

Bhutan: A Kingdom Besieged

Jigmi Y. Thinley

The hermit kingdom has been forcibly shaken out of its cloister. Bhutan has become a subject of interest to journalists, politicians, academics and the common man alike. While the opinions of scholars on Bhutan will be increasingly sought and valued, even those who were earlier oblivious to the existence of Bhutan appear to find in this country a cause to defend or challenge. Bhutan's aspiration of becoming a mountain paradise of exemplary social harmony and economic prosperity had begun to materialise in a uniquely fertile setting. It is now an elusive dream. The country is engulfed in a crisis, and the very foundations of the last kingdom of ancient Mahayana Buddhism are being shaken.

The situation in the south is not a simple problem. Its causes are as complex and perplexing as the shocking human drama that is unfolding before us. Its roots lie deep within the cultural, historical and political complexes of the indigenous inhabitants, the descendants of Nepalese immigrants, and recent migrants from Nepal. Psychological disorientation, emotional trauma and a sense of insecurity pervade the entire kingdom. Just who is the victim or villain is a valid question. The answer must be sought through a deeper understanding of the problem.

In trying to understand the situation, there is a danger of drawing hasty conclusions on the basis of values and standards which may not be entirely relevant to Bhutan. The problem as such is at risk of being viewed out of context. Yet another obstacle to obtaining the truth in such a case is the spontaneous reasoning that arises out of natural human compassion for those who appear to be the innocent victims.

Anyone who visits a refugee camp sees in the living conditions, more than the plight of the refugees, the harsh and cruel realities of life and death itself. Every man, woman and child is exposed and is there to reveal the cycle of life — of birth, sickness and death. Whether these have anything to do with their being refugees is often unwittingly ignored: it is this reality that often shocks the visitor and blurs his men-

tal and visual perceptions. He shares an immediate sense of solidarity with the victims while assuming an uncompromising position against any party perceived or alleged to be the perpetrator. The misery of life in a refugee camp can never be understated or denied: it is sad that anyone should suffer the deprivation and despair of a refugee. It is even more tragic that the refugee is often the victim of manipulation in a political struggle the outcome of which may give him no gain but the process of which gives him much suffering.

This essay attempts to offer an insight into the problem from a wider and deeper perspective on its root causes. Each section deals with an aspect of the southern Bhutanese problem. The essay also examines the legitimacy of the demand for political change by the dissidents and delves into the question of a hidden agenda. It asks whether the unrest could have originated beyond the boundaries of Bhutan and explains why the Bhutanese authorities never had any reason to suspect the uprising of September 1990 by southern citizens. The final section discusses Bhutan's perception of the problem and the future.

The Origins of the Nepalese in Southern Bhutan

The Nepalese of southern Bhutan, who have been known as Lhotshampas ('people of the south') among the Bhutanese since the late 1980s, originally migrated from Nepal. They include a large number of the ethnic groups of that country which, according to the first king of the united Nepalese nation, Prithvi Narayan Shah, comprised four *varnas* (caste divisions) and thirty-six *jats* (tribes/cultures) during his reign (1743-1775).[1] The problem in southern Bhutan has given cause for speculation on the actual date of entry and the role of the Nepalese. Some discussion of this subject thus appears to be relevant.

Some have argued that the Nepalese arrived in Bhutan during the reign of the first theocratic ruler, Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal (1616-1651).[2] In making this claim, it is reasoned that the dzongs, which have no resemblance to Nepalese architecture, were built with the help of Nepalese artisans. Further claims are made of the Nepalese having fought in the Duars war against the British.[3] However, these claims are not supported by any historical document.

The appearance of the Nepalese on Bhutanese soil was a case of silent entry, initially in small numbers, to be followed later in several overlapping phases by larger more aggressive groups. In tracing their

origin, the observations of foreign visitors, mainly the British who explored and passed through the territory now known as southern Bhutan and the Indian Duars, are taken as major sources of reference. None of these sources speak of there having been any Nepalese in any part of Bhutan prior to the Sinchula Treaty of 1865. In addition, there is conclusive government documented evidence.[4] According to this, it was in the year 1900 that Kazi Ugyen Dorji was authorised by the Tongsa Penlop to recruit Nepalese as contractual labourers or *tangyas* (forest labourers) for the extraction of timber. In this respect, it is interesting to note that among the many signatories representing regions, Dzongkhag and community at the coronation of Ugyen Wangchuck in 1907, there is no hint of a Nepalese community in the country, much less a signatory on their behalf.

What then of the claim that the Nepalese arrived in Bhutan during the reign of the Shabdrung? No Nepalese appear to have even visited Bhutan during the reign of the first Shabdrung. There is evidence that since the temporal reign of the Deb Minjur Tenpa (1667-1680), Newar craftsmen renowned for their skills in metal work were commissioned by Bhutan for the casting of statues. The Tibetans too employed the Newars for the same purpose, and they even minted coins for Tibet in Kathmandu long before the unification of Nepal.[5] These artisans have no historical connection with the Nepalese of southern Bhutan.

In attempting to establish a precise date for the entry of the first Nepalese into Bhutan, the reports of Ashley Eden (1863) and David F. Rennie (1864) are illuminating. They, like their preceding compatriots who visited Bhutan, such as Turner, Bogle, etc. speak of the absence of any Nepalese settlements in the foothills. Eden takes special note of their absolute absence. He wrote that "there were only two grass huts and three or four cattle sheds, a few men and a few women, and this constituted the whole garrison and town of Sipchu" (Sibsoo Sub-Division under Samchi District), the site of the first Nepalese arrivals. Two years later, Rennie, who was attached to the British forces, also observed that Samchi consisted of "twenty houses and a monastery" with some Mechis and Bengalese engaged in agriculture.[6]

The first sightings of Nepalese in the southern foothills are reported by Charles Bell in 1904 followed by John Claude White in 1905.[7] All Bhutanese records confirm that no Nepalese settled in any part of

Bhutan until then. Therefore, since the most authentic source is the *kasho* (letter of authorisation) from Ugyen Wangchuck who was then the Tongsa Penlop, it is clear that the first legal arrival of the Nepalese took place at the turn of this century, immediately or soon after the *kasho* was issued.

As for the claim that the Nepalese had a role in protecting the sovereignty of the country, it is also clear that the Nepalese did not enter southern Bhutan or any part of the Duars area until long after the Sinchula Treaty was signed. This is corroborated by Eden's report which states that the Nepalese porters, "were unwilling to enter Bhutan, the inhabitants of which were not looked upon with favour ... there the coolies left in considerable numbers being afraid to cross the frontier" (Teesta Bridge).[8] Arthur Foning, a Kalimpong Lepcha, writes that this bore testimony to how effectively the Bhutanese territorial interests were guarded.[9]

It can therefore, be stated emphatically that *no Nepalese ever crossed beyond the Teesta River until after 1865,* let alone penetrated into Bhutan, by which time the boundaries of Bhutan had been redefined and withdrawn far beyond the Kalimpong sub-division and the now ruined fortress of Dalimkot.[10]

The Continuing Phenomenon of Large Scale Nepalese Emigration

> Drawn by red blood are these boundaries
> like enclosures in every field
> . . .
> Wherever you look, drawn are the lines
> . . .
> Like the pigeons encaged
> Men are closed in these traps
> (Vijay Malla, written in Nepali)[11]

The migratory habit of the Nepalese is a cultural trait common among the multiple ethnic cultures of Nepal. The theme of the poem above is an expression of the yearning of the typical Nepalese youth to break out of the cage in which he finds himself trapped. To the people of this country, who have served and fought battles for foreign nations in many distant lands and enjoy the facility of free movement across the

Indian subcontinent,[12] the territorial boundaries are cruel barriers. But the boundary is a reality. It is a necessary evil that must be respected.

The spread of the Nepalese cultural area has been a cause of increasing concern for the countries and Indian states to the west, east and south-east of Nepal. Yet little appears to have been achieved by the parent state to overcome the circumstances that force the Nepalese to continue their extra-national migratory tradition in search of land and opportunities. This is frustrating the people in the affected areas. It is an established fact that the exodus or out-migration from Nepal in extremely large numbers is a continuing phenomenon which shows no sign of abating. The people of the fragile mountain cultures and economies are thus seriously concerned. These areas include mainly Assam and the north-eastern hill states of India, as well as Burma and Bhutan.[13]

A study of the causes and compulsions for this phenomenon has revealed the following factors:

(i) Political upheavals and economic deprivation appear to be the prime cause for the Nepalese to move either within or outside the country. While incessant wars and instability as well as the repressive conditions that prevailed under the Rana regime were valid reasons in the past, the inequalities of development and its failure to reach out to the vast rural populations under the difficult geo-physical conditions give little cause for the villager with a spirit of adventure to stay on. Urged by his free spirit, he ventures out to find greener pastures. By modern definition, he is labelled an "economic refugee".

Perhaps, the first major encouragement to the Nepalese to venture beyond the boundaries of their country arose from their role in the suppression of the Indian Mutiny.[14] Additionally, they had impressed the British with their industrious and skillful farming abilities in the terraced paddy fields of Nepal. Therefore, when Darjeeling was acquired by the East India Company in 1839, the natural choice of people to build the town and to bring the steep hillsides under agriculture were the Nepalese. Again, when the tea industry in Darjeeling reached the stage of commercial production in 1856, the Nepalese were the first choice for tea garden labourers.[15] Against the large scale import of Nepalese, the indigenous Lepchas, who comprised a small population, faded into an insignificant minority in their own homeland.

After the signing of the Sinchula Treaty of 1865, during which the Bhutanese ceded the Kalimpong sub-division along with the Duars, the hitherto fobidden land of the Lepchas lay open to the Nepalese. Soon the Lepchas were driven deeper and deeper into the forests while the aggressive colonising Nepalese took over the more fertile areas for conversion to permanent agricultural land. Even the forest succumbed to the heavy axe of the "intruders" and "the children of nature, like the birds of the sky" and their culture fell prey to those who are now masters of their homeland. With the destruction of their environment, the Lepchas had lost their habitat and source of sustenance. If it were not for the efforts of certain missionaries, the fragile Lepcha culture and language may have been lost forever.

What the Lepchas were able to preserve of their culture under almost two hundred years of Bhutanese rule, they had lost within a few decades after the arrival of the Nepalese. Arthur Foning laments that "The British may have done this for our good but, as seen later, the result proved to be a complete disaster and a sort of a curse for us Rongfolk". Indeed, as he adds, "the process of disintegration started". The next victims were the *Lho-Mon-Tsong-Sum* or the three races of the Bhutias, the Lepchas and the Limbus of Sikkim. Here again, their combined strength could not withstand the onslaught of the Nepalese agricultural "colonialists". To speed up the process, certain Sikkimese noblemen conspired successfully with the Newar merchants and the British to overcome resistance which until 1875 had prevented their penetration.[16] Within sixteen years, the *Lho-Mon-Tsong-Sum* had become a minority in their own land.

After Sikkim and Kalimpong, the spread of the Nepalese continued across the Bengal Duars where tea gardens and townships were also being established and where they now form a major ethno-political group. It was natural that as the immigrants moved further east, Bhutan should fall in their path. However, the areas of southern Bhutan were initially only skimmed as a result of strict measures to control entry of Nepalese except by authority of Kazi Ugyen Dorji in accordance with the *kasho* of the Tongsa Penlop.

(ii) The mercenary role: this tradition was established soon after the Anglo-Nepal war of 1814-1816 during which the Nepalese proved their military prowess and gallantry. Independent India continues the tradition while the British maintain a separate arrangement. This is,

perhaps, the main factor that has nurtured and sustained the migratory spirit. The fact that, until recently, the recruits came from the remotest villages had a profound impact on the migratory farmers. To this reason may be attributed a boldness, even in the simple villager, to leave the safety of the village threshold to travl fearlessly through difficult and strange lands.

On the subject of Nepalese martial characteristics, it may be said that the Rajputs of Chitor who once ruled over almost all the principalities of Nepal had a major influence on the indigenous inhabitants of the country. On the other hand, the Gurungs and the Tamangs are themselves descendants of the imperial Tibetan armies that were once posted on the Tibetan frontiers with Nepal.[17] Furthermore, their roles in the Indian and British armies have had a decisive influence on their settlement across the entire length and breadth of India and even as far as Burma. The exact Nepalese population in India is not ascertainable, but it is generally known that in a more or less continuous belt from Himachal to the eastern most hill state of India where there is a concentration of their population, the number is close to ten million. With the facility of free movement in India, their number is rising rapidly to the consternation of those with whom they are competing for land and jobs.

(iii) Population explosion: much like Bhutan, Nepal is a mountainous country. Most human settlements are situated on the steep slopes of the mountains. The delicate balance between man and nature is visibly and alarmingly pronounced. Unless the mutuality of dependence is appreciated and the balance maintained, man and mountain stand to destroy each other. In Nepal, this delicate equilibrium has been disturbed. The reproductive capacity of man has overtaken the productive capacity of the land. With one of the highest growth rates in the world, Nepal has seen its population explode.

Twenty years ago, Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf wrote that between 1930 and 1961 the population of the kingdom grew from 5.532 million to 9.753 million. Going by the present growth rate of approximately half a million per annum which is almost equivalent to the entire population of Bhutan, his projection of twenty five million by the end of the century appears to be falling short especially if the out-migration figures are to be included. He further adds that "even today many thousands of villagers ... migrate every winter in search of work,

and while most of them return ... it is not unusual for men to stay for a year or more in India". Nepalese are compelled to search for economic opportunities of both short term and long term nature outside their country.[18] The Nepalese population now accounts for 20.1 million (Almanac, *Asiaweek*) with an annual growth rate exceeding 2.3%. Over eleven million Nepalese, constituting 60% of the total population, live below the poverty line.[19]

Against the background of this population explosion, which the country's economy cannot support even with the present high level of international assistance, the productive capacity and area of arable land itself is diminishing alarmingly. The reasons for this include excessive stress on the land and deforestation; the resultant denudation of the top soil caused by rain water; gully formation, sheet erosion and the flash floods that even affect the valley bottoms; and the occurrence of adverse micro-climatic changes. Even the forest belt in the Tarai which had provided a "breathing space" has virtually disappeared. The farmer is thus squeezed out of the land that he has rendered infertile. While the land may slowly cure itself, there is no solution for the adventurous and the young other than to seek a source of alternative livelihood outside their village.

Where and How the Nepalese Settled in Bhutan

After Kazi Ugyen had been formally permitted to recruit Nepalese in the southern foothills, he initially recruited *sardars* (contractors) whose responsibilities were to organise the Nepalese into groups of *tangyas* to conduct logging operations for sale of timber to India. Once this was done, the more competent sardars were appointed as contractual landlords who were placed in charge of parcelling the cleared forest into plots for allotment. They realised the land utilisation fees as well as the return from the sale of timber which continued to be harvested. These contractual landlords were given considerable latitude in the administration of their respective areas of control. Some emerged to enjoy the confidence of the Kazi and even that of the Paro Penlop who exercised administrative jurisdiction over Samchi. Because of the authority vested in them for various reasons, not the least of which may have been communication difficulties, they even interacted with their British counterparts across the border on behalf of the Bhutanese state.

After the recruitment in Samchi, except for minor lapses, and for a

good number of years, a strict vigil was kept by the contractual landlords against illegal immigrants. It would appear that the inhospitable nature of the area was in itself a major deterrent. In fact, this was one of the main reasons why until the 1950s no other foothill areas were colonised except the malaria-free hills of Chirang District.[20]

Toward the early 1950s, the Nepalese began to acquire larger plots of land and encroached on the forest lands. From Samchi they began to spread westward and towards the north while those in Chirang began to push the indigenous people of Daga northwards, and spread southwards. It was around this time (1951-54) that the Bhutan State Congress Party was formed under the leadership of the Nepal Congress Party which had launched a successful rebellion against the Rana regime. Fearing their spread into the interior of Bhutan and the helplessness of the government to wield effective control over them, the Government halted further northward spread.[21]

After development programmes had been initiated in 1961, education, health and other facilities began to be established in the two districts. The greatest impact of early development was realised from the establishment of malaria eradication units along the southern belt which catered even to the tiny population of Nepalese in the Sarbhang area. While the positive impact was obvious, the eradication of malaria in the region invited further immigrants who were aggressive in their intent and action to "colonise" the vast stretches of fertile land. The entire Sarbhang Dzongkhag which until 1962 was known as Hathisa ('elephant land'), soon became a target for the Nepalese immigrants. The once impregnable area of subtropical forest has now lost its verdant cover, along with much of its fauna, and, like much of southern Bhutan, except for the protected wild life reserves and forest plantations, it has become an ecologically vulnerable area.

Once the five-year development programmes began to yield results, government efforts to control immigration were thwarted by the earlier settlers who colluded with their ethnic kith and kin to prevent detection, falsify records and facilitate infiltration. Free education, free health services, employment opportunities, highly subsidised agriculture inputs, generous rural credit schemes, and the security of a politically stable country were the main inducements that led to the influx of Nepalese immigrants in the 1960s and 1970s. Furthermore, opportunities in the neighbouring areas in India began to dwindle, aggravated by

political unrest and violence in the tea gardens. In addition to the new arrivals, those who had come in legally as labourers for the many development schemes also began to infiltrate into the villages.

The encroachment on government-protected forests by the southern Bhutanese was a major problem encountered by the government often leading to confrontations,[22] until very recently. Even as the government embarked on a policy of conservation and afforestation, environmental degradation became uncontrollable in the south. While taking full advantage of government leniency, immigrants were capable of conceiving the most clever methods of undetectable encroachment.[23] Presently, the legal average landholding among the southern Bhutanese is eight acres while that of the northern Bhutanese is 2.3 acres.[24]

Inter-ethnic exploitation often comes to play among the settlers in the south. The pioneers are usually the non-Bahuns who are more simple of mind and physically stronger. Once the forest is cleared by the slash and burn practice and the land is tamed, the Bahuns and the Thakuris follow with cash and guile. Before long, the pioneer is in debt and his mortgaged land has changed hands. The pioneers are either rendered landless and termed *sukumbasis* (landless people) or they carve out, usually illegally, new plots. Where the forest authorities are alert and assertive, the *sukumbasis* apply for *kidu* (special dispensations) from the King which are either given individually or to groups. The granting of *kidu* land to groups has produced settlements specifically for the southern Bhutanese in recent years.[25]

As much land as possible is colonised and managed through polygamous practice. A man may have several families, each of which may live separately, and look after properties scattered across different blocks or dzongkhags (districts). The possessions of the farmers, which include crop fields, orchards etc., are regarded as saleable wealth, and are often sold for various reasons. This application of monetary value to the land, and the comparative detachment of the farmer from it, is uncharacteristic of the typical Asian farmer.

The southern Bhutanese generally build small, light-structured temporary homes despite their comparatively higher income. Their northern Bhutanese counterparts who, on average, own less land and enjoy little income from cash crops, tend to build and live in much larger houses, indicating a much higher sense of belonging and permanence. The southern farmer, typically, does not invest his money in the coun-

try. The Bank of Bhutan has always reported minimal bank deposits by the southern Bhutanese, and it is commonly known that they prefer to invest their money in Indian banks across the border. Many are known to buy or own land and property in India and Nepal. Invariably, their main income is converted to liquid assets such as gold or silver, which is usually buried in the ground.

These behavioural peculiarities of the southern Bhutanese farmers have often been seen as pointing to the transitory nature of their domicile in the country, reflecting a lack of attachment and sense of belonging to Bhutan. Northern Bhutanese tend to think that the linkage with their adopted home and country is tenuous, but that they maintain a tenacious link with Nepal, their motherland. The suspicion that they did not in general sever their umbilical cord with Nepal is further strengthened by the presence of the portrait of the Nepalese King and Queen while the Bhutanese King's portrait usually found no space in their homes. Added to this was the discovery that even senior government officials and prominent farmers visited Nepal to obtain Nepalese citizenship cards.

Land disputes often arose between the southern Bhutanese and their neighbours as a result of their northward incursions. It was not uncommon for a new settler in the Samchi district to find himself confronting the local administration every now and then. Such disputes continue to take place, since the foothills of the south were the winter grazing grounds of the Paropas of Paro, the Hapas of Ha and the Dung-metaps of the Chukha Dzongkhag. These disputes are usually resolved in favour of the southern Bhutanese. Consquently, the cattle herds of the northern Bhutanese and their dairy products have dwindled considerably over the years.[26] Those who have lost a source of livelihood speak bitterly of government injustice. It is not uncommon even now for herders to find their shrunken pastures converted to orange, cardamom, ginger and arecanut gardens or even paddy fields each winter.

The Doyas, one of the original ethnic groups of Bhutan who at one time occupied significant tracts of land in Samchi, have also found themselves pushed out. Today, they are to be found in three main communities (two in Bhutan and one in India) confined to marginal land in what was once their homeland. In spite of there having been no effort on the part of the Government to provide any meaningful support, these communities have survived with their culture intact simply by

evading and escaping from their new neighbours. It is felt that unless these communities are given special protection, they are now highly vulnerable to final extinction. Elsewhere in the country, in the Dagana, Kheng, Martshala and Serthig-Lauri areas, similar encroachments and loss of traditional grazing grounds have occurred.

It is worth inquiring how this tiny nation survived as a sovereign state despite the Tibetan and Mongol invasions and its proximity to the British colonial power in India. Of the many reasons for this, the most important and popular one that the Bhutanese insist upon is their unique Drukpa identity, which gives Bhutan a distinctively separate form. It is this, they believe, that established a level of national homogeneity and cohesion among various linguistic and ethnic groups. They consider this to have engendered the will to survive, and the strength to defend their nation state.

It was observed that many of the southern Bhutanese lacked a sense of belonging. A British colonel in 1931 informed his government that the Nepalese constituted "a population which did not owe allegiance to the Bhutanese King".[27] On the other hand, the tenacity with which they held on to their Nepalese national identity, except among a few village communities, was very noticeable. At the same time, the prevalence of class and caste distinction was virtually unchallenged even in Bhutan, giving cause for further concern. Government development agents, including low caste southern Bhutanese belonging mainly to health and teaching cadres, were often insulted during interactions with the local southern population. Such sentiments and circumstances appeared only to distance the population from the other Bhutanese. Thus, the centrifugal implications for the Bhutanese polity arising particularly from the existence of two separate national identities could not be ignored.[28] The government, therefore, launched a series of measures to counter this threat to national integrity under the national integration policy.

The Rationale and Process of Integration

The King has always been deeply committed to bringing the southern Bhutanese into the national mainstream. It is significant that even during his early childhood when he received his education in an exclusive school in Paro, he ensured the inclusion of southern Bhutanese children. While his late father had initiated steps to integrate the southern

people, it was during his reign that major efforts to achieve integration on a broader and deeper scale were undertaken.

Although an alternative always existed, the government chose to frame a sincere policy of genuine integration which was translated into programmes covering all aspects of socio-economic development. It was reasoned that an acceleration of development in the south to achieve parity in development benefits between the Nepalese people and the rest would serve to make clear the true intentions of the Royal Government. At the same time, it would enhance the capacity of the Nepalese to participate equally in the national mainstream via equal access to education and employment. To this end, the government undertook a vigorous programme of integration, the salient features of which include the following:

(i) The introduction of the term *lhotshampa*, which simply means "southern people". Until this term was introduced, the southern people were referred to variously as Nepalese, *paharia*, and *rintsam gi miser* (people of the borderland). The introduction of this term not only gave them a standard Bhutanese nomenclature but implied the country's recognition of the Nepalese as a distinctly different cultural and linguistic unit in the diverse Bhutanese society.[29] Anyone who referred to the southern people by the earlier terms was subjected to a fine of Nu. 500 on the spot under an executive circular issued by the Home Ministry.

(ii) The lifting of restrictions on the entry and travel of southern Bhutanese, as well as on the acquisition of land in interior Bhutan,[30] was an event of great significance which was immediately recognised by all.

(iii) Development activities in the south were accelerated, intensified and expanded with the larger share of the development budgets being allocated to the southern Dzongkhags. The 4th, 5th and 6th five-year plan periods, covering the years 1976 to 1992, saw a dramatic rise in the number of schools, health facilities, agricultural extensions etc. in the south. In addition, the policy of the Royal Government to ensure equitable distribution of all national and regional facilities led to the establishment or upgrading of several educational, health and agricultural institutions in the south. Some of the largest development projects were also undertaken in the south. These include the Hill Irrigation Project of Chirang, the Gaylegphug Area Development Project and the resettlement projects for landless southern people.

(iv) The establishment of a Royal Civil Service Commission (RCSC) by authority of a Royal Charter which established a merit-based civil service with a clear set of criteria, rules and regulations for recruitment/appointment, transfer and promotion including all career development opportunities. The Commission is also responsible for human resource develop-

ment, under which mandate it established merit-based procedures for the selection of students for higher education and training abroad.[31] With the emergence of the RCSC in 1982, a guarantee was established of equal opportunities to employment with merit as the single criterion for all personnel in government and corporations. The process had already been initiated in 1977 under a Royal Command with the establishment of the Department of Manpower which later became the RCSC. In addition to the appointment of southern Bhutanese in the Commission, it was also ensured that certain key positions in the Secretariat were filled by southern Bhutanese.[32] Thus the greatest beneficiaries, as intended, were the southern Bhutanese, as all possibilities of discrimination etc. were totally eliminated. The percentage of southern civil servants in the government has reached 38% from less than 5% in the early 1970s.

(v) The recruitment of southern Bhutanese into the army and the police was also increased with special consideration given for officers' training. In order to increase the number of southern officers, the Royal Bhutanese Army allotted 50% of the slots for officers' training to southern candidates for several years. The success of the policy was apparent by 1989, when their percentage in the Army and Police was over 25%.

(vi) Almost all major industries and commercial centres are established in the south on the basis of purely economic considerations. Under the integration policy, long term political implications were given little attention. While the southern towns of Samchi, Phuntsholing, Gaylegphug and Samdrupjongkhar are now the biggest commercial centres apart from Thimphu, all major industries are located in the southern districts whether they be hydro power generation, mineral or wood based industries.

The Royal Government initiated further steps to accelerate integration by providing special incentives and gestures. These steps were seen as signs of weakness by the southern Bhutanese:

a. Certain key positions in the government were given to southern officers, some of whom had not demonstrated any professional competence. This action aimed to increase the number of southern civil service officers among the policy makers, and had some negative impact on the credibility of the RCSC. It was at this time that civil servants openly passed such remarks as "to receive *kidu* and rise rapidly in government, one must be born in southern Bhutan".

b. No legal action was taken against southern Bhutanese farmers for encroachment on government forests for their cash crop plantations or for the expansion of fields. The government initiated some action only when Bhutanese farmers in other areas who were unable to escape the severity of government action began to question the application of the law. Even rural taxes were far lower for southern citizens until 1980, when criti-

cism from their compatriots impressed the southern representatives to request uniformity during the 52nd session of the National Assembly.

c. It was a common perception among civil servants that while southern Bhutanese officers were likely to be exempted from severe forms of government action, others were less likely to be so privileged. This became apparent when certain high ranking district administrators were terminated from service and imprisoned for the minor misuse and misappropriation of government property and funds. A southern counterpart escaped imprisonment because the government was unwilling to press charges of corruption. Likewise, the government did not initiate any legal proceedings against Tek Nath Rizal, even when it was established that he was guilty of treason for which the only punishment under the law of Bhutan is capital punishment, which has not been imposed on anyone since 1964. He was instead only questioned and released after two days of detention in the police officers' mess.

d. Five Sanskrit *pathshalas* were patronised by the government. The salaries of the teachers were paid wholly by the government and other forms of support were also given. At the same time, the government approved plans for the establishment of an apex Sanskrit institution in the south where students from the various Sanskrit *pathshalas* could obtain a higher education.[33] This was not built because of a dispute between the people of Dagapela and a strong lobby group led by Tek Nath Rizal who wanted it built on his land in Lamidara, Chirang. The intention behind government support for the *pathshalas* was to ensure that the Hindu culture of the southern Bhutanese was preserved, and that there would be no dearth of *pujaris* (priests/religious functionaries). In addition to this, several students were sponsored by the government for higher studies in Sanskrit at the Benares Hindu University, even after the government had stopped all scholarships for Buddhist studies in the 1980s.

e. In order to ensure that there would be no disparity in the standards of education and therefore in future job opportunities, all the village schools in the south which were run privately with no trained teachers or set curricula were taken over by the government and upgraded to fully-fledged primary schools. This was done in addition to the numerous government schools that were opened. A programme of integration through the education system was also initiated through student exchange. Southern and northern students were well distributed in the boarding facilities in each junior and high school, thereby ensuring a favourable mix of students. This was advantageous to the southern children since there were more primary schools in the south than any other region. More southern students therefore qualified for placement in the north.[34]

f. Despite initial resistance from prominent farmers, the government undertook to eliminate the exploitation of cash crop growers in southern Bhutan by middle men who were both southern Bhutanese and Indians. Soft loans were made available to the growers to buy back their land and

to release them from indebtedness as well as to improve the plantations. This affirmative action taken by the government in the late '70s had a substantial impact in that the high percentage of southern farmers who grew cash crop surpluses (orange, cardamom, ginger), now obtained the full value of their produce. Furthermore, to maximise their income, the State Trading Corporation of Bhutan and the Food Corporation of Bhutan facilitated the direct accessibility of the produce to markets in India and Bangladesh.

g. The King himself made considerable efforts to build a personal rapport with the southern Bhutanese. He undertook frequent visits to the southern villages and knew many village headmen and elders by name. During these visits the problems and needs of the villages were discussed which resulted in many special projects for the south. Furthermore, the King always made it a point to take with him southern Bhutanese officials during these visits. Special meetings with southern government officials were also held frequently.[35]

h. Intermarriage between southern and northern Bhutanese was encouraged. Special cash incentives of Nu. 10,000/- were paid to those who engaged in such marriages, irrespective of the gender of the claimant. These people are among the prime targets of the terrorists, and are reluctant to work and live in the south.

i. The late King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck once told Father William Mackey, a prominent Jesuit educationalist, that Bhutan is like a bird which can only fly with both wings. The two wings, he said, are the ancient religions of Buddhism and Hinduism. Because Buddhism, as practised in Bhutan, has the entire pantheon of Hindu Gods, the government promoted the theme of compatibility between the two religions. New temples built in southern Bhutan emphasise this with both Hindu and Buddhist shrines in the same temple. The King and the royal family participate regularly in the Hindu Tika Ceremony with southern citizens each year and Dasain, the biggest Nepalese festival, was declared a national holiday in 1980.

These policies were the results of a genuine commitment on the part of the government to integrate the southern people into the national mainstream. These were all in keeping with the spirit of the National Assembly resolution of 1958, according to which all Nepalese immigrants resident in Bhutan before 31 December 1958 were granted citizenship by registration. Each successive act amending the main Citizenship Act of 1958 is less restrictive and more liberal, demonstrating the continuing concessions the National Assembly was willing to make to the people in the south.

The policy of integration has been condemned by the dissidents as a deliberate policy to undermine the Nepalese culture and language. The

element of the integration policy that has been criticised as a violation of human rights has been excluded from the above list to be discussed separately. This was the enforcement of Driglam Namzha by the Royal Bhutan Police and district authorities. The other subject for criticism was the exclusion of the Nepali language from the curriculum of the primary education system: this is not an element of the integration policy, but it too warrants some discussion.

Unless one has an intimate understanding of Bhutan's culture, history and ethos, and is sensitive to the continuing role of the Drukpa identity in shaping Bhutan's future destiny, the importance of Driglam Namzha may not be fully understood. As in all cultures, there are nuances and inexplicable behavioural patterns which even the most perceptive anthropologist cannot honestly claim to understand except by imbibing them through birth or long term association as a member of the community. Driglam Namzha is one such aspect, the nuances of which find expression both in form and spirit.

Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, the visionary patron lama who gave unity and the Drukpa identity to Bhutan,[36] spent much time on the promotion of Driglam Namzha. Literally, it means traditional values and etiquette. Carried beyond its etymological connotations, it represents the very essence of the vast cultural heritage which today rests alone in this Himalayan kingdom. Driglam Namzha is the fount of all the social values and traditions of Bhutanese society: these include respect for one's teacher, sovereign, parents and elders; the institution of marriage and family; and civic duties and behaviour.

The collective wisdom of the highest elected law-making body, the National Assembly, after due deliberations in the villages and districts, found it relevant and necessary to continue the practice of Driglam Namzha. Therefore, this is the will of the nation and it must prevail. If, in the pronouncement and enactment of that will, certain groups with vested interests find reasons to disagree, it is no cause for concern. But when such groups prevail upon those who were willing instruments in the formation of that majority will, then this is a cause for sadness, more than anything else. This, unfortunately, is the story of the southern opposition to Driglam Namzha.

In their opposition to this component of the integration policy, the dissidents have demonstrated their misunderstanding of the country's heritage. It is even alleged that they have, perhaps unwittingly, voiced

their innermost feeling of unwillingness to identify with Bhutan and accept the national identity. This unfortunate position articulates the unreasonable attitude of the dissidents, as well as their failure to appreciate the complexity of the culture and values of the people whose homeland they share, and to whose country they too belong. While they have not been in any way motivated by the national integration policy to become "Bhutanese" in spirit, it is thus understandable that their demand for political change is not inspired by any sense of noble patriotism.

Although the dissidents appear to have only seen or understood the element of form (dress code) in Driglam Namzha, it appears that this has now gained some legitimacy among the dissidents. It is possible that, as with any man, the true beauty of one's distant home is seen only upon reflection from the soil of another land. It is more plausible, however, that the dissidents realised that their claims for human rights must begin by respecting those of others, and so they have changed their position on a subject on which they had spoken with much vehemence. In fact this was a main cause for their uprising. Having now seen legitimacy in the preservation of the Bhutanese identity, the dissidents speak of the acceptance of *gho* and *kira* by the southern people even before the Driglam Namzha policy was introduced.[37] They now support the government's explanation that there was some fault in the provocative manner in which it was implemented by overzealous functionaries. One would then conclude that, with the recent change in the dissidents' attitude, the issue of Driglam Namzha has been laid to rest.

The issue of language has been raised on the grounds that teaching of Nepali was stopped in the government primary schools. Until 1988, Nepali was being taught up to grade five in all the primary schools in the south. The decision to exclude the language as a separate subject was taken on technical grounds after years of debate among education policy makers, including international educationalists. The main reasons for recommending the policy change were as follows:

(i) Since English language has been the medium of instruction since 1961, and Dzongkha is taught as a second language, the inclusion of a third language, Nepali, put the child in southern Bhutan at a considerable disadvantage. The introduction of New Approach to Primary Education (NAPE) in 1985 and the consequent decision to reduce the number of subjects led to the decision to drop Nepali from the formal curriculum.

Furthermore, there is a common examination for grade six that every primary school child must sit in order to qualify for admission into the junior high school system. Students from the south had to sit for an extra subject. Many government officials did not allow their children to take the extra subject. For those who are genuinely interested in studying the language, there is no restriction on private tuition or on joining the Sanskrit *pathshalas*.

(ii) There are many southern Bhutanese children in northern schools where Nepali was never taught.

(iii) There were growing complaints from other groups that their languages were not being taught in schools while Nepali, seen by many as a foreign language, was being taught.

(iv) It was concluded that Nepali is the national language and lingua franca of another country, and not an ethnic language, and that, in southern Bhutan, there existed many ethnic groups from Nepal who do not consider Nepali their language. Since the languages of the Gurung, Newar, Sherpa, Tamang, Limbu etc. cannot be taught, the continuation of Nepali teaching was considered discriminatory and supportive of another country's policy to undermine other linguistic cultures.[38] Furthermore, the Nepali language only accentuated the dichotomy of two distinctive national cultures in Bhutan. This is opposed to the Royal Government policy of integration, under a national culture based on the recognition of the diversity of ethnic, religious and linguistic cultures in Bhutan and the commitment to respect and promote them equitably.

Nepali is still recognised as one of the national languages of Bhutan. It is one of the two officially-recognised languages used in the National Assembly, the other being Dzongkha. It is widely used in the courts of law and government offices in the south. It is also used by government media and at all important gatherings at national and local levels. All important government documents are translated into and circulated in this language.

The argument that the government suddenly changed its attitude does not stand to reason. Had Bhutan been politically unstable, where a change in government could have taken place, then it is plausible that policies could also have changed. But in Bhutan, there is a stable government, where the same leadership that so earnestly framed the integration policy still continues.

No other country has done as much as Bhutan to respect, accept and integrate an immigrant culture and race. While the recent uprising must be seen as a pointer to the failure of the policy, the same policy had attracted large numbers of illegal immigrants. It was therefore in-

evitable that the integration policy which was counter productive in so far as it caused greater and highly visible Nepalese infiltration, called for an accurate and thorough census.

The Issue of the Census

Demographic data is the most basic information that a state is required to maintain in order to fulfil its obligations to the people. In the case of Bhutan, the critical importance of conducting a census accurately and frequently has been adequately established in the preceding sections. How a census is actually conducted is something that will differ from country to country according to the multiplicity of uses for which the information is intended. In advanced societies, technology simplifies the process of gathering and verifying the data. In a mountainous country like Bhutan, with a very limited communication infrastructure, limited trained manpower and a high illiteracy rate, the conducting of a census is not a simple task, in spite of the small population. This has been complicated by the long and porous border of approximately 720 km. The fact that the country is situated among some of the most populous states in Asia does not help. In fact, it is in relation to illegal immigrants from Nepal that the census activities of the government has aroused undue interest.

Bhutan is not the only country that is faced with immigration problems. The whole of Western Europe, the USA and most countries which are contiguous to less developed or politically unstable countries are faced with this problem. It becomes a serious problem when illegal immigrants assume a politically aggressive stance and threaten to destabilise the country.

Illegal immigration into Bhutan is being politicised with the support of certain sections of the southern Bhutanese. Under the guise of human rights and political discontent the perfectly legitimate action taken by the state is being questioned and condemned.[39] The immigration problem faced by the industrialised countries fades into insignificance when compared with that of Bhutan. When one takes into account the source of the illegal immigration, the nature of the threat becomes even more alarming. In Bhutan, the survival of the indigenous race and a rich cultural heritage is at stake.

The few groups of Nepalese who were initially brought into southern Bhutan as *tangyas* and those who followed them were granted citi-

zenship by an Act of the National Assembly in 1958. Although there were only two districts where they were settled at the time, they quickly spread throughout the southern territory converting the hitherto impregnable forest into rice and maize fields. Scattered among five Dzongkhags with millions of their ethnic kin across the border, they began to claim to be the majority of the Bhutanese population. In 1958, when their population was below 15%, they claimed to represent 64% and called for political change. There are strange similarities between the recent uprising and the earlier movement.

The Bhutan State Congress was organised by the current Prime Minister of Nepal in 1951 by his own public admission, and there are reasons to believe that there exists a strong political nexus between the dissident parties and political groups in Nepal. Their claims and demands have changed somewhat, but the long-term goal has remained the same. While the southern population is now larger it still has no support from the Drukpas. Ignoring this weakness, they staged a rebellion during which they even desecrated the national flag and raised their own. Whatever their stated demands,[40] the main cause of the violent demonstrations was the conducting of a comprehensive census by the Department of Census and Immigration. The Department had a mandate to identify all illegal immigrants, as per the provisions of the National Citizenship Act which comprises the 1958, 1977 and 1985 resolutions of the National Assembly.

The results of the census revealed exactly what had been suspected: planned and systematic infiltration by the Nepalese had been taking place. While they took advantage of their social, cultural and linguistic affinities with the southern Bhutanese, the latter found themselves torn between a desire to keep on the right side of the law while being pleaded with, coerced, threatened, and morally obliged to co-operate. There were those too, who were willing to collude voluntarily, seeing economic and political advantages of an immediate and long term nature. Since the census traditionally leaves the actual enumeration to the village authorities, the illegal immigrants had managed to escape detection and find a place in the records.

The following methods of infiltration were discovered. These suggest planned and deliberate infiltration for the dual purpose of achieving a demographic change and overcoming a chronic labour shortage on the large landholdings in the south:

(i) Entry by matrimony: a very popular method of infiltration is by marrying Nepalese from outside Bhutan.[41] As polygamy is very common among the southern Bhutanese, multiple wives are invariably followed by their relatives, establishing a web of matrimonial alliances both within and outside the country. Contrary to their cultural traditions, the brides bring in their husbands, often accompanied by relatives. Land would be acquired or given to such relatives and the co-operating village headman would be obliged to authenticate their claims for registration for a fee or favour.

(ii) Entry by "reverse adoption": adoption of foreigners (age no bar) is commonly practised. Entire families are "adopted" by individuals or families who are already established in the country. Such adoptions range from domestic servants and sharecroppers to total strangers with economic means. One case I came across was in Bhangtar, where the head of the family (a soldier) did not want to emigrate while members of his extended family wanted to leave. Finally, it emerged that his family members had been adopted by him and, as they themselves claimed not to be citizens, they wished to sell their property and depart for Nepal where arrangements had been made for purchase of land and property.

(iii) Entry by acquisition of land and house: this method required the collusion of the village authorities and the people's representative in the National Assembly. Since one criterion for granting citizenship was the possession of land and a house, before which a photo had to be taken, immigrants would hire or purchase plots large enough for a hut, then build a hut and acquire a plot number.

(iv) Entry as porters, farmhands etc: a large number of porters to transport the cash crops down to auction yards from distant hill plantations, a journey often involving several days, used to be recruited from Nepal each year. Many never returned. When this was discovered, the matter was deliberated upon in the National Assembly and the practice discouraged since 1986. To overcome undue hardship for the farmers, soft loans were given to purchase mules and ponies. At the same time, the local village authorities were asked to encourage local farmers to transport the orange crop since the season does not conflict with their normal agricultural activities.

(v) Entry by falsification of documents: in collusion with the local authorities, outright falsification of documents took place. Through this practice, some illegal immigrants were even elected to the National Assembly.[42]

(vi) Entry by displacement: since registered land and house were the most reliable criteria, purchase of registered land and house by immigrants was used as a foolproof means. Often the seller acquired new plots or claimed to be a *sukumbasi* who, having no difficulty in establishing his citizenship, was eligible for *kidu* land as discussed earlier. Often, people returned to Nepal where they acquired property and settled permanently.

(vii) Entry by "resurrection": a peculiarity among the southern Bhutanese is reported to be their continued resistance to the government's policy of compulsory rural life insurance, which is most popular among northern Bhutanese farmers. It was later discovered that the minimal occurrence of death in southern Bhutan was due to the sale of identity of deceased persons.[43]

(viii) Entry by intimidation, bribery, force, etc: this happened frequently. Paradoxically, such methods are now being used to compel the people to join the camps.

In addition to those who entered through the above means, many labourers recruited directly from Nepal, for various development projects such as road construction, diffused among the southern population.

These methods of infiltration were discovered or proven during the census of 1988. They explain why the Government had failed to detect illegal immigration. It has now been established that, beyond the simple social and economic reasons, the large scale infiltration was conceived to change the demographic character of an unsuspecting people. This explains why the government had to go beyond the normal procedures of enumeration and verification during the census. This in essence meant the conducting of a census under the direct supervision of the central authorities, though it had hitherto been a local responsibility discharged mainly by the village headmen. Records had been maintained in the Dzongkhag and sub-divisional offices, allowing easy tampering.

Reasons for Return Migration

A large number of Nepalese have left Bhutan in the last few years. It was considered natural for the illegal immigrants to leave the country especially under the generous terms and conditions offered by the government. They were fully compensated (as per prevailing rates) for the land which they had illegally occupied and on which they had established themselves. The government, on the other hand, was perplexed by the number of Bhutanese citizens who have also left their country after having established their crudentials as bonafide Bhutanese citizens. Upon a closer examination of the causes for their departure from Bhutan, the following reasons help to explain their choice to return to Nepal.

(i) Upon being discovered, the illegal immigrants usually decide to leave. In as much as the southern Bhutanese have aided the infiltration of the immigrants, many of them express solidarity with those leaving for reasons which among others include close emotional and family bonds.

(ii) Unlike the northern Bhutanese, who are highly individualistic, the Nepalese are susceptible to group influence. This is attributed as one reason for their continuing value as mercenaries who will willingly sacrifice their life in battles without the slightest concern for the cause. This plays a significant role in the decision of the Nepalese and southern Bhutanese to leave the country. Far removed from Nepal, and in the absence of political leaders, they have tended to look up to southern personalities who enjoy rank and status with the Government. Hence, the leadership image enjoyed by Rizal, Basnet and Subba who were close to the King. When these "leaders" left the country, it had a telling impact on the simple farmers. It should be mentioned here that, while Rizal left the country for purely political reasons, the Royal Audit Authority has levelled charges of misappropriating considerable sums of government funds against Basnet and Subba.

(iii) The dissidents use two forms of persuasion to attract southern Bhutanese. One involves the use of disinformation flavoured with the promise of a quick return in triumph. Meanwhile, they are enticed with information about the conditions under which they will be accorded hospitality at the camps in Jhapa. They are told about free shelter, food and clothing, amenities and a daily allowance of $3 per person for the short duration that they stay there. To the innocent and illiterate farmer, this has proved to be a very effective means of persuasion. The second and more powerful means of persuasion is the use of threats, the most well known being the threat to "make you six inches shorter". Those southern Bhutanese who have resisted all forms of persuasion and threats are being targeted as victims of terrorist acts.

(iv) The dissident leaders have politicised the problem. By so doing, there is a mutuality of interest between the southern Bhutanese dissidents and the illegal immigrants. On one side, the number of refugees is seen as the most powerful tool to convince the world of the mass support enjoyed by the dissidents so that international pressure can be brought to bear upon Bhutan. On the other side, the invitation to join the camps is tempting when the leaders promise that their illegal immigration to Bhutan will be legitimised along with the grant of citizenship.

(v) A number of people who had participated in the violent demonstrations did not return after having run away from the country to escape legal action. The families of these people are among those who leave to join them.

(vi) Because the present Prime Minister of Nepal was involved in the first dissident movement and has openly supported the current uprising, the dissident leaders are seen to represent him and the Nepalese government.

Given the racial, cultural, emotional and familial ties that many southern Bhutanese maintain with Nepal, the slightest provocation is enough for many to leave their homes in Bhutan. There are those in

Bhutan who are unable to understand why so many southern Bhutanese have left when they have prospered under the government's integration programme, and they believe that certain elements in Nepal are involved. Ultimately, the southern Bhutanese who leave are exercising the freedom of choice which is afforded to them by the law of the nation.

Human Rights and Terrorism

It is a normal human instinct to sympathise with the weaker, the older and the lesser. This basic instinct is often a barrier to reason, and the voice of truth can sometimes seem inaudible. In the problem that Bhutan is presently grappling with, it seems inevitable that the state is branded the villain and the dissidents the victims.

The majority of Bhutanese (including the southern Bhutanese) think they are the victims and, in their everyday life, they feel the loss of civil liberties, they experience deprivation and a pervasive sense of fear and insecurity. For the villagers in the south, every day is a nightmare. But their voice is not heard by the media, and their human rights appear not to be of any importance. Explanations by the Government are dismissed as propaganda and plain untruths. Even concrete evidence is seen as fabrication.

A recent article on Bhutan by an Asian journalist begins with a girl whose face is scarred by security people who allegedly "poured boiling water" on her. Whether this was the result of an accident is immaterial. The important thing was that it provided a vivid theme for the story that he wished to tell. On the other hand, the BBC recently aired a report on "The World Today", in which it was reported that a woman speaking "non-stop" in Nepali at a Jhapa camp claimed to have been raped. The interpreter was the camp health worker. A more faithful interpretation in London revealed that the woman in fact was denying having been a rape victim. The weaker, the lesser and the poor do lie—more, perhaps, than the state, for they are not accountable and are motivated solely by a purpose only they will know. In the case of the "Bhutanese refugee", that purpose does not appear to be survival.

The expulsion of a large number of people that is claimed to have happened cannot happen in a country so easily when the country does not have the means, militarily or in any other form. The fact that there

is an absence of any resistance, but an eagerness and willingness to leave one's land and home, must in itself convey a story.

The dissidents' call for human rights is paradoxical: it is accompanied by acts of terrorism which trample the human rights of innocent villagers in the south. The Bhutanese Government has caught and released numerous Nepalese and southern Bhutanese who were arrested for various crimes, including terrorism. The mental trauma and physical deprivation that the dissidents speak of are the results of the actions that they themselves have been perpetrating on the southern Bhutanese. Today, the inability of the Government to give adequate security coverage to the southern Bhutanese has resulted in the organisation of self protection volunteers on a village basis. These volunteers have become fairly effective in preventing a greater level of terrorism. The dissidents know that without the villagers to join them there will be no camps, without which their movement cannot survive. Greater numbers in the camps strengthen their position. The innocent farmers of the south are thus victims who are manipulated, raped and tortured.

Human rights are a convenient banner that the dissidents and their Nepalese supporters have raised before the international community. But their greater aim is to generate international sympathy for the dissident cause which is to grab political power. The Bhutanese people and government see no legitimacy in this demand. They are happy with the present political arrangement. They believe that legitimate demands for political change can only come from the true majority of the Bhutanese people. As admitted by the dissidents (and as was the case with the Bhutan State Congress), the dissident parties do not have any support beside a small section of misguided southern Bhutanese and the illegal immigrants.

While human rights violations by the dissidents have not been questioned thus far, Bhutan has made every effort to respond to international concern and to abide by the spirit of her own commitment to human rights. Confident of her innocence against the allegations made by the dissidents, and eager to accept new ideas, Amnesty International and the International Red Cross were invited to study and appraise the human rights situation in the country and the specific conditions of the detainees. Amnesty International's report has already been released, and gives a clearer picture of the actual human rights situation in the country.

The relevance of human rights in the context of the developing world, and in particular that of Bhutan, must be considered. To the people of Bhutan, what is most important is the process of development, the means by which the collective needs of society can be met in a fair and equitable manner. To this end, health care, education, transportation and, above all, hope for a better and more secure future, are more important than anything else. Individual freedom and liberty, on which the western concept of human rights is founded, have little relevance to these basic aspirations. If the will of the majority is that these can be obtained through the prevailing political arrangement, then that will must prevail.

Bhutan's Perception of the Problem and the Future

There is anguish among the people because of the attempt of a minority immigrant group to bring about political change in collusion with illegal immigrants and Nepalese beyond the border. The Bhutanese feel that they have been betrayed by a people they had welcomed, in whom they had placed their trust and with whom they were willing to share a common destiny. But the general attitude of the Bhutanese towards their southern compatriots does not indicate any rancour.

There is strong condemnation of the misguided actions that the dissidents have perpetrated on the people and the government. The audacity with which the dissidents have undermined the rights and will of the majority, and attempted to "take over" the country by bringing in political changes which in effect would have resulted in Nepalese rule through an "electoral majority" will probably never be forgotten.[44] That they could have become a minority in their own country with a "majority" population who showed no love or respect for their culture and traditions will always remain a haunting nightmare. But the Buddhist spirit of compassion and forgiveness is already visible in Thimphu. There is not the slightest sign of ethnic animosity. There are no pointing fingers. People know that the majority of the southern Bhutanese do not identify with the dissidents and that they are Bhutanese as they always will be.

This is particularly striking for anyone who experienced the tension that gripped the capital city after the announcement of the threat of a Gorkha takeover in late 1990. Foreigners who visit Thimphu see not only a calmness but a heartening casualness in the relationship between

the northern Bhutanese and their southern compatriots. There is no ethnic strife in the capital, which is now a sanctuary for the southern Bhutanese fleeing the "anti-national terrorists of Jhapa".

The majority of the people of Bhutan are not oblivious to the thousands who have deserted their homeland at the call of the dissidents. They are aware that, in spite of the attention that these people receive from various international and local agencies, there is always greater happiness, comfort and privacy in the humblest home that one can call one's own. Understandably, greater sympathy goes to those who are clearly victims of disinformation and who are beguiled by those who see in their swelling numbers growing prospects for their vested interests. At the same time, both the government and people are aware that the traditions and laws of the land give every citizen the freedom to renounce his citizenship and to emigrate to another country.

The concentration of such a large body of homeless people in Nepal, if indeed all are such, is disturbing. That people are dying of sickness and disease is cause for even greater concern. But what makes it a human tragedy is that there are no reasons compelling enough to cause this unfortunate situation. Collectively, the dissidents and their followers have betrayed the trust of their country. It is ironic that the process by which they abandoned their homes was in itself their first encounter with the hollowness of freedom and the exploitation of the innocent masses with which democracy is often synonymous in the developing world.

Yet there is moral respite for the Bhutanese, however misplaced it might seem, in the common knowledge that the camps with all their alarming numbers are host not only to people from Bhutan but also from within Nepal as well as from the region. The naivety with which the government went about printing the identity cards without any concern for security aspects speaks further of the alternative origins of many of the cards with which the camp members claim their identity (these were printed in Calcutta at the Caxton Press in 1981 at a cost of Rs. 1.60 or US $ 0.6 per card). There is also the well-known fact that a prime target of every raid launched by members of the camps is the identity cards of the southern Bhutanese. Not so incredible are the rumours that many Nepalese from the poor and disadvantaged areas in Nepal find the camps a haven (the standard of living in the camps is

higher and more comfortable than in the villages). The claim that all those in the camps are Bhutanese therefore arouses strong suspicion.

To the more discerning eye, there are in the dissident literature photographs of "starving" children in the laps of healthy and well fed mothers that make a mockery of the tragedy of the Somalis or the starving Ethiopians. Foreign journalists report that very few male adults and youth are visible in the camps. This has caused people to suspect that the rumours of the return migrants using the camps as training grounds for terrorists may be true. Recently, in the light of overwhelming evidence produced by the government of Bhutan, the dissidents admitted to the committal of terrorism against the southern Bhutanese who refuse to leave the country and join the camps.[45] Just this month again [March 1993], *Kuensel* printed the photograph of five terrorists caught by southern Bhutanese villagers after they had committed armed robbery, the rape of a seventeen-year-old girl and the cold blooded murder of a woman in Sarbhang. They were from the Timai and Beldangi camps in Nepal, and they revealed the names of the camp officials who had given the orders. One of them was from Sikkim: he admitted to having been registered as a Bhutanese "refugee".

The government is making as much effort as possible to stop the people leaving the country. Whatever their reasons, the government considers it its reponsibility to convince them not to abandon their home and country. The King himself has repeatedly called upon the southern people not to abandon their country during these difficult times. He also went several times to personally meet those who had applied to emigrate and to call upon them to withdraw their applications. In addition, as a gesture of special concern, the southern people were exempted from all rural taxes and labour contribution for one year. Despite all these moves, most preferred to go.

Although the security situation in the south is still not good, and in spite of the reluctance of civil servants and teachers to accept postings in the south, the government has begun repairing service facilities that were destroyed or damaged during the uprising. Many schools, health facilities and other social and communication infrastructures have started to function optimally.[46] It is hoped that all service facilities will resume normal operations in the very near future. The people and the government are hopeful that the madness which led the dissidents to

cause such unrest in the country will give place to sanity and that the people in the south will be left alone in peace to resume a normal life.

While it is obvious that all civil servants should continue to enjoy the same rank and status as in the past, even the close relatives of the dissident leaders continue to occupy high positions in the government without any hindrance or loss of personal status.

For those who have left the country and those who still intend to leave regardless of the government's effort to dissuade them, there appears to be little else that can be done for them by the Bhutanese government. One can only hope that the freedom of choice they have exercised will lead them to a safe and secure life in what they consider their homeland. It is also hoped that the Nepalese government will allow the return migrants to re-establish themselves by lifting the restrictions of movement imposed on them. It is only fair that the people in the camps irrespective of where they come from, if indeed they are destitute and refugees, should be afforded the basic human right of free movement and the right to earn a living.

It is understandable that the displaced persons in Nepal should receive international attention and sympathy. It is hoped that the organisations involved will continue with their humanitarian work. But Bhutan is no less deserving of international sympathy. Her very survival as a nation state is threatened by a dissident group which has been able to politicise and blur the issue of illegal immigration with demands for human rights and political change. The nation which had accepted as her own an alien population is now the victim of her own generosity. A section of these people who have rejected everything that is Bhutanese threaten to take over the country with the support of ethnic kin who comprise the most aggressive trans-national migrant people in the region.[47]

The rich culture of the Great Wheel of Buddhism which once flourished in Sikkim, Tibet, Ladakh, Lahaul and Spiti is well on the path to extinction. Today, Bhutan, the last bastion of this rich cultural heritage, is in a state of siege. On December 10, 1992, the General Assembly of the United Nations declared this year "The International Year for the World's Indigenous People". Surely, the legitimate rights of the indigenous people of Bhutan who are faced with a real threat to their very survival as a distinct culture and political entity will find a prominent place on the international agenda.

1 See Prayag Raj Sharma's comments on the "Dibya Upadesh" of Prithvi Narayan Shah in *Himal*, May/June 1992, Kathmandu. Walter A. Frank found some sixty different ethnic groups within his study area, which comprised eighteen of the seventy five districts of Nepal. Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf (ed.) *The Anthropology of Nepal: Proceedings of a Symposium held at the SOAS.* Warminster, 1973, p. 87.

2 Although none of the literature so far circulated has mentioned the name of the first ruler, perhaps deliberately to cause historical distortion, the period referred to does correspond to the reign of the First Shabdrung.

3 White, J. Claude. *Sikkim and Bhutan.* New Delhi 1984, p. 280. The Duars war with the British was fought in 1864 as a result of which a treaty of friendship was signed between the two parties on November 11th 1865 at Sinchula, whereby the Kalimpong sub-division to the east of the river Teesta, the seven Duars of Assam and the eleven Duars of West Bengal were ceded to the British for the payment of an annual subsidy. All hostilities between the two countries ceased thereafter.

4 An order to this effect, which contained the seals of the 5th Shabdrung Jigme Choegyal, and the Wangdu Dzongpoen, was issued on the 15th day of the 8th month of the Iron Year of the Rat during the 5th Rabjung which corresponds to 8th October 1900 AD. It appears reasonable to assume that, while the British had no official role in bringing the Nepalese to Bhutan, Kazi Ugyen Dorji may have been subjected to pressure by the local British authorities in Darjeeling who were faced with an unemployment situation concerning the Nepalese who had by then flooded the hill station. See RK Sprigg. "Decline of the Rong-folk: reflections on A. R. Foning's "Lepcha, My Vanishing Tribe"". *European Bulletin of Himalayan Research* 4, November 1992. He describes how the Nepalese were recruited for development and their rapid growth in population.

5 Ludwig F. Stiller, SJ. *The Rise of the House of Gorkha.* New Delhi, 1973, p. 101. It is interesting to note that Tibet had no coins of its own and that the Nepali "Mahendramalli" was not only in free circulation but was minted by the Newars for Tibet in Nepal.

6 Sinha, AC. *Bhutan. Ethnic Identity and National Dilemma.* New Delhi, 1991, p.245. Rennie, DR. *Bhotan and the Story of the Dooar War.* New Delhi, 1970, p. 46.

7 Bell, Charles A. (personal papers) "My Mission to Bhutan" 1910 and J. Claude White, op.cit.

8 See Eden, Ashley. *Political Missions to Bootan.* New Delhi, 1972, p. 64.

9 Foning, AR. *Lepcha My Vanishing Tribe.* New Delhi, 1987, p. 11.

10 It is interesting to note that even after the fort was lost to the British, the Bhutanese continued to procure bamboo from the groves along the ridge on which the dzong is located. The best Bhutanese bamboo bows known as the "Dali-sintha" were fashioned from this bamboo which is found only on this ridge.

11 Pradhan, Kumar. *A History of Nepali Literature.* Delhi 1984, p. 2.

12 Article 7 of the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship between India and Nepal guarantees residence, ownership of property, participation in trade and commerce, movement and privileges of a similar nature to citizens of one country in

the other on a reciprocal basis.

13 Burma has expelled large numbers of Nepalese in the past. The leading state and national journals and newspapers of Assam and the north-eastern hill states frequently report on the immigration/infiltration problem.

14 Hasrat, Bikrama Jit. *History of Nepal: As told by its Own and Contemporary Chroniclers.* Punjab, 1970.

15 Sprigg, RK, op.cit.

16 Ibid.

17 In the Tibetan language, the word Gorung (Gurung) means "guardian of the gateway" while Tamag (Tamang) means "horse soldier" or "cavalry". Even today it is common among the Gurungs to speak of being a Lhasa Gurung as opposed to being a lesser Gurung from another part of Tibet.

18 Haimendorf (ed.), op.cit..

19 SK Datta-Ray, *Statesman,* 18 May 1992.

20 The British, being seriously concerned about the growing "Gorkha menace", even helped to survey and map the entire southern foothills of Bhutan in order that appropriate measures could be devised.

21 Col. Weir reported to the Government of India on 7th Dec. 1931 on the increasing "Gorkha menace" and noted that the Nepalese "do not owe allegiance to the Bhutanese King". Basil Gould, Political Officer in Sikkim, wrote on August 26, 1938 that "both in Bhutan and Sikkim a very practical problem in politics is whether the local races are destined to be overwhelmed by the Nepalese."

22 See Leo Rose. *The Politics of Bhutan.* Ithaca, 1977, p. 110.

23 Such methods include, among others, the conversion of protected forest land into orange plantations. Orange seedlings are planted in the forest in neat rows with minimal perceptible disturbance to the forest. Since the seedlings are planted in summer, telltale signs are quickly concealed while the seedlings are given adequate protection from competing undergrowth to allow fairly rapid growth. Each year a few obstructive trees are discretely removed and when the orange trees are nearly fully grown, the forest is fully cleared, leaving little trace of illegal felling. Stumps are carefully concealed, taking full advantage of the fast decaying process in the sub-tropical/warm temperate forest. The bewildered forest guard sees a mature plantation established, "obviously", a long time ago.

24 See Planning Commission report on the 7th Plan.

25 Samrang and Kawaipani resettlement projects are the main examples which were undertaken specifically for the southern Bhutanese.

26 White (*op.cit.* pp. 97, 113) observes that "...the winter grazing grounds near Sipchu and the lower hills have been seriously curtailed by the increasing interruption of the Nepalese settlers, then the chief source of their wealth — cattle rearing and dairy produce — has begun to fail while constant quarrels arising between them and the Paharias entail much worry and expense."

27 Colonel Weir, quoted in Sinha, *op.cit,* 1991.

28 These observations and concerns were noted mainly during the pre-integration policy period.

29 See Nagendra Singh, *Art Culture and Religion,* New Delhi, 1972, for a brief account of the ethnic and linguistic diversity of Bhutan. Here it may be clarified

that, contrary to dissident claims that the eastern Bhutanese are being discriminated against with regard to senior positions in government, the Wangchuck dynasty has its origin in Lhuntse, eastern Bhutan and, as Ugyen Wangchuck told John Claude White, most senior government officials even today have direct or ancestral roots in eastern Bhutan.

[30] See National Assembly Resolutions of the 43rd session, 1975.

[31] All the dissident leaders are beneficiaries of the highest and best educational and training opportunities offered by the government under various multi- and bilateral schemes. RB Basnet, Bhim Subba, and DNS Dhakal were educated entirely by the government through university education in New Zealand and the US.

[32] Shiva Pradhan, another dissident activist, was the second highest ranking officer after the Secretary and was responsible for the selection of civil servants for career development opportunities among other major functions.

[33] See the Sixth Five Year Plan document of the Education Sector.

[34] In 1990 there were sixty one schools in the south with 23,101 students while the whole of northern Bhutan had ninety five primary schools and 25,993 students.

[35] Bhim Subba and RB Basnet, prominent members of the dissident groups, often accompanied the King during such tours. They enjoyed a close personal rapport with the King. The same was the case with Tek Nath Rizal earlier. Such exposure of these individuals to the southern Bhutanese population and their subsequent public (southern) recognition may have led them to develop high political ambitions.

[36] The name "Drukpa" is derived from the Drukpa Kagyu tradition of the Mahayana sect of Buddhism prevalent in the country. The word "Bhutan" is foreign to the Bhutanese who call themselves Drukpa of the land of Druk (Druk Yul).

[37] "The wearing of Bhutanese Gho even in the absence of Government insistence was beginning to be accepted by all." Human Rights Organisation of Bhutan, the *Bhutan Review*, I, 1, Kathmandu, Nepal, Jan. 1993, p. 3.

[38] Harka Gurung, "Frontier to Boundary", *Himal*, May/June 1992, argues that "as a matter of fact, ethnic Nepali (Nepali Jati) does not exist, but rather different ethnic groups that live within political Nepal (as citizens) or one of the "Nepalese" origin but live outside (aliens)." In fact the name of the language was officially changed from Gorkhali to Nepali in 1932 (until then, Nepali was the name of the language of the Newars).

[39] The expulsion of Nepalese migrants for the illegal clearing of forests for settlement was one of the main reasons for the agitation of the Bhutan State Congress in the early '50s. "The example of Sikkim, where involvement in agitational politics had seemingly brought the Nepali Sikkimese community tangible economic and political gains, is likely to prove attractive to Nepali Bhutanese as well. The liberalisation of the Bhutanese political system and the expansion of the political elite to include elements from all of Bhutan's major communities in the last two decades may prove to be an important factor in the future political role of the Nepali Bhutanese community." Rose, *op.cit.*, 1977, p. 49.

[40] That expatriate Nepalese harbour ambitions that go beyond local political aspirations is betrayed by pamphlets that bear the following message: "The

Government of Bhutan would do well to remember that we the Gorkhas of southern Bhutan are not only the majority but we also have seventeen million brothers and sisters in Nepal and over ten million living in India ... there is every possibility that the borders of the Gorkha State of Sikkim and adjoining districts of Kalimpong and Darjeeling can very easily be extended acrosss the whole of southern Bhutan... Then ... the minority Drukpas of northern Bhutan are themselves Nepalised by the Gorkhas..." Cecil Victor, "Bhutan and "Greater Nepal"", *The Patriot*, (New Delhi), 8 Nov. 1991.

[41] In his petition to the King, Rizal submitted that it was not possible for southern Bhutanese to find suitable spouses in Bhutan.

[42] Gautum, an employee of the sub-divisional office at Samdrup Jonkhar, acquired substantial land and property in the town as well as in the village of Bhangtar (Chhota tar) and became both a gup and, later, a people's representative in the National Assembly. He was from Kalimpong and recruited by the government along with a few others who still serve in the government as non-nationals. He had used his position to falsify his records in collusion with the village authorities. He left the country in 1990 after having sold his land and property. He is now well settled outside Bhutan.

[43] An example: Mani Kumar Sunwar of Changmari block under Chirang Dzongkhag married a non-national woman in 1982 and registered her in the gewog census record after she assumed the name of his first wife who had died ten years earlier.

[44] Cecil, *op.cit.*

[45] "It is a matter of deep regret and shame that subsequent investigations in the camps have confirmed the truth...the despicable actions of these depraved people is all the more abhorrent since the targets of their nefarious activities were innocent villagers...yet it is true." (From an item headed "Shame on Us", *Bhutan Review*, Jan. 1993.) This admission was possibly made on the insistence of relief agencies, after the government released the photographs and names of two members of the Patthri camp in Morang, Nepal.

[46] Sixty schools have been opened along with other services.

[47] "PM speaks to TRN on 100 days of interim government", *The Rising Nepal*, 26 July 1990. "In this regard luckily the mobility of the Nepali people has become a great asset and they have started moving out in spite of many difficulties and spread themselves throughout the world, including, of course, India."

Bhutan's Current Crisis: A View from Thimphu

Kinley Dorji

Today, as a bewildered Bhutanese population looks back on the past few turbulent years, one of the most striking characteristics of the anti-national movement is its rapid growth. The clandestine support given to Tek Nath Rizal by a group of teachers, students, and civil servants first surfaced in the form of propaganda leaflets and threat letters distributed throughout the country, and then grew into an open anti-government revolt. With the arrest of forty one ringleaders, thirty eight of whom were later released, members of this core group moved outside the country and formed dissident organisations. In a matter of months, the country was dragged into an era of unprecedented disturbances and violence.

Tension escalated in 1989 as an active anti-government propaganda offensive was launched by dissidents who formed the People's Forum for Human Rights, and the Bhutan People's Party. They also began a campaign of gruesome acts of terrorism that included raids and assaults on villagers, kidnappings, killings and mutilation. By the second year, ethnic Nepalis began an exodus from Bhutan as the illegal immigrants identified by the census left the country and were followed by Lhotshampas. According to reports, some of them left in solidarity with those declared illegal immigrants, some because of the insecurity caused by the terrorist raids, and some to join their families in Nepal. The Bhutanese government maintains that, according to the views of the Lhotshampas who were still living in Bhutan and statements by terrorists who have been arrested, many Lhotshampas were applying to emigrate and were heading for the camps in Nepal in response to calls from dissident groups.

By the end of 1992, about 70,000 ethnic Nepalis were housed in several refugee camps in eastern Nepal. The dissidents had formed one political organisation (BNDP), one militant group with a terrorist wing (BPP), and a human rights organisation, PFHR, which was renamed the Human Rights Organisation of Bhutan (HUROB) after the PFHR

was linked with terrorist activities. The people who left Bhutan received support from various international organisations including UNHCR, and the dissidents were backed by the Nepalese government. Media coverage of the problem was still somewhat confused, as was the international community which began to focus its attention on the camps.

In three years Bhutan, the last bastion of Mahayana Buddhism in the Himalayas, suddenly found its back against the wall, defending itself against allegations of state-sponsored atrocities by security troops, of human rights violations, and of holding democracy at bay. What began as "wild and ridiculous" allegations by the dissidents, which the government chose to ignore, had matured into issues taken up by the international community. In a brief but stormy period, it had become a national crisis.

A Well-Planned Movement

One basic grievance of the dissident groups is that they are victims of cultural and ethnic discrimination by the Bhutanese government. The movement, they insist, was a natural and spontaneous response to this policy. The Bhutanese government, however, points out that, rather than a spontaneous uprising, the movement had been planned and nurtured with meticulous efficiency. The beginning was uncanny. *Lhotshampa* (Bhutanese of Nepali origin living in southern Bhutan) school teachers, civil servants and students from tertiary institutions were meeting regularly, they wrote and published pamphlets, and even collected substantial contributions from Lhotshampas from all parts of the country. Not a single Bhutanese of non-Nepali origin knew or even suspected this. With an effective strategy of threat letters and terrorist tactics, launched from camps based in the Duars and Assam belt, the dissidents were able to mobilise the ethnic Nepali population. The core group of rebels was joined by hundreds of youths, some reportedly under duress, and these were soon followed by thousands of others as the movement picked up momentum on the promise of easy success and rich rewards made by the leaders to all ethnic Nepalis who supported them. According to the Bhutanese government, the rich rewards meant taking over political power in Bhutan.

The dissidents launched a propaganda offensive from the Duars, where they established camps or mingled with the local population,

which is largely Nepali. There were stories of Bhutanese soldiers throwing hundreds of Nepalis into the rivers, raping women and forcefully cutting their long hair, forcing Hindus to eat beef, and torturing and drinking the blood of Nepali prisoners, as well as allegations of religious discrimination by the Bhutanese government. Today, much of this continues in the press in Nepal, while the Bhutanese government dismisses the reports as false.

On June 2, 1990, the anniversary of King Jigme Singye Wangchuck's coronation, the nation was stunned when the decapitated heads of two Lhotshampas - one a census official - were left near the police checkpost in Gomtu. Attached was a note in English and Nepali, warning that such would be the fate of all those who supported the government. As this grim message hit home to the largely rural Bhutanese population, for whom terrorism and violence were harsh new developments, it sent shock waves throughout the kingdom. The fear was especially deep among the mainly illiterate villagers of southern Bhutan.

The terrorists' tactics took on a systematic pattern. Bhutanese crossing the border were stripped, robbed, and beaten. Since the first incident, several more people have been decapitated. Others were kidnapped and tortured. The message was always the same, as every victim was described as a "government *chamcha*" (stooge). People were attacked for not joining the movement. The Duars belt became fraught with tension as the dissidents took up this campaign of violence. This strategy of intimidation and violence continues today, with the main emphasis on attacking and robbing innocent Lhotshampa villagers of their money, valuables, tax receipts and citizenship documents. After the Indian government banned militant activities on its soil and Nepal established the refugee camps with international assistance, the camps became the terrorists' strongholds. In recent weeks, terrorists who were caught and arrested have provided details of the raids which are organised by the camp administrators themselves. A new dissident publication called the *Bhutan Review* recently confirmed reports that terrorist acts in southern Bhutan were being organised in the refugee camps.

In its documentation of terrorist activities by the dissidents, the Bhutanese government lists fifty six reported killings, thirty five incidents of rape, two hundred and one kidnappings, five hundred and ten armed robberies, forty seven vehicle hijackings, and four hundred and

fifty three injuries during terrorist raids. It also lists more than two hundred installations destroyed, including twenty nine schools, twelve health units, sixteen forest offices, eleven police checkposts, fifty six houses, fifteen bridges, fourteen water supply projects, eight power pylons, and other basic infrastructure. There were sixty attacks on security troops in which six officers and twenty eight soldiers were injured. Forest plantations along the southern border were plundered and destroyed. The government reports the theft of guns and explosives from official stores, and the recovery of a large cache of arms and ammunition.

Demonstrations

But the most dramatic development of the movement came in September, 1990, when the tension and antagonism exploded into a series of demonstrations across the entire southern belt of the country. About 18,000 demonstrators marched against local government offices in five districts and one subdivision. Groups of three thousand to six thousand people were led by armed young men in camouflage uniforms. The members of this "Action Group", the terrorist wing of the Bhutan People's Party, marched behind a human shield of women and children. With no resistance from a skeletal police force, which was prohibited by the government from firing its weapons or using force, the groups marched into government offices in the southern districts, destroyed census documents, freed prisoners, tore down the national flags, stripped schoolchildren of their uniforms, and humiliated district officials who were also stripped of their clothes. Large piles of the Bhutanese national dress were set on fire in several districts. Both Bhutanese and non-national teachers were harassed and humiliated by their own students who had joined the mobs. Several teachers were kidnapped.

It was a chilling week for the Bhutanese population which had never experienced mass aggression of this nature or magnitude. Even the residents of Thimphu and the northern districts were close to panic. One official explained that the people were convinced the aggression could not be contained. Most people had already been unnerved by pamphlets distributed by the dissidents, foretelling a massive invasion and conquest of Bhutan by the entire Nepali population both within and outside Bhutan. One said:

It would do well to remember that we, the Gurkhas of southern Bhutan, are not only the majority but we also have seventeen million brothers and sisters in Nepal and over ten million living in India. Unless the minority Drukpas come to their senses and immediately undo the damage and great harm they have done to themselves, there is every possibility that the borders of the Gurkha state of Sikkim and adjoining areas of Kalimpong and Darjeeling can very easily be extended across the whole of southern Bhutan.

It was perhaps during this peak of the movement that Bhutan became aware of the magnitude of the threat behind the anti-government campaign by the Nepalis. Security forces were rushed to the south after these incidents, to guard important installations and the social infrastructure. Security officials point out that the 1990 demonstrations, covering more than seven hundred kilometres of rugged terrain and dense forest with no public communication facilities, were organised with ruthless efficiency. Such a coordinated programme needed planning, funds, and professional advice.

The police force suffered one dead, two kidnapped, and nine injured during the demonstrations. A forest range officer and two forest guards were also kidnapped. While a BPP spokesman claimed that up to five hundred people had been killed in Samchi, and hundreds more injured, the Amnesty International report last year confirmed just one death. But the 1990 demonstrations took a far greater psychological toll than the physical impact. The cultural humiliation was symbolic, and many Bhutanese in Thimphu still describe their own helplessness and shock when, in their own offices and work stations, Lhotshampa colleagues began voicing their support for the movement. It was possibly this stage of the movement which created an abysmal ethnic chasm that is now becoming increasingly difficult to bridge.

Today many people feel that, while the demonstrations unnerved the entire Bhutanese population, they did not succeed as an invasion because they did not enjoy mass support at that stage. The movement was supported by the Nepali population outside Bhutan, but the economic boom in southern Bhutan that many Lhotshampas enjoyed dissuaded them from risking hearth and home for a movement that had not yet proved itself.

Issues

Bhutan's crisis is shrouded in issues: democracy, human rights, ethnic cleansing, greater Nepal, cultural invasion, Gorkhaland, and racial discrimination are some of those raised by the dissidents. But political analysts point out that there are always numerous issues in politics. Often, they are never the real causes. It is important, however, to examine the issues because, while they may be just slogans and political symbols, they can sometimes become the cause.

The Census

The 1988 census conducted by the government was aimed at distinguishing between illegal immigrants and Bhutanese citizens. The timing of the census was influenced by the violent GNLF agitation in neighbouring Darjeeling, which had sent many Nepalis to seek shelter in southern Bhutan. The census assumed special urgency when the government realised that it was not possible to physically differentiate illegal immigrants from bonafide Bhutanese citizens, and when it discovered that there had been large-scale illegal immigration into southern Bhutan by ethnic Nepalis over the years.

The citizenship law of Bhutan thus became a vital issue affecting the current crisis. With the world focusing on the people living in the refugee camps in Nepal, the key question is whether they were Bhutanese citizens in the first place. The refugees claim to be Bhutanese citizens, unfairly displaced. Bhutan maintains that they are not Bhutanese, but a mixture of people who had come illegally into Bhutan, those who had worked in Bhutan and attempted to stay on, economic migrants from neighbouring parts of India and Nepal itself, and Bhutanese nationals who had emigrated of their own free will in response to persuasion by dissident leaders.

The dissident movement picked up momentum and the outflow of people from Bhutan began in 1988, after the government census indicated that a large proportion of those living in the south were illegal immigrants who had infiltrated across the porous border. The government refused their claims to citizenship. It also rejected allegations that the entire census exercise had been held to expel ethnic Nepalis through a retroactive citizenship law. The allegation is that the citizenship law had been passed in 1985 with a cut-off date of 1958.

The Bhutanese citizenship laws, enacted in 1958, 1977, and 1985, are reproduced in the Amnesty International report of 1992. The laws themselves have no ambiguity: immigrants cannot claim citizenship, unless they have been naturalised and were living in Bhutan in 1958. Judiciary officials also explain that 1958 was not a blind cut-off year. It was the year when the country's first Citizenship Act was passed by the National Assembly to grant Bhutanese citizenship to ethnic Nepalis who had been in the country for at least ten years and owned agricultural land. Until then, the Nepalis had all been aliens. The relevant clause of the 1958 Act states:

> If any foreigner who has reached the age of majority and is otherwise eligible presents a petition to an official appointed by His Majesty and takes an oath of loyalty according to the rules laid down by the official, he may be enrolled as a Bhutanese national provided that: (a) the person is a resident of the kingdom of Bhutan for more than ten years; and (b) owns agricultural land within the kingdom.

Judiciary officials also point out that the 1985 Act is a more liberal interpretation of the 1958 Act because it does not require a person claiming citizenship to prove he was a resident in Bhutan for ten years but instead accepts his claim if he was a resident in 1958, when the first Citizenship Act was passed. The relevant clause in the 1985 Act states:

> A person permanently domiciled in Bhutan on or before 31st December, 1958, and whose name is registered in the census register maintained by the Ministry of Home Affairs shall be deemed to be a citizen of Bhutan by registration.

The citizenship law affected a large number of Nepalis who had come to Bhutan after 1958. Bhutanese officials point out that, while none of these people had actually applied for citizenship, many had registered as citizens with the collusion of village headmen who had been given the authority to maintain local records. Once the illegal immigrants had intermarried and developed family ties in southern Bhutan, many Lhotshampas were also affected because the 1985 Act required both parents to be citizens for a person to be entitled to citizenship. Neither did the Act entitle non-Bhutanese spouses to automatic citizenship.

In November 1988, King Jigme Singye Wangchuck recommended to the National Assembly that residence permits should be issued to foreigners married to Bhutanese citizens to ease their inconvenience.

The king said that it was not the intention of the government to separate parents and children and husbands and wives. Non-nationals married to Bhutanese citizens, he said, should be given special resident permits that would entitle them to health, education, and the other social welfare benefits available to bonafide citizens.

Government officials point out that the dissident groups oppose the 1985 Citizenship Act because its proper implementation affects their aspirations to create a Nepali-dominated state in Bhutan. They see this intention in the dissidents' demand that citizenship should be granted to all non-nationals who were in Bhutan before 1985.

"Do long-term illegal squatters have a formal right to citizenship?" asks a Western writer. The government of Bhutan maintains that no country can afford to absorb such a large number of illegal immigrants, least of all a small country like Bhutan. Senior government officials express their alarm at the demands already voiced by dissident leaders and point out the demographic threat that had already emerged: until 1958, the Nepalis were all aliens. Thirty years later they were claiming to be the Bhutanese majority.

Bhutanese census officials also reject the charge that, in a move to evict even Bhutanese citizens of Nepali origin, the government has asked, as proof, for documents that farmers do not usually keep. According to the census system, every block (group of villages) in the south has a census team - comprising a census official and Lhotshampa village elders - to certify a person's domicile in the country before 1958 if the person cannot produce the relevant documents. If domicile in the country in 1958 is proved, with or without documents, citizenship is automatic.

Ethnic cleansing

Thimphu sees allegations of ethnic cleansing as the most farfetched, borrowed directly as a trendy buzzword from Yugoslavia, although the two situations are not comparable. Aid workers agree. An expatriate in Thimphu points out that one of the most important facts omitted in the international discussion is that the majority of Bhutanese Nepalis are still living in Bhutan. In a growing trend, stemming from the insecurity caused by terrorist activities in the south, many Lhotshampa families have, in fact, moved to Thimphu and other parts of northern Bhutan.

The secretariat of the Royal Civil Service Commission in Thimphu points out that Lhotshampas constitute a significant proportion (thirty two percent) of the Bhutanese civil service despite the fact that even senior Lhotshampa officials betrayed their country and joined the anti-government movement. Many of them, including family members and relatives of the dissidents and their leaders, still hold high posts in government. A significant proportion (twenty five percent) of the army and police are also Lhotshampas.

With the terrorist raids repeatedly stepped up on the villages, southern Bhutan is still tense, but the nightmare of the last few years appears to be giving way to normality in some parts. Most of the districts have just harvested their orange crop, which brings in most of the US $8.00 million in cash crop earnings. Because they become choice targets for the terrorist raids at this stage, many have taken a stand in resisting the terrorists and organised themselves into village volunteer forces.

In a new trend, some Lhotshampas are themselves implementing a proposal made by the Lhotshampa representatives during the 71st session of the National Assembly in October 1992, that all those who had left the country should be banned from returning. Last February, thirty households in Sibsoo requested the subdistrict administration to expel ten families that had been involved in anti-government activities and had returned after a year's absence from their village.

Villagers across the southern belt are also initiating their own vigilante groups to guard their homes against the raids. In places where the government is unable to provide 24-hour security protection, groups of men patrol their villages at night and are actually foiling raids and other subversive attempts every week. So far, these groups of Lhotshampa villagers have killed five terrorists during the raids and handed over seventy to the police, among them the BPP General Secretary, D. K. Rai, who was tried and sentenced last year.

Driglam Namzha

One of the most misunderstood policies of the Bhutanese government is *Driglam Namzha*, "traditional values and etiquette", which has been emphasised since the country's Sixth Plan to "promote national integration and the Bhutanese identity". While the concept of Driglam Namzha itself reflects the deep roots of the Bhutanese culture and identity that have evolved since the 17th century, the dissidents have de-

scribed it as a new discriminatory policy to provoke the Lhotshampa population. In the context of today's problem, the loose interpretation of Driglam Namzha focuses on the dress code and language rule.

The Ministry of Home Affairs explains that the Driglam Namzha policy was implemented only after consulting the people. An edict was first issued by the king on January 16, 1989, proclaiming the need to promote a national dress, language, and Driglam Namzha to strengthen Bhutan's unique national identity. The district development committees (DYTs) were instructed to consult the people and submit their views to the government. After receiving reports from all the districts that the people fully supported the policy, the king toured all the districts of southern Bhutan to meet the people and confirm the reports submitted by the DYTs. On the national dress, the king gave the people the option to select a distinct dress which would reflect Bhutan's unique identity. The Home Ministry points out that the people themselves had selected the *gho* and *kira* - the dress of the northern Bhutanese - as the most suitable national dress.

The national dress regulation, which requires all Bhutanese to wear the national dress at all religious institutions and functions, government offices and formal gatherings, has been frequently criticised by dissident groups. The rule applies nation-wide and is believed to inconvenience the trendy youth more than any other section of society but, coming at a time when tones of ethnicity had entered the movement, it was protested against as cultural discrimination.

The Bhutanese government has admitted that, while the rule itself was clear and was necessary to promote the national identity of a small country like Bhutan, it had been implemented with "unnecessary vigour by some overzealous district officials" who made the dress mandatory at all times and all places and administered fines and penalties for those violating the rule. Today, this rule is implemented more faithfully, and Dzongdas invite critics to "go to the villages and see for themselves".

The controversy over the Nepali language, meanwhile, arose after the Education Department removed Nepali from the syllabus in primary schools in the south. The department maintains that this was done for practical reasons, with the introduction of a programme called the New Approach to Primary Education, and in line with the

Education Board's view that it was too much of a strain on small children to learn a third language in addition to English and Dzongkha.

The government explains that Nepali was merely dropped from the school curriculum and not banned. It is still officially used and, in fact, the National Assembly proceedings are translated simultaneously into Nepali. The national newspaper is published in Nepali as well as Dzongkha and English, and the national radio service also broadcasts in Nepali.

Human Rights

The graphic allegations of military violence against the people have been categorically denied by the Bhutanese government. But observers point out that, under the pressures and tensions southern Bhutan saw in the last few years, it is likely that the security troops were sometimes rough in their treatment of militants. Working under severe restraint from the government, with numerous attacks and provocations by the terrorists, it is believed that there are cases - even though these are rare incidents - of militants being beaten. In an extreme case in 1990, four militants were shot by security troops when an armed mob of more than two hundred attempted to snatch guns from some soldiers' hands, not expecting them to retaliate because of the government's standing instructions not to use firearms.

The Bhutanese government has denounced, at the highest level, the misuse of authority by officials and the use of force by the security forces. In January, 1992, the king issued an edict that was read to the public in the southern districts:

> Regarding this matter, any Bhutanese national who desires to give up Bhutanese citizenship and emigrate to another country is free to do so according to the law. However, it is a serious violation of the law and a punishable offence for any administrative or security official to force any Bhutanese national to leave the country.

Subsequently, three senior government officials were tried by the High Court, Bhutan's highest legal authority, and were punished for using their positions to purchase property at unfair prices from people leaving the country, and for pressurising one Lhotshampa family to leave. The police chief in the same district was punished for the same reasons. In a separate incident in February, 1991, a police officer and one con-

stable were courtmartialed for "over reacting" and killing a man when some miscreants attacked a police jeep.

But generally, the security troops confidentially express their frustrations with what they see as a restriction which puts their lives at risk. A common complaint among those posted near the borders is that the terrorists taunt them at every turn, because they are aware that security troops are not allowed to use their weapons. In several incidents during the 1990 demonstrations, police officers and constables suffered serious injuries at the hands of the mobs because they complied with the government's instructions not to use their firearms. A police officer in Pagli held on to his gun while he was slashed by some demonstrators with their khukuris, while two constables under his command were kidnapped by the mob because they did not fire their guns to defend themselves. A police officer in Geylegphug subdistrict was seriously wounded because he did not fire his pistol, even when he was attacked with knives by members of the mob.

Government officials categorically deny that there has been any systematic intimidation of the Lhotshampas. They have also pointed out that, besides the close surveillance of the troops posted in southern Bhutan, strict instructions have been issued that women should not be detained. But with the increasing consciousness and awareness among the people, the human rights situation remains a chief concern of both the government of Bhutan and the international community. In response to wide-ranging allegations, Bhutan invited Amnesty International and the International Committee of the Red Cross to visit the kingdom. In what was widely seen as a relatively favourable report on Bhutan, Amnesty International's comments cleared the kingdom of many allegations of human rights violations. The report also welcomed the amnesty granted by the King to more than 1,500 detainees and expressed its concerns about six prisoners of conscience, five of whom have been released since then and one brought to trial.

Democracy

The call for democracy and human rights by the dissident movement was reportedly picked up after the leaders made contact with more experienced "advisors". A professor of political science at the North Bengal University, which maintains a close academic scrutiny of the region, points out that it was a shrewd political move boosted by Nepal's

successful transition to democracy in 1990. But he also points out that, though it might be a sign that the movement is gaining experience, the call for democracy is tinged by the ethnicity of the movement - the fact that there is not a single non-Nepali involved.

The Bhutanese government argues that, without a genuine commitment to the true spirit and substance of democracy, the anti-government movement has actually been campaigning for its own version of electoral democracy to recruit enough voting power, both from inside and outside the country, to achieve its real motive of taking over political power. Meanwhile, recent debate in Europe indicates that Western countries are beginning to accept that democracy does not necessarily mean a Western-style government. The spirit and substance of democracy can be just as effectively adopted in different forms of government.

Monarchy is seen by the Bhutanese as the essence of the Bhutanese system and the unifying foundation of society. At the same time, the Bhutanese monarchy is inherently democratic, and it is the king who has initiated several steps to establish democratic institutions in the country. In recent years, King Jigme Singye Wangchuck has relinquished several key positions, including the chairmanship of the Planning Commission, and has given the Royal Advisory Council the authority to report to the National Assembly against the king's own actions. Another significant initiative by the king is the policy of decentralisation, aimed at taking the planning and decision-making process to the people. This was further strengthened with the establishment of 196 block-level committees throughout the country, to encourage an increased awareness of development and politics among the rural population. In October, 1992, the king issued a decree giving the media full autonomy from the government, signalling the beginning of a free press in the kingdom.

Throughout his reign the king has been reminding the people of Bhutan that the country's future lies in their hands and that they must prepare themselves to shoulder this responsibility. He has also often told journalists that he does not think monarchy is the best form of government because it is dependent on a single individual who assumes a position of authority by birth and not by merit: "I have no objections to any political changes so long as it is a better system that will be lasting and good for Bhutan and the Bhutanese people." Because of Bhutan's small size and because it is at the crossroads of development,

the king believes that it is possible to fulfill his vision of building a good system of government that is not dependent on any individual, a system that will function efficiently because of its built-in merits that will be of the greatest benefit to the country's future security and well-being.

Perspective

Historians maintain that the real causes of political movements are sometimes never identified because they are covered by a smoke screen of issues and slogans, and that the only way to take a clear look at the picture is to put it into perspective. Bhutan and the Bhutanese problem, therefore, should be put into a historical, geographical, and political frame. This is where most of the issues share an essence - ethnicity and the politics of demography. Put into a regional perspective, Bhutan is cringing at what it sees as a demographic invasion as the Nepali population pans the entire Himalayan belt. Highlighting a ratio of one Drukpa to seventy Nepalis in the region and looking at the migratory habits of the rapidly-expanding Nepali population, Bhutan sees its very survival as a distinct nation threatened.

Given this demographic map and the factors that have given today's dissident movement its tone, it is clear that Bhutan's crisis was inevitable. Surrounded geographically, politically, and demographically by Nepalis, the Bhutanese mind is constantly stalked by the threat of a cultural invasion as the eastward migration of the Nepalis swallows up the smaller cultural groups in Sikkim, Darjeeling, Kalimpong, and the West Bengal Duars. It was politically significant that, at this stage, the dissidents also picked up the theme of "Gurkha power". A dissident pamphlet declared:

> Rather than adopt the Drukpa customs and dress we Gurkhas must insist that, as we are the majority, they the Drukpas must accept our customs and traditions. If this is not acceptable to them, then we must fight for our rights like the Tamils of Sri Lanka and like them we must call upon the support of our brothers and sisters in Nepal and India in our liberation struggle... We the Gurkhas must all unite together and create another Gurkha state in Bhutan and extend the borders of Gurkha states along the Himalaya which has always been the rightful home of our people.

It is widely accepted that the Nepali psyche is far more politically ma-

ture than the Bhutanese mentality, which is still thawing after years of self-imposed isolation. Given the demographic threat, it was also inevitable that ethnicity entered the dissident movement in Bhutan right from the beginning. After the Sikkimese Chief Minister Nar Bahadur Bhandari consolidated his power and the GNLF supremo Subhash Ghising formed his hill council, the movement was given its stimuli along ethnic lines.

These developments obviously aroused Nepali nationalism, and Thimphu could not miss the elation of the dissident movement, which began moving its bases into Nepal in 1990. The "Greater Nepal" or Gurkhaland concept also loomed in the background as Kathmandu voiced moral support for the movement for "democracy and human rights" in Bhutan. Prime Minister G. P. Koirala himself announced that he had helped organise, on Bhutanese soil, the Nepali dissident organisation called the Bhutan State Congress in the early 1950s.

Neither could the international scenario be more accommodating as democracy became a trend across the globe, from the Soviet Union to Eastern Europe, and to Nepal itself, which reduced to a constitutional status a monarchy that had ruled Nepal for over two centuries. Along with the new slogans for democracy came the concept of human rights, which was yet another winner with the international community. As the camps in Nepal began to swell with tenants who brought with them horror stories of physical and mental abuse, observers began turning a critical eye on Bhutan. With Western governments linking aid to human rights, the allegations of government atrocities and the plight of the refugees have been translated into pressure on Thimphu and a boost for the anti-government movement.

Thus, timing became a key factor for the growth of the movement. A dissident publication urged Nepalis to take up arms against the government: "It is time for us to say to ourselves...we have nothing to lose, but gain. The hour has struck for the historic conflict." But Bhutan too has much to ask of itself. Why were major steps like the census exercise taken in 1988? If the threat was a demographic invasion by the Nepalis, why was it not conducted earlier? Did the government of Bhutan lack the political acumen to foresee the problem? Was it too complacent or too naive? Was it caught napping?

According to senior Bhutanese officials, the answers lie in the question of priorities and the pre-occupation of the Bhutanese leadership.

King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck took upon himself the burden of launching Bhutan onto the path of modernisation in the early 1960s. In 1972, soon after King Jigme Singye Wangchuck assumed the throne at the age of seventeen, he turned his attention to development, and the widely acclaimed goal of "Gross National Happiness" became the priority of the decade. He was preoccupied with the policy of promoting economic self-reliance and creating individual development plans for every district. When the king did turn to the ethnic Nepali minority, his approach was one of integration, and efforts to encourage the Nepalis into the national mainstream became an important national policy.

But, Bhutanese officials point out, the policies aimed at promoting national integration and creating "one nation, one people" were seen by the ethnic Nepalis as a development that was "harmful to their aim of creating a Nepali-dominated state". An Indian politicial scientist even asks whether the king's own development efforts were so successful that they gave this section of the population enough affluence to hunger for power. Many northern Bhutanese even feel that the king's preferential treatment of the Lhotshampas actually contributed to this problem. Observers also continue to question the factors which led the nation into its predicament.

For Bhutan, it is time for soul-searching. In three decades of planned development, the kingdom had taken such great strides in the process of modernisation that, by the 1980s, the government may have outdone itself in development, oblivious to the ethnic cauldron brewing under the surface. Having skipped generations of the growth process, Bhutan faces many dilemmas: satellite communication has come while roads are still being constructed, computers have come in before typewriters, faxes before telephone lines. Behind the deceptive facade of sophistication is a raw and relatively unexposed society. Is the international community judging the kingdom by standards it cannot afford? Is it expecting too much?

Bhutan has been viewed with suspicion for what has been described as its "hermit" mentality, the self-imposed isolation that has shaped the national image and kept the kingdom hidden from the world. It was this psyche that led to a restricted tourism policy and injected a note of extreme caution into every facet of its development. This thinking has

also determined Bhutan's priorities and values since it emerged from its jealously-guarded isolation thirty years ago.

The Bhutanese are far from xenophobic. The relatively few people who have visited or worked in the kingdom will agree that the people are more open and uncomplicated than most Asians. But the discerning visitor also points out that the years of being cushioned in the security of their "Shangrila" has left the people less exposed to current realities than, for example, their Nepali neighbours. And it was, perhaps, this innocence - or naivete - that left them oblivious to a sizzling fuse even as they sat on the powder keg.

In the past, the world spoke of subjects rather than citizens, territories rather than state boundaries, military power rather than cultural identity. The concepts of national boundaries and nation states were only conceived this century, and the Bhutanese leadership displayed remarkable foresight by not only tuning in to this perception but by making this cultural sensitivity the very essence of Bhutan's existence.

Bhutan's political and cultural identity, drawn from the Drukpa Kagyu sect of Mahayana Buddhism, became clearly defined in the mid-17th century during the rule of Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal. Today, it has become a cause of fierce pride for the Bhutanese that because the Drukpa identity became so distinct, it provided the cohesion for Bhutan to resist numerous external invasions. Bhutan was never colonised and remained a sovereign independent country.

King Jigme Singye Wangchuck repeatedly told his people that, without economic or military might, Bhutan's strength as a nation lay in its unique and distinct identity. It was this identity that protected and preserved Bhutan and also provided the foundation for its major policies. Today, it is this identity which stands on trial as the demographic pressures of the region encroach on the existing balance. Bhutan's critics describe this psyche as Drukpa chauvinism. But historians regard it as the threat perception of a small country with a small population. The Bhutanese see themselves as an "endangered species". Bhutan's survival has been threatened, and it is reacting.

But the Bhutanese response, in many ways, is characterised by a lack of political and international experience. While it has history, logic, and legal justifications on its side, Bhutan has lost out on the slogans required in modern political warfare. As a result, it risks losing international sympathy. In the age of communications, Bhutan lacks the

media tools and the public relations knowhow to articulate its own sensitivities and to respond to aggressive propaganda. Bhutan does not yet have a media policy to deal with the issue. And this has become a major disadvantage because Bhutan has no defence when the media and international establishments view the government - especially a monarchy - with suspicion.

Within the country itself, the people have reacted to the problem with anxiety, then anger. As a series of shock waves in the first two years of the movement appeared to threaten the country and their very existence, the Bhutanese of non-Nepali origin took a hard-line stand on the problem. Fuelled by the ethnicity of the movement, the elected representatives of the people in the National Assembly not only rejected the demands of the dissidents, but have also been criticising the government for compromising the security of the country.

In the last two sessions of the 154-member National Assembly, the 105 people's representatives directed an emotion-charged debate against the government, even criticising the king for adopting what they saw as a conciliatory and weak stand on the problem. The specific demands included the punishment of all "anti-nationals", eviction of their families, and even ridding the civil service of all Lhotshampas. As a result, the government of Bhutan treads a delicate path, wedged between hard-line pressure from the Bhutanese majority, allegations by the dissidents of a variety of human rights violations, and international concern for the people who have been displaced in the crisis.

At the helm, King Jigme Singye Wangchuck is confronted with the greatest challenge a monarch could face: a threat to the survival of his country. In 1991, the king responded to the crisis with a pledge that shook the nation: "If I, as the king, cannot protect the sovereignty and integrity of our country and ensure a secure future for our people, then it is my duty to accept full responsibility and abdicate". The National Assembly struck a deal with the king. It withdrew its opposition to the king's policy of "balanced development" and reposed in him the full responsibility of solving the "anti-national problem". Since then, the government has allocated a substantial chunk of the national budget to the southern districts in the country's seventh development plan, which beganin 1992. Schools and health facilities have been opened and development projects, which were closed when the violence erupted, have been resumed.

King Jigme Singye Wangchuck has also directed much of his dynamism towards the problem which paralysed much of southern Bhutan. He tours the southern districts by road almost every month and walks through the villages to talk to the people. He issued several edicts to protect the Lhotshampa population against alleged abuses by district officials, and waived rural taxes to stem the flow of Lhotshampas migrating towards Nepal. Between 1990 and March 1993 the king has released a total of 1,577 people detained for anti-government activities and commanded the trials of those responsible for sedition and terrorism. Observers have viewed the moderate moves with relief, especially after the government invited Amnesty International to visit the kingdom to investigate allegations of human rights violations, and the International Committee of the Red Cross to work with the government on prison conditions. Both organisations have expressed their satisfaction with these moves. On the issue of the refugees in Nepal, attention shifted from southern Bhutan to the camps in Nepal and now focuses on the political arena.

"History has been unkind to king", King Jigme Singye Wangchuck once told a journalist. But if history was unkind to kings, modern times are not any kinder. The pressures mount against the King of Bhutan as he leads the Bhutanese people in a fight for the survival of their country and for the protection of a rare and unique Buddhist culture that deserves its precious place in human history.

The Dissidents

Christopher Strawn

In 1987, no one would have predicted that in five years' time over 84,000 refugees from Bhutan would be living in camps in Nepal. Yet, despite the turbulence that has disturbed the "Land of the Peaceful Dragon", there is no clear answer to what happened and why. The Government of Bhutan claims that the people in the camps are illegal settlers, economic refugees, citizens who voluntarily left the country, or conspirators bent on overthrowing the government through political and demographic pressure. In a dramatically different story, the refugees claim that they were forced out of the country: that some were evicted at gunpoint by the army; that some were arrested, tortured, raped; that families who had lived in Bhutan for generations were stripped of citizenship and ordered to leave; that some, seeing mass arrests around them and hearing stories of army brutality, left for fear of being the next victims. Both sides plead that they are fighting for their survival—on one side is a nation with its sovereignty and culture threatened, on the other mostly farmers who have lost their fields, their livestock, their livelihood, everything they own.

Is one side telling the truth and the other lying? Or is the truth somewhere in between? It is difficult to know for certain. Bhutan has always restricted foreigners' access to the country, especially so today with journalists they think might report negatively on Bhutan.[1] The refugees, too, would be unlikely to admit to being economic immigrants, or to secretly harbouring desires to overthrow the government. Even though a detailed, unassailable report on the refugee crisis is beyond reach today, it is possible to piece together the basic story of the Bhutanese refugees on the basis of press releases and publications from the Bhutan Government, articles in newspapers and magazines, and tales from the people living in the camps.

The Seeds of Dissent

Since the situation in southern Bhutan deteriorated and thousands fled the country, foreign writers as well as many of the refugees have

searched for the first signs of when the formerly cordial relations between Bhutan's north and south started to sour. Most refugees agree that life was good in Bhutan before 1988, and that the government did little which raised protest. Although some laws and policies foreshadowed the problems to come, the Bhutan government did not implement policies that disturbed the Nepali Bhutanese until 1988: first, a census exercise revoked some people's citizenship and frightened other Nepali Bhutanese; this was followed by a Bhutanisation programme aimed at turning the nation into a mirror of Ngalong culture. These policies led to demonstrations throughout southern Bhutan in September and October of 1990.

Prior to 1988, the Bhutan Government began to restrict the actions of the southern Bhutanese and indicated its growing concern with the ethnic Nepalis in Bhutan. These policies included the Marriage Act of 1980, the Bhutanisation programme for Nepali Bhutanese government officials, the "decentralisation" policy of the early 1980s, the 1985 Citizenship Act, the Green Belt proposal, the sixth five-year development plan's preservation and promotion of "national identity", the eviction of foreign workers and illegal aliens from 1986 to 1987, and an incentive scheme for Drukpa-Nepali intermarriage. The implementation of the 1985 Citizenship Act and the Sixth Plan's proposals for a "national identity" in 1988 and 1989 triggered the initial Nepali protest. Additionally, the decentralisation policy of the early 1980s shaped the organisational framework through which the government implemented and enforced cultural policies. Although these pre-1988 policies did not impose Drukpa traditions on the Nepali Bhutanese to the extent that later policies would, they demonstrate that the government for at least a decade followed a plan to slowly Bhutanise the Nepalis.

The 1980 Marriage Act

The government implemented the 1980 Marriage Act to control the marriage of Bhutanese citizens to foreigners, but in fact the original 1958 Citizenship Act, modified in 1977, already restricted and penalised marriages between nationals and non-nationals. Under the 1977 Act, Bhutanese citizens had the right to marry whomever they chose. However, according to the 1977 Act, unlike the 1958 Citizenship Act, the spouse of a Bhutanese national did not automatically acquire citizenship by marriage. Although the non-national spouse

was allowed to reside in Bhutan, if s/he wished to become a citizen s/he had to apply for citizenship by naturalisation, which required that the applicant had resided for a minimum of twenty years in Bhutan (fifteen for government servants) and had "some knowledge of the Bhutanese language both spoken and written and the history."[2] Because almost all of the Nepali Bhutanese, except for some government servants, live in the south where there is little linguistic or cultural influence from outside the Nepali community, fulfilling the citizenship requirements would take a considerable investment of time and effort. Many of the less-educated older Nepali Bhutanese farmers, for example, are almost completely ignorant of the Dzongkha language and Ngalong history, though they have lived their whole lives in Bhutan. The 1977 Act also restricted the citizenship of the children of a Bhutanese national and a foreigner. Such children are only granted citizenship when a Bhutanese man is married to a foreign woman, not when a Bhutanese woman marries a foreign man. Although non-national children who have attended Bhutanese schools for a length of time might easily be able to fulfill the government's naturalisation requirements, the policy of restricting the citizenship of children must have kept Bhutanese women from marrying foreigners and settling in Bhutan.

The 1977 Act provided rather strict criteria for non-nationals who marry a Bhutanese national, but the 1980 Marriage Act was even stricter. In contrast to the 1977 Act, the 1980 Marriage Act only formally recognizes marriages, and therefore allows a foreign spouse to live in Bhutan, with prior approval by the government:

> If a Bhutanese citizen wants to obtain a marriage certificate from a court of Law to enter into matrimony with a non-Bhutanese spouse whether residing in the kingdom or outside, he/she will be required to produce two persons as guarantors before the court. One of them must be a reliable Bhutanese citizen in the knowledge of the court and both of them must possess thorough knowledge about the bride and groom. [3]

Without a marriage certificate given by the court, a non-national spouse of a Bhutanese citizen could have problems staying in the country, as s/he would technically be a foreign resident, and the government usually controls foreigners' movements very strictly. In addition to regulating marriages with foreigners, the Marriage Act penalises people who marry outside the country. It states that those in government ser-

vice who marry foreigners should not be promoted past their position at the time of marriage. Anyone marrying a foreigner, according to the 1980 Act, forfeits participation in some farming and livestock assistance programmes as well as the possibility of receiving land or cash loans from the government. Also, a person married to a non-national spouse is ineligible for foreign education and government education assistance inside Bhutan. Upon marriage to a foreigner, a Bhutanese is even expected to pay back the government his/her education expenditures: "[T]he expenses incurred by the government on education or training until the day of marriage will be required to be refunded to the government".[4] Presumably, the reasoning behind this policy is that anyone marrying a foreigner might move out of Bhutan, so that any education or training given by the Bhutanese government would be wasted, in breach of the expectation that those who are trained by the government will serve the government. Clearly, compared to the previous laws regarding marriage to foreigners, the 1980 Act discouraged marriages outside Bhutan by affixing large penalties and strict conditions to any such union. This reflected the government's desire to restrict outside influences in the country, especially influences which would reinforce Nepali culture, since a significant number of Nepalis—roughly 10,000 by government figures—have married outside Bhutan.

When the 1980 Marriage Act was drafted by the Law Committee of the Assembly and approved in 1979, the Assembly apparently debated the law at length. Southern Bhutanese members protested that scholarships awarded to students studying outside Bhutan and married to foreigners should not be withdrawn, and that citizens already married to foreigners should not be adversely affected by the law[5]. The record of the Assembly proceedings also records some animosity over the issue between southern and other Bhutanese: one of the eastern members from Mongar "suggested that permanent rules with regard to penalizing those who marry foreigners be framed".[6] Even though the sentiments of the Mongar representative are observed in the 1980 Marriage Act over those of the southern Bhutanese, the southern Bhutanese did not contest the law outside the Assembly, and the law appears not to have greatly affected southern Bhutanese marriages. For one, the Act was not applied retroactively to people who had already married foreigners. Also, the restrictive citizenship law probably reflected the attitudes of many southern Bhutanese, not just those of people from the

north. DNS Dhakal, the General Secretary of the BNDP, for instance, agrees that since Bhutan, as a small country, must be wary of foreign influence, it needs to maintain restrictive laws on citizenship and foreign residence. Consequently, it seems that the 1980 Marriage Act's restrictions regarding non-citizen residents and approved marriages functioned smoothly, or at least were accepted by the populace, even if Bhutanese married to non-nationals forfeited some of their privileges.

Driglam Namzha

The broad implementation of the policy of Bhutanisation which evoked protests from southerners after 1988 was preceded by the requirement that government officials such as Mandals and Chimis should receive tuition in Driglam Namzha—the Ngalong code of conduct—and wear the Ngalong dress. The Home Ministry introduced this policy in the National Assembly at the end of the 1970s, with some protest from representatives from the south:

> In accordance with the resolution 40 of the 50th Session [1978], the National Assembly decided that the Government and people must observe and promote our cultural heritage. In this regard, the Home Ministry had circulated a brief compilation of Pelden Drukpai Diglam Namzha (principles of Bhutanese customs and traditions) in the Assembly. Most of the members agreed and consented that the National dress must be worn during the National Assembly... However, some members from southern Bhutan requested that they be exempted from wearing the national dress, as they felt they would be criticised by some members of their society. The National Assembly decided that all people must observe the Pelden Drukpai Diglam Namzha.[7]

While it is unclear whether this resolution, in stating "all people must observe" Driglam Namzha, requires that everyone in the country must wear national dress and follow Driglam Namzha, its implementation in the early 1980s affected only government officials, whom the government required to take a course in Driglam Namzha, learn some Dzongkha, and wear the national dress when engaged in official duties. Interestingly, in 1973 the National Assembly passed a similar resolution requiring all Bhutanese citizens to wear the national dress while in Bhutan, allowing only those people who operated modern machinery and those working outside the country not to wear national dress. A penalty of one month's imprisonment was assessed if one was caught not wearing the national dress.[8] Apparently, like the 1978 resolution,

the government never enforced the 1973 resolution. The lack of enforcement might have reflected the sentiments of the more tolerant high-level government officials and the King, who might have baulked at such a proposition, and also a division of opinion within the Assembly itself. In 1979, for example, there seemed to be disagreements about the methods by which Assembly members wanted to promote national unity. In 1980 the Assembly approved one member's resolution to afford equal understanding and respect to all cultures in Bhutan: "To foster unity among people of different regions with different languages, customs and traditions, dress and food habits... the Department of Education should incorporate the teaching of various communities' customs and traditions, languages, dress and food habits".[9] If, however, there was vacillation in the late '70s and early '80s in choosing between the paths of inclusive integration and cultural imposition in order to achieve national unity, by 1988 and 1989 it was clear that the government was choosing the latter.

Decentralisation

Bhutan officially introduced the policy of decentralisation in 1981 with the fifth five year plan.[10] The key elements of the policy were the establishment of a Royal Civil Service Commission to oversee civil servant actions and recruitment, the creation of district level committees, the Dzongkhag Yargey Tshogchungs (DYTs), in order to increase public participation in development planning, and an increase in the powers of the Dzongda, the chief district officer. Although the stated goal of decentralisation was to increase grass-roots decision-making, its end effect was, ironically, to strengthen the King's and higher officials' hold on the country, taking power out of the hands of publicly-elected representatives. This was especially visible at the village level, where Mandals' responsibilities were gradually handed over to the Dzongdas. Former Mandals (village block headmen) now in the refugee camps complain that after 1985 the Dzongdas became more and more powerful, and were by 1987 in almost complete control of the districts. In 1985, the Mandal's term of office was reduced from five years (though many served for longer periods of time) to three years. Election procedures changed as well. While the process of election used differed slightly in every village, public representatives were more or less elected by the people, with each household casting one vote. Many southern

districts elected Mandals and Chimis (representatives in the National Assembly) by secret ballot, with villagers nominating candidates for Mandal and villages collectively nominating Chimis. From around 1985, however, Dzongdas greatly influenced elections.

Mandals in the camps claim that the Dzongdas handpicked candidates, making it clear whom they favoured to win the election. Since the Dzongdas would sometimes make people vote in public, so that it was clear who voted for whom, people were afraid to challenge the Dzongda, and consequently his candidate was usually elected. According to former Mandals, the Dzongda can now elect essentially whom he wants, and often Mandals are simply appointed. Also, the election of Chimis by popular franchise was replaced from 1985 to 1987 with a lottery system, a Ngalong tradition, where one of several candidates nominated by the people and the Dzongda would be randomly selected. The system reverted to the old procedure in 1987 after public protests, though former Chimis now in exile claim that the Dzongda gained even more influence in choosing the Chimis after the lottery system was abolished. The DYT members, who used to be nominated and elected by Mandals, also began to be appointed by the Dzongdas or even the central government.

A further example of how decentralisation became centralisation is evident in the modified National Assembly procedure. Whereas previously a villager might have given a petition for the National Assembly first to a Mandal, who then forwarded it to a Chimi, under the decentralisation policy any petitions had to be approved by the DYTs before they could go to the assembly. Some of the former Chimis in the camps remember occasions when they raised what they thought were substantive issues only to be told to submit them first to the DYTs. In this way, the Chimi's power was limited by having to seek the approval of the supposedly grass-roots DYT, which was increasingly packed with representatives appointed by high officials—Dzongdas, the central government, and the monk body— so that in effect all subjects brought up in the Assembly were initiated or approved by top officials or the appointees of top officials. The centralisation of power in the DYTs and in the hands of the Dzongdas distanced the government from the people by curtailing the Mandals' role as intermediaries. The subordination of the Mandals to the Dzongdas facilitated the implementation of

the Bhutanisation policy and the 1988 census, because avenues of protest and decision-making were removed from the Mandals, who might have opposed the policy or hesitated to implement it.

The 1985 Citizenship Act

The Citizenship Act of 1985, though indicated as one of the main points of contention by the Nepali Bhutanese dissidents, at first glance appears to be nothing out of the ordinary. The regulations regarding citizenship by birth, for example, are quite standard: if both parents of a person are citizens of Bhutan, then the person is a citizen by birth. But could one be born in Bhutan, be able to trace one's family back several generations, and still not be a citizen? The question is crucial because this is what the refugees allege has happened in Bhutan over the past few years. In fact, the Act is not as clearcut as it seems. First of all, the Act is retroactive: "In case of conflict between the provisions of this Act [The 1985 Bhutan Citizenship Act] and the provisions of any previous laws, rules and regulations relating to citizenship, the provisions of this Act shall prevail."[11] There is no grandfather clause in the Act whatsoever, although it was later made clear that it applied only to those couples married after 1985. This means that if the Act is more strict in determining citizenship than previous laws, people who were once permanently-domiciled citizens of Bhutan could have found themselves suddenly becoming non-nationals, in which case they would have to apply for citizenship.

Was being reclassified a non-national a real concern for the Nepali Bhutanese under the 1985 Act? Ultimately, the most one can say is that it is uncertain, but there is a potential problem in the Act for the southern Bhutanese. While the 1985 Act gives the King power to grant citizenship by *kasho*, the method of granting *kasho* outlined in the Act is distinct: "A person shall then be deemed to be a citizen of Bhutan upon receiving a *kasho* from His Majesty the King of Bhutan according to Form GA of this Act."[12] This *kasho* is in a specified form and for an individual. This could imply that the single *kasho* granted to the Nepali Bhutanese in 1959 is now invalid, and either a new *kasho* must be granted or the Nepali Bhutanese must apply for citizenship. For the Nepalis of southern Bhutan, applying for citizenship is a problem, as the naturalisation procedures of the 1985 Act are very strict. The applicant for citizenship through naturalisation has to be able to speak, read,

and write Dzongkha proficiently and have "good knowledge of the culture, customs, traditions, and history of Bhutan". Fulfilling the requirements might not have been so problematic had the southern Bhutanese been allowed to travel freely to the north before the 1970s, been taught Dzongkha in southern schools before the 1970s, or permitted to own land in the north. While government officials posted in the north or young adults schooled in Bhutan might pass, most older people and people without much education, of course, would not fulfill naturalisation requirements.

The other way one can become a citizen is by registration: "A person permanently domiciled in Bhutan on or before December 31, 1958, and whose name is registered in the census register maintained by the Ministry of Home Affairs shall be deemed to be a citizen of Bhutan by registration".[13] This clause seems to apply specifically to the Nepali Bhutanese and to guarantee that those who received the earlier *kasho* are given citizenship. Still, citizenship by registration could present some difficulties. How accurate are the records of the Home Ministry, especially in the south? Since the Home Ministry did not exist until 1968, could it have any records for 1958? Does the specification that a person be registered in the Ministry of Home Affairs records mean that other forms of proof, such as land tax receipts or a Mandal's affirmation, are not acceptable? Because the government appeared to be very concerned with increased migration after 1958, it probably kept very strict records concerning registration. Also, since the government reportedly had a plan to issue citizenship cards to Nepali citizens in 1958, which was stopped because of fears that it might lead to misunderstandings on the part of the Nepalis unless applied to all Bhutanese, it is likely that some records existed. In fact, the former Mandals in the refugee camps claim that they submitted lists of citizens in their villages to the government every year with the *kajana* records and regularly recorded censuses. A regular census procedure is evinced in the 45th resolution of the 52nd session of the National Assembly, which resolved "that the census record, which is prepared only after a period of two-three years in southern districts, shall now be prepared every year as practised in the interior districts". Because of the likely existence of accurate census records, the Citizenship Act of 1985 should not have threatened the citizenship of the Nepali Bhutanese because accurate documents should have existed.

Arguably, the Citizenship Act is unfair. Anyone who acquires the citizenship of another country, or property in a foreign country, forfeits Bhutanese citizenship. The Act also qualifies the grant of citizenship by naturalisation, allowing the government to revoke citizenship if obtained "by means of fraud, false representation or the concealment of any material fact". Also, any person who leaves Bhutan of their own accord and whose name is not recorded in the citizenship register for a year loses citizenship. Finally, a naturalised citizen can be stripped of citizenship "at any time if that person has shown by act or speech to be disloyal in any manner whatsoever to the King, Country and People of Bhutan."[14] Still, since the Nepalis should be citizens by registration, and not naturalisation, the especially restrictive grant of citizenship by naturalisation should not have threatened them.

Even though the Citizenship Act of 1985 did not appear too harsh, especially compared to the Marriage Act of 1980, there were definite signs that it could be used against the Nepali Bhutanese and make it difficult for them to prove citizenship, which is why some of the ex-Chimis claim they vigorously protested against the law. In fact, the Citizenship Act was reportedly withdrawn from heated National Assembly debates, and simply introduced as law in 1986 without National Assembly approval. Moreover, the law appeared to have great scope for interpretation and was vague regarding some procedures. For example, how did one prove that one's parents were citizens, or know if one was recorded in the Ministry's records? Yet, the complaints that were to come from people who claim they were forced to prove their citizenship before committees seem to be weaknesses either of implementation or record-keeping rather than a fault of the 1985 Citizenship Act.

The Green Belt Proposal

If by this time it was not evident that a government policy to assimilate or remove the Nepali Bhutanese was taking shape, the Green Belt proposal added support to the supposition. Originally proposed in 1984, the Green Belt was supposed to be a two kilometre swathe that would run along the southern border. Its purpose, according to a government report from 1990, was to check erosion, and thereby flooding in India, and provide a distinct physical border between Bhutan and India.[15] While "main townships" would not be included in the Green Belt, all

other areas were fair game, and the government was expecting to displace people, either offering compensation or resettlement. The values of orchards, dry land, paddy land, and houses within the proposed Green Belt were all to be assessed, and the government would compensate the people for their land, giving between 15,000 and 30,000 Nu. per acre of paddy land and 8,000 to 15,000 Nu. per acre of dry land. Alternatively, people could opt for replacement of land and resettlement in the districts of Samchi, Shemgang, Dagana, and Wangdi Phodrang.[16] Although, obviously, the main towns of Phuntsholing, Geylegphug, and Sibsoo could not be moved or all their inhabitants resettled, technically all other areas might have become forest, displacing a total of 30% of the Nepali population, according to refugee sources.[17] Although the government does not give figures for the total expected displacement, the portion of Green Belt in one part of Samchi alone would have affected 1175 households (around 7000 people), according to government estimates.[18] Furthermore, few southerners would have wanted to settle in the cold north with less fertile land and no Nepali community, so they would perhaps have chosen to take monetary compensation and go to Nepal or India. Some refugees claim this was an unabashed policy to depopulate the south.[19] Indeed, a 28 May 1990 memo from Deputy Home Minister Dago Tshering to the Ministry of Finance clearly shows that the government was more interested in getting people to leave than in resettling them: "I shall, therefore, be happy if you will kindly purchase lands from those falling within the Green Belt but entirely on their expressed desire and voluntary basis. The present acquisition should exclude those people who wish to have land replacement or desire to be rehabilitated in the resettlement area". In other words, in 1990 the Home Ministry was implementing only part of the Green Belt policy, buying land from people who were willing to leave the country, but not from those who would stay in Bhutan. In its own way, the Green Belt was a perfect encapsulation of the government's later Bhutanisation programme: those who would not have wanted to settle in the north, and thus be demographically integrated into Bhutan, would leave; the others, as time passed, would adopt Drukpa traditions since they were living in the north, and at any rate they would not be a strategically situated mass on the Indian border. Even though the plan's formulation began in 1984 with India's help

and backing, it ended up not being financed, as donors, India included, backed out when it came to implementation in the 1990s.

The Sixth Five-Year Plan

The sixth five year plan (1987-1992), formulated in the mid-eighties but released in 1987, was the precursor to the Bhutanisation programme implemented in 1988. The plan set "preservation and promotion of national identity" as one of its nine policy objectives.[20] According to RB Basnet, one of the four officials involved in drafting the plan and now the President of the BNDP, originally there was only a brief mention of the importance of culture. Yet the plan was changed by the government when it was released, so that the cultural preservation objective went beyond simply acknowledging the value of maintaining traditions:

> The well-being and security of the country depends on the strength of its culture, traditions and value systems. Therefore, every effort must be made to foster the unfailing faith, love and respect for the country's traditional values and institutions that have provided the basis and ensured the security and sovereignty of the nation while giving it a distinct national identity. [21]

One western economist reportedly protested against the emphasis on an economic externality such as "national identity" as a rather unusual goal for an economic plan for a nation's development. Since the later Driglam Namzha codes, religious pressures, language, and dress restrictions are viewed as a critical element of the "national identity" policy, the sixth plan might have been the inspiration for Bhutanisation; at least, the sixth plan definitely foretells its coming.

The Assembly also set "national self-reliance" as one of the nine objectives of the Sixth Plan. This redressed the weaknesses perpetuated by development, which required bringing foreign nationals into the country as labourers and skilled workers. Before development started in the 1960s, Bhutan was completely "self-reliant" because there were almost no foreigners in the country, but at the same time the country faced extreme poverty and health problems. Before development, foreigners were not necessary for the day-to-day running of the country, as they are now to staff schools, maintain roads, help run industries, etc. Dependence on foreign labour is depicted as a security issue for Bhutan: it is necessary to become self-reliant in order to ensure the

"sovereignty and security of the nation". In turn, a decrease in foreign influence reinforces the "identity" objective of the sixth plan, described above.[22] Actually, the Assembly has reiterated the importance of protecting the sovereignty of the country for years, noting specifically that foreign workers should be replaced as soon as possible and Bhutanese people should be put in their place.[23] To fulfill this objective, the government, and often the Assembly members, were willing to subjugate the economy, curtailing the import of non-national labourers even though they were desperately needed to fill demand, to perceived self-reliance and security issues. For example, the use of non-national seasonal labourers in the south, mainly to help with the harvest of cash crops, was stopped in the early 1970s by the 36th National Assembly. Although southern members received permission for three years to import seasonal labourers in the 49th session of the Assembly, in the 60th session the King commanded that foreign labour be banned and that the Food Corporation of Bhutan and the Dzongkhag should help farmers in Samchi and Gaylegphug to find alternatives to importing labour in the next two years.[24] If government figures are accurate, Bhutan's concern about undue foreign influence from non-national labour is quite legitimate. In the 66th session of the Assembly in February 1988, Dago Tshering, then Deputy Home Minister, pointed out that over 100,000 non-nationals were in the country, mostly employed in development projects, where they comprising 80% of the work force.[25] Certainly such figures indicate Bhutan's labour need in the light of its small available labour pool. Notably, even though they were hurt by labour import restrictions, the southerners did not object to the expulsion of non-national workers. In fact, people in the south had supported this policy from the 1970s. In 1978 the southern Assembly member from Lamidara suggested issuing ID cards in order to enable the detection of foreign workers, echoing the government's statements by arguing that the issue was one of "future security".[26]

In line with the objectives of the sixth plan, non-national workers were either evicted or encouraged to leave the country from 1986 to 1988. The first to go were Nepali and Indian manual labourers working on Bhutanese development projects (Indian project staff, of course, could not be evicted), especially construction such as road building and maintenance, in which there were many Nepali workers, some of whom had reportedly overstayed their permits and settled in Bhutan.[27]

These people were unceremoniously evicted, in some cases being shipped out of Bhutan into India by the truckload.[28] Next, Indian advisors and skilled workers were either retired, demoted, or placed on contract service to encourage them to leave.[29] Additionally, the policy of putting Bhutanese in charge of education put the Indian headmasters out of their jobs. While the Indian headmasters were allowed to stay in the country, they took a demotion in position if not a salary cut. The Jesuits, who were invited into the country to establish higher education during the 1960s, were asked to leave in 1988 simply because the government did not renew their contract, which expired in 1988.[30] For professionals employed in Bhutan, this Bhutanisation of the workforce was done without animosity, but it was obvious that the government wanted to decrease the number of non-nationals employed in Bhutan as much as possible.

In order to counter the effects of the removal of non-national skilled and manual labour, the government simply put unqualified people into higher positions, acknowledging that the quality would decrease initially. For manual labour needs, the government started a National Work-Force programme in 1987, but this could not fill the gap of imported labourers, as reflected by the King's statement in the 67th Assembly that "of the 30,000 persons required to be mobilised under the national workforce programme, so far 5,000 have come forward from the 18 Dzongkhags, leaving a shortage of 25,000".[31] The government also relied more on the system of obligatory labour duty, with each house giving up to one person for two weeks per year.

Incentives for Intermarriage

The monetary incentive for Drukpa-Nepali intermarriage is a policy which clearly indicates the government's concern with bringing the Drukpa and Nepali elements of Bhutan together. Yet the government's abandonment of this policy in the early 1990s shows a change in policy regarding the Nepalis. The incentive first started in the late 1970s, and was passed as the 25th resolution in the 50th session of the Assembly in 1978. The incentive, granting 5,000 Nu. to encourage marriage, increased to 10,000 in 1989[32], was a benevolent policy, trying to effect integration through non-coercive means, but still indicated the government's desire to bring the Nepalis into Drukpa culture. The policy was working steadily among educated people in the country—armed per-

sonnel, teachers, health workers, and technicians—if not among the villagers. Even at the highest level, the policy seemingly had effect, as the King's third sister Ashi Pema Laden married Barun Gurung, a Nepali resident of Samchi, and Minister Om Pradhan married a Sarchhop, although both Pradhan and Gurung were members of the elite Nepali families. Now the government views this policy as a failure, and in 1991 it stopped giving the incentive.[33] Evidently, the rate of change was not speedy enough, though the rather surprising withdrawal of this long-standing policy could also be explained by the government's shift to a Drukpa nationalism that ran against a Nepali dilution of the Drukpa culture.

The Drift Towards Nationalism

Although the present crisis began to emerge during the 1980s, the seeds of the problem, particularly with respect to culture and tradition, have really existed since the 1950s, when the presence of a large Nepali population in the south started to occupy a place on the national political agenda, unquestionably because of the Bhutan State Congress uprising. Since then, traditionalists in the National Assembly have consistently insisted on restricting foreign workers' entry into Bhutan and on converting the Nepali Hindus to Buddhism, as well as attempting to ensure that the Nepali population does not grow, either by immigration or marriage to non-nationals. Nevertheless, traditionalist sentiment was suppressed by King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck. During King Jigme Singye's time, the traditionalist attitudes gained prominence. Investigating the restrictive laws passed prior to the outbreak of problems in 1988, the direction that the government was taking looks predictable. Yet, while hints of the policies to come were evident in the late 1970s, the policies at that time were not far-reaching, and it was not obvious that Bhutan was going to crack down on the Nepalis to any great extent. In fact, looking at even the earliest National Assembly records, one can find many instances where Assembly members and government officials expressed the desire to solidify Drukpa culture and protect Bhutan from foreign influence, but all through King Jigme Dorji's time the conditions for the Nepali Bhutanese improved. King Jigme Dorji himself is usually described as an enlightened leader. Even though he may have been forced by pressure from India and the Bhutan State Congress agitation to improve the lot of the Nepalis,

granting them citizenship and a role in the government, he seems to have supported the idea of a multi-cultural Bhutan. When Jigme Singye Wangchuck came of age, he also appeared to be following in his father's footsteps. But, starting primarily in the mid-1980s, he began to push, albeit through generally uncoercive means, for a Bhutan that reflected the Ngalong culture. Despite the presence of conservative, traditionalist elements, especially the monk body and some Assembly members, that pressed for the promotion of Ngalong culture for all citizens, before 1988 it seemed that the government had not firmly decided to impose it on the Nepalis in Bhutan. What is clear is that prior to 1988 the government was moving away from simply letting the southern Bhutanese live as they pleased, continuing their cultural traditions. After 1988, all tolerance of Nepali Bhutanese cultural freedom disappeared.

The Genesis of the Crisis

The 1988 Census

The tangible beginning of the present political crisis in Bhutan is the 1988 census, which was undertaken with the intention of correcting the mistakes of the previous nationwide census conducted in the early 1980s. The government's purpose in the earlier census was to distribute national identity cards to all Bhutanese citizens based on factual information recorded with the Home Ministry and recommendations from village Mandals and district officials. By 1988, most Bhutanese had obtained ID cards duly certified by the Department of Registration, Ministry of Home Affairs.

The 1988 census was also the first implementation of the 1985 Citizenship Act. Reportedly, southern Bhutanese Assembly members and bureaucrats had protested against the Act, worrying about the retroactive application of the law, marriage restrictions, and the 1958 cut-off date for citizenship. Particularly, people seemed to be worried about the possibility that people who were citizens of Bhutan previously, and who had even been given ID cards, might lose their citizenship because they came to Bhutan after 1958 or were married to foreigners. The government, however, simply introduced the Act as law in 1986 despite protests, and reportedly without the approval of the Assembly.

The objective of the 1988 census was to re-establish Bhutanese citizenship, particularly the citizenship of the southern population, since the Ministry of Home Affairs suspected the presence of a large number of illegal immigrants on the southern border.[34] This alleged discovery, however, must be seen against the backdrop of the Bhutan government's attempt to dislocate the southern population by establishing the Green Belt as well as the earlier eviction of the non-national workforce from the Kingdom.

The Home Ministry reportedly constituted census teams comprised primarily of Drukpa loyalists, with little consideration of whether or not the members had experience in dealing with the illiterate public. With strict orders from the Home Ministry, and on the assumption that most of the said non-nationals lived in southern villages, the census teams began enumeration in the south, requiring each family to produce a tax receipt proving residence in or before 1958 for a Certificate of Origin (CO) issued by a district administrator upon confirmation given by a village committee comprised of the village Mandal, *karbari* (assistant Mandal), and village elders.

To acquire the CO, people were required to go back to their place of birth. If a person lived in his/her district of origin, acquiring a CO was only a small inconvenience. But for those people who had resettled in Geylegphug, Dagana, and Samdrupjongkhar, the requirement was difficult. Parts of Geylegphug, Dagana, and Samdrupjongkhar districts were opened in the 1960s for settlement by *sukumbasis* (landless people), people with inferior lands, and flood-affected families. People in this area therefore had to cover long distances to collect their CO, sometimes spending weeks in their district of origin. Villagers were also harrassed by the over-cautious approach of the census teams, either trying to dig out more information about the person applying for the CO or else purposefully delaying the process.

Some people with credible documents experienced problems. On some occasions, those who were unable to produce documents dated from or before 1958, and those who had left Bhutan for a period of time, sometimes for as little as a few months, experienced difficulties, according to Mandals. First, since the statements of the Mandals were not always accepted as evidence, people without documents, either because they had never kept them, their houses had burned down, or other family members had them, were threatened with a loss of citizen-

ship even though they had been born in Bhutan and lived in the same area their entire life. Some refugees even allege that they were forced to show a 1958 tax receipt specifically. A tax receipt before that time was not taken as proof of citizenship, ostensibly because a person could have left the country and then resettled in Bhutan after 1958, the cut-off year for citizenship. The requirement to produce a specific year's tax receipt from over 30 years ago would obviously be difficult for a population that was mostly illiterate and not normally required to produce historical documents. Some also complain of the unpleasantness of appearing before the census team. Simply because the burden of proof lay on the person's shoulders, going before the census team could be a harrowing experience for a person without clear documentation.

For those who had married outside the country, the 1988 census was a potentially devastating exercise. Many people complained to the Mandals and sent protests to or sought advice from Assembly members, high-level bureaucrats, and Royal Advisory Council member Tek Nath Rizal when their spouses and sometimes their children were declared to be non-nationals. The most significant case was that of the wife of Budhiman Mote Darjee, a Bhutanese citizen of Chokana block, Chirang. Born outside Bhutan, she was told in early 1988 that, as she was not a citizen, she would be forced to leave, and either take her children with her or leave them behind. She was so distraught by the pronouncement that she committed suicide, and the news spread throughout the south. In fact, the King even visited Budhiman soon after on his way to a public meeting in order to get the story behind his wife's death.[35]

For most, the 1988 census presented few problems, but the stringent requirements and several restrictive new policies caused much anxiety among some of the Nepali Bhutanese. The conflicts over the 1988 census were essentially over a change in the citizenship law and census policy. Previously, Mandals and village elders were allowed to vouch for people in the village whom they knew were citizens, but who did not have old documents as proof of citizenship. Non-nationals married to Bhutanese citizens had also been allowed to reside in the country. Both of these situations changed during the 1988 census. Nonetheless, even within these two categories, problems with the 1988 census were somewhat localised, partly because the census was initially conducted only in Chirang and Samchi, and also because some districts and villages did

not experience the complications and harassment that others did. In some parts of Samchi, for example, the census teams consulted with the Mandals and village elders regarding the citizenship of people without papers during the census in March and April 1988, according to RP Subba, a former Chimi on the census team for Samchi and now a refugee. In other places, and in future censuses, the Chimis' and Mandals' assertions were ignored by district officials. Also, unlike in later times, people who were clearly citizens and had the documents to prove it were not forced out of the country during the 1988 census. Since the government itself states that there were some 10,000 marriages to foreigners, and certain census teams appeared to be stricter than others in their interpretation of the census laws requiring documentation of residence, a number of people, but not all of the people in the south, were greatly affected by the census. Through those who suffered during the 1988 census, a cry against the census proceedings rose up in the country.

The Petition to the King

The people of the south did not quietly submit to the methods of the census. Tek Nath Rizal and BP Bhandari, the two Royal Advisory Council members for the south, received protest letters about the problems, and, as was their duty, investigated what was going on. First they approached several top Nepali Bhutanese bureaucrats, and then, believing that the census was unfair and indiscriminate, they decided that Rizal should go to talk with the King, who told him to put everything down in writing.[36] Realizing the importance of this, a group of top Nepali Bhutanese government servants worked together to help construct a written appeal: RB Basnet, the then Director of Posts, Telegraphs, and Civil Wireless; Achut Bhandari, Director of the SAARC division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Hari Chetri, Second Secretary in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs; Lok Bahadur Gurung, a High Court Judge; Meghraj Gurung, Director of the Royal Institute of Management; Subarna Lama, Deputy Secretary in the Ministry of Trade and Industry; Bhim Subba, Director of the Department of Power; and Sangpa Tamang, Director of the Public Works Department. The group met several times in each others' houses in Thimphu, openly, in fact, because the King had commanded Rizal to draft a peti-

tion and consult others in doing so. Rizal and Bhandari presented the petition on April 9th, 1988.

The petition first outlines the concerns of the general public, pinpointing the flaws and discriminatory aspects of the Marriage and Citizenship Acts and the psychological impact of the methods adopted by the teams in the census enumeration. It concludes with an earnest appeal to the King for his intervention and reconsideration of the Marriage and Citizenship Acts in order to address the grievances of the southerners. Soon after receiving the petition, the King visited the Chirang, Geylegphug, and Samchi Dzongkhags to make a personal assessment of the situation. He then returned to Thimphu and convened a cabinet meeting to give a decision on the petition.

Rizal, though a cabinet member, was told not to attend the meeting. The cabinet charged Rizal with treason, a week after he submitted the petition. Rizal alone was arrested, as he was viewed as the main person behind the investigation into the problems. Bhandari, the other RAC member, escaped punishment by pleading that, because of his poor English, he had signed the petition without fully understanding its contents.[37] The arrest shocked both Rizal and the others involved in drafting the petition, as the King had previously stipulated in the National Assembly that RAC members would be free to criticise policy without fear of retribution:

> Firstly attention was drawn to Rule 11 of the document [Rules and Regulations of the RAC] which provided that the Royal Advisory Council will observe the activities of the Government officials, including that of His Majesty the King, and report any activity which seemed in its view to be in the disinterest of the Kingdom, firstly to His Majesty, the King... His Majesty the King was... pleased to reaffirm that any action of the King which placed the interest of the kingdom in jeopardy, deserved to be brought to the attention of the National Assembly without any hesitation. [38]

Rizal was detained and reportedly humiliated for three days. Although pardoned by the King three days after his arrest, Rizal was coerced into signing a confession and an agreement, witnessed by LB Gurung and DN Katwal, both judges of the High Court, stipulating that he would not meet with more than three people at one time. Afterwards he was supposedly under constant surveillance. Of the eight senior bureaucrats involved in drafting the petition, four were required to submit a writ-

ten statement explaining their involvement in drafting the memorandum. Strangely, the remaining four officials were not questioned. Although the officials involved in the drafting other than Rizal were not punished, all felt that the government was eyeing them suspiciously.

Since Rizal's post had been terminated and his actions were controlled in Bhutan, he left Bhutan, first staying in Gauhati, India, for a month, then leaving on the advice of RP Sharma, an advocate in the Assam High Court in Gauhati. According to Rizal's brother, Nanda Lal Rizal, he travelled first to Sikkim, where he met with KN Upreti, a minister in Sikkim, who advised him not to stay in India but to move on to Nepal. Rizal came to Nepal in July 1988. In Nepal, he had the intention of building a movement from outside and putting pressure on the government to change, and he began to contact other political figures. Notably, he met with Subhas Ghising, the Gorkhaland (Gorkaland) National Liberation Front (GNLF) leader, to discuss the situation in Bhutan, and communicated with the veteran Nepali Bhutanese dissident Lamitare. The government of Bhutan changed its strategy quickly. It promoted LB Gurung, who was less outspoken than Rizal, to the post of zonal administrator and sent him to Chirang, where people were politically inclined as well as educated. The government provided concessions on the citizenship issue—granting residence permits for non-national spouses of Bhutanese and retracting the retroactive application of the laws.[39]

Bhutanisation

A policy of Bhutanisation for the Nepalis living throughout southern Bhutan began in late 1988.[40] The policy was similar to the Bhutanisation program that trained the Mandals and Chimis in the 1980s, but was more pervasive and broader in scope. This Bhutanisation took the form of Driglam Namzha training, Dzongkha classes, dilution of Hindu religion, language restrictions, and dress restrictions. Recalling the sixth plan's preservation of "national identity", the goal of Bhutanisation was to go beyond the earlier policies that sought to give the Nepali Bhutanese a separate identity—a feeling of being Bhutanese—from their neighbours across the border, and to actually create a difference in their outward appearance and everyday activities. This plan is encapsulated in the principle of "one people and

one nation", which posited that only through a unity—a sense of being "Bhutanese"—could Bhutan retain its internal harmony and sovereignty. This policy was planned by a committee, called the Dratshang Lhentshog, made up of religious officials in the country, including one Nepali pandit, VN Subedi, which met once a month from 1986 to 1988. Officially, Driglam Namzha, language, and dress restrictions were established by a January 1989 *kasho* from the King, though they had been formulated over the course of several years and implemented in late 1988.

It is difficult to determine exactly to what extent government policies went in promoting "national unity". While the Government denies that people faced "regulations such as the restriction on the length of hair, compulsory norms for eating food, or that Hindu women are not allowed to wear the sindoor and that Hindus are forced to serve and eat beef" as alleged by refugees,[41] dissidents in the camps complain of all these, although only during the most tense and restrictive times. In fact, the government had adopted such restrictive means with regard to the length of hair, dress, etc. for Tibetan women early on.[42] Though the government never gave such a clear mandate in the case of the southerners, the National Assembly resolution record of the 68th Session, in a long but telling quote, clearly indicates that there was a policy to impose Dzongkha and the national dress on the Nepalis:

> The Deputy Home Minister expressed his happiness that the people had now understood the importance of promoting our national identity... He explained that this subject assumed particular significance since some of our ways and practices were identical to the customs and traditions prevailing in other countries and some of our people tend to identify more closely with the people of other countries. In a large country, such diversity would have added colour and character to its national heritage without affecting national security. However, in a small country like ours it would adversely affect the growth of social harmony and unity among the people. The Government has, for these reasons, promulgated a policy to promote Driglam Namzha, National Dress and Language among our people. He emphasized that the successful implementation of this policy is vital for the promotion of our national identity. The Deputy Minister said that His Majesty's KASHO clearly states that the dress or the customs of the people living in the north need not necessarily comprise the basis for promoting our national identity. What is imperative he said, was that a small country such as Bhutan should have a distinct national identity that would always stand as a proud and common symbol of strength to promote and safeguard the wellbeing of the people and sovereignty of the nation. Therefore, it was necessary for all Bhutanese to contribute towards the promotion

of our Driglam Namzha... His Majesty the King was pleased to observe that even though our people faced great inconvenience in learning Dzongkha and Driglam Namzha their response, level of understanding and support for fulfilling this important national objective was most touching and encouraging... His Majesty then expressed his deep appreciation and happiness to our people of southern Bhutan who, in spite of all the difficulties and inconveniences they faced, have wholeheartedly endeavoured to fulfil this important national policy of promoting a unique national identity for ensuring the well being of our beloved country. In this regard, the National Assembly resolved that the Government and public in all dzongkhags should support this policy and contribute towards its successful implementation so that the objectives of this important national goal can be fully attained.[43]

While the government claims that the people in the south supported and submitted to national language and dress promotion, the Assembly records hints of the government's own fears of the Nepalis. Obviously, the people who "identify more closely with the people of other countries" are the Nepalis, who have close relatives in other nations. The idea that people in Bhutan must differ in "traditions and customs" from other cultures in order to protect the nation's sovereignty underscores the fact that the promotion of a national dress and language separate from those of other countries' would originate from Drukpa, not Nepali, fears. It seems far more probable that the Drukpas would look at the Nepalis and insist that they be easily differentiated from the people across the border than that the Nepalis would feel a need to differentiate themselves outwardly from their ethnic relatives. Predictably, Ngalong identity became the subject of the drive for "one nation one people". The above National Assembly quote clearly indicates that the government policy was coercive, and that the government wanted to substitute the culture of the Nepalis with a "Bhutanese" look different from the people across the border. Although the government sometimes claims otherwise, a recent interview with foreign minister Dawa Tsering makes it clear that the national dress was a requirement: "In November last year, when I was in Kathmandu, one of the points I raised with the Nepali officials on the instructions of my king, was that the national dress requirement was being removed, and the southern Bhutanese were free to wear whatever they wanted".[44] While the Nepalis were willing to follow the Bhutanisation policies to a degree, their harsh and sudden imposition triggered dissent.

Descriptions of Bhutanisation by refugees from different districts are all similar, though sometimes people indicate different times when the

policy began. First, in mid or late 1988, the Dzongda held meetings where district officers informed people of the necessity of following the Bhutanisation policy, particularly the wearing of the national dress. In Geylegphug, reportedly, when the meeting was set up the Dzongda said that Driglam Namzha was the King's command and everyone had to obey. There was a little dissent, but the Dzongda insisted it was a royal decree, and so the people obeyed it as best they could. In fact, the Geylegphug Dzongda made some concessions to the religious leaders, since the people regarded the mandatory dress for the pandits somewhat sacrilegious. To this effect, under special consideration a special order from the District administrator Rinzin Gyaltsen exempted Acharya Basudev Dhakal, Pandit Udayachandra Dahal, and Pandit Tikaram Bhattarai from the rule. In Chirang there was much more protest. People argued against the policy, impressing on the Dzongda how difficult mandatory dress restrictions would be for the older people who had never worn the *bakkhu*. Again Bhutanisation was presented as the will of the King, so it had to be obeyed. In Chirang, there was a brandishing of arms to make sure that people obeyed. Afterwards, the King was less imposing, sometimes thanking the people for their compliance with Driglam Namzha or asking their opinions about the policy. When the King came later, to discuss the policy, the audience in Gaylegphug was packed, with only supporters in the front row to give positive comments. In Chirang, the King gave a speech thanking the people for wearing the *bakkhu* and learning the language, sympathising with how hard it must be for them. He even suggested that they wear a lighter kind of *bakkhu* to make life easier in the hot climate.

Regardless of what the King said at the meetings, Bhutanisation ended up all across southern Bhutan as a repressive policy that was bitterly resented. Disobeying the national dress requirement carried a fine of 100 to 150 Nu., or imprisonment for a week with rigorous physical labour if the fine was not paid. Moreover, since the police were given half of the fine, they had an incentive to be harsh in the implementation of the dress policy. In fact, refugees claim that at first it was as if the Dzongdas and local officers were competing with each other to see who could best implement the Bhutanisation policy. At first the dress policy was that one had to wear national dress when going to an office or official building. Gradually, national dress became mandatory when

going to the bazaar or even outside for short periods of time. The existence of receipts for fines levied on Nepalis for failing to wear the national dress shows that the policies were strongly coercive. One Mandal from Chirang even claims that he was fined for not wearing his *bakkhu* while washing his clothes outside. The resentment fostered by the dress restrictions on the Nepali Bhutanese is evident while talking with refugees in the camps. These restrictions are usually the first things they mention when talking about the problems in Bhutan.

In addition to dress restrictions, the use of Nepali language was also curtailed. First, the teaching of Nepali language —limited as it was— was stopped in schools. In schools and public meetings, too, people were supposed to speak only in Dzongkha, even though Nepali had been the working language for the south ever since it was settled by the Nepalis. Some allege that they were admonished for speaking Nepali. Dzongkha classes were organised in some districts for villagers.

The government's policy to dilute the orthodox Hinduism creeping in from India was more subtly implemented. The government simply tried to encourage people to favour the hill Hinduism of Nepal which is a mixture of Buddhist, Hindu, and animist practices. The King, for example, presented statues of Ganesh and Shiva to temples in the south, an action which was supposed to show the King's acceptance and tolerance of Hindu practice.[45] The message that the King brought was that Hinduism and Buddhism are not only compatible, but very similar. For example, they worship the same gods but use different names, he said. Also, in emphasising the link between the roots of Hinduism and Buddhism, the King described a form of Hinduism different from that coming into southern Bhutan. The Indian Hindu sects entering Bhutan were more modern creations; they focused often on a specific *guru*, and were probably less accepting of the Hindu-Buddhist links espoused by the King. Definitely, in the eyes of the government, the emergence of popular Indian Hindu sects in Bhutan blurred the distinction between the southern Bhutanese and those people across the border, as well as further culturally distancing the Nepalis from their Buddhist Drukpa neighbours. In a more coercive stance, the government in 1988 banned the *kirtan sangh* (devotional singing groups) that spread through the south from Chirang after 1970. The *kirtan sangh* was undoubtedly banned because it was a forum that strengthened Hindu identification and belief.

The Increase of Protest

While the census exercise brought only limited protest after the government introduced concessions in the Assembly, the imposition of Bhutanisation spawned more widespread protest. Rizal, in exile in Birtamod, Nepal, was a magnet for dissidents, refugees, and disgruntled citizens; also, inside Bhutan protest was strongest at the post-high school educational institutions in Bhutan—Kanglung College, the National Institute of Education (NIE), and the Royal Polytechnic Institute. At first Rizal, alone on the outside, felt powerless. He contacted some intellectuals in eastern Nepal, who formed the Bhutan Support Group. As Rizal starting trying to get the news on Bhutan out, increasingly people inside Bhutan heard about him. Those Bhutanese who had family in Nepal, work-related travel, or school outside Bhutan occasionally came and talked with him. Through the People's Forum for Human Rights (PFHR), started in July 1989 with the full participation of members from within Bhutan, several publications appeared that pointed out the concerns of the southern Bhutanese. The booklet *Bhutan: We Want Justice* was the first publication, written primarily by Ratan Gazmere, at that time a lecturer at the NIE. In Kanglung College, too, students report that there was underground activism, consisting of students handing out pamphlets, meeting secretly, and discussing government policy.

A number of students, some of them uninvolved in the initial activism, left the country and joined the movement outside. In Kanglung there were also people passing out pamphlets, but some of the Nepalis who tried to display their own culture were forced out of the country. One specific incident at Kanglung College illustrates how even those not bent on opposing the government ended up leaving the country. According to Tara Subedi, a former student at Kanglung College:[46]

> On October 10th, 1989 the college was tense because of constant vigilance by the government. In this atmosphere, they decided to celebrate Durga Puja in the traditional way of carrying an altar to the river wearing traditional Nepali dress. The first two days went smoothly, but on the third day when they were bringing the idol to the river, they were stopped by the Principal of the College, the Dzongda and several Tashigang Police officers who demanded that they wear the bakkhu. They pleaded with the officials to let them wear traditional clothes, but the officials were resolute. So, left with no other alternative, they went back to the college, changed into the bakkhu, having left the idol standing by the road, and then brought the idol to the river. On October 11th, the four boys organizing the puja

were called to the room of some senior Drukpa boys. The Drukpas asked them, "Why aren't you wearing traditional dress?" They explained to the Drukpas the religious basis for their actions, but then the Drukpas started pressing them: "Why are you against the King?" They denied that they were against the King but the Drukpas tore off their clothes, threw them on the ground, and beat the students up. Then the Drukpa boys said that if any people were caught wearing the Nepali dress, the four of them would be held responsible. The same day, one police officer at the college threatened them, saying, "Either you or I am going to get arrested." They pretty much got the idea that they were not safe, so five of the students involved left the country. They too went to Nepal, staying several days with T.N. Rizal, and then some of them started working in local schools to earn some money as well as working for the movement.

While some of the students who came out early on talk about being forced out, about ten or twenty others left voluntarily to join the movement. Yet, even though some students and activists fled the country along with those—like Nepali teachers and Nepalis married to foreigners—who were affected by early government restrictions, most of the Nepali Bhutanese were still in Bhutan in 1990. Of those who had left, only a dozen or so people were trying to organise a movement, while the others were simply trying to survive with family outside Bhutan or on their own.

At the end of 1990, the King stated in the National Assembly that "subversive elements" had tried to "disturb the minds of our people" by distributing "anti-national" literature, pointing to Sherubtse college, the National Institute of Education and the Royal Polytechnic as hotspots and targeting Tek Nath Rizal as the mastermind.[47] By 1990, the amount of underground anti-government propaganda was substantial: according to the government: "a total of six pamphlets and 72 newspaper articles maliciously and baselessly" attacked the Royal Government.[48] At this time, there was not only an underground network of people distributing the pamphlets, but also discussion groups that talked about the developments in Bhutan. The dissidents outside Bhutan met with activists from inside in Siliguri, Kakarvita, and border towns in India. While protest in the form of letters, articles and discussion may seem like a small threat, the government took such dissent very seriously. In 1990, 42 people were arrested for involvement in "anti-national" activities. The booklet *Bhutan: We Want Justice*, while not advocating the overthrow of the government, was nonetheless couched in the accusatory language of human rights.

In contrast to the conciliatory stance taken by the government towards protesters in the past, this time it arrested the people involved in writing and distributing the pamphlets. Jogen Gazmere, Sushil Pokhrel, and Tek Nath Rizal were extradited (or abducted) from their residence in Birtamod on November 17th, 1989. Others inside Bhutan and in India who were part of a loose organisation to distribute seditious literature or working with PFHR were arrested on the following days, but some heard of the arrests and left Bhutan.

The abduction of Rizal created a leadership vacuum among the dissidents. The movement shifted to West Bengal and Assam, but even there they were not safe, and several people were arrested by the Bhutan government in India, including Deo Datta Sharma, a student activist whose whereabouts are still not known to the dissidents [Sharma was released in Feb. 1994-ed.]. In early 1990 student activists established a base at the Garganda tea estate in West Bengal. At first there was no concrete strategy for the movement, and PFHR and SUB worked to increase publicity. On February 6th, 1990, PFHR sent a memorandum to King Jigme Singye Wangchuck appealing to him to correct the human rights situation in Bhutan. On March 27th, 1990, PFHR sent letters describing the state of human rights in the Kingdom of Bhutan to the heads of the SAARC states, the UN Secretary General, George Bush, Mikhail Gorbachev, Francois Mitterand, the Premier of China, and Margaret Thatcher. The early days of the movement are still shadowy. Both the government and other dissidents allege that its tactics were misguided and sometimes violent. Some of the amateur activists in Garganda reportedly adopted GNLF-style coercion techniques to extort money. The Royal Government accuses the activists of the murders of Kailash Dahal and Balaram Giri of Ghumauney village, who were supposedly kidnapped and killed on the charge that they were government informants.

On June 2nd 1990, the formation of the Bhutan People's Party was declared from Siliguri, and its headquarters were also stationed at the Garganda tea estate. The BPP, PFHR, and SUB reportedly worked under the leadership of RK Budathoki, president of the BPP, to mobilise support and resources, although later the groups split and worked more and more independently. During 1990 the movement started to gain strength both inside Bhutan and outside, even though Bhutan was cracking down on dissidents.

In September and October 1990, mass demonstrations erupted throughout southern Bhutan. This was the second attempt at a large march in Bhutan. The first had been organised by the Bhutan People's Party on August 26th and was to have crossed over the Bhutanese border at Phuntsholing. The Indian Government, however, warned them not to march from India into Bhutan, and for good measure they reportedly closed off the roads and shut down the buses that day. Accepting that a march could not be arranged effectively from outside Bhutan, the BPP set about organizing one inside Bhutan, with help from the Student's Union of Bhutan and PFHR. With the exception of the most notable activists, people gathered secretly from different parts of southern Bhutan to launch the demonstration. Many of those involved were arrested by the police, and others continued to live with families until the crackdown after the demonstration. The plan was to distribute a list of demands to the sub-divisional officers, the Dungpas, in each district. There were two waves of demonstrations, one throughout the south between September 19th and 25th, and the other in Chirang on 4th October. On the 19th and 20th, demonstrations started in Samchi, spreading to Sarbhang on the 21st, and Chirang and Dagana on the 25th. The turnout was large, with around 3,000 marching in Samchi, 4,000 in Sarbhang, and thousands too in Chirang. While the exact numbers are disputed, in total tens of thousands of southerners marched in the demonstrations. Word of the demonstration was spread from house to house, usually just a day or two before it was to take place. While some claim that everyone came out voluntarily, in some areas, especially Chirang, people felt forced to come out because of the numbers demonstrating and pressure from the organizers. The October 4th demonstration in Chirang, however, was a peaceful demonstration, where people were not forced like the first. The number of demonstrators startled the government, and some of the actions of the protesters caused concern. In Dagana and Sarbhang they planted the BPP flag side-by-side with the national flag at district headquarters, and in Chirang they burned *ghos* and *kiras*. Although the demonstration was peaceful in most areas, there were occasional outbreaks of vandalism, and violence from the demonstrators. The government of Bhutan also reacted harshly. In Phuntsholing a number of demonstrators allege that they were arrested and tortured. RB Basnet, who then worked at Phuntsholing as the Managing Director of the State Trading

Corporation of Bhutan, claims that the protest was absolutely peaceful. Demonstrators were surrounded by security forces in the public park for the whole night. In the morning, women, children, and elderly people were released with warnings, while youths and suspected adults were latthi charged, beaten up, rounded up, and violently loaded into security vehicles driven towards Thimphu. In Chamurchi, an Indian journalist reported, the government fired on demonstrators.[49]

In general, the refugees' and the government's reports of the demonstrations are questionable. On both sides there seem to be reliable accounts of mistreatment and abuse. Yet the violence of the demonstrations pales in comparison to what followed. In the months after the demonstration, or sometimes just a week after for some areas, the real problems for the southern Bhutanese began.

[1] For example, the self-styled "SAARC Jurists mission", Kanak Mani Dixit, editor of *Himal*, and Carol Rose, who were all potentially pro-Nepali to varying degrees, were denied entry into Bhutan. Even when people are allowed into the country, they do not usually gain access to the south. The Amnesty International group, for instance, requested a visit to Chirang during its visit, but was allowed only to visit Samchi. The government claims that security is the reason for keeping foreigners out.

[2] SAARC Jurists, *The Bhutan Tragedy When Will It End?* Kathmandu, 1992, p. 59. The King, of course, can also bestow citizenship, but this power was evidently not exercised in simple marriages. Instead, it was reserved for special circumstances, e.g. granting citizenship to foreigners who had contributed greatly to the country.

[3] Article Kha 2-1, 2; quoted in ibid., p.69.

[4] Articles Kha 2-4 to 2-8; ibid., p 70.

[5] National Assembly of Bhutan (NAB), 1979 (51st session), Res. No. 27. All NAB resolutions 1953-1991 have been published in seven volumes by the Royal Government of Bhutan.

[6] NAB 1979 (51st session), Res. No. 27.

[7] NAB 1979 (51st session), Res. No. 19.

[8] NAB 1973, Res. No. 19; also qtd.in AHURA, *Bhutan, a Shangri-la without Human Rights*, Damak, 1993, p. 12.

[9] NAB 1980 (52nd session), Res. No. 10.

[10] Parmanand, *The Politics of Bhutan, Prospect and Retrospect*, New Delhi 1992, p. 42.

[11] SAARC Jurists op. cit., p. 52.

[12] Ibid., p. 54

[13] Ibid., p. 52

[14] Ibid., p. 55.
[15] NAB 1990 (69th session), Annexure 1.
[16] Home Ministry, Memo to NAB, 1990.
[17] R. B. Basnet, "Memorandum to Honourable Members of the Indian Parliament on the Political Crisis in Bhutan", July 1992.
[18] Home Ministry, Memo to NAB, 1990.
[19] Basnet, July 1992; Human Rights Organisation of Bhutan (HUROB), "Bhutan's Southern Problem: the Genesis" (pamphlet presented at the UN World Conference on Human Rights, Vienna, June 1993).
[20] NAB, July 1987 (65th session), Res. No. 18.
[21] Idem.
[22] Idem.
[23] See, for example, NAB 1979 (51st session): pp. 29-32; June 1980 (52nd session); pp. 51, 58; November 1980 (53rd session): p. 124; etc. (Page nos. refer to *Resolutions of the National Assembly of Bhutan* vol. 2, Thimphu, 1984.)
[24] 1984 (60th session), Res. No. 9: 372-3
[25] See Res. No. 10.
[26] NAB 1978 (50th session), Res. No. 45.
[27] *The Statesman*, 19 April 1989.
[28] Kanak Mani Dixit, "The Dragon Bites its Tail", *Himal* July/August 1992, p. 18.
[29] *Hindustan Times*, 18 April 1989.
[30] Interview with Father Leclaire, Darjeeling, 22 February 1993.
[31] November 1988, Res. No. 9.
[32] NAB 1989 (68th session), Res. No. 9.
[33] NAB 1991 (70th session), Res. No. 15.
[34] *The Facts Behind Recent Developments in Southern Bhutan*, quoted in SAARC Jurists op. cit., p. 141.
[35] This story is independently confirmed by several refugees, including the ex-Chimi of the Chokana block.
[36] At this time TN Rizal and RB Basnet, (who was allegedly using Rizal to help voice concerns he had, but could not raise due to his senior position in the bureaucracy), were working together to develop a strategy to deal with the increasing problem.
[37] HUROB, *Annual Report*, December 1992, p.6.
[38] NAB, November 1983 (59th session), Res. No. 25.
[39] NAB 1988 (67th session), Res. Nos. 2,3.
[40] It should be noted that the term "Bhutanisation", though easily underood as a dissident catchword for the government's policy, was in fact used by King Jigme Singye Wangchuck. As he said during an interview, probably being far less cautious than he would be now: "Apparently our national dress was resented. So we decided that people living in southern Bhutan should be Bhutanized" (*Link*, 20 May 1990, p. 9).
[41] Royal Government of Bhutan, *Facts on the Situation in Bhutan*, 1990, p. 13.
[42] NAB 1964 (20th session), Res. Nos. 8, 17.
[43] NAB October 1989, Res. No. 3.
[44] Interview with Sonny Inbaraj, *The Nation*, Bangkok, 2 May 1993.

[45] Royal Government of Bhutan, Department of Information, *Anti-National Activities in Southern Bhutan: a Terrorist Movement*, September 1991, pp. 12-13.

[46] Interview with Tara Subedi, 17 March 1993, Damak, Nepal.

[47] NAB 1990 (69th session), Annexure 2.

[48] Idem.

[49] *Sunday*, 25 October 1990.

Life and Work in the Bhutanese Refugee Camps of Southeast Nepal

Rachael Reilly

In March 1993 I had just returned from six months spent working for UNHCR as a Social Services Officer in the Bhutanese refugee camps in southeast Nepal. This paper is a description of my own experiences and observations during my work in the camps: it contains my own personal views, not those of UNHCR or any of the other organisations working with the refugees.

My work as a Social Services Officer involved coordinating all the social, community and education services in the refugee camps. I worked closely with those agencies responsible for implementing social and education programmes, with the teachers and students working in the refugee schools and with the refugee women's committees that have been set up in the camps, as well as with vulnerable members of the refugee community, such as rape victims, the elderly, disabled and unaccompanied children.

The Bhutanese Refugee Camps in Nepal

Following a formal request from the Nepali government at the beginning of 1992, UNHCR has been responsible for the overall coordination of the relief and assistance programme for the Bhutanese asylum seekers who have come to Nepal. There are currently (March 1993) five camps in the Jhapa District of southeast Nepal, and one camp in the Morang district. Two more refugee camps with a capacity for a total of 20,000 refugees are presently being established in Jhapa. At the beginning of March 1993, there were approximately 75,000 refugees in the six refugee camps, with an arrival rate of about 100-150 new arrivals a day. The refugee camps ranged in population size from 7,000-17,000 people. The total population of the three largest camps, which are close together, is 50,000: one of the largest cities in Nepal and double the size of Thimphu. Some of the camps were spontaneously settled, while the first camp, Maidhar, which was a self-settled camp on

either side of the main road running through Jhapa and on the banks of the river Mai, has been dismantled, due to the unsuitability of the site; other camps have been specially planned and formally settled.

Camp Management

The camps were initially established by the refugees themselves and they continue to be run and managed by refugee camp committees. The camps are divided into sectors and sub-sectors for administrative purposes. Each sector and sub-sector has its own selected head: in most cases these are people who held leadership positions in Bhutan (i.e. village heads/mandals). The camp committees manage and administer the camps, dealing with daily problems, representing the refugees' needs and problems to the agencies working in the camps, and ensuring that services are effectively delivered. Each camp has an advisory board consisting of elder members of the refugee community who are responsible for listening to and settling internal disputes within the refugee community. There are also Nepali police stationed in the refugee camps to deal with more serious disputes and criminal offences and recently Nepali Government officials have also been present in the camps.

When the refugees first arrived in Nepal, HUROB (the Human Rights Organisation of Bhutan) took full responsibility for the establishment and running of the camps. However, since UNHCR has become involved in coordinating the refugee relief programme and also as the number of refugees arriving in the camps has increased, HUROB is no longer responsible for the management of the camps. Some of the camp secretaries were appointed at an earlier stage by HUROB, but HUROB has recently been playing a decreasing role in appointing members of the camp committees. The majority of sector and sub-sector heads are chosen by the refugees themselves, very often because they were village leaders in Bhutan and are respected by the refugee community as figures of authority.

UNHCR explicitly bans political activity, political propaganda or the distribution of political pamphlets and material in the refugee camps and has avoided any kind of elections for leadership positions within the refugee camps which could be run on political lines.

The refugee women have also formed camp committees based on the same structures as the male committees, with sector and sub-sector

heads and camp secretaries. These women are chosen by refugee women in the sectors or sub-sectors in the camps, and they again tend to be older women who held positions of responsibility in Bhutan and who command respect amongst the community. They are involved in welfare work, visiting families in their sectors, especially the sick and families with special needs. They motivate the women in the camps to become involved in the non-formal education and supplementary income generation projects for women that are run by OXFAM, and they also represent the views and problems of women in the refugee community at camp and inter-agency meetings.

Agencies working and services provided in Bhutanese refugee camps

As in other refugee situations, UNHCR operates using implementing partners, NGOs or other inter-governmental organisations which are responsible for providing different services in the refugee camps and receive funding from UNHCR to do so. A full-scale refugee relief programme has been operational in Nepal since the end of June 1992, when Save the Children Fund (SCF) UK took over responsibility for health care in the refugee camps. The health conditions in the refugee camps were extremely poor during May and June 1992, especially in Maidhar before it was closed. Due to very poor sanitation, lack of clean water and proper health services and the extreme heat during that time in that part of Nepal, up to 30 children were dying each day from malnutrition, dehydration, diarrhoea and a measles epidemic. SCF UK set up emergency health facilities, consisting of Basic Health Units (BHUs), a dispensary, clinic and basic hospital, as well as an immunisation centre, cholera and TB ward, mother and child health clinic and 24-hour therapeutic feeding centre for severely malnourished children in all the camps. The health services are run by both Bhutanese and Nepali doctors, nurses and health workers, as well as a team of British health workers. The health conditions in the camps have improved enormously and in March 1993 all the therapeutic feeding centres were closed and the cholera, meningitis and typhoid epidemics had passed.

One of the first agencies to become involved in the refugee relief programme was the Lutheran World Service (LWS). Run mainly by Nepali staff, with a few expatriate workers, LWS is responsible for all food and non-food item distribution in the refugee camps. Each family on arrival in the camp receives a ration card which entitles it to a

weekly ration of rice, dahl, vegetable oil, salt, soap and a few vegetables. They also receive five pieces of bamboo, a piece of plastic sheeting and a jerry can. Each family is then allocated a small plot of land where they can build their hut. LWS is also responsible for the provision of water and sanitation in the camps, the building of pit latrines and bore and tube wells, and the monitoring of water quality. The LWS is responsible for all site planning, road and building construction and maintenance in the camps.

CARITAS Nepal has been involved in assisting the refugees since the beginning of the relief programme and now takes responsibility for the education programme. Each camp has a primary school which was initially set up by the refugees themselves, who place enormous importance on the provision of education for their children. CARITAS, with assistance from UNHCR, funds the construction of simple school buildings, the provision of text books and basic classroom supplies and materials, and the payment of incentives to the refugee teachers. All the teachers in the schools are Bhutanese. Some of them are qualified teachers who were working in schools in Bhutan, while others are students who were in the middle of their secondary school or higher studies when they had to leave Bhutan. There are currently 23,000 children attending the schools: each school has between 3,000-5,000 students and runs three shifts a day with classes of over 70 children. The schools follow an English medium syllabus, which is supplemented with subjects like Dzongkha, Bhutanese history and geography. The education programme is run and planned entirely by the Bhutanese refugees and the standard of education and levels of motivation and commitment amongst teachers and students are very high indeed.

OXFAM, as mentioned earlier, is responsible for community and womens' programmes. OXFAM runs a non-formal education and adult literacy programme and supplementary income generation projects for refugee women. OXFAM also works closely with local Nepali NGOs in the villages surrounding the refugee camps.

CVICT, a Nepali NGO which works with victims of torture, runs a small and very sensitive programme for rape victims, which involves training refugee women to work as rape counsellors within the refugee community. Some of the torture victims within the community have also been given treatment at the CVICT clinic in Kathmandu.

Finally, the Nepal Red Cross is also involved in the refugee relief programme, providing blankets, mosquito nets and basic clothing for the refugees, as well as ambulance services. The Nepal Red Cross is involved in community programmes with the refugee community and the local Nepali communities around the refugee camps.

Two of the agencies (LWS and CARITAS) working in the camps have religious connections, but the majority of LWS's staff are Nepali Hindus or Buddhists and until very recently CARITAS had no representatives working in the refugee camps. It should be stressed that both agencies are responsible for delivering specific services in the refugee camps and they are not involved in any kind of missionary or proselytising work. It should also be noted that it is only in the past three years that any missionaries have been allowed into Nepal and that proselytising is actually still illegal in Nepal.

Of course in any situation where people are very vulnerable, some groups of people will exploit their position, but neither UNHCR or any of the other agencies working with the refugees pursues a policy of religious preaching or proselytising. One of the objectives of any refugee relief programme is to ensure as far as possible, through refugee participation in the planning and implementation of programmes, that refugees are able to maintain a sense of self-reliance and self-control, and that despite the socially disruptive and traumatic effects of life in a refugee camp, they are able to preserve their own social and leadership structures, traditional values, beliefs and customs. In the case of the Bhutanese refugees, some of the elders and Brahman priests in the community, fearing the erosion of their religious and traditional values and customs, and especially fearing that some missionaries may take advantage of their situation and try and convert the refugees through methods such as bribery, have formed their own religious organisation, to preserve their religion and traditional values.

It has been suggested that UNHCR and the other agencies are providing strong pull factors which encourage people to come to the refugee camps, and that the services provided in the camps are better than services available locally, and that this is attracting local poor and landless people to the camps as well. It is totally inaccurate to suggest that UNHCR or any other agency provides the refugees with any kind of daily cash payment or allowance either as part of their general ration or to encourage them to come to the refugee camps. Only those

refugees who are employed as teachers, health workers, engineers etc. within the camps receive what is termed an "incentive" from the agency employing them. Under UNHCR policy, not even the skilled and experienced professional refugees who are employed are able to receive equivalent Nepali scale wages for their work, as UNHCR argues that they are already receiving free food, shelter and services, and should be working for the community and not for money. UNHCR also wishes to avoid competition with the local Nepali labour market.

Although conditions in the refugee camps have greatly improved, and in some cases are better than local conditions, there is little evidence that they are attracting people to the camps. The camps are still very overcrowded and are becoming very quickly urbanised with all the social problems associated with rapid urbanisation. The refugees have no land on which to cultivate any crops and very few activities to occupy their time: this breeds boredom and great frustration. Although some of the refugees may be materially well off and have all their basic needs seen to, my experience of refugee camps is that no material assistance or free services can compensate for the loss of a person's land, property, and belongings, or, most importantly, their self-reliance and sense of self-worth. All of these are lost in a refugee situation, where people become almost entirely dependent on external aid and assistance.

For subsistence farmers who have spent lives of self-sufficiency, supporting themselves and their families in an overcrowded urbanised refugee camp, totally dependent on food rations and with nothing to do all day, is extremely frustrating and depressing. Many of the Bhutanese refugees describe the land, orchards and property they owned in Bhutan and have photographs to show. For them, no amount of free food rations, mosquito nets or plastic sheeting will ever make up for the enormous loss they have suffered, most significantly the loss of their land and their self-esteem. Having worked with refugees I would argue that it takes a lot more than material pull factors, especially in situations where people had land and property of their own, to make people leave behind everything they own and come and live in a refugee camp. I do not believe that even the poorest Nepali citizen would give up their small amount of property, land or independence to come and live in a refugee camp, no matter how attractive the services provided were.

The number of refugees in the camps

It has been suggested that UNHCR is not only encouraging people to come to the camps through the provision of attractive services and cash payment, but that also it was in some way in UNHCR's interests to increase the number of refugees, and that UNHCR is in fact 'fixing the figures'. It has been claimed that UNHCR officials in Nepal have been advising refugee leaders to encourage more people to come to the camps in order to raise the refugee population to 100,000, thereby raising international attention and support for the plight of the Bhutanese refugees.

It is entirely invalid and illogical to claim that UNHCR would in any way be encouraging or paying refugees to come to refugee camps anywhere in the world or that it would ever be in UNHCR's interests to increase the number of refugees or 'fix the figures' of refugee populations. According to UNHCR's international mandate as defined in the Statute of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the objectives of UNHCR are twofold; firstly to provide international protection to any person for whom the Office has competence as defined by its Statute and subsequent General Assembly resolutions; and, secondly, to seek durable and lasting solutions to refugees' problems. The latter part of the mandate includes not only seeking solutions for those people who have already had to flee their country and are classified as refugees, but also exploring ways of preventing the situations that lead to refugee flows.

With refugee emergencies in almost every region of the world, UNHCR has responsibility for providing international protection and relief assistance and for seeking durable solutions for over 18 million refugees throughout the world today, as well as responsibility for the growing number of internally displaced people (there are an estimated 35-40 million internally displaced people in the world). It is very unlikely that with its financial and personnel resources stretched to full capacity, UNHCR would be interested in encouraging any more people to leave their countries and come to refugee camps, let alone paying them to come. In Nepal, UNHCR has a small office, very limited personnel and financial resources and its working capacity is already stretched to an absolute limit: for example, I was the only Social Services Officer for six camps and 75,000 refugees. In such conditions no UNHCR official in Nepal would be likely to encourage more

refugees to come to camps that are already over-crowded, under-staffed and under-resourced. Moreover, it would be totally against UNHCR's international principles and objectives to do so.

UNHCR is a strictly non-political, non-partisan inter-governmental organisation, and neither would it be in its interests or within its mandate to increase the numbers or in some way 'fix the figures' of refugees in the camps. As far as the refugee operation in Nepal is concerned, the refugee population figures produced by UNHCR are collected by the Nepali government registration unit, OMIU, who register all the refugees in the camps and update the figures on a regular basis.

The citizenship/identity of the refugees in the camps

It is argued in some quarters that none, or very few, of the people living in the refugee camps are in fact bona fide Bhutanese citizens, and that very few of them have any right to return to Bhutan. It is suggested that they were either local Nepali or Indian citizens, attracted to the camps because of the good services, illegal Nepali immigrants who were previously living in Bhutan, or Bhutanese citizens who have left Bhutan voluntarily, thereby surrendering their citizenship.

The Nepali government has been conducting a very comprehensive and thorough registration of all the people living in the camps, and has quite extensive data on them, their occupations, former addresses, education, property, documentation, proof of citizenship etc. According to this registration programme, 90% of the people in the camps have citizenship cards or other written documentation proving that they are bona fide Bhutanese citizens. Many have land tax receipts going back to the 1930s and 1940s when southern Bhutan was administered from Kalimpong. I have spoken to new arrivals at the camps who have a full set of land tax receipts going back well before 1958, as well as citizenship cards, school certificates etc. Of those people who cannot produce land tax certificates or citizenship cards, there are very, very few who have no proof that they were either citizens of or residing in Bhutan before they came to the camps. In order to double check the people coming to the camps, UNHCR has started independently to screen all new arrivals to ensure that they are genuine Bhutanese and have come from Bhutan. Moreover, no people are allowed to enter the refugee camps now unless they have been registered by the Nepali police at the border, in order to ensure again that only genuine Bhutanese and not local

Nepali people are coming to the camps. UNHCR has also ceased issuing refugee status certificates until all the registration and screening processes are completed.

My personal impression is that the vast majority of people coming to the camps are Bhutanese, have come directly from Bhutan, and can prove that their families have been living in Bhutan for several generations. The children and students are familiar with the Bhutanese education system and have Bhutanese school certificates, while the teachers have all worked and trained in the Bhutanese education system. People can describe their villages, homes and land in great detail, and many people also have photographs as proof. In addition, due to the very close-knit nature of the refugee camps, where everybody knows each other, it would be very difficult for non-Bhutanese people to move into the camps without being identified by the refugee community and leaders. Anyone who has spent any period of time in southern Bhutan would most certainly be able to identify whole villages in the camps, as people tend to live together in groups that correspond to their villages in Bhutan.

It has been argued that the southern Bhutanese lack any sense of loyalty towards Bhutan and do not really consider themselves as Bhutanese. Again, my own impression of the refugees has been the opposite to this view. I have found a great sense of Bhutanese identity amongst the refugees and a strong sense of pride in and loyalty to their country. Almost without exception, the refugees I have spoken to express the great desire to be able to return to their country as soon as possible. They adamantly claim that they are Bhutanese and not Nepalese and their sense of national identity most certainly lies with Bhutan and not Nepal. In fact there is a certain sense of superiority amongst the refugees (which is common in many refugee situations): they are quite negative about Nepal and the quality of life in Nepal, and are always telling me how much better services and conditions were in Bhutan. As a small example of their loyalty towards Bhutan, at the start of every school day the students all sing the Bhutanese national anthem at school assembly. Bhutan's national day was celebrated in the camps in December 1992, and the teachers insist on teaching Dzongkha and Bhutanese history and geography in the refugee schools.

Political activity and terrorism in the refugee camps

Fears have been expressed that the refugee camps are being used as "terrorist training grounds" and are the centre of anti-national political activity. There are clearly some quite serious social problems in the refugee camps, which are becoming worse. These are partly the sad but inevitable result of rapid, overnight urbanisation and a large population of very bored young men with no constructive activities to fill their time. Incidents of crime and social disruption have increased in the camps and cause as much concern and worry amongst the refugee community, who have to live in such conditions, as they do to UNHCR, the other agencies and the Nepali government. However, there is little evidence to suggest that all the refugee male adults and youth are involved in terrorist activities. From the statistics produced by the Nepali government registration team, and from my work in the refugee camps, it is not apparent that there are very few male adults and youth visible in the camps, as has been claimed. The number of youths involved in criminal and disruptive activities is quite small and I understand that stronger measures have recently been introduced to deal with troublemakers and criminals in the camps.

Conclusion

The over-riding view expressed by the Bhutanese refugees is that they were forced to leave their homes and country, but the primary focus of their lives now is to return home to Bhutan. I have been impressed by their sense of commitment, organisation and motivation to set up, manage and improve conditions and services in the camps. In many ways the Bhutanese people I have worked with have been a great tribute to Bhutan. In particular the standards of education are an enormous tribute to Bhutan's very successful education system.

However, no matter how effective and efficient the services provided, refugee camps are not a desirable environment for a rural population to live in. Inevitably, the longer a large population of predominantly rural people have to live in very over-crowded, urban conditions, with no source of employment or income and totally dependent on external assistance, the greater the social problems within the camps will become. The threat of quite serious disruption is very real and could spread beyond the camps, while traditional social structures and values and respect for traditional leaders, elders and authority

within the refugee community are likely to be eroded, leaving a vacuum of values, leadership and social order.

Although there are, as in any population, members of the refugee community who are disruptive, on the whole I have been very moved by the dignity, motivation and skills of the refugees I have worked with. However, the future for both the young and old alike, beginning and ending their lives in increasingly institutionalised refugee camps, provides a very bleak prospect indeed.

Aspects of the "Southern Problem" and Nation-Building in Bhutan

Brian C. Shaw

Events in Bhutan since 1988, and in particular since the ethnic Nepalese demonstrations in the kingdom in September and October 1990, have been dominated by "the southern problem" — its origins and nature, its consequences, and how matters might come to be resolved. It was my original intention to deal at length with the origins and present status of this issue in the context of power-brokering and institution-building in Bhutan,[1] but here I wish only to review very briefly these events within a broader context of political and social change, and to speculate very selectively on the present state of major institutions and possible future trends, in order to place the dissident or "anti-national" agitation of some ethnic Nepalese into a broader perspective.[2]

Summary background

We need to bear in mind the changing circumstances of Bhutanese politics and economy during the past several decades, and how far Bhutan still had to go in 1947 to become a recognisably sovereign polity. The achievements to date are certainly a great tribute to India's continuing support and sustenance: but it could have been otherwise. When Sikkim was incorporated into the Indian Union in 1975, there were widespread fears that Bhutan might suffer the same fate.

As matters have developed, great pressure for change has been brought to bear on Bhutan's institutions from a number of fronts. The task of moving rapidly from a pre-modern circumstance to that of a modern nation-state has often resembled an ever-faster juggling act in which more and more objects are to be coordinated. Occasionally one of the juggled objects falls: but the trick — so far successful — is to keep the others in motion. ("Pre-modern" does not mean useless or irrelevant:[3] hallowed and ancient practices usually have something going for them that deserves to be kept, and if one factor is tinkered with,

other factors may unbeknownst become dysfunctional creating instability in the system.)

At the time of the Indo-Bhutan treaty in 1949, the ruler of Bhutan was still styled "Maharaja". The process of modernisation began only a little over three decades ago, and accelerated economic change just over two decades ago. In 1968, when Bhutan was beginning to consider applying for membership of the UN, the Indian government began to use the term "King" in place of "Maharaja" (the English term was already in use when the first issue of *Kuensel* was published in July 1967). Indian and UN agency grants and loans — and those of third party governments — have all grown steadily since UN membership in 1971. Bhutan extended international contacts and minimised losses in the application of aid, so that by 1993 the kingdom was the potential recipient of more aid than could be constructively injected into its economy. Bhutan was becoming "relatively well off", in contrast to Nepal's "relative poverty", as has been plaintively and perhaps tellingly observed by AP and Reuters' reports filed from Kathmandu in 1991 and 1992.[4]

Earlier indentured and wage labour,[5] and the free right of entry into India, and *inter alia* to the foothills on the Indo-Bhutan border, confirmed to Nepalese citizens by the 1950 Indo-Nepal treaty, had by the 1990s brought possibly more than ten million into India's northern belt. This Nepalese diaspora is one of the major population outflows of modern times, with many tragic aspects. Some of these emigrants had come to the potentially rich foothills of southern Bhutan — Samchi or further east — to settle down, the first as indentured forest labourers, then later as managers for the Haa-based owners of land in Samchi. These in turn later called for labour assistance from friends and relatives in Nepal. When development aid began to flow into Bhutan, particularly after the early 1970s, the word quickly spread that the living was better in southern Bhutan. In the 1970s and 1980s, village leaders routinely put up requests to the government for more schools, hospitals and other facilities, and these were routinely granted. Some bought their way onto census registers; some others obtained exemption from taxes and woola corvée labour through status as Mandals; most simply kept their heads down, worked hard, cooperated with the Mandal, and sought opportunities to obtain land and in their turn call for labour assistance from Nepal. Many settlers went on to other places in southern

Bhutan to the east, or moved directly to Indian territories such as Meghalaya or Assam. The children of these settlers born in Bhutan (notably in the cool hills of Chirang, where there was a more stable settlement of immigrants than in rather more populous Samchi or further east) could and did come up through the local schools and even join the civil service — particularly after 1982 — in a variety of roles; many doors were opened, and promotions accelerated.[6] Formal talents were encouraged.

In addition to those who came or were called to the land in southern Bhutan, the recruitment of up to sixty thousand labourers — mainly Nepalese — was called for each year for the roads development programme in the 1970s and first half of the 1980s, and many of these labourers apparently slipped away to the land in places like upper Chirang.

The 1958 Act governing citizenship generously, and for the first time, allowed for the grant of citizenship status for (in general) those foreign (Nepalese) settlers holding land in that year who had been resident for ten years. The Citizenship Act of 1977 increased the period of residence to twenty or fifteen years.[7]

The national census of February and March 1988[8] — the first since the pilot survey of 1980 — was essential for the implementation of the 1985 Citizenship Act, but it was hastened by the pressures placed on Samchi villagers by the GNLF (the Gorkhaland National Liberation Front) for donations and safe houses in the preceding two years. Census records at the district level were no longer accepted as valid or reliable. The census was conducted with urgency by teams of civil servants, many of whom were brought briefly under the umbrella of the Home Ministry for the purpose of the exercise and therefore had little basis for playing with subtleties. Southerners allegedly began to bring complaints to Royal Advisory Councillor Tek Nath Rizal, who on 9 April 1988 submitted (with fellow-Councillor B.P. Bhandari) a petition document to the King, requesting among other things a new cut-off date for citizenship eligibility of 10 June 1985 (the date the 1985 Act came into force).

The events that flowed from the declarations in this document are too numerous, and in some respects not yet sufficiently documented, to relate here in detail. Tek Nath Rizal (and, to follow him, more than one hundred and eighty other persons at present in custody) was in

mid-July 1993 undergoing trial by the High Court in Thimphu for alleged crimes against the state. Rizal is named by the Home Ministry as the mastermind behind the disturbances in southern Bhutan. Whether any person or group stood behind him is unclear, and on balance unlikely, since political ambition seems to have been a major motivation for Rizal, at least at the beginning. However, other forces clearly became joined to his cause once he moved to eastern Nepal from Bhutan in 1988. If there is more to say, and if Rizal was "fixed up" as some allege, this may emerge during his trial, when he will have an opportunity to speak his mind (although he may decide that it is in his interests to say as little as possible, by way of mitigation, in view of the capital charges against him).

The September 1990 demonstrations in southern Bhutan organised by Bhutan Peoples Party (BPP) militants[9] were focused on the assertion by the BPP of its "13-point demand" for what amounted to a political takeover of the state by Nepalese or persons of Nepalese extraction. From this point, the government in Thimphu has — not unreasonably — declared that it is fighting for the survival of the people of Bhutan as a sovereign people with sovereign state institutions acceptable to the people as a whole.[10]

The Royal Government (RGB)'s response in 1991, 1992 and 1993 has been to continue pre-existing policies, to continue to place significant development funds in southern Bhutan (including the replacement of schools, health units and other facilities destroyed by anti-nationals), and to continue to employ southern Bhutanese throughout the civil service and elsewhere, despite increasing resistance to these policies (particularly the latter) by public representatives and indeed key sections of the administration such as the Royal Civil Service Commission.

From Kathmandu, the BPP, augmented by other groups such as the "Human Rights Organisation of Bhutan" (HUROB) and the "[Bhutan] National Democratic Party"[11] (BNDP) which claim degrees of difference in strategic orientation, has conducted a fairly successful campaign of persuading the media to accept its views concerning the "refugee" issue and charges of "ethnic cleansing". (On the latter term, one may note that — apart from its being borrowed from another circumstance — there is a clear attempt to sow disease in the mind of the reader/viewer by implying that there is the same phenomenon of raw

ethnic hatred in Bhutan as in the former Yugoslavia.) It should be strongly underlined that it is the BPP and its Action Wing that have imposed a regime of terrorism against the southern Nepalese still living in Bhutan, who have not acceded to pressures to migrate to the camps in Jhapa.[12]

Some Present Trends

Bhutan's social and political institutions continue to evolve, in part as a consequence of economic change and the development process. Here I merely refer to some major issues as a basis for discussion.

The constitution

Dissident Nepalese have argued that Bhutan has no constitution, implying thereby an arbitrary and tyrannical rule by the king and his ministers. There is nevertheless a substantial body of rules constituting an evolving "unwritten constitution". Documents guiding and constraining the exercise of power in Bhutan certainly exist, beginning with the 1907 genja to establish an hereditary monarchy, continuing with the 1953 rules concerning the newly-constituted National Assembly and the later elaborations of rules and procedures concerning both the Assembly and the Royal Advisory Council.[13] To these rules we should also add, among other formulations, the Royal Charter setting up the Royal Civil Service Commission, and the *chathrim* for the *dzongkhag yargay tshogchungs* (DYTs) of 1988 and the *gewog yargay tshogchungs* (block development committees, or GYTs) of 1991.[14] There are also extensive rules guiding the judicial process, which however still need to be updated in an edited and systematic document. It should be noted that, however flexible the application of these rules might be in practice, they do reflect a conscious attempt to erect a system of interest articulation and conflict resolution through representative assemblages from the hamlet to the national level. There is considerable stress on the need to establish decisions by consensus, so as to minimise the development of disaffected fac-

tions or fractions, although this mode may not be the most suitable for dealing with circumstances that require rapid and flexible decisions.

The monarchy

A common remark from prominent members of the citizenry is that "King Jigme cannot abdicate — the people will not allow it"; "Bhutanese society needs our King" (and notice "our" King, not "the" King); "Bhutan could not survive without King Jigme". There seems to be an understanding that without the present king, Bhutanese society could quickly fall into disarray, even anarchy, and then lose its independence and identity. There is a widespread recognition that a strong and incorruptible leader standing above the administration is the last succour for felt injustice and guidance for felt threat. There can be no doubt about the affection that the vast majority of people in Bhutan have for the person of King Jigme: they are genuinely concerned for his well-being. The anti-monarchist forces have made a major error of judgement in tilting at this target, although their present position seems to be based on the conflicting assertions that either (a) there are anti-Nepalese policies being put into effect, the king must know of or approve these policies, and therefore the king is to be opposed, or (b) the king is being held increasingly captive and ignorant of realities by scheming ministers, for their own ends. But — notwithstanding the unanimous support for the monarchical system expressed by the 71st and 72nd Assemblies — present support for the person of King Jigme does not necessarily mean unqualified support in the country for the institution of monarchy as a whole in say ten years time. Much depends on how the rural people see their local interests being encouraged by the government in Thimphu; that in turn obviously depends on their changing concept of self-interest.

The legal system

The judiciary (the High Court and the district Thrimkhangs) are now (1993) declared to be wholly independent. This was not always the case. The contemporary court system is based on traditional rules and punishments, and it is acknowledged by senior judges and officials that many aspects of the law need to be re-written to reflect changing circumstances in a number of fields. The commitment to a working system of justice is there, including the regular use of *buh* (a pragmatic

arrangement whereby the aggrieved undertakes to carry on his own shoulders the penalty otherwise due to the object of his complaint) and *genja* (formal undertakings by disputing parties to abide by a compromise settlement to their dispute, on pain of suffering appropriate penalties in default).

There were some complaints in the mid-1980s that judgements were being made (in particular concerning charge-sheets relating to the district audit) by members of the judiciary who had no training at all in the law. Other complaints were of judges favouring family members or relatives, or imposing derisory fines in place of statutory penalties for such activities as smuggling religious items from the country, or of inconsistent judgements according to the status of the accused. While this alleged (but widely believed) partiality was indeed strictly against the laws, it would be foolish to pretend that it did not happen in fact. Nevertheless, anecdotal evidence makes it clear that family pressures to compromise just that little bit further were sometimes enormously difficult to resist, at a time when the nominal "full independence" of the judiciary was difficult to demonstrate.

Substantial changes are now underway. All outstanding cases in the district courts were settled by the end of January 1993. The National Security Act of 1992 allowed for more subtle distinctions in the degree of seriousness of offenses against the state. A legal cadre has been established. Court procedures (particularly of the High Court) are clearly set out. Some graduates are reading law in India, and others are to follow: they will gain experience in the district courts on return to Bhutan.

The agenda for change is conservative in timing — avoiding change for change's sake — but seeks to move with all deliberation to build a strong, respected and modern legal system on the foundation of the Shabdrung's rules, which is appropriate for Bhutan's present circumstances, and which is also self-regulating and allows for principled flexibility in decision-making. This leads to some felt incongruities: e.g. legislation on such matters as intellectual rights is foreseen, while existing legislation on property rights (the Land Act) cannot be comprehensively applied because the national cadastral survey is still incomplete (to date, only four districts have been covered in all respects).[15] It is also argued that it would be improper to publish details of criminal, or indeed other trial proceedings, because of the sensitivity of Bhutanese to matters of face. This may well be a valid point, but the likely conflict

between a strict adherence to this notion, and the rule that justice should be seen to be done, is clear.

I am not aware of any proven allegations that decisions have been affected by ethnic considerations. The Home Ministry has responsibility for implementing most legislation touching upon law and order, including the National Security Act, and late last year it sought "clarification" from the High Court concerning the acquittal of five southerners charged along with D. K. Rai and thirty five others, arguing that they had "already admitted their guilt". As a result of the process of clarification, there is now a clear understanding of the separate roles for the Home Ministry and the Court: where appropriate, the Home Ministry formulates charges, but cannot challenge the judgements of the High Court.

Nevertheless, there is a clear commitment to change and the direction of change is cautious and positive. The speed and extent of changes in the law are often constrained by developments in other fields. The shortage of persons trained in the law is one difficulty. Another factor has been the evolutionary trend of the Courts towards independence from the administration: while the principle has been enunciated, this process still has some way to go, but the rules and boundaries of the judiciary and the executive are being sketched out, tested, and readjusted from case to case. In this context, the BPP's 1990 demand that a "system of representation by attorneys and lawyers must be introduced" proposes an arrangement that may come to be, but whose time is not yet ripe, bearing in mind the relative lack of sophistication in the country at large.

One may note nevertheless that in its demands for reform of the judiciary, as in many of the other demands, the BPP has expressed — and perhaps even accelerated — the rationale for changes in many areas that were already on the government's agenda. The demand for the "unconditional release of political prisoners" was never acceptable, in part because any action seen as a concession to these demands would be received as a sign of weakness, and in part because the Amnesty International (AI) pressures — however disagreeable in tone[16] — have in fact acted as a catalyst to bring forward amendments to the National Security Act as a prerequisite to sentencing D. K. Rai and his thirty five co-defendants, plus Tek Nath Rizal and the others in custody for anti-national activities. Similarly, the first visit of the International

Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in January 1993 on invitation of the RGB, followed the construction of the new prison facility at Chemgang (Simtokha) for the "anti-nationals". The substantial cost of providing this facility had to be met from local revenues, and now the rations and living conditions of these prisoners are reportedly rather better than[17] those of the rank-and-file Royal Bhutanese Army and border guards; so there is bound to be some feeling of double standards accorded to the security forces on the one hand and to the "anti-national" forces on the other.

The Assembly

The rather formal traditions that have developed for debate in the Assembly might obscure the changes that are even now taking place in the relationships of chimis and government representatives (principally members of the cabinet). In 1991, 1992 and 1993, the chimis were disciplined but outspoken in their presentation of points of view from their constituencies: government representatives, especially in 1992, were placed on the defensive to explain and justify policy in a number of fields. That the latter did this with skill and eloquence should not hide the fact that the chimis are now becoming better educated, more articulate, and have a stronger feel of accountability to their constituents. The proceedings of the 1993 Assembly suggested a better appreciation by chimis of government policy, particularly concerning the southern problem.

Traditionally and at present, virtually all decisions are made on the basis of consensus or "sense of the meeting" (except the secret vote for Royal Advisory Councillors). The utility of this is clear — it makes for more harmonious agreement, it avoids the creation of disgruntled cliques, and it avoids the iniquities of "51% democracy". But further changes are in the offing: the rules for the advisory council, last revised in 1989, were revised by the 72nd Assembly (partly because of admitted improprieties at the elections in 1992, when an elected Councillor was obliged to withdraw because money had been offered for votes — despite the secrecy of the ballot). The rules governing chimis are also to be further consolidated.

The BPP's demand for proportionate ethnic representation clearly depends on agreed and detailed population statistics, but is only one possible way of establishing a representative assembly, and is clearly

self-serving for a group that asserted (and believed?) itself already a majority. It may also have the disadvantage of making ethnicity a central issue.

A more serious charge may be for the possibilities of gerrymandering the chimi representation, which is in general steady at 105 in an assembly of 151; the number of gewogs or "blocks" (now 196) changes virtually every year and I have for some time sought a list of which gewogs are represented by which chimis. In principle, each chimi should represent about the same number of people, and this arrangement should be revised every five years. These issues need quite urgent attention.

The civil service — losses and gains

The rules and regulations for this arm of government date only from 1982: at that time the principal concern was to establish a compact and efficient civil service while eliminating nepotism and corruption as far as humanly possible. The loss of trained southerners from the civil service after late 1990 undoubtedly has been a major blow to hopes for integration at the level of the educated elite. 475 absconded and 520 resigned up to November 1992, in a civil service of 12,732 at the latter date. However, the fact that very few left between August 1992 and July 1993 suggests that most of those who felt insecure, for whatever reason, have now left the country. (As the number of those resigning or absconding includes a substantial number of lower-level personnel such as forest guards and policemen, perhaps not too much should be made of the overall effect of these losses: but they were nevertheless significant enough to be felt strongly in a number of areas.)

In due course of time, it may become feasible to consider reemploying at least some of the specialist-trained southern Bhutanese graduates who, for whatever reason, chose to resign their posts after February 1988 (although I cannot see any rationale for considering the return or reinstatement of any who absconded). An appropriately-timed indication of a willingness by the government to do this might be a helpful gesture towards reconciliation, although care would need to be taken not to compromise the sentiments of those southern Bhutanese officers who remained loyally at their posts throughout, and in truth it is those who ran away who should demonstrate in what way they have reverted their loyalties.

The districts

The development of the DYTs, and more recently the GYTs, holds substantial promise in the mid-term not only as genuine but also comprehensive fora for the expression of opinions, complaints and judgements on a range of issues. While there is always a danger that the devolution of political decision-making authority can be frustrated by a number of factors (not least by an avalanche of trivia), the present level of literacy is slowly improving, and the leading role of educated and even graduate chimis is growing. It may be that the attempts at devolution in the Fifth and Sixth Plans were largely ineffective or premature because there appeared to be no issues that would engage a clear consensus at the local level, since it is there that decisions must find root. During the past two years, of course, minds have become rather more concentrated. My expectation (which may — but only perhaps — be too bold) is that there will come about an explosion of interest articulation in these fora not dissimilar to the explosion of interest in primary education in the mid-80s after decades of relative disinterest. Much may depend on whether the Home Ministry can effectively devolve more of the nominal powers now lying at the district level, especially since the closure of Zone IV and the ending of the zonal experiment meant the resumption of residual authority by that Ministry.[18]

The media

The de-linking of the media from ministerial authority from October 1992, and the hopes expressed by Bhutanese leaders for a constructively critical role for the media, contrast with conservative attitudes in 1989 and 1990 (to late September). At that time, the cabinet forbade any public reference to the campaign of intimidation and violence against southern officials, on the grounds that everything possible should be done to prevent ethnic antagonism. The result was the circulation of wilder and wilder rumours, some originally based on fact, which began to threaten the credibility of the government. There had likewise been no references to the events in Tiananmen Square in June 1989. In 1990, people in towns and larger villages were turning daily to Radio Nepal for news concerning Bhutan, on matters that their own government was silent about. Even before the demonstrations in late September of 1990, I strongly urged as many officials as I could reach to press for an end to this policy, which seemed to me to be based on a

serious misconception of how sensibly urban and rural opinion leaders were able to assess bad news as well as good, provided it was presented in a balanced form.

I expect the informed citizenry to take enthusiastically to a strong but graduated opening up of the area of public debate and constructive criticism. The habit of principled criticism will become a new factor constraining the grosser misuses of authority that may occur from time to time. It has to be graduated, because it is a learning process, but in this field as in others my belief is that while the response to change may initially be slow, it will then accelerate much faster than some might expect. Bhutanese are a canny people, and love to gossip: information is the raw material of knowledge, and knowledge is a key to power. This process of deliberate but accelerating tuition in the utility of knowledge must necessarily be quite different from the rather naive and block-buster approach envisaged by the BPP's point 7 ("We demand an absolute freedom of the press").

The growth of literacy

The use of English as the medium of instruction in schools in recent years has enabled doors to the outside world to be opened to an extent no other single policy could have achieved. The widespread availability of videos from India also opens another door to alternative but often negative values for the young. The development of the elementary and primary education system in recent years, along with the eclectic New Approach to Primary Education (NAPE) curriculum, provides a strong basis for literate self-esteem. At the same time, there are those who are concerned that traditionalist trends may prevail over literate secular patriotism in curriculum revision. This discussion over what is the proper limit to the world of religion and the world of the secular, and to what extent the promotion of traditional culture should be based on acceptance of an all-embracing orthodoxy, will go on for some time and must be healthy. Southern Bhutanese can also make significant contributions to this debate. It is also a creditable achievement to have kept some schools open in the disturbed districts, despite the intimidation of staff and students.

Security for the future

The Home Ministry cites a figure of 40,000 "southerners" who have gone out of the country since February 1988. There are at present no means to independently verify this figure, and in any case the actual total — possibly higher — may be academic, since it is clear that a great number of people originally from Nepal have departed from Bhutan during 1988-1993, going to a variety of destinations but mainly (particularly since August 1991) to the holding camps in eastern Nepal.

The decision of the 71st Assembly that vacated lands should be resettled by landless or land-poor people from the east and elsewhere, to be implemented by the Home Ministry, has encouraged several thousand easterners to sign up and be ready to move south. Lands previously occupied by illegal or illicit settlers clearly have a political value to the anti-Thimphu people so long as they lie fallow. Small-scale resettlements in Bhangtar are reportedly successful, but a pending resettlement in Sarbhang awaits a turnaround in security conditions.

Ultimately, the frontier regions will always be subject to pressures of population from the Indian side; the only long-term guarantee of security must therefore be the self-interest of the southern Bhutanese citizens themselves, to commit themselves to the safeguarding of their livelihood and to accept the responsibilities of citizenship as well as the material benefits. The growth and increasing effectiveness of village volunteer forces are a major expression of this growing realisation, that southerners must actively resist terrorism and other pressures from the anti-national groups. Southern villagers also see enhanced security coming from an augmentation of their population clusters by northerners.

The people in the camps

King Jigme and Mr. G. P. Koirala (Prime Minister of Nepal) addressed this issue during the SAARC heads of state meeting in Dhaka on 10-11 April 1993. Hopes that the meeting would be helpful in conveying and clarifying the competing national self-interests, and thus in identifying areas of common interest, were not immediately realised, as the Nepalese side continued to insist that all the people in the camps were from Bhutan. Given that there have not been any formal understandings between Bhutan and Nepal on the Nepalese settlers prior to the

events of 1990, such understandings were clearly necessary if matters were to go forward.

Since the Nepali Congress government appears to have done nothing until 12 May 1993 to stem the influx of returning Nepalese, and appears to have done little to discourage their placement in the camps rather than in their home or ancestral villages, that government could not avoid an important responsibility for the situation as it has developed and for any solution to those persons' ultimate disposition. It therefore seems entirely proper that the Bhutan government's principal focus for discussions in the first instance is with its counterpart, rather than with the BPP, BNDP or other organisations claiming authority over the "displaced". In the context of a search for a solution to the human dimensions of the camp phenomena, Koirala's public statement to a BBC-TV reporter in August 1992, ("all that needs to be done to solve this problem is for Bhutan to take all these people back"), was surely disingenuous and unhelpful.

The Nepal-Bhutan Home Ministers' joint communique of 18 July 1993 contains an important concession by the Nepalese side to the Bhutanese point of view, that it was first necessary "to determine the different categories of people claiming to have come from Bhutan in the refugee camps in eastern Nepal". The anti-government forces claim that all the persons in the camps are refugees, that they have all come from Bhutan, that they are all citizens of Bhutan, and that therefore they must all be returned to Bhutan; they must indeed argue on these lines if they are to have political success in their aims, but ironically by arguing thus they have fundamentally flawed the credibility of their case.

One does not have to invoke reports of refugee camp politics (e.g. the alleged corruption of leaders of the World Lutheran Service operation)[19] or even draw attention to UNHCR's apparent practice of granting "Bhutanese refugee" status to persons who at the same time hold current Nepalese identity cards,[20] to acknowledge that the camp people at mid-1993 probably included persons in each of the following categories:

i. Nepalese expelled from Assam and other places in northeast India
ii. Nepalese formerly living illegally or illicitly in Bhutan
iii. Former Bhutanese citizens of Nepalese origin previously living legally in Bhutan, who have left through proper channels and who have thereby

(and voluntarily) surrendered their Bhutan citizenship.

iv. Former Bhutanese citizens of Nepalese origin previously living legally in Bhutan, who have left without going through the required procedures and who therefore have forfeited Bhutanese citizenship according to Bhutanese law.

v. Nepalese formerly living elsewhere in south-eastern Nepal.

To this list we should also add:

vi. Bhutanese citizens of Nepalese descent previously living in Bhutan who left Bhutan involuntarily.

In a strict sense, and leaving aside the question of numbers, it is only such persons who fall under category (vi.) who might have residual claims to resettlement in Bhutan, in terms of the citizenship and other laws of Bhutan.[21] Nevertheless, the modalities of identifying and dealing with those — although surely a daunting task — might be worked out with the help of third parties (perhaps the ICRC).[22]

Maha Nepal

The Greater Nepal theme is variously used to imply an organised movement, a philosophy or point of view, or a generalised condition. In my own research I have found no evidence for a political movement or strategy consistently master-minded over an extended period of time by identifiable individuals for identifiable ends. This includes the Bhutan State Congress (BSC) activity in the early 1950s, and that of the BPP.

What can be seen is continuing population pressure from Nepal on the neighbouring territory of India and Bhutan, and an overwhelming motivation of migrating Nepalese for economic betterment. Certain people both in and outside Nepal may have seen political opportunity windows from time to time for their own ends (which might vary from personal political ambition to seeking an ethnic balance to Indian influence).[23] Any thorough-going examination of the latter factor would also need to review the use of caste identity as a political instrument in the development of strategies and relationships.

Even more important may be a re-examination of what it means to be "Nepalese", some aspects of which have been discussed in *Himal* magazine in 1992. The role of the monarchs (and the relationship of subject to monarch) in the grant of Tikka deserves attention. The citi-

zens of Kathmandu still queue for the King of Nepal's Tikka at the Dussehra festival; King Jigme and the Crown Prince have for the past several years themselves taken part in Tikka ceremonies in Thimphu for that festival.

It may be[24] that certain Nepalese said in 1988-89 to some southerners in Bhutan: "now's your chance — we've got democracy in Nepal, we've made some victories in Darjeeling — push now", with the maximum goal of ultimately incorporating Bhutan into Nepal and repeating how the Lepchas in Sikkim became a minority in their own country.

One cannot ignore the explicit claims to make Bhutan a Gorkha homeland, as presented in the November 1989 pamphlets[25] sent to officers in Thimphu and elsewhere. While these claims are not at present being pressed, presumably in order not to detract from the utility of the "refugee" exercise, it remains a fact that there has been a tradition in Nepal which has not been repudiated by the more recent change in style of government, in which:

'the government claims that its boundaries are determined by the territorial distribution of a culturally unique people and that its governmental system is an expression of their culturally formed will'.[26]

Prospects for the wider integration of Nepalese into Bhutanese society

The Bhutanese are a proud but poor people. Under pressure from outside, their initial tendency is to think defensively, to gain time to prepare for an appropriate response. This strongly defensive attitude was evident at the National Assembly meetings in 1991 and again in 1992, although presented more reflectively in 1993. In principle, there appears to be no sense of racial animosity against Bhutanese of Nepalese extraction. However, events since 1990 have left an inevitable feeling that potential traitors or anti-national elements remain in the civil service or elsewhere, and that the extra degree of intimate trust of pre-1990 is now in many cases lacking. I would not suggest that this has left a permanent stain on all relationships: but it is certainly there, and I have met a few Drukpa who have become deeply embittered by the Nepalese activism, especially through the use of violence and intimidation, and in the sense of betrayal. At the village level, there is a clear understanding that basically the settlers from Nepal may say one thing today and do another tomorrow, that one may work with them but not trust them. Of course, there are important qualitative differences in ed-

ucation and concepts of self-interest between the villagers and the graduate civil servants.

The most immediate difficulties are perhaps faced by those who were born in Bhutan and subsequently educated in the kingdom, but whose parents or antecedents were technically deemed illegal or illicit settlers. While I am assured that those categorised as F7 (see Appendix E) had the right of appeal (on F10), only about seven or eight appear to have used this right through the courts. Thus an official born in Bhutan was able to reclaim his right to land and house, although his parents were F7. Some — especially those in government or donor-agency service — have petitioned the king for citizenship by *kasho*, and many have been successful. Others, who knew of their rights, chose not to seek a *kasho* for reasons of personal pride — but it is argued in private that these same people might because of this character trait show unreliable loyalty to Bhutan under pressure.

Strict adherence to the caste system is a major potential barrier to integration, more so than dress. At the ideological level, the caste system in practice, specifically the rules concerning pollution, is seen at present as inherently undemocratic and distasteful by many educated Bhutanese, although for younger southern Bhutanese it often appears to be more important than, and not in conflict with, Bhutanese citizenship itself. Many Drukpas judge privately that a process of desensitising to caste of southern Bhutanese is the necessary prerequisite for their full acceptance into "Bhutanese" culture. Many also judged, prior to 1990, that this was a process to be achieved by the efflux of time, and assisted by educational practices, rather than by fiat. Southern girls, especially the secondary- or tertiary-educated, seem better able than boys to break out from the chains of the caste system, and marry Drukpas: but they generally cannot do this without a strong commitment both to themselves and to their children, to embrace Bhutanese manners and religious customs.

Ultimately, the goal of integration must involve re-thinking by all parties, must be allowed considerable time, and must turn on a growing awareness of all parties of the utility of secular themes in public.

Democracy

If we can accept that democracy's moral claim to superiority lies solely in its harnessing of power in the service of our common community,

then there can be no argument that Bhutan's leaders are committed to the democratic impulse, even if institutions to give fuller expression to this impulse may not yet be wholly in place. The trend is unmistakable and clear, and this is the most important aspect. King Jigme has repeatedly stated that the goal for Bhutan is to have one social structure, with all citizens united, and loyal to both country and people.

It seems especially important that this impulse should not be constrained at this point of development of the popular political consciousness. As a highly placed source has said, "our idea of democracy is not one from without, but a government that the people respect and support; we see no perfect system of government anywhere in the world; we want one which is responsive to informed and politically aware people." The precise form that future institutions may take in Bhutan may not yet be clear in detail, but they already accept as their starting point the tried procedures of the past, rather than an artificial form such as a multitude of political parties. The sentiment for "democracy" [27] needs to be given (and is being given) a Bhutanese institutional form. This is both the goal and the challenge for the next several decades.

The formal position of the government (in practice the Home Ministry on this matter) is that if there has been any "funny business" in the south in recent years, it was not part of government policy. This may well be so in any particular case of "funny business" that can be established (as in the Chirang thrimpon's activity in late 1991); but this argument can easily be presented also as a catch-all absolving the government of all responsibility for actions by its officers. "Proving" funny business (if or when it exists) is not an easy matter: and what are the precise legal, social and political parameters of "funny business" anyway?

Conclusion

There are a number of very important issues that have not been touched on above for reasons of space — the "easterners"; the legitimacy, role and likely fate of Driglam Namzha; the changing circumstances of the monk body (now in many ways effectively civil servants,[28] and the whole gamut of economic and environmental issues. One must certainly also record the obscenity of the violence perpetrated by the anti-nationals from 1990 against those loyal southern

Bhutanese who resisted threats and persuasion to move to the camps in Nepal.

My present intention has been merely to suggest that a great number of changes are taking place in many fields, and that in general the direction of change seems positive and likely to enhance rather than to diminish popular involvement in political accountability, in both breadth and depth.

In a number of demonstrable ways, current government policies reflect a positive commitment to reconciliation vis-a-vis southern Bhutanese who are not antagonistic to the political reality in which they work, and there is the beginning of a new maturity informing decision-making that was perhaps not always to the fore in the period up to September 1990. There remain a number of areas that cry out for speedy resolution, despite incompleteness or temporary difficulties — for example, the publication of formal population figures for citizens and/or non-citizens, by gewog or at least district. No details of the 1988 national census, or the follow-up re-census, have been published; nor have the details (or even totals) of the annual censuses since: I very much hope that it may prove possible for the Home Ministry to update and publish these, broken down to gewog level, in 1994.

The clarification of agreed areas of jurisdiction between the Assembly, the Courts, the particular ministries, and the dzongkhag administration officers, is proceeding, although some might wish for greater acceleration. The principle of independence of the judiciary is firmly enshrined, as stated above. Developing extremes of wealth and poverty also threaten to be destabilising in the mid-term if not tackled in a principled way. Irrespective of how the issue of "the camp people" is resolved, the public's political awareness is probably both broader and deeper than some officials might credit, notwithstanding the chimis' understandable and explicit rejection of any (externally imposed) institutions of democracy at the 71st session of the National Assembly in 1992.[29] If this is indeed the case — and the performance of individual DYTs and GYTs certainly lies along the full range of a broad spectrum of excellence — then the real task of political and social adjustment in Bhutan is just beginning. The present threat to Bhutan's survival as a distinct and independent political and cultural entity overshadows other concerns today, but the unifying consequences of the same threat are perhaps Bhutan's greatest guarantee for that survival.

[1] These and other issues will be examined in depth by the author in a forthcoming study of the development of Bhutan's social, religious, political, economic and cultural circumstances since 1972.

[2] I wish to record my continuing appreciation of the facilities provided by the Royal Government for regular visits during the past decade and more. However, in this paper, the opinions expressed are my own responsibility, and errors of fact and judgement must fall on my own shoulders.

[3] See Gupta, Anil K.; Karma Ura, "Blending cultural values, indigenous technology and environment: the experiences of Bhutan", paper presented to International Symposium on Strategy for Sustainable Mountain Agriculture, ICIMOD, Kathmandu, 10-14 September 1990.

[4] E.g. Dhruba Adhikary reporting from Kathmandu for Reuters, 16 September 1991, and also 22 September 1991, and again on 12 April 1993; also Reuters from Kathmandu, 31 December 1992.

[5] See Sunanda K. Datta-Ray, "Influx by treaty: pressure of Nepal's diaspora" (*The Sunday Statesman,* Calcutta, 6 October 1991) for a general background, although in the context of Nepalese migration to Sikkim.

[6] The detailed history of migratory labour into Bhutan during the last thirty to forty years, when it is written, will be a seminal resource for placing the events of the past five years in a fair perspective. To date, no such history exists, nor can it be easily assembled given the corruption of immigration and census officials and others with responsibility for record-keeping that was exposed by the 1986-7 district audit.

[7] Extract from The Citizenship Act of 1958 as revised by the Lhengyel Shungtshog in its eighth session held on March 22, 1977:
Conditions required for the grant of Citizenship:
KA1. In the case of government servants an applicant should have completed fifteen years of service without any adverse record.
2. In the case of those not employed in the Royal Government, an applicant should have resided in Bhutan for a minimum period of twenty years.
3. In addition, an applicant should have some knowledge of the Bhutanese language both spoken and written and the history of Bhutan. Only those applicants who fulfil the above requirements may apply for grant of Citizenship to the Ministry of Home Affairs, which will ascertain the relevant facts and submit the application to the Royal Government for further action.

[8] It is unclear why the census was not undertaken in 1986 or 1987, although at that time the audit of major projects (e.g. Penden Cement Authority), the civil service and dzongkhag officers — with its consequent uncovering of major corrupt activities — created much fear and confusion among the senior ranks, and probably had to be brought to a head before the census could be contemplated. In any case, when it was undertaken in early 1988, it had necessarily to be undertaken with considerable speed, despite severe manpower constraints.

[9] The "anti-nationals" claim their protest demonstrations in September-October 1990 were peaceful. Nevertheless, the fact is that militants in camouflage uniforms herded villagers towards southern district headquarters with a mixture of threats and promises. In at least one place — from within Chengmari (Samchi

district) police station grounds — photographic evidence clearly confirms the explicit display of weapons by militants (see the front and back cover illustrations of *Anti-national activities in southern Bhutan: an update on the terrorist movement* (Thimphu, Department of Information, 1992). I have confirmed the authenticity of this evidence by examining the original Konica negative and by matching — in my own photographs — the middle and distant landscape from the standpoint of the photographer.

[10] In this respect, see the many elaborations of his policies given by King Jigme. A case in point is the extended interview with Kumkum Chadha reported in the *Hindustan Times*, 17 November 1991:

" ...we cannot depend in the future on the hope that we will have a wise King. Therefore, I have always emphasised the importance of decentralisation of the government so that the people participate more effectively in the decision-making process within the country. I feel that political changes are necessary. But that must be one which is best suited to national interest... Bhutanese people must be far more politically conscious of sharing the responsibility of Bhutan's national interest and security [and] the decentralisation has to be implemented more vigorously right down to the grassroots level. At the same time more powers have to be given to the National Assembly... I have always emphasised that whatever political changes we bring about in Bhutan does not lie in the hands of the king but in the hands of the people and therefore the people must choose what kind of government they want..."

Right now in the north the feeling that the present system should continue is unanimous. In the south we have one set of people who want the present system of government to continue but there is another set of people, who are not Bhutanese nationals but live in Bhutan — they are economic migrants who have come from Nepal — who want democratic changes in Bhutan. ... Whatever political changes or system we have, it cannot be forced upon us by non-nationals.

[11] The title bracket is as given in the founding document, "[Bhutan] National Democratic Party: Headquarters: Thimphu, Bhutan: Ideology, manifesto, and organisation structure: 7 February 1992".

[12] See the documentation in *Anti-national activities in southern Bhutan: an update on the terrorist movement* (Thimphu 1992); *The southern Bhutan problem: threat to a nation's survival* (Thimphu: Ministry of Home Affairs, May 1993); *A brief pictorial summary of the terrorist activities in southern Bhutan: 13 August 1992 to 5 June 1993* (Thimphu: Ministry of Home Affairs, 1993). Up to 5 June 1993, cases reported to or confirmed by the Royal Bhutan Police include the following: murder, 58; rape, 40; kidnapping, 211; dacoity and robbery, 584; vehicle hijackings, 49; Bhutanese nationals attacked or injured in raids on villages, 495; terrorists killed in encounters, 5; terrorists apprehended by village volunteer forces, 90 (Home Ministry figures).

[13] See Shaw, Brian; Rose, Leo E., "Bhutan" in the series *Constitutions of the countries of the world* ed. Blaustein and Flanz (Dobbs Ferry, NY: Oceana Publications, 1989).

[14] The text of these chathrim, along with other constitutional documents, are included in the forthcoming update to the Bhutan section of *Constitutions of the countries of the world*. There are now (mid-1993) 2,589 GYT members and 560

DYT members who are exposed to grass-roots decision-making.

[15] In general terms, the Land Act addresses itself to land records already recorded in the central land register (Thram); but only a cadastral survey can definitively put to rest disputed claims over e.g. adjoining plots of land which may be marked in the Thram only by a rough sketch map.

[16] Amnesty International, *Bhutan: human rights violations against the Nepali-speaking population in the South* (London, December 1992; AI index ASA 14/4/92). AI's call for the unconditional release of Tek Nath Rizal as a "prisoner of conscience" seems to fail to take into account the charges against him of conspiring (when in Nepal) to set up an alternative government in southern Bhutan. The tone of the tract "Bhutan: we want justice" is clearly rebellious and contemptuous of constituted authority, and it is surprising to read that AI has "examined the booklet ... and concluded that it did not contain threats of armed uprising against the state or the advocacy of violence". Consider the following extracts:

It is time for us [to] shout to the power in Thimphu "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity" and bring down the "Bastille". It is time for us to say to ourselves Bhutanese Nepalese, unit[e], we have nothing to lose but gain. The hour has struck for the historic conflict. ... *This document is a protest and a prophecy.* A protest to the powers that inend [sic] to put shackles on us. A prophecy that a whirlwind of rebellion will shake the hills of Thimphu and bring down the rising towers of terrorist power. We want to tell in unmistakable terms that we shall hold on to our religion, our culture our language and our land woth [sic] our *"teeth"*. We shall fight until we win. (p. 1)

We will die fighting for our rights, but we will never submit our rights.

So come *friends,* let us unite and join hands and bring an end to this apartheid rule, we have the will, the courage and the resources to win victory. The world is with us in our struggle. *If we all unite and fight, a new flag of freedom is sure to go up and flutter in the sky of the Bhutanese in the near future. Come we shall start today and now.* (p. 20)

While there is always scope for reinforcing institutional safeguards to improve human rights, it seems on the evidence presumptuous to refer to a need to prevent "continuation of human rights violations" (p. 25). AI by its mandate must seek to occupy the high moral ground in its relations with governments, but it is by no means certain that AI reflects reality when it records that it "believes all the testimonies quoted in [its report] to be reliable" (footnote 3, p. 13): in such a serious issue, it is important to go beyond "beliefs", no matter how sincerely held. Likewise, the presumption that various forms of torture have been widely applied by the Bhutan security forces is, in my opinion, not proven.

[17] In Bhutan, the living conditions of the rank and file RBA and RBG jawans are very rough indeed. It is understandable that a prison is not normally comparable to even a modest private dwelling. The "anti-national" prisoners detained at Chemgang have facilities significantly superior to those accorded common prisoners in other gaols in Bhutan.

[18] A draft internal document on "decentralisation and devolution of new functions to dzongkhags" circulated to dzongkhags in 1992 clearly states:

"The essence of the Fifth Plan (1981-86) document is as relevant today as it was for the Fifth Five Year Plan...no development effort can succeed without the

people's cooperation and commitment, and effective development cannot take place through a top-down process alone. While government would give the lead in the overall direction of development and provide resources and technical inputs which are beyond the capacity of the people, plans will have to be formulated in consultation with the people so that these plans can reflect the felt needs of the people and that their execution is within the capabilities of the people. It is the conviction of the government that only when these conditions are satisfied and effectively pursued that the benefits of development would actually reach all sections of the population leading to increased equity. The principles enshrined in the 7th Plan (1992-97) documents also echo the basic approaches of the earlier plans.

The norms for decentralisation even in the 7th Five Year Plan [include]:

a) All activities related exclusively to the rural development of a particular dzongkhag are to be decentralised to the dzongkhags and to the Gewog.

b) GYT and DYT are to be actively involved in plan formulation, decision making and in implementation of the programmes.

[19] See Tapas Mukherjee, *Mail Nation,* October 18-24, 1992, citing investigative reports in an (undated) copy of the Kathmandu weekly *Dristi."*

[20] See *Anti-national activities in southern Bhutan: an update on the terrorist movement* (Thimphu: Department of Information, 12 August 1992): at p. 11 there is reproduced what purports to be a photocopy of a Nepalese citizenship card of Indra Bahadur Chettri which "confirms [him] to be a Nepali Citizen like many other Nepali immigrants in Bhutan"; at p. 12 there is reproduced a certificate (signed by A. T. Leckey, UNHCR representative) dated 24 October 1991, giving "endorsement [to] his [i.e. Indra Bahadur Chettri's] claim to be a refugee even though he holds a Nepalese citizenship card".

[21] Since 12 May 1993, the Nepalese government has introduced strict screening procedures for Nepalese re-entering Nepal and claiming to be from Bhutan: only those "confirmed as genuine asylum seekers from Bhutan will be permitted to enter Nepal and be registered for receiving assistance in the refugees' camps" (AFP from Kathmandu 12 May 1993; see also *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts,* FE/1670 A1/5 [16]).

[22] I have retained this mention of a possible role for the ICRC in the text as delivered, although it subsequently became clear that such a role would not accord with its mandate. Subsequent events have made it clear that the detailed identification of persons claiming to be refugees from Bhutan could realistically be made only by the Nepalese and Bhutanese governments, in cooperation, as was agreed in Thimphu on 18 July 1993.

[23] Anecdotal evidence strongly suggests that high personalities in Nepal have for many years shared the rationale that an effective concentration of Nepalese in a sensitive area of India was essential, if Nepal was to have any chance of exercising counter-pressure on India concerning the extensive and continuing Bihari migration into Nepal's duars. The most logical sensitive area, in this analysis, is the Darjeeling-Kalimpong-Sikkim area and, by extension, Bhutan — or at least a substantial area of southern Bhutan. The area's sensitivity to any Union government is clear: the Chinese presence in the Chumbi valley cannot be ignored, and the narrow Siliguri neck, if choked, can cut off the entire north-east from the

rest of India. Whether this notion was ever committed to paper as a viable long-term strategy is another matter; in the author's opinion, the principal orientation to date has been opportunism based on a relatively short-term vision.

[24] So far as I am aware, there is no public evidence that such an intervention was in fact made, but likewise one cannot say with certainty that it was not made in some form or other. A simpler and more plausible explanation may be that certain southerners themselves came to this opinion.

[25] E.g., "The Gurkha people of Southern Bhutan must unite and fight for our rights", a six-page tract signed "the Voice of the Oppressed People of Bhutan", commences: "The time has come for the majority Gurkha people of Bhutan to rise against the despot Drukpa king and his corrupted government".

[26] Burghart, Richard, "The formation of the concept of nation-state in Nepal", *Journal of Asian Studies* (XLIV, 1 [1984]), p. 122.

[27] For some, the sentiment is not yet by any means a full-flowered understanding of the concept, and the era of local autocrats is by no means over in all districts, although much has been done to smooth the rough edges.

[28] To put the matter thus is not in any way to denigrate the great contribution and present value of the Buddhist point of view concerning compassion and respect for all sentient beings. However, note e.g. (Dasho) Rigzin Dorji: "The monastic system of Bhutan", p. 7: "All [the monastic] centres [...] may be likened to government departments in so far as monks can join them normally after a stipulated period of education and meditation" (unpublished paper presented to the 5th International Seminar on Tibetan Studies, Narita, Japan, August 27 - September 2, 1989).

[29] See e.g. *Resolutions of the 71st Session of the National Assembly*, Agenda heading XVI, point 11: "Proposal to consolidate the established system of government": "The people's representatives of the four gewogs of Phuntsholing, Lokchina, Bhalujhora and Gengu under Phuntsholing Dungkhag in Chukha Dzongkhag called for the further consolidation of the institution of hereditary monarchy in Bhutan. They pointed out that the ngolops were trying to malign the Royal Government through countless anti-national letters and literatures including their so-called thirteen point demand which had no relevance for the people of Bhutan. The people already enjoyed the rights and privileges the ngolops were demanding for propaganda purposes in their so-called thirteen point demand. Under the farsighted guidance of His Majesty the King and because of the cherished system of hereditary monarchy, the country had been enjoying peace and tranquillity and making rapid progress in socio-economic development. The people had no wish whatsoever for the democracy demanded by the ngolops but wanted to further consolidate the institution of hereditary monarchy which had been so beneficial for Bhutan. The people had observed that although there was institutional democracy in neighbouring countries, the people there faced far greater problems than the people of Bhutan who enjoyed greater peace, happiness and progress."

Looking for Greater Nepal

Kanak Mani Dixit

Is there today in South Asia a movement to establish a "Greater Nepal"? If not, is such a movement likely to arise under present political conditions? This paper seeks answers to these two questions.

A few connoisseurs of South Asian news and politics might consider the first question irrelevant because they consider the Greater Nepal concept a "bogey", opportunistically pushed by a handful of regional actors. However, the fact that some diplomatic, political and media circles in India profess to take seriously the idea of a Greater Nepal "conspiracy" makes this an issue of actual geopolitical significance. Secondly, analysing the subject of Greater Nepal can be useful in itself, because this leads to an examination of "Nepaliness" — that amorphous state of belonging among a section of the population of the Himalayan rimland and contiguous plains. Under what circumstances could this Nepaliness evolve into a movement for a Greater Nepal?

Historical Greater Nepal

Until the mid-1700s, the principalities of the Central Himalayan region had been content fighting each other or serving as tributaries of more powerful states. The ascendancy of the House of Gorkha under Prithvi Narayan Shah was a new phenomenon. Emerging from the mini-state of Gorkha (to the west of Kathmandu), Prithvi Narayan devised a method of mountain warfare, conquest and consolidation which allowed him to extend the Gorkhali domain far beyond what earlier rajas had dared contemplate. Prithvi Narayan and his immediate descendants subjugated the Chaubisi rajas of today's central Nepal and the Baisi rajas of the far-western Karnali, incorporated Makwanpur and Bijayapur in the eastern lower hills, conquered the Kirat regions in the eastern hills and parts of today's Sikkim and Darjeeling, and, above all, seized the prize of Kathmandu Valley. Then the empire builders lunged westwards across the Mahakali river into Kumaon, taking it in 1790. Garhwal was taken in 1804, followed by further cis-Sutlej principalities, until the forces of Kazi Amar Singh Thapa, the Gorkhali general of

the western campaign, were laying seige to the fort of Kangra. Beyond, and probably within reach, lay Kashmir.

In 1813, the "historical Greater Nepal" extended from the Sutlej to the Teesta, spanning 1500 kilometres. However, the Gorkhalis' rule over this expanse was never consolidated and the war with the British East India Company (1814-1816) saw Kathmandu's realm cut down to size. The Gorkhali presence in Garhwal lasted for a little over a decade; Kumaon was under Gorkhali control for 25 years and Sikkim for 33 years. All these and more (some Tarai lands) were ceded in the war's aftermath. The Treaty of Sagauli, between a chastened Gorkhali state and the Company, was ratified in 1816. It stripped Kathmandu's rulers of about 105,000 sq km of territory and left Nepal as we find it today: about 142,000 sq km that has remained under rulers who have not shown extra-territorial ambitions since. Except for an adventure against the Tibetans under Jang Bahadur (1854-1856), the Gorkhalis' military muscle was never used externally again, other than in the service of the British Raj.

Even as this Greater Nepal went into eclipse, however, a "demographic greater Nepal" was in the making. During what the historian Ludwig Stiller has characterised as the "silent years" of 19th-century Nepali history, the pressures of the state on the ethnic and other hill communities increased dramatically. A host of push-factors including repression, economic exploitation and possibly over-population, as well as pull-factors in British India (the need for labour), led to largescale migration from Nepal eastwards along the hills and Duars. These migrants provided the brawn that the British needed to open up the Indian northeast, for settlements, timber industries and tea gardens. Over the decades and into the 1900s, settlers from Nepal were to build up heavy concentrations in the lower hills of Sikkim, Bhutan and in the Duars. In lesser densities, they extended themselves right across the northeast and as far as today's Myanmar. Could this scattered community of Nepali labourers and peasants ever come together to form a Greater Nepal?

Who says there is a Greater Nepal movement?

Apparently independently of each other, both Dawa Tsering, the Foreign Minister of Bhutan, and Subash Ghising, Chairman of the

Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council, have contended that there is a movement afoot for the creation of a Greater Nepal.

Ghising has had disputes with West Bengal's Left Front government and Chief Minister Jyoti Basu, as well as with Nar Bahadur Bhandari, Chief Minister of Sikkim until May 1994. In dealing with challenges from without, one of Ghising's strategies has been to highlight contentious issues relating to territory, language and nationalism. Over the last couple of years, for example, he has made the following claims: that Darjeeling is a no-man's-land due to certain lacunae in the 1950 Indo-Nepal Friendship Treaty; that Kalimpong is leased territory actually belonging to Bhutan; that "Gorkhali" rather than "Nepali" should have been recognised as an official language in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution; and that there exists a conspiracy to create a Greater Nepal.

In a letter to the Indian Prime Minister dated 26 July 1991, Ghising asserted that the recognition of "Nepali" rather than "Gorkhali" not only deprived the Gorkhas of their right to their mother tongue but also contributed to the stabilisation of the "Greater Nepal Movement". The movement, he maintained, was a communist plot which was receiving clandestine support from the Indian communists and Sikkim's Bhandari Government. Ghising also claimed that the Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist Leninist), Nepal's powerful opposition in Parliament, had during election campaigns demanded that all Nepali territories "unjustly" ceded to the British be returned to Nepal. "That is why I am spending sleepless nights," Ghising told *The Statesman* of Calcutta. He added,

> Their plan is somehow to build up a case of ethnic homogeneity so that the objective of Greater Nepal can be achieved some day. I don't want to be personal but some of these Greater Nepal leaders, including the Sikkim Chief Minister, maintain excellent relations with Kathmandu's Singha Durbar.

Ghising also believes that the current problems in southern Bhutan are part of the same "gameplan". He told *The Statesman,*

> I have been in politics since 1964 but never have I seen such subtle, quiet and calculating moves by separatists trying to wrench these Indian territories for merger with Nepal. The separatists are trying to set up a confederation of Himalayan kingdoms which would also include Bhutan. The powerful initiators of this move in Nepal, India and elsewhere have set the ball rolling by creating disturbances in

> Bhutan. My sixth sense and political acumen have repeatedly alerted me to the grave danger that the manifestations of the Greater Nepal movement pose to the Indian Union. Surprisingly, this danger is completely unknown to the rulers in Delhi and Calcutta... If our national leaders do not wake up, the Nepalese flag will be flying in these Indian territories in another three years' time.

The fears expressed by Ghising have a lot in common with those of the Foreign Minister of Bhutan. In January 1992, Dawa Tsering told a visiting Amnesty International delegation that the Nepali-speaking southern Bhutanese who had rebelled were "supported by groups and individuals in India and Nepal who support the concept of a greater Nepal, which is based on the premise that the Himalayas are the natural home of the Nepalese, a myth which is not supported by historical fact." Dawa Tsering was of the view that the concept of Greater Nepal "has become attractive to many Nepali politicians in India and Nepal [because] the green hills of Bhutan have become a paradise for the land-hungry and job-hungry poor, illiterate Nepali peasants from across the border". Additionally, he said, southern Bhutan had tremendous industrial potential with minerals, forests and hydro-power readily available. In Autumn 1992, the Foreign Minister informed the Bhutanese Tshogdu (National Assembly) of the Greater Nepal threat. As reported by *Kuensel*,

> It was not merely out of ethnic affinity that the political parties and people of Nepal were supporting the anti-nationals of southern Bhutan, but more out of their deep-seated desire to promote the concept of a Greater Nepal. This concept envisaged Nepalese domination over the entire Himalayas by bringing Bhutan, parts of the Duars in West Bengal and Assam and the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland under Nepalese control just as in the case of Sikkim and Darjeeling.

The likely "conspirators"

If the threat of "Greater Nepal" truly existed, it would come from one of three directions: the Nepali state, the Sikkimese state or the Lhotshampas of Bhutan. Let us take them one by one.

The Nepali state

The new 1990 Constitution of Nepal states in Part I, Article 4, entitled *The Kingdom:*

1. Nepal is a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, democratic, independent, indivisible, sovereign, Hindu and Constitutional Monarchical Kingdom.
2. The territory of Nepal shall comprise:
   a. the territory existing at the commencement of this Constitution; and
   b. such other territory as may be acquired after the commencement of the Constitution.

When historical Greater Nepal was truncated by the Treaty of Sagauli, Nepal entered an insular period that was to last until 1951, mostly under the rule of Rana oligarchs. The Ranas governed under a strict understanding with the British that they would have untrammelled internal authority as long as Nepal stopped eyeing neighbouring territories and maintained a steady supply of Gurkha fighters for the armed forces of the Raj. After 1816, the British never faced an expansionist Nepal.

During 1951-1960, a period of relative political freedom, the Nepali middle and upper classes were carried along in an upwelling of pan-Nepali feeling. Emerging from a century of political slumber, Nepalis were able to express long-suppressed feelings of what might have been. Textbooks carried patriotic primers on the glorious days of expansionism, and songs extolled the Gorkhali prowess. There was an outpouring of pan-Nepali poetry and songs: take the following free translation of a lyric by Nepal's "Folk Poet" Dharma Raj Thapa, written in the mid-1950s:

What has happened to us Nepalis?
Our own songs have all been lost.
We did twice best the Germans in battle,
We did take the Sutlej and Kangra,
But today our own voice is heard no more.

In these sentiments there is a yearning for a glorious past, but no militancy. A pan-Nepali movement did not emerge in the 1950s, as indeed it could not. Nepalis tested the subcontinental waters and realised that the new Indian rulers had merely supplanted the British Viceroy. Any notion of expansionism was banished.

If mainstream Nepali politicians have given up the thought of incorporating Kangra and Darjeeling, it is not necessarily because they do not relish the prospect, but because of the impracticability of establishing Greater Nepal on India's front lawn. The establishment of Greater Nepal would have to involve the takeover of Sikkim (now a state of the Indian Union) and Bhutan (which falls squarely under New Delhi's security umbrella). Promoting Greater Nepal would be a dare that no government of Nepal (whether of the Nepali Congress or some future Left party) would be willing to take, even clandestinely. As one observer in Kathmandu asked rhetorically, "Wouldn't the first move taken towards a Greater Nepal bring Nepal up against a certain institution called the Indian Army?"

In the early 1960s, some Western scholars mooted the idea of a Himalayan confederation — a coming together of Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan to form a front against Communist expansion in Tibet and facilitate better bargaining with India. This idea was never acknowledged or endorsed by the states of the region, although there was said to be some interest in Nepal, which would have been the dominant partner. Had the idea taken hold, the Himalayan confederation might have been the beginning of a Greater Nepal. But in subsequent years, subcontinental geopolitics have moved ever further away from Himalayan consolidation and from the "Himalasia" that some scholars wished to see take shape.

The three decades of the autocratic Panchayat system, too, might have provided a leisurely occasion to push for a Greater Nepal spearheaded by the king, who is a direct descendant of Prithvi Narayan. But Greater Nepal once again took a backseat. The defining foreign policy demarche during King Birendra's years as unfettered monarch was the Zone of Peace proposal which, far from being pan-Nepali in nature, has been considered an attempt by Nepal to protect itself from a "Greater India". Since democracy arrived a second time in Nepal, in the spring of 1990, freedom of speech has once again provided a fillip to those few who continue to be obsessed with re-establishing the Gorkhali state's lost glory. One example of Greater Nepal activism is a letter, said to have been sent in 1992 to the US and Indian embassies, and copied to some Kathmandu papers, from a group calling itself the Greater Nepal Committee. The letter states,

Since the Nepali people are now sovereign, it is but natural that they worry about their nation and the perpetual security of its territorial integrity. In accordance with Article 8 of the Treaty of Peace and Friendship between the Government of India and the Government of Nepal, 1950, the Government of India should give back the Nepalese territories east of the Mechi river and west of Mahakali river to Nepal unconditionally. Instead, these territories have been colonised by the Government of India by violating the above-mentioned treaty... In this context, we would like to make Your Excellency aware that we have already started a campaign for "Greater Nepal". A body called "Greater Nepal Committee" has been formed on July 17, 1991. Our objective is to create a world-wide public opinion in favour of the "Greater Nepal" and to achieve it.

The letter is signed by Surendra Dhakal, who is introduced as a member of the Greater Nepal Committee. Dhakal was until recently the editor of a two-year-old Kathmandu weekly called *Rangamanch,* which claims to have been the "first newspaper to raise the voice for Greater Nepal". The weekly has consistently projected what it calls "Bishal Nepal", although others also use the terms "Brihat Nepal" or "Maha Nepal". In an interview given to his own paper, Dhakal stated that the Committee's preliminary agenda was to do research and to present its findings on Greater Nepal to the public and the Western press. In an interview with this writer, Dhakal claimed that he was not interested in day-to-day party politics, and that he was fulfilling his moral and nationalistic duty by speaking up for Greater Nepal. He said that Nepali politicians across the political spectrum were cowed by "fear of India", which was why they were unwilling to speak in support of Greater Nepal. Dhakal said he did not know of any organisation other than his own that was pushing for a Greater Nepal.

Whatever the seriousness with which some individuals and groups regard the Greater Nepal concept, their enthusiasm might be dampened by a look within the nation-state of Nepal. Since the spring of 1990, there has been a surge of ethnic assertion within the country. The ethnic communities of the hills as well as political groupings in the Tarai are making demands for greater political representation and a more equitable sharing of power with the Bahun, Chhetri and Newar communities. There has been opposition to the Constitution's description of Nepali as the national language of Nepal, and calls for education to be provided in mother tongues. This, therefore, is a time when the Nepali state is looking inward to resolve the problems that come with class, caste, regionalism and ethnic assertion. Far be it from the

power centres in Kathmandu, then, to look outward for adventures that would amount to a direct challenge to the Indian state.

Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala did raise some fears in Thimphu when he served as the General Secretary of the Nepali Congress Party during 1990-91. In calling for democracy and human rights in Bhutan, Koirala recalled that he had also been involved in the Bhutanese struggle for human rights back in the 1960s. As Prime Minister, however, Koirala speaks differently. In 1992 he told Sikkimese journalists in Jhapa that the Greater Nepal idea was "a product of unstable minds". As far as the mainstream leftist parties are concerned, there does seem to be some sympathy for a "coming together" of the Nepali-speakers of the subcontinent, but to call this an agitation for a Greater Nepal would be an exaggeration. *Rangamanch* magazine quoted Madan Bhandari, former General Secretary of the CPN (UML), as saying,

> I do not want to make any political comment on Greater Nepal. But as far as it is a question of feeling, as a Nepali I can express the emotion that Nepali-speakers who are linked through their ancestry should be able to come together as one united family. If the Greater Nepal issue progresses, then in a peaceful manner, taking into account the sentiments of all people, this thing can be decided.

Ishwor Pokharel, Central Committee member of the CPN (UML), had this to say when asked by this writer to comment on Ghising's accusations that the Nepali communists are involved in the Greater Nepal Movement,

> We have made no formal statements on the question of Greater Nepal and no leader of the party has endorsed this concept. We have certainly decried unequal treaties between Nepal and India, but these are in the context of the 1947 tripartite agreement and subsequent treaties. We have not gone back to question the Sagauli Treaty of 1816, nor asked for cession of land to Nepal. The party regards the Greater Nepal proposals as neither relevant nor timely and we have not taken them seriously.

The Sikkimese state

The other source of a Greater Nepal conspiracy would be Sikkim under Nar Bahadur Bhandari, who was until recently Sikkim's powerful Chief Minister, or some other personality. The Darjeeling hills were a part of Sikkim until gifted by the Chogyal to the British in 1835. Now that

Sikkim has been incorporated into India, there is concern in some quarters, and expectation in others, that Sikkim and Darjeeling will be united as in the past. Today Sikkim is a state dominated by Nepali-speakers, the Bhutia/Lepchas having been rapidly marginalised. Bhandari ruled Sikkim with an iron hand for fourteen years and emerged as the most powerful Indian of Nepali origin. A charismatic and ambitious man, Bhandari must have wished for successes beyond his tiny state. Could a move for Greater Nepal, then, have come from him?

Under existing circumstances, it would not have been realistic for Bhandari or any other Nepali leader in India to entertain visions of becoming a leader of the Nepalis of South Asia as a whole. "Greater Sikkim", in fact, seems a more likely possibility than Greater Nepal, and Bhandari himself seemed to indicate in a July 1991 press conference, as reported by the *Sikkim Observer*, a preference for a Sikkim that had Darjeeling incorporated into it. According to the *Telegraph* of Calcutta, Bhandari's move was a retaliation to Ghising's claims that the Sikkim Chief Minister and other protagonists of the Nepali language were involved in the "Greater Nepal gameplan".

Sikkim's historical claims over the Darjeeling hills would not make the demand for a united state untenable. The creation of such a state, which would have a Nepali-speaking majority, would of course complicate affairs as it would impinge upon the turf of Ghising and his followers as well as the West Bengal government. If such a Greater Sikkim were to incorporate the Duars, the Indian government's concerns would be pronounced, as this is India's "chicken neck" to the northeast. Bhutan, too, would have reason to be worried, as it would then be bounded on two sides by a Nepali-speaking state.

B. S. Das, a former Indian envoy to Thimphu, was of the view that if Bhandari's emergence as a spokesman for all the Nepalis settled in India remained within bounds, it would not become a problem. However, "if these forces are allowed to become stronger by Indian neglect or Bhutanese mistakes, the concept of Maha Nepal will emerge under the garb of the so-called Greater Sikkim." Others too may agree with Das that a Greater Sikkim would be a stepping stone to Greater Nepal. But it is open to question whether Nepali-speakers would opt to leave the Indian Union's "economic centre" to join a Nepali state on the periphery.

The Lhotshampas

The third possible source of a conspiracy for Greater Nepal would be the Nepali-speaking Lhotshampas of Bhutan. However, it appears that the Lhotshampas' most logical agenda would be for greater power-sharing within Bhutan, and this is what a perusal of documents and newsletters published by the refugee opposition to the Thimphu government suggests.

The one document that comes closest to making territorial threats was a booklet brought out by the first handful of refugees to arrive in Jhapa at the end of 1989 (including Tek Nath Rizal, presently in a Thimphu jail). Entitled *Bhutan: We Want Justice,* the booklet contains one passage which reads:

> Once Chhogyal's Raja of Sikkim ruled his country in a similar way but that consequently led the country to become an Indian state. At present the Drukpa rulers are marching the Chhogyal way.

This is certainly combative prose, but it has not been possible to find documents brought out by the Bhutan Peoples' Party (BPP) or the Bhutan National Democratic Party (BNDP) which contain explicit references to the establishment of a Greater Nepal. R. B. Basnet, President of the BNDP, states, "There has been no document and no speech by any refugee leader which has spoken of Greater Nepal as our goal. Greater Nepal is something we have heard of only since we have come outside. It is a concept that is neither feasible nor desirable for Bhutan. It might have been brought up to create misunderstandings between Nepal and India and to undercut any Nepali support for the refugees."

Until the Lhotshampas emerged as refugees, there seem to have been very few political links between them and the Nepalis of Nepal. If there is any place where there is a feeling for being "Nepali" today, however, it is in the refugee camps of Jhapa. Said one refugee, "This feeling arises because the very reason we have been made refugees is for being Nepali-speakers. I used to feel Bhutanese first and Nepali second. Now it is the other way around." Their refugee status has forced the Lhotshampas to consider their Nepaliness. By creating the conditions that force Nepali-speakers to become refugees on a mass scale, the Bhutanese Government might have inadvertently started a process of self-identification by Nepalis that could snowball and go out of control.

For the moment, however, this seems unlikely, and the refugee leaders seem far removed from initiating or joining a movement for a Greater Nepal.

Since the Thimphu government seems firm on not wanting the refugees back, there is only one government that can ensure the refugees' repatriation to their homesteads in Bhutan — the government in New Delhi. And the one move that would guarantee immediate antagonism from that quarter against the refugees is for them to agitate for a Greater Nepal. The refugee leaders realise, perhaps better than others, that the best way to ensure a non-return to Bhutan would be to agitate for a Greater Nepal.

Eyes on New Delhi

It seems that in Ghising's case the Greater Nepal issue was a weapon in his battles with Chief Minister Basu and former Chief Minister Bhandari. Having had difficulties in delivering sound government to the Darjeeling hill population, partly due to obstacles created by Basu's Left Front state government, and in order to try to undercut the power of his rival Bhandari, Ghising picked up "Greater Nepal" as the way to make the politicians and bureaucrats in New Delhi sit up and take notice. In the case of the government of Bhutan, wary of a possible attempt by the Nepali-speaking Lhotshampas of the south to wrest control of the state, there was a need to alert New Delhi to the urgency of the situation and to ensure that New Delhi was antagonistic towards the refugee organisations. In the case of Bhutan as well, "Greater Nepal" was the way to make the politicians and bureaucrats in New Delhi sit up and take notice.

Why is "Greater Nepal" such a convenient issue to catch New Delhi's attention? Both Ghising and Dawa Tsering know well the sensitivity of India's strategists towards the "northern frontier". They also believe that New Delhi would not take kindly to the emergence of a Nepali-speaking super-state in such a sensitive region. Even worse, if such a state were to be foreign, under Kathmandu's rule, it would give rise to a host of attendant geopolitical complications that New Delhi could well do without.

As far as the northern frontier is concerned, the thawing of relations between Beijing and New Delhi has meant that the guard has been lowered slightly. This has allowed the opening up of several Indo-

Tibetan trading routes, and more areas are slated for opening. Under the urging of state governments keen to develop tourism, inner line restrictions have been lifted in large sections of the Himalayan states of India. Helicopters are now ferrying tourists into high valleys close to the northern border, something that was unthinkable a few years ago. All of this suggests that the fear of conflict along the northern frontier has reduced considerably. But there are other reasons for New Delhi to be wary of a Greater Nepal. It would be a powerful state whose establishment would destabilise a host of existing relationships within India. Greater Nepal, at its geographically widest extent, would be a Nepali-speaking entity which would command the Himalayan rimland, controlling water resources, irrigation, hydropower, tourism, and trade with Tibet. Among Indian strategists, a Greater Nepal state would be seen as something to be avoided. At the same time, astute diplomacy could also make use of the Greater Nepal scenario, even if it is not entirely believable for the moment, as a means to keep Nepal on the defensive. "Greater Nepal" could thus be serving a purpose even if Greater Nepal failed to come about.

Indian concerns are probably also fed by a lurking fear that the martial races of the Nepali hills, the Gorkhalis, will at some point rise and take over chunks of the Indian Himalaya. This "fear of the khukuri" as a regional threat seems quite redundant to those who know the politics of Nepal but, although the khukuri's days as a tool of conquest are long past, some of the fear lingers. This is largely because most plainsmen (and also many westerners) continue to regard the "Gurkhas" or "Gorkhas" as a single unified race that has the ability to articulate a political agenda. As we have seen, there is today a rise of ethnic self-assertion and the break-up of the Gorkhali identity, but many plains-based analysts continue to regard the "Gorkhas" as a homogenous group capable of achieving geopolitical designs. The journalist Sunanda K Datta-Ray wrote recently in the *International Herald Tribune,*

> The (Indian) government has long been wary of the Nepalis. Their claim (for recognition of Nepali in the Eighth Schedule) was seen as the thin end of a wedge of political demands by a martial race entrenched in pockets along India's 1,500 mile Himalayan border.

Tanka Subba, a sociologist at the North Eastern Hill University in Shillong, agrees that there is a fear of Nepali expansion from the tens of

thousands of demobilised and retired Gurkha soldiers: "with so much military experience, so the argument goes, it may be possible for Nepalis to take over areas where they dominate." Sumanta Sen, in the *Times of India*, writes that with jobs scarce both in Nepal and India, "these former soldiers may choose to become mercenaries. Within the next few years, such ex-havildars and even senior ranks will rise in numbers in the Darjeeling hills. The market for Gorkha mercenaries need not be limited to the hills of Darjeeling or the foothills of Bhutan."

When such worries and suspicions exist about the Nepali-speaking hills (a sensitive northern frontier, a possible super-state, the Gorkhali martial legacy), a suggestion that Nar Bahadur Bhandari's supposed popularity among the Nepali-speakers of India has to do with a Greater Nepal conspiracy, or that the Lhotshampas in Bhutan are the vanguards of a Greater Nepal campaign, serves the purpose for Ghising and Dawa Tsering of getting the New Delhi power centres on their side. But not everyone believes the dire scenario that they put forward. In an oft-quoted remark, the Chief Minister of West Bengal, for example, dismissed the Greater Nepal issue as a "bogey". Basu told the West Bengal Vidhan Sabha in August 1991, "If Mr. Ghising has reports on the Greater Nepal issue, let us get together and talk about it, as the Union Home Minister and the state government have no reports on the matter." But a *Sunday Mail* reporter believed that

> of late, fissiparous tendencies have been observed suggesting that there is more to the "Greater Nepal" issue than meets the eye... West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu may dismiss the allegation of a "Greater Nepal" movement as a "bogey" for political reasons, but the responsibility of the Union government goes deeper than that.

And a reporter of the *Statesman* wrote,

> The Left Front Government may have dismissed Mr. Ghising's warning as "bogus". But in Delhi's perception, it is either blissfully ignorant about the ethnic and demographic crises that have already overtaken large areas of the Dooars, the hills of Darjeeling, Sikkim and Bhutan, or it is overconfident that it can handle any worsening situation on its own. Though the official and academic circles in Delhi are not willing to paint too grim a picture, they are against the situation being taken lightly in view of the historical antecendents of the "greater Nepal" movement.

The Nepali Psyche

Under what conditions would a pan-Nepali "ethnogenesis" come about, which could then be expected to lead to a potent Greater Nepal movement?

There has been no wrenching incident in Nepali history that has led to the development of a collective nationalistic psyche, one which separates "them" from "us". There has been no national ordeal by fire. What has served to loosely bring the population together has been the force of Gorkhali expansion, the Kathmandu-based monarchy, hill Hinduism, a sense of being separate from the plains, and, most significantly, the spread of the Nepali language. While all these have provided a sense of identity, nationalism has never settled deep, either within Nepal or among the Nepali-speakers who are scattered in a light sprinkling all over South Asia. If the Nepali-speaking world travels the distance from soft nationalism to hardcore nationalism, Greater Nepal's underlying requirements will have been achieved. What would such travel require? What are the external events that could force Nepali-speakers to feel more nationalistic?

Anirudha Gupta, a political scientist at the Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, when asked to comment on the notion of Greater Nepal, replied, "There is no conspiracy, but there is an aspiration." According to Gupta,

> There is revival everywhere today, and the Nepali-speaking middle class perhaps is no exception. Historical revivalism always brings up irredentist eruptions. In the Nepali case, people may start looking back to Sagauli [the treaty with the British] and the ceded territories. All along the Nepali-speaking areas, there is a psychological stereotype which exists about the plainsman. Especially in the districts that were ceded at Sagauli, you see a commonality of feelings. The cultural living connections are very much there among Nepalis across the borders. What constitutes this feeling of Nepaliness? It has to do with numbers, culture, language, inter-community integration, geographical homogeneity, etc. If you can go back to the question of the Sarda agreement, then you can also go back to Sagauli. The middle class intellectual aspiration has always been an easy ground to revive a feeling of past perceived wrongs. When "we" and "they" comes to the fore of discourse, history comes alive to influence the future.

Prithvi Narayan Shah, the unifier of Nepal, is not the icon of choice among Nepali-speakers outside Nepal. Except in Ghising's present-day Darjeeling, the most commonly accepted symbol of pan-Nepali cul-

tural identity is the poet Bhanubhakta Acharya, the *adi kabi* of Nepali literature. Nepalis do not make historical pilgrimages to spots of erstwhile military glory — for example, to the battlefields of Nalapani or Malaun. But the Nepali language is travelling along the hills. When Madan Krishna Shrestha and Haribansha Acharya, Nepali satirists who work together, perform in Sikkim or Siliguri, they receive an overwhelming response. It might be a very weak thread, but what binds Nepalis from all over South Asia is primarily the Nepali language, formerly known as *Khaskura*, which developed and spread under the aegis of the Gorkhali state and with migrant populations all over the Indian northeast. Although ethnic self-assertion is rising in Sikkim and Darjeeling, creating a divide between the Bahuns and Chhetris on the one hand and the "hill tribes" on the other, it does not seem that the role of the Nepali language will be weakened in these areas.

There is thus a "Cultural Greater Nepal" which is a product of a "Demographic Greater Nepal". The economics of modern mass media demand a dominant language for journalism, entertainment and advertising. In the central section of the Himalayan rimland, Nepali seems to have taken on that role. In order to reach the largest audience within the existing political boundaries, politicians, journalists, advertisers, filmmakers, singers, tradespeople and others are making increasing use of Nepali. In education, too, the state's support for education in Nepali has meant that other languages and dialects are weakened. In the unfortunate loss of ethnic language and culture that is taking place all over Nepal, it is the Nepali language that seems ascendant, followed by Hindi and English.

However, it is clear that although the feeling of "Nepaliness" in the Nepali "diaspora" is culturally charged, it is not politically so. One explanation for the insignificance of the political charge might be that, other than in Sikkim, Darjeeling and the Duars, the concentration of Nepalis in India is relatively low. In Assam, for example, Nepalis are said to make up less than three per cent of the state's population. Another reason for this weak politicisation could be that Nepalis do not constitute an ethnic group or race. For a Bengali, a Marathi or a Punjabi, it is a quick step from language to cultural identification. Among Nepalis, however, it is primarily the Parbatiya Bahun and Chhetri community, and the "assimilated" among the hill ethnicities and Tarai people, who can lay claim to Nepali as mother tongue. For

the rest, it is a second language, and hence the feeling of Nepaliness is also once removed. Nepali serves as a link language, but there is so much that sets apart "Nepali-speakers" from one another — tribe, caste, class, language, region, and so on. As a result, the politicisation required for the mass articulation of Nepaliness is that much harder to achieve than it is for a more homogeneous population.

While cultural identification (through language or other means) is often a harbinger of political assertion and agitation, in the case of the Nepali-speakers of South Asia it does not seem likely that the self-awareness brought about by the spread of Nepali will lead quickly to a greater Nepali state. An actual pan-Nepali move towards a greater Nepali state would have to have its origins in the targeting and humiliation of Nepali-speakers, all over the Nepali-speaking region, on an extreme scale, *for being Nepali-speakers.* Even then, the "threshold of tolerance" seems to be rather high, both in and outside the "mother country". Reports of severe suffering inflicted upon Nepali-speakers does not seem to have led to a circling of wagons or a subsequent rise of regionwide Nepali assertion. Neither the eviction of Nepali-speakers from Burma in the 1960s, nor the expulsion of Nepali-speakers from Meghalaya in 1985-86, gave rise to organised pan-Nepali reaction. During the height of the Nepal-India trade and transit crisis of 1989-90, when relations between Nepal and India reached their lowest ebb, the surge of pan-Nepalism that some might have expected did not come about. Even with media attention focused on the case of the Lhotshampa refugees, one does not detect a political coming together of the larger Nepali-speaking world. In Sikkim and Darjeeling, which closely adjoin southern Bhutan, the reaction of political leaders to the southern Bhutan problem has been a studied silence.

Conclusion

The scenario for a Greater Nepal, as presented with alarm in a national Indian daily recently, is to include large parts of Himachal Pradesh, Kumaon and Garhwal, Dehradun, all of Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, and the Duars. The map presented by Dhakal of the Greater Nepal Committee covers more or less the same territory. But the reality of this region today, from east to west, is as follows: a well-entrenched state of Himachal; the Uttarakhand region (Kumaon and Garhwal) which does want autonomy, but only from Uttar Pradesh; a Nepal whose political

leaders remain preoccupied with petty politics of short-term advantage; a Darjeeling that wants emancipation, but only from Calcutta; a Sikkim that wants only to be left alone; and a Bhutan that is every day shedding more of its Nepali identity. Mana Ranjan Josse, a Nepali journalist who follows regional politics, is of the view that the Great Nepal movement is "a non-starter in present-day circumstances". He reasons that Sikkim's incorporation in the Indian Union and New Delhi's virtual control over Bhutan's foreign affairs and defence would not only make any such plan a pipedream, "but could even invite a fate too terrible to contemplate".

The question of whether there is a movement to create a Greater Nepal has to be answered in the negative. It is not politically feasible for either Nepal or Sikkim to set in motion a programme for taking over territories to create a Greater Nepal. And as far as the Lhotshampa refugees are concerned, their sense of being "Nepali" might have been strengthened, but they are without the inclination or ability to extend this sentiment into a movement for a Greater Nepal.

The politics of Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim have been completely divorced from each other for much too long for a Greater Nepal movement to gain ground. Everything else, other than migration and familial ties, have flowed from north to south rather than from east to west — trade, political interaction, education, and so on. The vested interests of administration and politics are all well entrenched and only a subcontinental wrenching that goes far beyond the Himalayan rimland would dislocate them. While a large portion of the population of the Central Himalaya is able to appreciate the cultural attributes of "Nepaliness", one might conclude that this feeling does not go deep enough to emerge as a movement for Greater Nepal anytime soon.

The Role of the Monarchy in the Current Ethnic Conflicts in Bhutan

Leo E. Rose

The Background

Bhutan has been blessed with a very atypical monarchical system, both institutionally and operationally, since the establishment of the monarchy in the first decade of the 20th century, and that is still the case in the last decade of the century. The Bhutanese monarchy, and indeed its dynastic system, differs in certain critical respects from that of similar institutions in the few remaining monarchies in both Europe and Asia. This continues to be an important factor in the interrelationship between the ruler and other political institutions and elites, both local and national, in this seemingly simple but, in fact, quite complex society. For one thing, the status of the ruling family and the legitimacy of its claims to the right to rule in classic traditional Bhutanese terms is much less precisely defined than, for instance, in Nepal where the semi-divine attributes of the ruling monarch as a manifestation of Vishnu have been a powerful factor over the centuries in legitimising both the monarchy and the ruling dynasty. The situation in Nepal has certainly been modified in some basic respects by recent political developments that transformed what had been a highly authoritarian kingship with absolute powers into a real constitutional monarchy, but differences with the monarchical system in Bhutan are still evident.

The ruler in Bhutan, in contrast to Nepal, has never been an absolute monarch in either theoretical or legal terms, as attested by the way in which the institution was first established in 1907 and the limited authority exercised by the ruler over the local elites both before and after the introduction of a "modern" political and administrative system in the 1960s. The first Wangchuck ruler did try to acquire the religious authority of the Shabdrungs in the semi-theocratic system that predominated in Bhutan from the 17th to the late 19th century, by assuming the secular powers of the Deb Raja (*De-srid*-Desi), but he was never in fact a "Chogyal" — the head of both the civil and religious systems in Bhutan — but just the Druk Gyalpo — the ruler of the

Drukpa society — as the Shabdrung's religious powers were assigned to the Je-Khenpo, who presides over the Buddhist establishment in Bhutan.

Part of the explanation for all this can be attributed to the comparatively recent date for the establishment of a unique entity, the monarchy, in Bhutan which had never had anything like a monarchical system in its relatively short history as a functioning unified polity. There were several local ruling families in various parts of this region that had some of the attributes of a monarchy prior to the 17th century, but none of these had ever been transformed into a monarchical governing system in conceptual or procedural terms. The unification and establishment of the state of Bhutan was an achievement of the Druk sect of Buddhism, and in particular of the Shabdrungs and Desis who exercised both civil and religious authorities — if often ineffectively — over this poorly-defined national entity. The first Wangchuck ruler, installed on the throne in 1907 by a hybrid collection of representatives of local elite families and the Druk religious establishment, had no other theoretical or practical basis to claim the exalted status of the "ruler of the country" other than his election by the civil and religious elite. A hereditary monarchy was established and the local leaders and high lamas swore allegiance through a *genja* (legally binding agreement) to the ruler and his heirs.

But this nominal acceptance of the authority of the Wangchuck rulers did not seriously limit the dominance of the local elite families over their sections of the country. There was, in fact, a de facto division of responsibilities and powers between the King and his small coterie of officials, drawn mainly from the Wangchuck family and males from *non-elite* Drukpa families, and the local elite families. They exercised the "national" powers — e.g., foreign relations, arbitration between the local elites in cases of dispute — but the dominant local families were broadly autonomous in most other respects. There was a "national" tax system and judicial structure, but the local civil and religious elite collected the revenue, little of which ever got to the royal court, and served as the judiciary in the courts. This "live and let live" approach to governance worked quite effectively in maintaining internal peace within the country, in contrast to the incessant strife that had been typical of the Shabdrung system in the 19th century and gave the impres-

sion to the outside world (that paid any attention to Bhutan) that there was a stable and effective monarchical system in the country.

I should note here that these general comments on the political system in the 1907-1952 period — i.e., during the reign of the first two Druk Gyalpos — also applied to the southern third of the country where the Lhotshampas (mostly Nepali-speaking migrants from India and Nepal in the post-1907 period) constituted the vast majority of the population. Most of the early Lhotshampa families had entered Bhutan through a settlement programme organised by the Dorji family of the Haa valley (who had a residence in Kalimpong on the Indian side of the border as well) with the cooperation of several Nepali families in Darjeeling district and Sikkim. This had all been done with the approval of the Wangchuck rulers, but in southern Bhutan it was the Dorji family and its coterie of Nepali elite families that ran the government on essentially the same terms as the local elites in the rest of the country.

This highly decentralised but reasonably efficient system of governance began to change with the ascent of the third Druk Gyalpo to the throne in 1952. Developments in both India and Tibet in the late 1940s made it clear that the "good old days" were gone and that Bhutan had to adjust to this new regional environment if it was to survive. A programme of across-the-board modernisation was introduced in the 1950s, involving not only changes in the administrative system but also in the distribution of power and responsibilities within the existing elite, due in part to the introduction of a modern educational system open to a broad range of young Bhutanese from all social groups. It came as a surprise during my work in Bhutan in the early 1970s to find that a high percentage of the students in local schools in most areas of the country came from non-elite families which had a good idea of the potential utility of an education in the "new" Bhutan, while many of the children in the local elite families saw no need for an education beyond the first few years. After all, if their families had dominated the local areas without an education for several generations, why should it be necessary for them to utilise the schools being established in most major rural centres in Bhutan?

It is interesting to note that the introduction of modernisation policies in Bhutan had an impact similar to that of the establishment of British colonial rule in most of the rest of the subcontinent. The tradi-

tional Hindu/Buddhist monarchies in South Asia closely resembled the Wangchuck system in the pre-1960 period in that the rulers shared power with a broad range of local and institutional leaders, civil and religious, in their kingdom. The Islamic dynasties that ruled over part of the subcontinent prior to 1800 came from a different tradition, but for good pragmatic reasons they established systems modelled after those of their Hindu predecessors. It was only with the introduction of the British colonial system in the 19th century that the traditional Indian polity was replaced by a "modern" — that is, more effectively centralised — system, which survived as the dominant political culture in the post-1947 period.

Modernisation in Bhutan also led to a trend toward increasing centralisation of authority on a broad range of subjects, and thus the end of the traditional consensus on the "separation of powers" between the ruler and local leaders. There were good reasons for this, as the programmes to develop the economy of Bhutan required a centralised administrative system with broad powers in decision-making and in the distribution of resources — and, in particular, a new phenomenon in Bhutan, foreign economic assistance in massive quantities for the traditional agrarian Bhutanese economy. There were, moreover, perceived threats from Bhutan's neighbours to the north and south on a scale previously unknown in the country. This led to the decision to establish modern military and police forces that were very different from the local militias and police that had defended the country from outside powers and effectively controlled the movement of migrants (i.e. Nepalis) into the southern districts.

In 1950, the central bureaucracy in Bhutan consisted of a small number of officials in the palace who served as assistants to the King in fulfilling his very limited duties. By 1972, there were a number of departments, organised on a more "modern" basis, that exerted substantial authority throughout the country on virtually all subjects. Decision-making had become the virtual monopoly of the Thimphu "boys" who, on most occasions, paid little attention to the views of the local leaders scattered all over the country or even their representatives in the Tshogdu (National Assembly). The bureaucracy was a close model of the Indian administrative system, which was, perhaps, not too surprising since a goodly number of the higher officials in Bhutan in

the first two decades of modernisation were Indians, many of whom were on leave from their posts in the Indian administrative system.

It is probable, however, that the process of centralisation would have occurred even if there had been no Indian administrators with the classic "Delhi should rule" mentality in Bhutan, for good Bhutanese social factors. A high proportion of Bhutanese who were absorbed into the administrative services in those early years of modernisation were from *non-elite* local families and were, thus, not strong supporters of the highly decentralised traditional system of governance. There were a few exceptions like the Dorji family which functioned as a sub-dynasty in the early 1960s, but their role was significantly reduced after the assassination of the Dorji "prime minister" and the hasty departure of other leading Dorjis from the country in the 1964-65 crisis period. And even these events were, to some extent at least, a contest between a well-established local elite family and a variety of officials in the administration and military who were from non-elite families.

In any case, the systemic changes in the political and administrative systems continued through the 1970s, with appointed district officers replacing the local elite families as the centre of focus in governance and officials from various departments becoming the decision-makers on even local issues — e.g., where roads should go — of considerable importance to the local public. Quite astonishingly, this was all accomplished without evidence of popular or elitist opposition or even much of a debate, perhaps because the establishment of the Tshogdu in 1953 gave the local elites the misperception that they would have a voice in basic decision-making processes in Thimphu. But it is also evident that the basis of a confrontation between the national and local elites had been set, and in particular, perhaps, among the Lhotshampas in southern Bhutan who had fewer ways to counter the intrusion of "national" bureaucrats than the local elite in the Drukpa areas of the country.

One would have expected the Druk monastic establishment to have viewed with concern the growing powers of the central government in certain matters of importance to them, such as the collection of taxes from local people for the support and maintenance of local monasteries. But this does not appear to have been the case, in part perhaps because the Thimphu/Punakha-dominated Central Monk Body was also involved in establishing more effective controls over the other monastic institutions throughout the country. There was a substantial division of

authority and responsibility between the King and the Je Khenpo which did not totally satisfy either side but was preferable to a confrontation between the two entities. And, as part of the national government system, the Central Monk Body gradually acquired a greater voice in the decision-making on issues over which it had not had much influence under the first two Wangchuck rulers. This was probably one factor in the adoption of the Driglam Namzha (preservation of the Druk "national" culture) policy in the late 1980s, though it is clear that some other factors (the infusion of a large number of illegal Nepali migrants) was more important to the government on this issue.

While these potentially divisive social, political and economic factors were integral to the political system for the past couple of decades, there was rarely any indulgence in a public debate on these issues, much less any more forceful forms of confrontation up to the mid-1980s. In part this can be attributed to the careful and sensible ways in which King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck sought to ameliorate the causes of discontent by strengthening the national political and social structure through integrating the various potentially dissident "interest groups" into the decision-making system on national issues. It was, for instance, in the early 1980s that the King introduced a decentralisation policy that was supposed to bring the local public, and elites, into the decision-making process on economic planning and allocation of resources. The central bureaucracy was not enthusiastic in its implementation of this programme — for obvious reasons — but some concessions to the local public were not easily avoided. The King was also determined to bring the Tshogdu into the governing process on a broader basis by expanding its authority in legislative matters and in the approval of royal appointees to official posts. It never quite worked out that way, in part because of the obstructive role of the official members, both from the bureaucracy and the Central Monk Body, in the Tshogdu. They may have been a minority in the Assembly, but they were far better organised and more "respectable" than the members selected on the local level.

The Monarchy's Response to Recent Developments

King Jigme Singye Wangchuck's concern with certain aspects of the course of developments in Bhutan was clearly evident in the early 1980s and was reflected in the series of innovative initiatives that he

sought to introduce into the polity. An effort was made to avoid openly challenging elite groups at the centre, in the monastic system, as well as at the local level, but the changes were bound to affect the status and powers of important groups throughout the country. The reform of the judiciary through the establishment of district courts and the introduction of a new legal code, based upon "modern" principles of jurisprudence as well as the traditional Buddhist legal code dating back to the 18th century, was not welcomed with great enthusiasm by either the local elite or the monastic bodies which, for different reasons, preferred the old legal code. The King also introduced some land reform measures in the late 1970s and early 1980s that did not substantially transform the land ownership system but did give tenants certain rights to the land they cultivated. Even more disturbing perhaps were the restrictions placed upon the old system of unpaid labour (*goonda woola*) that had been exploited by both the local elites and the monastic institutions. And the monk bodies may have been even more distressed when the royal government substituted direct subsidisation of Buddhist institutions for the percentage of agricultural production they had extracted from the local populace under the traditional rules.

By the mid-1980s, King Jigme Singye's concern with what he perceived to be the excessive concentration of power and responsibilities in the central bureaucracy persuaded him of the need to introduce a number of programmes directed at the effective decentralisation of the polity, and in real rather than formal terms as had been the case in supposed decentralisation programmes in India and Nepal. The government officials in both Thimphu and the districts had doubts about the viability of such a programme — e.g., the local people making decisions on whether they preferred a road or a school under the development budget for their area — while the local elite was uncertain about how decentralisation would affect their very important relations with the official body. In any case, despite the numerous tours the King made around the country in an effort to implement decentralisation, not much was accomplished in real terms in the first few years despite the tendency to list certain items in the national plan budget as the consequence of consultations with the broader public.

In any case, the decentralisation objective was superseded, in fact if not in form, in the late 1980s by a broad range of new policies which had as their objective the preservation of Bhutan's national identity and

traditional Druk Buddhist culture — the *Tsa-Wa-Tsum* (the "three elements" of Bhutan, i.e., the King, Country and People). The rallying cry under these programmes was "the people and government must be one", which soon was translated into "one nation, one people" — an extremely narrow definition of what was traditional in Bhutan's culture. Several new rules were introduced that had as their objective the creation of a society in which everyone dressed, spoke and thought alike, with little apparent understanding of the impact this would have on a broadly heterogeneous society. A dress code specified that all Bhutanese should wear, on certain occasions at least, the "traditional" Buddhist clothes. These were identified by the official establishment as meaning the *gho* for men and the *kira* for women, even though these were not the traditional garb for some Drukpas, much less among the Lhotshampas. It was also decreed that Dzongkha should be the "national" language, raising questions about whether the old trilateral language policy (Dzongkha, English and Nepali) was still operative.

Controls over the entry of foreigners, mostly tourists, into the major Buddhist shrines were introduced, reportedly upon the demand of the monk bodies which wanted their religious institutions, and privacy, to be protected from high-paying sightseers. It was also decided to preserve the public from the intrusion of foreign — primarily Indian — cultural and intellectual influences by banning disc antennas, thus terminating the transmission of TV broadcasts from external sources (the only kind available in Bhutan) into the home, though of course families with the right equipment can still enjoy the videos that are readily available in India and elsewhere in the region.

These policies were in part a response to demands from important elements of the Drukpa community, both secular and lay, who perceived the Bhutanese traditions as threatened by extinction through modernisation and the opening of the country. But the support base for these exclusivist policies was substantially expanded by the discovery in the 1988 census that the number of illegal Nepali residents in Bhutan was far larger than previous estimates had indicated, and that most of them were well-established in Bhutan's economy and social structure — that is, they were not temporary residents — particularly but not exclusively in the southern districts. The fate of Sikkim, in which a flood of Nepali immigrants over the past century had overwhelmed the traditional Sikkimese social and political culture was all

too evident, and there was a general agreement in all of the Drukpa society that Bhutan should not become another Sikkim. The increasingly strident differences within the Bhutanese political community are not over policy objectives, thus, but rather over how these are best achieved. The more liberal, integrationist approach to preserving the Bhutanese nation has been pressed, quietly but persistently, by the King and a few of his cohorts. The more extremist viewpoint, common to both the religious and civil elite at the central and local level, insists upon the necessity to exclude "outsiders" and to severely limit the involvement of legitimate Nepali Bhutanese residents in the country's politics, economy and social structure.

The Policy Debate

The extensive coverage now given to the "debates" within the Tshogdu by *Kuensel* provides a useful source of information on issues in dispute, as the Assembly includes not only the selected representatives from the districts but also high officials in both the bureaucracy and the monk body. The cabinet ministers also participate, in order to present the "official" view on subjects, usually considered to reflect the palace's perceptions and preferences. While the Tshogdu still respectfully accepts the royal government's "advice", in recent sessions it has also expressed some reservations on critical policy matters that presumably reflect the opinions of a broad segment of at least the elite groups in Bhutan. I will briefly summarise the principal themes and arguments used in this very important political dialogue.

The National Dress Code

I was in Bhutan in 1988 when the national dress policy was just being introduced. In a conversation with King Jigme Singye, I expressed some confusion about what Bhutan's "national dress" was, since I had seen Bhutanese wearing a variety of local dress in different parts of the country. The King agreed with this and said the government would be flexible on this matter and that a variety of Bhutanese clothing would be acceptable. The *kasho* issued by the King on this subject seemed to allow some flexibility on the national dress issue. But this was not the position taken by the Special Committee set up to formulate the rules on this subject which, in effect, stated that all Bhutanese men must wear the *gho* and women the *kira* in virtually any appearance in public.

In the debate in the Tshogdu on a Draft National Dress Act, several ministers expressed the view that the proposed legislation went beyond the somewhat less rigorous specifications in the King's *kasho*. The Assembly, after a lengthy debate in which a stricter policy was advocated by several members, agreed to drop the legislation. But if reports from various areas of the country are correct, most local officials generally interpret the *kasho* in the strictest form possible, though the reluctance of much of the public to adhere to the extremist position on the dress question has been a problem.

The Language Issue

The debate over Dzongkha as the "national" language was raised in the 1992 Tshogdu session when several members questioned the practice under which the proceedings of the Assembly were automatically translated into Nepali by a simultaneous translation facility for the benefit of the chimis (members) from southern Bhutan. Different views on this subject were expressed by several ministers, but the Home Minister and several colleagues supported the termination of the simultaneous translation. At this point, the King intervened and stated that discontinuing translations would not be appropriate as it was essential that the chimis from all areas of the country should clearly understand the proceedings in the Tshogdu sessions. The Tshogdu finally accepted the King's suggestions, but once again it is clear that important elements of the Drukpa elite have strong reservations about the "Bhutanness" of the old liberal language policy.

Policy Toward Lhotshampa Emigres and "Ngolops"

This has certainly been the most critical issue in Bhutan since 1989 and one on which the strongest objections to certain features of the government's policies have been expressed by a diverse collection of Bhutanese. In the view of the critics, the royal government has been much too tolerant of the "anti-nationals", termed *ngolops*, in the process failing to defend and preserve the integrity of the Bhutanese polity. The criticisms are directed at a wide variety of government policies. First, the royal exemption extended to Lhotshampas — but not to other Bhutanese — on the payment of rural taxes and on *goonda woola* (involuntary labour) for 1992. Second, the granting of amnesty by the King to about 1500 Lhotshampas under detention in an effort to get

them (unsuccessfully) to remain in Bhutan rather than expelling them from the country. Third, the failure of the courts to impose capital punishment, presumably on the advice of the King, to *ngolops* under trial for "anti-national" activities in contradiction to the terms of the law on the subject for acts of "treason". Fourth, objections to the King's policy of not only retaining Lhotshampas in official positions but even more his efforts to recruit more officials from this suspect community. Fifth, the King's visits to southern Bhutan (e.g., Geylegphug in July 1992) to attempt to persuade Lhotshampas to stay in Bhutan became the subject of criticism by some Drukpas who argued, instead, that the entire Lhotshampa community should be forced out of the country for their inherently anti-Bhutanese culture and perceptions. Sixth, strong objections have also been directed at the government's policy of making *kidu* grants to Lhotshampas who were emigrating from the country. Seventh, the policy under which land abandoned by Lhotshampas in the south has not been made generally available for settlement by Drukpas while Lhotshampas were being encouraged to settle in the northern districts.

But probably the most vigorous debate between the King and some members of the Assembly has come over the legislation introduced into the Tshogdu in 1990 calling for all Bhutanese to make a *genja* — that is, a legal agreement that constitutes a pledge of loyalty to the King and the dynastic system — similar to the *genjas* made in 1907 when the monarchy was established. King Jigme Singye expressed strong reservations about this and, instead, pledged "to abdicate if he did not find a lasting solution to the ngolop problem" in Item No. VI of the resolutions adopted by the 1991 session of the Tshogdu. The *genja* issue was again raised in the 1992 session by a large number of members; when the King again expressed his view that no such renewal of the pledge of allegiance was required, the Tshogdu went along. It should be noted that this debate is much more than merely a consideration of a new *genja*, for the implicit theme in all this dialogue is whether a *genja* from a Lhotshampa is acceptable. It is, therefore, an integral part of the ongoing discussion of the *Tsa-Wa-Tsum* policy and the manner in which the "one nation, one people" principle should be applied.

The vigorous (for Bhutan) debate on a whole range of critical issues, and the differences in views expressed, has been dismissed by some Bhutanese who interpret the "extremist" views of some elite groups as

bombastic verbal exercises which do not indicate their generally more moderate position as indicated by their willingness to accept the royal pronouncements and policies. A similar evaluation of the debate is expressed by the various Nepali and Nepali Bhutanese groups in Nepal and Bhutan who insist that the debate, in which the King invariably assumes the more moderate and liberal position, is in reality done to "fool" foreign governments and the foreign press about the oppressive character of government policies in Bhutan. There may be a measure of truth in both these assessments of politics in contemporary Bhutan, but neither is an adequate explanation. The King is not just saying nice things to please the outsiders, but he is also issuing orders and insisting upon the implementation of policies that are directed at mitigating and, hopefully, eventually resolving the differences between the different elements in Bhutan society that had, up to a few years ago, demonstrated a general attitude of tolerance toward each other. The criticisms directed at the royal policies have some substance both in pragmatic and theoretical terms and will not go away even if the *ngolop* problem is contained or even resolved. We have at last a real dialogue on substantive issues that is still polite and restrained but that is also too important to be ignored. The position of the monarchy is in no way threatened by these new developments but the way in which the palace does politics will have to be revised and reconsidered over the next few years.

Reporting Bhutan

Nicholas Nugent

Bhutan as Shangri La

In preparing this paper I have dipped back through the file of BBC reports on Bhutan over some thirty years. It makes interesting reading. Coverage of Bhutan by the BBC, and indeed the British press, has been skimpy to say the least. On the rare occasions where Bhutan has been featured we have tended to focus on the country's external relations, like the demarcation of its boundary with China, the King's visits to India and other neighbours and, since the mid-1980s, on Bhutan's search for international aid. I myself reported from Delhi in 1985 how Bhutan had, at one go, doubled the number of countries with whom it had diplomatic relations by opening relations with Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands and Switzerland.

Whilst international news magazines have delighted in the image of Bhutan as "the last Shangri La" and the "Land of the Dragon King" and, in a particularly inappropriate 1990 label "the Tranquil Oasis", more serious journalistic attention to Bhutan has tended to focus on the annual speech the country's foreign minister has made since 1972 to the United Nations General Assembly. We had very little to say about the internal situation, about life in one of the world's more inaccessible nations. We did not really know much about it. I used to write about Bhutan for a yearbook but gave up the assignment because it was so difficult to get source material. Journalists were only occasionally granted visas and, being busy people with other more pressing stories to report, we did not seek access that often.

But some internal stories did demand attention. I vividly recall 31 October 1988 when we received a telexed despatch from Calcutta telling of the King's "surprise" marriage to four sisters, by whom he already had eight children. The despatch told us that the "secret" marriage had taken place nine years earlier but had been a closely guarded secret till an auspicious moment for the announcement was found.

Whilst I would not for one moment question Bhutan's marriage customs, it was an interesting reflection on the ability of the foreign press

to report events in Bhutan that we were oblivious for nine years of what we were subsequently told was a widely known fact in Bhutan. Three years before the announcement *Asiaweek's* Delhi correspondent, Ravi Veloor, on a visit to Thimphu, had asked the King in an interview whether he had any marriage plans. He replied that he was "under constant pressure to choose a queen" and that he would "have to do something about it soon".[1]

It was King Jigme's coronation in 1974 that first brought journalists to Bhutan. My colleague Mark Tully recalls getting a virtually unprecedented four minute slot on British television news in which to report the event. Ten years earlier, in 1964, we had relied on secondary sources to report the assassination of Prime Minister Jigme Dorji. Even then we tended to see the event in external relations terms, reporting how the Chinese "denied...the comment made by a government spokesman in Delhi...that the alleged assassin was known to have had some connection with the Chinese", counter-charging that the Indian government had "instigated Dorji's assassination because of his efforts to free Bhutan from foreign control". This was just eighteen months after China and India had fought a war for control of the territory immediately to the east of Bhutan.

A few days after his coronation, the eighteen year old King Jigme gave what Mark Tully described as "his first major international press conference — probably the first given by any Bhutanese leader." In it he told of a plot against his own life which had been uncovered — but not reported — three months earlier. (A government announcement also introduced a foreign factor by proclaiming that a Tibetan woman was involved, though it was at pains to stress that the majority of the four thousand Tibetan refugees in Bhutan were loyal. It subsequently became known that the woman in question was the former king's second wife, who had wanted one of her sons to succeed to the throne.)

Trouble in Shangri La

We were late to report that plot, just as we have been late to report the unrest fermenting in southern Bhutan since 1989. It has not been easy. Small under-populated countries do not easily demand or get media attention, though there are notable exceptions such as Laos, Lebanon and Liberia and even East Timor and Kuwait. Impenetrability makes Bhutan harder, especially as its government has been reluctant to admit

foreigners in general, let alone journalists. Quite a lot of determination was needed to go there. I succeeded on my fifth attempt, twenty three years after I first tried.

By the time of my visit, in 1991, the southern problem was well ablaze. The government seemed to have taken the view that it was better to admit foreign journalists to the country — at least some foreign journalists — and to show them their side of the story. The other side was coming from Kathmandu, Calcutta and Delhi, a version that was notably and unashamedly based on the tales of refugees from southern Bhutan as well as a handful of better known dissidents from government circles. ("Violence Comes to Shangri La" ran the inevitable headline in the *Economist* whilst *Time* magazine opted for "Storybook Tranquility is Shattered".) It was apparent that Thimphu received a much better press from journalists who visited the country than from those who did not, so the greater willingness to admit foreign correspondents is understandable. As part of my preparation, Bhutan's Delhi embassy gave me a pile of recent cuttings which, to be fair to them, were a mixture of critical and sympathetic pieces.

In fact the BBC had been sorely tested a year before I received my visa, the year of my fourth unsuccessful application. On 20 September 1990 we reported an incident in which demonstrators — or anti-nationals as Bhutan's government calls them — clashed with security forces at the Chamurchi bridge in Samchi district, south western Bhutan. According to the government's chronology, this was the one-hundred and twentieth incident in a series which had begun in March that year, but I believe it was the first that we reported. Our correspondent in Kathmandu reported that several hundred people were killed, as did the French and Japanese newsagencies, AFP and Kyodo. They were basing themselves on the accounts of refugees. The government, through its mission in Delhi, denied the reports and subsequently admitted to one death — caused when security forces opened fire on demonstrators who were blocking the bridge.

I visited the bridge a year later. I am inclined to believe the government version and to accept that the reports we at first carried were exaggerated and partisan. But I am equally sure that many of the tales of atrocities by Bhutan's security forces being told by refugees in southern Nepal are not exaggerated. Truth is a difficult commodity to recognise

at the time, and is especially hard to fathom in the circumstances of Bhutan's southern problem.

Shortcomings

As far as I am concerned, the importance of the Chamurchi bridge incident was that it was the first occasion on which we were actually able to interview a government spokesman, the press attaché at the Delhi embassy. We broadcast the interview, together with the accounts reaching Kathmandu, in our regional current affairs programme, South Asia Survey, which has a good following in Bhutan. Radio depends not just on accurate reporting but on voices. Our ability to report Bhutan fairly depended on our being able to interview protagonists on both sides. During my visit to Thimphu, I found government ministers very ready to talk and be interviewed, even if the King himself has not yet overcome a reluctance to be recorded on audio or video tape. He talks freely, but says he is worried that if recorded his words could be distorted and used against him "by his enemies". (In truth, politicians in countries where radio and television are accepted as playing a crucial part in the democratic system know there is less chance of their utterances being distorted or their opinions being misrepresented if they have been recorded — but that is part of a wider debate.)

Since that time, foreign minister Dawa Tsering has regularly taken part in telephoned interviews into our programmes, articulating the government's point of view and providing some balance to the readily-available Kathmandu-based dissidents. (There may be some who do not see why there is a need to air both sides of an argument, especially if they believe that one side is right and the other wrong. It is because we, the journalists, are not in a position to judge which is right and wrong, and suspect there may be some right and some wrong on each side, that we consider it our responsibility to air both sides as accurately as we can. As an objective journalist I cannot distinguish between, for example, a terrorist and a freedom fighter, so I avoid using either loaded term and simply describe the facts.) We have a great asset in that telephone links with Thimphu and Kathmandu are easy to get and very clear — something that incidentally is not the case to Somalia, Afghanistan or Kashmir. We also have benefited from several visits to the kingdom, following the easing of the granting of visas. But it re-

mains a fact that many journalists — notably those from Nepal — have had their applications to visit rejected.

Even within the country it is not easy to find out what is happening in southern Bhutan. I visited Samchi district but I cannot pretend that I gained a much deeper insight into what was going on, even if the visit did help me to understand the nature of the problem. I understood how porous the border between India and Bhutan is, and how attractive, lush and under-populated Bhutan must seem as a place of work and source of free schooling and medical care to those across the border in the densely populated Duars of West Bengal. I had pointed out to me the scenes of various "anti-national" atrocities. But I did not hear any explanation or even admission of the sort of horrors which many journalists and refugee workers have had described to them by those who have taken refuge in the camps of Jhapa in south east Nepal.

Talk of the movement for Greater Nepal (by members of the Bhutanese government) or of the feudal and anti-democratic ways of the Bhutanese monarchy (by members of the Nepalese government) have, in my view, tended to cloud rather than clarify the issue, and to demonstrate how Bhutan's "southern problem" (as it is euphemistically known) has become a diplomatic issue between two Himalayan neighbours. Is it simply that the only South Asian country with a manpower shortage, which has had to import its labour, now finds the immigrants are in a majority and so has started to expel them by whatever means? I suspect it is much more complex than that.

Journalistic Challenge

Journalists have rightly come in for criticism for failing to report the problem fully. In the Nov./Dec. 1990 issue of *Himal*, Mana Man Singh writes: "The events in Bhutan...stood as a challenge to the international and regional media in providing fair and balanced coverage of troubled Druk Yul. The journalists have by and large not been up to the task." He goes on to bemoan the problems of access, the dearth of independent scholars and writings to provide background, and the willingness of journalists to lap up information from the governments of Bhutan or Nepal, or from groups in exile. The important issues that are waiting to be addressed by journalists and scholars include the social and economic quality of life in Bhutan; the extent of discrimination against Nepalis; details of the major ethnic groups within Bhutan, etc". He

concludes by asking: "when are we going to get a detailed treatment of the historical process of migration from Nepal eastwards?" The implication of his criticism is clear: for too long journalists and scholars have tended to equate Bhutanese culture with that of the predominant Drukpas.

We journalists are certainly as guilty as scholars and tourists of falling under the spell of life in the Thimphu or Paro valleys, of being seduced by the uniqueness of Drukpa culture. This is the nearest we can come these days to Tibet before the Chinese takeover. There is a fascination amongst westerners with "lost civilisations". (I, for one, first became interested in the continent of Asia after reading the story of the flight from Tibet of the Dalai Lama.) But I like to think we have woken from our complacency and are doing better now. When Sikkim was absorbed into India in 1975, few people outside its immediate vicinity seemed to know where Sikkim was. The despatch I wrote for the BBC at the time did little more than explain its location, its demography and its customs. Whilst I am not suggesting that the same fate as befell Sikkim is about to befall Bhutan, there are similarities as well as differences and we would do well to try to understand them.

I have concentrated on international reporting, but much of what I have said applied to journalism within Bhutan too. Before 1986 there was no newspaper. There still is no television, and radio allows only for one news bulletin in each of the four broadcast languages per day. Now *Kuensel*, the weekly newspaper, has become autonomous from government. The paper's editor, Kinley Dorji — who gives his own perspective on reporting Bhutan's difficulties — knows that fact in itself does not guarantee the paper's independence, or the absence of governmental or other pressures, since the newspaper still has to earn its way. But I shall quote from what Kinley Dorji told the BBC in an interview in the first year of his paper's operation about the difficulty of gathering news within Bhutan: "We don't have any reporters or correspondents. We have contacted school teachers, district officials, basically anyone who can write around the country and asked them to contribute news items. They come in the form of letters, wireless messages etc. which I rewrite for the newspaper." In the same interview Kinley denied that there was any censorship and I believe pointed up an important role for the news media in a small country — perhaps any country — when he

said it was his aim "to build a paper that can function as a feedback system for the government".

I have little doubt that he has succeeded in that objective though he will probably say there is still some way to go. I pay credit to him for forcing back the boundaries of what it is permissible to discuss or write about in the kingdom. Kanak Mani Dixit also deserves credit for raising the tenor of debate about events in southern Bhutan and making them known to a wider public through his magazine *Himal*.

In this short paper I have not attempted to reach any conclusions, but merely to give a perspective on the formidable challenge of reporting Bhutan. In the process I hope to have thrown a little light on the current tension in the kingdom and to have contributed to the wider discussion of that subject.

[1] All quotations are from BBC reports or other writings in the possession of the writer.

Bhutan: Political Culture and National Dilemma

A. C. Sinha

Political culture, as an inseparable aspect of larger values and beliefs, provides a package of theoretical and empirical orientations to understand national politics at one level and local politics at another. The recurrent themes in studies of political culture emphasise normative patterns such as roles, institutions, "community", "realm", participation, power and authority, rules of the game, symbols, scope of government, issue agenda, etc. The concept, though based on the Anglo-Saxon experience of a pluralistic tradition of communication and persuasion, consensus and diversity, change and continuity, is flexible enough to encompass the nuances of non-Western political systems. The present paper first tries to identify some salient features of Bhutanese political culture. Next, on the basis of its history and traditions we shall endeavour briefly to track down the decline of the Bhutanese theocratic system to a near British colony. And finally we shall comment on the present predicament, in which Bhutan must achieve a balance between its traditional political culture and the incomplete process of an emergent Bhutanese nation state.

Drukpa Political Culture

On ecological and ethnological grounds, Bhutan is a frontier society away from the riverine centres of civilisation. Though pre-lamaist ethnic groups existed in the *lho mon* (the classical name for Bhutan in Tibetan)[1] it was the *Drukpa* (or *Druk*) theocracy that provided the social base of the contemporary Bhutanese social structure. On an apparent animistic and Bonpo social base, the Tibetan lamaist missionaries — invariably house-holding monks — were either engaged in magical/divine warfare, discovering lost holy texts, or fighting sectarian battles.[2] The mainstay of the economy was pastoralism and barter trade, which was adjusted as per the demands of transhumance. Dzongs (initially significant structures for strategic purposes in Tibet) were adopted in Bhutan first for defence-cum-ritual purposes and then as administra-

tive centres. Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal's charismatic leadership (1594-1651) laid the foundations of the Bhutanese system by providing a sound theocratic legitimacy and evolving a flexible status in the regional power structure and functioning of the Bhutanese system during the medieval period.

Some of the significant aspects of Drukpa polity were: ubiquitous oligarchic conflict, a shifting capital and seat of authority, duality of authority, and an extremely fragile and limited economic base.[3] With a view to understanding this political culture, it is imperative to examine the traditional Tibetan pattern of government among the Shakya orthodoxy, which is closest to the Drukpa sect of Buddhism. The system of government was possessed of both *dharma* (*chhos:* religion) and *samsara* (*srid:* the world). While in an organisational sense *chhos-srid* meant a diarchy of clerical and lay elements, in an ideological sense it meant a synthesis. In this view the norms of *dharma* and *samsara* were two sets of laws, one for the domain of the church and the other for the state. There were two sets of officials, monk and lay, not necessarily working to the exclusion of each other. One also finds monks and nobles closely connected and thus overruling the possibility of absolute separation between the spiritual and temporal estates.[4] Furthermore, because of the institution of the incarnations and prince-abbotship, the sacred and secular roles were invariably mixed up. There was a provision that when a secular chief was elected to an office of the State, he was expected to take lower religious vows.

The first Shabdrung (or *Dharmaraja)* himself began as a prince-abbot under the patronage of his grandfather and became a householding monk ruler over the estates of the Drukpa sect. Once his domain had been extended and established on a sound footing after various skirmishes with the Tibetan Gelugpa rulers, he himself appointed a Je-Khenpo (the ritual head), a Deb Raja (the secular head) and the penlops (regional governors) while retaining the office of the Shabdrung (the one who rules as per the tenets of the *Dharma*) for himself. Since the Shabdrung's time there have been between five and eight Shabdrungs, 66 Je-Khenpos and 55 Deb Rajas.[5] The system was simple enough, as there was no hereditary distinction of landed aristocracy in the rugged topography and harsh climatic conditions. Taxes were paid to the penlops and dzongdas (district heads) in kind for the

consumption of the monk body at Punakha, Thimphu and other monastic establishments.

Technologically, it was a simple system. Apart from climatic and geographical hardships, the small Drukpa society was also exposed to a number of diseases. In such a situation, gainfully employed persons were small in number, generating little economic surplus. Apart from the maintenance of the monk bodies at the cost of the state exchequer, ubiquitous wars and feuds demanded the involvement of productive forces. A relatively isolated and near-nomadic community such as the Drukpa had a limited appreciation of the settled plains people. This explains the continuous excursions of the Drukpas to the southern Duars (gateways to the southern foothills) to catch slaves and livestock and to collect economic surpluses and other consumer goods. The various sets of functionaries, with their limited exposure to the affairs of the state administration, remained on the periphery of the universal state and tribal polities. Needless to say, the Drukpa polity itself acknowledged nobody except its most immediate neighbours.

Bhutan under the British colonial fold

Between 1705, when the first Shabrung's death was made public, and 1903, when the last official sovereign Shabdrung died, the Drukpa theocracy exhausted all its internal and external relevance. Internal requirements and geopolitical compulsions conspired to the emergence of the Wangchucks' dynastic rule in 1907, almost as a creation of British Indian frontier policy. The monarchy was created as a matter of expediency, without appropriate legitimacy and institutional props. This becomes obvious from the confusion that surrounded the institutions of the Shabdrung and Deb Raja after the establishment of the Wangchuck dynastic rule. For example, though the office of the Shabdrung was reported to have been abolished after 1907, we are informed that Jigme Dorji (1905-31) was the Dharmaraja born in Tawang region, who crowned the second Wangchuk Maharaja and died in mysterious circumstances in May, 1931. [6] It is said that his reincarnation was discovered in the 1950s and is located at Rewalsar in the Manali district of Himachal Pradesh in India. Similarly, the institution of the Deb Raja, which was reported to have come to an end in 1905, finds its continuation in the form of the Wangchuck rulers as an afterthought in the 1970s. In this way, "the Wangchuk dynasty lacked the

traditional ideological legitimation that has been so crucial to the survival of monarchies."[7] It appears of late that there is an effort to discover theocratic legitimacy for the Wangchuck ruler as the Druk Gyalpo.

Up until 1931, the British Political Officers in Sikkim and the Wangchuck Maharajas were unanimous in their view that Bhutan was an Indian principality within the British Empire. The Maharaja visited Calcutta to pay homage to the Prince and Princess of Wales, and attended the Delhi Durbar to pay homage to the King Emperor along with other rulers of Indian princely states. Similarly, the second Maharaja was taken to Gauhati, Calcutta and Sarnath on conducted tours by the resident Political Officers. The Maharajas and their second men in command - father and son Dorjis - Ugyen and Sonam Tobgyel - were decorated with British imperial titles like other princely dignitaries. In fact, on at least two occasions Ugyen Wangchuck himself is reported to have said that Bhutan had become part of the British Empire: once when the treaty of Punakha was signed in January 1910[8] and again in 1923, when the Maharaja's request to increase his annual subsidy from 100,000 rupees to 300,000 rupees was turned down. On the latter occasion, he is reported to have remarked: "[I]f they are unable to accede my request, I do not mind it, as it is by the kindness of the British Government that I have become what I am now".[9] The British encouraged the Crown Prince to learn English and Hindi like other Indian princes. In fact, a number of Political Officers made it a point to report that the prince spoke good English and Hindi.

Charles A. Bell, the Tibetologist and successor to John Claude White as Political Officer at Gangtok, was considered to be one of the architects of British policy in the Eastern Himalayan region in the first two decades of the 20th century. He was so close to the Maharaja of Bhutan that after learning that the former had filed papers for his retirement, the latter wrote, on March 2, 1919, that it was as if his own father had died. Bell had submitted a proposal, to the Foreign and Political Department on January 23, 1914, for the creation of a North Eastern Frontier Agency (NEFA) with its headquarters at Tawang, modelled on the North Western Frontier Agency (NWFA) at Peshawar. The Agency was to deal with political works connected with Sikkim, Bhutan, Tibet and the Assam hills (Arunachal Pradesh). Luckily for Bhutan, the proposal was not implemented by the British.[10] Bhutan

contributed to the War Fund during the two World Wars like other princely states in spite of its meagre financial resources. In fact, except for bureaucratic fussiness, the status of Bhutan as defined in 1911 remained unchanged: "there is no doubt that Bhutan is a native state of India under the suzerainty of H.M.G."

There appears to be a distinct change in the overall orientation of British policy towards Bhutan after the 1931 conflict between the second Maharaja and the last officially reported Shabdrung, Jigme Dorji. The Shabdrung considered the Maharaja to be a usurper of his authority, backed up by British support. He was not only in touch with the Indian National Congress leader, M. K. Gandhi, but was also in contact with the Dalai Lama in Lhasa. The British supported the Maharaja against the Shabdrung, so much so that the Shabdrung was quietly poisoned at the instance of the Maharaja with almost open British approval. Col. J. L. R. Weir, then the Political Officer at Gangtok, who guided the Bhutan Durbar on the Shabdrung crisis, did not crown himself with diplomatic glory when he openly lied to the Dalai Lama that the late Shabdrung was a born Bhutanese and he was convinced that he had died a natural death. A grateful Bhutan Maharaja confided to the Political Officer: "if an Indian were ever to be made Political Officer in Sikkim, he would never be invited to set foot in Bhutan". The report by Col. Weir was greeted with relief.[11]

The British bureaucracy left a message of warning-cum-advice to the successor Indian Union on her relations with Bhutan, in the form of a note[12] prepared for the Cabinet Mission on August 10, 1946: "In practice it may well prove difficult to secure a tidy solution of the future of Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan and even of the eastern marches of Kashmir. This will largely depend on the future policy and fate of China and hence of Tibet. The Government of the [Indian] Union must be prepared for complications on the North-East Frontier and evolve a policy to meet them. This may well have to be that of maintaining all the principalities in virtual independence of India but as buffer and, as far as possible, client states. There may be greater advantages in according Sikkim a more independent status than in seeking to absorb Bhutan as well as Sikkim in the Indian Union, adding the communal problem of Bhuddhism to those of Islam and Hinduism ... the Government would be well advised to avoid entering into fresh commitments with any one of those frontier states or seeking to redefine their status. Their impor-

tance is strategic in direct relation to Tibet and China and indirectly to Russia. Such adjustment of their relations with the [Indian] Union as can usefully be affected ... by those political strategic considerations ... account which it is hoped that the treaty will take rather than by constitutional niceties which do not help defence policy".

The Predicament of the Bhutanese Nation State

The British bureaucracy, especially the old Tibet experts such as F. M. Bailey, Basil Gould, and A. J. Hopkinson, appear to have had little faith in the Maharaja and the Indian democrats in the aftermath of the British withdrawal from India. They were apprehensive that the emergent democratic India might try to absorb Bhutan, to the extent that they vainly pleaded that this imaginary issue should be taken to the United Nations Organisation and that Bhutan should be turned into a crown colony, or at least have some sort of British patronage. It is a tribute to the Bhutanese and Indian policy-makers that the transition from British overlordship to Indian assistance for a meaningful coexistence was a smooth and almost effortless enterprise. For the first fifteen years after the British departure, Bhutan appeared prominently in the newspapers only twice: first when its second ruler expired in 1952 and again in 1958, when the Indian Prime Minister paid a visit to it. In between, the Bhutan State Congress raised a little storm in the placid Bhutanese teacup[13] which was almost totally ignored by the newspapers.

Meanwhile, the administration was run on an autocratic feudal pattern. The landlords controlled the bulk of the state's income and sent the residue to the government treasury. The government was in fact a body of about 130 semi-elected members, drawn even from the village headmen as official representatives of their districts. The Council "met once a year, if an emergency arose, or if the Maharaja had an announcement to make ... the Government merely rubber-stamped the Maharaja's wishes. There were no trained people and illiteracy was one hundred per cent ... the Government was so scattered and isolated, [that] administration was limited to a few officials ... the "capital" moved with the Maharaja and nobody bothered a great deal about anything. The hospitals and dispensaries were more often than not without medicines, which expired beyond their effective dates in storage through lack of interest or authority to issue. Schools were unattended

because teachers were not paid and had to find other means to supplement their income. Even the "Army" was subject to their feudal indifference, for while "on paper" it was supposed to number two thousand five hundred with a ceiling of twenty thousand it was really only a militia who were occasionally issued guns for firing practice for a few days, after which guns were returned to the headmen and the "army" returned to the villages and field." [14]

The eighty-five-year-old Bhutanese dynastic rule of four successive kings may be divided into two broad periods. The first four decades and the regime of the first two Maharajas provided a typical picture of a distant, exotic, archaic family enterprise under the benign gaze of the British bureaucracy. The regime of the third and fourth rulers over four decades from 1952 exhibits an effort to refurbish the old structure to receive inputs from an imminent transition. A period of transition is always painful and strenuous, demanding urgent decisions. All significant decisions affecting the course of the emergent Bhutanese nationhood were initiated during the reign of the third Wangchuck ruler (1952-72). He tackled the political challenge posed by the Bhutan State Congress in the 1950s, invited the Indian Prime Minister (the first international leader to visit Bhutan) and took a far-reaching decision for the planned economic development of his country through Indian financial aid. Besides the introduction of transport, education, health care and other welfare and infra-structural schemes, he created various administrative bodies. It is said that he was engaged in a type of hurdle race in terms of human resource development. He sent selected trainees abroad for education and decided to go slow on having his own centres of higher learning.

Almost the entire development assistance for the first four Five Year Plans came from India, and since then India has remained the single largest donor of aid to Bhutan. Apart from India, Bhutan is very choosy about aid givers and external relations. Apparently the Bhutanese do not want to flood their country with tourists and advisors from abroad, who would adversely affect the small and ill-educated population. Thus, Bhutan chose either distant countries such as Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Japan, or small and mountainous countries such as Switzerland, Sweden, Kuwait, etc. as potential foreign collaborators. Besides these countries, Bhutan joined various international fora for economic and social development. This all resulted in

the almost hundred per cent employment of its youth, a higher standard of living and a better quality of life for the average Bhutanese. However, in spite of all the precautions, geopolitics have conspired against the kingdom in its natural resource location. Because of the obvious southward orientation of the infrastructural network, most of the labour-intensive urban industrial enterprises were located in the southern "negative land" of the past. Thus, Samchi, Phuntsholing, Chukha, Geylegphug, Chirang, Lamidara, Sarbhang, Samdrup Jongkhar, and many more small settlements located on and near the Indian borders turned into limited trading and industrial centres, producing consumer goods and contributing to the exchequer in a considerable way. Most of the labour-intensive development projects were to be located in the south.

A regional imbalance in the course of economic development is not unique to Bhutan. However, the ethnic policy of the country is that the Nepalese *(Lhotshampa)* immigrants are not permitted to settle north of an imaginary line drawn from east to west just behind the southern Duar foothills. There has been another problem related to the ethnic policy and that is a "politics of statistics", if one puts it mildly, or rather "a war of statistical figures" if one so desires. In a thinly-populated, infrastructurally poor country such as Bhutan, which lacks transport facilities, it is no wonder that there has never been a formal census or enumeration of the population. The official statistics collected by village headmen are merely imaginary figures, as they are always reported to be the latest census estimates, with the last three digits invariably consisting of zeros.[15] In the absence of a universally reliable and acceptable population figure, the claims and counter-claims of the size of the Lhotshampa population vary from sixteen per cent [16] to sixty four per cent [17] of the national population, depending upon the ethnic affiliation of the claimant. The thickly-populated and intensively-cultivated southern region of Bhutan presents a contrast to the thinly-populated northern Drukpa pasturelands. In such a situation, a potential ethnic powder-keg developed in the southern Nepalese ghetto in Bhutan, which ignited in 1988.

It was Kazi Ugyen Dorji, the chief of the King's household (*Deb Zimpom*), the Royal Chamberlain (*Gongzim*) and the Governor (*Dzongpen*) of Haa in western Bhutan, who encouraged large-scale Nepalese settlement in the southwestern part of the country in the last

decades of the nineteenth century. Charles A. Bell found 14,000 Nepalis on the Torsa river bordering India in 1903.[18] In no time, the land-hungry Nepalese cleared the thick vegetation and organised themselves as cultivators in the southern Duars. Some twenty five years later, Captain C. J. Morris of the Gurkha Regiment was commissioned to investigate the possibility of recruiting Bhutanese. He made an extensive tour of the two Nepalese districts of the south and made a crude estimate that the 1,500 households of the eastern districts and 4,000 households of the western districts contained a population of 60,000 out of a total population of 300,000, making the immigrants twenty per cent in 1932. He remarked upon the largeness of Nepalese families within polygamous maritial alliances.[19] Morris stated that the actual number of Nepalese settlers in Bhutan was much higher than his estimate, because he had not included Sipchu area to the extreme south west. Nepalese immigration to Bhutan continued well into the present century even though there was a shortage of arable land. The government eventually banned further Nepalese immigration in 1958. It is apparent that the bamboo and thatch houses of the Nepalese are less substantial than the multi-storeyed stone houses of the highlanders. The Nepalese areas are predominantly agricultural, producing rice, maize, wheat, pulses, oranges, pineapples, ginger, cardomom and so on. Migrating across from Nepal, Darjeeling and Sikkim over the past 125 years, the Nepalese turned his "negative land" into a productive bread basket.

The Nepalese lead a frugal life. They are available for any type of work, and well suited to the extreme climate of the Bhutanese hills. In addition to agriculture, they have provided the work force for recent development programmes. With the emergence of Samchi, Phuntsholing, Daga, Sarbhang, Geylegphug, Chirang and Samdrup Jongkhar as the new commercial and (albeit modest) industrial towns of southern Bhutan, the role of the Nepalese in the national economy became more pronounced. Their food, dress, perseverance, industriousness and "mercenary" character make the Nepali speakers one on an alien soil. They look to Nepal and India as the founts of their civilisation and historical achievements, and where their places of pilgrimage are located. Higher Nepalese Hindu castes practise ritual purity and shun beef, polyandry and widow remarriage. The Nepalese are new entrants in Bhutan and also occupy a lower economic and political status

in national life. As residents of Bhutan, however, Nepalese do expect a share in the destiny of their new homeland and they have some genuine expectations from the Bhutanese nation state.

Drukpa - Lhotshampa ethnic conflict

On a different occasion we identified the Bhutanese national dilemma at four different levels: national versus ethnic, the king versus the parliament, elitism versus populism and frontier particularism versus universal modernisation.[20] Events beginning with the 1988 census enumeration have telescoped the entire dilemma into a conflict between Drukpa-ethnic-elitist-particularism versus Nepalese-ethnic-immigrant-populism. Never before has the Bhutanese polity put so much of its survival at stake. The total assimilation or outright rejection of the Lhotshampas appears to be the slogan of the day. In the absence of a creditable mass media, the publicity material produced by the Bhutanese establishment gives two aspects of Bhutanese thinking. One aspect is a sad, forgiving, repentant and rather remorseful Druk Gyalpo[21] and another is an aggressive, determined and vindictive Bhutanese bureaucracy[22]. Are these postures two sides of the same coin? Before we answer this question, it will be instructive to view the Bhutanese ethnic orientation towards the Lhotshampas.

In the Bhutanese hierarchy, faith and loyalty to one's superiors goes unquestioned. A society of pastoralists and subsistence farmers was happy to leave trade, commerce and industry in the hands of the royal family. Bhutan's dynastic rule did not permit an aristocracy to emerge. Thus, today's Drukpa society consists of an all-powerful ruling family at the top, commoners at the bottom, and a monk body in between. The geographical compulsions of a mountainous country further isolated the Drukpa commoners from the shared experiences of a modern technological society. Under such circumstances, the urge for democratic participation practically does not exist. Any semblance of representation has to be sponsored from the top, and the regime is notoriously intolerant of dissent. The stage was, thus, set for a conflict. While the Drukpas tried to impose an assimilationist policy, demanding oneness in language (Dzongkha), dress (*gho* and *kira*) and cultural systems, the Nepalese regarded themselves as culturally superior.

The Bhutanese administration had always kept a careful watch on anti-feudal movements in Sikkim and Nepal, because the Lhotshampas

have natural allies among them. It therefore came as a shock to the Bhutanese ruler when the 334-year-old Namgyal rule over Sikkim came to an end in 1975, succumbing to a movement organised almost entirely by Nepali-speakers. Even closer to home, the Bhutanese found an armed struggle in Darjeeling ending with the district also being governed by Nepali-speakers. The realisation dawned that, in the long run, New Delhi's commitment to prohibit anti-Bhutanese movements on Indian soil as per the provisions of the Punakha Treaty had no meaning. In a changed political scenario, the Nepali-speaking rulers of Nepal, Sikkim and Darjeeling could nullify New Delhi's assurances. This they could do by instigating, supporting or even financing agitation. Acting on these fears, the Bhutanese implemented an aggressive policy of cultural assimilation, starting with the implementation in 1988 of the Driglam Namzha code of conduct. The rest is the story of the Lhotshampas' flight from their Bhutanese paradise.

Bhutanese officials maintain that the refugees in the various camps belong to three categories: (1) Indian refugees from Assam, Meghalaya and other eastern states; (2) illegal immigrants to Bhutan, who had no business to be in Bhutan (and were, thus, expelled after the 1988 census operation), and (3) Lhotshampas, who willingly surrendered their Bhutanese subjecthood and since then are busy in anti-Bhutanese terrorist activities. They say that none of the above has any claim on Bhutan and, thus, the Bhutanese have nothing to do with the Lhotshampa refugees residing in the various camps: they are necessarily Nepalese and Nepal should take its responsibility seriously. They also view the Nepalese presence east of the river Teesta as a part of a Nepalese scheme to carve out a greater Nepal *(Maha Nepal)* at the cost of Bhutan and India. And, thus, the Bhutanese and the Indians should ideally make common cause against such a nefarious design. Though India may decide to ignore the "menace" of the Nepalese immigrants because of a Nepalese presence in India, treaty obligations, cultural and religious ties and its own huge plural ethnic base, Bhutan cannot afford to accept them as equal, as such an acceptance may threaten the very core of its ethnic and national identity.

The Bhutanese have adopted a number of strategies to deal with the crisis. They consider Nepalese identity to be a myth and portray the Nepalese as divided into small groups such as Tamang, Rai, Gurung, Kami, Magar, Damai, Bahun, Chhetri, Newar, Madesi, Sherpa, etc.

They straight away deny their presence in Bhutan prior to 1900. They paint the Nepalese as an anti-national mercenary menace to the legal regime. They have of late started to cultivate scholars and journalists, who could be more sympathetic to the cause of the last surviving lamaist monarchy in the world, and to invite such persons on conducted tours of Bhutan. In this context, they are concentrating of late more on Indian academics and journalists. They themselves have done their homework thoroughly and prepared illustrated documents to support their stand.[23] Lastly, they see to it that the representatives of the Lhotshampa refugees are not invited, wherever they make their presentations.

A classical theocracy turned into an exotic Wangchuck-ruled Bhutan and had little experience of ethnic coexistence on its own soil. It has not been able to weigh the implications of its aggressive ethnic policy to assimilate an ancient, martial and substantive Nepalese commonwealth into its then relatively simple and recent Drukpa fold. Policy-makers such as the Foreign Minister appear to have an exaggerated image of their powers. They tend to forget that their aggressive ethnic policy and false sense of absorptive capacity is bound to affect the pace of economic transformation. The Bhutanese aberrations might slow but cannot stop the Nepalese expansion in the Eastern Himalayan foothills; rather, such antics as the Drukpa regime is currently engaged in may provide an impetus for a Nepalese resurgence in the region.

If nation-states are the reality of the 20th century world political scene, resurgent ethnicity is going to be the concern of the first decade of the 21st century. There is hardly a nation-state in the world today that has no ethnic minority within its fold. Added to this is another aspect of the Himalayan states in the Asian heartland: the existence of numerous divided frontier communities across legal national boundaries. To date, no state has been able to completely resolve the vexed and over-arching ethnic claims from across or within its frontiers. Bhutan, one of the world's smallest and least developed nations, is trying to achieve the impossible, i.e. the absorption or expulsion of Lhotshampas. It should be in the interest of the Bhutanese to realise the limits of their aggressive ethnic policy. Once they do it, they may take the initiative in helping the SAARC countries to evolve a policy of ethnic coexistence without affecting national priorities. Once a regional consensus on ethnic policy has been hammered out, it may decrease the

heat on Bhutan and morally bind Nepal and India to extend their support to it in its hour of crisis. In this way, the apparent conflict between Bhutan's national identity and the Lhotshampas' ethnic aspirations within the Drukpa polity may be resolved.

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Appendix A

The Nationality Law of Bhutan, 1958[1]

Having found [it] necessary to amend this law relating to the acquisition and deprivation of citizenship which has been in force till date, His Majesty the Druk Gyalpo, in accordance with the suggestions put up by the Royal Advisors, People and the Monastic Body, is pleased to incorporate the following changes:

1. This law may be called the Nationality Law of Bhutan, 1958, and it shall be effective throughout the Kingdom of Bhutan.
2. This law shall be in force throughout the Kingdom of Bhutan from the day of its enactment.
3. Any person can become a Bhutanese National

(a) If his/her father is a Bhutanese National and is a resident of the Kingdom of Bhutan; or

(b) If any person is born within or outside Bhutan after the commencement of this law provided the previous father is a Bhutanese National at the time of his/her birth.

4. (1) If any foreigner who has reached the age of majority and is otherwise eligible, presents a petition to an official appointed by His Majesty the Druk Gyalpo and takes an oath of loyalty according to the rules laid down by the official, he may be enrolled as a Bhutanese National provided that:

(a) The person is a resident of the Kingdom of Bhutan for more than ten years; and

(b) Owns agricultural land within the Kingdom.

(2) If a woman, married to a Bhutanese National, submits a petition and takes the oath of loyalty as stated above to the satisfaction of the concerned official, and provided that she has reached the age of majority and is otherwise eligible, her name may be enrolled as a Bhutanese National.

(3) If any person has been deprived of his Bhutanese Nationality or has renounced his Bhutanese Nationality or forfeited his Bhutanese Nationality, the person cannot become a Bhutanese National again unless His Majesty the Druk Gyalpo grants approval to do so.

5. (1) If any foreigner submits a petition to His Majesty the Druk Gyalpo according to the rules described in the above sections, and provided the person has reached the age of majority and is otherwise eligible, and has served satisfactorily in Government service for at least five years and has been residing in the Kingdom of Bhutan for at least ten years, he may receive a Bhutanese Nationality Certificate. Once the certificate is received, such a person has to take the oath of loyalty according to rules laid down by the Government and from that day onwards, his name will be enrolled as a Bhutanese National.

(2) Any foreigner who has reached the age of majority and is otherwise eligible, can receive a Nationality Certificate provided that in the opinion of His Majesty the Druk Gyalpo his conduct and his service as a Government servant is satisfactory.

6. Any person who:-

(a) becomes a national of a foreign country and resides in that country; or
(b) has renounced Bhutanese nationality and settled in a foreign country; or
(c) claims to be a citizen of a foreign country or pledges an oath of loyalty to that country; or
(d) is registered as a Bhutanese national but has left his agricultural land or has stopped residing in the Kingdom; or
(e) being a bonafide national has stopped residing in the country or fails to observe the laws of the Kingdom:

shall forfeit his Bhutanese nationality.

7 (1)If a Nationality Certificate has been obtained on presentation of false information or wrong facts or omission of facts, the Government may order the Certificate to be cancelled.
(2)(a) If any citizen or national, engages in activities against His Majesty the Druk Gyalpo or speaks against His Majesty, or the people of Bhutan; or
(b) When Bhutan and India is engaged in a war with some other country if any citizen or national of Bhutan is found indulging in business, correspondence or helping the enemies; or
(c) If any person within a period of five years from the day when he was enlisted as a Bhutanese national, if imprisoned in any country for more than one year, the person is liable to be deprived of his Bhutanese nationality without prior notice.

8. To implement this law, His Majesty the Druk Gyalpo may incorporate additional rules if necessary.

9. This law supersedes all laws, rules and regulations, ordinances relating to the acquisition and forfeiture of nationality from the day of its commencement.

Appendix B

The Bhutan Citizenship Act, 1985[2]

1. This Act may be called the Bhutan Citizenship Act, 1985. It shall come into force from the twenty third day of the fourth month of the Wood Bull year of the Bhutanese calendar corresponding to 10th June, 1985. In case of conflict between the provisions of this Act and the provisions of any previous laws, rules and regulations relating to citizenship, the provisions of this act shall prevail.
2. *Citizenship by Birth*
   A person whose parents are both citizens of Bhutan shall be deemed to be a citizen of Bhutan by birth.
3. *Citizenship by Registration*
   A person permanently domiciled in Bhutan on or before 31st December, 1958, and, whose name is registered in the census register maintained by the Ministry of Home Affairs shall be deemed to be a citizen of Bhutan by registration.
4. *Citizenship by Naturalization*
   A person desiring to apply for Bhutanese citizenship to the Ministry of Home Affairs in Forms KA - 1 and KA - 2 must fulfil all the following conditions to be eligible for naturalization:

(a) The person must have attained the age of 21 years, and 15 years in the case of a person either of whose parents is a citizen of Bhutan;
(b) The person must be mentally sound;
(c) The person must have resided in Bhutan for 15 years in the case of Government employees and also in the case of applicants, either of whose parents is a citizen of Bhutan, and 20 years in all other cases, and this period of residence must be registered in the records of the Department of Immigration and Census;
(d) The person must be able to speak, read and write Dzongkha proficiently;
(e) The person must have good knowledge of the culture, customs, traditions and history of Bhutan;
(f) The person must have good moral character and should not have any record of imprisonment for criminal offences in Bhutan or elsewhere;
(g) The person must have no record of having spoken or acted against the King, Country and People of Bhutan in any manner whatsoever; and
(h) The person must be prepared to take a solemn Oath of Allegiance to the King, Country and People of Bhutan according to the prescribed form KHA.

On receipt of the application Form KA - 1 for naturalization, the Ministry of Home Affairs will take necessary steps to check all the particulars contained in the application. The Ministry of Home Affairs will also conduct written and oral tests to assess proficiency in Dzongkha and knowledge of the culture, customs, traditions and history of Bhutan. The decision of the Ministry of Home

Affairs on the question of eligibility for naturalization shall be final and binding. The Royal Government of Bhutan also reserves the right to reject any application for naturalization without assigning any reason.

5. *Grant of Citizenship*

(a) A person, whose application for naturalization has been favourably considered by the Ministry of Home Affairs, shall take the Oath of Allegiance according to Form KHA of this Act.

(b) A person shall then be deemed to be a citizen of Bhutan upon receiving a Kasho from His Majesty the King of Bhutan according to Form GA of this Act.

6. *Termination of Citizenship*

(a) Any citizen of Bhutan who acquires the citizenship of another country shall cease to be a citizen of Bhutan. The wife/husband and children of that person if they were Bhutanese citizens shall have the right to remain as citizens of Bhutan provided they are permanently domiciled in Bhutan and are registered annually in the Citizenship Register maintained by the Ministry of Home Affairs.

(b) Any citizen of Bhutan who has acquired citizenship by naturalization may be deprived of citizenship at any time if it is found that naturalization had been obtained by means of fraud, false representation or the concealment of any material facts.

(c) Any citizen of Bhutan who has acquired citizenship by naturalization may be deprived of citizenship at any time if that person has shown by act or speech to be disloyal in any manner whatsoever to the King, Country and People of Bhutan.

(d) If both the parents are Bhutanese and in case of the children leaving the Country of their own accord, without the knowledge of the Royal Government of Bhutan and their names are also not recorded in the Citizenship register maintained in the Ministry of Home Affairs, then they will not be considered as citizens of Bhutan. (Resolution No. 16 (2) adopted by the National Assembly of Bhutan in its 62nd Session).

(e) Any citizen of Bhutan who has been deprived of Bhutanese citizenship must dispose of all immovable property in Bhutan within one year, failing which, the immovable property shall be confiscated by the Ministry of Home Affairs on payment of fair and reasonable compensation.

Appendix C

Petition to His Majesty the King of Bhutan[3]
CONFIDENTIAL

His Majesty, King of Bhutan
Tashichhodzong, Thimphu

May it please Your Majesty,

As Your loyal subjects, and having had the proud privilege of serving Your Majesty in the Royal Advisory Council as the representatives of the people of Southern Bhutan, we beg to submit this petititon on an issue of paramount significance for the peace and progress of our nation. Most humbly, we submit that the issue needs the most careful and urgent consideration of the Royal Government. We would be failing, we believe, both Your Majesty and the people of Bhutan if we did not bring this matter before Your Majesty.

2. Some alarming reports have reached us regarding the census exercise currently underway in the southern dzongkhags. According to these reports, we understand that:

2.1 The Census Teams are questioning the people with undue threats and classifying them into various categories.

2.2 The Teams are demanding that people produce evidence of their having settled in the country before 1958, even going to such an extent of asking old people with children and grand-children born in Bhutan to provide evidence of their arrival in Bhutan, or else be declared non-nationals.

2.3 In many instances, Citizenship Identity Cards already issued have been confiscated or withdrawn.

2.4 Gups and chimis formerly considered knowledgeable and authoritative sources in census matters are not being taken into confidence and are not permitted to testify the credentials of their village people. Some of these have even been reprimanded for suggesting at DYT meetings more rational ways for conducting the census.

2.5 Illiterate and simple village people are being coerced into signing documents, the contents of which are not known to them. This has intimidated and instilled fear in the people.

3. On receipt of these reports, we took the liberty of enquiring about this matter with the Department of Immigration and Census. We were informed by the Secretary of the Department that this was a routine population census exercise. Notwithstanding this explanation, which was conveyed to the people, there are still misgivings because the methods employed by the Census Teams belie this statement. We, therefore, beg to submit that perhaps the Census Teams have over-

stepped their mandate. This has resulted in panic and confusion among the people. This is disturbing the peace and tranquillity that has reigned in the hearts of Your Majesty's loyal subjects fostered by the enlightened policy of the Government. This policy was clearly reflected in Your Majesty's statement at Gaylegphug during the National Day Celebrations in 1978 that people settled in Southern Bhutan are true citizens and cannot be considered or treated otherwise. The renewed confidence and national pride generated by Your Majesty's benign policy is, however, being undermined by the current exercise.

4. There are wide-spread feelings among the people that the actions of the Census Teams in randomly categorising people, and affecting the status of many citizens, are unjust and contravene the assurance of Your Majesty. It is the humble submission of the people that:

4.1 The classification of people as nationals, non-nationals and people without status are based on incomplete documentation and hearsay. The cavalier manner in which the exercise is being carried out does not conform to the seriousness of the issue in hand and is an affront to the dignity of the people and denial of their inherent rights as citizens of this Kingdom.

4.2 The classifications are based on narrow and literal interpretations of the Citizenship Act. This has resulted in the deprivation of national status of a large segment of the population of Southern Bhutan, particularly children. Despite the law providing for citizenship to children born to Bhutanese fathers before 1985, the retrospective application of a provision of this Act makes stateless even those loyal subjects who have been serving the Royal Government.

4.3 The people are concerned that no distinction is made between non-national spouses and other applicants for citizenship. In some cases, the Teams and local Government officials have even informed individuals concerned that the children and spouse would be deported. This has been a source of great distress and is shaking the very foundation of the family and society. Due to social barriers, inter-community marriages were seldom practised. Even among the Southern Bhutanese, inter-caste marriages have been rare owing to customs and traditions. These circumstances, coupled with communication difficulties, compelled many Southern Bhutanese to seek spouses outside the country. Your Majesty may be aware that according to the customs of Southern Bhutan the wife becomes a part of the husband's family and for all purposes her links with her own family are severed after marriage. With the ongoing exercise, many families are now being torn between their loyalty to the country and their love and responsibility for the family.

4.4 The people are concerned that, even as the census is underway, an order has been issued forbidding Bhutanese citizens married to non-nationals to stand for election to the National Assembly. This order penalizes and deprives them of their participation in the national forum. It is also the feeling that this order undermines the confidence of the people in this august body.

4.5 The manner in which the Census Teams were fielded and the disregard of the authority of gups and chimis have led the people to believe that this is not a routine exercise as it is made out to be. Unfortunately, this has been rein-

forced by the fact that in a matter of such great significance even the representatives of the people from Southern Bhutan in the Royal Advisory Council were not consulted.

4.6 The historical factors which have resulted in the settlement of the Southern Bhutanese community in the kingdom, and the evolutionary process through which indissoluble links have been created between the people and the land, only emphasises the importance of the issue of nationality and status. The rights of property and other privileges vested in the people over the years, and the corresponding duty to the country through the payment of taxes, contribution of labour and other services to the nation, underscores the nexus between this country and the people of Southern Bhutan. The manner in which the current census is being implemented appears to be questioning these very bonds.

5. In connection with the whole gamut of concerns which are now pressing for attention, we cannot help but recall that it was at the very initiative of the people of Southern Bhutan, urged by their desire for the security and stability of this country, that the process of review of the Citizenship Act of 1977 was started. This is ample proof that the people fully shared the concern of the Government to stem the possible settlement of illegal immigrants in Southern Bhutan. The primary responsibility for the control of unauthorised immigration has, however, always vested with the Government. At this juncture, to view the people with suspicion and to blame them for allegedly colluding with the immigrants to secret them into the country is unfair and unjust. We cannot also fail to recollect the various occasions when Your Majesty so graciously assured the people of Southern Bhutan that their interests and welfare would be fully protected in implementing laws and policies in the Kingdom. It was in this context the representatives of Southern Bhutan in the National Assembly raised the matter of revision of some of the provisions of the Citizenship Act 1977 to accommodate the concerns of the people of Southern Bhutan. However, owing perhaps to the diminutive voice of the southern members of the National Assembly, the 1985 Citizenship Act was passed. Much to the dismay of the people in Southern Bhutan, this Citizenship Act echoed their worst fears by surpassing even the provisions of the former Act in its stringency, particularly for the people of Southern Bhutan. This is not to suggest that the law is discriminatory or based on racial or ethnic grounds. However, the fact that the thrust of the legislation is felt mainly by the people of Southern Bhutan has given rise to speculation that a bias is implicit in the law, though unintentional. This is causing much consternation among the people.

6. In these difficult circumstances, the people of Southern Bhutan most humbly beg Your Majesty for protection and relief. We have always served Your Majesty, the Royal Dynasty and this Kingdom with unswerving faith, unfaltering loyalty and total dedication, and it is our fervent desire to continue to do so in the future. We pray in our deep distress that Your Majesty may be pleased to Command that:

6.1 The retrospective effect of the 1985 Citizenship Act, whereby 31st December 1958 is fixed as the cut-off date, be amended so that the cut-off date is 10th June 1985, the date of the Act coming into force.

6.2 The provisions of the 1985 Citizenship Act be amended so that children born of any Bhutanese citizen automatically acquire Bhutanese citizenship.

6.3 The provisions of the Citizenship Act 1985 be amended to provide privileged procedures for non-national spouses of Bhutanese citizens to acquire citizenship within the shortest possible time.

7. We have taken the liberty of bringing these issues before Your Majesty for most compassionate consideration. We have done so in the conviction that Your Majesty is the sole dispenser of our destiny and it is in Your Royal wish that the fate and future of the people of Southern Bhutan depends. May we express our deepest gratitude to Your Majesty that we have never had an occasion to even feel the slightest disappointment in our lives from the wisdom of Your Majesty's decisions. At this critical time, when our very foundations in this Kingdom are jeopardised by the magnitude of the problem confronting the people of Southern Bhutan, we have turned to Your Majesty with full faith that our prayers will receive the most gracious favour.

We humbly remain,
Your Majesty's most obedient servants,

(Teknath Rizal) (B. P. Bhandari) Councillors
Thimphu
9, April 1988

Appendix D

The BPP's 13-point demand[4]

BHUTAN PEOPLE'S PARTY
Sarbhang, Bhutan

President: General Secretary:
R. K. Budathoki D. K. Rai

DEMANDS

1. Unconditional release of political prisoners.
   We demand the unconditional release of all political prisoners arrested from within and outside Bhutan.

2. Change of absolute monarchy to constitutional monarchy.
   We demand the change of the present system of absolute monarchy to constitutional monarchy. Prime ministership must be introduced with election of the cabinet by a secret ballot democratic process. There must be proportionate representation of various ethnic groups in the cabinet, based on population criteria. The King shall be the nominal head of the country where Prime minister the Govt head.[5]

3. Reform in the judiciary.
   Article 7 of the UN declaration of Human rights provides that "all are equal before the law and are entitled to equal protection of the law".
   We demand a completely new and independent judiciary with professional judges who impart justice without distinction of race, religion, wealth, social status or political influence. The system of representation by attorney and lawyers must be introduced. The present system of one-man judgement must be abolished.

4. Amendment to the citizenship act.
   The baseless cut-off year be amended and intentional implicit biases existing in the present system be lifted. Inter-country mariages be duly considered and laws enacted accordingly. However, infiltration and illegal immigrants be restricted.

5. Right to culture, dress, language and script.
   The UN declaration of Human rights (10th December 1948) grants an individual the freedom to one's own culture, dress, religion, language and script. Further, resolution No. 8 of the National Assembly of Bhutan (autumn 1959) recognises the southern Bhutanese as one of the ethnic groups of Bhutan with

all the rights of the land. We demand for every ethnic group in Bhutan the right to conserve their own culture, dress, language and script. We demand absolute freedom in matters of dress and celebration of festivals.
The language of the dominant ethnic group should receive equal recognition and support of the government.

6. Freedom of Religion
We demand absolute individual freedom to profess and practice religion. The state shall have no religion and it shall not allow religious or cultural instructions in governmental institutions nor shall state funds be drained to any religious body. Bhutan should be a secular state, meaning "Equal respect for all religions".

7. Freedom of Press, Speech and Expression
We demand the right to express one's convictions and opinions freely in word or speech, writing, painting, pictures or any other mode. We demand an absolute freedom of press.

8. Freedom of Formation of Unions, and Political Parties
We demand the right to form associations, unions and political parties.

9. Freedom of Trade and Occupation
We demand the right to practice any profession or carry out any occupation, trade or business which is not illegal, immoral or injurious to the health and welfare of the people.

10. Right to Equitable Distribution of Wealth and Funds
We demand equitable distribution of wealth and development funds for all areas of Bhutan without distinction on grounds of race, religion, language and culture.

11. Right to Equality of Opportunities in Matters of Public Employment
We demand equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the state.

12. Right to Education
We demand the right to education in any field and up to any level as per one's ability and choice. There must be no discrimination in training, scholarships and admission on grounds of race, religion, language and culture.

13. Right against Exploitation
We demand the abolition of the present system of forced labour such as "National Work Force", "Goongda Woola", "Septolemi", etc. wherein women, children and old people are exploited.

Appendix E

Extract from "Guidelines for taking annual census"[6]
Reporting of annual dzongkhag census

9. Procedure and classifications

I. There are eight reporting formats.

a) Proforma "A" I is an abstract, to be completed at Gewog/Dungkhag/Dzongkhag level.
b) Proforma B consists of six items and it is called "Individual Slip". The individual slip has to be filled up for each family member or persons in that household. If there are ten members in one household there should be ten individual slips filled up.

II. The other six forms are specifically designed as the case may be. They are: List of Returned Emigrants (Form -2), List of Drop-out persons from the Census (Form -3), List of Children of Bhutanese father and Non-National Mother (Form -4), List of non-national Father married to Bhutanese mother and their children (Form -5), List of Adopted children (Form -6) and List of Non-nationals who have Land and Properties or without residing in your Dzongkhag (Form -7).

F-2 a) In accordance with the resolutions of the Sixty Seventh Session of the National Assembly of Bhutan section 5, Bhutanese nationals who have earlier emigrated from the country should not be considered Bhutanese Citizens from the day of departure or return to Bhutan. Therefore, such cases have to be verified thoroughly during the time of Census and listed in Form No 2 along with Individual Slip (Proforma B) and then be submitted to the Registration Division for onward submission to the Home Ministry for necessary action. In order to investigate and when in doubt of such case checklist (Annexure-II) should be used.

F-3 b) Bhutanese nationals who have not been registered in Mitsi Mayic due to lack of knowledge or for justifiable reasons and those deliberately avoiding to appear in the Mitsi Mayic for reasons of evasion of Woola and taxes are to be filled up in Form No 3 along with the individual slip (Proforma-B) and then be submitted to Home Ministry for kind approval. When in doubt use Check List (Annexure-III).

F-4 c) When a Bhutanese man is married to a non-national woman the children will be considered Bhutanese upon the approval of Home Ministry. Therefore, such category should be filled up in Form no 4 along with individual slip (Proforma-B) if the case is prior to 10th June, 1985. In order to process such cases strictly follow the check list (Annexure-IV) or when in doubt.

F-5 d) When a Bhutanese woman is married to non-national, her husband and their children if the case is prior to 10th June 1985 such case should be filled up in Form No 5 along with individual slip (Proforma-B). To verify such case follow the check list (Annexure-IV) or when in doubt.

F-6 e) The adoption of children whether Bhutanese or Non-nationals should be permitted provided the cases are processed through the Thrimkhangs and appropriate agreements stating that the child would be entitled to full benefits under the Inheritance Act as applicable to natural born are undertaken. In order to process such case Form No 6 along with individual slip (Proforma-B) should be filled up.

F-7 f) Non-nationals who settled in Bhutan after 31st December, 1958 and acquired land and property or without are to be thoroughly verified and listed in Form No 7 along with individual slip (Proforma-B).

g) The individual slip (Proforma-B) has to be attached to each of Form-2 to Form-7.

Appendix F

Joint Communique between the Home Ministers of Nepal and Bhutan

JOINT COMMUNIQUE Thimphu 18th July 1993

The Home Ministers of the Kingdoms of Nepal and Bhutan met in Thimphu on July 17 and 18, 1993. His Excellency, Mr. Sher Bahadur Deuba, the Home Minister of the Kingdom of Nepal and his delegation were accorded a warm welcome by Lyonpo Dago Tshering, the Bhutanese Home Minister who expressed the desire of the Royal Government to further strengthen the traditionally close and friendly relations between the peoples and governments of the two countries. He expressed his extreme happiness with the visit of the high level delegation from Nepal to hold discussions on the problem confronting the two countries at present. The Home Minister of Nepal and his delegation were received in audience by His Majesty the King at Tashichhodzong.

The Nepalese Home Minister conveyed his appreciation for the warm welcome and reciprocated his country's desire to strengthen the existing ties of friendship and cooperation. The talks were held in a warm and cordial atmosphere.

The two Ministers expressed their firm resolve and keen determination to bring about a speedy and durable solution to the problem of the people in the refugee camps in eastern Nepal. In this regard, both the ministers agreed to establish a ministerial Joint Committee comprising of three persons from each side to resolve the problem. With a view to ensure that such a committee will be able to carry out its work effectively, the two Ministers agreed that this high level committee will fulfil the following mandate before undertaking any other activity:

a) To determine the different categories of people claiming to have come from Bhutan in the refugee camps in eastern Nepal.
b) To specify the positions of the two governments on each of these categories.
c) To arrive at a mutually acceptable agreement on each of these categories, which will provide the basis for the resolution of the problem.

Both sides will communicate to each other the names of the members of the Joint Committee through the normal diplomatic channel. The Joint Committee shall begin its work as expeditiously as possible.

The first meeting of the Joint Committee will be held in Kathmandu as early as possible on mutually acceptable dates which will be decided through normal diplomatic channels.

The Home Ministers of Bhutan and Nepal reiterated the importance of close and friendly relations between the two countries and they expressed the conviction that the Joint Committee will find a durable solution to the problem which is causing great concern to both the countries.

Lyonpo Dago Tshering
Hon'ble Home Minister, Bhutan

H. E. Mr. Sher Bahadur Deuba
Hon'ble Home Minister, Nepal

Appendix G

Summaries of selected reports on the "southern problem".

Compiled by Michael Hutt

Reports published by the Royal Government of Bhutan

The 43-page document entitled *Anti-National Activities in Southern Bhutan. A Terrorist Movement* was published in September 1991, and spells out the Bhutan government's interpretation of and position on the situation in southern Bhutan. After a brief account of the government's "generous" treatment of the Lhotshampas, including the grant of citizenship in 1958 and the high level of prosperity in the south, the report describes the mass illegal immigration that it alleges took place after 1958: "(w)ith abundant jobs and economic opportunities, easy availability of fertile land, and free health and educational facilities, vast hordes of Nepali migrants came to perceive Bhutan as an economic haven. For their part, the Lhotshampa population in the southern districts welcomed the prospects of increasing their numbers and changing the demographic balance in the kingdom." The 1988 census "not only identified a substantial number of illegal immigrants but also revealed an unprecedented rise in the Lhotshampa population." Total illegal landholdings in Samchi, where the population had "doubled within a period of 10 years", were more than total landholdings in Tashigang, Bhutan's largest district. The report links the "launching of anti-national activities" to the census and cadastral survey, alleging that many of the leaders were themselves illegal immigrants. It also outlines various ways in which the government accommodated the "genuine difficulties and problems of certain categories of illegal immigrants on humanitarian grounds", but claims that although the majority of the southern Bhutanese supported the government's cultural policies "the anti-national elements viciously attacked this policy". After 42 arrests and 39 subsequent amnesties, "the anti-national elements stepped up their activities, mistaking tolerance for weakness" and "soon graduated to blatant terrorist acts". The report claims that the demonstrations of September and October 1990 were violent, and that eight policemen sustained injuries and one was killed because they were under orders not to fire on the "violent mobs".The report describes in detail the efforts that the government claims to have made to keep schools, hospitals and other facilities open in the south. Pages 28-40 contain 26 photographs that "give an idea of the wide-scale acts of terrorism that has [sic] been unleashed in southern Bhutan". The photographs show destroyed facilities and individual victims of violence, including the heads of two decapitated Lhotshampa officials.

The 91-page report entitled *Anti-National Activities in Southern Bhutan, an Update on the Terrorist Movement* is dated 12 August 1992. It claims that the "anti-national movement" is in disarray and is losing support in southern Bhutan. It notes the formation of new dissident organisations in Nepal, and accuses them of carrying out a "massive disinformation campaign against the Royal Government in

order to mobilise international sympathy and support". It further accuses the "anti-nationals" of "working out a novel strategy" to create a serious refugee problem in Nepal and then to portray the Royal Government "in a bad light by accusing it of forcibly evicting the Southern Bhutanese people from their homeland". It states that large numbers of ethnic Nepalis from India and Nepal are being issued with forged Bhutanese citizenship cards by the "anti-nationals" and then being registered as Bhutanese refugees. The southern Bhutanese, the report asserts, are being lured out of Bhutan by promises of free food and good conditions in the camps, and by the promise of a mass return and the granting of the "anti-nationals"' demands. Many are also being coerced into leaving Bhutan through the use of violence. Various documents and a photograph of men apparently holding guns are reproduced to support these assertions. Officials of the Royal Government, the report asserts, (including, in one celebrated instance, the king himself) are doing everything within their means to persuade potential emigrants to remain in Bhutan. The "anti-nationals'" ultimate objectives are to achieve the "eventual domination of Bhutan by a majority Nepali populaton" and "to carve out a Nepali state in Bhutan through armed struggle if the first objective cannot be attained through political means". The report goes on to explain Bhutan's citizenship laws and begins by outlining the problem of illegal immigration, claiming that it took "almost three decades" for the government to become aware of the problem. "The true dimension of the problem can be appreciated from the fact that Bhutan's population which is about 6,00,000 is only a fraction of the 10 million Nepalis living in India, most of them in the areas immediately across Bhutan's southern border..." With regard to the census of 1988, it is stated, "[a]ny documentary evidence whatsoever, (land ownership deeds or documents showing sale/gift/inheritance of land, tax receipts of any kind, etc.) showing that the person concerned was resident in Bhutan in 1958 is taken as conclusive proof of citizenship". There are sections on human rights and Bhutan's judicial system. The report concedes that "being a small, least-developed, landlocked country with low per capita income...the human rights situation is far from perfect", and states that an Amnesty International delegation was invited in "to suggest ways to improve it. The Royal Government looks forward to a continuing and constructive dialogue with Amnesty International". The two final sections describe development efforts in southern Bhutan and "education and human resource development", and are designed to counter accusations of discrimination against southern Bhutanese. The texts of royal edicts, which state that it is a "violation of the law" and a "punishable offence" for an official to force any Bhutanese national to leave the country, are reproduced. There are 33 colour photos of destroyed facilities, injured individuals and maimed corpses. All but one of the dead and injured appear from their names to be Lhotshampas.

A 58-page report, entitled *The Southern Bhutan Problem, Threat to a Nation's Survival* was published in May 1993. This reiterates the government's assessment of the problem as presented in earlier documents, but in a rather more measured and sophisticated tone. Seven pages present the Bhutanese version of the meeting between the Prime Minister of Nepal and the Druk Gyalpo in Dhaka in May 1993, which broke up without reaching an agreement. The report contains the important statement that "the Royal Government of Bhutan will accept full responsi-

bility for any bonafide Bhutanese national who has been forcibly evicted from Bhutan". The first appendix reproduces three documents (rent and property tax receipts, of which two are dated 1940 and 1968), with a caption that reads "[t]his is the kind of document produced by the people in the refugee camps as proof of their Bhutanese citizenship. Payment of property tax in itself is hardly proof of Bhutanese citizenship for there were many ilegal immigrants in Bhutan who had acquired property". The second appendix gives the texts of the Nationality and Citizenship Acts of 1958, 1977 and 1985.

In June 1993, the government produced a document entitled *Bhutan: A Brief Pictorial Summary of the Terrorist Activities in Southern Bhutan 13 August 1992 to 5 June 1993*. Expressing its "deep regret in having to reproduce pictures of terrorist victims", the Home Ministry explains that it is necessary to show that "contrary to their allegations against the government, it is the dissidents themselves who are committing atrocities". The 30-page booklet contains 25 colour photgraphs. All of the victims appear to be Lhotshampas. In a summary of "terrorist activities up to 5 June 1993", the report gives figures on "kidnapping, murder and hijacking" (58 murders, 40 rapes, 211 kidnappings and 584 robberies reported to the police), "arson and sabotage", "attacks on security forces" (61 ambushes and 34 injuries), "looting of arms" and "arms and explosives seized from the anti-national terrorists" (2231 assorted firearms, 6385 detonators etc.)

Reports published by INHURED (Institute for Human Rights, Environment and Development), Kathmandu

Bhutan, An Iron Path to Democracy, edited by SK Pradhan, was published in January 1992. It begins by summarising the history of Bhutan and then casts a critical eye on the legal system ("independence of judiciary and Rule of Law are non-existent...There is no written constitution"), the law of treason and the functions and composition of the National Assembly ("King Jigme Singye Wangchuk was a bit sincere when he admitted...during a press interview that the representation in the Assembly is not fair..." It then details an alleged lack of basic freedoms in Bhutan. Pages 4-7 are taken up by a lengthy critique of Bhutan's citizenship laws, headed "Denial of Right to Nationality". The report alleges that the 1985 Act and 1988 census stripped various categories of Bhutanese of the citizenship they had been granted after 1958. These categories allegedly included persons with only one Bhutanese parent, and all those granted citizenship after 1958 who could not prove residence in Bhutan before 1958. The report goes on to describe the process of granting citizenship before 1988, claiming that it was dealt with by officials at the local level. It is stated that all Bhutanese citizens are required to possess a Sathram number (a record of registered land holdings) and a house number, to be enumerated in census records, to fulfill national obligations such as compulsory labour contributions or cash payments in lieu of same, and to pay taxes. "The so called illegal immigrants include even those people who are in possession of these documents [but were] unable to produce such documents for 1958". The report claims that census and land registration exercises in southern Bhutan in 1972 identified substantial numbers of people who lived and owned land in both India and Bhutan. These were given the choice of residing in Bhutan or selling their prop-

erty. Once these matters had been settled, it is claimed that citizenship certificates were issued in 1980 on the basis of the 1972 census. The report claims that the 1985 Citizenship Act nullified all previous decisions on citizenship. Regarding the Driglam Namzha policy, the report alleges that the Royal Bhutan Police "virtually stopped chasing criminals" because fines could be extracted on the spot from persons not observing the dress code, and that the removal of Nepali from the school curriculum "added another dimension to the already snowballing unrest". During the "Mass Demonstration and Peace Protest" of September 1990, it is alleged that the Royal Bhutan Army "opened fire upon the crowd and charged them with bayonets resulting in the death of several people..." The report places the blame for the flight of southern Bhutanese on the government of Bhutan which "went on punishing every citizen who participated in the peace procession". Finally, the report lists the names of 52 persons allegedly "unlawfully arrested and detained" between 1989 and 1991, 16 "deaths in police custody", 19 "killings during shootout and bullet injuries", 32 cases of "demolition and burning down of houses", 16 cases of "abduction and disappearance", and 25 cases of rape.The report argues that the current unrest is not a simple case of ethnic strife, and concludes by summarising the "plight of refugees". Twelve individual case summaries are appended, along with chapter 17 of the Law of Bhutan and copies of relevant documents. A further document, *Bhutanese Refugees. Destitutes Without Destination*, was published by INHURED in February 1993, and covers much the same ground as the report summarised above.

In August 1993 INHURED published a report entitled *Cultural Cleansing. A Distinct National Identity and the Refugees from Southern Bhutan* written by David Thronson, co-editor of the *Harvard Human Rights Journal*. Thronson outlines the development of the crisis and remarks, "[t]he picture is not one of a sudden realization, thirty years after the fact, that Bhutan was inhabited by a large number of illegal ethnic Nepalis, but rather a scenario of escalating concern over the failure to integrate this portion of the population..." He takes issue with the Bhutan government's estimate of the number of Nepalis in India but allows that "whatever estimate is reasonable, the Nepali population in India is substantial... and the fears expressed by Bhutan merit consideration". However, the politicisation of the southern Bhutanese was "more a reaction to increasing pressure to assimilate than a proactive powergrab". Thronson defines nationality as the "core issue", although "the texts of the law are relevant only to the extent they influence implementation". However, Thronson alleges that the laws "have great potential for creating statelessness" and "if the 1958 clause stripping citizenship from all those who abandon agricultural land is literally applied, without consideration of the myriad reasons the southern Bhutanese had to flee, every resident of the camps can be "legally" declared a non-national." He also discerns "[v]ariance between the language of the acts and their practical application". In a discussion of the Driglam Namzha code and Bhutan's language policies, he notes that "traditional society in Bhutan is under pressure from forces of modernization as well as the forces of growing ethnic populations", but argues that the justification offered for dropping Nepali from the school curriculum "goes well beyond purely educational motives, demonstrating the influence of the "One Nation, One People" ideal." Several pages

are devoted to an assessment of the refugees' allegations of torture and rape, with reference to a UNHCR-commissioned survey by a sociologist, Cindy Dubble: "Dubble verified torture in 95 of the 100 reported torture cases... rape in 63% of the cases and violence...in 21% of the cases". Thronson records that only 237 people were registered in unofficial camps in Nepal in July 1991, that the influx rose to 1,000 a month in August and "skyrocketed" to 10,000 in February 1992. He also provides information on the number of cases screened in May and June 1992 and the proportion of those accepted as genuine refugees. With regard to reports of terrorism in southern Bhutan, Thronson states, "[w]hile some reports of anti-national activities are credible, virtually no crime in southern Bhutan is not attributed to terrorists" and "objective assessment of the extent of anti-national activity...will not take place until wider access to southern Bhutan is allowed." The rest of the report focuses on refugee activities, particularly on the growth of new human rights organisations and political parties, and on the moves that have taken place towards a resolution of the problem. Thronson concludes, "[t]he government of Bhutan cannot make the simple equation that advocating for the rights of the southern Bhutanese is the same as advocating for the extinction of the Drukpa culture...Diversity is not a luxury reserved for large countries and can be an aspect of Bhutan's distinct national culture". The texts of Bhutan's nationality laws and the Marriage Act are appended to the report.

Report by Amnesty International

Amnesty International's 26-page, approximately 13,000-word report, *BHUTAN Human Rights Violations against the Nepali-speaking Population in the South*, was published in December 1992. It begins by outlining the reason for Amnesty's interest in Bhutan, and for its sending a delegation to the kingdom at the King's invitation in January 1992. It records the fact that it was allowed to visit Samchi but not Chirang, and summarises the allegations of arbitrary arrests, torture and rape made during an earlier visit to the refugee camps in eastern Nepal.

Having introduced Bhutan and the general political background, the report immediately scrutinises Bhutan's citizenship laws in some detail, and describes the various categories into which people were placed by the 1988 Census, ranging from F1, "Genuine Bhutanese citizens" to F7, "Non-nationals". "The AI delegation concluded that the current situation in the south of Bhutan had been exacerbated due to the government's failure to specify and make known in advance what would happen to people in southern Bhutan once they had been categorized under F7. From late 1990, many of these people, some of whom were born in Bhutan and had been resident there throughout their life, were apparently forced to leave the country." The report goes on to discuss the implementation of the Driglam Namzha policy, and focuses on the dress code in particular. It then describes opposition to the government's policies, and outlines the cases of six southern Bhutanese whom AI had adopted as Prisoners of Conscience: "AI investigated all the information provided by the government and concluded that the individual violent crimes for which these six prisoners were held responsible were all committed in April-June 1990, six or more months after they were detained." The report notes that five of the six were subsequently released.

The anti-government demonstrations of 1990 are described next: "AI delegates investigated earlier reports that up to 300 people had been shot dead during the demonstrations in Samchi town on 19 September 1990. It found no evidence to support these reports." The report then goes on to detail allegations from *Kuensel* and government sources of terrorist activities by the Bhutan People's Party in the south, quoting extensively from *Kuensel*. In conclusion, the report remarks, "AI appreciates the difficulties faced by the Bhutanese authorities in seeking to maintain law and order in southern Bhutan and recognizes the government's responsibility to bring those involved in criminal activity to justice. However, while attacks on civilians in southern Bhutan are consistently attributed to "anti-nationals", it is not always clear that evidence exists to indicate the political motivation behind the acts."

The report records the testimony of an ex-prisoner, arrested in the wake of the 1990 demonstrations, under the heading "arbitrary arrest and detention without charge or trial of political prisoners", maintaining, in response to government accusations of tutoring, that it "believes all the testimonies quoted in this document to be reliable". The report also discusses the trials of suspected anti-nationals, and records that the government refused to allow AI to send observers, though it offered to allow observers "from one of the international agencies with a presence in Bhutan", an offer that AI rejected, as a contravention of AI's own working rules.

The seventh section of the report comprises accounts of torture and rape from refugees in Nepal, and the eighth documents a number of deaths in custody and AI's concern about inadequate prison conditions. The ninth records a number of initiatives from the Bhutanese government to grant amnesties, allow relatives regular access to prisoners, abolish the use of shackles, and revise the National Security Act. In its conclusion, the report makes the following recommendations:

"that Tek Nath Rizal and all other prisoners of conscience be immediately and unconditionally released;

that the government consider adopting measures contained in internationally recognized human rights standards, which refer particularly to prisoners who have been arbitrarily detained;

that torture be officially condemned at the highest levels, including by the government and the heads of the security forces;

that effective systems would be created whereby members of the security forces will be held accountable for acts of torture, including rape;

that Bhutan would consider prompt ratification of or accession to the Convention Against Torture as another specific means by which a government may demonstrate its commitment in this regard both nationally and internationally;

that the government allow the ICRC [International Committee of the Red Cross] to develop a full program of regular visits to all places of detention, to set up a

program of dissemination of information to members of the security forces and provide medical assistance at the earliest opportunity."

Reports published by HUROB (Human Rights Organization of Bhutan)
This organisation, set up by former Royal Government bureaucrats in exile, has since January 1993 produced a monthly bulletin, the *Bhutan Review,* which comments critically on developments in Bhutan. In addition, two annual reports have been published to mark World Human Rights day (December 10th) in 1992 and 1993. The first of these, a 24-page booklet, summarises the development of the crisis and refers to Leo Rose's book *The Politics of Bhutan* to "confirm" that the Lhotshampas had settled in southern Bhutan before 1907 without displacing the original inhabitants, and that the region already "suffered from population pressure" before 1958. It is argued that "despite the discriminatory clauses [of the 1985 Citizenship Act]...almost all southern Bhutanese felt protected by the knowledge that they were pre-1958 settlers" but "the malafide intentions of the government became clear once the actual enumeration process...began". "The year of implementation of the census exercise is crucial...Did this decision stem from the sudden detection of over a hundred thousand "illegal immigrants" who appeared in the country between 1982 and 1987?" The years between 1958 and 1977 are described as "the best years in Bhutan's modern history" and it is argued that "it is both impossible and preposterous to suggest that the situation observed by Rose in 1977 would be, or could be, altered by the southern Bhutanese themselves within...ten years". The Royal Government's argument that the last remnant of Buddhist culture was in danger "was initially able to generate some interest and concern" because foreigners were unaware that "there is little interaction between the different ethnic groups". The introduction by the government of new policies on citizenship and culture is described as a reaction to the worldwide trend toward democratic reform, although "most Bhutanese...would agree that the political institution in Bhutan had no cause for worry" because of the "benevolence and dynamism of the reigning monarch". These changes are therefore blamed on an "inner circle" with "powers and privileges..enjoyed as a result of their association with monarchy". The report then gives the southern Bhutanese version of the emergence of the crisis, provides a detailed documentation of the refugee situation in Nepal, and reproduces the testimonies of five refugees.

HUROB's second annual report (December 1993) is a summary of the events of the past year. With regard to the refugee situation, it observes "[t]he Bhutanese refugee problem in Nepal has not been resolved — it has, for the time being, been tidied up". There is a brief summary of HUROB's analysis of the way in which the crisis emerged, with an official photograph of the prominent citizens of Chirang welcoming a new district administrator in 1982. The name, designation and current status of each person who appears is given: of the twenty-two persons pictured (fifteen *gups,* three National Assembly members, the incoming and outgoing *Dzongdags,* a *Dzongrab* and a *Thrimpon),* twelve are now claimed to be refugees and two to be in prison. The events of the year are summarised in 11 pages, and then an article entitled "inventing terrorists" attempts to counter the Royal Government's claim that it faces a terrorist movement in the south: "...all the re-

ported cases of "terrorist activity" in southern Bhutan during the year has [sic] involved routine looting of the public — no services have been targetted, no police ouposts attacked, no patrols ambushed, no officials kidnapped". Finally, the agencies assisting in the care of the refugees are listed, and there is a breakdown of the population in the eight camps which, as of 30 November 1993, had a total population of 84,854.

Other Reports

The Bhutan Tragedy. When Will It End? First Report of the SAARC Jurists Mission on Bhutan.

One of the earliest publications on the issue was written by a panel of four Justices from India, Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh and published by INSEC (Informal Sector Service Centre) in Kathmandu in May 1992. Unable to visit Bhutan, the mission based its findings on interviews with refugees and a review of Bhutan's laws. In their findings, the judges accused the Government of Bhutan of "the enactment of a number of discriminatory laws and policies", "the abuse of powers", "illegitimate use of force", "systemic and manifold discrimination", "illegal confiscation of citizenship rights", "forced national integration" and sundry other human rights violations. They placed wide-ranging recommendations and demands before the governments of Bhutan, India, Nepal and the SAARC countries, and before donors to Bhutan and the UN. Over two-thirds of the 176-page book is taken up by appendices to the report: these include the texts of Bhutan's citizenship laws and national Assembly resolutions, copies of official correspondence, petitions to the King of Bhutan from leading southern Bhutanese, refugee statements etc.

AHURA BHUTAN (Association of Human Rights Activists): ***Bhutan.A Shangrila Without Human Rights.*** Published in Nepal in June 1993, this 147-page book begins by covering much the same ground as the other "dissident" literature summarised above, with a summary of Bhutan's history, a critical account of government policy since 1980, and an account of the opposition to it, and ends with the usual appendices. It quotes liberally from Amnesty International reports, lists 200 prisoners in custody in Bhutan as of May 1993, and gives details of forty-nine alleged extra-judicial killings and deaths in custody. The main body of the book (pages 63-128) consists of twelve very detailed refugee case-histories, accompanied by copies of relevant official documents, newspaper reports, letters etc. These case histories are intended to provide evidence that supports allegations of "demolition of [emigrés'] houses", "persecution of Christians", "erosion of meritocracy", "systematic deprivation of citizenship" etc.

Articles

Anon. "Bhutan's Foreign Minister interviewed on ethnic problem". *Summary of World Broadcasts* FE/1679, BBC, London, 4 May 1993.

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Dixit, Kanak Mani . "Bhutan: the Dragon Bites its Tail". *Himal*, July/August 1992.

Hobson, Carol. "Behind the Mask: Ethnic Cleansing in Bhutan". *Geographical*, January 1993.

Hutt, Michael. "Refugees from Shangrila". *Index on Censorship*, April 1993.

Josse, MR. "Western Gullibility and Bhutan: A Case Study". *The Independent* (Kathmandu), 6 January 1993.

Kirby, KSS. "Clash of Cultures in Bhutan Spurs Emigration". *Los Angeles Times*, 1 September 1992.

McGirk, Tim. "A Kingdom in Crisis". *Independent on Sunday* (London), 6 December 1992.

Muni, SD. "Bhutan in the Throes of Ethnic Conflict". *India International Centre Quarterly*, Spring 1991.

Puri, Nisha. "Migrants cast a shadow on the land of the peaceful dragon". *The Economic Times* (New Delhi), 23 May 1993.

Rabgye, ST. "Bhutan Explains". *Times of India*, 4 October 1991 (letters page).

Shaw, Brian C. "Bhutan in 1991. "Refugees " and "Ngolops"". *Asian Survey* 32,2 (February 1992).

Shaw, Brian C. "Bhutan" in annual issues of *Asia Yearbook*, published by *Far Eastern Economic Review*.

Spotlight, (Kathmandu), 30 April 1992 (various articles).

Vinayak, M. "Unrest in Bhutan. The Voice of a People Uprooted". *Frontline*, 27 April 1991.

As this book went to press, three further accounts of Bhutan's 'southern problem' and the refugee issue became available. These were: DNS Dhakal and Christopher Strawn's Bhutan: a movement in exile (Nirla Publications, New delhi, 1994), which contains a slightly different version of Strawn's paper on the dissidents; a second issue of Himal magazine (vol.7, no.4, July-August 1994) that focused on Bhutan; a new 17-page report from Amnesty International entitled 'Bhutan—forcible exile (AI Index ASA 14/04/94).

[1]Taken from *The Southern Bhutan Problem. Threat to a Nation's Survival.* Thimphu, Ministry of Home Affairs, May 1993, pp. 45-8.

[2] Ibid., pp. 55-8.

[3]This is said to be the full text of the original petition, as given in *The Bhutan tragedy. When will it end?* by the unofficial and self-designated 'SAARC jurists mission on Bhutan: people-to-people initiative (May 1992)' (Kathmandu: 1992), pp. 19-22 - *Brian C. Shaw.*

[4] Text as reproduced in the 'SAARC Jurists", *The Bhutan tragedy. When will it end?* (Kathmandu, 1992), pp. 25-28. From the photocopied original first page (p.25) up to point 5, then from the typed version.

[5] In the original, the word 'Govt' is written in by hand. The 'SAARC Jurists" typed version has the wording 'with a prime minister the constitutional head'.

6 Registration Division, Ministry of Home Affairs, supplied courtesy of Brian C.

Shaw. The Annexures and Proformas referred to are not reproduced here.

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