

THE HEART OF  
NEPAL  
DUNCAN FORBES





# THE HEART OF NEPAL

*by*  
DUNCAN FORBES

ILLUSTRATED



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### MAP

The Valley of Nepal

*pages 8-9*

## *Foreword*

FOR MANY generations Nepal, like Japan, was a country closed to Europeans and Americans. After the Gurkha conquest in 1769 and the departure of the Catholic fathers, no European was permitted to enter the country until the British Residency was established in Katmandu after the treaty of Sagauli in 1816. But the Resident himself was restricted in his movements to the Valley of Nepal, as were the few Europeans who were able to visit the country in the ensuing years, except for those who were invited on the organized big-game hunting expeditions in the Nepalese Tarai.

All this time, however, Gurkha soldiers were coming down from the Hills to serve in the Indian, and later in the British Army, and were travelling all over the world on military service; and in the reverse direction Indian pilgrims travelled freely to the holy places of the Himalayas which lie within Nepal. There was also continuous coming and going across the border with Tibet. So it was only from the European that Nepal, the buffer state between the British and Chinese Empires, was isolated.

The exploits of the men of the Gurkha regiments and their renowned bravery in two world wars and many other campaigns, the lure of the almost unknown peaks of the Central Himalayas, and travellers' tales of the "forbidden" city of Katmandu made the world curious to learn more about this mysterious mountain kingdom. The "classics" on Nepal have already been written—by the British Resident, Hodgson, by the Residency surgeons, Oldfield and Wright, by the French Sanskrit scholar, Sylvain Lévi, by Landon—but they are almost unobtainable. Now, after the revolution of 1951, with the country at last open to foreign travellers, it is possible to see for oneself whether Kipling's couplet is indeed true:

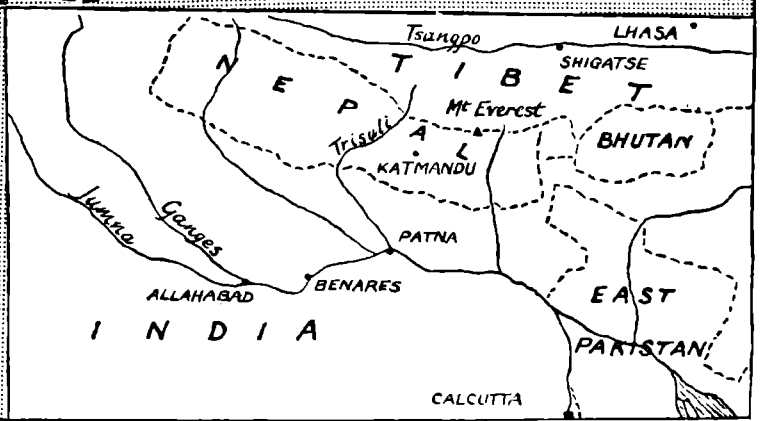
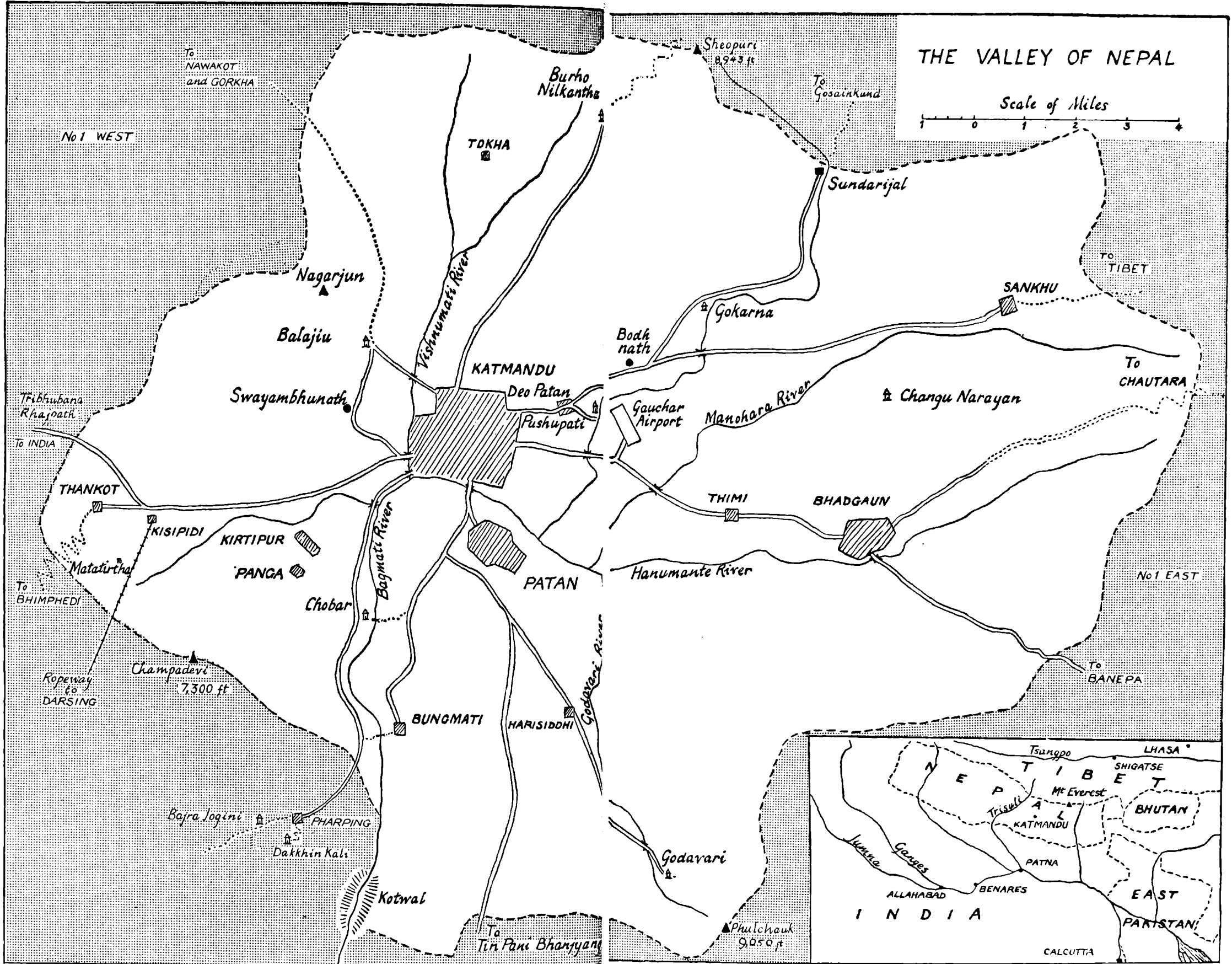
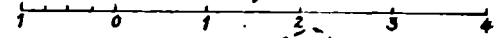
"And the wildest dreams of Kew  
Are the facts of Katmandu . . ."

This is not another Himalayan mountaineering book. It is a book about the people and life of the Nepal Valley and its three ancient cities of Katmandu, Patan and Bhadgaun. It is about their history and surroundings, their gods and temples, and also about the impact of modern life on them and the coronation of their king.



# THE VALLEY OF NEPAL

Scale of Miles



*Acknowledgement*

The quotation on pages 127–8 is adapted from Sir Charles Bell's translation in his *Tibet, Past and Present*, (1924), included here by permission of the Clarendon Press.

# I

## *Towards the Nepal Valley*

IT WAS ten years since I had been in India, years of great political and social changes and the growth of new frontiers. In Calcutta well-known streets had changed their names, the motor traffic was sparse and mostly decrepit and the buildings had a run-down and ill-cared for look about them as though the whole tempo of life had slowed down. But as soon as I reached the railway station at Howrah I realized that nothing had changed. The crowds were still there, waiting patiently for their trains. Some of them looked as though they might have been waiting there the whole ten years, squatting beside the gates which give access to the platforms, with their luggage piled around them—brightly-painted metal boxes and bundles wrapped in mats and tied with string that looked as though it would break at any moment, and brass pots and kettles and babies.

And on the platform itself there were the same red-coated coolies jog-trotting along with trunks and bedding-rolls perched precariously on their heads, there was the same argument when you paid them (no matter how much you paid there was always an argument), and the same conductor examining one's luggage in the compartment and insisting that it was more than the regulations allowed, but after a while getting tired of the whole business and going away. There was the tea-vendor with third class tea poured from a battered kettle into an earthenware cup ("*Chae ek anna! Chae ek anna!*") and second class tea in a china cup with milk and sugar to taste ("*Do anna chae! Do anna chae!*"), and the superior waiter in white gown and turban bearing first class tea served on a tray with a damp slice of buttered toast, and there were the orange-vendors ("*Naringi! Ek rupiya char!*") and the samusa sellers and the little boys running here, there and everywhere, offering to clean your shoes, fill your water-bottle, get you a newspaper or get you cigarettes or tea or anything else you liked to think of. No, nothing had changed.



And as the first whistle went there was the same frantic scrambling and pushing and squeezing into the third class compartments, the violent arguments evaporating in a flash into courteous expressions of apology and protestations of friendship, the contrast of bright-red and gold saris against the dull white and black of dhoti and umbrella, the chatter and noise of the travellers calling from the train to their friends and relatives left behind on the platform, now formed into their own groups—here Bengalis wearing white Gandhi caps, there Sikhs in their tall turbans, and there Anglo-Indians exuding perspiration into European suits—and the excitement in people's voices in this country where every journey is an adventure and a sort of pilgrimage.

Thus was the beginning of my journey to Nepal. According to Newman's Indian Bradshaw by boarding this particular train on Friday afternoon I would reach the Nepalese frontier station of Raxaul on Saturday night. There was no need, even, to work out the complicated connections usually necessary on long distance journeys. It had a separate column devoted to it in the front of the book, showing the link-up with the Nepalese State Railway. I was somewhat surprised to find that I had a complete four-berth compartment to myself with no one anxious to disturb my solitude.

I soon discovered the reason for this when we clanked to a halt at the first suburb five miles out of town and went on stopping at every station in the Calcutta conurbation, which stretches far up the right bank of the Hooghly river. It was a slow train, in other words an "express" train as opposed to a "mail" train. Fortunately it was the month of February and the weather was cool. I settled down in patience—and solitude—to a clattering, rattling progress across the plain of Bengal, punctuated with cups of tea and oranges and hard-boiled hen-fruit no bigger than pheasants' eggs, bought at one or other of the frequent halts.

By the time we reached Asansol, a railway workshop centre which is only just over a hundred miles from Calcutta, it was already dark. Here a little cross-eyed man tried to sell me the local version of a sword-stick—a swagger cane about two feet long containing a dagger. Perhaps I looked in need of care and protection.

From Asansol Junction we branched off to the north, away

from the Calcutta–Delhi main line. I unrolled my sleeping-bag and lay down on it, but I could not sleep for I now saw that I would have to get up before dawn in order to get out of the train at the Ganges river-crossing. If I overslept, the train would take me on to Patna. Station after station passed in the dark, the beams of their platform lights swinging silently across the compartment, and it was still dark when we got to Mokameh Ghat, where I had to get out.

I looked out on to the platform and saw row upon row of crouching off-white, hooded figures looking like local members of the Klu Klux Klan. What was it? A demonstration? A hold-up? A peasant revolution? The possibilities ran through my fuddled brain. The train stopped, whereupon four or five of the hooded figures rose up, wrenched open the door of my compartment, seized my luggage, hoisted it on to each other's heads and went running off with it into the misty darkness.

I stuffed my hat on to my head and went off with them, but I was soon jammed into a tight crowd of people all heading in the same direction and could only float with the tide. Meanwhile my men had disappeared. However I was now comforted by seeing that others of the hooded clan had resolved themselves into railway coolies with numbers on their wrists, who had been sheltering under their *kadder* sheets from the pre-dawn cold.

The hurrying crowd came to a halt about two hundred yards away at a little train perched on an extremely narrow-gauge track standing in the middle of nowhere. The train was full already. But in India nearly all trains are full, only some are fuller than others. This one had to be made fuller. My men found a compartment where the door would open without anybody falling out and offered it to me with an air of magnanimity. The occupants protested, and I was inclined to agree with them, but my men knew better and proceeded to push my luggage in between the rows of knees. They then pushed me in and waited for the next move.

Money passed from my hand to theirs. A fierce argument followed. I looked round at my fellow-passengers wondering whether they were for or against. I could hardly see them in the unlit compartment, but those nearest seemed to show an interest in the proceedings, though giving no indication of taking sides. Then I muttered something about these fellows always wanting more, whereupon a gentleman half-hidden by

a large basket of water-melons said they were all rogues (*badmarsh*) and the argument was cut short by a fresh wave of luggage and bodies being forced into our pen on top of us.

This was the limit. There was now no possible chance of moving until the little train reached its destination, wherever that was. But it did not start. For a long time it did not start, whilst the pallid light of a new day slowly crept into our wooden hutch. Then at last it moved, rumbled down hill for about a minute and stopped again. What was happening? Coolies were coming to the doors again—the same men as before—and man-handling the luggage. Passengers were getting out. Our own compartment spilled out on to the ground, and lo and behold, there was a blunt-nosed, broad-beamed river-steamer moored up against the soft bank of the river at the end of a banked-up, muddy causeway, ready to receive us.

The mighty Ganges is here a mile wide, full of shifting sand-banks and swirling currents. At each inundation during the monsoon rains it eats into its banks in some places and silts up in others. Hence the necessity for continually moving the site of the landing-place and for laying a light railway to the new site for the convenience of passengers.

As we cast off, now sorted out into our respective classes, the arguments with the baggage coolies having been settled for better or for worse, a miraculous peace settled on us all. The sun came up over the water, throwing into relief the distant outline of the partly-constructed bridge downstream, and many of the women turned towards its heart-warming glow with palms joined together in ritual greeting. As the steamer swung out into the stream to do battle with the current, the further shore emerged out of streaks of mist. Green twigs of the neem tree were produced and teeth cleaned, to the accompaniment of much clearing of throats and a good deal of spitting, mostly over the side.

On the northern shore there was more portage, more arguing with coolies and another train, which was to spend the day trundling across North Bihar as far as Sagauli. On this part of the journey I had companions from time to time. I remember a man with a lame leg, who obviously had no ticket, but pleaded to be allowed to squat in a corner of my compartment as he had no other way of getting home to his village, and a group of schoolboys on their way home from High School, who invaded



my compartment in the middle of the afternoon some distance beyond Muzaffarpur. I doubted whether their tickets entitled them to be where they were either, but then there was in the compartment a notice in three different languages informing us, the people, that the railways now belong to us, the people, and telling us to treat them as our own property, so who was I to complain? They were a friendly, inquisitive lot of boys, and when they thought they knew me well enough they produced a subscription list for expenses to be incurred on Sri Panchami day, the spring festival, at which honour is done to Saraswati, goddess of learning.

Sagauli, which I reached late in the afternoon, is noted in Nepalese history as being the place at which the treaty of 1816 was signed, which limited Nepal to its present boundaries. The date marked the end of the Gurkha expansion, checked by the second campaign of the British-Gurkha war, in which General Ochterlony led his East India Company forces as far as the fort of Makhwanpur on the direct route to Katmandu. With the treaty in mind I looked around at this, the first concrete connection with Nepal on my journey, but naturally there was nothing to indicate the historical significance of the place. It was simply a small country town, with long rows of bullock-carts loaded with sugar-cane queuing up outside the local sugar-mill, and with another portage to another train. Nor did the scenery change between Sagauli and Raxaul, though for this last leg of the day's journey I happened upon the Secretary of the All-India Gurkha Ex-Servicemen's League as a travelling companion and naturally turned the conversation to Nepal.

It was only at Raxaul, the frontier, that at last the appearance of things changed. In the old days this part of the North-Eastern Railway used to be called the Bengal and North-Western Railway (i.e. north-west from Calcutta) and the Gurkha soldiers, long in group memory and tradition, still sing a song with the recurring chorus, "*B.N.W. Railway ma Nepal jandai chha*," which means, "He's going to Nepal on the B.N.W.R." And here, sure enough, on the track from the station to the Rest House there were open-air restaurants patronized by hill-men stocky of leg and round of face, and shelters behind, in which they would wrap themselves up in their blankets for the night—for few people go to Raxaul unless they are going to Nepal. And at the Rest House the caretaker mentioned the

names of several well-known mountaineers who had been exceedingly generous to him in the past.

Next morning I boarded yet another train, the fifth of my journey, which took me thirty miles to Amlekhganj. There are only two railways in Nepal, both narrow-gauge collectors' pieces, though they still carry considerable traffic. This miniature train was on one of them, and the other, a few miles longer, is further to the east, running from Jayanagar, on the frontier, to Janakhpur, a place of pilgrimage which is famous as the birthplace of Sita, wife of Ram, the hero of the Ramayana.

A short distance from Raxaul we crossed a sluggish, muddy stream, which marks the border of the independent kingdom of Nepal. To the north of it the plain of North Bihar continued as before, though we were, in fact, in the Nepalese Tarai or Madesh ("Big Land"). This territory, conquered by the Gurkhas in the eighteenth century, is, as it were, colonial land to them and is, in general, more productive than the hill country, with good crops of rice and sugar every year. It is Nepalese by virtue of the Treaty of Sagauli and the fact that the landlords are, or were, Gurkhas from the Hills, but the real frontier of Nepal is the main rampart of hills over sixty miles further north and there are no passport or customs formalities whatever at Raxaul.

Five miles along the line from Raxaul lies Birganj, a large town founded by Maharajah Bir Shamsheer Jangbahadur Rana. Like Biratnagar, the other considerable town of the Tarai, it contains a match factory, but in appearance it is not much different from an Indian town and the Indian rupee freely circulates there. However, I did notice on the outskirts one or two of those large, square mansions called bhawans, which are very numerous in the Nepal Valley itself.

My tiny compartment was invaded here by a large group of well-to-do Nepalese, the men dressed as for a stroll in Hyde Park and the women in the most diaphanous of Indian saris, with carefully coiffured jet-black hair setting off their fair features, and fragile court shoes of silver and gold on their feet. I gazed at them incredulously. Surely these ethereal creatures were not going to trek like that to Katmandu, and if not, where were they going?

A dozen miles further on the solution to the problem presented itself. The train stopped at Simra, where there is an air-

strip and an air service, which flies over the hump of the Mahabharat mountains the sixty odd miles to Katmandu. It is nominally a freight service, but that did not prevent my "Hyde Park" companions piling out of the train and piling into the plane on top of the freight and baggage. After all, it is only a twenty minutes' ride, and the other way the journey takes two days, with much toil and trouble.

Simra is at the southern edge of the jungle belt that covers the foothills of the Himalayas, stretching over the three thousand foot Chauria range—an extension of the Sewalik hills of Uttar Pradesh—and into the Inner Tarai or Bhitri Madesh. Between Simra and Amlekhganj the train climbs gradually upwards through the dense sal forest. The only thing that relieves the monotony of the trees is the sight of the rough track that does service as a motor road running beside the railway here and there and occasionally crossing it.

We reach Amlekhganj at midday, but there is no time for a meal. We have to rush (another portage!) from the train to the mail-bus in order to get a seat for the next part of the journey. By this time, however, I have a friend who knows the ropes. He is a student of economics at Trichandra College, Katmandu, on his way home from a political meeting of the Nepali Congress Party in Birganj. He runs on ahead and gets the seats in the bus, whilst I follow more sedately with the combined luggage. In record time we are jammed into our seats. Then follows the usual wait for something to happen. Eventually we set off. A hundred yards further on we stop again. It is to pay our fares at the company's office. Remarkable as it may seem I pay three times as much for my luggage as I do for myself. No use arguing, however. I am next to the driver, who is the arbiter of our destiny and addressed by all the passengers, irrespective of rank, as *driver-ji* (or "Sir Driver"). On my left sits a Nepalese gentleman dressed in the *suruwal*, or breeches, of the country and a brown tweed shooting-jacket, who is deputed to blow the squeegee horn whenever necessary. My student friend is immediately behind, whilst hanging on to the back of the vehicle, behind the crowded third class seats, is an individual indispensable to Indian buses, who is known as the "cleaner".

We start off from the company office, but then, on the outskirts of the little town, we stop once again. This time it is to pick up the passengers who have made a private arrangement

with the driver to pay for their journey, at reduced rates, direct to him. After the transactions involved in this business have been concluded we finally get away.

North of Amlekhganj the road almost immediately starts climbing into the Chauria hills, winding up the valley of the Bageri Khola. The corners keep my neighbour on the left continually engaged with the horn and culminate in an exceedingly narrow and low tunnel at the top of the pass. Here, at the tunnel's mouth, we halt whilst the engine lets off steam. Some passengers get out and do obeisance at the shrine of Ganesh, elephant god of luck, which is placed at the side of the road. Meanwhile the cleaner tries to flatten down the luggage on the roof. Then, to a fanfare of hoots, we take the plunge. Arrived safely at the other end, the driver puts the engine out of gear and we freewheel down into the Inner Tarai or Doons.

The Doons in the old days constituted the first formidable natural defence of Nepal. Overgrown with thick sal forest and elephant grass and swampy thickets, the area contains the largest stock of big game left in the world today. Indeed, the Chitawn district, which is approached by a track branching westwards at Hitaura from the road to Katmandu, is the centre of the finest big game country anywhere and is the scene of those large-scale royal tiger hunts, in which large numbers of highly-trained elephants encircle the game and the hunters shoot from howdahs on the elephants' backs.

More dangerous than the tigers, rhinoceros and elephants that roam there, however, is the anopheles mosquito, bearer of the deadly "aul" malaria, which in the past meant probable death to any outsider trying to cross the Doons in the rainy or autumn seasons. It was thought that the aul fever was brought by deadly miasmas which rose with the morning mist from the swampy ground, but in reality, of course, it was the mosquito that kept the country reserved for one race only—the Tharu—who had developed a measure of immunity from the disease. Mepacrine and paludrine now allow visitors to travel there without fear of the ground mists, and there is a large development scheme in progress in the Rapti river basin, backed by American funds, in which it is hoped to bring many thousands of acres under cultivation. But the go-getting Americans have obstacles in plenty to overcome, including the ill-drained, sandy soil, the lack of experienced local workers and the prejudice of

the people against settling in an area with an unhealthy reputation of long standing.

Our horn-blower got off at Hitaura and the cleaner took his place. From there we continued the climb into the Himalayas, with the hills closing in on us in ever-steepening slopes. At the river-junction of Bhainse Doban the new motor-road to Katmandu branches off to the left. Called the Tribhubana Rajpath after the present king's father, it was built by Indian Army engineers and crosses two eight thousand-foot passes in its seventy-nine miles' length, but it suffers from landslides and also appears to go a longer way round than need be. Evidently the Nepalese Government thinks so too, since they are now engaged in building another road due south from Katmandu over the Tinpani (or "three waters") Pass near the Bagmati river, which will link up with the old road at Hitaura.

A little further on from Bhainse is Darsing, the site of the loading-platform of the aerial ropeway which carries heavy goods to Katmandu. This device was hit upon by Maharaja Chandra Shamsher as a means of getting the amenities of modern life to his capital city, whilst avoiding the expense and possibilities of infiltration from the outer world involved in the construction of a railway or motor-road. It was built by a Swiss engineer, and its pylons can be seen from many parts of the trail marching over the mountains like an electricity grid system. Its buckets carry goods to Kisipidi, eight miles from Katmandu, whence there is both a light railway and a continuation of the ropeway to the customs shed at the south-west corner of the city.

Four miles further on the bus reached Bhimphedi, which lies in a deep trough, with the Mahabharat range towering above. This was the end of its run and there was no option but to get out and walk. My student friend, whose name was Yadunath, was still with me, and together we soon found three porters who were willing to take our baggage eighteen miles over the hills for the sum of seven Nepalese rupees, or about seven shillings, each.

This was my first introduction to Nepalese currency and to its fluctuations *vis-à-vis* the Indian rupee, which is still known as the Company rupee from the old days of the East India Company. The exchange rate varies from day to day. Sometimes you may get as many as one and three-quarter Nepalese rupees for

your Indian rupee, sometimes only one and a half or even one and a quarter. The rate appears to be controlled by the money market in Katmandu, since all the money-changers give a uniform rate on any given day, but you never know beforehand what to expect.

I changed some money, and then, accompanied by Yadunath, set out up the steep hillside into the mountains, with the porters following behind. The time was late afternoon and now I felt that my journey really had begun. All the five trains, one steamer, one bus and eight portages had merely been preliminaries to this. Up till now I had caught only the barest glimpses of the Himalayas as a thin white line seen from the Tarai near Birganj. Now I was climbing up into them, advancing step by step deeper into their folds. From time to time I turned round, not so much to see whether our porters were following us as to savour the height gained above Bhimphedi and the valley below.

These sentiments were rather lost on Yadunath, to whom one mountain was very like another, and now that we were walking together away from the roar and rattle of the bus, we had our first opportunity for unimpeded conversation. He seized it eagerly.

“Why are you going to Katmandu, who are you, and what are you going to do there?” he said, or words to that effect. They were questions which, with variations, I was to hear repeated a hundred times over in the Hills, where the standard opening gambits are, “*Kata janu hunchha?*” (Where are you going?) and “*Kahan bata aunu bhayo?*” (Where have you come from?).

I answered him as best I could, and then he asked me why I had not gone by plane. “I was going by plane,” he said, “but I couldn’t get a seat.” He didn’t say he couldn’t afford the plane.

“I might have gone by plane,” I said, speaking in Nepali, “but I wanted to see the road. Besides, all this luggage would have been expensive on the plane.”

“Most foreigners are not like you,” he said. “Most foreigners go by plane. The road is very steep up and down.”

“It is,” I agreed. By this time I was panting and perspiring, sweating off some of the fat gained from too much good living, whilst he was just getting into his stride.

“You are interested in seeing Nepal?” he said in English.



I nodded, not wanting to waste precious breath.

“We are a backward country,” he said. “Many changes are needed.”

“I have heard you are making good progress,” I said, sticking to Nepali.

“For so many years we had no changes,” he went on, still in English. “Now we have to catch up with the rest of the world.”

I nodded—it was a particularly steep stretch of track.

“We must build roads and railways and hospitals and factories,” he said. “Now that we have democracy it can be done. Formerly all the wealth of the country went into the hands of a few people who did nothing. Now the wealth of the country is for the people.”

“What about your meeting in Birganj?” I said, giving up trying to talk in Nepali because of Yadunath’s obvious desire to air his English. “How did it go?”

“Very well,” he said. “We made many resolutions. We have to prepare ourselves for the elections. This time we do not have to make mistakes. We will bring progress to Nepal. We will share the wealth of the country amongst the people. His Majesty, too, will help us. His Majesty is for democracy. We also welcome people from abroad who are able to help us. For a long time we have been shut in. Now we must bring our country into communication with the rest of the world.”

I did not reply, the gradient having lost none of its severity. Then, at last, there was a break in the steep ascent, a level space amongst the pine-trees on a shoulder of the hillside, with a sheltered bench on one side and piped water on the other—deliciously cold, clear mountain water, unlimited in quantity.

I looked at this young bourgeois socialist of Nepal in his schoolboy cap and town trousers and shoes, a shopkeeper’s son who had been lucky enough to get a high school and college education, and it seemed to me that we two looked at the mountains from completely opposite points of view. To me they were challenging and inspiring obstacles to be conquered and overcome, enclosing in their deep valleys strange peoples remote from the main stream and still maintaining their antique customs and way of life. To him they were obstructions which had impeded progress and enabled the Rana family to rule unmolested for a hundred years and gather into their hands the wealth of the state. To him the greatest of modern inventions

was the aeroplane because it could fly over the mountains, going from Katmandu to Patna in less than an hour and to Delhi or Calcutta in less than half a day.

The sun went down behind the mountain as we set out after our rest and the temperature fell rapidly. The track was rough, so Yadunath took his shoes off to save them from getting cut to pieces. Not wishing to be encumbered with them himself, he placed them on top of one of the porters' eighty pound loads, warning him as he did so in most unbrotherly and unsocialistic terms of what would happen to him if he lost them. "These coolie people know a lot of side tracks," he explained. "They run off with your luggage and disappear if you do not watch them. They are great thieves."

I thought this to be unlikely, since the porter contractors at Bhimphedi, and at Thankot at the other end of the trail, keep tabs on all their men. But I did not press the point. I was thinking about the fading light and arrangements for the night and had already glimpsed the buttresses of a building perched on top of a cliff, which was the fort of Chisapani.

"The Rest House is here," I said. "We can spend the night here, then make an early start in the morning."

Yadunath surprised me by not agreeing with me. "It's too cold there," he said. "The porters will never stop there. We should go on to Kulikhani."

"We've come far enough," I insisted. "I want to stop at Chisapani."

"Please take my advice," pleaded Yadunath. "It is warm at Kulikhani and there is a very good hotel there. We shall be comfortable there."

"I've heard the Rest House is all right," I said. "I don't want to go on further in the dark. Kulikhani's too far."

So we went on, and the argument was still unresolved when we reached the village street and stood looking down on the little fort instead of up at it.

This fort, garrisoned by a platoon of the Nepalese Army, stands on the inner frontier of Nepal. The sixty-five miles between Raxaul and Chisapani cross, so to speak, the outer territories, the land "without the wall". The true frontier is here, six thousand feet up in the Mahabharat mountains, where a log of wood across the track acts as a symbolic barrier and the customs officials inspect one's passport and luggage.

There is a series of these forts, called *garhi*, which cover the trails through the Mahabharat range along the whole length of the central part of Nepal. A *bara hakim*, or governor, resides at each post and the Nepalese flag of two red triangles, with the sun on one and the moon on the other, flies overhead. Of course their military significance is now lost, but in the past at least one felt the heat of battle when General Ochterlony's troops advanced to Makhwanpur Garhi, some ten miles south of Chisapani, in the war of 1815. From that date onwards perpetual peace and friendship between Nepal and the British Indian Empire gave the *garhi* no opportunity of proving their strength.

A retinue of ragged little boys followed me to the village green, where I asked for the Rest House. When it proved to be the biggest building in sight I announced firmly that I was going to stop there and that Yadunath could go on if he liked. He was disappointed but resigned, and since we had agreed to travel together, he decided to stay too. After making some inquiries we unearthed the governor's deputy, who unearthed the caretaker, who let us in and set about preparing a meal.

It was now pitch-dark and we peered about in the light of my torch, whilst the locals went for a lantern. Looking round the rooms I began to see some point in Yadunath's remarks. The Rest House, built in dak bungalow style in the days when this was the only route for foreigners to Katmandu, had been allowed to fall into decay. In those days, if one went to Nepal at all one went as a person of consequence, sponsored by the Prime Minister. One was booked in at the Rest House in advance and welcomed there by the assembled staff. Nowadays a person of consequence goes by plane and the Rest House has suffered from disuse. For the necessities of the toilet it is preferable to retire to the wide open spaces, and to make sure of a good night's rest one needs one's own bedding.

And here was young Yadunath dragged into the place by me! On several counts he was an outsider. Firstly, this was Rana territory, a house originally built and maintained for the convenience of the ruling Ranas travelling with their retinues. Secondly, I had got in there by virtue of my white face, for they would never have opened up for him if he had been on his own. Thirdly, what an introduction to his country for me—this dirty, run-down barn of a place, instead of a busy, companionable

hotel. And lastly, it certainly was beastly cold. Even the name Chisapani means "cold water"!

He put a brave face on it, however, and surmised that the governor had taken most of the furnishings with him to follow in the king's train at the big-game hunt, which was in progress in Chitawn. We went to bed early after a small meal and I produced a parka and a heavy woollen sweater, which had been through the Korean winter, to help him keep out the cold. Next morning we left as early as we could and set off at high speed for Kulikhani, the other place of the previous evening's argument.

A mile or two beyond Chisapani Garhi, at a little over seven thousand feet, one reaches the first of the two passes which the track crosses on its way to the Nepal Valley. A small stone chaitya marks the top of the pass, with the four pairs of eyes of the Adi Buddha gazing out from it at the four points of the compass. There is also a row of tea-shops, where the traveller may "rest and be thankful".

At this point I had my first real view of the snows. I was ahead and waited there for Yadunath, who was hanging back worrying about the porters. I had time to contemplate the line of jagged, white peaks, which appeared to be almost on top of me in the clear early morning air, in spite of being thirty or forty miles away. Needless to say, Yadunath hardly spared them a glance when he caught up with me, and together we plunged down to the suspension bridge, on the far side of which lies the *bhojanalaya*, or restaurant and hotel, Kulikhani.

We went inside and ordered breakfast, crouching beside the open charcoal fire to warm ourselves. For our money the restauranteur gave us brass tallies, which were to be exchanged for our food on the pay first and eat afterwards principle, and armed with these Yadunath turned to explore the interior. He pointed wistfully to the ruffled beds of the departed travellers, complete with mosquito-nets and quilts, which might have been ours, but I refused to be impressed and wanted to eat and get moving without delay. Down by the bridge, amidst much hawking and spitting, the final group of porters was getting under way from a large stable-like brick shelter where they had spent the night. Adjusting their huge loads and tightening up head-bands, they prepared for the day's march, with anything from a bag of cement to four full four-gallon tins of kerosene

on their backs. Although cars are now no longer manhandled bodily over the mountains, the coolie traffic is still great, for the ropeway is not in full working order and is quite unable to handle the volume of imported goods, even though a fair proportion of the load is taken by air. As for the motor-road, it is still not yet open to general traffic.

The meal came—a mountain of rice with vegetable curry, pickles and chillies—and we set to. Yadunath was paying me back with interest for insisting on meeting the expenses of our board and lodging at the Rest House, so I did my best to show my appreciation, but my mountain was still a sizeable hillock when I had to give in. On the other hand he, himself, though half my size, had no trouble in finishing his portion to the last grain.

Our porters had stopped on the other side of the river for their meal of barley pudding, and were still there out of sight when we were ready to start. Again I grew impatient at the delay, since I had already telephoned to Katmandu from Chisapani in order to anticipate my arrival in the early afternoon. But impatience gets you nowhere in Nepal. As I was to find out later, a hillman will march for four hours or more in the early morning with nothing at all inside him, but once he stops for a meal it takes dynamite to shift him.

Eventually they were ready, but needed a cigarette each before they could go on. Yadunath, who had thoughtfully laid in a supply of Motor and Bus brand, which sell at twenty pies, or about twopence for ten, dispensed the medicine. More coughing and spitting, and then we were off again.

From Kulikhani the track undulates up and down along the bed of the Markhu river, which is a tributary of the holy Bagmati, and continues thus as far as Chitlang. We overtook steady streams of porters going in our direction and later on ran into the first of the day's traffic coming from the Thankot end. At the top of each ascent and in each village we found built-up ledges of stone, called chautaras, at the wayside, of just the right height for the porters to dump their loads for a rest without having to lower them to the ground. In some of the villages there were also powahs, or resting-places, built as pious acts by public-spirited citizens and akin to the dharmshalas of India, where travellers can shelter and lay out their beds. On the veranda-posts and window-frames of the powah at Chitlang,

I saw, for the first time, an example of the wonderful wood-carving for which the Valley of Nepal is famous.

The gentle Markhu valley gave Yadunath a chance to develop the conversation more fully than the day before. He had taken his shoes off again and was continually lagging behind to make sure that the porter he had left them with had not cut them loose from his load, but whenever he was level with me he would ply me with questions, such as, "What is the population of London?" "What are the working hours of government officers in England?" ("Ours are too short.") "How many political parties have you got?" ("I think we have too many.") "Is your queen's sister coming for the coronation of our king?" ("We would like that very much.") "Do you think we can use atom power to develop Nepal?" "Do you think Laurence Olivier is a good actor?" "What are the daily wages of a porter in England?" and so on and so on.

Thus we were proceeding, myself trying to answer his questions as best I might and wishing he would answer more of my questions about the country that lay ahead, and he unable to keep silent, when we saw striding towards us, over the summit of a grassy knoll, a lean, dark man dressed in a white shirt and dhoti, with black jacket, black umbrella and broken black shoes. When he saw me he stopped, turned a keen pair of near-black eyes on me and addressed me in Hindustani.

"Where are you going?" he said.

I replied in Nepali. "I am going to Katmandu," I said.

"And what are you going to do there?" he went on sharply. "Are you going to help in the 'progress' of the country?" He pronounced the word "progress" with considerable irony.

"How can I interfere in the progress of the country," I replied subtly, "seeing that Nepal is an independent kingdom?"

"Have you read the shastras?" he said, ignoring my answer.

"Some of them," I said.

"You know our four castes—the priest, the warrior, the merchant and the toiler. Thus it has been, thus it is and thus it will be, now and for ever more, ordained for ever and unchangeable."

"Yet things do change," I said. "And where, may I ask, are you going? You do not use the language of Nepal. I do not think you are of the country. I would prefer to ask the men of Nepal, themselves, whether they want change."

His eyes flashed angrily. "I go back to my home in the Plains," he said, "but, mark me, foreign ways are not wanted in Nepal. To serve the gods is the greatest good. And that is the greatest good of the people of Nepal. They know their gods and do not want to change. But you, sir, why do you not take the aeroplane, as all the men of 'progress' do?"

"I did not say I was a man of progress," I answered heatedly. "You call me that simply because I have a white face. I do not wish to take the aeroplane. But you have said the word. With the aeroplane even the Hills change."

At this point seconds entered the ring—Yadunath on my side and two companions of the stranger on his—and combined to calm us down. We went on our way, and the stranger strode off in the opposite direction, reaching violently forward with his umbrella at every step. "A man of the past," grumbled Yadunath apologetically. "He does not belong to Nepal." To which I did not reply.

Some while later we were hailed by a young man sitting in a roadside tea-shop, who called to Yadunath as to a friend. He was dressed in the Nepali *suruwal* and *labeda*—cotton breeches and tunic—with a rakish-looking Bhadgauni topi on his head, shaped like an upturned flower-pot squashed down on one side.

"Eh, Yadu brother, come and sit down. Who is this with you?" he called.

Yadunath told him who I was. "He speaks Nepali too," he added by way of warning.

"I didn't see you last night."

"We stayed at Chisapani. It was cold."

"Come on, come on. Come and have some tea."

The three of us sat down together, whilst our new friend, whose name was Deviprasad, went through the familiar performance of trying to find out everything about me—my reason for coming to Nepal, my probable position in the social scale and my power to win friends and influence people. "I know very well the First Secretary at your Embassy," he remarked, speaking as a man of the world. "It is a pleasure to do business with him."

It appeared that Deviprasad had set out before dawn from a point below Bhimphedi, and in response to a telegram was hurrying back to Katmandu in order to arrange some urgent



business affairs. "I have to settle about cement," he declared eagerly. "It is for a new contract. And there is special timber to be brought from Hitaura. And metal piping too—hundreds of yards of it. And tin roofing must be collected from the railway. I do these things very well. Transport is cheap because I employ many men. They have work all the time, so they are willing to work for less money. No one can supply cement as cheaply as I can."

I glanced at Yadunath's face to see whether there was any conflict between his socialist ideals and this example of young capitalist enterprise. None appeared, and our friendly chat continued over cigarettes. Yadunath produced a packet of Indian Players for ourselves and handed out Bus brand smokes again to the porters.

When we set out again there were four of us, for Deviprasad had a less talkative companion with him. Soon we were tackling the steep ascent to the Chandragiri Pass (nearly seven thousand five hundred feet), which is the final bastion of the once-forbidden land of Nepal. The main trail zigzags up a very steep mountainside for about two miles, and is a stiff enough ascent in itself, but there are also short cuts as steep as ladders, connecting up the loops of the zigzags and used mainly in the descent. My young travelling companions, however, saw nothing amiss in going up the ladders, assuming the shortest distance between two points to be a straight line no matter how sharp the gradient. I tried to follow, but the morning's mountain of rice was still making itself felt, with the result that they had the pleasure of watching me from the plinth of the chaitya at the top for a considerable time as I plodded upwards. "The main road is only for porters!" exclaimed Deviprasad. "But of course you are not yet used to the mountains!"

The Chandragiri range, which can be anglicized from the Sanskrit as the more romantic Mountains of the Moon, constitutes the southern rim of the sixteen mile wide Valley of Nepal and is broken only at one point, where the Bagmati river cuts its way out to the south, and eventually to the plains, through a deep gorge, carrying with it the whole drainage of the Valley's river system.

I write Valley with a capital 'v' advisedly, because thus it is described to distinguish it from the whole Kingdom of Nepal, which stretches five hundred miles from the Mechi Khola in

the east to the Mahakali in the west. Indeed, until the Gurkha conquest in 1768 and their subsequent expansion, this Valley alone was Nepal. The surrounding hills contained the Kingdom of Gurkha and other principalities, which were entirely separate from Nepal and frequently at war with one another, like the clans of the Scottish Highlands. And the double meaning of the word still persists. Hillmen talk of going to Nepal when they are already inside the Kingdom of Nepal. They mean the Nepal Valley, which contains the three cities of Katmandu, Patan and Bhadgaun. On entering the Valley at Thankot at the foot of the Chandragiri Pass you come to another customs control post and passport inspection office. The frontier at Raxaul and the barrier at Chisapani Garhi have been mere delusions and deceptions. Only now are you entering the "real" Nepal.

From the northern slope of the Chandragiri Pass, a little below the summit chaitya, I got my first view of this Valley which I was to come to know so well. The day was too far advanced and the haze and distance were too great for me to pick out details, but I could clearly see the roofs of the twin cities of Katmandu and Patan, one on either side of the Bagmati river, and the famous tower of Bhimsen Thapa at the edge of the wide parade-ground, and further away, the flat oblong of Gauchar airport. I could see, too, the other main rivers of the Valley—the Vishnumati, the Manohara and the Hanumante—coiling round the buttresses of the curious mesa-like patches of tableland, which they have carved out of the soft soil like the living creatures that the people believe them to be. I could see, also, the bhawans, or mansions, of the erstwhile nobility, scattered around the dense clusters of the cities, and terrace upon terrace of cultivation on the slopes of the mesas inside the Valley and on the lower levels of the hills surrounding it and abutting into it. And I could see the wooded hills of Nagarjun and of Sheopuri to the north, and beyond them the long range of the snowy Himalayan giants. It was enough for a start.

After a brief rest we sped down the hillside into the Valley, and this time I was able to turn the tables on my travelling friends by outstripping them with ease. The superior strength afforded my ankles by the support of my boots, and making the best of my longer legs, gave me the advantage. But, after all, it

was not a race, and I had to wait at the bottom for my porters in any case. We parted jovially at the road terminus at Thankot and went our separate ways the remaining eight miles to the city.

## 2

### *Himalayan Japan*

THE FOLLOWING morning I set out in the crisp, cold February air to see the town of Katmandu, and as I walked down alongside the long brick wall enclosing the Narayanhiti Darbar, which is now the Royal Palace, as I caught glimpses of the top tiers of the wooden pagodas above the roofs of the houses, as I watched the small Mongolian-looking soldiers wheeling in response to the rattle of staccato commands and the background of snow-tipped mountains, there was only one other place that came strongly to my mind—Kyoto, the former capital city of Japan.

At first I thought it was a very tenuous comparison, for there are so many points of dissimilarity, but the more I considered it the more I liked it. Here is a country which, like Japan, was a hermit kingdom for more than a hundred years. And, like Japan, it had its Mikado, its King of Kings, exalted into a national, mystical figurehead, and residing in mysterious seclusion behind his palace-walls, whilst temporal rule was in the hands of the Maharaja, alias the Shogun, and the country was organized on militaristic lines. The wooden pagodas, too, resemble in architecture nothing so much as the shrines of the Japanese, and here also are two religions—the Buddhist religion of withdrawal, of harmonizing with nature, overlaid by the dynamic creed of Siva which accompanies national ceremonial. Nepal has now had her revolution, nearly a hundred years after the Meiji revolution in Japan, which restored the Mikado as an active, participating head of State, and her present king is valiantly attempting to reconcile the demands of free-for-all democracy with practical politics. And Nepal, again like Japan, has now a considerable American population and welcomes foreigners with a warmth of appreciative politeness that is not entirely feigned, but at the same time retains an essential reserve, a fear of losing status and independence

through the activities of too many busybodies at the nation's heart.

But here the resemblance ends. The connection with India is and has been too close and fundamental, and the difference of race and culture is too great, for the comparison to stand for long. I made my way into the heart of the city along narrow streets overhung by solid three-storey brick houses such as would never have been seen in old Japan.

Katmandu, or Kantipur, is four thousand two hundred feet above sea-level and consequently never experiences the fierce heat of the Plains of India. The name means "temple of wood" and legend has it that in the reign of Lakshmi Narsinh Malla the Tree of Paradise was watching the White Machhendra festival procession disguised as a man, but was recognized by a certain person named Biseta. This Biseta captured the Tree of Paradise and only released him on condition that he would build a dharmsala out of the wood of a single tree. When the dharmsala was built it was called Kashtamandap in Sanskrit, or Katmandu in the vernacular. It stands on the right as one leaves the Darbar Square through Katmandu Tole on the road to the bridge over the Vishnumati river.

Sifting history from legend—if that is possible—it seems that the city was founded in the eighth century at the confluence of the Bagmati and Vishnumati rivers and was originally built in the shape of the sword which the goddess Devi brandishes in one of her many hands. The old town is divided into "toles", which are groups of houses intersected by narrow streets and alleys. Each group was responsible, in the old days, for the defence of one of the gates of the city. It is an arrangement which fell into disuse after the Gurkhas took over the government, but the toles remain and refer to the principal streets as well as to the parishes which they intersect.

In 1934 a disastrous earthquake opened out a wide area on the north-eastern side of the city, so that now the old royal palace and Darbar Square, the focal point of old Kantipur and a kind of town within a town, appears to be on the edge of the medieval part of the city instead of at its heart in the middle of the spider's web.

As I walked through the narrow, old streets I was continually bending my head back and all but bumping into people in my attempts to look up at the wood-carvings on the overhanging

balconies and window-frames, many of which are of marvellous intricacy. I was heading for the famous Darbar Square, nor was I inclined to delay on the way, but at some points it was impossible not to slow one's pace. One was at an intersection of seven streets, where vegetable-sellers crowd one side and money-changers the other, presided over by an exquisite little temple, roofed and walled with copper-gilt plating, which is dedicated to Annapurna, the Goddess of Plentiful Harvests—the Ceres of Nepal—one of whose abodes is the 26,504 ft. mountain, conquered at the cost of much suffering by Maurice Herzog and his French expedition of 1950. Another was at Indra Chauk, the other money-changers' domain, where the rupees change hands under the aegis of Akash Bhairab, the Demon of the Sky, and under the bronze griffins which guard his home.

These business-centres were crowded with activity, and so were the bazaar streets of Asan and Makhan Tole, where the fair Mongolian features of the hill people mingled with the darker, longer faces of the Valley. To get ahead was sometimes hazardous, for the Newars, who are the original and most numerous inhabitants of the Valley and speak a language of their own, which is of the Tibeto-Burman group and quite unlike Nepali, have a custom of carrying their goods, and sometimes even their babies, in two baskets, suspended at either end of a yoke supported on the shoulders. These baskets, which I have seen used amongst the Chinese but nowhere in India, can take up a lot of room in a narrow street.

But that is not all. In the middle of a manœuvre intended to avoid a small Newar baby swaying about in a basket one is also quite likely to come up against another snag in the form of a convoy of heavily-laden Tamangs down from the surrounding hills, whose invariable custom it is to carry their goods on their backs in large baskets of split bamboo, supported by a head-band. These hazards avoided, there are still cows and weaving bicycles and tightly-packed bunches of convivial women to contend with.

And so, emerging from these thoroughfares into the area in front of the Darbar was something like coming out of the Strand into Trafalgar Square. There was room to relax again, take one's eyes off the traffic and look around at the lions. But here there were no placid, tamed lions guarding a single simple

column. Here were strange creatures and creations so fantastical and untamed that they brought the eye up short with a sudden shock. I found myself repeating over and over again those lines of Kipling which recall this same city :

Still the world is wondrous large—Seven Seas from  
 marge to marge,  
 And it holds a vast of various kinds of Man ;  
 And the wildest dreams of Kew are the facts of  
 Katmandu,  
 And the crimes of Clapham chaste at Martaban.

The most conspicuous of these “wild dreams” is a twelve foot high stone plaque with the Black Demon, Kalo Bhairab, sculptured in high relief upon it. There he stands, the male counterpart of the destructive Kali, with no breasts to offer the milk of human mercy, a chaplet of skulls about his head and a garland of human heads around his neck, facing squarely so far across the roadway that no one can avoid him. In three of his six hands he holds a sword, a clutch of three heads and the trident of Siva, the Destroyer, whose manifestation he is. His black feet trample a prostrate, naked man, one foot on his face and the other on his legs.

As I stood spellbound by this fiercely staring, ancient figure, which is flanked by the sun and the standard of Nepal, I saw humble women approach with their brass trays that carry the requisites of temple worship, place flower petals on the foot that tramples the human face, and kiss it. The act raised a curious train of thought within my mind. There are some who say that Kalo Bhairab, the black demi-god, represents Justice, the prostrate man being the forces of evil, and the skulls being those of evil men who have met their just deserts, whilst the upraised sword is the sword of just retribution. Yet how convincing can that explanation be? It is true that the image is so much a part of the town and so familiar that it no longer appears terrible. It is true that the victim could be construed as the personification of evil and the whole apparition as a warning to wrong-doers. Yet the fact remains that the figure carries the form and attributes of Kali, who is the same as Durga, the awe-inspiring black goddess of Bengal, and to whom the bullocks and goats, and occasionally human-beings, are sacrificed in the ten day autumn rites of Dasahra. She is the Destroyer,



who must be placated, the harbinger of famine and pestilence who must be honoured, the death-dealing reminder of men's mortality who smiles at the smell of blood. How else to explain the actions of these gentle, innocent women who kiss the great, trampling foot?

Whilst these thoughts were passing through my mind I was conscious of a persistent whispering, tinkling noise, like a flock of twittering, metallic sparrows, and at first, looking here and there at the small pagodas which are dotted about the square, I could not trace its origin. Then I raised my eyes higher, to the left and back from where I stood. My eyes fell upon a large three-tiered pagoda standing on top of a lofty terrace back from the square, and I saw that the sound came from countless little bells hanging under its broad eaves. The clappers of the bells were attached to metal leaves which fluttered in the breeze like the leaves of an aspen tree.

It was the royal temple of Taleju, which is actually within the palace walls and cannot be entered through the locked gates on one side of the Darbar Square. Standing on its high plinth it dominates the surrounding buildings and shines with beaten bronze plating. Its chief idol is said to have been destroyed in 1795 by the young king Rana Bahadur in a fit of mad fury, following an argument with the Brahmans over his marriage to a Brahman's daughter. Taleju is a war-goddess and some say that the temple contains a pointed diamond, transmuted from the frontal bone of a celebrated Himalayan yogi. This diamond tipped the arrow that slew the devil king Ravana of Ramayana fame, when Ram and his legions attacked him in his fortress in Ceylon.

The palace wall extends from in front of the Taleju temple up to the corner, in which stands the "Monkey-god Gate", or Hanuman Dhoka, from which the palace derives its name of Hanuman Dhoka Darbar. It then continues at right angles, thus forming two sides of the Darbar Square. To the left of the Hanuman Dhoka stands the monkey-god, Hanuman, who was Ram's lieutenant in his war against the demon king of Ceylon. He stands on a pedestal four feet high, shaded by a regal parasol. The gate itself is guarded by two great dogs, very like the Burmese chindits, and the lion-god, Narsinh, and has painted on its lintel and posts the same sort of deities, eyes, birds and other symbols as the townspeople paint over the doorways

of newly-weds to ensure a happy and fertile marriage. Above these "symbols at your door" there is a group of courtly figures done in the round in two panels on either side of a centrepiece which contains the red image of the tantric deity, Bishwarup Bhairab, whose myriad heads rise up in a tower above his shoulders.

Further along the wall from the monkey-god there is an odd inscription in stone. It was composed and written by Raja Pratap Malla, who gained something of a reputation as a poet in the middle of the seventeenth century. But this is not poetry. It is a series of words strung together in fifteen different characters and many more languages, which unfortunately make no particular sense. No doubt the king wished to impress upon his subjects the extent of his polyglot studies, for even the word "winter", written in English, and the French words "automne" and "l'hivert" (sic) are included.

The wall which contains this curious inscription is two stories high, and the one at right angles to it extends to three stories. The windows built into these walls, and the balconies which extend their whole length, are of wood stained black, which stands out in vivid contrast against the whitewashed background, and the two contrasting colours act as a kind of back-cloth to the four pagodas and the tall pillar, crowned with a statue of the Malla king and his attendants, that stand actually within the square. Towering above the higher of the two walls is the Deotali Mandir, another royal temple, and at its furthest extremity there is a large wooden grill, behind which lurks a huge face called the Seto Bhairab, or White Demon.

Like the Kalo Bhairab, the Seto Bhairab faces squarely on to the main thoroughfare. It is a horrific painted face, about ten times life size, with long, snarling fangs, and is normally hidden behind the grille, which is only opened at festival time. During the Indra Jatra, in particular, this bhairab comes into his own, for on this day in September, Indra, the ancient Vedic god, who descended into India from Persia with the Aryan forefathers many centuries before Christ, visits Katmandu. He is the Jupiter Pluvius of Indian mythology, the rain god ever seeking to dispense his treasures to thirsty humanity, and the terrifying aspect of the bhairab matters little to the people as, on behalf of Indra, he dispenses gallons of rice-beer through a pipe inserted between his fangs.

Across the street from the White Demon, in a special house of their own beside the modern police station, there are two enormous drums, which together with the great bell that hangs close by, were formerly used to call the citizens to gather in the square.

This, then, was the Darbar Square in the city of Katmandu—that city of which Colonel Kirkpatrick, writing after his peace-making expedition to the Gurkha capital in 1792, said, “There are as many temples as there are houses and as many idols as there are men.” Katmandu Tole, the next square adjoining it, seemed to confirm his impression, for here again, in addition to the “temple of wood” from which the tole takes its name, there is a large group of pagodas, each one standing on its own lofty terrace high above the hubbub of the vegetable market and the jeeps and bicycles and telephone-wires below. They are dedicated to Siva and Narayan, and are of the same Newar design as those of the Darbar Square, with deeply overhanging roofs, the supporting joists of which bear elaborate carvings of the Great Mothers—the design which, in simplified form, we immediately associate with Japan.

It is often claimed in Nepal that this pagoda style actually originated in the Valley, and spread from there through Tibet to China, and thence to Japan and other parts of the Far East. To support this view there is evidence that Newar craftsmen were working in Lhasa, the capital of Tibet, as far back as the seventh century, and that at about the same time one of the most famous pagodas in Peking was built to the design of a Nepalese architect. The style is really an elaboration of the tower of the Buddhist chaitya. In its earliest form the tower is a small protuberance on the big body of the chaitya. As time goes on the round hemisphere of the chaitya becomes smaller and smaller and the tower larger and larger, with its umbrella effect more and more pronounced, until the hemisphere disappears altogether. Although the roofs of all the pagodas in Nepal are square, except for one with five round tiers inside the Hanuman Dhoka courtyard, they really represent the ceremonial umbrellas which shade deities and royalty from the elements.

But if it is true that the pagoda style originated in Nepal and spread through Tibet to China, Japan and Burma, the mystery of its non-existence in India, which was the mother-land of Buddhism and is much closer to Nepal, is all the more striking.

The answer seems to be that it is a creation of carpenters and not of stone-masons. Nepal was building her finest pagodas at a time when India was being consumed by the fire of Muslim iconoclasm. Such pagodas in India, if any there ever were there, have long since been destroyed by fire or worm. Meanwhile the style seemed particularly suited to the fancy of the Mongolian races who inherited the Buddhist religion, and to the peoples of the hills and forests, where good wood was plentiful.

In Katmandu Tole there are also three religious buildings shaped more like normal houses, which are of greater than passing interest. One, a little back from the square, is the temple of Gorakhnath, the patron saint of the Gurkhas. Gorakhnath was originally an ascetic yogi, devotee of Siva, whose cave was at Gorkha, four days' journey west of Katmandu. The Gurkhas brought his cult with them, and also their war cry of "Jay Gorakh!" which has struck terror into their enemies in India, Mesopotamia, Egypt, Burma and all those other countries where Gurkha soldiers have campaigned, as far west as the crags of Monte Cassino in Italy and as far east as the islands of Indonesia.

The second of the three is a building dedicated to Siva and his mountain maiden, Parbati. Siva is here in one of his more amiable moods and the two of them can be seen sitting at an attic window side by side, like a comfortably married couple. The third and most interesting is on the far side of the square, facing this oriental Darby and Joan. Like the Hanuman Dhoka Darbar it is a white and black building, but the carving on its windows and window-frames is much more ornate and elaborate. It is called the Kumari Ghar and contains not a lingam or image of wood or stone but a living goddess.

The Kumari, or virgin, of Katmandu is a little girl chosen for her fair features and flawless appearance and demeanour. She lives in this house in the company of other children, and presides, like a diminutive mayoress, over the principal municipal functions. She has her own chariot, which can be seen stored in pieces in the porchway of her house—heavy cart-wheels four or five feet across, with axles and body to match—and, for less important occasions, her own palanquin. Later I was to see her twice—the first time presiding over the elephant, horse and bicycle races of the Ghora Jatra, installed in an upper-room of the armed-police barracks which overlooked the scene, and the

second time watching the Buddha Jayanti procession as it passed her own window later in the year. On the first occasion she was dressed up in her scarlet robes, a human being imbued with the spirit of the city's guardian deity and taking that spirit with her to the games. On the second she was just a very pretty little girl, leaning on a window-sill with her hair done up in a big top-knot Burmese style. At the age of eleven or twelve, on reaching puberty, she would have to hand over her responsibilities to a successor, and her parents would look about for a husband for her. In spite of her beauty and renown it might not be easy to make a suitable match, for not everyone is inclined to be married to a goddess.

Contrasting with these ancient buildings, the eastern side of Katmandu Tole is occupied by the main entrance to the Gaddi Baithak, or throne-room, which is a modern building erected in the time of King Tribhubana to celebrate his accession to the throne, and contains many paintings of royalty, including one of Queen Victoria. It is a modern excrescence in this particular spot, for abutting on to its other end is the old town again in the form of part of the old Basantapur Palace—a building of red brick and black wood, which was built by Prithwi Narayan Shah after the Gurkha conquest in 1768.

Having reached this point I found that I was again out in the open, for although the Basantapur Palace looms high over the street, on the other side of the road there is a wide open space created by the earthquake of 1934. It is possible, therefore, to stand back a bit and see the whole height of this building which, except for Bhimsen's tower, is the highest in Katmandu. The rickety wooden floors lie one above the other, rising up to the topmost pent-house, which is called Kailas after the Hindu Mount Olympus. There is an improbable story that the king used to sit up in this pent-house at the time of the evening meal, watching the roofs of the houses below. If he espied a house with no smoke coming out of it, he would send down to inquire why his poor subject was not cooking his food, and to send rice if the poor man had none. As I watched, artisans, standing on flimsy bamboo scaffolding, were busy repairing woodwork in anticipation of the coronation procession, leaping fearlessly about on the roof-tiles with far more confidence than I had in their stability.

There I left the old town for the new, with my mind already

so full of what I had seen so far that I could hardly absorb more. So, going down Juddha Sarak, which is the main street of the more modern section, I determined to confine myself from then on to a general impression of things and not to load my brain with more close detail.

Juddha Sarak is a link between the old and new, between the narrow, crowded city streets and the broad open spaces of the parade-ground and the large palaces and mansions beyond. Indeed, the street itself, named after Juddha Shamsheer, the last Rana maharaja but one, is a symbol of the link between the two, for one side of it is macadamized and the other side is earth and stone, so that horse traffic may still have a chance. That is the theory, but in practice I never saw an equestrian brave the wandering, uninhibited traffic of Juddha Street, now swollen out of all proportion by the increase in lorry services and car and jeep-driving foreigners. Naturally all drivers, including cyclists, try to keep to the smoother macadamized part, with the consequence that it is no unusual thing to be faced with oncoming traffic approaching well on the wrong side of the road. Fortunately nothing goes very fast and one usually has time to decide on which side to pass the offending vehicle, and at the same time to avoid any pedestrians who may be in the way.

Pedestrians, incidentally, still consider that they have rights to the road in Nepal, and with the stolid refusal to be rattled that is one of the most likeable characteristics of these mountain people, they have not yet been hounded into the ditch to be covered with a blanket of dust by any passing fool on four wheels. The peasant of Nepal walks solidly down the middle of the road. If he hears the sound of a horn behind him, he takes it to mean that the driver has taken notice of his presence and leaves it to him to decide on which side he will try to creep past.

In or near Juddha Sarak, then, are the amenities which the general public expects to find in a modern city—a post-office, a bank, a cinema, an airways booking-office (one can now fly from Katmandu to four different places in Nepal), a United States Information Service library and a British Council reading-room. The far end of the street is framed by an archway adorned with Ganeshes, huge faces, blissful deities and coupled human-beings, and beyond it lies the huge open expanse of the parade-ground, called the Tundikhel.

This vast open space, or *maidan*, is the Hyde Park of Katmandu and stretches the whole length of one side of the city. It is treeless, however, except for the large oriental nettle tree around which the memorial to the Gurkha recipients of the Victoria Cross in the First World War is built, and the behaviour of the people there is considerably more correct than in its London counterpart. From the outer edge, between the rows of plane trees which line the road, equestrian statues of the kings of Nepal and the maharajas of the Rana family gaze across at the leafy avenue on the far side, severely deprecating any kind of plebeian levity, whilst the road to the Singha Darbar, the seat of government of the country, cuts right across it.

Some idea of the size of the Tundikhel may be gained from the fact that, as part of the Ghora Jatra festivities in 1956, elephant races were held there with half a dozen starters at a time. The spacious sports stadium, completed in the same coronation year, fits easily into a corner at its lower end, and the Headquarters of the Nepalese Army fills only a fraction of the space on the other side.

From the middle of this open expanse I looked northwards at the long, uneven white line of the peaks of the Central Himalayas, uninterrupted from the region of Mount Everest and Kanchenjunga in the east to Dhaulagiri in the west. It was a cut-down version of what one may see on the flight over the hump from Patna. From the maidan the mountains look distant and almost hidden by the intervening hills, and mountaineers have had long arguments as to whether Everest is or is not visible. The maps are not accurate enough to solve the problem beyond doubt, and the local population is not interested. To them the Himalayas are simply "Himalaya", the Abode of Snow, and notwithstanding all the publicity about Tensing Sherpa and the ascent of Everest and the suspicion that, since most of the powerful nations of the world make a point of climbing mountains, there must be something in it, their minds are still not stirred. Everest has, however, now been named in Nepali. It is called Sagarmatha, "sky-mother", and the rising generation will learn as much in their new geography books—if they go to school.

Under that remote skyline a tower stands out on the northern fringe of the Tundikhel. It is the clock-tower of Trichandra



College, which formerly offered university courses enabling students to take the examinations of the University of Patna, and has now become the nucleus of Nepal's own university. There is a good deal of talk and planning concerning the expansion of the University of Nepal. Money and land have been offered by the two widows of the late king, and money and assistance have been offered by the United States Operations Mission in Nepal, and if the differences of opinion on aims, objects and methods can be ironed out, building may soon begin, but the main problem will be to breathe life into the bricks and mortar, to find professors who are both competent and Nepalese, and to make it really a national university rather than a continuation high school.

I now began to retrace my steps after my first look round the town. I had preferred to go my own way without the hustling, misleading and inaccurate comments of a casual guide (Tell 'em anything so long as it sounds good), and to rely on the "classics" on the country—*Le Nepal* by Sylvain Lévi, *Nepal* by Percival Landon, *Sketches from Nepal* by H. A. Oldfield—for background information. Now I had my reward in an unhurried stroll back the way I had come, with no one but myself to set the pace.

At the clock-tower end of the Tundikhel I skirted the sheet of water called the Rani Pokhri, or "Queen's Lake", which was created in the seventeenth century by Raja Pratap Malla in memory of his son, who died in peculiar circumstances. This Raja—the same polyglot poet king as was responsible for the writing on the wall of the Monkey-gate Palace—at one time temporarily abdicated the throne in order to allow his four sons to reign for a year each. Three of them reigned for the full period without untoward incident, but the fourth, Chakravartindra, died after only one day as Raja. The king found the reason for his son's death in the unlucky association of the emblems on the coins struck to commemorate the boy's year of rule.

The original lake was enclosed in the nineteenth century, at the time of Jang Bahadur, within its present stone borders in the shape of a large square, and a stone causeway leading to a small pavilion at the centre was substituted for the former wooden one which carried the main road from Sankhu. On the southern bank there is a stone elephant with three figures on it of doubtful

identity. It is said that, until recent times, trial by ordeal was held there, the first man to come up for breath from under the water being deemed to carry the name of the guilty party.

Past the Rani Pokhri and the policeman on point-duty I was back again on the road which runs alongside the wall of the Royal Palace, where earlier that morning I had been reminded of the old capital of Japan. And now I noticed a strange thing about it. At regular intervals along the footpath there were women standing with their backs to the wall. They had not been there before and were dressed in ordinary saris of various colours, with bare heads. Yet judging from their regularly spaced positions and the short staves they held in their right hands, it was obvious that they were there in some official capacity. Were they some kind of Amazonian royal guard? I wondered. Were they watching to see whether passers-by touched their caps at the royal gate? But they looked neither strict nor awe-inspiring, and the problem was solved a little later when I saw one of them walk out from the wall and call across to a little yellow-faced man who was plodding down the road bent under a large bundle of wood. At first he appeared not to notice, but a woman's voice can be penetrating and persistent. After suffering a torrent of words, delivered in a high-pitched, piercing key, he veered his course to the footpath, mounted it and carried on. Thus progress comes to Nepal in the form of policewomen—but only during the "rush" hours. At other times of the day one may still jay-walk undisturbed.

### 3

#### *The Eyes of God*

IT WAS THE fifth day of Magh, and that festival in honour of the Goddess of Wisdom, the Spring Festival of Sri Panchami, to which I had contributed in the train between Muzaffarpur and Sagauli, was upon us. The young people were up and about early, heading in gay groups for the one and only temple to Saraswati, there to pay their respects and insure for success in examinations. I also went there, expecting to meet Yadunath and his friends amongst the crowd.

The Saraswati Mandir stands on a hill a mile or so from the city. But the hill is more renowned for the huge Buddhist stupa of Swayambhunath, which stands on its summit, than for the diminutive sanctuary of the Goddess of Wisdom. It rises up like an island out of the valley floor, with the gilded tower of the stupa clearly visible above the trees.

Indeed, ages ago it may well have been an island, for geological research now confirms what legend always said—that the Nepal Valley at one time was a lake, and the grey fertilizer called *kalimati*, which the peasants dig out of deep pits in the ground, was once its bed. Long, long ago the Bodhisatva, Manjusri, came from China and circled the lake, which was then the abode of the serpent king, Karkotak, and his snaky tribe. It was called the Snake Lake, or Nag Hrad. Liking the look of the land, he placed his two spouses one on Phulchauk and the other on Champadevi, two mountain peaks on the southern rim of the vale. He himself stood between them and with his mighty sword sliced through the connecting ridge, allowing the water to drain away at the place called Kotwal, through the gorge in which the Bagmati river now runs.

I stopped my jeep and looked at the hill of Swayambhu across the intervening patchwork of market-garden land and over the wisps of mist that were still lying on the river flats, then swung away across the Vishnumati river towards the wooded ridge of Nagarjun on the first of two sides of a triangle, for though there

are several footpaths which go more or less straight from Katmandu to Swayambhu, the motorable track makes a detour and comes in from either side.

The first part of the road was crowded with travellers, since this was the starting point of the main trail to Nawakot, Trisuli Bazaar and the Western Hills. It soon narrows to a track that is strictly for pedestrians only, and normal wheeled traffic cannot go beyond the village of Balajiu at the foot of Nagarjun, hardly a mile and a half from town, though a jeep or landrover might get as far as Dharmtali, three miles further on, by fording the Mahadeo river, but only in the dry season.

At Balajiu I turned off sharply to the left and hairpinned back to reach the foot of the island hill. I appeared to be a late-comer, for the number of people coming down was already greater than that of those going up, but I was by no means the last, and I still had time, I felt, to take in impressions at a reasonable speed.

Three large Buddhas welcome one at the base of the hill, like a prologue to the scenes that lie above. The path leads between them and straight up the slope in ever-steepening flights of steps, following the principle I had already encountered in Nepal, that the shortest way to the top of a hill is straight up its steepest part. On the way up through the trees there are various small chaityas and a curious oblong stone, painted with eyes and a nose. There are also several resting-places, but these become fewer as the steps to the four hundred foot summit become steeper and the great stupa looms closer and closer above. At the steepest part, near the top, there is a hand-rail on which one may drag oneself upwards, whilst the monkeys swing about from tree to tree regarding one highly critically.

Swayambhunath, which is contracted to Simbunath in colloquial language, means "The Self-born Lord" and the stupa's great sanctity for Buddhists of the Mahayana, or Great Vehicle, is due to the fact that, when the whole valley was a lake, it was on this spot that the lotus bloomed, which contained Swayambhu, the Self-born, in its petals.

The stupa itself, more correctly called a chaitya since it contains no specific Buddhist relic, is a large white hemisphere of masonry about fifty feet high. This is the *garbh*, or "womb", representing the creation of the world of nature. It is surmounted by a square tower, faced with gilded plating, called

the *toran*, which in turn is crowned by the *churamani*, a conical canopy of gilt rings like the *hti* of Burmese pagodas. From each of the four sides of the toran a pair of eyes stares out at the world around and down at the mortals circumambulating below. Between the eyes of each pair a nose is painted, shaped like the figure one of the devanagri script.

These grave, all-seeing eyes are the eyes of God. They represent the Adi Buddha, the primeval mind out of whose consciousness the world was formed. To the European the nose looks like a question-mark, the symbol of the enigma and mystery of creation, but it was not intended thus. Buddha, more correctly written "Bodh", means "Mind" or "Intellect" and is the force that creates order out of chaos. The Triratna, or "three jewels", which are the primeval Trinity, include the Adi Dharma, Primeval Matter, and the Sangha, or Visible World, as well as the Adi Buddha, but it is the Adi Buddha that stands in the centre as Creative Mind. Without Mind the Adi Dharma is simply Chaos, the domain of the flaming, wild demonic Ugra Tara.

Finally reaching the topmost, steepest step I came face to face with a great bronze dumb-bell, supported on a circular metal stand. It was the thunderbolt, or *vajra*, of Indra—a symbol of power which was wrested from the God of the Firmament by the Primeval Buddha. This vajra was presented to the temple by the poet king Raja Pratap Malla, the author of the writing on the wall and builder of the Queen's Lake, and its supporting *dhatu mandal* (metal circle) is inscribed with the symbols of the Buddhist twelve year cycle—rat, bull, tiger, hare, dragon, serpent, horse, sheep, monkey, goose, dog and pig—the same symbols as appear in China and Japan.

The Adi Buddha himself is not portrayed, but round the base of the *garbh* are images of his creations, the five Divine Buddhas, governors of past, present and the future, of whom one alone, the Amitabha Buddha, is active in this present day and age. Broken only by the shrines of these five Buddhas there is a continuous circle of prayer-wheels, just within reach of an upstretched hand, on each of which are inscribed the all-powerful words "*Om mane padme hum*" (Hail the jewel in the lotus), repeated again thousands upon thousands of times on the prayer-papers rolled up inside the wheels.

As I passed round the circle of the great stupa, decked out

with flags for this year of years, the 2,500th anniversary of the birth of Gotama Buddha, I followed and mingled with the crowd, moving clockwise, as is the custom, and flicking a prayer-wheel round here and there. And then I began to wonder whether I had not come to the wrong place, for Saraswati is a Hindu deity, and of her there was no sign, though the surroundings of the stupa contained innumerable subsidiary chaityas, minor shrines, sacred pillars crowned with divinities, lingams, sacred flames fed with clarified butter, and so on.

However, I followed the main stream of people and found that it led me out through the other side of the stupa compound, down to a small col, on the far side of which I could see a subsidiary summit, slightly lower than the main one. There the crowd was thickest and the noise of voices loudest round a small compound containing a two-storey building, which was half-swamped by the sea of people. And there was Yadunath, standing outside the compound with a group of his friends.

As soon as he saw me he came to meet me and introduce me to his friends, whereupon they fired off the usual barrage of questions about my impressions of Nepal and my business in the country. They were college students, and all had red spots on their foreheads indicating that they had already been into Saraswati's precincts. One of them handed me a printed sheet of paper on which was written, in high-flown poetical, Sanskritical Nepali, an ode to the goddess. Another offered to take me into the temple, and a third volunteered to look after my shoes. Since I had not yet bought the local footwear, with uppers made of black corduroy and soles of old motor-tyres, I had to take off my leather pair. Then, together with half a dozen of Yadunath's college-mates as escorts, I joined the crowd going in.

This temple to Saraswati, on the hill behind the great Buddhist stupa, is a typical example of how the Hindu and Buddhist religions have mingled together in Nepal. For this particular Saraswati is also called Manjuswari, the female counterpart of that Manjusri who sliced a cleft in the mountains to drain the Nepal Valley. It also contains the *churan*, or footprints, of Manjusri and images of the Divine Buddhas. In this respect it is something like the temple of Mahenkal on the edge of the Tundikhel in Katmandu, a favourite place for

hurried obeisances to the supernatural powers from civil servants on their way to work. The temple is dedicated to Siva, represented by his consort, Maha Kali, but the Buddhists say that the image is of Lokeshwari Padma Pani, the Buddhist Goddess of Pity, because of the little stone figure rising out of its forehead, which is reputed to be Amitabha Buddha.

On this day, however, such was the press of people—men and women, youths and girls—that we were unable to see any of the details of the shrine, and the image itself was hardly visible over their heads. The worshippers threw red sindur powder and flower petals over the goddess and lit tapers in front of her, and the officiating priest, standing on the wall behind the statue, in turn sprinkled sindur and petals over their shiny black hair. In this he was assisted vigorously by two or three Boy Scout volunteers, but even so they could not hope to cope with so many, and the worshippers themselves were anointing each other with the tika, or red spot, on the forehead, after they had got outside. A large one was duly made on my forehead by Yadunath from rice grains mixed in sindur paste.

All was done in an atmosphere of light-hearted gaiety, as befitted this bright spring morning, and I was admitted into the ceremony with an ease that would have been unusual in India, where Hinduism has been on the defensive for so many generations against both Islam and militant Christianity. We wandered away from the shrine in a loose, straggling group by a path that took us across another part of the hill.

Passing several small chaityas, this path came to the same col as the one I had gone over before, but on the way we came upon an unusual scene. Sitting cross-legged on mats near the path and just below one of the chaityas were half a dozen little girls, aged about six, dressed in bright scarlet silk brocade, with an older girl similarly dressed one from the end of the row. One of the little girls was wearing a golden chaplet round her head and golden chains hanging from neck to waist, whilst behind her a mat was spread out with offerings on it and a leopard-skin behind it.

I asked my companion of the moment what it meant. He was a youngster who had been with one of the mountaineering parties the previous year and was hoping for the chance to go again.

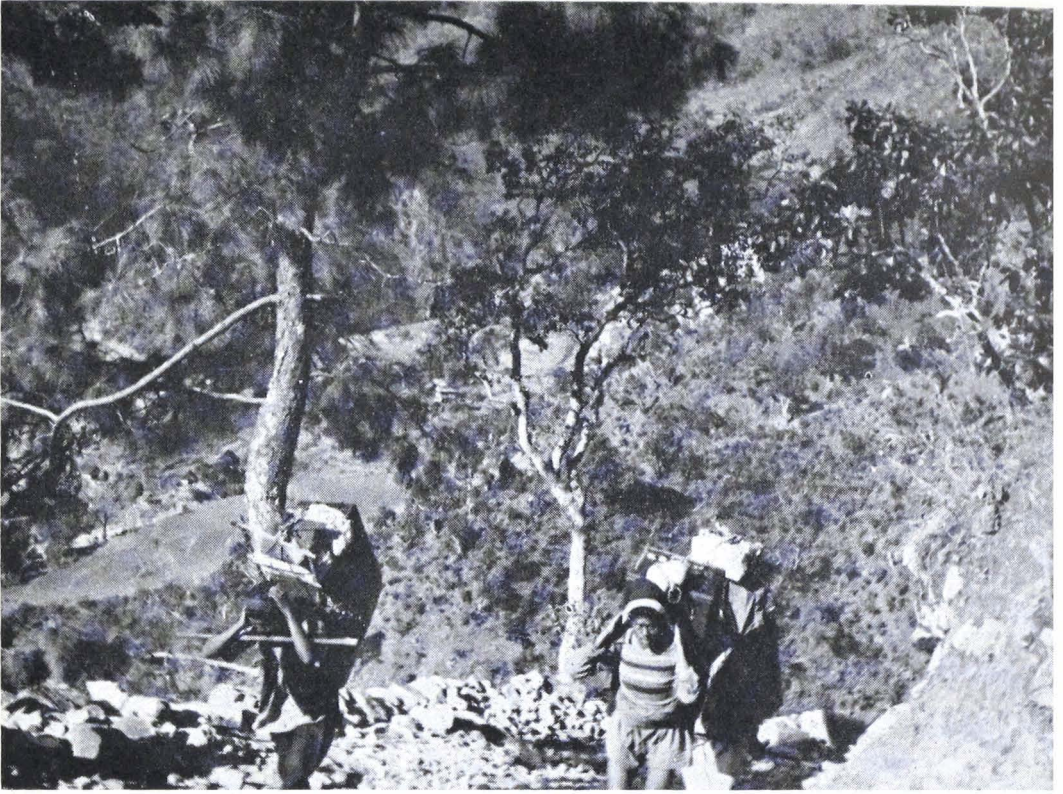
“She is getting married,” he said.





Buddhist stupa at Swayambhunath: 'These grave, all-seeing eyes are the eyes of God'





The road above Bhimphedi: '...set out up the steep hillside . . . with the porters following'



Saraswati and Manjusri: '... for success in examinations'

“Who? The big one?” I asked.

“No,” he said, pointing to the child with the golden chaplet. “This little one.”

The little girls were sitting motionless, with solemn seriousness written on their round, cherubic faces. Sombre thoughts of child marriages came to my mind, and I wondered how the older girl could contrive to smile at the ordeal.

“Where is the bridegroom?” I asked tentatively.

“The bridegroom is a fruit,” he answered.

“Did you say a fruit?”

“She is being married to a fruit,” he repeated.

I could not make sense of it and opened my mouth to ask again if I had heard correctly, but seeing my puzzled expression in time, he began to explain.

“The girl will be married to a bel fruit,” he said. “You know the bel fruit?”

I nodded. I remembered the round, yellow fruit with the hard skin and soft flesh from my time in Bengal when I had taken it for dysentery.

“She is marrying the fruit,” he went on. “Then she will never be a widow. When she comes to marry, and perhaps her husband dies, then she will not be a widow, because she is still married to the fruit. In our law widows cannot be married again, but she will not be a widow, so she can marry again. Is it not a good idea?”

The logic of this seemed to me to be decidedly Irish. “If she marries the fruit and then marries a man, perhaps,” I could not help remarking, “she will be committing bigamy.”

“Bigamy?”

“Married to two people at once.”

“No, sir. Not so,” the youth replied. “The fruit is a fruit. The man is a man. You cannot say she is married to two men at once.”

“Then when the man dies, she is a widow. How can the fruit count?”

“Ah, in this case,” said he, “the fruit represents a man because she has been through the marriage ceremonies with the fruit, but when a real man wants to marry her he takes the place of the fruit.”

I argued no further against a mode of thought beside which Irish logic is a model of clarity. It seemed to be an amusing and rather clever way of insuring against the miserable lot set

aside for orthodox Hindu widows—always assuming acceptance of the original premise that widows may not remarry. And in practice it works.

Leaving the little girls to complete their vigil, we made our way back past Swayambhunath and the Eyes of God and down the hill again. It was these eyes that remained in my mind more than Saraswati, for they were the same eyes as I had seen at the top of the first pass over the mountains by Chisapani Garhi. The same pairs of eyes are everywhere in the Valley of Nepal and in the Hills—in cities and on the wayside, in villages and at the tops of a hundred passes. They seem to watch you as you go along and keep a check on what you are doing and how you are behaving.

The sternest and most majestic and austere of all these eyes look down from the stupa of Bodhnath, which is to the northeast, on the opposite side of the city from Swayambhunath. The great white garbh of Bodhnath, "Lord of Wisdom", bigger even than that of Swayambhunath, is a landmark that can be seen from afar—even from the heights of the Sheopuri mountains on days when the rest of the Valley is simply an indeterminate haze. It is the goal of the Tibetan pilgrims who come down from their high tableland through the Kuti Pass, to strike the Valley at its eastern end at the township of Sankhu.

Bodhnath is similar to Swayambhunath, but more primitive and less ornate. The stem of the churamani is composed of a step pyramid instead of metal rings, and the shrines are less numerous. The garbh is raised on a series of rectangular terraces, the whole being enclosed in an outer circular wall containing prayer-wheels and paintings of the Five Buddhas. It is surrounded by a circle of ancient houses, which form a vihara for the lama and for the metal-workers who produce silver prayer-wheels and other votive articles.

The setting of Bodhnath emanates an aura of great antiquity, which the engaging Chini Lama, the custodian of the shrine, seems to confirm in his conversation. This poses an interesting problem. Could Buddhism have existed before the Buddha? Certainly as far as the Hinayana school of Buddhism in Ceylon, Burma and Thailand is concerned, it could not, any more than Christianity could have existed before Christ. But what about this other sect of the north, which accepts the historical Gotama Buddha as one amongst many, as one Enlightened One



in a whole series, past, present and future ; was this in existence before the birth of the Light of Asia at Lumbini in the Nepalese Tarai? For the northerners the Adi Buddha and the Five Divine Buddhas and their Celestial Boddhisatvas, with their female energies, were already in organized array.

Historical research and chronological comparisons are addictions of the western world, which have little attraction or meaning for those who worship at the shrine. The Nepalese Chronicle of Kings, however, states that the stupa was built by Raja Manadeva about A.D. 500 and recounts the following interesting story :

“Raja Vikramajit was a good king, who worshipped every day at the shrine of Burho Nilkantha. One day the fountain of Narayan ran dry and his astrologers told him it required the sacrifice of a human being possessed of the thirty-two virtues to start the water flowing again. The only two people in the kingdom possessing all these virtues were the Raja and his son. Raja Vikramajit, rather than sacrifice his son, determined to sacrifice himself and gave instructions that his son was to kill a certain man he would find on a certain day lying covered up at the fountain. His son, Manadeva, did so, but almost immediately the pool became full of worms and he found out what he had done. Horrified at finding himself a parricide, he ran off to the temple of Mani Jogini, where the guardian goddess told him to build a big temple to Buddha.”

One story or another, the truth is as one fancies it. To the great, lolloping men and women from the roof of the world, in their tall fur hats and clumsy cloth boots, the white womb of creation and the Eyes of God always have been, are and ever shall be. The weirdness of the place remains. A band of poor musicians gathers round to intone their thin, plaintive songs, accompanied by rustic, home-made fiddles. Wizenegged beggars dance attendance, grinning like imps of outer darkness. In an upper-room huge tubs of clarified butter stand ready to feed the eternal flames in front of Amitabha Buddha and his male and female attendants, with the flaming demi-urges of Lamaic Buddhism watching from the dark walls. And in another upper-room the Chini Lama, the “Priest from China”, womanishly petite, urbane and cultivated, welcomes visitors and poses in his robes, silver prayer-wheel in hand, for photographs. If you want to buy the prayer-wheel, he will sell.

## 4

### *The Raja's Bath*

TO THE east of Katmandu, on the far side of the wide, grassy parade-ground called the Tundikhel and between the Government Secretariat and the Bagmati river, stands a vast, rambling old palace called Thapathali. It was there that, cycling one fine morning, I met Prakashchand, scion of a noble breed who trace their descent back to the "conquest".

Prakashchand was still a young man, round-faced and genial, a man of the world and former army officer and diplomat, who had seen service in India and Burma. He found me at a road-junction, uncertain of which fork to take, and invited me to drink tea with him. "You are looking at the house of Nana Sahib," he said. "Nana Sahib of the Indian Mutiny."

I was not quite sure which of several undistinguished-looking buildings he was pointing at, but I knew the story—how Nana Sahib, one of the prime instigators of the Indian Mutiny of 1857, had been put to flight, how the family of the rebel prince sought and was granted asylum in Nepal, although the assistance of the Nepalese troops and the strength of the Gurkha battalions had been one of the main factors that swayed the balance in favour of the East India Company, and how the mystery of Nana Sahib's survival or decease had never been solved.

I also knew that one of the reasons why Nana Sahib's wife, Kasi Bhai, who was only thirteen at the time of her flight and lived on in Katmandu for fifty years, was welcomed in Nepal by Jang Bahadur was the treasure she carried with her. The Nepalese crown is ringed with a cluster of twenty-three huge emeralds, all of which were bought from Nana Sahib's family for a nominal sum. The largest jewel in the crown, an emerald three and a quarter inches long with a carved gold and diamond seal at one end bearing the words "Ya Ali" in Arabic, came from the same source, although it previously belonged to Nadir Shah, the Persian conqueror who sacked Delhi in 1739. Over

the crown, which is closely sewn with pearls, rise the long plumes of the bird of paradise, which is only to be found in the Aru Islands off the coast of New Guinea and is now almost extinct as a result of man's—and woman's—vanity.

"It is a very good thing to meet someone who is interested in our country," went on Prakashchand, and since there are no tea-houses in Katmandu, he took me to his rooms.

We passed through an archway into the precincts of the palace and stood in a small courtyard, whilst Prakashchand called up to a second-floor window to give warning of our approach. "Please excuse the condition of my establishment," he said. "But these days, indeed, what can one do?"

Where oh where had I heard those words before? He led the way up a bare stone stairway with an unsteady balustrade from which the paint was flaking away, along an empty, echoing passage and into a large room, bare of furniture except for an unmade bed in one corner, a writing-desk, a small occasional table and a large photograph of one of the apsaras, or dancing-girls, sculptured on the temples of Khajurao. It was a bed-sitter, for all the world like the bed-sitters of Kensington and Bayswater, where, too, the big houses have been broken up into bits and pieces in which the little people live separate and alone.

So it is with the big palaces of Nepal. The great mansion of Thapathali was built by the first Rana Prime Minister, Jang Bahadur. From time to time subsidiary bhawans were added to it to accommodate the ever-increasing Rana family circle and their retainers, until it became a veritable labyrinth of courtyards and corridors and a great stronghold of the ruling caste.

This was in the past, and now, with the retainers gone and the family organization shattered, the main-spring of its life has been broken. Who can live in these vast, crude halls where there is no plumbing and no central heating? Who can exist except in the snugness of the porter's lodge or the humble quarters of the Ranas of the third or fourth class? Better to hire the building out to the state and collect the rent. And those who have been able to do so count themselves fortunate. Min Bhawan, the other side of the Dhobi Khola, or "washerman's river" on the back road to Patan, has become the Teachers' Training Centre; Rabbi Bhawan, just off the Thankot road, is the Headquarters of the United States Operations Mission;

Padmalaya Bhawan, in Lajimpat close to the British and Indian Embassies, contains a school for medical men run by the World Health Organization of the United Nations; and Shanti Bhawan is a mission hospital.

The list could be added to. One palace is now a hotel, another is used to house visiting V.I.P.s. As for the former occupants, some now live in India with the proud title of Shamsher Jang Bahadur Rana abbreviated to plain Mr. Sham, others remain in Nepal. And there are still others who continue to be pillars of the state and have kept their splendid homes intact, such as that grand old gentleman of Nepal, Field-Marshal Kaiser Shamsher J.B.R., who remains in Kaiser Mahal with his beloved library, and General Mrigendra Shamsher in Baber Mahal, and General Kiran Shamsher, recently retired Commander-in-Chief, and General Toran Shamsher, the present C.-in-C.

Presently tea was brought to us by Prakashchand's manservant, an ex-policeman who had found it hard to live on a policeman's pay, and Prakashchand, excusing the absence of his wife, talked about himself to me.

"My fortunes are now low," said he. "As you can see. Those I have trusted have failed me. Even my back pay for one and a half years I have been unable to obtain. The money that should have been paid to me when I was on duty overseas is all still owing to me. Every week I am going to Singha Darbar to state my case and ask for justice, and still I have no success. There are some people who set themselves against me because they know that I did my duty well. But it cannot go on like this. It cannot. God will not allow it to continue. They invented a story that I took the money belonging to the government, and yet they know very well that there was a fire which destroyed everything, and destroyed half the town as well, and my wife, who was pregnant, was only saved from being burnt to death by a miracle. Is this justice, sir? I tell you, sir, there are some people who are so flinty-hearted that even the words of your Jesus Christ could not move them. And now what do they do? They make me keeper of the zoo!"

I sipped my tea and sympathized. "Have you many animals?" I said.

"Oh yes!" Enthusiasm filled his voice again. "Of course. We have tigers and rhinoceros and deer and birds, many sorts of

birds, and the bandel. The bandel is the wild boar. It is a very fierce animal. Are you interested in fauna? Yes? Then I will show you the zoo."

And there and then, after we had finished our tea, just as if for several days Prakashchand had been planning to do that very thing, we set out on our bicycles to study the captive wild creatures of Nepal.

We went over the bridge which crosses the Bagmati river not far from the Kalamochan temple, a building which, with its large white cupola, is reminiscent of mosque architecture until one sees the gilt lions at the four corners of the main roof and the gilt statue on its pedestal facing the main building. The building of this temple was started by the first real statesman of Nepal, Bhimsen Thapa, and completed in 1852 by Jang Bahadur, who dedicated it to Jagganath, "Lord of the World", commemorating the wars with Tibet and British India. The other side of the bridge the way divides, the right-hand fork leading to Jawalakhel and the zoo, and the left-hand fork to Katmandu's sister city of Patan.

I ventured a suggestion. "Do you think," I said, "you could first show me something of Patan? I'm really more interested in antiquities and the arts than in animals."

Without a word of protest Prakashchand agreed. "Tomorrow we will go to the zoo," said he. "Today I will show you Patan."

So we took the left-hand fork instead of going to the right. It was about ten o'clock, and civil servants were still hurrying down the hill to get to their government offices in Katmandu on time. At the top of the hill we passed through the city gate, entering, as we did so, another world.

Patan is the second in size of the three main towns of the Nepal Valley, which were all separate city-states before the Gurkha conquest. Its golden age was in the era of the Lichhavi and Malla kings—the middle-ages up to the early eighteenth century—when it was called Lalitapur, "City of Joy". After becoming a mere dependency of the Gurkha government at Katmandu it lost much of its splendour, but it is still predominantly a Newar and a Buddhist city, where old traditions die hard. Plunging straight in, between the high houses, and along the narrow street ahead of us, where a jeep would have had only a couple of feet to spare on either side, we cycled through to the Darbar Square, which is the heart of the town.



One quickly gets used to all things, but the first vision of that square, which is also the town's market-place, or mangal bazaar, was for me an unforgettable experience. Imagine a vegetable market in which the melons and egg-plants, cauliflowers, giant radishes and chillies are piled up on stone terraces, with their vendors—men and women in the dress of the Jyapu peasant—squatting beside them. Imagine people coming and going—here a group of chattering, stocky little Tamang girls with loads of wood from the hills, there a pair of tall Bhotiyas, dressed in loose, maroon-coloured robes with thick, multi-coloured cloth boots, and there a wandering cow snatching at a cabbage, and here, there and everywhere the local townspeople in their breeches and tunics with their broad cloth belts wound round and round their waists. Then raise your eyes a little above the bustle of the market, above the stone terraces, and you will see the most fantastic collection of towering pagodas and collonaded temples, of carved façades and pillars crowned with bronze statues, of chimeras, griffins and monsters, ever devised by the fertile imagination of man.

The crowning apex of all this fantasy is the five-storied royal pagoda, called Deotali, inside the Darbar itself, with the statue of Siddhi Narsinh Malla facing it on a tall pillar. To the left of it is the Darbar gateway, adorned with a mass of intricate figure-carving in which the highlights are picked out in white paint on a base of black.

Half a dozen other pagodas, dedicated to Vishnu and Siva, are scattered about the square. At the time of our visit they had all been refurbished and repainted for the forthcoming coronation celebrations, and the picture was one of violent colours and barbaric splendour. From the deeply overhanging eaves of the Bhimsen temple, the Visheshwar temple and the Mahadeo temple the gods looked down, and under the feet of the great gods, in their classic, placid poses, the little humans were portrayed, writhing and twisting in passion—on one pagoda suffering the tortures of hell, on another copulating or an-hungered or in the extremities of old age. And at the corners of the pagodas, stretched out on the longest of the wooden joists which support the tiered roofs, with upraised fore-feet and bared loins, were the rampant rams that are the symbols of fertility.

Standing amongst these Newar works of art, which are so Indian in their inspiration and yet so Chinese in form and

appearance, there is a more modern building which is purely Indian in style. It stands in the dominating position in the Darbar Square, where once there must have been an open piazza in front of the main gateway, and its white stone columns look cool and detached beside the riot of colour round about. There is something of Mogul design in the little detached towers at the corners of this temple, which is dedicated to Krishna and his consort, Radha, though the central cigar-shaped sikra is purely Hindu.

The chronicle tells us that Raja Siddhi Narsinh Malla, who was King of Lalitapur early in the seventeenth century, one night dreamt a dream, and in his dream he dreamt that he saw Radha and Krishna in blissful union in front of the Darbar. Therefore on that same spot he built a beautiful temple and placed the conjunct Radha-Krishna deity in it. Scenes from the Mahabharata are engraved in great detail on the walls, and a bronze figure of Garuda, the eagle vehicle of Vishnu, stands facing it, perched on top of a pillar.

As was only natural, I wanted to take photographs of all these remarkable things, and far from objecting, Prakashchand offered all kinds of advice and helped me by shooing away small boys who had an inordinate desire to be in the picture. We stood in distant corners, climbed on to the angles of walls, came close up under the roofs, knelt, crouched and tilted our heads back, all to get the best effects. Most of the time we were watched by an interested and friendly crowd.

At last we were finished, but I still could not say I was satisfied. "All this is wonderful," I said. "But it's all Hindu. And yet I thought Patan was a Buddhist city."

Prakashchand nodded. "Yes, many people worship the Buddhas," he agreed. "People do not worship in these churches you see here. These have been built by great men to show their greatness. We find the people worshipping in other places. You must ask the Gubajius and Shreshtas about the Buddhas."

We then went on foot out of the Darbar Square in a southerly direction, and entered a paved quadrangle at the end of which stood a large pagoda. This was the home of Machhendranath, "Lord Protector of the Fishes," and the most important sanctuary in the town, since he is Patan's patron deity and is taken out every year in procession during the important Machhendra Jatra festival, which takes place just before the rainy season.

Avalokiteshwarmachhendranath, to give him his full name, was discovered, it is said, in this way. Gorakhnath, patron god of the Gurkhas, came to Nepal determined to see him, so he caught the nine Nags, who are the rain-giving snake deities, thus causing a drought. Sure enough Machhendra came into Nepal, bringing rain to his people. He came in a chariot in procession, and at a certain point, now called Bungmati, which is near the Bagmati river four miles south of Patan, a bhairab, or demon, in the shape of a dog, barked and said "bhu" (born), and that was considered to be the birthplace of the god.

The deity that lives in this temple is a red-faced doll, dressed in bright-coloured vestments. In the month of Baisak he is paraded round the town on his *rath* in order to bring rain to the country. Nothing must stand in his way, and not infrequently the branches of fir and spruce sprouting from the tall wooden tower of his chariot bring down the telephone wires. The monsoon rain follows almost immediately.

I asked Prakashchand whether Machhendra was a Hindu or Buddhist deity, and with typical Nepalese uncertainty, he did not answer one way or the other. "Many people follow him," he said. "He is an important god. It is necessary to respect him."

As his full name indicates, he must, in fact, be Buddhist, being an incarnation of Avalokiteshwar Padmapani Buddha, the present Governor of the Universe. Through an archway just off the road leading to the south of the town, a grassy square contains another temple to Machhendra, a three-storied pagoda, and the finely moulded bronzes of animals, which stand on pillars some four feet high facing the front door of the idol's home, are the same as the creatures of the twelve year cycle of the Tibetans and Chinese.

On the other side of the road, which is really no more than a footpath, stands the two-tiered pagoda of Min-nath, which is equally equivocal in appearance, but actually contains an image of the Boddhisatva Lokeshwar. A variety of pots and pans and other household articles are nailed to the boards under the eaves of the temple. They are the property of thieves, confiscated by way of punishment, and of people who have died without heirs.

It is true, therefore, that the Newar-style pagodas, which are unique to Nepal, and anything approaching the likeness of which is not to be seen west of Burma, may serve either the

Hindu or the Buddhist cause—indeed it is not surprising when one considers the fact that Nepalese Buddhism also embraces the Hindu triad of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva within its scheme of things—and yet, at the same time, Patan is full of sanctuaries about which there could be no possible mistake. In the past the town was a sort of Nepalese Oxford or Cambridge, pretty evenly divided between the “town” of labourers and craftsmen and the “gown” of Buddhist monks, whose ideal it was to follow the blessed “middle way”. The monks lived in courts called viharas, very similar in conception to the old college quadrangles of the universities, and there are still over a hundred of them, large and small, in all quarters of the town. Each court is entered by a low, narrow doorway, guarded by chindits or other mythological beasts, and normally contains a central chaitya of some sort, the distinguishing feature of which is the hemispherical garbh in the design. Sometimes the chaitya is in the centre of the court, where in the West one might expect to find a bird-bath or a sundial, and sometimes it is built into one side like a college chapel. These monastic communities in their latter days allowed marriage and family life, and finally suffered dissolution under the Hindu Gurkha rulers, their birtas, or freehold church lands, being taken away from them. Consequently the viharas fell into decay and are now inhabited by Buddhist Newars engaged in various trades.

These enclosed quadrangles might easily be overlooked completely by anyone making a hurried tour round the main streets of Patan, for most of them are hidden away off the beaten track, but the five large Asoka stupas which claim the town for Buddhism could hardly be missed by anybody. One is at the centre and the others are at the four cardinal points of the compass at the perimeter of the town. It is related that the famous Emperor Asoka, whose empire covered most of the Indian sub-continent and whose symbol of three lions adorns the coat of arms of the Republic of India today, was shocked by the slaughter in his war against the South Indian kingdom of the Klings. His dismay led him to embrace Buddhism, which forbids the taking of life. He made pilgrimages to the places which the Buddha had visited, one of which was Nepal, and built memorials there.

The Asoka stupas are hemispherical mounds of plain, unadorned brick, except for the central one, on which a small

toran and churamani have been built. They date back to the days of simple faith in the "Wise One" before the involved heirarchy of Mahayana Buddhism had been elaborated, and they contrast as sharply with the complicated creations of tantric Buddhism as does a simple Romanesque chapel with the façade of a medieval cathedral.

The Buddhist monument to which most visitors are taken in Patan, however, is the Mahabodh (Great Buddha) temple, which is buried in a small vihara up a side turning in the south-western part of the town. Yet it is of little real interest, since it is merely a copy of a copy. The original is the famous temple at Budhgaya in Bihar, where Gautama Sakyamuni achieved enlightenment and became the Buddha. The tower of the first copy was then destroyed in the earthquake of 1934 and later rebuilt. The sikra shape of traditional Hindu architecture and the detailed terra-cotta mouldings have nevertheless been faithfully restored, and if it were possible to see it from a greater distance, it would create a pleasing enough impression.

Prakashchand took me rapidly in and out of the courtyard of this temple, which appeared to be little frequented by local people, and back across the Darbar Square to another narrow entrance under an archway. This one led to Kwapa Bahal, the richest and best-known of the viharas, or bahals as they are called in the colloquial dialect. Even the entrance corridor is covered with beaten copper work, and the chapel enshrining the merciful, compassionate Lokeshwari, offspring of Amitabha Buddha, is richly adorned with silver and gold. On the upper floor of one side of the small courtyard there is a religious school.

Thus having shown me the town, Prakashchand led the way back to the Darbar Square, where we had left our bicycles. It seemed to be the end of our expedition, and I wanted to thank him for giving up so much of his time to show me all these things, but before I could speak he produced one more card from his sleeve.

"There is one more thing I would like to show you," he said. "One more thing before we go. This will really show you what our artists were like once. It is just here."

Opposite the great bell that stands in the square we went to a doorway which is guarded by the lion-god, Narsinh, sculptured in the act of eviscerating a rash mortal who, supposedly, was fool enough to try to enter. The living doorkeeper was less awe-

inspiring, and after some talk he agreed to show us into the courtyard beyond. At first sight it looked like one of a hundred other courts, except that on one side, in offices open to the cold air, with no furniture except for the bamboo mats on the floor, some kind of municipal clerical work was being done. But, looking more closely, I could see, to the right, a depression in the flagstones, bordered by a low balustrade, and on the further side, steps leading down.

"It is the bath of Siddhi Narsinh," Prakashchand said as quietly as he could. "Let us go closer." And to the doorkeeper, "Is it permitted?"

"Perhaps it is permitted," the doorkeeper said doubtfully.

"We may go to the top of the steps?"

"It may possibly be allowed."

We had already reached the top of the steps before the doorkeeper's answer was finished. Below and in front of us was the most ornate and intricately carved bath-tub that I have ever seen. It was a bath in the Indian manner—a dhara, or spout, of water running in a continual stream, under which the bather stands or crouches, allowing the water to play over him. With this spout as its focal point the six foot high oval wall was adorned with row upon row of highly decorated stone images of the gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon.

"May one take photographs?" I asked.

Prakashchand looked unhappy. "It has never been permitted," he said. Then he pointed to a plain wooden bench at the head of the bath. "The king used to sleep here," he said. "He was very pious. After sleeping he would take his bath and then he would see all the gods and goddesses around him. That was how he liked to live."

"I would very much like to take just one photograph," I said.

"I will ask. Doorkeeper, is it permitted to take photographs?"

"It is not permitted."

"This gentleman is a very distinguished professor. He has travelled all over India, China and Japan, and now he has come all the way to Nepal to see the dhara of Siddhi Narsinh. Perhaps he could take just one photograph?"

The doorkeeper shrugged uncomfortably, not quite believing. "From the top of the steps, then, it may perhaps be permitted."

I sympathized with him, but I took my photograph. No

lightning or thunder followed to show the gods' displeasure. I went a step down, then two, then three. Prakashchand and the doorkeeper watched anxiously, on the verge of interfering. Still no supernatural signs as I focused, set the aperture and shutter-speed and snapped. I returned to the top, feeling guilty of a misdemeanour as the two of them watched me solemnly. Thus and thus, one by one, the forbidden secrets of Nepal are probed, peered at, dragged to the light of day. First the outer frontiers are penetrated, then the inner ones. The foreigner has money, wins helpers, influences people. He drags the curtain aside, infiltrates, treads unharmed where the native-born himself fears to tread, enters first the courtyard, then the sanctuary, then the holy of holies, and bares all the ancient mysteries for the sake of a story to take home.

Outside, in the Darbar Square, Prakashchand was his usual cheerful self again. "You have something good to take home now," he said.

"Yes," I said. "Yes indeed."

## 5

### *The City of Cut Noses*

THREE MILES south-west of Katmandu lies Naskatipur, "City of Cut Noses", and thither went I one evening with my friend Jyapu to celebrate a wedding.

Jyapu is the Newar word for peasant, for the patient thousands who turn the deep soil of the Valley with their short U-shaped hoes, who dig pits for the grey potash fertilizer which they call "black earth" and spread over their fields, and who plant corn and rice in their due season, two crops a year. So my friend Jyapu was one of the Farmer Giles' of Nepal, a man of the soil and proud of it, though now a wood-carver and art teacher. I met him opposite the Bhimsen temple just above the bridge over the Vishnumati river, late for our rendezvous as was natural having been engaged in business with various government departments since early afternoon, but he excused me in his loud, careless voice, and off we went on bicycles towards the setting sun.

About a mile from the town on the Thankot road we got off our bicycles and started pushing them up a steep footpath to the left. Thenceforth we were on and off the bikes, riding where we could, even if it was only on a one-foot-wide bund between fields, and walking where we could not ride. The further we went the less we were able to use our wheels, for very soon the track emerged on to the ever-steepening shoulder of a hill, which finally rose into a sharp ridge. Stretched out along it, like one of those old medieval hill-towns of Italy, lay the City of Cut Noses.

The real name of this town is Kirtipur, which means "City of Fame", and the grim nickname of Naskatipur refers to its noble and tragic history. Like the Italian towns, it too was an independent city-state in medieval times, protected by the precipitous slopes of the ridge, its stone ramparts and the walls of the outer ring of houses, which all face inwards on to a perimeter



street. But Kirtipur was the first town in the Valley to be attacked by the invading army of the Gurkha conqueror, Prithwi Narayan Shah. He was repulsed, but in 1767, having secured the passes into the Valley, he returned to the attack. Again he was repulsed. The stout defenders of Kirtipur then invited the Katmandu raja, Jaya Prakash Malla, to become their king and unite with them against the invader, but Jaya Prakash's answer was to arrest the deputation, slaughter some of its members, and humiliate their chief, Danuvanta, by compelling him to walk through his own town dressed as a woman. The Gurkha chief then attacked a third time, and the inhabitants, driven from the outer walls and despairing of outside help, asked for a parley. It was agreed that if they surrendered they should go unharmed, but two days later a message was received from Prithwi Narayan, angry because his brother had lost one of his eyes in the fight, that all the male inhabitants—except for musicians and babies at the breast—should have their noses and lips cut off.

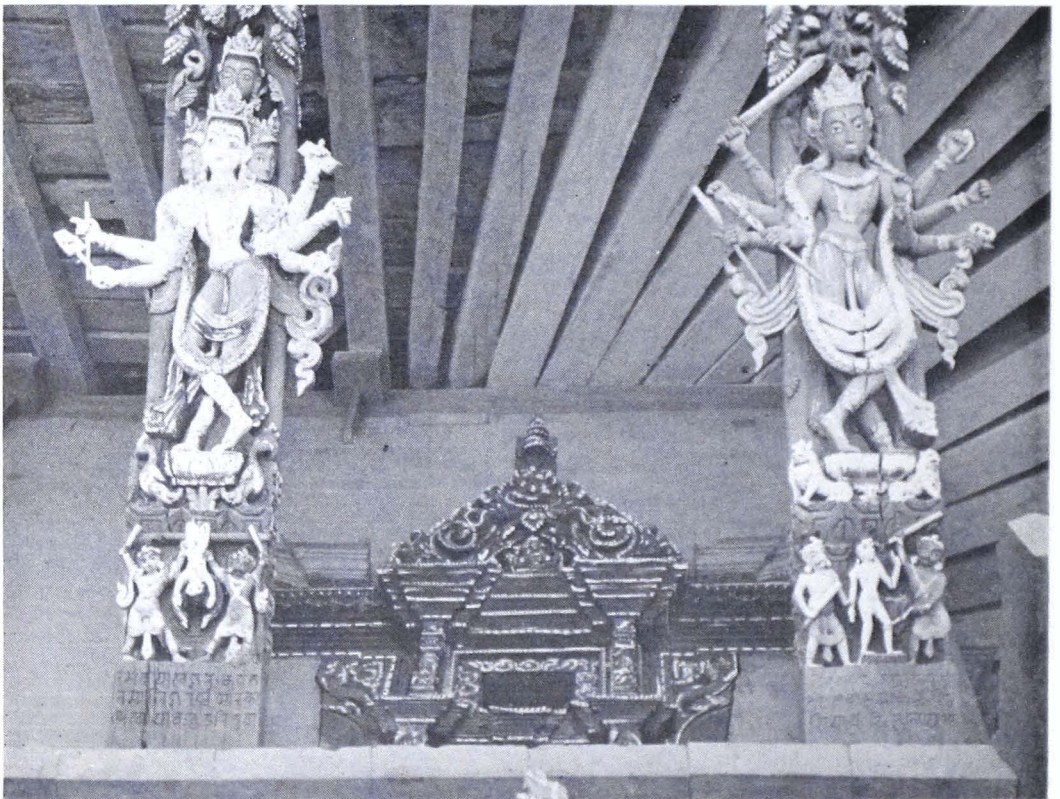
The order was carried out in all its brutal savagery, and we are told with Teutonic thoroughness that the total weight of the noses and lips of the 865 people was eighty pounds. It was the more ironical since, in the first attack, Prithwi Narayan had found himself at the mercy of one of the defenders, whose comrade had stayed his hand, saying, "He is a king, and kings we may not kill."

We manhandled our bicycles up the steps at the top of the hill and through the narrow, thick gateway. Jyapu immediately disappeared into a house almost opposite, leaving me outside in the street, but without the usual crowd of curious children and youngsters around me. After a few minutes he returned and announced that we would leave our bikes and circulate a little first, the wedding feast being not yet ready.

We walked down the cobbled street to the left between rows of three-storey brick houses. I was surprised to see few people about, and those who were to be seen were bustling hither and thither, not staring up at us from their street-level verandas or crowding round the *angreji* as all white men are called, whether they are Englishmen or not. This was unusual, but Jyapu, with his mind full of the wedding, had forgotten to tell me it was an unusual night. We soon came to the centre of the town, with its central tank of water some forty yards square between the

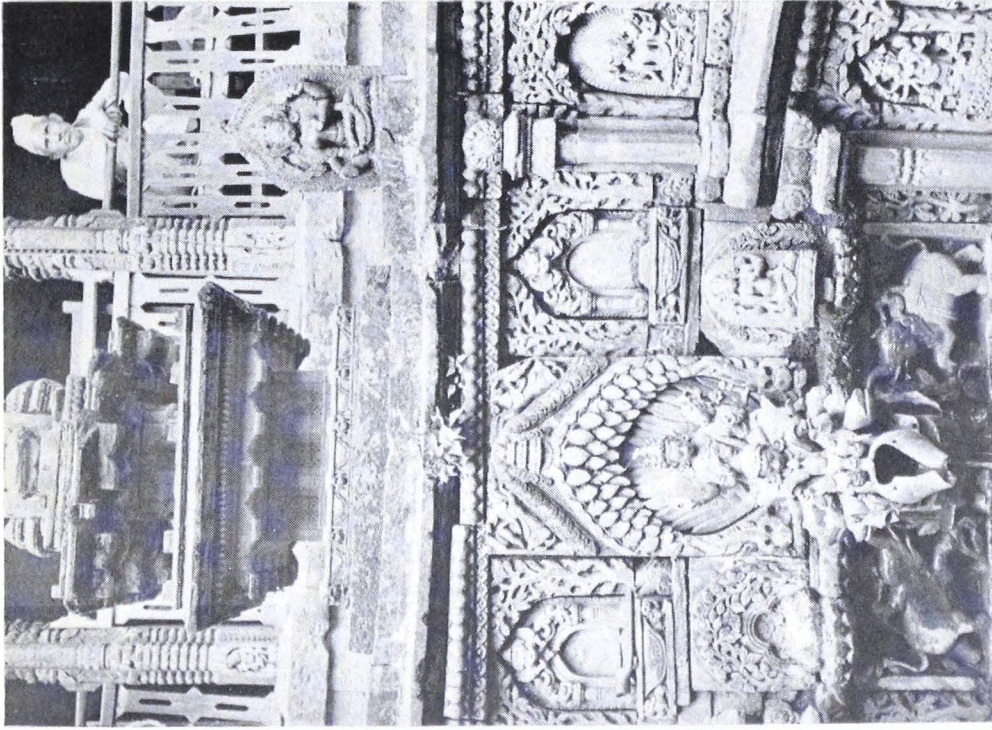


Marriage to the bel fruit; the bride is the little girl on the right

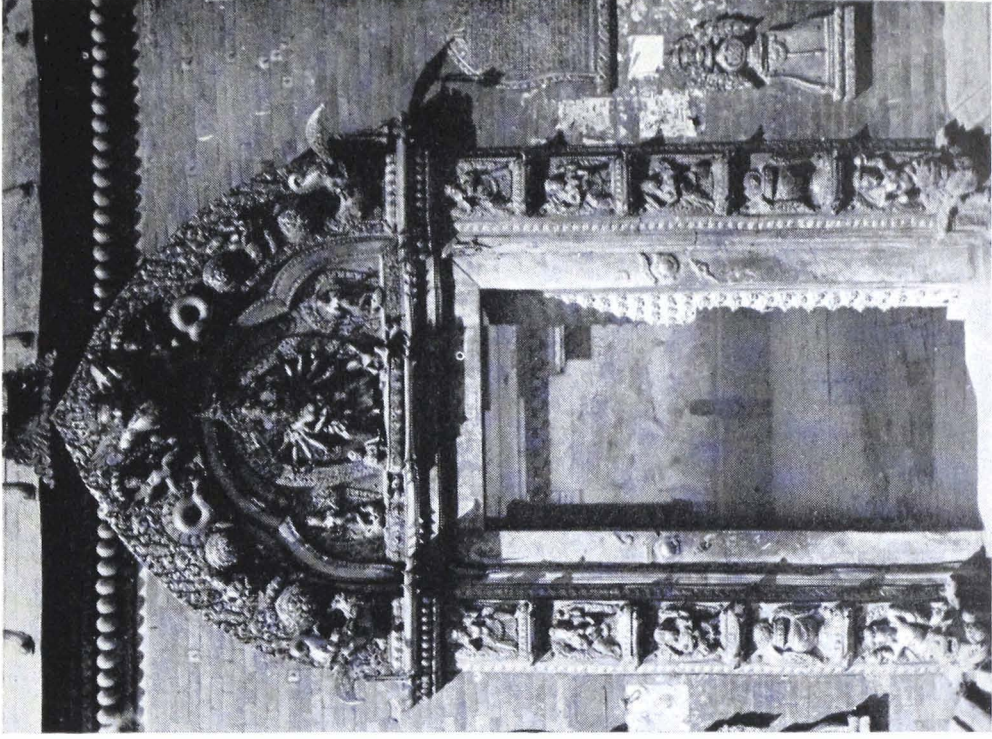


The punishments of hell: carvings on the Mahadeo Temple, Patan





The Bath of Siddhi Narsinh: 'Perhaps . . . just one photograph?'



Golden doorway of Bhadgaun, embellished with monsters of marvellous intricacy

temple on one side and a small piazza, backed by the further perimeter, on the other.

The piazza and the surrounds of the tank were thronged with townspeople and a strange festival was in progress, the festival of Maghe Purnima, the full moon of spring. On one side of the piazza there stood a brightly-decorated pavilion, like the float of a pageant, containing a group of children—a boy with a golden crown on his head and six or seven little girls with eyebrows heavily made up with collyrium. They were Lord Krishna and the Gopi cow-girls who play games with him. On the side of the piazza bordered by the tank stood a row of large earthenware pots on bamboo frames. The pots had straws bristling out of them on all sides like pins in a pin-cushion, and above these bristling pots were oranges stuck on sticks, out of which emerged sprays of little coloured fluffy balls.

“They bring water from Bagmati river,” Jyapu explained, pushing his way through the throng of people and acknowledging the greetings of acquaintances right and left. “Let us see what is happening.”

We pushed further forward towards the other side of the piazza, where we could hear the sound of pipe and drum, and there, from the further street, a most extraordinary procession was emerging. Firstly came a man with half-naked body and padded arms and legs. Aided by two supporters he was measuring the circuit of the town with his body, falling forward full-length on the ground, rising again and falling again. Behind him were young children bearing standards, the first of which was a large flag depicting Bhimsen, the conquering hero of the Mahabharata, holding his victim upside-down, with legs split apart and blood streaming from the wound. The second flag was the two-pointed national flag of Nepal, and the third one looked like the royal standard, the lion rampant reminding one for a moment of the standard of our own House of Windsor. There were other flags too, which were followed by bristling pots like those lined up beside the tank. Water was spraying out from the straws in the pots—holy Bagmati water sprinkling over the streets.

The procession moved slowly forward with antique, ritual tread, and after watching it for a while, I slipped away to look at the rest of the town, free of the usual train of staring sight-seers and inquisitive children. I slipped through the narrow

gateway of the temple and into the courtyard beyond, and stood facing the bell which worshippers ring to call the god's attention to themselves. In front of me, nailed in columns to the posts supporting the overhanging roof, were the horns of buffaloes which had been victims of former sacrifices.

The idol in this temple contains the spirit of a Bagh Bhairab, or tiger demon, one of the demi-gods of Siva in his destructive aspect, whom it is necessary to placate in order to avoid ill-fortune. It is said that the children of Kirtipur used to amuse themselves making a clay figure of a tiger when in the forest tending their sheep. One day, after going to fetch a leaf to make the tiger's tongue and complete the model, they returned to find the sheep eaten up and a real tiger in the place of the clay one, which had been entered by a demon. This demon is now housed in the Bhairabnath temple which stood facing me.

I gazed at the temple, peering here and there and trying to make out the faded frescoes which were painted in friezes on the right of the main door. There was no one about, so I tried to look inside, but the front door was bolted and barred. I tried the side and found there a little hatchway—low down, for one has to bow before one may see the god—and at the end of a long funnel, looking, as it were, into a peep-show, I saw a grotesque, bright-red hobgoblin-like creature which took my mind straight back to the fairy-tales and nightmares of childhood days.

I did not look at it for long, for I felt like a peeping-tom, crouching down to pry into something that I was not supposed to see, and I turned away to the other side of the courtyard where the ground fell away almost sheer from the wall to the fields below. The sun had gone now and the valley below was all in dark shadow, waiting for the rising moon. I seemed to be in the country of Frazer's "Golden Bough", in the infinite variety and circumstance of ancient paganism, where every tree contains a spirit and even the stones have life, and a man may be set upon and hacked to pieces and offered up to heaven if he happens to be passing a cornfield on the wrong day.

Jyapu found me there and called me away. We went back to the heart of the town and up the steep steps to the darbar, the former throne-room and stronghold of the raja, which is perched like an eagle's eyrie on the highest pinnacle of the ridge. At the foot of the steps stand two stone elephants, each

one carrying a headless warrior and trampling underfoot a man, but at the top of the steps, above those two symbols of absolute monarchy uncontaminated by any kind of mercy, there is nothing but a bare barn of a building, empty and dead.

From the height on which we stood the sunset was still in the sky behind the Mountains of the Moon. Below us, away from the sun, the ridge descended to the deserted Buddhist chaitya which legend attributes, like those of Patan, to the Emperor Asoka. It then rose again and fell away to Chobar, where the Bagmati river goes through its first sizeable gorge on its way to join the Ganges. Two hundred feet below us and a mile away the tight-knit village of Panga lay in the midst of its terraced fields. "It is where the bride lives," Jyapu said. "After staying here they will go there."

Night fell and we returned to the house by the gate which we had first visited. A young man was at the entrance to welcome us with sweets and nuts. He was the bridegroom, aged sixteen, the thirteen-year-old bride being inside the house. He was wearing his best tunic and breeches and seemed to be accepting his important position very coolly. After a few minutes he left us, and his elder brother, a student teacher whom I had met previously and who was our real host, took us not into his own house but to an upper-room on the other side of the gateway. In this room—it is always an upper-room, the ground floor being given over to dogs, goats, chickens, manure and all kinds of rubbish—half a dozen of us feasted in the light of a petromax, and sang and made music with a harmonium and drums.

The mainstay of the feast was *chiura*—rice that has been steamed enough to soften it, pounded out flat and then parched in the oven. It tastes something like oatmeal, but is hard and not easily chewed. On the same dish *kasi*, or gelded goat's meat, was served, omelette à fines herbes, peas, beans and pickled cauliflower—all cold. As sweet we had *thalthale*, or jellied meat broth, on plates of sewn leaves, and to wash it down a powerful and villainous *raksi*, or rice-spirit, served out of a Haig's whisky-bottle stoppered with a piece of rag.

After the meal we sang such songs as we knew. They turned to me to perform, for a man's not a man unless he can sing, they said. So I tried to pick out the Neapolitan ballad "Santa Lucia", and "Makura, makura", the spider song the Gurkha soldiers sing. In exchange I got, instead of Newar folk-music,



the "*Nani muni bachhi teri muthhi main kya hai?*" song from the Hindustani film "Bootpolish", which was then all the rage, and from the same film the song the orphans sing as they go begging through Bombay.

In the midst of our music-making we looked out of the window and saw the slow, antique procession approaching. The "measurers"—there were two of them now—were upright and walking at the head of the crowd. Each carried eight oil-lamps, four in a tray in his hands, one on each shoulder and two on his headdress, the oil being replenished from time to time by an attendant with a brass pot. And so they proceeded through and out of the gateway.

We then went across to the bridegroom's house and stumbled up the narrow step-ladder stairs to see the bride. A Newari girl, who spoke little Nepali, she was sitting dressed in her finery, with a fillet of gold around her head and a large golden medallion hanging down from her neck to cover her womb, surrounded by the women of Panga. We passed money to her, as is the custom, and she appeared pleased to be the centre of attraction. Looking down from the windows we saw the feast laid out in the interior courtyard on forty or fifty plates of leaves—a minor edition of our own. The bridegroom's father then accosted us and took us to a room containing three or four huge jars, from which we were helped to cups of rice-beer, the *janr* which the mountaineers in their books call *chang*. After this we tottered downstairs and were given pieces of *supari*, a hard nut which is cleansing to the teeth if you have teeth strong enough to crack it.

We bade farewell to our Kirtipur friends and turned to leave, but they would not leave us, insisting on pushing our bicycles for us as we walked down the hill. Jyapu and I were merry, going arm in arm, stumbling occasionally and coughing as we passed people to show that we had been drinking. Jyapu, I thought, still had some misgivings about the feast. "It was only to show you," he insisted. "To show you our Nepalese customs and culture. You did not like our food? You liked it?" "Yes, I liked it," I said. I tried to sound convincing, though I would have much preferred an ordinary workaday curry and rice. "I think you did not like it," he said. "But I did like it. Didn't you see me eating it?" "You did not eat so much." "I wasn't so hungry." "But you did eat our food. I am glad." "I

didn't eat so much because I'm not used to it," I said. "It does not matter. You like our food," he said. "But we are not such clean people." "It doesn't matter," I said. "You are happy people." He shook his head. "Not so happy," he said. "You know in the whole of Kirtipur there is not one doctor, only two or three what you call witches. There is not much school either. Do you know where the school is? That room where we were having dinner. That is the school. We should be cleaner. Nepal is dirty place." "Why don't you clean it up?" I said. "We are trying (not very convincingly). With God's help we are trying." "I shall always remember Kirtipur," I said. "And I am so happy to have such a friend, sir." Arms around each other's shoulders, we felt for mutual support under the great round circle of the moon. "We are friends walking in the moonlight," Jyapu said, "and we are very happy. One day I will come to visit you in your house. How much will it cost to come so many thousand miles? I will come by aeroplane flying over the mountains. First I will go to America and then I will go to you, flying everywhere. Shall it be so?" "I hope so," I said. "If God wishes," said Jyapu. "It is very lucky chance we meet. I will remember our friendship always."

Our sentimental conversation piece was interrupted when we persuaded our Kirtipur escort to leave us, mounted our bicycles and sped off dangerously down the narrow, stone-flagged, bumpy path, over the suspension bridge which spans the Kirtipur river, and back to Bhimsensthan, the site of our original rendezvous.

But this was not the end. "We will go now and see my sister," said Jyapu. "She teaches in the Basic School." Whereupon we turned into a dark passage-way out of the deserted street and climbed two flights of stairs. "But she is not my real sister," he explained hurriedly. "She is my adopted sister for when we do bhai puja." From this I was to understand that on the appointed day in the month of Kartik she would do obeisance to him, garland him and place the red spot on his forehead, whilst he would give her money, clothes perhaps, and ornaments. "She is also studying at High School," he added. "Let us go in."

Inside the second-floor room we found her with a group of five or six youngsters who were studying English at her direction. She was a serious-looking girl, apparently living on her own, but showed no anger at being disturbed late at night by



two tipsy characters like ourselves. She produced some embroideries to show me, one of a goddess and the other of a tiger chasing a deer, and then—a treasured possession—a long frayed roll of carpet on which were depicted scenes from the Mahabharata, including the warrior Bhimsen with his upside-down victim, as on the flag up in Kirtipur.

Jyapu then called on one of the youngsters who, he said, was a wizard on the drums. "He is going to study with a master-drummer in Calcutta," he said. "You will hear." And as if they had been in readiness all the time, a pair of drums appeared and the wizard dragged rhythm off the skins. At the height of the noise Jyapu leant across to me, and in a hoarse, shouting whisper, said he would like to buy my bicycle, also my camera. His pay was only two hundred Nepalese rupees a month, so he wanted them cheap. Perhaps he thought he had chosen the moment of weakness and it was unkind of me to head him off. "Maybe when I go away," I said. "I need them now. And now I must get home before the curfew."

So, all of us laughing again, I broke away.

## 6

### *Lord of the Animals*

TOWARDS THE end of February the road to Katmandu became crowded with travellers. But these were not the usual stocky little men with flower-pot hats and kukhris stuck in cloth belts and kit carried on broad backs. These were taller men and women, with flat feet unused to gripping mountain paths, erect of carriage, with staffs in their hands and bundles resting on the broad turbans on their heads. They were the peasants from the Plains—from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal—bent on pilgrimage. For the most part they were thinly clad, with broad expanses of their brown torsos exposed to the mountain air. Some may have had to stop at Chisapani, which Yadunath and I had found so cold, others were overtaken by rain and hail. Yet still they came on, like migrating herds, possessed by that urge to travel on pilgrimages which sends the Indian peasant off on a thousand mile journey with perfect faith and confidence.

Some came in family parties, some alone, some in village groups, some in parties of women only, conducted by a male leader. Some were mere tenant farmers, some landowners, some craftsmen, some clerks and small merchants. The well-to-do—the knight and the miller and the wife of Bath of Chaucer's tale—came in crowded planes, unless they were tramping the road for the good of their souls.

These pilgrims were but a small section of those millions of India's children who journey every year to points of peculiar and exceptional sanctity, such as the junction of the River Ganges and the Jumna at Allahabad, or the temple of Jaggnath at Puri in Orissa, or Rameshwaram on the chain of islands between India and Ceylon, or that remotest of all pilgrim goals, Lake Manasarowar in Western Tibet and Mount Kailas, the Abode of the Gods, which stands beside it. And if the journey is arduous and long, what of it? To the cheerful pilgrim,

as to the mountaineer, the difficulties simply add to the adventure and the merit.

The tens of thousands that crossed the Mountains of the Moon in February were bound for the holiest of Siva's shrines in this land of Siva—Pashupatinath, Lord of the Animals. Their object was to be there on Sivaratri, the most auspicious day of the year, to bathe in the river and do puja in the temple.

Pashupatinath is the Nepalese Benares. At this point the sacred Bagmati river flows through a small gorge between two hills, one of which is wooded and the other of which is open grassland. The former, on the left bank, is called Mrigasthali, because long ago Siva was seen in the woods there in the form of a deer, the latter is called Kailas. Below the gorge the right bank of the river, for a distance of about a quarter of a mile, is built up in ghats, to which the dying are brought so that they may be washed in the waters of the river before they expire. On the uppermost ghat—the Arya Ghat—the kings of Nepal are cremated, and here the funeral of the revolutionary King Tribhubana was held in 1955, after his mortal remains had been flown back from Switzerland, where he died. Below the kings, but above the two footbridges, the maharajas used to meet their quietus, and below the bridges the bodies of the common people are burnt. The ghats are backed by dharmsalas, occupied by the aged and the sick, who wait to die in this most blessed place, and by pagodas and temples, including the temple of Pashupatinath himself, which stands high above the river bank.

When I first went there not many people were about, and I walked in and out of the dharmsalas, watched only by the ancients and aged crones in the last stages of senile decay who inhabit them. Those who were able hobbled closer and followed me around like a retinue of impending death and dissolution, whilst those who could not move peered at me with their bleary, almost sightless eyes. The carvings of coupled human-beings above their heads, the lingams and oversexed bulls at their feet, seemed to be a mockery to them, an intrusion of Siva the Reproducer on the territory of Siva the Destroyer. But I doubt whether they, themselves, were conscious of the irony. They gathered in a group at the gateway and saw me take out a packet of cigarettes. A professional beggar—a man with a

palsied arm—begged for one. Wild eyes gazed at me from under wisps of straggly, unkempt hair as I satisfied him. Then one of the crones could contain herself no longer. "Me too!" she croaked. "Cigarette! Cigarette!" And all of them took up the cry, holding out their shaking hands for the smoke that, more than money, would help to soften their journey to the last great smoke of the funeral pyre.

But when I went on Sivaratri morning these living dead, the permanent inhabitants of the place, were swamped by the crowd of pilgrim visitors, who occupied every nook and cranny of living-space. The pilgrims who were too late to squeeze into the dharmshalas were camped out under the trees on the slopes beyond, in shelters erected for them by the Nepalese Government, which had also set up provision stores, water-points and a first-aid centre. Meanwhile local traders had moved in with their wares—souvenirs, colour prints of the temples, sweets, religious talismans and all the stuff of the fair.

I shuffled forward with the crowd, past the dharmshalas and down the steps to the bridges. Between the bridges I looked again at the small Newar pagoda of Bachhla Devi, the original shrine, so it is said, where in the days of Raja Sivadeva, a human sacrifice used to be offered up on Sivaratri, whilst fires were lit wherever there was a Siva image, after which there was a chariot procession of the goddess, his spouse.

On this day the pilgrims had no thought for the older temple, nor for the statue of Narayan which stands behind it and is said to have been made in a single night. They swarmed on, some across the bridges, others keeping to the right bank, many of them descending to the ghats to bathe themselves in the purifying waters before presenting themselves in front of their lord.

I crossed the upper of the two bridges and made my way through groups of people who were squatting round the remnants of a morning meal, to a terrace on which I found myself on the same level as a long row of *samadhi* or memorial shrines, erected by members of the Nepalese nobility. They were all exactly the same—square stone buildings some ten or twelve feet high, containing stone lingams with small stone bulls facing them, and in their repetitiveness they reminded me again of Japan, of the statues of Buddha repeated over and over again at the Shrines of Ise and the rows of stone lanterns at Miyajima in the Inland Sea.

From the vantage point of this terrace it was possible to watch in reasonable comfort the human stream surging up the steps to the large temple on the other side of the river. The water in the river was so low and the flow so sluggish that bathing was not easy. Consequently small earth dams had been scooped out of the river-bed in an attempt to form deeper pools, but even so there was no part where the level of the water came above the knees. Yet to gain the maximum benefit total immersion, as in baptism, was desirable. For the women it would have been an embarrassing problem were it not for the fact that the spirituality of the occasion overrides man-made considerations of modesty. Each is wrapped in her own aspirations as the precious fluid trickles over her bared body, and no one will cry "shame!"

After bathing, the pilgrims re clothed themselves and joined the queue for the temple, which was regulated by a number of officials, including some army officers and the king's personal secretary. Assisted by volunteers their method was to form human chains across the steps and approach terraces, cutting the crowd into separate groups with clear spaces in between. At intervals they would release a group and let it rush forward to the next human barrier, like opening the gates in a series of locks to allow the water to pour through, except that in this case the water was flowing up instead of down.

At the top of the steps the pilgrims squeezed through a doorway into the courtyard of the temple, sometimes struggling wildly in their enthusiasm to get in, but never beyond a certain point, never beyond the limit of their essential camaraderie, their brother to brother relationship in the adventure. Inside the courtyard they were again controlled, this time into a narrower queue to enter the sacred door.

The temple of Pashupatinath is a large, two-tiered pagoda, with gilded roofs and a silver-plated façade. It contains the lingam of Pashupati, which is three and a half feet high and has four faces sculptured on it where its circular stem bulges out into four sides. The face which is turned towards the south is the god under his pitiless aspect, the Aghora, and according to legend this face showed its terrible teeth to Mukunda Sen, a barbarian highlander who had invaded Nepal from Palpa in the thirteenth century. It let loose a pestilence upon his forces, which decimated them within a fortnight, and Mukunda Sen

fled, terrified. But he was too late. He himself fell dead before he could reach the Hills.

This story may be taken as a symbol of the political function of Pashupati in the kingdom. In the dim, distant past perhaps a herdsmen's totem, he became eventually the focal point of the state religion, in counterpoise to Machhendra, the protector of the common people, and his fame spread far and wide, right down to the deep south of India. The temple is strictly guarded against frivolous, non-Hindus, but anyone may see the huge, gilded bull, about five times life-size, which sits in the courtyard on the side farthest from the river, with the golden trident of Siva beside it.

It would not, perhaps, be guarded so suspiciously if the custodians were sure that those who applied to enter came in reverence and not in mockery, but it has been known for visitors to try disguising themselves in saris and to return to their hotels boasting rather wildly that they "got beyond the bull!"

As I was sitting on the parapet of the terrace watching the scene I have just described, I was accosted in a friendly, inquisitive manner by a young man dressed in a white shirt and khaki slacks, who asked me who I was and my business in the country. He was in a cheerful, holiday mood, and after I had answered him I took my turn at questions. He had come up from Calcutta with some friends, he said (they had now gathered round), and they were spending a few days in Nepal. How had he come? By the road, he said. He had already been to Puri and to Benares and to Hardwar and to Manasarowar, and now, this year, he had had a desire to come to this place.

"To Manasarowar?" I interjected. "Are you sure?"

"Yes," he said. "Yes. It was a long, long journey. Very cold. Very high mountains. It took many months."

"Did you have horses?" I asked.

"No," he said. "No horses. We had nothing but ourselves."

I looked at him closely. Was it true that this slightly-built youngster of the Plains had been on the longest and most difficult of all pilgrimages? If he had done so he seemed to think it nothing to boast about, and that alone appeared to indicate that his assertion was unfeigned. But the pilgrims are like that. They have no passports. They organize no complicated expeditions. Ever since time was, the pilgrims of India

have tramped up into the Himalayas to penetrate and be one with the mystic "Abode of Snow", have tramped into "forbidden" Nepal not even knowing it was a foreign land, let alone forbidden, and have tramped on beyond, up on to the roof of the world, counting themselves not unfortunate if they died on the way.

"I get special concession on the railway," said he, "because I work as railway clerk. I like to travel and see our country and visit our holy places. It is easy to get leave with medical certificate. My medical man is most obliging gentleman."

"And what is there to see in this temple here?" I asked.

"It is Pashupatinath," he said.

"But what is there to see?"

He hesitated, looked at one and another of his friends. "It is just one image," he said. "It is Pashupatinath."

"You have been?"

"Yes, we have been. We went early in the morning."

"And you have seen?"

"Yes, we have seen."

"What?"

"It is just the image. Not the real Pashupati, just the image."

"I understand," I said.

I could not press them further, beyond the inevitable reluctance to describe the mystery in the clear light of day. But the railway clerk's thirst for information was not exhausted.

"What is your salary, please?" he politely inquired.

"Enough to live on," I said.

"Tell me what it is. Is it a hundred rupees (about £8) a month?"

"A little more than that," I said.

"Two hundred rupees (£16)?"

"A little more."

His eyes began to goggle. "More than two hundred! Two hundred and fifty then (£20)? Three hundred (£24)!"

"Double it," I said, and to save further wonder on his part, I left it at that. To them I was rich, and it is an event to meet a rich man on equal terms, especially in the middle of a sort of bank holiday crowd. When I said I was going on to see the rest of the sights, the clerk determined to go with me. So together we went through the "wood of the deer", up between the

memorial shrines, which are the Hindu equivalent of a cemetery.

At the top of the hill stands the tallest samadhi shrine—a cigar-shaped sikra memorial to Maharaja Chandra Shamsher Jang Bahadur Rana, who died in 1929. His many titles, including Honorary General of the British Army, Honorary Colonel of the Fourth Gurkhas, and the Chinese T'ung-ling-ping-ma-kuo-kan-wang, are listed on the memorial tablet. The Chinese title is also a military one and means something like "Commander-in-Chief of the Forces, truly brave Lord".

Over the brow of the hill, once again on the bank of the Bagmati at the upper end of a tight loop in the river, stands the jealously-guarded sanctuary of Guheshwari, the "Secret Goddess", who is one of the particular guardian deities of Nepal. One of the legends has it that, in the reign of Pratap Malla, a Brahman from Tirhut (a district of North Bihar), who had repeated certain mantras for three years, came to Kantipur (Katmandu) and went to live at Panchalinga Bhairab (i.e. Pashupatinath). The Raja visited him there and gave him the title of guru (teacher). Walking to the north of the wood the guru decided that that was the spot where a goddess lived. So the Raja made his people dig a pool there, and sure enough the Goddess Guheshwari-Kali-Mahamaya appeared. Thereupon a temple was built and a prayer inscribed in Sanskrit on stone was put in it, which reads:

"Glory to Sri Sri Sri King of Kings Ramchandra of the Solar Race, whose descendant, Sri Pratap Malla, in order to secure his welfare, has erected a pillar, surmounted by a lion, in front of the temple which he has built and consecrated with burnt offerings and sacrifices."

Thus Guheshwari, the Secret Goddess—the Black One—the Great Mother, was to the older Malla dynasty what Pashupatinath is to the Shahs of the House of Gurkha. Yet the temple itself has a curiously modernistic look about it, because of the unusual arched construction of tubular furniture-like metal-work which surmounts the low building and supports four serpents at four separate corner points. This superstructure is modelled on the tantric yantra, or symbolic design, appropriate to Guheshwari, who herself is represented by the simple female symbol of the geometric triangle, being too secret to be overtly shown.



The clerk and I walked towards this temple, but they had seen me coming and closed the door, so we went back up the slope of the hill to a point from which we could look over the wall. It was not possible to see anything but the bare outlines of the place, however, so we slowly retraced our steps. Meanwhile my companion, with his back on Guheshwari, began to talk in the manner of modern India about the need for industrial development and the harnessing of natural resources and planned production. "This country is backward," said he. "We should make use of the mountains and get minerals out of them and use the power of the rivers and open up the communications."

"I believe they have plans for doing such things," I said.

"We should send more men here," he said, "men who know how to do these things and will not sit down and do nothing."

"We must see how they want to do things here," I said. "After all, this is not India."

"Why not India? It is part of India," he objected. "Of course it is part of India."

"Nepal is a separate country," I insisted.

"Ah yes, it may be. But it is part of India. Look! Are not all these people Indians?"

"They are, it is true, but this is a special occasion."

"Not special. Is not Pashupatinath part of India?"

Put that way it was, of course, true. The territory of Hinduism stretches from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin. It is finite, rooted in the soil, in its sacred rivers and their confluences, in its holy places and mountains and forests. To Hinduism Nepal is no less India than any of the former princely states, such as Rajputana and Mysore, which have now been absorbed into the Republic of India. The independence of Nepal was preserved by the Treaty of Sagauli, by her remoteness, and by the fact that, as a *quid pro quo* for being left intact, her rulers provided without fuss and bother a large number of first-class fighting men for the Indian Army. Now that modern life is encroaching on the country, there may be changes, but her present buffer position between India and the Chinese Empire may still preserve her identity.

"Many Indians are here already," I said, "doing their best for Nepal. Haven't you heard of the Kosi river dam near

Biratnagar in East Nepal? There they are making a huge dam across the river, which will stop the floods over East Bihar and North Bengal in the monsoon time and irrigate millions of acres of land in the dry season. There are Indians here with the army, too, giving military training, and Indian engineers building roads."

"That is a very good thing," the clerk said. "And all this nonsense of customs control and different money should be done away with too."

"But that means giving up their independence. It is up to the Nepalese to decide what they want."

"How do they know what they want?" the clerk said, gesturing excitedly. "Their best plan is to join in with India."

He was speaking as hundreds of thousands of others, flushed with the consciousness of their new great nation, speak. We are good and right, they say, therefore it is right to round off the rightness, to sandpaper off the rough edges, to bring all enclaves into the fold. Thus Goa, thus Kashmir, thus the Naga Hills—and thus Nepal. In self-defence Nepal is likely more and more to play the middle game between India and China, at the same time accepting aid from the United Nations, the U.S.A. and other countries, like Britain, which cannot possibly have territorial ambitions.

Our conversation was incongruous in this medieval setting, but typical of the modern trend of thought amongst the young, college-educated Indians of today. They still believe in their old gods with one part of their minds, but the other part is busy with the speculations of the technological age.

As we descended the steps back to the bridges, where I bade farewell to the Calcutta clerk, we turned off to the left to take a quick look at the small Ramchandra temple, which stands a few yards away from the steps. Unfortunately we were faced with a close-knit group of saddhus of the Siva-bhakti persuasion, dressed in loin-cloth and ashes, with their hair done up in topknots and animal skins thrown over their shoulders. They did not exactly block our way, but since we would have had to force a passage through the crowd of ashen bodies to get to the temple, we turned away.

The incident had an interesting sequel, however, for the thorough-going pilgrim not only visits Pashupatinath but also takes the opportunity of "doing" the Valley as well. The

Pilgrim's Guide-book lists no less than two thousand five hundred temples as being within the pilgrim's circuit in the Nepal Valley, and it was not to be expected that the saddhus would leave without at least visiting some of them. In fact I saw this particular band at the temple of Changu Narayan a few days later. It was in the middle of the afternoon. I had cycled out from Katmandu, past Bodhnath, across the Bagmati, up the deeply eroded gully alongside the enclosed forest of Gokarna, and down again to the Manohara river. There I had left my cycle on the ground floor of a house belonging to an old soldier and forded the river on foot, after which a stiff half-hour climb took me to the top of the hill on which the temple stands.

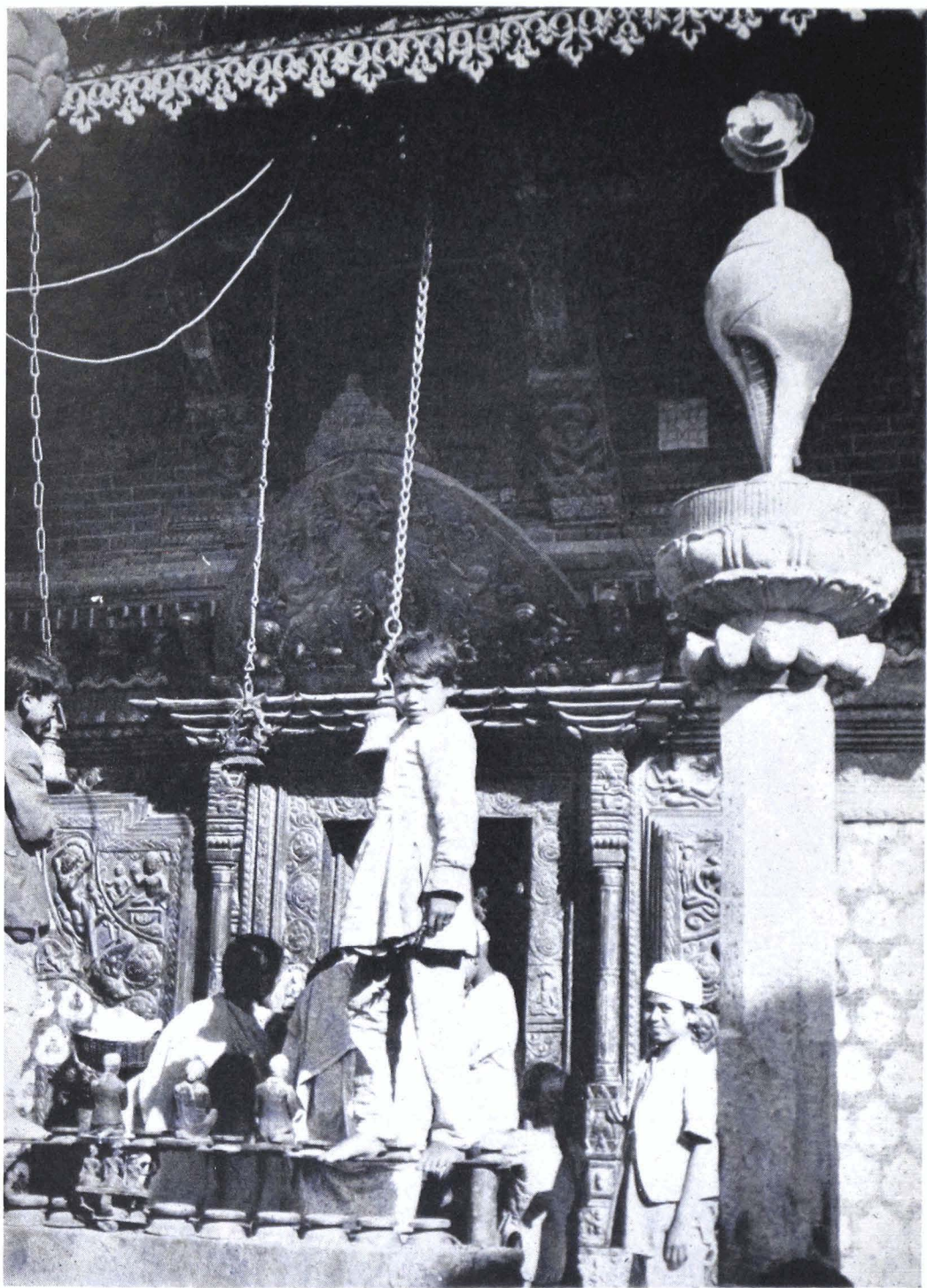
Changu Narayan is the least visited and perhaps the most rewarding of all the temples around Katmandu. It is magnificently sited on the steep extremity of a ridge, which juts far out into the Valley from its eastern rim, and is reached up a long flight of steps. It is a two-storied pagoda of the usual Newar form in very good repair, with the *chakra*, or wheel, and *sanka*, or conch-shell, of Vishnu mounted on pillars to the left and right of the gilded entrance to the shrine. The sanctum of the temple contains a complicated work in bronze showing Lokeshwar mounted on Vishnu, who stands on Garuda, the eagle, who is entwined in the coils of the snake, Taksuka Nag, and is, in turn, perched on a griffin.

The door was locked and I was unable to see this fantastic work of art, though I had already seen its twin in the National Museum near Swayambhunath. The pujari was not present, nor was the caretaker willing to unlock it for me, so I could only turn away to admire the view. It was at this point that the saddhus arrived, tired after a four-mile tramp from Bhadgaun. They paced about the temple courtyard looking here and there, examined the inscription on one of the pillars which records the warlike exploits of Manadeva, but did not read it, and peered at the lesser shrines, both Hindu and Buddhist. Then they came to me.

"Sahib, kindly be good enough to instruct these people to open the temple door. We have come far and do not wish to go away without a view."

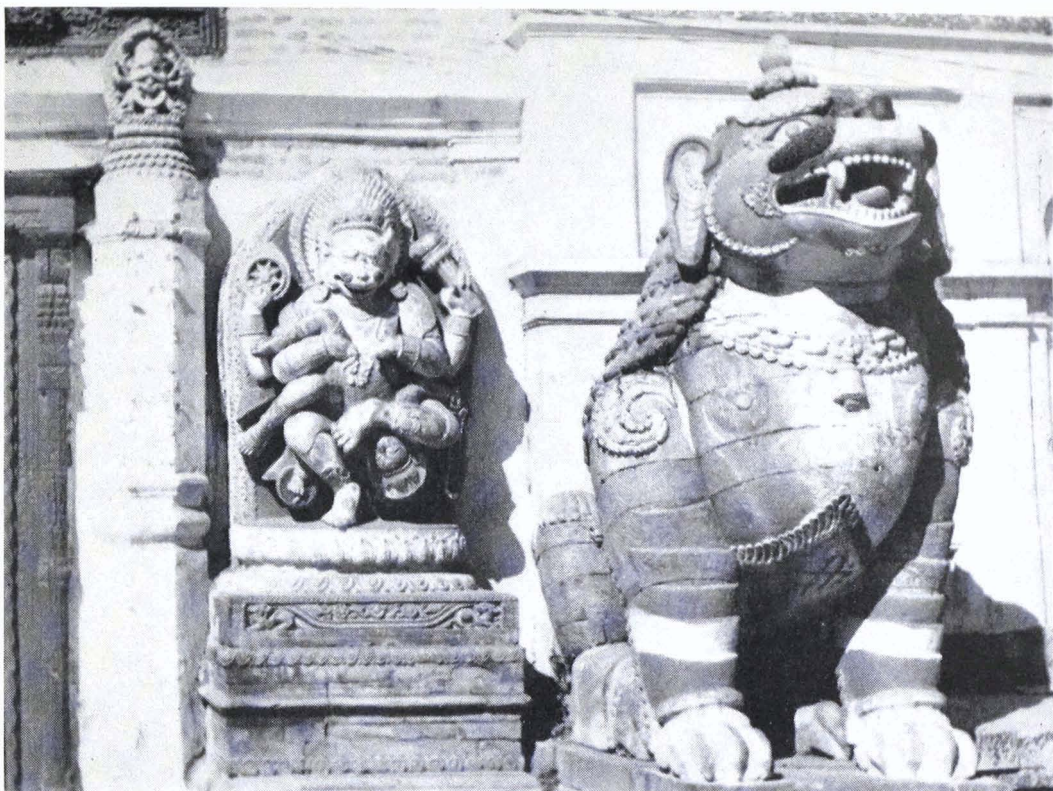
I had to explain that I had no power to do so.

"But they will do it for you, Sahib, if you wish it."

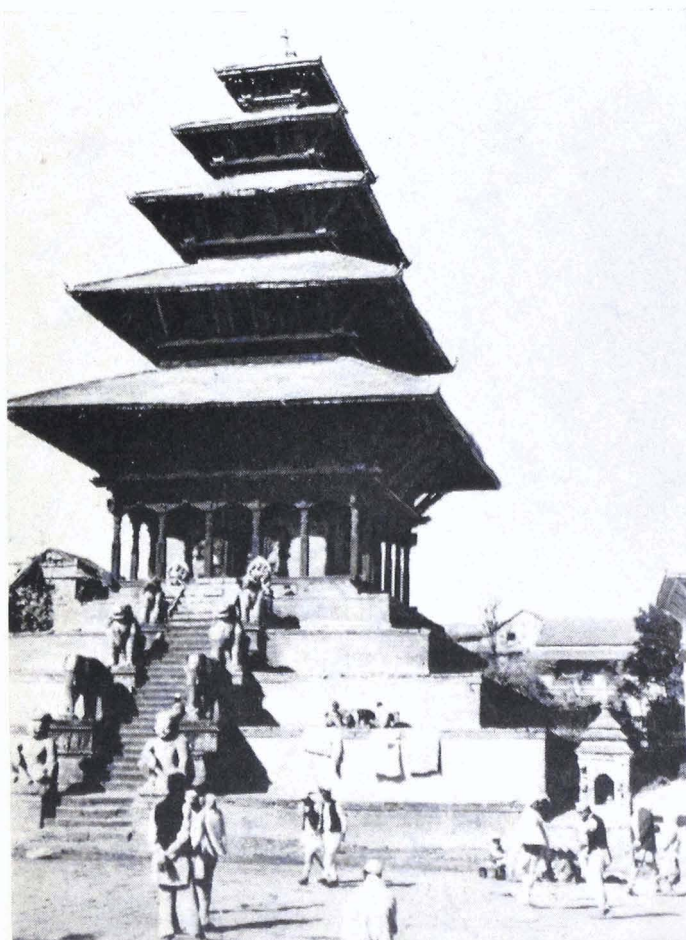


Ring the bell to call the god, Bhadgaun. The conch-shell of Vishnu, with the tantric symbols behind





(Above) The door-keepers at Bhadgaun: ' . . . lion-like in strength and dog-like in obedience . . . Nar-sinh eviscerating his foolhardy victim . . . '



(Left) The five-tiered Nyatpola Pagoda in Bhadgaun

“They will not do it,” I said. “I have asked.”

“Ah, they are wild men! If not for us, then they must do it for you, Sahib!”

Indeed the tradition of the Sahib dies hard!

# 7

## *The Bhairab of Bhaktapur*

DUE EAST from Katmandu, eight miles along the road that the Mount Everest expedition took in 1953, stands Bhadgaun, or Bhaktapur, the third of the former city states of the Nepal Valley.

The rush and bustle of that Himalayan caravan, squeezing its way through the narrow cobbled streets, is now forgotten and Bhadgaun sleeps again, its former splendour gradually decaying with the years. Although it has a population of eighty thousand or more, mostly Newars, since the Gurkha conquest its status has diminished to that of a district centre, away from the main stream of life which flows through Katmandu, and visited by foreigners only in brief day trips by jeep from the capital, there being no convenient accommodation for an overnight stay.

Yet the former princely magnificence of the city is still there for all to see, crystallized for the present age and ages yet to come in the golden king, Raja Bhupatindra Malla, perched on top of his twenty foot pillar like an eternal pole-squatter, a regal Saint Simeon Stylites, in the middle of the Darbar Square. And facing the king is the golden doorway to his palace, a masterpiece of the metalworker's art, the equal of which is not to be seen anywhere in the East, or indeed, in the world, except perhaps in Italy on Ghiberti's bronze doors to the Baptistery in Florence. Here, in high relief on either side of the door, stand the strange tantric gods and goddesses, each on his own pedestal, whilst above, in a great flame-shaped tympanum embellished with monsters of land and sea of marvellous intricacy, stands the many-armed, many-headed representative of Kali herself, a curiously elegant figure, whose dress looks oddly like a ballet-dancer's skirt and whose garland of heads could almost be a stole.

When I first visited this Darbar Square I had, in some sense, already been prepared for it by previous experience in Kat-

mandu and Patan. The king forever holding audience on his pillar, the great bell, the drums, the group of royal pagodas, the Radha-Krishna temple of Mogul design, the "chindit" doorkeepers wearing dog-collars with bells attached, lion-like in strength and dog-like in obedience, Narsinh eviscerating his foolhardy victim, all these were also to be seen in Patan. But here, in place of the market bustle, a deep silence hung over everything, a stillness as if all were just as the Malla king had left it, not centuries but days ago, only waiting for the dust to be blown away in order to function again.

As in Katmandu so in Bhadgaun there is a Palace Square and a Market Square—a King's Square, as it were, and a People's Square. In Bhadgaun the People's Square is on a slightly lower level, quite separate from the King's Square and much larger, an open quadrangle unencumbered by temples or other buildings. The paved quadrangle is spacious, as befits the central piazza of a city, but its size is overshadowed by the two massive pagodas which fill two of its four sides. One is solid, rectangular, three-tiered, with grass growing on two of its three roofs, and the other is a tall, spindly building with no less than five roofs, elevated on a high plinth of five terraces, and looking as precarious as a pile of children's blocks waiting for one more for the whole tower to collapse.

Thus runs the Chronicle of Kings :

"Bhupatindra Malla built a three-storied temple and placed in it a Bhairab for the protection of the country. But the Bhairab gave much trouble, so he consulted the wise men, who said that if the God of the Tantra Shastra were placed near him he would be appeased. He therefore built a five-storied temple with a flight of steps and images of lions, griffins, elephants Jaya Malla and Phatta Malla. When the temple was finished he secretly placed in it the God of the Tantra Shastra, who rides on Yamaraj (King of the Underworld), whom no one is supposed to see and who is kept hidden. After this the Bhairab was quiet."

True enough, there it stands, this five-storied pagoda called variously Nyatpola in the Newar language and Panchtala in Nepali. There, on the lowest terrace, are Jaya Malla and Phatta Malla, the two giant champions of the Bhadgaun raja. Above them are two elephants, ten times as strong. Above the elephants are the lions, said to be ten times as strong again,



and above them the griffins, in popular imagination ten times as strong as the lions. On the final terrace, the top of this geometrical progression of strength, stand the goddesses, Baghini and Singhini (Tigress and Lioness), ten times as strong as the mythical beasts.

So far so good, and does the God of the Tantra Shastra live within? That I cannot say. When I climbed to the top of the steps I found the door solidly barred, with no chinks through which one might see inside. It was what I had expected, and no help was forthcoming from any of the citizens. In this matter of the Tantras they are reticent in the extreme, yet it may be as well here to go into a slight digression and try to give some sort of an answer to the questions, "What is a Bhairab?" and "Who is the God of the Tantra Shastra?" for both Bhairabs and Tantras loom large in the life and letters of Nepal.

The fact is that the Bhairabs and their female counterparts, Bhairavi, have no place at all in the orthodox Hindu cosmogony as expounded in the Vedas. They are destructive and usually malevolent powers with strictly limited parishes under their control. Thus each town and village has its Bhairab as Christian places have their saints, with this difference—that the saint is appealed to in the goodness of his nature, whereas the Bhairab is generally placated in his malevolence.

Nevertheless, however independent these powers may have been in their demoniacal aboriginal state, they are now embraced in the Hindu scheme of things. They represent Siva, the Destroyer and Reproducer, in his destructive aspect, and are shown like Siva's consort, Kali—the female more terrible than the male—with a garland of heads and upraised weapon. This is the usual form of the Bhairab, but not the only one, for Bhairab and Bhairavi, in the loose application of the words and particularly in Nepal, have come to mean any local god or goddess, be it tiger spirit or wooden doll fetish or many-armed giant. And not only in Hinduism, as Siva's vassals, are the Bhairabs to be found, but also in Buddhism as, for instance, Bishwarup Bhairab, the "Universal Form", and the Bhadgaun Bhairab already mentioned.

The God of the Tantra Shastra must be Siva too, for he is the Mahadeo, the Great God, of those medieval religious writings known as the Tantra Shastras, from which the tantric practices were derived. In the tantric scheme the female power, or

Shakti, embodying the active female mate of the quiescent male, is all-important, and the female is to be worshipped rather than the male. Furthermore the Vayu Purana, the "Old Scripture of the Wind", explains that not only was Siva of a two-fold nature, male and female, but also his female nature became two-fold—white and black. In tantric Hinduism the white, or mild, nature is left on one side, and the black, or fierce, nature is the one to be reckoned with. This black nature is Kali, the "Black One" or Durga. Indeed this latter day and age of ours is designated the Kali Yuga, in which but one quarter of the stock of righteousness of the original Shruti Yuga remains. The left-hand worshippers, who are followers of the Kaulo Panishad and the Tantras, devote themselves especially to the worship of Kali, not as Siva's wife, but as the goddess who presides over sexual intercourse and the acquisition of magical powers.

This is tantric Hinduism—a worship of force and the placation of female energies. Tantric Buddhism has borrowed the idea from Hinduism and added a sixth Divine Buddha, Vajrasatwa Buddha, to its five. This sixth, apochryphal Buddha's symbol is the vajra, or thunderbolt, and his Shakti controls power like Kali. Her rites are held in secret and bear little resemblance to the serene resignation of Gotama Buddha, the Enlightened One.

In the Bir Library at Katmandu there are hundreds of priceless manuscripts of the Tantras, for when the Moslems burst into the degenerating Hindu India of the later Middle Ages men sent the sacred texts into the Himalayas for safe keeping. The manuscript parchments, preserved between their board covers, are kept in red bags like post-office mail, and the librarian will take a selection from the shelves to show you. Very little of the Sanskrit has yet been translated into English and still less of the local Newari. One gazes at the heavy devanagari script and wonders what mysteries and strange rites are written there, whilst the painted illuminations of the text only serve to sharpen the curiosity. The old paintings, however, leave no doubt as to some of the matters with which tantric Buddhism is concerned. These large pictures, done in colour wash on paper, are as plain and clear as a medical diagram.

All was quiet in the square of the Bhadgaun Bhairab as I stood there on the warm March afternoon of my first visit. Though theoretically of Buddhist pedigree, the Bhairab's

pagoda differed little in outward appearance from a Hindu temple to Siva Mahadeo. Only to the experienced eye would the stone eyes and the stone pairs of gesturing hands, and the tiny image of Bishwarup with the peephole behind it, and the equally tiny seated Buddhas set as corner pieces in the façade indicate that its place belonged in the Buddhist pantheon.

All was quiet, too, on the opposite side of the square, where the timbers of the Bhairab's chariot lay stored in their own chariot-house. All was quiet in the streets, hemmed in by their three and four-storied brick houses—so quiet that in many of them the women had put up rows of sticks between which they were stretching out their yarn to dry, walking from one end to the other of a fifty foot long fence and unravelling the product of the spindle on the way. All was quiet with the women at the well amongst their earthenware pitchers, and the women washing clothes in a very dirty pond.

I walked on over the uneven cobbles and in and out of a quiet vihara, looked at the crumbling brick of the tall houses, the grass growing high on their tiled roofs, gazed at the deeply weathered carving of the window lattices and the faded frescoes of the Five Buddhas and other symbols over the doors, saw the people single-minded at their trades—hammering, weaving, fashioning things, four or five sitting on the floor of a small room—and the peasant in from the fields and the priest in his profession, and I seemed to be back in the Middle Ages—except that there was no king.

All was not quiet, however, on the far side of the town, where the three-storied temple called Dattatraya, or Three Heads, stands with its two giant guardians and tall Garuda pillars, facing a rather dilapidated Bhimsen temple across a small square. A considerable number of people were gathered in this square watching the antics of a group of ten or twelve naked men.

These men were camped actually on the temple steps and inside the building. They were tall men by comparison with the local bystanders and bore the mark of Siva on their foreheads. Their pilgrim staffs and bundles lay on the ground, together with some coarse cotton clothing, for they had not braved the Chandragiri Pass entirely without covering. The local populace had come out of their houses to see these unusual visitors from the Plains, for naked saddhus are not common in the coolness of the Hills.

The naked ones were not doing anything in particular. In fact they were not convincing as true "nanga saddhu" for they were very conscious of themselves. A number of them were ostentatiously playing with their clothing, putting it on and taking it off again, strutting about the while in pure exhibitionism. The unsmiling citizens watched in silent disapproval, whilst the women of Bhadgaun, if any passed, ignored their existence with that capacity for inwardness and indifference to outward phenomena which is characteristic of the women of the Indies.

My appearance on the scene seemed to spur the naked ones to redoubled efforts to "épater les bourgeois" and foolish grins spread across their faces beneath their wild, uncombed black hair. They pranced about to show their naked bodies, which incidentally looked well-formed and in the pink of condition, healthy and hardened to cold. The citizens now looked at me with the new interest of seeing what my reactions would be to the introduction of nudism into their respectable city square.

I observed the scene with British sang-froid and prepared my camera to take a photograph. Anticipating some antagonism I announced that I wanted to photograph the Dattatraya temple, in front of which they were standing. Their grins, however, merely increased in breadth, and thereupon they lined up in all their glory as for a college group or hockey-team picture and invited me, with a kind of brash insolence, to snap away.

This I did, and at the same time I could not help reflecting that the one thing that had never occurred to any of the on-lookers was to call a policeman to clear these intruders away. This is undoubtedly what would have happened in the Western world. But in the East people think differently. Who knows whether these men may not be right to show their loyalty to Siva in this way? Who knows whether it might not be dangerous to cross swords with them, not only physically but also supernaturally? Who knows who is right and who is wrong? In India those whom the West would regard as mental cases can always find a sect to sanctify their passions and queer quirks. We imprison the members of our society who do not conform, behind the spiked walls of an asylum. In India they roam at large. Only when they take to violence or murder or eating babies does the law take a hand.

"It is universal, is it not?" As I closed my camera, unable to

photograph the Dattatraya without its human adornment, I heard a voice at my side.

"It is all universal." The voice, I saw, belonged to a thick-set, tousle-haired man who was dressed in Nepali breeches below, European jacket and tie above.

"You also have your naked people, is it not? Also in photographs?"

"That is true," I said. "We have our naked people, but they usually remain in private."

"Quite so," he replied. "It is better. These people here are not our people. They have come from abroad."

"So I thought."

"My name is Shreshta," he said. "I see you are interested in our city. May I show you our chief places of interest?"

"I have been looking at some of them," I said.

"You have seen our principal temples, I suppose."

"I have indeed."

"It is universal, is it not?"

"What is?"

"The desire for religion."

"I suppose so," I conceded.

"But we are very keen on education also in Bhadgaun," he said. "I myself am in the profession of education. That, of course, is nowadays universal too, is it not?"

"Excuse me. What exactly . . .?"

"The desire for education. The desire is nowadays so strong that we are unable to satisfy it altogether. All the people want to be educated, but they do not wish to pay the expenses of the education."

"That is universal too," I said. "School teachers are always badly paid."

"Nevertheless for the love of knowledge we press forward. We carry the torch with us. Let us take a walk."

"By all means," I agreed.

We had already turned away from the naked ones and were leaving the Dattatraya square. Under the gaze of the citizens Mr. Shreshta walked beside me with a proprietary air. Apostle of the modern scientific age, he wore no Bhadgauni hat or tunic and cloth belt. Down to the waist his dress was of modern European city style, but from the waist downwards it was the old mode still.

“We have night school too,” he said. “Night school is always crowded. It is also difficult for the students to get books and equipment.”

“That is true everywhere in Nepal,” I said.

His words brought to my mind a picture of the Ratri Pathsala, or night school, I had visited in Katmandu, which is accommodated in an old vihara. You went off the road at Naksal and past a large pond containing a snake’s head on top of a tall wooden pillar. Then you entered the narrow doorway of the vihara, and the school was on two sides of the court, on the upper floors. The rooms were low-ceilinged, like those of the original buildings of the old grammar schools of England, and walls and floors were bare. About fifty students, in each of three classes—teen-age lads for the most part, but with a fair sprinkling of older men amongst them—sat at closely packed desks in the light of a few dim electric-light bulbs. In the principal’s office there was a petromax, which gave out a much better light and could be carried about along the dark, unlighted passages. And all these students listened with solid, determined attention to the teacher, making themselves disciples of the dispenser of knowledge. In Bhadgaun, where there is no electricity, it would be petromax or kerosene lanterns only.

“What do you teach in the night school?” I asked.

“We teach all subjects,” he said, “but mostly they want to learn English.”

“English?”

“It is universal, is it not? He who knows English can know about the modern world, so they think. English is the universal language of the modern world.”

“You don’t teach arts and crafts and hygiene and practical subjects?”

Mr. Shreshta nodded his head up and down to signify the negative. “It would be a great thing to teach the practical subjects,” he said, “but we have no equipment. The students wish to gain knowledge and to pass examinations, so we must carry out their wishes.”

“There is a big scheme now to open schools for practical education all over Nepal,” I said.

“I have heard something about that,” he said. “But we have not seen anything of it yet here in Bhaktapur. There was also the scheme for the Basic Schools before the World War. Some

of the Basic Schools are still in existence, but there is not enough money for the tools and equipment."

"Let us hope the new scheme will be more successful," I said. "The Americans are also helping with money and advice."

"The Americans are wealthy people. They can help much," Mr. Shreshta said. "At the same time we must also help ourselves. We must not depend on foreign people. That is universal, is it not? Each country must help himself."

As we talked we had been walking at a brisk pace down towards the Hanumante river, which flows south of the city westwards to join the Bagmati. The road led to the burning ghats at the outskirts of the town, and to the river bridge across which it is possible to motor another eight miles over the Sanga Pass to Banepa, and if the track is not breached by rains, on to Dhulikhel in the Province of No. 1 East.

Standing amongst the monuments of the ghats we looked out over the fields, where the winter corn was growing green and tall in gentle terraces up to the top of the pass, then back at the reddish-grey roofs and walls of the city, at the houses crowded together, not to keep within a city wall but to leave the maximum growing-space for the life-giving grain, and at the roofs of the pagodas raised above the houses against the background of the hills, beyond which, here and there, could be seen the snows. The city seemed to be a living entity of its own, a natural growth from out of the soil it stood on and in the close embrace of the fields of corn that surrounded it. It seemed impossible that it could ever be transformed into a modern town.

"It is universal," said Mr. Shreshta.

"What is?" I said, again mystified.

"Death."

"That is true."

"Here the body is burnt, but the soul is reborn. Who knows where the soul may be reborn?"

"Tell me," I said suddenly. "Do you believe in Bhairabs?"

Mr. Shreshta hesitated. It was like asking a sensitive child if he believes in ghosts. He knows he is not supposed to believe in them, and yet he does.

"Bhairab means God, does it not?" he said.

"Each town and village has its own Bhairab, isn't that so?"

"It is true," he said slowly. "But there is one God over all. That is scientific. One God. That is universal."

“Then these Bhairabs are not important?”

“Not to say they are not important. Some of them are powerful.”

“But if you are modern and scientific?”

“So many people believe in them. So that gives them power. It is like a king and his subjects, is it not? The more subjects the king has, the more powerful he is. We must not be too rash with these Bhairabs. Let us go slowly and gradually they will lose their power.”

“Then you must believe in them.”

“Not to say, believe in them. But we must be careful. Some are dangerous.”

“And you offer sacrifices to the dangerous ones?”

“Many offer sacrifices. They do not wish them to become angry. They wish to please them. Some are more dangerous than others. Our Bhaktapur Bhairab is not dangerous, I am glad to say. You will come to the procession next month—the Bhairab Jatra?”

“I hope so,” I said. “But what Bhairabs are dangerous then?”

“All Bhairabs *can* be dangerous,” Mr. Shreshta said, “if they are not looked after properly. But some want more than others.”

“Human sacrifices?”

“It is possible. I do not know. There is one place, Harisiddhi, where the Bhairab is dangerous. There they say . . . sometimes . . . it is necessary . . . but it is not permitted . . . on a certain night some person will be walking in the road and he will come to know in his mind that he must go to the temple. . . . No one will tell him, but he will come to know. . . . And in the middle of the night he will go. . . . And it will be known that he is the one that the Bhairab has chosen. . . . And they will keep him there until the proper time when the Bhairab demands him. . . . But whether these things happen thus I cannot say. A man may disappear for many different reasons. It is universal, is it not?”

“People do disappear,” I agreed.

“Your Abraham wished to sacrifice his own son, is it not?”

“In the end he did not do so.”

“So, it is not a good thing. With scientific knowledge we will be able to avoid such things. Fortunately our Bhairab here is not of a dangerous character. You will see.”

“I hope I shall,” I said.

We walked back through the quiet streets up the hill to the



Darbar Square, and there I mounted my borrowed jeep and said good-bye to Mr. Shreshta, leaving him standing on the deserted flagstones beneath the golden king, with the warm afternoon sun smiling down.

It was the end of April when I went to Bhadgaun again, and the hot sun of India had already overtaken us in our Valley in the Hills. Dust from the wheels of many vehicles hung in thick clouds over the Bhadgaun road. Indeed the traffic was so heavy that we found it impossible to get beyond the large square artificial lake called Siddha Pokhri, which stands within its upraised embankments at the threshold of the city. Rattletrap buses, lorries, jeeps, jalopies and bicycles came thick and fast, and our own jeep was jammed tight with a party of five, plus three literal hangers-on, not including the driver. For this day was the festival of the Bhairab, and both the Bhairab and his city were on show.

Leaving the jeep we walked with the noisy crowd—myself, an anthropologist from London University, the editor of a Newari newspaper and his reporter, and another anthropologist from the New York Museum of Natural History. This time we passed quickly through the Darbar Square and into one of the streets on the other side. I thought we were going straight down to the Bhairab temple, but before reaching the “People’s Square” our editor led us off the street into an enclosed courtyard, which formed the auditorium for an open-air stage.

There were about a hundred people—men and women—sitting on the chairs facing the boards at the further end. Others were standing at the back amongst a continual movement in and out, and still more people were looking out of the windows of the surrounding houses. At the time of our entry a girl was standing on the stage reciting a poem. We were shown to seats at the front and introduced to the organizers of the entertainment amidst a general stir of conversation. The poetess continued, however, raising her voice a little louder than before.

It was a programme of Newar poetry and drama that we had been brought to see, and I was interested by what appeared to be something of a renaissance of Newari literature. I had been told that during the rule of the Gurkha Ranas it had been impossible to publish newspapers or literature in Newari in Nepal, and that now that freedom of speech for the Newars had been regained there was a new flowering of Newari poetic art.

This curious language, which is spoken only by the inhabitants of the Nepal Valley and those Newars who have spread through the rest of the kingdom as merchants and craftsmen, is akin to Tibetan and quite unlike Nepali. Consequently I understood not a single word of what was being declaimed. Nevertheless, as soon as the poetess had descended from the stage, the young and vigorous master of ceremonies took her place, announced the presence of myself and my friends, and said that I was going to make a speech.

It was a touching gesture, indicative of the desire for status and for recognition by the outside world of the Newar community, which is now a definite political factor in the state. There is a feeling of having been buried and forgotten for nearly two hundred years, and of emerging now into the light of day. This does not mean that they have come out of slavery into freedom, for many Newars, like the Jews in Europe, made money and lived well by their lights under the old régime, but it does mean that as the actual inhabitants of the Valley—as the rice-farmers and toilers and merchants—they feel they can now raise their voices in their own land.

I declined to make a speech, which could well be reported in the paper and align me in public opinion with this particular group, and so the programme continued. The next item was a dramatic song in praise of the Jyapu—the Newar peasant farmer. It was performed by four or five young men armed with hoes and sickles, with a line from one, a response from another, and then all together for the rousing chorus. The whole thing went with a stirring swing. For one who could not understand the words, however, it went on too long, and I began to look around me. So doing I saw, against the wall to one side, the tousled head of Mr. Shreshta.

He was looking in my direction, and when our eyes met he felt the need to come across and talk to me. His head jerked forward in recognition, and simultaneously his legs moved him from the back of the court to the back of the chair on which I was sitting. He leaned over as I twisted round to face him.

“It is universal, of course,” he said. “You enjoy the drama?”

“It is interesting,” I said, “but unfortunately I do not understand the words.”

“Not so much like Mr. Shakespeare.”

“But very like Shakespeare in some ways,” I said. “In a

courtyard in the open-air on a stage with people on three sides of it. Very like Shakespeare.”

Since there had been no recognition between them I then introduced Mr. Shreshta to my companions. There were brief acknowledgements, rather perfunctory on the part of the newspapermen, who regarded themselves as persons of consequence and influence in society, after which my acquaintance had to be accommodated. No chair was vacant in our row, and no one wished to move for him, yet he himself seemed to be physically unable to make up his mind to take his leave. So there he stood, behind my chair, like some old faithful retainer, but feeling more and more conspicuous as the minutes passed. I could hear his breathing growing heavier and see his hands perspiring.

Mr. Shreshta was put out of his temporary embarrassment when the decision was finally made to leave the play. I was afraid we would be missing the festival of the Bhairab and had been growing more and more impatient, hinting as forcibly as I could that the mere action of the drama was hardly intelligible without an understanding of the words. But this visit to the outward proof of a Newar renaissance was part of the editor's programme for us and had to be more than a simple dropping in and out. Hence nearly an hour had gone by before we actually moved.

Out in the town once more we were again in the thick of the crowd. Streets which on my previous visit had been taken over by the women for stringing out their yarn to dry, were now thronged with people, and we drifted with them rather than made our way along. Mr. Shreshta stuck with us in the stream, which flowed downhill between buildings and round a corner to a point where, like an estuary, it spread out over the open side of the hill on which the city stands, with the buildings receding to the left and right, like the banks of a river opening out on to the plain.

The estuary was a white and black moving mass, thick with men, but entirely lacking the colour normally provided by the women. At its broad end, which was furthest from us at the bottom of the hill, there stood a tall pole, at least seventy feet high, called Bishwat Danda, the Pole of the Universe. The pole's great height could be gauged from its dwarfing effect on the figures below it. Eight or ten feet from the top there was a crosspiece, which made it look like a giant Christian cross. In

fact there is an old tale which relates that, when the Capuchin friars came into Nepal in the early eighteenth century, they entered the Valley from the east. When they saw the Pole of the Universe at Bhadgaun, they exclaimed in wonderment, thinking the people must already be Christians.

When the friars looked closer they must have been disillusioned, for hanging from the intersection of the cross was a long banner, such as one often sees in Tibet—a *thang-ka* adorned with tempera paintings of the Mahayana Buddhist divinities. It hung vertically away from the pole, which was considerably inclined, and swayed a little in the hot air, not quite reaching the hats of the heads below. To the left of the pole, surrounded by the crowd, stood the wooden chariot of the Bhairab, which had been dragged there by human hands from the People's Square.

At the top, narrow end of the estuary a brass band had been assembled, and below it there were chairs laid out for civic dignitaries and important visitors. The Chief of Police was there, and a number of officers of the Armed Police, which now forms a third force in the country between the Army and the Civilian Police—also a group of municipal officials. Their ladies were accommodated on the balcony above.

Our group was spewed out of the crowd into this small oasis, where seats were found for us. We sat down expecting something to happen, some item on the programme to begin, but of course there was no visible "programme" for the festival. The Bhairab was out for his airing, and the people were assisting, in the French sense of the word *assister*, "to be present". The time was filled in by talk and by the sense of being there with the crowd. Even the band was not inclined to play.

Mr. Shreshta was still with us as we sat down, and there was chair enough for him, but now he, himself, would not take one. He became very much the humble schoolmaster, out of place amongst so many exalted personages, not daring to sit amongst them. But still he could find no formula with which to leave us for a place in which he might feel better at ease, and so he again stood behind me as at the theatre show, relishing the importance which he fancied his contact with me gave him, yet ill at ease outside the circle of his own associates—and panting and perspiring more and more heavily.

I felt sorry for him, and as I watched the vast, moving crowd

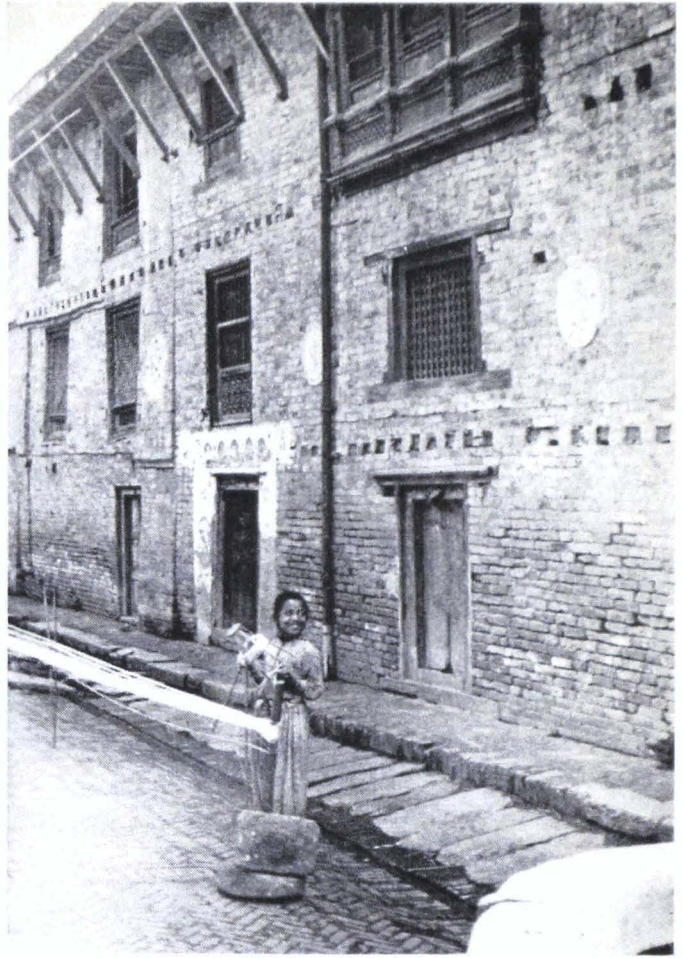
I could not help thinking it was all rather unfair. Your perfect traveller, your visitor from a foreign land, comes without caste and without social status. Seeking only to observe and understand, to be friendly and to be liked, he hobnobs with prince and peasant, or in this case with government official and schoolmaster, alike. The peasant comes to regard him as his friend. The prince is also friendly. But what happens when he meets the prince and the peasant on one and the same occasion? The peasant comes running towards him with open arms, but at the same moment the prince beckons him to the vacant seat in his carriage. Which way does your perfect traveller turn?

There are endless variations on this theme. In Nepal it is easy enough to be friendly with Gurkha officer or Newar scholar, but another matter to make the two mix. A further social problem is created by the large increase in the number of European and American visitors to Nepal. They have become too many to be automatically offered a place amongst the V.I.P.s. Some of them must of necessity stay out in the crowd. But who knows who should have a place in preference to whom? As we sat there in our oasis we saw another group of European acquaintances being jostled along the stream. They waved and started to make towards us, claiming us as partners in adventure. But our little haven was small, with no room for anyone else. We put on wooden faces till they had turned away and gone on down with the tide.

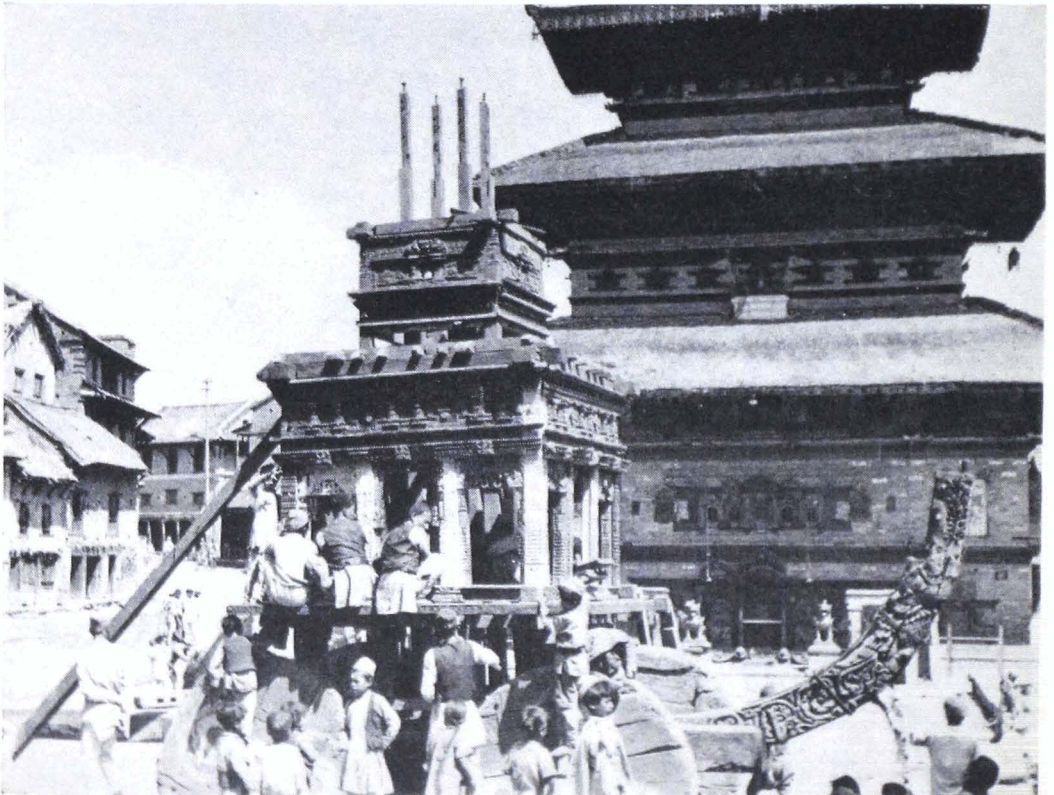
I felt a little bit hot under the collar for Mr. Shreshta, and there seemed no sense in just sitting on in one place, so without giving anyone time to object, I launched myself back into the current and allowed myself to be swept down towards the pole and the chariot. I glanced back to see the other foreigners of our party following, but the Nepalese members of our group had not moved, except for Mr. Shreshta, who had melted out of sight.

The chariot, which was built as a three-tiered pagoda some twenty-five feet high, was resting stationary on its four wheels of solid wood on a slight incline. Instead of being thickest in its immediate neighbourhood, the crowd was appreciably thinner as though people were not quite happy about going too close to it. Some few yards away, at the top of the incline and between the chariot and the mighty pole, stood a small single-roofed pagoda with bricked-in walls, and sitting on its terrace

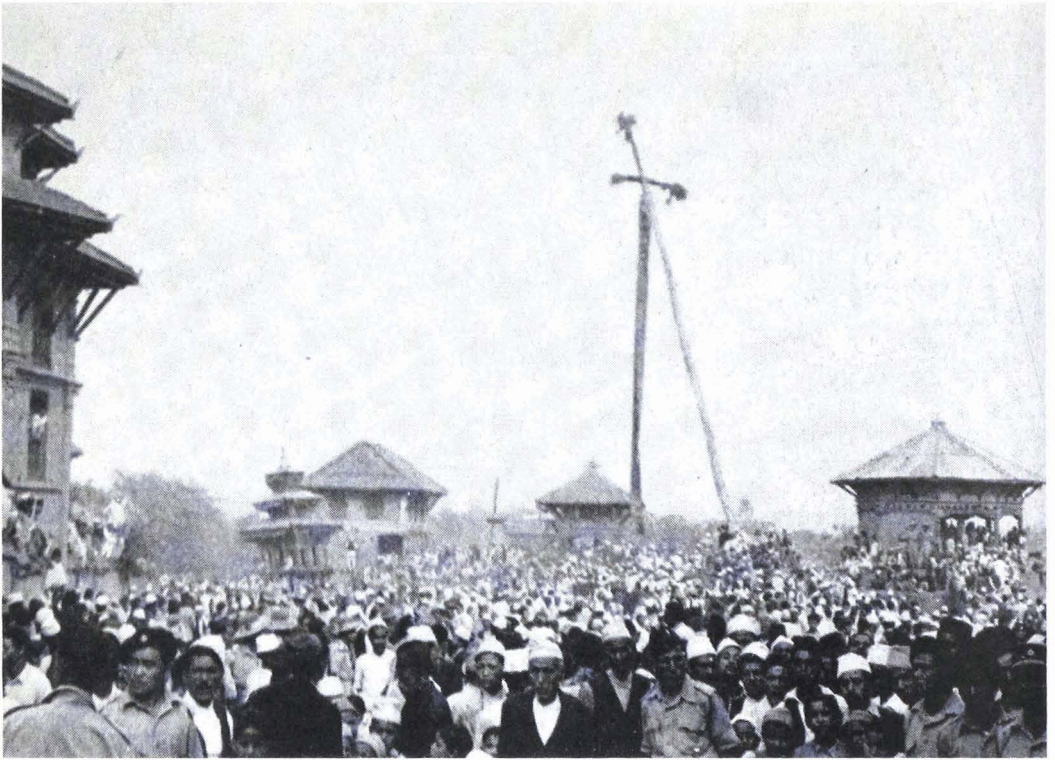
(Right) Drying out the yarn in a Bhadgaun street



(Below) Building the bhairab's chariot at Bhadgaun







The great cross rising above the crowds at the festival of the bhairab of Bhadgaun



The purvanga ceremony: the high priest places the *tika* on the forehead of the King of Nepal; the pressmen watch

were the conductors of the Bhairab, the hereditary officiators of the Gubajiu caste, dressed in the flowing white robe of the Newars, which is exactly what one imagines a temple priest should wear, and the hat, which is shaped exactly like that of a Roman Catholic curate but is white instead of black. The Gubajius were sitting quite informally, garlanded with flowers, amongst other men dressed in their workaday garb. They looked up when I approached, but showed no particular interest. They seemed to be waiting—waiting for the Bhairab to finish his affairs at this particular stage and pass on to the next. I was struck by their air of inactivity, of lack of excitement or exaltation, almost of disinterestedness. It was as if they were as well used to looking after their old Bhairab as they were to making old grandad comfortable in the sleeping-corner, as if they had played their part in this old play so many times that they did not have to think about the acting any more.

But at the chariot itself the atmosphere was subtly different. There were a number of brawny young men near it—the pullers and pushers of the vehicle—and when a camera was produced and bared for action a murmur of disapproval started. It grew with frightening rapidity and was augmented with shouts and waving of hands until the camera was safely shut away in its case again. Close to the massive wooden vehicle, first cousin to the Jaggernaut chariot of Puri, one felt a tension, a powerful presence, perhaps communicated through the unquiet eyes of the crowd, perhaps arising out of the knowledge of their worship of the god, as if there really were something up there on the high platform above the wooden wheels, something hidden, yet exerting influence. They thought that the eye of the camera would distract that influence either by taking something of it or by antagonizing it. And who can call them wrong?



## 8

### *The Day After Tomorrow*

IF THERE is one word in the Nepali language heard more frequently than another, it is the word "parisi", which means literally "the day after tomorrow". It is a word beloved of civil servants, as might be expected, but it is also a general favourite in this Ruritania, where time has not yet achieved that exact and inimical significance which it possesses in modern industrial conurbations.

Parsi is a word that has caused many an honest and conscientious adviser of the United States Operations Missions of the "Point Four" Organization for Assistance to Underdeveloped Countries to tear his hair. Such a man flies up from Calcutta or Delhi three or four days out from the States bursting with "get up and go". His brief is to organize one of a number of things like water or mines or agriculture or education on viable modern lines. He has dollars to spend, but at the same time he has to make sure that Uncle Sam's money is put to good use and not wasted. Unfortunately for him he is an adviser, not an executive. He must go and see the head of the appropriate department in the Government Secretariat, his Nepali opposite number, as it were, in order to get his ideas translated into action. And then, perhaps, for the first time, he hears the magic word "parisi".

The members of this sizeable, not religious but technological mission are comfortably housed with their families and Stateside stenographers in one of the former Rana palaces, half way between Katmandu and the City of Cut Noses. Overt religious missions there are none in Nepal. The Gurkha conqueror, Prithwi Narayan Shah, forbade them in 1763, since when that old canard about the bayonet following the bible has often been quoted by jealously independent rulers. There is a medical mission, however, the admirable work of which is supported and strengthened by Christian zeal, and also an educational mission,

if the two flourishing schools—preparatory and secondary—in the Nepal Valley, founded and run by Jesuit Fathers, can be called such.

The technical adviser sallies forth, then, from his quarters—not luxurious by average middle-class U.S. standards, but palatial in comparison with those of the local functionaries—and armed with a scheme, let us say, for the drilling of certain artesian wells in a certain area of the Tarai, he sallies forth to meet his contact. He bowls down the road in one of the mission's jeeps, which constitute a high proportion of the local traffic, and fetches up at the massive gates of the Singha Darbar. He will have remembered not to go before two o'clock, before which time outside visitors are, strictly speaking, not permitted to enter, and he will probably dispense with the tedious business of scrambling in the crowd to get the clerk in the gate-office to issue a pass, deciding to rely on being able to push his way in.

He then drives past a spacious formal front garden, along the double-colonnaded white façade of Maharajah Chandra Shamsheer's former palace, and round to the side entrance, which is busy with comings and goings and faces the Assembly Hall and Radio Station. At the door he had better ask for a guide, since he is not likely to find the office he wants on his own, but this may mean that he will be asked for the pass that he did not have the patience to scramble for at the gate.

Possibly he will be sent back, but probably he will be able to get past by mentioning some important minister's name. He will then find himself in a series of long corridors on several floors, which form a hollow square round a central courtyard. One side of the corridor is open to the elements and on the other side doors open into government offices.

One might pause a moment to wonder who inhabited these rooms in former days. Were they occupied by junior members of the family or by senior servants? Were they well-furnished or almost bare as they are today? For the great Rana families were enormous, far too big for all the members to live on the grand scale. Exaggerated gossip subdivides them into four classes—first, those born of the principal wife; second, those born of the junior wives; third, those born of more or less established mistresses; and fourth, those born "below stairs" of servants and the like. The great patriarchs of these huge families lived in regal style and entertained monarchs on their

epic big-game hunts in the Tarai, but the lesser sons had to be content with the crumbs that fell from father's table.

The succession of these Hindu Shoguns was not filial but fraternal, thus ensuring that the government was never left to a minor and avoiding the baleful influence of women that brought about the eclipse of the power of the king. Only after the brotherly line was exhausted did the eldest son of the eldest brother get his chance. Nor would the government be left in the hands of a weak, vacillating man. Such a man, if it became apparent that he was not capable of strong rule, would be "retired" to some salubrious hill-station in British India such as Mussoorie or Bangalore, and the next in line would take his place. Thus firm government continued almost uninterrupted until King Tribhubana fled to Delhi in an Indian Airways plane and sparked off the revolution of 1951, which brought in a government dominated by the Nepali Congress Party. By then the Rana seed had been so widely disseminated that there were nothing like enough appointments to go round. Consequently Maharaja Mohan Shamsher, the last of the line, could not count on anything like the unanimous support of the clan.

The Singha Darbar, like most of the other Rana palaces, is magnificently imposing outside, with its huge façade of double Corinthian columns, but it is a barn of a place inside, with a noticeable absence of plumbing or modern conveniences. One suspects that these great men, for all their wealth and power, lived far less comfortably than a city clerk in his cosy suburban semi-detached. But, of course, they did not prize comfort greatly. To live splendidly and to spend their boundless energies in the pleasures of the chase were their principal aims. Heat and cold or a hard bed worried them no more than they worry the Gurkha soldier today.

Well then, our U.S. technical adviser, an expert in his own field, finds his man—the Secretary of the appropriate department—and is shown with all courtesy to a seat beside his desk. The Secretary almost certainly speaks excellent English, so there is no linguistic difficulty. However, there are probably already two or three Nepali gentlemen around the Secretary's desk whose business is not yet finished. They will, of course, be talking to the Secretary in Nepali, and the adviser, as he awaits his turn, wonders what in the world they are discussing so vociferously. He glances at his watch, noting that it is already past

the time of his appointment. The Secretary's sharp eyes catch the gesture and he breaks off into English to apologize for the delay. The other two men, on the other hand, continue in Nepali, determined not to go till they have settled their point, whatever it may be.

The Secretary turns back to them. More time passes, until eventually the adviser feels he owes it to himself and Uncle Sam to butt in. The Secretary again apologizes and this time introduces his two visitors, of whom one is a colleague and the other a cousin. They all then speak English and make polite conversation, asking him about himself, how he finds Nepal, whether he is going to see the festival which is just impending, and so on. More time passes. The adviser wants to talk to the Secretary alone, but the other two show no signs of departing. The adviser feels he should force the issue and starts to talk about the business of the wells. He produces his plan, typed out on a sheet of paper, expecting the other two to take their leave now that the conversation has become technical. Instead, they lean forward to listen. The Secretary places the paper on the table beside him. "It is a most important subject," he says. "The necessity for water is great. Please make these wells as quickly as you can. Let us see now, how much money can you spend on this project?"

At the mention of money the two visitors' eyes turn expectantly on the adviser. He senses the need for caution and begins to explain that the wells will only be economic if they are connected with rural resettlement in the area. The visitors' eyes drop again. The Secretary looks at his watch. "I am sorry," he says. "It is later than I thought. We have been discussing so much. I will read your paper and then we shall meet again. Parsi?"

The adviser leaves, intending to return the day after tomorrow. But back at the Bhawan he finds that the day after tomorrow is a holiday. Saturday is a holiday too, in lieu of our Sunday, but Sunday is *his* holiday and there is a picnic excursion out to the woods round Godavari, so about a week elapses before he goes to see the Secretary again. This time unfortunately the official is not in his office. He has had to go and attend the marriage of his niece. It is the season for marriages, but up till now there has been some uncertainty as to the date for it to begin because of the difficulty of interpreting the

bridegroom's horoscope. A thousand apologies on the part of the Secretary.

The adviser returns to his Bhawan in a mood of angry frustrated impatience. His colleagues calm him down. It's like the South American *mañana*, they say. You'll get used to it. And in fact, when he does manage to see the Secretary again he forgets his impatience as he listens to a fascinating description of the Hindu marriage ceremony. "Please come as my guest to the bride's feast," the Secretary says. "But I thought you'd *had* the wedding," the bewildered adviser replies. The Secretary smiles a winning smile. "Our weddings are not like yours," he says. "They are not all over and done with in one day. That would be too quick for us. This evening you will come to my house and see."

The adviser notices that his paper about the wells has not moved from the position on the desk in which it had been placed at the first meeting. The quick eyes of the Secretary catch his glance. "I am sorry I have not been able to read it yet," he says. "We shall see about it soon. Shall we say *niparsi*?"

"Niparsi?"

"Some time soon. First comes *parsi*, then *niparsi*."

"Ah, I get it. The day after the day after tomorrow."

"That is how you say it perhaps."

# 9

## *Great King of Kings*

SRI PANCH Maharajdhiraj Mahendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev is the full title of the reigning monarch of Nepal. He is the only Hindu sovereign in the world today and his coronation in 1956 was an occasion such as is not likely to recur for a long time.

The "Sri" title is an honorific, which in general use nowadays is not much different from "Mr." or "Esquire" and is possibly etymologically related to our "Sir". "Panch" means "five", so the King is "Sir" five times. He is also "Maharajdhiraj" or "Great King of Kings". This is in comparison with the former Maharaja (Great Kings), who were always known as "Sri Tin" or "Three Sirs", and the Sivaite deity Pashupatinath, who is entitled to one hundred and eight "Sirs" and is portrayed on the Nepalese coat of arms as a Himalayan yogi with a background of mountain peaks.

King Mahendra is of the dynasty of the Shahs. They trace their line back to Drabya Shah, who mounted the throne of Gorkha in 1559. But Shah is simply the Persian word for king and it was therefore probably an adopted title rather than a family name, though today all members of the royal family have Shah for a surname.

The lineage of Drabya Shah is more or less conjectural, but tradition has it that the family were originally Rajput princes, amongst the few survivors of the chivalry of Rajputana who perished in the great battle with the Mohammedans at Chitor. As fugitives they trekked northwards to the Himalayas and carved out little kingdoms for themselves in the folds of the mountain ranges. It is said that Drabya Shah was brought to Gorkha from the neighbouring principality of Lamjung to become king. He was hidden in a hut by one, Ganesh Pande, until the time was ripe. Then, aided by many of the citizens, who presumably did not like the king they had, he attacked the darbar, or palace-cum-fort, killed the raja with his own sword and mounted the throne amid the clanging of music.

Be that as it may, it is certain that the Shahs are of Aryan stock, whereas the majority of their subjects are Mongolian, as their flat eyelids with the supra-ophthalmic fold and their high cheek-bones clearly show. The royal family is also staunchly Hindu in a country where Buddhism is widespread both in hill and dale. For nearly two hundred years the Shahs were content to lord it over the small hill-town of Gorkha and the surrounding highlands. Then came their Napoleon, who put them on the throne of a nation of some six million people.

Gorkha is four days' march north-west of the Valley of Nepal and its fertile lands and populous cities, which constituted all that was known as Nepal in those days. Narabhupal Shah, like some raw highlander, looked over the intervening ranges and saw the three wealthy city-states of Nepal in the soft lowland plain, and he saw them quarrelling amongst themselves.

Narabhupal Shah assembled his forces and advanced to the attack, but he was driven back from Nawakot, the hill-town and citadel eighteen miles north-west of Katmandu. His successor, Prithwi Narayan Shah, in his turn looked over the ranges. He saw that the rajas of Katmandu, Patan and Bhadgaun were still quarrelling amongst themselves and, in the words of the Nepalese Chronicle of Kings, "was very pleased to see these things." He was more successful than his father in capturing the Nawakot Darbar, from which he directed his operations against Nepal.

At first Prithwi Narayan was not particularly successful, but he was a man with a fixed idea and his early failures only spurred him on to greater efforts. He surrounded the Valley with his men and manned all the passes in and out of it. He then attacked Kirtipur, and at the third attempt succeeded. An attack on Patan followed, which was called off because of the advance of Captain Kinloch with a small body of the East India Company's troops, which got as far as Hariharpur Garhi in response to Jaya Prakash's call for assistance. The following year, 1768, Prithwi's task was easier. He waited until the Indra Jatra festival and marched into Katmandu without opposition, most of the citizens being drunk. Jaya Prakash may well have thought this was hardly playing the game, but in any case it was too late. The three repentant rajas, forgetting their differences in adversity, barricaded themselves in Bhadgaun, where they held out till the following year.

Having conquered Nepal and tasted victory, the men of Gorkha were not content to sit back and rest. When Prithwi Narayan's grandson, Rana Bahadur Shah, came to the throne he was only an infant, and his uncle, Bahadur Shah, ruled the country for him. Under Bahadur Shah the Gurkhas enlarged their new-found country in all directions. They overran the loose confederations of the twenty-four and twenty-two principalities in the west and the Kiranti country and Sikkim in the east. Still they were not satisfied, and in 1790 they raided Tibet, plundering Shekar Dzong and the monastery of Tashi-lhumpo near Shigatse.

This adventure brought upon them the anger of the Son of Heaven in Peking, Tibet being then a vassal state of China, and a punitive expedition advanced southwards through the Kyerong Pass as far as Betrawati, twenty-four miles from the capital. Bahadur Shah, anxious at all costs to keep the Chinese troops out of the Nepal Valley, made peace. In the treaty he agreed to acknowledge the Chinese as overlords and to send a mission to Peking every five years with presents for the Emperor. For a hundred and ten years the mission set out twice in every decade on its long, rough journey and only ceased when the Emperors themselves passed into history.

Undaunted by their setback with China the Gurkhas burst out in other directions—to the west into Garhwal, Kumaun and the Kangra Valley, and to the south into the Gorakhpur district of the Indian province of Bihar. This sparked off a war with the British East India Company in which, after several mishaps, General Ochterlony was finally victorious. The Treaty of Sagauli, which followed in 1816, set the present boundaries of Nepal. It also provided for the establishment of a British Resident in Katmandu, a post which has remained in being ever since, the appointment being raised to ambassadorial status after the achievement of Indian independence.

During this war with the British the executive power in Nepal had been in the hands of Bhimsen Thapa, the famous statesman who forged the state of Nepal out of the Gurkha conquests and built the watch-tower, called the Dharara, which the Nepalese regard with much the same affection as Londoners lavish on Marble Arch. Yet in the end Bhimsen fell victim to palace intrigues. Accused by the Pande faction of murdering the senior queen's youngest son, he was thrown into a dungeon,



where he committed suicide after being told that his wife had been forced to walk naked through the streets.

When another young king, Rajendra Bikram Shah, came to the throne at the age of two in the same year as the treaty was signed, the seal was set on the eclipse of the monarchy. The king being a mere infant, the dowager queens came to the forefront of affairs. The senior queen was a Pandeite and came into her own when the Pande faction disposed of Bhimsen Thapa, but when she died the second queen restored the Thapas to favour. For a space the young king tried to rule, but the constant clash of faction interests and intrigues, and the intemperance of his step-mother proved too much for him. For some years there was disorder in Katmandu, until in 1846 the pot boiled over. Gagan Singh, supposedly the dowager queen's lover, was murdered, it was thought, at the instigation of the king. Mad with rage she besought Jang Bahadur Rana, Commander of three regiments of the army, to produce the guilty men. The leading nobility of Nepal were called to the kot, as the quadrangle of the royal guard was called, to hear the evidence. There, with the enraged queen screaming for vengeance, each man accused his enemy. Accusations and counter-accusations followed each other in frenzied succession until someone drew his kukhri. Thereupon Jang Bahadur let loose his men, whom he had held in readiness, and the slaughter began. Fifty-five leading men of the Gurkha nobility were killed in the Kot Massacre, during which King Rajendra fled to the British Residency. He returned to the palace and to exile in Benares.

From this time dated the relegation of the Shahs to seclusion and semi-divinity and the elevation of the Ranas to the top-most executive power. Both Surendra Bikram Shah and Prithwi Bir Bikram Shah lived in Katmandu, but they had little or no say in the affairs of the country. For nearly a hundred years the Ranas ruled. In sternly patriarchal fashion they dispensed rough justice and sent their soldiers forth as Britain's staunchest allies, not only in the enormous effort of the two world wars, but also in the Bengal Army's rebellion, which is known as the Indian Mutiny.

Times changed in 1951 after King Tribhubana's flight to Delhi. Mohan Shamsheer, the last of the Ranas, abdicated and a constitutional democracy was introduced into the mountain

kingdom. However, as might have been expected, there was very much of a free-for-all between the nascent political parties which suddenly saw the light of day, and considerable chaos resulted. The Nepali Congress Party, Heroes of the Revolution, reserved the right to have first go, and did so under the premiership of—a Rana! After nine months the Rana cabinet resigned, and after a further year or so the party had been broken apart into four splinter groups, whereupon the King took over and set up a council of nominated advisers drawn from all parties.

King Tribhubana died in May 1955, and the present King inherited the responsibilities of government which his father had found falling on him so late in life. For a young man of thirty-five, who had hardly been outside his own country, it was no easy task. He had to try to settle the squabbles of his own politicians and form a stable administration. He had to try to guide his country at a time when it had suddenly become much more open to the influences of the outside world. And he had to try to form a national consciousness as opposed to a tribal consciousness in the minds of his people. Furthermore he had to try to prepare them for the general election promised for the end of 1957.

At King Mahendra's coronation in May 1956 Nepal was on show to the world. Foreigners poured in by special planes from east and west. The gentlemen of the press alone numbered nearly a hundred, and the official foreign delegations totalled about the same. Therefore, in a sense, the festivities were as much to put Nepal on the map of that great world over the mountains as for the benefit of the little world of her own people. During a whole week of ceremonies, entertainments, banquets and sports-meetings one could not have wanted more charming and attentive hosts, and if some few took unseemly advantage of their hospitality, the more is the pity for the gate-crashers who insisted on worming their way into a free show.

The Coronation Committee, under the grand old man of Nepal, Field-Marshal Kaiser Shamsheer—another of the old-time Ranas—started work early in the year. Katmandu and neighbourhood was to have a thorough spring-cleaning, the main roads were to be macadamized, a new pagoda-style pavilion was to be built on the maidan, and in keeping with the spirit of the age, a new sports stadium was to be constructed

for the National Games. Cynics who had always said that Nepal would never do today what she could put off till tomorrow, prophesied that nothing would be ready. When the lights went dim in the evenings rude comments were levelled at the German contractor who was installing new generators, and the progress of the new surface on the road from airfield to city was checked day by day.

But in spite of setbacks, not surprising when one considers the remoteness of the country, the capital was gradually transformed. Men could be seen uprooting the grass of ages from the roofs of their houses, others perched on spindly bamboo scaffolding painting and decorating the temples, laying the brightest colours of the palette on to the weathered wooden gods and men, others were busy removing a quarter of a mile of wall and re-erecting it ten yards back in order to widen the avenue which leads from the Royal Palace, and yet others under the direction of Indian military engineers were moving earth and building roads.

And so the work proceeded until in the end, by the grace of God and Sri one hundred and eight Pashupatinath, everything was ready. Then the Indian Airways pilots started their airlift over the hump from Patna, and the official guest-houses at Maharajganj and elsewhere, the two embassies and the hotels began to fill up.

The coronation ceremony itself was divided into two parts—the pre-coronation ritual called the Purvanga, followed the next day by the coronation itself. Both were held in the first courtyard of the Hanuman Dhoka Palace in the heart of the city, beyond that monkey-gate through which entrance is normally restricted. On Tuesday morning, then, the first of May, I made my way to the appointed place and went inside past the lion-god Narsinh.

The Purvanga, which occurs not only in coronations but also in Hindu weddings and other ceremonies, is a kind of preparation and purification. The leading participants dedicate themselves to the task ahead, the priests are nominated and final details for the following day are sorted out. Inside the Hanuman Dhoka I saw that the traditional *mandap* had already been erected. It was a kind of hut supported on the branches of banana-trees, with open sides and a thatched roof. Inside the *mandap* a ceremonial jar, with an image of the elephant-god,

Ganesh, stood on a small altar, whilst offerings of curds, honey and butter were laid out on plates of sewn leaves on the ground outside.

The ceremony had an informal air about it, for His Majesty was dressed in a homely fashion in a simple labeda, suruwal and Bhadgauni topi. He entered the courtyard without panoply or undue fanfares, with Queen Lakshmi at his side, though as is the fashion amongst men that matter in the Orient today, he was wearing dark glasses. The Queen, also in dark glasses, was bare-headed and dressed in the simplest of saris.

The High Priest, or Raj Guru, also dressed informally in a white dhoti, was already waiting at the mandap and led the King inside for prayers and the recitation of mantras from the scriptures. Meanwhile there was pipe music and incense-burning. Then the King nominated the High Priest and other dignitaries for next day's ceremony and listened attentively whilst the High Priest delivered what were presumably last-minute instructions. He then took the oath of office, after which he seated himself crosslegged on a white cushion, with his Queen beside him, for the High Priest to place the red spot, or tika, on his forehead. For the King the final part of the ceremony consisted in offering the honey, curds and butter to the priests. Then, having made the offering, the royal couple left the Hanuman Dhoka courtyard, whilst the priests remained to carry on with their prayers to the Divine Mothers and the Builder God, and to worship the Ancestors.

The Purvanga ceremony was conducted in the midst of a large throng of pressmen, who all but outnumbered the actual participants, and on the big day which followed the throng was pretty well doubled. It included, of course, large numbers of cameramen taking peep-hole snapshots, but the *pièce de résistance* from the world of publicity was a cinerama camera brought from California by the travelogue king, Lowell Thomas. This was a large piece of equipment, which filled the key position in front of the mandap and seemed to put in the starkest terms possible the gap between old and new which Nepal is trying to bridge today.

On Coronation Day the crowds gathered early, filling up the terraces of the pagodas and lining the route which the procession from the Royal Palace was to take. Then the Royal Guard took up its position in the courtyard, with officers in British

redcoat uniforms of the nineteenth century. The foreign delegates followed, group by group—British, French, United States, Chinese, Indian, Pakistani, Afghan, Burmese, Siamese, Japanese, Tibetan, Bhutanese and Sikkimese. Taking their places in the seats at one end of the courtyard they presented startling varieties and contrasts in mode of dress, features and style. And of these the greatest contrast was undoubtedly between the Earl of Scarbrough in the magnificent sky-blue robes and accoutrement of a Knight of the Garter and Ulan Fu, the vice-premier of the Republic of China, in his navy-blue tunic and worker's cap. They were seated side by side.

Army officers on one hand, and civil officers in gilt-faced dark-blue uniforms on the other hand, completed the hollow square, whose fourth side was the coronation mandap itself; and on all four sides stood the white walls, with woodwork picked out in black, of the various parts of the palace. In one corner a tapering round turret of six roofs, diminishing in size one above the other, with lavishly carved and barbarically coloured struts in their eaves, lent an air of fantasy to an already fantastic scene.

The entrance of the King was preceded, this time, by groups scattering rice-grains, followed by torch-bearers, and men waving fans of peacock-feathers. He himself and his queen walked slowly forward under a gold-braided umbrella. They went straight into an inner-room to perform the ceremonial ablutions. After some time they returned into the public eye and entered the mandap, where a low, square seat had been prepared for them. Seated on the *mudrasan*, as it was called, the King made gifts of clothes to the four chief priests, who then sprinkled holy water over him.

The holy water needs some explanation. It is water collected from the seven great river-confluences of the Hindu world, at which points its spiritual potency is said to be greatest. Small pewter pots of this water were placed at each corner of the mandap. Whilst sprinkling the water, the priests recited a mantra, which goes something like this:

I ordain thee with the heat of the soma, of fire, of the sun and of Indra (God of the Firmament). Thou art the Lord of the Kshatriyas (warriors). Defend thou all. The water with which I sprinkle thee is holy. It is a panacea for evil. I

sprinkle thee with the water with which Prajapati ordained Indra. May thy arms receive the might of the sun and of Indra.

This mantra was followed by a blessing in these words :

In thy kingdom may the Brahmins be intelligent and wise, the Kshatriyas brave and accomplished bowmen, may the cows give much milk and the bulls carry great weight, may horses be fast and wives chaste, may rain fall in its due season, may medicines cure, and may each person be able to earn his own livelihood. May thy sons be brave and victorious, may they be great charioteers and worthy of sitting in the councils of men.

After mantras of this sort the crown, with its thick clusters of diamonds, emeralds, rubies and pearls, and its long drooping bird of paradise plumes, was placed on the king's head by the royal preceptor. The crowned King then left the mandap, sceptre in hand, and went to a pavilion in the centre of the courtyard, where the serpent throne had been installed; and with Queen Lakshmi on a smaller throne at his side, he received the allegiance of his chief ministers and the felicitations of the foreign delegates. As they approached him slowly one by one he nodded in acknowledgement, with the golden snake-heads of the serpent of eternity, rearing up above his crown in a broad spray over a mass of writhing serpentine bodies.

Thus ended the morning's programme. It was followed in the afternoon by the procession to the maidan, where the King was to show himself to his people and make his speech from the *pandal*, or pavilion, specially built for the occasion. For this procession elephants, which do not normally live in the Nepal Valley, had been brought up from the Tarai, and a dozen or more of them were spread throughout the marching columns to add their regal weight to it. The elephants carried V.I.P.s, some of whom looked as cheerful as children at the zoo, and between the great beasts marched troops of the Nepalese Army and Armed Police, Gurkha Contingents from the British and Indian Armies, Newars in their ancient white robes, masked dancers, Boy Scouts, Girl Guides, school-children, a pipe-band from Malaya, a brass-band from India, a covered wagon bearing important ladies, and a number of cars grinding along in

low gear for those who did not fancy climbing aboard the elephants. The King himself appeared with his Queen after some two-thirds of the procession had passed. He rode in a silver howdah on a creature decked out with heavy velvet brocaded caparisons adorned with jingling bells, and such was the appearance of magnificence that, as the elephant and its royal cargo swung past, an awed murmur of "Maharaj! Maharaj!" rumbled down the rows of the spectators.

The procession was slow-moving, and the light was already fading when the King descended from his elephant and mounted the steps of the pandal. From his place in this pavilion he delivered a speech, which was amplified over loud-speakers. It was couched in high-flown Sanskrit language, which only a minority of his subjects could have understood. However, in it he postulated the ideals for which he would strive—preservation of independence, establishment of democracy, and material progress as augured in the Five Year Plan and the National Bank. The King finished his speech by thanking his guests, the representatives of friendly nations, for being present at his coronation. It was a typically courteous gesture, and one of the few visitors who understood his words must have been Professor Turner, Director of the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, who was a member of the British delegation.

An Indian Airways plane, piloted by the chief of their Nepal team, flew low over the pandal scattering flower petals (and also advertisements for a local transport company which had somehow got mixed up with them), then the King walked slowly through the Himalayan archway, representing the white peaks of the eternal snows, and drove home to his palace. The memorable day finished with fireworks shooting across the darkened sky, silhouetting pandal, pagodas, Dharara and mountain ranges alike.

The rest of the coronation week was filled with the sort of activities which modern states are expected to provide on such occasions. There was a National Development Exhibition, which put on show present achievements and future hopes in industry, commerce and the arts. There was a programme of folk-songs and dances, given in the open air against a perfect natural background of grassy banks and wooded hill. There was a Royal Review, in which His Majesty, in his redcoat uniform, inspected his troops drawn up on the Tundikhel.

There was a state banquet, a buffet dinner and a garden party, the difficult job of catering for which was engineered by the Russian manager of one of the principal hotels. And at the new stadium there was a national sports meeting and a searchlight tattoo. The former, with its boys and girls marching behind banners in true Olympic style, seemed to epitomize the new spirit of athleticism and regimentation which is abroad in Asia today on both sides of the Bamboo Curtain. The tattoo, on the other hand, was a fascinating mixture of old and new and made use of darkness and lighting to great effect. The soldiers flashed their kukhris in the "Dance of the Warriors" and boys dressed in white cleverly simulated the opening and closing of a huge lotus "Flower of Peace". Historical tableaux included one of Ram at Janakhpur, holding the broken bow like Ulysses, and meeting not Penelope, his wife, but Sita, his bride. Another showed Prithwi Narayan Shah at the Gorkha Darbar "with his mother, Chandra Prabha, blessing his plan for the unification of Nepal". And yet another displayed "King Tribhubana, the first king in the history of the world to lead a national revolution, proclaiming the establishment of democracy in Nepal".

Yes, democracy, the magic word of the century, revered by East and West, Communist and non-Communist, alike, is now the magic word of Nepal and of the King of Kings. Even in a tattoo which finished with a good old-fashioned assault on a strong-point, with rifle-fire and simulated grenade-bursts and artillery, which sent us home with our ears splitting, the magic word was not forgotten.



## IO

### *A Cock for Manamaiju*

CHIRI WAS the gentlest of men, neither violent nor timid. He lived with his family in part of a three-storey house behind the British Embassy, not far from the cemetery where the mortal remains of some of the old-timers of the Residency days lie buried under the cryptomerias in a little walled English enclave.

It was a house built of unburnt bricks dug out of the grey clay of the backyard, and Chiri loved to be photographed in front of it with one or other of his chubby children in his arms, and to talk about his family and the rice-fields and the comings and goings in his neighbourhood and the customs of his Newar peasant people. Like all Nepalese he kept his hat on in the house—one of those limp, lop-sided fezes of flowered wallpaper design—and for the rest he wore the traditional tunic and breeches with belt of turban-cloth wound round and round the waist. Sometimes he wore shoes, but usually not.

Chiri served at table and soon got to know that I liked *achar*, the chutney of finely-chopped herbs and chillies that looks like spinach but tastes like green peppers. He got to know my other tastes too, and whenever he was on duty the meal seemed to go well. He knew I was interested in the local customs and in the cycle of the Nepali year, so in between the soup and the meat or the sweet and the coffee he would tell me of what was going on amongst the people and when and where the next chariot procession or puja or pilgrimage was to be. In this way I was able to follow local events and get to see the White Machhendranath with his fir-topped vehicle and the Ghora Jatra with its horse and elephant races and sacrifices to Kali and other festivals of the crowded calendar.

He could forecast the main events some days in advance, but there was a host of lesser occasions which he thought I ought to know about, though he could never pin them down to a definite date until it was almost too late. Such was the pilgrimage to the annual baptism in the sacred pool at Tokha.

Nobody seemed to know exactly when it would take place, and yet when the day came and I cycled out in the clear cool of morning along the bunds which divide the fields, I found the bathers already returning in a long, long line through the standing grain, with pipes and flutes making music amongst them. Such also was the homage to Manamaiju on the road to Phutunggaun.

Chiri had said that this puja to the ancient goddess of the Newars would take place some time soon, but he could not say exactly when. It was a thing in which he seemed particularly interested, for he had reverted to the subject several times. One got to Manamaiju, so I gathered, by the track that led past his house. She belonged to his locality, then, and he was keen that I should see the show and grace the spot with my presence.

After a week or ten days, during which Manamaiju was frequently mentioned, he announced one morning at breakfast that today was the day. I marvelled that he had not been able to give me longer notice, but by this time I had been long enough in Nepal to have no qualms about postponing an official appointment in order to spend a morning in the country, so shortly after his announcement, I set off on my cycle in the company of my friend, the American anthropologist, bound for Phutunggaun.

We had been given directions by Chiri, who was to follow later when he got off duty at the hotel, and we found no difficulty in following the track past the cemetery and his house which led towards the Vishnumati river. After that, however, we became uncertain. There were so many tracks straggling off here and there through the ripening winter corn, and so many clusters of houses that might be villages. The track we were following suddenly took a turn and dived straight into the river. We followed it, with the spray from the shallow water of the dry season whooshing up from our wheels. Then, on the far bank of the river, we had to push our way up a steep cliff into a broken country of miniature mesas—country over which the age-long action of the monsoon waters had worn what ought to be a smooth valley bottom into crumbling escarpments and gullies, which have to be negotiated one by one.

We entered a village big enough to be called a town in less thickly populated parts, and found it almost empty of people. They too seemed to have had the word that today was the day,

though yesterday they would probably not have been able to say. Whether the message is actually passed round from mouth to mouth, or whether some strange telepathy tells them, like migrating birds, to all assemble at a certain place at a certain time I do not know.

We stopped in the middle of this village, not sure of which way to turn, and stood beside our bicycles. Some ragged little children waved us on, however, and we continued towards the northern rim of hills. In a few minutes' time we reached our destination—a small and unassuming pagoda of only one storey, standing just beyond the last houses. A crowd had already gathered there, and the overhanging roof was decked out with hanging pelmets for the occasion. From the entrance archway we could see a replica of Manamaijiu above a crossbar festooned with blossoms, whilst in the darkness under the eaves we could just discern through the press of people an altar strewn with flowers, to which one descended down a flight of steps.

We stood outside the building and chatted to some of the bystanders. As always, it was the schoolchildren and youths who were most interested in us, with their insatiable curiosity and quick, darting questions about the world beyond the hills. The older people looked on tolerantly whilst the youngsters pumped us, and occasionally laughed at their enthusiasm. Then we heard music, growing louder, from the direction of the village—the thump of drums and the clashing of cymbals. The questions ceased as the procession came in sight.

It was led by a single piper, followed by a lone man bearing, but not playing a long, thin trumpet as long as he was tall. Behind them came a row of four drummers, thumping the skins, and the cymbal-players, followed by two men carrying a huge earthenware jar of liquor on a yoke across their necks. In the wake of the drink came the food, concealed under coarse cloths and borne in the Newar manner in two hanging baskets. Then came the two priests—the so-called Vajracharyas—dressed in their white vestments and wearing golden helmets of gilded copper. The cortège circled the temple, then entered with the offerings.

But this was not all. After the priests and the bearers had entered the temple courtyard and descended to the altar, and the band had dispersed to one side, two more individuals appeared, and assisted by retainers on either side, were led and

almost carried through the archway into the compound. These individuals were wearing robes of dull purple. Whether they were male or female I could not say, for their faces were wizened, their hair shorn and their chests shrunken, and their gestures and gait both failed to indicate their sex. Their steps and movements were jerky and ill-co-ordinated, as of a man in a fit, so that they had to be supported in their progress to the shrine. Their eyes, though wide open and looking here and there, appeared entranced.

I realized that we were in the presence of some kind of Shamans, or mediums, who were to take part in the rites under the direction of the Vajracharyas, so in order to get a clearer view, I went round to the back of the pagoda where I could easily look over the wall. The two Shamans were sitting on a ledge beside the great jar of liquor, and as the beating of the drums and cymbals increased I could see that their bodies were beginning to tremble all over as if in the grip of high fever. The priests, being before the altar at the front, were not visible to me, and it was soon obvious that the people inside the compound, which was now crowded with both men and women, did not like me looking over their back wall, for they called to me—politely enough—to go away.

I went back to the front of the temple and was just in time to see men bringing two or three squawking chickens to the entrance. They took them in, and whilst the thunder of the drums and wailing of the pipes increased, the priests got to work. Each chicken was seized by the body and by the head, and an incision was made with a sharp knife in the skin of the neck. Then came the critical part of the sacrifice, performed to the accompaniment of the long horns. The neck of the frantic chicken was bent back and the Vajracharya made a cut in the jugular vein. The blood of the dying bird then shot forth in a thin jet, and now came the Shaman's part, for before that jet of blood had reached the ground, one or other of them had shot forward and was drinking it down in great gulps and sucking at the bird's neck like a vampire.

Goats followed the chickens, and by a slightly longer process reached the same fate. Then, climax of the day, a young buffalo was dragged in. By this time the Shamans were reeling drunk with blood, but there was still more to swallow, so they vomited forth into the liquor jar in order to restore the capacity of their

stomachs. After considerable manœuvring the buffalo was dispatched in the same way, by having its neck cut open and its jugular vein incised. There was more than enough blood in this slowly dying beast for both Shamans, and they took their turns at drinking, each one after the other, till they fell exhausted to the ground.

The anthropologist and I turned away and waited no longer. A number of the men in the congregation were not quite sure that they liked us witnessing their bloody rite, and for our part we were not sorry to go. As we cycled away odd snatches of Frazer's immortal "Golden Bough" again came to my mind—the bit where the reapers suddenly leap out from their cornfield on to the passer-by and kill him as an offering to the corn god, and the bit about the beautiful grove of Nemi beside the sparkling lake, where death lurks incessantly for the King of the Wood. For in Nepal the gods still demand blood, be it only that of animals.

And who should we see belatedly hurrying up the track from the village but the gentle Chiri himself, with a red-brown cockerel tucked underneath his arm.

## I I

### *Langtang People*

THERE IS one thing which Nepali politicians or administrators hardly ever do; they hardly ever travel in the interior of their country. The smiling vale is theirs, with its encircling ring of hills, and there they are content to be. Beyond the ring lies the territory of the tribes—the Tamangs and Sunwars in the near neighbourhood, the Magars and Gurungs to the west, Rais and Limbus to the east, Sherpas and Bhotiyas in the north. The Hills rise up in a crescendo of ever-steepening ranges, the trail is arduous—too steep for any pack-animals—and at the end of a long day's march one is never sure of finding a night's shelter in conditions appropriate to one's caste and status. And so they remain in their Valley, legislating for a nation five hundred miles long, but thinking inevitably of their own stamping-ground of Katmandu and the Bagmati river basin.

Not wishing to fall into this particular error, I set out soon after the coronation of King Mahendra to see the Hills for myself. Having joined forces with a young journalist from Tasmania I decided on a trek almost due north from the capital as far as the Tibetan border, via a certain sacred lake that had fired my imagination. I had read accounts of previous expeditions with a certain amount of awe at the size of their baggage-trains, thirty or forty porters being by no means uncommon in support of three or four pale-faces, but there really seemed to be no need for that number and I found that three could quite easily carry all we wanted to take. So we asked the Corporal of Porters at his little office in old Katmandu for two good men, and we never had cause to regret the two young Tamangs—Jaman Singh and his younger brother, Kharman Singh—who were allotted to us. Our third porter, nicknamed "Happy" Chakale of the Ale breed, was found for us by the Swiss representative of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. He was to remain up north to look after a cottage which had been built to house a small cheese-making

project. As general factotum and *sine qua non* of all self-respecting Himalayan expeditions these days we also took a Sherpa with us on the trail.

And so we set out one fine morning and drove towards the northern rim of the Valley, past Bodhnath and Gokarna towards the source of the Bagmati, until a large hole in the road caused us to dismount and take to our feet. The way out of the Valley was past the waterworks, which are called Sundarijal, or "Beautiful Waters", and steeply up through terraced maize fields and forest over the eight thousand feet Sheopuri range. At the top of Sheopuri we found wild strawberries in profusion which the local Tamang woodcutters considered to be beneath their notice, being too busy with their huge loads of wood. We also ran into mist and drizzle, which dogged us for three days, obscuring the snows completely, and bothered us to a greater or lesser extent for most of the trip, since the whole countryside was steaming up for the monsoon.

We reached Pati Bhanjyang, our resting place that night, quite early and expropriated the upper floor of a house whose owner was away. Sonam, our Sherpa, who seemed to think it nothing out of the ordinary thus to take over an absentee landlord's property, soon lit a fire and set about brewing up and cooking a meal. He made Tasmanian Mac and myself wish that the invention of the chimney had reached these regions, for the fireplace was simply an open hearth in one corner of the bedroom, whence the smoke escaped as best it could. Naturally, with such an arrangement, the better and more snugly-fitting the roof, the smokier the room. On this occasion Sonam was fortunately able to cook early and let the fire die down whilst we sampled the rice-beer in the pub (*pati*) from which the village derives its name, but at other times we often cursed the smoke when it cut into our eyes.

The rice-beer, which is the staple brew in the *patis* of Nepal, is fermented from the grain in large earthenware jars. When fermentation has ceased, it is transferred to copper cauldrons. The barmaid serves it from the cauldrons to the customers in bronze dishes, which they bring to their mouths on the tips of the fingers of both hands. In the poorer establishments the dishes may be of earthenware.

The best of the rice-beer is clear and almost colourless, like Japanese *sake*, but a lot of it is drunk whilst it is still a milky-

white colour, and some when it is still the consistency of porridge. In potency it could roughly be described as being about half-way between an English beer and a Scotch whisky. Though it is normally a flat drink, it will soon become aerated if it is jogged along the trail for a few miles, and it then tastes something like a planter's punch.

The other part of the name, *bhanjyang*, means "pass", and "Pub on the Pass" was no bad description of the small, non-descript staging-point on an unimportant trail which it was. The *pati* is normally the poor man's club and the traveller's rest, and the serving-woman goes in and out amongst her customers with as much chit-chat in her as a Killarney colleen, but here there were only two besides ourselves—a quiet pair of Bhotiya folk on their way home to the village of Malemchi in Helmu—so we retired early.

Next morning we started at dawn, and aided by the bamboo staves that we had cut the previous afternoon, we climbed steeply up on to a ridge trail. Here we were above the terrace cultivation and up amongst trees and rare patches of pasture. At one point, under a clump of trees at a parting of the ways, we came upon a handsome woman of the Tamang Lamas tending a primitive dairy, with half a dozen yaks around her. We asked for milk and were served with it fresh from a large tub under a lean-to shelter. Another traveller also happened to be there at the same time. He too wanted milk, but as he had no cup to drink from, he took off his flower-pot hat and used that instead, replacing it carefully on his head after he had had his fill.

We followed the ridge trail until, some ten miles from *Pati Bhanjyang* and thirty-five from *Katmandu*, increasing rain drove us to seek shelter earlier in the afternoon than we would otherwise have done. By this time we were at a height of about eight thousand feet on the northern end of the *Mamche Danda*, but all we could see was two blankets of mist, one on either side of our ridge.

Luckily the farmhouse, which we came upon, was too close to the trail to be missed, and out of sheer necessity we knocked on the door and gained admittance. Though solidly built of stone, it was a poor dwelling, hardly big enough for the farmer and his family, let alone five intruders, but in such circumstances, if you live on the trail, you cannot stop travellers



coming in, and if they come in, you cannot stop them taking your best room. So we laid out our bedding-rolls in the exceedingly smoky upper-room of the house and fretted away the evening there, whilst the wizened proprietor and his family huddled round the meagre wood fire below. A rupee a head was thought to be generous compensation to him for disturbing his domestic economy.

The following day, determined to get out into the fresh air, we set off as soon as it was light, climbing through the forest until heavy rain again drove us to look for shelter. Until nearly midday we sat inside a cowherd's stone-walled and wooden-roofed shack in a forest glade, watching the antics of a silver fox whilst we brewed up and dried off. Then came our reward—fresh sunlight after rain—as we continued our climb through rhododendron forests, with a clear view down into the Bhotiya valleys of Helmu to the east and the Tamang country of the Trisuli river to the west.

This was at about twelve thousand feet, and the rough track then traversed off left past the deserted settlement of Thare Pati. At this place there was not a single soul, and even the pati, like the rest of the village, was reduced to a shell of broken-down stone walls. We wondered what had persuaded the inhabitants to retreat to lower regions, for though we were as high up as anyone could reasonably be expected to live, there were pleasant small pastures scattered amongst the boulders, quite suitable for yak-grazing. A trail branched off to the right to the large village of Malemchi, five miles away, deep down in the valley to the east which drains away from the Nepal Valley into the Sun Kosi river.

Malemchi is the chief centre of Helmu, where the engaging Chini Lama holds lands in fief. The people live in two deep valleys, gouged out of the ridges of the Jugal Himal by the headwaters of the Malemchi and Indrawati rivers, and though they are in the southern lee of the snows, they are of Tibetan stock. Men and women alike weave their hair into long, black pig-tails, and on their feet they wear the big cloth knee-boots of many colours which remain part of their bodies throughout the winter months.

That night the rain pelted down again, and all available waterproofs and groundsheets were pressed into service in the insufficient shelter of a yak-herd's hut. Added to this, Kharman

Singh, the baby of the party, developed a fever, which I had to dose to the best of my ability. Next day, our fourth, we hung around until eleven o'clock waiting for the rain to stop. We even fell to wondering whether it was all worth it after all, but eventually the rain stopped and the sun emerged, and with the sun fresh enthusiasm and a fresh sense of wonder and delight at being on heights so rarely trodden except by the big expeditions. After redistributing the loads in order to lighten the baby's burden, we set out along the rocky traverse which led to the snowy pass above us.

The track skirted round the northern head-streams of the Tadi river on the steep southern slope of Gosainthan, the seventeen thousand foot mountain which separates Helmu from Gosainkund—not to be confused with its big brother in Tibet. It descended far too much for my liking, to cross deep gullies, and I was worried about getting across the sixteen thousand foot pass to the Gosainkund lake, which was our first objective, before nightfall. I started scouting around for caves to sleep in or rocks to sleep under, and even Sonam began to cast an anxious eye around.

But I need not have been so concerned. After we had been waiting on the snow-line for less than half an hour, our three porters, with loads weighing up to eighty pounds in the baskets on their backs, came plodding up behind us. Chakale asked me to lend him my pair of Nepalese slippers, then we all plunged into the snow, myself in the lead. Before long Sonam was ahead, followed by Jaman Singh and the other two close behind him, whilst Mac and I brought up the rear, panting painfully at the unaccustomed altitude.

At the top of this pass there is a tarn, such as one finds in the lakeland hills of Cumberland. It is called Surjakund, the Lake of the Sun, and on the other side the high valley descends in a series of four steps, on each of which there is a lake about a quarter of a mile long. The second highest of these lakes is Gosainkund, a Hindu place of pilgrimage, sacred to Siva, and reputed source of the Trisuli (trident) Gandaki river, though in fact it is only a tributary of the main stream that it feeds, the true source being in Tibet.

From our high pass we plunged down off the snow towards the steep lakeside. The light was going fast and it looked dark and cold, but here and there on the cliffs bright splashes of

yellow primulas relieved the gloom. It was quite deserted, as the pilgrims go there later in the year, preferring to be wet and warm rather than cold with the chance of being dry, so we were able to have our pick of the empty stone huts which were grouped close to the water's edge. Indeed it was just as well that we had a choice, since the wooden roofs of many of them were missing, the reason being that as soon as a traveller reaches his destination for the night, he wants to light a fire, and in this barren neighbourhood, where there are no trees, he is not above helping himself to the roof-timbers.

I could hardly eat that night because of a sharp attack of mountain sickness, but next morning I felt better able to take stock of my surroundings. The small shrine to Gosain, Siva as Lord of the Cows, with its V shaped symbol beside the lake, caught the rays of the dawn, and Siva's rock, a huge boulder on a knoll above the lake, emerged out of the shadows. The pilgrims also claim they see the outline of Narayan's form in the dim depths of the lake, but we were unable to decide which of the shadowy rocks, deep in the black water, is the one that attracts their fanciful attention.

Leaving Gosainkund we went down, down, down to the Bhotiya village of Syabru, which lies along a ridge high above the narrow gorge of the lower Langtang valley. Here we found that the spring harvest had been gathered in, and women and boys were threshing the grain with flails. Like the people of Malemchi, the inhabitants of Syabru are of the Tibetan, or so-called Sherpa, type, with prayer-flags fluttering over every house, a village gompa, or Buddhist temple, and a lama priest. They cannot be strictly Buddhist and vegetarian in their diet, however, for one of the first people we met there was a woman sitting on the ground with strips of meat laid out beside her to dry in the sun.

Before long a small group had gathered to see the strangers. All of them, including children, had an insatiable desire for pills and cigarettes and would not be satisfied until I had doled out as many as I could spare of each. One village hoyden, to whom I offered a cigarette, seized on the whole packet and would not let it go, gripping it so hard in her frantic greed that by the time the tug-of-war was over, the contents were not much good to either of us. Sonam was rather put out by this incident and a little ashamed of folk he regarded as distant

cousins to himself. He kept urging us on, so we delayed no longer and went on down to the Langtang gorge, which we crossed by a suspension-bridge at the end of our day's march.

This bridge, a mere five thousand feet above sea-level, is at the junction of the Langtang Khola and the Bhote Kosi, and at its northern end lies Syabrubensi, a staging-point on the trade-route to Tibet. The Bhote Kosi is the northern extension of the Trisuli river, which the Hindu sages, in defiance of geography, say rises in Nepal at Gosainkund. Both it and the Langtang river boil with turbulent melted glacier-water.

We found Syabrubensi hot and oppressive, for we had descended a full ten thousand feet in one day from Alpine tundra to tropical cactus and bamboo. As we sat lazily on the veranda of the village shopkeeper's upper-room, the local populace came to stare at us, but maintained a stolid silence. Then a drizzle drove everyone indoors, and we could see the porters under the overhang of the cliff by the trail on the far side of the bridge dropping their loads of sugar, salt and tea and making cooking-fires.

From this staging-point we set out for the frontier fort of Rasua Garhi, which is about eight miles further north. The trail tries to follow the valley of the Bhote Kosi, and at two places it comes right down to the river, but such is the precipitous nature of the sides of the valley, that it never ceases going up and down to avoid crags and buttresses, sometimes climbing thousands of feet above the stream and sometimes descending almost to water-level. There are bridges at both places where the trail comes down to the river, but we found only one, five miles north of Syabrubensi, in use. The other one, much closer to the village, had a gap six feet wide in the middle.

On this section we overtook a Tibetan gentleman, his wife and child and a male and female servant, who had spent the night on the veranda of the gumpa. We gathered from his small son, who was wearing a smart trilby hat almost as big as his father's, that they had been visiting Buddhist sanctuaries in Nepal and were now returning to their home in Western Tibet. He spoke no English and very little Nepali, so I could not ask him about conditions in his country, but if the smartness of his shiny brown leather boots and the quality of his white silk shirt were anything to go by, he was not faring too badly. The long pendant of turquoises hanging from his left ear indicated that

he was a member of the nobility, and I have sadly wondered since what his present life under the Communist régime is like.

A few miles short of the frontier we came upon a row of five of those stone chortens that you are always supposed to pass on the left-hand side, standing in a narrow field of corn on one of the few flat spots in the gorge. They heralded our arrival at Timure, the sizeable village which lies just back of the frontier-post. Here a small body of Indian police was maintaining a signal station, and we accepted their hospitality for the night. But first, leaving Sonam and the Tamangs there, we pushed on to view the frontier itself.

Half a mile short of our objective we came upon the first concrete evidence of our proximity to another country in the shape of the large, flat surface of a boulder, which had been painted over white and then inscribed with red characters in the Tibetan script—two lines of the ubiquitous “Om mane padme hum” in letters about three feet high. It was in a village standing on a small triangle of land between the Bhote Kosi and a minor tributary called the Ghatte Khola. Below the tight little bunch of fields beside this village a rope of woven bamboo grass had been slung across the river, with a home-made breeches buoy dangling from it, and in this precarious basket the villagers went to and fro across the boiling torrent. It was a place of a few dark and dour inhabitants, but most incongruously I glimpsed two handsome girls of almost lily-white complexion, who scampered away shyly when I looked at them. They seemed to be two fluttering butterflies amongst the beetles—and perhaps they were.

The next corner revealed Rasua Garhi itself, and the stone-walled fortress built by order of the mighty hunter, Jang Bahadur, which straddles the narrow gap between river and cliff. Here another tributary, the Lende Khola, joins the Bhote Kosi from the east. It is crossed by a bridge which one reaches through a gateway in the northern wall of the fort. This is the frontier-bridge, watched over by a Nepalese customs official, who cannot be too pleased at such a remote posting. The fort is also permanently manned by a detachment of the Nepalese Army.

We crossed the bridge and looked back at the heavy stone walls of the fort, and we looked forward at—nothing. On the Tibetan side the only sign of the frontier was a stone tablet the

size of the average suburban tombstone, which was inscribed in Chinese characters. It dates back to the Chinese expedition of 1791, which entered Nepal at this point, and there was nothing newer on the Tibetan side for the eye to see, although the town of Kyerong lies only ten miles or so further on.

More than a frontier incident to the Chinese, the expedition referred to on the stone, in fact, consisted of an army of possibly twelve thousand men, of whom a large number were Tibetans. The Gurkhas had been raiding into Tibet and had captured Shigatse, the provincial capital nearest to the border. At that time, as now, the Chinese considered Tibet to be their vassal state and had their Resident, known as the Amban, in Lhasa. The Amban had thought it wiser not to notify Peking of previous Gurkha depredations, but this latest sally was too serious for him to ignore. When the Emperor received the news he was so anxious to avenge the insult to his territory that he sent his forces through Tibet and into Nepal in the heart of winter.

We have to turn to an inscribed pillar, which stands in its own stone mausoleum below the Potala at Lhasa for further details. The translation of the Tibetan, which I have abbreviated, is by Sir Charles Bell.

“Now as regards the submission of the Gurkhas in the Female Earth-Bird year, although they brought troops for looting U and Tsang (the two main provinces of Central Tibet), Pa Chung did not go into the matter thoroughly, so the Gurkhas were not frightened. Having obtained loot last year, they came back. The wicked Minister was degraded, and the famous Chang Chun was sent. The latter arranged on a large scale for provisions and wages. Fu Kang men appreciated my gifts highly, and did not consider fatigue or fear.

“During the winter of last year additional soldiers of Solon and Szechuan came quickly, batch by batch, along the Sining road, and arrived in the country of the thieves (i.e. the Gurkhas) during the fifth month of this year. Immediately on their arrival they retook the country of U and Tsang, and captured the territory of the thieves. They traversed the mountains, so difficult to push through, as though they were moving over a level plain. They crossed rivers with great waves and narrow gorges as though they were small streams. They climbed up the peaks of the mountains and descended again in the pursuit. They captured the important places and at the same time

captured the roads in the gorges. Not considering injuries to hands or feet, they fought seven battles and gained seven victories. The thieves were panic-stricken.

“After that, when the troops arrived close to Yambu (Katmandu), the chief leaders of the thieves were sent. They submitted respectfully and represented that they would conduct themselves according to our orders. Although they carried out the orders of the great Commander-in-Chief, they were not allowed to enter our encampment. The reason for this was that last year they seized Tensing Paljor and those with him by means of a falsehood; and so they were not allowed to enter.

“Owing to the great heroism of the mighty army the thieves were helpless. He could have had them removed from his presence, and could have made an end of them, letting not even one of them escape. However, that was not the wish of the Heavenly Protector. Even if all those territories had been obtained, as they are more than a thousand distances from the frontiers of U and Tsang, it would have been difficult to cultivate them and to guard them. As for ordinary, simple people, even if they obtain a thing, the end will not be gained. Therefore orders were given, the respectful submission was noted, and the army was withdrawn. Thereby the work was completed.

“Now the Gurkhas having admitted their fault, and wishing to save their lives, fear us and follow us. Thus agreeing with us and following, the two qualities are complete. The failing was theirs, and they have admitted their fault: that is how the matter stands.

“If this matter be considered, it will be seen that the people of U, abandoning military pursuits, devote themselves solely to literature. Thus they have become like a body bereft of vigour. This is unfitting. If a people abandon military pursuits and make literature their chief object, they become unable to safeguard their former position. This should be known.

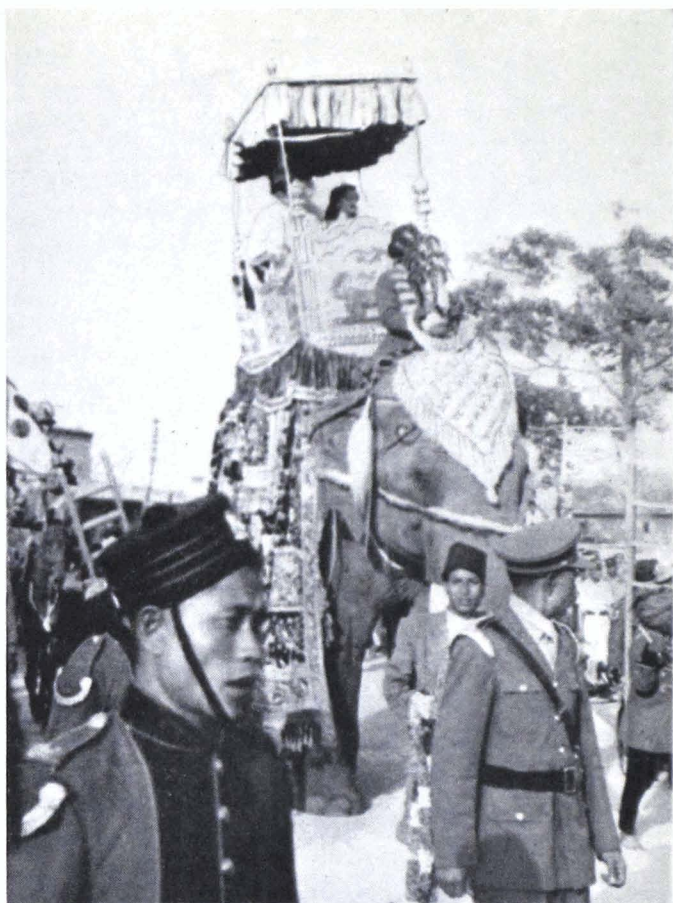
“This has been written by the King on an upper date (i.e. during the first half of the month) in the first month of winter in the fifty-seventh year of the reign of the Heavenly Protector, that is to say, in the Male Water-Rat year.”

The writing on the boundary-stone itself is somewhat confused and seems to have been written by a scribe who was not very learned in his profession. Dr. K. P. K. Whitaker of the London School of Oriental and African Studies has kindly



The coronation of the King of Nepal. (*Right*) The royal elephant in the procession: '... a silver howdah ... a creature decked out with heavy velvet ...'

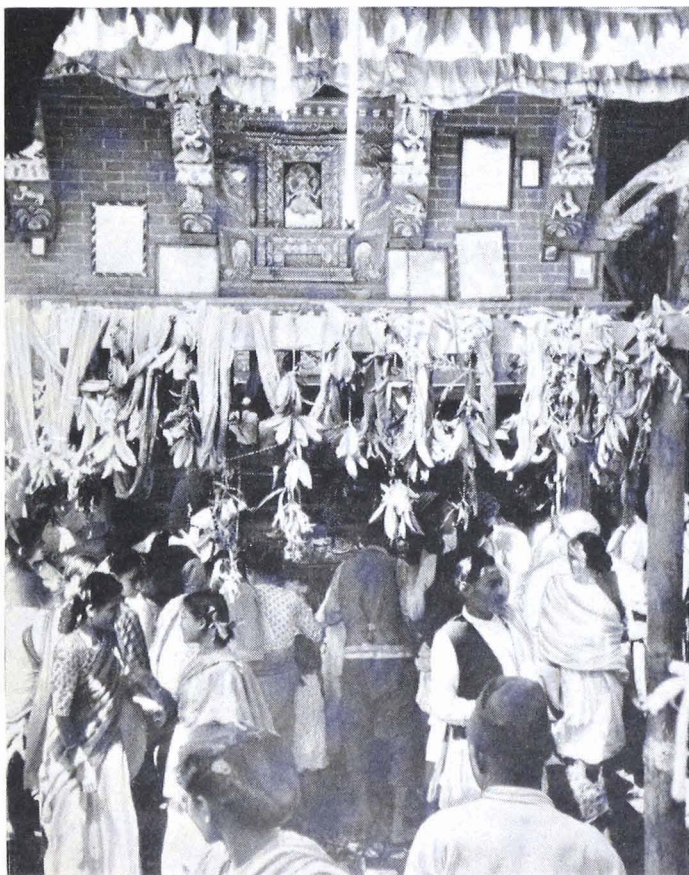
(*Below*) The coronation audience of field-marshals and government officials







*(Above)* Returning  
from a pilgrimage,  
Newar Jyapu



*(Left)* Newars at the  
flower-decorated  
temple of Mana-  
majju

given me the sense of it in so far as it is capable of being deciphered.

The stone was erected on the thirteenth day of the tenth month of the fifty-seventh year of the Chien Lung reign period, namely 26th November 1792. It refers to the demarkation of the boundary between the Chinese sphere of influence and the territory of Nepal after the victory over the Gurkhas accomplished by General Fu, who is entitled "Great General for the Pacification of the West". This is the Fu Kang referred to on the monument in Lhasa. For his success in what was reckoned to be one of the most outstanding campaigns in Chinese history the Emperor Kai Tsung made him a Grand Secretary with hereditary first-class rank. If he had completed the conquest of Nepal, the emperor declared, he would have made him a prince. Fu was "ably assisted by Hai" as his Chief of Staff. Hai's title is given as Duke Chao Yung, a dukedom of the first class, although the scribe has mistakenly written the ideograph for "meritorious service" instead of the one for "duke". The Chang Chun in Bell's transcription is presumably the same man. His full name was Hai Lan Cha and he rose from the ranks to become one of the ablest generals of his age, his portraits being hung in the hall of military heroes. He was made a duke after his success in Nepal, but died in the following year.

We returned to Timure and our Indian hosts, who in their anxiety to be hospitable produced a powerful brew of the local raksi, which they would not drink themselves, and then we settled down for the night in their barrack-room, stretching out our sleeping-bags on the floor. They seemed to be very much a group of exiles in this foreign land, being at the extremity of a long, thin line down to Katmandu and then to Delhi, and they said they had been long periods out of touch with their families and without leave. In fact the inspector, who was shortly to be relieved, could almost have been described in Air Force parlance as "round the bend". He sought to forget his exile in flying kites and saying his prayers, and it was to the accompaniment of an incantation to Hari-Ram-Sita-Ram-Hanuman-Vishnu-Narayanji that we dozed away.

Next day we retraced our steps for about four miles till we came to a traverse off to the left that was to take us east into the Langtang valley, which runs parallel with the Tibetan border. This meant another stiff climb to a village called

Syarpagaun, where our billet for the night was a tunnel-like shelter of split bamboo. Our front door faced the threshing-floor where, as in Syabru, the flails were at work on the corn harvest. Here we could look across the deep valley to Syabru, which we had passed through two days before—a mile away as the crow flies, but a full day's march as the man hikes.

The following day, the eighth of our trip, we made a very early start and marched four hours before breakfast, thus breaking the back of the journey to Langtang. The first part of the trail alternated between the damp forest close to the river and the cliffs high above it, but further on the valley emerged from its narrow funnel and opened out, providing patches of grazing for cattle and horses. On one of these patches we came upon a group of Langtang men camped out in their rude shelters with their yaks around them.

We bought milk and potatoes from them and had our late breakfast sitting on the grass in their home paddock, whilst they and their husky dog watched our every movement. That morning we had some sardines on our chapatis and I casually threw away the empty tin. Immediately several of them made a grab for it, but the one that won was a boy who had been sitting almost in my lap. One of the grown men demanded it, however, and when he refused to give it up, tried to seize it out of his hands. The boy gripped the tin all the more tightly, whereupon the man took his hands and violently tried to pull it away. This he eventually succeeded in doing at the expense of tearing several deep cuts in the boy's palms and fingers.

This incident shocked me and underlined the rarity of any kind of manufactured article in these remote areas and the desirability in these people's eyes of many of the most ordinary items of refuse. I bandaged the boy's hands, and at the instigation of the big, grey-haired man who was the patriarch of the group, the other man repented and handed it back, but it had been a startling breach of the peace for the sake of an empty sardine-tin.

After we had finished our breakfast we went on up to the village, which is built of substantial stone houses on a tongue of land not far below the Langtang glacier. If it were not for the vast scale of the rock-cliffs on either side it might remind one at first sight of a Lakeland dale. The rough stone walls, both of house and field, are there, and so are the winding paths between

them. But here the resemblance ends, for the walls of the Langtang houses are much more massive, and their roofs are of great timbers weighted down with big stones. The living-rooms are on the first floor, reached by a ladder staircase and a veranda, and the ground floor constitutes the storage-barns and cattle-sheds. And in the fields, like the Irish, they grow potatoes.

The potato was first imported into Nepal from the British hill-station of Darjeeling, east of Kanchenjunga, and it is now cultivated by these Bhotiya, so-called Sherpa, people all along the northern back-blocks of the country, because in such stony soil and in such a damp climate it is the easiest and most productive food-crop to cultivate. When we went to call on the headman of the village in his new house under the crags at the edge of the valley, he offered us baked potatoes from the hearth, and instead of whisky, a thick, porridgy corn-beer in silver bowls. He also offered, as something of a luxury, dried gram roasted in an iron pan over the open fire.

Langtang people, being of Tibetan peasant stock, have the Tibetan combination of cheerfulness and dirt—and stoicism—as the following incident will show.

On our approach to Langtang I had made a slight diversion to have a look at the gompa, which was slightly off the main trail up a hill to the left. Sonam, who strongly disapproved of straying from the track and always stuck to a rigid schedule, probably as a result of too much service with determined mountaineering Sahibs, forged ahead to announce our arrival in the main village. I made my way up to the whitewashed gompa, between the walls of several largish houses, but found it locked. I was in a courtyard, and the stones of the yard were warm with the midday sun, which was shining more strongly than it had done for days. Two other people were also in the courtyard—a man in a reclining position, basking, as I thought, in the rare heat of the sun, and a woman dressed in a peasant skirt and bodice, who pointed at the gompa and tried to tell me that the priest was not about.

I asked her when he would be back, and she replied in not very intelligible Nepali that he might be there in the evening. She was sorry, she would like to let me in, but she had not got the key. She spoke in a calm, unexcited way, which was in contrast to the staccato chattering of most of the women of this region, and her clear, regular features showed that she was



more than one of the crowd. She accepted a cigarette and smoked a while with me, neither of us, strangely enough, wanting to talk much. Then she said she had to go, making her excuses in the most naïve and obvious, yet to me the most unexpected way. Baring one of her breasts, she looked pensively at the mother's milk emerging from it, then smiled at me and went off to her babe.

That evening I returned to the same spot, but again the gompa was locked. I stood about for a minute or so, and suddenly a feeling of utter loneliness and remoteness came over me, for the sun had gone down behind the crags some time ago and there was a keen wind blowing down the valley, swirling up the dust and farmyard refuse of the courtyard. And with the coming on of night the grey stone boulders of the walls looked hard and forbidding.

Although I was reluctant to depart without seeing the inside of the building, I had to leave and turned away to pass the big house which stood beside the gompa and go back to our party three-quarters of a mile away. As I did so, however, I looked up at the veranda over the cattle-sheds, and saw looking out of one of the windows high above and watching me, the woman of the afternoon. I hesitated. It was enough. "Come in," she called. "Come in, please! There is no man at home."

I climbed the ladder-like steps which led to the front door and went inside what was quite a large room, stretching the whole width of the house. At first I had the sense of being inside a cave, for the ceiling, being quite black from the smoke of the fire, was blurred in outline even though it was not yet actually dark outside, and one's eyes were drawn automatically to the open fire which was burning on a brick hearth in one corner of the room. Although everything was rudely fashioned there was no lack of household goods. Along one wall stood great jars almost big enough for the Forty Thieves, and with them were iron pans and ladles, and brass pans and kettles dancing in the firelight. Along another wall were the bones, horns and fleeces of animals that had died, and preserved probably for some recondite supernatural reason, a number of egg-shells. Along a third wall, beside the window-seat, were the household gods—the Buddhas and their peers.

Below the Buddhas, on a low couch, lay the man I had seen basking in the sun. He was, I am sure, the only man in this

group of homesteads at that particular time, and now I saw the reason why. Most of his body was wasting away to a skeleton, and his right leg, almost up to the loins, was a huge misshapen mass of pus and gangrene. It was covered with a dirty blanket, and he did not immediately show it to me. First the honours of the house were done. The woman produced a dish of corn-beer and a potato from the fire, and watched me eating and drinking, squatting by the hearth. She took a handful of gram too, and roasted it, with the man lying helpless watching her.

Then he removed his grimy covering and with a wry smile showed me his affliction. His tale was pathetic, though he told it with complete resignation and an entire absence of self-pity. Two summers ago he had been out below the village cutting wood in the forest when his axe slipped and bit into his leg. However, the axe was not very sharp and did not bite deep, so he thought little of it. But the wound did not heal, and after a month or so the swelling began which went on and on increasing until it reached these monstrous proportions.

The man was plainly dying, though he might perhaps have been saved by an amputation high up on the thigh. He did not complain and seemed not even to seek hope, but the woman looked at me with questioning in her eyes and I felt my powerlessness to help. The leg was much too far gone for any normal lancing and antiseptic treatment, and amputation was quite beyond my limited powers, so what could I do but produce pills to occasionally allay the pain?

She accepted the situation calmly and began a halting conversation, which I only half understood. I gathered that the family here, of which all the able-bodied men were away, were rivals in some way of the Headman up at the main village, who was a brother; that when the Swiss United Nations man had come to start his Langtang cheese-making business, this brother had pushed himself forward and had been assumed to be the Headman. He had profited from the cheese business—witness his shining new house, with the fir sapling still standing on its roof—but there had been no reason to assume he was, in fact, the Headman, except for his pushing ways, and now her husband had gone to Katmandu to petition the Government and seek redress.

This excursion into village politics was rather involved and mystifying, for it came out in bits and pieces, not all in a rush,

and I did not entirely understand her unaccustomed accent. She explained it all in a calm and dignified way, not pleading or particularly expecting me to do anything about it, and in the middle of her halting exposition she fished the baby out of the bedclothes in which it was almost smothered and gave it the breast. It was a wee mite, hardly a month old, and its eyes were not yet open. I was startled to see her dripping milk on its eyelids at the end of the feed in the hopes that this would ease them up.

During this time an old crone with a huge goitre and an almost unbelievably ugly face came in and took a place by the fire. She routed around in the embers for a hot potato, accepting my presence there with a raucous chuckle. Then, at last, the priest arrived, bustling in like a hearty country parson. He showed no more surprise than the old woman at seeing such an unusual visitor as myself, and picking up the baby, tried to do with the correct incantation and the breath of his priestly mouth what the mother had failed to do with her milk. First he blew in one eye and then in the other. Then the baby was put back in its box on the shelf to the left of the fire and the priest turned to the man dying of gangrene.

He knew the gravity of the case as well as I, but could do no more than utter some consoling words. The sick man expected no more either, and one had the impression that the jolly, round priest had long ago tried all the articles of his supernatural pharmacopœia on the case without success. Now his visits were more in the nature of reminders of possibly better worlds to come. And so he wasted no time, drank his dish of beer and prepared to go. The woman went with him to the door, from where she looked back at me. "Will you not go with him to see the gompa?" she inquired. I hesitated a moment and then, seeing the dull dusk outside and piqued a little by the parson's complete lack of interest in my presence, I declined. "It is too dark," I said, "I would see nothing."

We three—the goitrous crone, the mother and I—returned to squat by the fire. Then there was a noise below of goats and a dog, followed by the appearance of a small boy in the room, with a stick in one fist and a bunch of wild borage in the other. He gave the mother the green stuff, poked a potato out of the fire and squatted down beside us, just as he was, straight from the fells. So we sat, whilst I tried to make some conversation,

telling them about my journey and asking them about their life and how they spent their time.

After another half-hour I, too, thought it was time to depart. Since they were all avid smokers I left them cigarettes. It was the least I could do, yet I had nothing else with me except the clothes I stood in and my electric torch. Not that they themselves made me feel I ought to give more, for the woman had to be pressed to take even my humble packets of fags, but that for once in my life I felt that I really wanted to be generous without hoping for anything in return.

The mother came with me to the top of the steps. By now it was quite dark outside and growing rapidly cold, for we were well over ten thousand feet above sea-level. A rising wind was hissing through the gaps between the big stones of the farmyard walls.

"I am sorry about your man," I said. "I am afraid he is very bad, but I can do nothing."

Her eyes, which were a very light hazel colour, seemed out of focus, hovering already between the unreality of the visible and real and the reality of the invisible and unreal. "I do not wish you to do anything," she said.

I put my foot on the first step. "I will tell them in Katmandu," I said. "If any doctor can come we will try."

She did not believe me. "He is ready," she said.

"It is dark," I said.

"You do not have to go," she said. "You can stay. There is no man at home."

She had moved across the top of the steps and stood beside another door, which could only lead to a sleeping-room. For the third time that day I hesitated, fascinated by the illusion of her light, dreaming eyes.

"I will try to come again," I said.

Not believing myself and she not believing me, I turned and stumped down the steps. My boots sounded like a regiment of footguards as they clattered away over the stones of the empty, silent village lanes.



## 12

### *Hamro Nepal*

MEANWHILE OUR party was housed beside the new residence of the de-facto Headman. Sonam spoke to him in his own dialect of Tibetan, but did not acknowledge close kinship. Indeed there could hardly have been a greater contrast than between the Sherpa on the one hand—stocky, bullet-headed, with close-cropped bristles of hair, light of skin and eye—and the Bhotiya on the other hand, with his taller carriage, long jet-black pig-tails and dark-brown complexion. In fact Sonam, with local chauvinism, disapproved of the Langtangers, calling them dirty and uncivilized, yet there is a kinship of language and way of life between all these people of the back valleys of Nepal, in and behind the main ranges of the Himalayas, that leads the ignorant to label them all with the world-famous brand name of Sherpa.

That night Sonam and I discussed snowmen and goblins, in both of which he believed quite as firmly as Sir Thomas Browne believed in witches, and the following day Mac and I went on an excursion higher up the valley, taking only “happy” Chakale with us. For the first few miles we had a noisy retinue of about a dozen village gossips, who were off to work in the potato-fields. Chakale, who was an old friend of theirs, was pawed outrageously, but he seemed to enjoy it in a youthful kind of way. He was the slimmest, and without being in any way weaker, the most handsomely proportioned of our three Tamang boys, and it looked as though the women, who were incredibly ugly, were determined to get the best out of him.

After a while we outstripped the jabbering dames and climbed up on to the beginning of a glacial moraine. As we did so the Langtang glacier, leading up to the border range on our left, came into view, and another reach of the long, winding Langtang valley, flattening and broadening out into upland pastures. Yaks and horses were grazing on these pastures, the former to supply the Langtang cheese-making industry, and the

latter being bred as remounts for the Nepalese horseguards. In the middle of the meadows Langtang men and women were building a new group of huts, the women carting earth and stones and the men fashioning the big beams of timber for the roofs with primitive axes. At the foot of the meadows stood the cheese-factory—a small cottage built in the lee of a moraine of big rocks, with the churns and machinery stored inside. Overlooking the cottage, even as far up the valley as this and so remote from any permanent human habitation, there was a whitewashed temple—the gompa of Kyangjin Ghyang—containing strange frescoes of the demonic gods of Lamaic Buddhism and part, no doubt, of the parish of the country parson I had met the night before. And around and above all gleamed the shining white snows.

Leaving Chakale to open the cheese-making season, we turned away from Langtang and set our sights again for Katmandu, returning by another part of the country. A long day's march took us back to Syabrubensi, where though we were now only five, we found no room in the shopkeeper's house, which was full of soldiers on their way to relieve men of the garrison at Rasua. So we slept on the veranda of the gompa instead.

Next day we set out on the long hike down the Trisuli river valley, where it thunders down a massive gorge between the ranges of the Langtang Himal and the Ganesh Himal. On the map it looks simple—a red line representing about sixteen miles along the river bank—but the reality is very different. The trail shoots up and down in a series of staircases far too steep for any but human beasts of burden, now so high up the mountain-side that the river is a silver snake far, far below, and now deep down in the deafening roar of the waters. And where a tributary stream comes in from the side, the length of the detour to negotiate it is best left undescribed.

In this way it took us two perspiring days to reach Betrawati, a low-lying village on the fork between the Trisuli river and the smaller Phalangu Khola. We had come down hillsides planted with maize and millet, with the adobe cottages of the Gurkhas in place of the stone houses of the Bhotiyas. There were banana-groves and medlar trees here as well, and we avidly munched the fruit of both, since we had been living too long on a dull diet of rice and flour and potatoes. Both Mac and I must

have been starved of carbohydrates, for in the village shop we came upon a sack of sweet biscuits and involuntarily our mouths began to water. We bought as many as we felt we needed, but could not resist going back for more, and then again for more, until we had repeated our purchase four times.

Betrawati is interesting as being the furthest point south to which the Chinese advanced in the punitive expedition already described. At this point the Gurkhas sued for peace, anxious at all costs to prevent the foreign force actually penetrating into their heartland Valley of Nepal. Men like to say that they destroyed the bridge with the vanguard of the Chinese on it, flinging them into the stony river, but the only real support we found for this story was the fact that there was still no new bridge there. In reality, however, the last bridge had been washed away only a few years before. Men said that, in these days of democracy, there was no one to build a new one.

We were plagued with flies in our lodging at Betrawati, for the place was tropically hot, and we were glad to get away next morning. On a fairly level trail at last, we were relieved to be able to saunter through a green and fruitful countryside with banana and mango ripe on the trees and the summer grain a-planting. It was a region of neat, square farmhouses, red and buff coloured, with rice in the "wet" fields and maize in the "dry" ones, and no evidence of the great poverty of the country of which the Katmandu politicians complain.

A short, sharp climb up to the left took us to Nawakot, the provincial capital of No. 1 West, that is, the first mountain province of the west of the Nepal Valley. Half way up the hill we stopped beside a trickling spring to have our morning meal, and sat looking down at the long, straggling street of Trisuli Bazaar. It is the first main staging-point on the trail from Katmandu to the Western Hills and can be reached from the capital in one day in a forced march or in two days by loaded porters. The bridge across the Trisuli river, the shops and inns half-hidden by overhanging trees, and the verdant valley leading up to the next pass on the road to Gorkha and Pokhara all lay below us, smiling in the sunshine. Mac, with years of ranging the Australian outback behind him, and I with my insatiable desire always to look around the next corner, felt an itch to get off our hill and head west towards the ancestral hometown of the Gurkha kings. But time was against us, so after we

had drunk our fill from the spring—under the approving eyes of Narayan, god of the waters—we went on up towards the hill-top, where stone-set streets took the place of the crumbling trail.

Nawakot lies clustered round its lofty darbar building like some sleepy old cathedral town around its cathedral. It was here, some eighteen miles from Katmandu, that Prithwi Narayan Shah planned his conquest of the Nepal Valley, but nowadays, being off all through-routes, the town is not much visited by strangers and the civil servants in their offices opposite the Darbar are left in peace to administer their province in the leisurely manner to which they are accustomed.

Coming from the Betrawati direction, the main street first reaches the "People's Square" with its shops and dharmshalas, and then goes on to the "Official Square" where the government offices face the solid red-brick, four-square, four-storeyed strong-point mansion, which is the Darbar. It then goes on through an archway as far as the edge of the hill where, leaning on a stone balustrade, one may gaze southwards over the broadening Trisuli valley towards India and eastwards up the broad, shingly bed of the Tadi river in its embracing woods and hills. That is the end of town—the most magnificent cul-de-sac that could ever be devised—and there the eternal trail begins again, cutting away sharply to the river ford.

I was hailed here, in the unreticent way of the East, by a man seated in a small dharmshala. He was naked to the waist and bearded like a Sikh, but without the bangle and comb and pagri that the followers of Guru Nanak are obliged to wear. He wanted to discuss the international situation and the conflicts of the nations and asked me if I could describe to him the details of the atomic bomb. So I went over to him and leant against one of the four posts of his shelter, whilst he remained seated with his bits of clothing and bundle around him, rather like a nesting hen.

"These things are a result of unfortunate positions of the stars," he informed me in a loud voice. "They cannot be avoided by us, though we should also strive for friendship and understanding. This is, after all, the last Age, the Kali Yuga, is it not? It is surprising there is still some virtue left in the world. However, it will be interesting to see the manner of the destruction."

"One is most likely to be destroyed in the seeing," I said.

“But the spirit rises,” he went on, his voice as loud as ever. “When the spirit rises high enough it may see all things, even the destruction of worlds.” His mind seemed to multiply the valleys below like a plane climbing ever upwards, until the whole globe was in his ken.

“It is true this world is not all,” I said.

“We should have one universal language, don’t you agree? Do you speak Esperanto? When I was a young man at the University I was very keen on that language, but of course it is not universal—only European. It would be better to learn Sanskrit. Tell me, please, this bomb—how many persons will it destroy at one time?”

“Difficult to tell,” I said. “Perhaps the whole of Katmandu. Certainly all of Nawakot.”

“Not more?”

“Is it not enough?”

“Such things are interesting. It is as an earthquake or a flood, but not, I think, as effective as a pestilence. And the poison from this bomb?”

“It is spread by the wind, killing and maiming living creatures.”

“Such is the power of Yama, or of Kali for that matter. Have you read the work of Dr. Einstein? He tells us that a straight line cannot be straight. Of course, we knew that already. All things are as the serpent eating its own tail. However, his way of describing it is interesting, although unnecessarily complicated.”

“Too complicated for me,” I said. “I never got beyond the Differential Calculus.”

“Does not Shelley describe it more simply? Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass, stains the white radius of eternity.”

“Radiance,” I said.

“Of course, radiance. I was still thinking of mathematics. The dome, you see. The sphere. An endless succession of circles. Nothing can be straight. I hope now, sir, for the unity of nations. Where circles intersect we hope for concord. That is the true meaning of the Wheel of Muladhara. It’s centre is here,” he trumpeted, slapping his lower stomach. “Therefore he who regulates his stomach regulates the world. I myself eat but once a day. And you, sir?”

“More,” I said.

With the loudness of his voice I edged away towards the group of interested spectators, who had been roused out of their midday siesta. Now he trumpeted again, "I take water three times, but never when the sun is up. Between fire and water there is no concord."

I withdrew my eyes and glanced across at the tall, old building on the other side of the street. A goat was looking down from an elaborately carved second-storey window.

"I must go now," I said. "My people have already gone ahead." As I turned away a belated official bustled up to me to examine my passport, gazed at it from back to front and handed it back to me with an air of duty done. "Work for peace!" the trumpet shouted as I strode off down the hill.

Whilst Mac and I dallied in Nawakot, Sonam, with his doggish instinct for getting ahead, had gone on down the hill with the two Tamangs. Assuming it to be a well-trodden route we had not worried about separating and ambled down towards the river as gently as the steep gradient would allow. By this time the soles of my boots, which had originally been issued to me by the Government for the pleasures of a Korean summer, had come completely away, leaving me to slither down on the nail-less hide of the inner layer, whilst Mac's shoes—a pair of canvas, rubber-soled hockey sneakers—were still perfect.

Our complacency was soon shaken, however, when we came to a parting of the ways. I was uncertain as to which fork to take, but Mac, with a convincing show of backwoodsmanship, trailed Sonam's nailed footprints in the soft dust of the track which went to the left, and decided firmly that that was the way. It went on down through woodlands, past a country squire's estate and as far as the flats of the Tadi river—then it petered out.

Certainty rapidly evaporated in the heat of the afternoon. We hailed a group of yokels who were perched on a raised shelter above their paddy-fields, and they told us no strangers had passed that way. But the steep hill was behind us, the river-side flat land in front. We could not face the prospect of going back. So it was along the river bank that we went, jumping from bund to bund across the fields, till three miles further upstream we came to the suspension bridge that was marked on my map, and the village beside it. One look at the empty

street and the air of somnolence about the place was enough to guess what the answer was going to be. No strangers had passed that way.

By this time, thoroughly annoyed and tired, we took a dish of toddy at the grog-shop and concocted a plan. Mac was to wait at the bridge as a long-stop in case the missing baggage-train turned up there; I was to track back to Nawakot. If I did not find them between the bridge and the town, I was to set out for the lower trail and the ford. Mac would wait up to a certain time at the bridge, then head for the ford.

This sounded practical enough, but the distances and gradients involved were not small. I toiled back six miles to the hilltop darbar on what was in reality a most pleasant track, past comfortable farmsteads and terraces of cultivation, but with a raging thirst, which no amount of drinking from the water-spouts at the wayside could assuage, and with a sweltering sun overhead, I could not appreciate the view. Up at the top sleepy Nawakot had dozed off again. I went on down the other side, towards the Tadi river again, heading for the ford, but relying too much on my inaccurate quarter-inch survey map, consequently hitting the river at the wrong place, then scrambling along the bank, and at last emerging out of the undergrowth on to the dry shingle of the river-bed and into the main stream of east-west travellers. There, at the ford itself, I sat down to wait.

It was amusing, as the sun cooled on its way out of the sky, to watch the people at the ford. On a man of average size the water was about thigh-high for a distance of some thirty yards. The loaded porters would hesitate at the brink only long enough to gird up their loins, but for others there was a palaver of taking off of shoes, gathering up of skirts, shouting out loud to pluck up courage and throwing oneself on the mercy of the god of the river. Children would be carried on the backs of their elders, and ladies and gentlemen of any pretensions would expect to be carried on the backs of their porters or servants. One poor man came to me and implored me to tell him if I had seen anything of his young son, from whom he had got parted several miles back. His plight struck sympathy in my own mind and it hurt me to have to tell him I could not help him. My raging thirst refused to leave me and drove me to drink from the watering-place of the nearby village, which was

a muddy little spring in the river-bed some distance from the stream.

Light failed and still no Mac, so I put my boots on again, picked up my haversack and went on towards Katmandu. For a mile or two the track actually followed the river-bed and in the darkness I could not help splashing into water. At one point a group of temporary huts showed a stopping-place and a sluttish girl shouted out her opinion that I was a plain fool to stagger on, but she looked no better than she ought to be and I had no wish to wake up next morning with my pockets picked. Presently the moon arose and the path, though still in and out of streams, became drier and more defined. At the next group of huts I got the welcome news that a white man had passed that way not long before.

Although I must by now have walked twenty-five miles in the day my legs had got into such a rhythm that it seemed almost an effort to stop them, yet there he was at last, sitting on the veranda of a house half-way up the next steep incline and waiting for the good wife inside to cook up a curry and rice. As we sat on the floor-mats inside the house, eating our fill, Mac tried to explain the route by which he had come and why he had not met me at the ford. He probably spoke perfectly clearly, but somehow I could not seem to take it in, and it did not seem to matter. The good wife kept piling on the rice and vegetables, the egg-plant tasted delicious, and I kept asking for more and more water, both for my mad thirst and to put out the fire of the chillies.

After our meal we went on yet further, passing several long sheds, in which rows of porters and other travellers were sleeping on their first night out from Katmandu. A mile or so further on we too lay down to sleep, on a level patch under a tree, but ants attacked us, driving us on until, unable to drag ourselves any further, we found ourselves a veranda near the road and stretched out on it. I tried to sleep, but though there were no ants, it was too uncomfortable and I hardly dozed. I heard movements inside the house, which showed that there were folk there still awake, and I wondered what their reactions would be when they discovered their uninvited guests.

We were already in the small hours when a noisy, stocky character came up the track and stopped at our veranda. I was fully conscious that he was standing a few feet away from us,



looking down at us, but I feigned sleep, thus making it up to him to make the next move if he so desired. After a few moments he banged on the door, calling to the man inside, who opened up in answer. Then, calling on two deities in one and the same word, he asked who the devil we were.

"Eh, Krishnanarayan, for the Lord's sake what are these two fellows doing here on your veranda? They look like a couple of white men, but holy Krishnanarayan, who ever saw white men stretched out like that without another man between them to help them on their way. Shall I wake them then, God in heaven?"

"I don't know who they are," the householder said. "They just came and lay down here without a word."

The noisy man let out a sharp, raucous cough. "For Krishnanarayan's sake," said he, "these fellows are soldiers and no other. Look at this one's shirt. Is it not khaki, the colour of soldiers? (For "soldier" he used the word "lahure" after the days when hill-men served the Sikh king in Lahore.) But God knows what they are doing here unless they have run away from their regiment."

"How can they have run away from their regiment? The white regiments are not in the Big Land any more."

"Krishnanarayan Lord, is that so? Ah, but it cannot be true. For generations and generations they have been there. Some fool has told you that, who does not know the meaning of his own words. If these fellows are soldiers then there must be a white regiment somewhere, so do not speak like a big fool."

"It may be they have come back."

"*Ramro*, that is it. Krishnanarayan, what fellows these whites are. They come and go everywhere. Did you not see that lot three days ago? One man, one woman and baggage enough for two elephants; twenty porters, cooks, everything. But, Lord, Lord, these two scurvy fellows, have they nothing? Only this small sack and two broken sticks. What say you, brother?"

"As far as I know they have nothing."

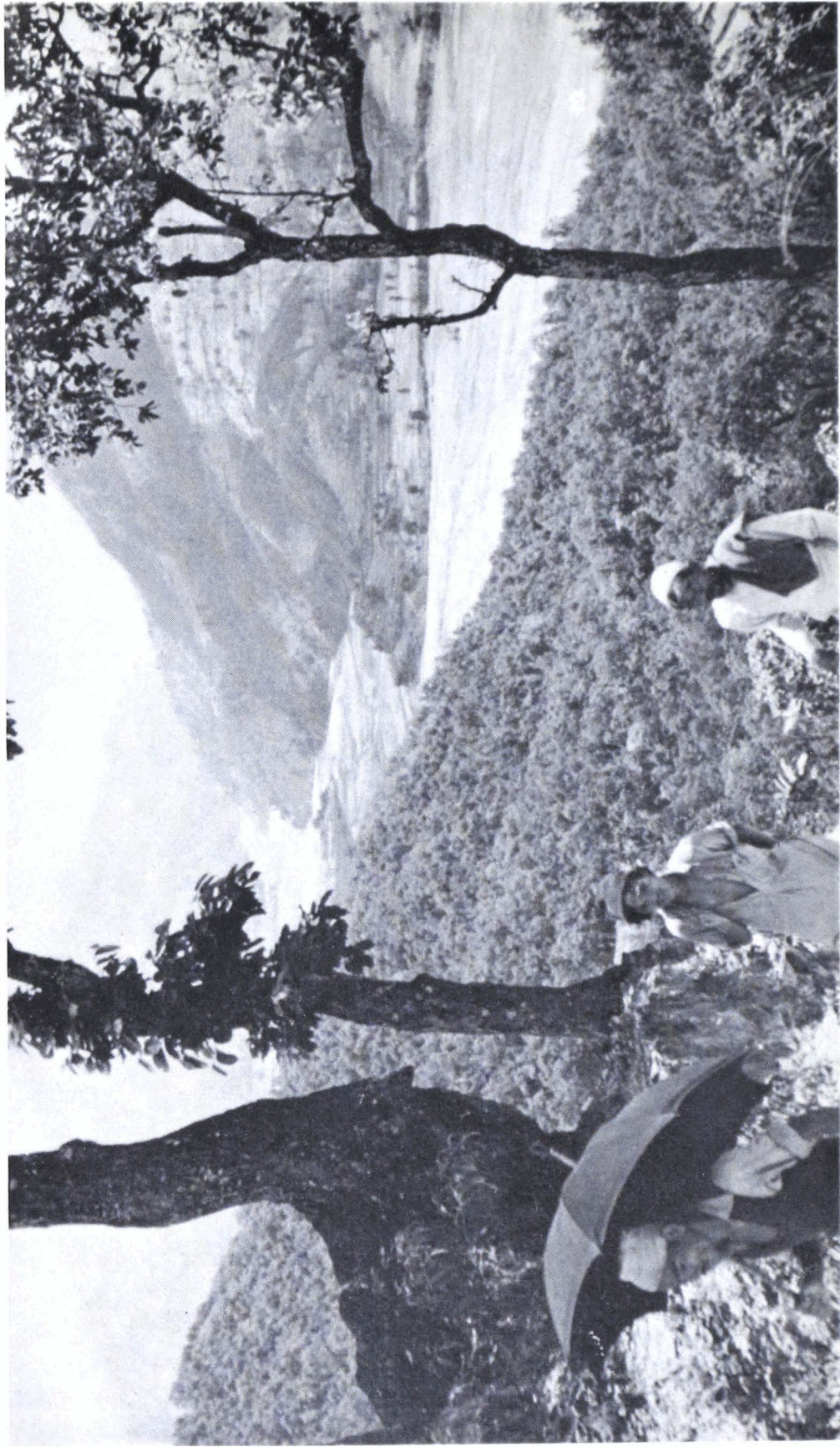
"We must charge them. They cannot sleep here for nothing."

"Oh, let them be. They have nothing."

"Still, they should pay two annas like everyone else."

"Let them be. I do not think they could pay two annas."

"Holy Krishnanarayan! Very well, very well. It is your veranda. And now. . . ."



The road from Nawakot to Katmandu





Everything but the kitchen sink: '... a mattress ... a sack of household goods ... a young boy as well ...'

There followed a complicated discussion about money, accompanied by the chink of coins, which I did not entirely follow. The sense of it, however, was that the noisy, raucous character had been collecting dues from travellers, mostly porters, in payment for their places in the rows of sleeping bodies in the sheds on or near this section of the road. He had now finished his round in one direction, but he still had to go and take over the dues collected by his agents further up the hill. There was some sort of profit-sharing arrangement with our involuntary landlord, about which they were arguing. Having taken their cuts they would then have to hand over the remainder to the legal owner or owners of the buildings.

This argument went on altogether too long, very one-sided though it was. The noisy character's energy appeared to be inexhaustible and he was still as sprightly as ever when he went off to complete the night's business. It seemed as though his nattering had taken up most of the night and only a few more minutes had passed when the woman of the house shooed her clucking chickens out of doors and the streaky false dawn came up in the eastern sky.

We wasted no time in getting away and had been going for less than a quarter of an hour when we came to a whole village of lodging-houses, complete with water-spout and cistern. The inmates were already astir, with loud clearing of throats and stretching of arms, and here, amongst them, looking as though he had been on the watch most of the night, was our youngster, Kharman Singh. The look of relief on his face at having found us was so beautiful to see that we had no words to chide him. He told us Sonam and Jaman Singh had cut across to the other road—the one that led up from the bridge instead of the ford—to look for us, and that they had planned to converge on the top of the pass, thus covering both routes.

So we set out for the pass, allowing the "baby" to forge ahead with his load. After the long grind of the day before, I found it decidedly difficult to make the grades and could not summon up enough will-power to prevent myself stopping for a cup of tea and a dish of raspberries at every other estaminet, whilst Mac would eat an egg or two at each one as well. Since these refreshment-stalls were quite thickly sprinkled on the steep sections near the top, our progress was slow.

At last we were there—with a level track ahead of us instead of the everlasting climb—and shortly afterwards Sonam and Kharman Singh's brother hove in sight, approaching up the other trail. Then the reunion, and though I had been carefully nursing recriminations, fiercer and fiercer as the track grew steeper and steeper, in the event I could not do anything but reflect their happiness at having found us at last. We tried, not very successfully, to work out for each other what our movements had been, and then the matter faded into an amusing memory as we contemplated a descent of three thousand feet or more into the Valley.

For another two or three miles the trail swept round and about the flanks of the high hills, sometimes even rising a little again, and then finally, just beyond a cluster of houses, our old familiar Valley came into view. There was the Bagmati river, holding the side of the distant city in its coils, there was the white pimple of the huge Bodha Stupa, there were the terraces upon terraces of fields and the woods of Nagarjun. "*Katti ramro ho, hamro Nepal!*" Jaman Singh involuntarily exclaimed. "How good it is, our Nepal!"

So began the last lap of our journey to see some of the country about which the Katmandu politicians make plans. As we went down the last precipitous descent to the "frontier" village of Jitpur, we ran into the morning's crowd of porters coming up. We marvelled, as we never ceased to do, at their enormous loads, for one, besides having a mattress and a sack of household goods on his back, had a young boy as well, and others were bent under huge crates of merchandise. Reaching the Valley in its north-western corner, we still had six or seven miles to go, through an old Newar town called Dharmtali, to reach the capital. In the flatter parts the track was amazingly ill-defined considering that it was one of the main arteries of the kingdom, and in places where it crossed fields it sometimes disappeared altogether. In these places it appeared to have been ploughed over by the husbandman of that particular area, in the hope, possibly, of diverting the path and the traffic that goes with it to someone else's land.

Light-headed with too little sleep and too much walking we came to Balajiu, which lies in the lee of the royal forests on the ridge of Nagarjun. Here we entered a restaurant, and Sonam, as a kind of indication that all's well that ends well on a journey

well-completed, bought the first, but not the last round of rice-beer. Mac and I fed our sweet-starved stomachs with all manner of tasty fried samusas and jelabis, candies and fudges, enough to make doctors shake their heads in alarm. Then, after gorging ourselves on such delicacies, we went off to see the twenty-two water-spouts and the statue of Narayan-in-the-waters, which lie in a garden near the point where the road branches off for Swayambhu.

The atmosphere of this garden, with its artificial lake, out of which the spouts of water plash into ducts leading to another artificial pond below, has a suggestion of former dignity, of eighteenth century elegance. King Jaya Prakash Malla, who built it for his royal pleasure, is gone the way of all flesh, but like the ancient carp of Fontainebleau, marvellous in their longevity, the big metallic-green fish and their offspring remain in possession of the lake, and swarm towards anyone who cares to feed them—a sore trial to the hunting and fishing instincts of our boys.

Narayan, who is always connected with the water, reclines in his own separate pool on a bed of coils, representing the serpent, Sesha, whose thousand-hooded cobra heads make a halo round the god's head. He is larger than human size, but smaller than the massive blue-black sculpture, with vermilion decoration, which can be seen at the northern edge of the Valley, under Siva's hills. His more northerly home is the one referred to in the legend of the founding of the Bodhnath Stupa, although confusion is sometimes caused by his name of Burho Nilkantha (Old Blue-neck). The blue neck refers to Siva, whose neck went blue when he took into his throat, but did not swallow, the poison churned up out of the ocean by the three hundred and thirty million gods of the Satya Yuga age, thus saving the world from destruction. Narayan, on the other hand, belongs to Vishnu, a fact which gave rise to the fancy that the King of Kings, himself regarded as an incarnation of the deity, could not look upon his counterpart in stone. Such a doubling of ideas is not uncommon, however, in a land where the supernatural beings vastly outnumber the human, and in this case it is said that the northern statue was named after the sanyassi who was its first guardian, after it had been brought to light by the spade of a local farmer.

We found a party of Sikh Indian Army engineers camped in

the lower garden, and one of them was washing his shirt and silk pants under a water-spout. We compared beards, then left the pleasaunce and trudged on through the hot dust of the straight road back into the city.



# 13

## *The Song of the Villages*

WHEN I first visited the National Teacher Training Centre at Min Bhawan the circumstances were delicate. The students were on strike. They complained that they had had no proper tests to assess their ability, and that they had not been taught the answers to those questions they had been asked. On a crisp winter morning in February, with the sun shining clear out of an electric blue sky, they were gathered, men and women, at the iron gates of the mansion, whilst the staff discussed the problem in the hall inside.

In the event it was decided that the questions should suffer and not the students, so the democratic right to strike achieved a doubtful victory. With the temporary satisfaction of all concerned, the principal and his staff of thirteen were free to continue their task of training teachers on a shoe-string.

It was a task on which they were literally working from the ground upwards, for the first group of students had been obliged to spend part of their time weaving rush mats to sit on and making string cots to lie on. Both exercises in self-help were probably very salutary for young people who, after a bare six months, would be going out in ones and twos, but mostly in ones, to villages throughout the country to enlarge existing schools and to open new ones.

In a way they were the successors to the teachers in the Basic Schools, who, before the Second World War, had been trained on principles established in India under the inspiration of Mahatma Gandhi. The Basic Schools, whose symbol was the wheel of the spinning jenny, had been activated by the desire to improve the life of the villages through instruction in methods of making the home conditions better and through the teaching of useful skills and techniques to enable the peasant to spend profitably his inevitable period of leisure between the time he sows his crop and the time he reaps it. It was intended that the teaching of the three Rs should be linked closely to the



primary aim of helping the peasant to better his own lot and the lot of his family and neighbours in his own surroundings, and should not encourage him to look for an office job in the town.

In Nepal, though some seventy-five Basic Schools remain, the training of the teachers for them has died away. The principles embodied in them are now incorporated and modified in the wider picture of education painted, with American assistance, by the National Education Planning Commission.

Up to this century the only schooling a poor man could hope to get in Nepal—and it was a very slender hope—was, as in medieval Europe, at the hands of the Church. The Buddhist monks taught school in the viharas in the towns and in the gompas and monasteries in the Hills, and the Brahman priests passed the ancient Hindu lore down the generations in the Sanskrit pathshalas.

In recent times there was one other way in which a hillman, but not a plainsman, might get to school, and that was through the highly competitive selection for recruitment to the British Indian Army. Those who served in the Gurkha regiments returned to their native heath better educated and better informed than the majority of the stay-at-homes. The general tidiness and orderliness and comparative cleanliness of the villages favoured by recruitment clearly shows the difference. And a few of the pensioners, not content merely to pass their time wielding the rod and gun and sitting in the chimney-corner with tales of past battles and far-off places, were themselves fired with the idea of passing on their knowledge to the village children.

In this way the first village schools were opened in the Hills of Nepal. The pensioners would club together to form a school board, under the chairmanship of the senior rank. In some villages they would pay a teacher from outside, in others one of the pensioners himself might take on the job. A floor of beaten mud on the veranda of a house, a couple of dozen slates and an equal number of dog-eared readers in the devanagiri script, with the same number of little boys squatting in front of the teacher—this was their genesis. But it was difficult. The demands of work in the fields on the children were just as compelling as the desire for schooling. Improvements came gradually, as circumstances permitted. After the Second World

War it was possible to increase the number of schools with funds from the Indian Army Post-War Development Fund.

But although funds were needed urgently enough, money alone does not make a teacher. Some teachers, attracted by improvements in pay and conditions and by a love of their home-land, returned from the Nepalese colony in the Darjeeling district of India, where government and missionary training colleges have existed for a century, to teach in the highlands of their fathers, particularly to Ilam and Dhankuta in the eastern part of the country, but this was a drop in the ocean compared with the requirements for a nation-wide coverage. To teach more than a million children in a population of eight and a half million forty thousand teachers are required. If a thousand teachers were trained each year, more than a generation would still be required to approach the goal—and by that time the first trainees would be retiring.

This formidable task did not seem to worry Yam Bahadur Karki unduly as he explained his aims in training his small nucleus of two hundred. Put in a nutshell, it was to teach the teachers to think for and teach themselves. This was something of a shock to them at first, and the widely-used discussion-group method was entirely new to them. But of course, the lack of furniture helped, for sitting cross-legged on the floor seemed more appropriate to a village meeting or panchayat than to an academic class.

Some said that they had learnt the free discussion-group method, encouraged by the United States educational adviser, only too well when they staged their strike, but paradoxically the feeling behind the strike was not that the work was too hard, but that it was too free. Such is the shortage of educated people in the country that those being trained to teach were themselves extremely short of the knowledge they were to be required to impart to others. None had any kind of further education and some had not even been to High School. They desperately wanted their training to be in the reverse priority—firstly, an increase in their own knowledge; secondly, what to teach; and only thirdly, how to teach it. And they wanted to be told, not asked, how to do it.

It was very natural that such a feeling should spread in an establishment where everyone, from the principal downwards, was groping his way towards something entirely new—the idea

that education should be the medium through which the tiller of the soil might be awakened from his age-long sleep in the heart of nature, and become, for the first time, conscious of himself; and not only that he might be awakened, but that he might be awakened gently, lest in a far ruder awakening he should lose rather than gain that consciousness.

Under the double pressure of a common frontier with the Republic of China in Tibet to the north, and of the well-meant, but not entirely welcome, influence of the Republic of India to the south, twentieth century national consciousness has grown by leaps and bounds in the Kingdom of Nepal, which is the lean meat between two very thick wads of bread. Tribal loyalties are becoming blurred and fusing, though reluctantly, into the body of the nation. No longer is it apt or appropriate to discuss breeds of Gurkha like live-stock at an agricultural show. And Nepal, in deference to the modern ideals of powerful nations, already has its schoolboy hero—Tensing Sherpa, who climbed the highest mountain in the world assisted by his mates and one or two Englishmen.

The young teachers who go out into the field from the Training Centre, will help, for better or for worse, to spread the idea of the nation. But as yet they are mainly men and women of the Valley and the Plains, the *desi*, as the hillmen call them. The men of the Hills still hold aloof, independent-spirited, fending for themselves, with the help of the British and Indian armies which so many of them serve.

But it was not dry statistics that Yam Bahadur and I discussed as we gazed out of his office window towards his own fields across the Bagmati river. Oriental statistics, like oriental arithmetic, are capable of infinite expansion and contraction, and the elusive figures are only really tied down when it comes to pay and allowances and the price of goods in the market.

First, in the official manner, he showed me the big coloured charts and Nepali readers, which had been written from the scientific principles developed by Dr. Laubach and printed in Bombay for the U.S. Operations Mission to help the adult literacy scheme. He then showed me little books on agriculture and carpentry and water-hygiene, composed by members of his staff and run off on the duplicator in their first efforts to satisfy the demand for written school material originating in Nepal itself.

But it was when he began to talk of the real life of the villages themselves that his eyes really began to light up. He talked of the rhythm of the yearly cycle of village life, of the villagers' festivals and dances and music, and of their songs, sung to the accompaniment of fiddles and pipes and drums, with the eternal white backcloth of the snows. He revealed the heart of the peasant in the simple words he uses to express his love for his land, his struggles against hardship, and the great and small emotions of life—a far cry from the complicated metaphysics of the tantras.

He talked of the *gaine*, who play their *sarangi* from village to village. The *sarangi* is a kind of two-stringed fiddle, peculiar to the Hills, and the *gaine* who plays it is the traditional bard, who keeps alive the folk memory of the heroes and epic events of the past in poetry, some of which is handed down orally from generation to generation, and some of which is created anew, with topical allusions to current events. He is a wandering minstrel, often in rags and tatters, who has to sing for his supper. But the people never leave him out in the cold, for singing and dancing are part of their life.

The following is a favourite opening couplet of the *gaine*:

Khane chamal chhaina,  
Launchhan sarangiko tanti!

I have no rice to eat,  
Let the strings of the sarangi set to!

In the pages that follow I have collected together some of the well-known traditional village songs of Nepal and given an English rendering of them. In these lines, for example, which the peasant sings at the spring harvest in the month of Chait, which straddles the end of April and the beginning of May, he praises the earth that gives him his livelihood.

Kati ramra mera yi pangre goru,  
Kati ramro mero hal.  
Kati ramro mero ubjani bali,  
Ramro chha mihinetko phal!

How good are my brindled oxen,  
How good is my plough.  
How good are my grown crops,  
Good is the fruit of labour!

Dharati amai, dharati babai,  
 Yasbata paunchhu anna.  
 Pyaro ma garchhu, sanman garchhu,  
 Dharati amai, dhanya!

Earth my mother, earth my father,  
 From it I get corn.  
 I love, I honour you,  
 Mother earth, thank you!

Umer bitaen jotaima maile,  
 Aena sukhko din.  
 Jiu burho mero, man burho mero,  
 Sukh chhaina ekai chhin.

An age I have passed in ploughing,  
 The day of rest has not come.  
 My body is old, my mind is old,  
 Not a moment's rest is there.

And in these lines about a simple girl washing her hair, the singer thinks of the sparkling spring water of the Hills.

Nepalai jyanko sunako dhara,  
 Ma kapala nuhaunchhu.  
 Kapalai nuhaune dungama basi,  
 Ma kapala sukaunchhu.

In a golden water-spout of beloved Nepal,  
 I am washing my hair.  
 Sitting on a stone washing my hair,  
 I am drying my hair.

And these verses express the villager's simple idea of love, linked with the natural surroundings—the three cities of Nepal and the Himalayas:

Himalai chuli tyo paribata  
 Hiun kaile jaminchha?  
 Bageko pani ureko chitta,  
 Kahan gai thaminchha?

Over there on the Himalayan peaks  
 When will the snow gather?  
 The running stream and the flying heart,  
 Where will they stop?

Bagaincha bhari phala ra phula.  
 Chheu chheuma karela.  
 Ankha chhan timra junkiri jasta,  
 Jhimkaune parela.

The garden is full of fruits and flowers,  
 And round it vegetables grow.  
 Your eyes are just like fireflies,  
 Eyelashes winking.

Tinai ra shahr Nepalai jyanma,  
 Sunako makala.  
 Pagarimathi dui thunga phul,  
 Sun bainsa nakala.

Three towns there are in dear Nepal,  
 A hearth of gold.  
 Two flower-blossoms in the turban,  
 A golden face.

Sun jasto Nepal ke ramro dekhchha,  
 Swarga chha sansarma.  
 Sun jasto premla jun jasto dekhchha,  
 Mayako sansarma.

How lovely it looks, our golden Nepal,  
 A heaven in this world.  
 My golden sweetheart looks like the moon,  
 In the world of love.

And in these a more plaintive note creeps in, with the pangs of  
 separation uppermost :

Himalai chuli ke yati ramro,  
 Sarpako kanchuli.  
 Yo papi manma biraha chalyo,  
 Na bajau bansuri.

How fine it is, the Himalayan peak,  
 Like the skin of a snake.  
 This sinner filled my heart with sorrow,  
 Do not play the flute.

Shirko sindur launa bhaujyu,  
 Hamra dajyu ai ra puge, Nepalai jyanma !  
 Tyatiko jhaljhalko ke manchhyau nani,  
 Kaile ra aunthe ti timra dajyu, ranaima pareka?

Put sindur on your hair, wife of my brother,  
 Our brother has come back to dear Nepal!  
 Why does your heart leap for him, little sister,  
 Will he ever come, your brother, from the far  
 battlefield?

And in this song there is the expression of an age-old, familiar problem, only too often aggravated when the man of the house is away on military service and obliged to leave his family behind:

Choliyai malai chahindaina, bajyai,  
 Timri piyari, kathai, timri piyari!  
 Patuka malai chahindaina, bajyai,  
 Timri piyari, kathai, timri piyari!

I don't want a blouse, mother-in-law,  
 I want your affection, your affection!  
 I don't want a girdle, mother-in-law,  
 I want your affection, your affection!

And in this one, on the same theme, one is not quite sure whether the ending is meant to be light-hearted or bitter:

Sasu bhanchhe, "Buhari!" Buhari bhanchhe, "jiu!"  
 "Singmangma rakheko kasle khayo ghiu?"  
 "Dekhnu na sunnu maile khaen?"  
 "Oth tera chilla chhan, thaha maile paen,  
 Dhoka jati thunchhu, jhyal jati kholchhu,  
 Ghiu chorne Buhari oth tera polchhu!"

The husband's mother says, "Buhari!" The son's wife  
 says, "Yes!"

"Who has eaten the ghi in the wooden pot?"  
 "Did you ever see or hear of me eating it?"  
 "Your lips are shiny, now I know.  
 I'll shut the door and open the window,  
 I'll brand the lips of ghi-stealing Buhari!"

The ghi referred to is the clarified butter which is kept in every household and used as cooking-fat. In the next song, too, a girl is in a little trouble. She sings about the red sindur powder, which is used to decorate the parting of the hair:

Shirako sindur birsera aen,  
 Yo manai andhyaro!  
 Ghar jaun bhane kasari jaun,  
 Shirako sindur birsera aen.  
 Maita jaun bhane, behoshi cheli,  
 Yo bhanchhin hamri amaile.

I came forgetting the sindur for my hair,  
 Dark is my heart!  
 I will go home, but how can I go home?  
 I came forgetting the sindur for my hair.  
 If I go, Mother will say, "Thoughtless girl."  
 That's what my mother will say.

And finally the quality for which the hillmen are renowned the world over—courage:

Bir babako choro ma baghko shikar,  
 Deutale die javani, deutale die ni yo rup.  
 Bir babako chorale maridie ni bagh,  
 Cheharaima unko phalkanchha bahaduri.

Son of a brave father, I am a tiger-hunter,  
 God gave me youth, God made me like this.  
 The son of a brave father killed the tiger.  
 Bravery shines in his face.

In every village of importance in the hills of the Gurkhas there is a *rodi ghar*, a hall in which the young men and maidens sing and dance in spring and autumn, until the great ten-day harvest festival of Dasain, commonly known as Dasahra. On the first day of the festival they plant little plots of earth with barley seed, which they tend with great care, until on the tenth day, the barley shoots are visible above the ground. On this day, called Mar from the word *marnu*, to kill, all the villagers gather to sacrifice a buffalo at the *maula*, the sacrificial post to which the animal is tied. A youth, chosen for his strength, slices off his head with a single powerful stroke of his kukhri, in honour of Durga, who killed the buffalo-headed demon, Maheshasur, in the same way. After the sacrifice they dance the night through, dressed in all their finery, and in some villages the ancient totem masks—the lion and the tiger and the bear—are brought out of their store.

Dasain is also a favourite time for carrying out a little



ceremony that can often cut across the divisions of caste and tribe. Two young men who have taken a liking to each other may decide to become blood-brothers, rather in the manner of the gypsies. Though the relationship is based, in the first instance, on mutual attraction, it entails definite obligations. Instead of saying, "He's my mate," the Nepali says, "He is my *mit*." If his *mit* is ever in difficulties, it is up to him to help him as much as he can. He may have to lend his *mit* money, or contribute food and clothing for his wedding, or help to arrange the marriages of his children, or indeed take over the guardianship of his children, if he dies before they are grown up.

The *mit* is, in fact, a kind of god-brother, and the relationship is entered into with all due religious solemnity. Watched by friends and relations, the two intending *mits* lay down their kukhris, take off their shoes and face each other across a sacred fire in which rice, ghi and honey are burned. The presiding priest delivers a short sermon, in which he refers to the incident in the Ramayana in which Ram, seeking his wife, Sita, in the forest, meets Sugriva, who becomes his *mit* and helps him in the search. The priest puts the red tika spot on their foreheads and they garland each other with flowers. Money and personal possessions, such as caps and rings, are exchanged. In this way they are considered to become like real brothers, and their children may not marry each other. Although *bhai* (brother) is a common form of address amongst comrades and corresponds roughly to our words "chum" or "mate", the *mit* is a special kind of brother.

Dasahra is followed, in October or November, by the five days of Diwali, the festival of lights, when honour is done to Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth. Only on these five days are the people allowed by law to indulge in their great passion for gambling, and on the fifth day, which is called Deuse, the children go from house to house, like oriental carol-singers, wishing riches on the household and hoping for a few coppers in exchange. The deusi-singers sing this song :

Yasai gharki mahatarile  
 dunga chhunda drabyai hun,  
 mato chhunda annai hun,  
 pat chhunda pitambar hun,  
 pani chhunda telai hun.

May the stone the mistress of this house touches  
 turn to money,  
 the earth she touches to corn,  
 the leaf she touches to silk,  
 the water she touches to oil.

Yasai gharma Lachhimile  
 sadhainbari basai garun.  
 Yasai gharma lala-bala, burha-burhi  
 kera jastai ganji rahun,  
 dubo jasto mauli rahun,  
 bar-pipal jasto tapi rahun.

May Lakshmi always stay in this house.  
 May the young and the old,  
 grow like bananas,  
 flourish like the dub grass,  
 rise up like the banyan and pipal trees.

Madhesaiko latta-kapra  
 ghar-bhari hun.  
 Bhotko nun, Lhasako sunle  
 bhararai bharun.  
 Yasai gharko dukh-pir Gangajile bagai lagun,  
 Unbhotira Himalchuli batasaile bagai lagun.  
 Dieko ashik lagi jaun.  
 Deusi bhai ho! Ashik diera gharai jaun.

May this house be filled with clothing from the Plains.  
 With salt from Tibet, gold from Lhasa, may it be  
 filled up.  
 May Mother Ganges drive away pain and sorrow from  
 this house.  
 May the wind drive them away above the Himalayan  
 peaks.  
 May these blessings come true.  
 Brother deusi-singers! Having given our blessing,  
 let us go home.

From the singing and dancing in the villages to which he hoped to send his students, Yam Bahadur's conversation switched to the history of his country. He showed me the draft of a series of dramatic sketches he was writing to illustrate the

lives and exploits of past kings of Nepal, the Lichhavis and the Mallas and the Shahs. His idea was that, by acting out these little plays, the children would become imbued with a sense of their cultural heritage and less likely to knock pieces off their national monuments to sell to foreign tourists, a habit which is becoming much too prevalent.

He then showed me his projected Guide to Nepal, and finally the work which seemed to be closest to his heart. Published in the Nepalese year 2012, it was called "The First Stone-Age in Nepal". I had a sneaking suspicion that, as far as he was concerned, he would be quite happy if there were no more changes in the country at all.

# 14

## *The Golden Age*

EVERY COUNTRY looks back to its golden age, when everything in the garden was lovely and the gods smiled on mankind, when the war-drums were silenced and the arts of peace flourished. The Nepalese look back to the time of the Lichhavi, far enough back in the mists of time to be out of the range of detailed documentation, but close enough to be thought of as an age when great men were custodians of civilization and patrons of culture.

“The Lichhavi were the great kings of Nepal,” Raunak Man Pradhan said to me as we sat in his house in Tripureshwar. “They united the Valley and gave our people the chance to live in peace and enjoy their arts and crafts.”

In those days golden Nepal had its golden dynasty, the Suryavansi, or Seed of the Sun, whose Lichhavi forbears came from Vaisali in the Plains. They ruled, the modern Nepalese historians would have us believe, by consent of the people. There was religious toleration, with Hinduism and Buddhism living side by side in harmony. From their palaces at Managriha and later at Kailaskut they dispensed justice and beautified the kingdom. The arts of building in wood, brick and stone were already well understood, as were the crafts of working in copper and gold, and of smelting alloys and casting bronze images in clay moulds. At that time Katmandu and Patan had not been separated by the division of the realm, and Bhadgaun was not yet in existence.

The first of the great Lichhavi kings was Manadeva, the legendary parricide builder of Bodhnath, who set up pillars at the temple of Changu Narayan to record his exploits. He probably reigned at the turn of the fourth and fifth centuries of the Christian era.

In Manadeva's time the study of Sanskrit flourished. The most informative of his pillars, which stands on the left of the main door of the temple, surmounted by the wheel of Vishnu,

bears an inscription which comes down the centuries like a cry from the heart. Out of love for his mother the king persuades her not to commit suttee and throw herself on the funeral pyre of her husband, and having prevailed on her to accept life rather than to seek death, he steels himself to perform deeds of valour worthy of her and of the name of Dharmadeva, his father. He honours his mother in these words, which were translated into French by the great orientalist, Sylvain Lévi, sixty years ago :

Dharmadeva had a wife of pure race and dignity, the most excellent Rajyavati, one would have said the Lakshmi to that Vishnu. When he had illuminated the universe with the rays of his glory, this monarch departed to the three heavens, as if he were going into a pleasure garden. Then she was left struck down, wasting away, deranged and languishing, she whose pleasure it was before her widowhood to sustain the gods with regular ritual.

This Queen Rajyavati, who is called the wife of the king, will in reality only be "Sri", bound to him to follow him faithfully in this other guise, she from whom the irreproachable hero has been born there below, Manadeva the king, whose nobility never ceases to refresh the world like the autumn moon.

Turning round, her voice choked with sobs, she says tenderly to her son, "Your father has gone to heaven. Oh, my son, now that your father has departed, what need have I of the breath of life? Assert your royalty, my dear son! I am going to follow in the path of my husband. What have I to do with the chains of hope, which are forged in a thousand ways for tasting pleasure, to live without my husband, since the time of being together fades like the illusion of a dream?"

"I am going," she says. Then her son, afflicted at seeing her thus, inclining his head tenderly on to the feet of his mother, addresses this prayer to her : "What have I to do with pleasure, what have I to do with the joys of life, if I am separated from you? It is I who will die first, and then do you set out for heaven afterwards."

Placed within the lotus of her mouth, mingled with the tears of her eyes, the laces of these words of her son held her fast like a bird caught in a net, and with her virtuous son she busied herself in person with the funeral obsequies, her spirit purified

by virtue, giving of alms, austerities, fasting and self-imposed tasks, and distributing all her fortune to the Brahmans to increase the merit of her husband, she seemed, in the midst of the rites, so wrapt in them was she, to be Arundhati herself.

And her son, replete with vigour, heroism and constancy, patient, affectionate towards his subjects, active without boasting, smiling in speech, always addressing the first word, valorous without pride, at the summit of the knowledge of the world, friend of orphans and the poor, hospitable to guests, dispensing largesse upon those who solicit it, demonstrating his true manhood by his worthy skill in the use of arms of attack and of defence, with powerful and graceful arms and tender skin, lucent like beaten gold, and massive shoulders, he is Love incarnate, a feast for lovers' delights.

"My father," he says to himself, "has scattered beautiful pillars over the rich earth. I have been initiated by fights and battles into the ways of the Warriors. Now I will take the field in the eastern regions in order to destroy my enemies, and I will set up kings who will bow to my commands."

And bowing down in front of his mother, whose misery was departing from her, he spoke thus to her: "Oh, my mother, I cannot acquit myself of my obligations to my father by means of austerities without purpose, I can only serve his feet humbly in the ritual of arms, in which I am skilled. I will now go!"

And the king's mother joyfully bade him farewell. He set out towards the East. The vassals who ruled in the East prostrated themselves, bowed their heads and let slip the chaplets from their foreheads. He forced them to accept his sovereign authority. Then, fearless like a lion with a thick, fearsome mane, he went towards the western lands. He learnt that his vassal was misbehaving there. Then, lifting up his head and slowly touching his arm, which seemed to be like an elephant's trunk, he said resolutely, "If he does not obey my summons, my heroism will know how to lead him to obedience.

"But what use are long sentences that mean nothing? A few words are enough. This very day, oh my uncle, beloved brother of my mother, I cross the Gandaki, rival of the ocean in width, in treacherousness of surface, in turbulence, where the water rolls in waves and frightful whirlpools. With hundreds of caparisoned horses and elephants I cross the river and I am your army."

Having made his decision, the sovereign carried through his promise to the end. He conquered the city of the Mallas, then returned slowly to his country, with a joyous spirit, and gave boundless riches to the Brahmans. And Rajyavati, the virtuous queen, heard her son say to her in a firm voice: "And you too, my mother, if your heart is glad, make pious donations!"

The second great king of the Lichhavi was Amshuvarman, who reigned in the seventh century. He was not in the direct line of succession, for when we first hear of him, Sivadeva, the fifth in line from Manadeva, was king. The Valley was united, apparently peace reigned, and Sivadeva retired from worldly affairs to lead the life of an ascetic.

Amshuvarman, whose descent is uncertain, though he may have been Sivadeva's son-in-law, was appointed general factotum. His title was Mahasamanta, or Great Satrap. D. R. Regmi, who finds time in the midst of his political activity to write Nepalese history, supposes that he may have been a kind of President of a Republic, after the pattern of the rajas of Vaisali, who for a long period were elected by the people, and he also says, though it is difficult to reconcile the two fancies, that this is an early example of the dual government system of King and hereditary Prime Minister, which became crystallized in the Rana period.

Amshuvarman's progress, as revealed on the stone inscriptions which have come to light in Katmandu, Deo Patan and Bungmati, was steady and sure. In time he dropped the title of "Great Satrap" and simply called himself "Sri" and shortly afterwards he was calling himself "King of Kings".

Fortune smiled on him according to the Nepalese Chronicle of Kings. He left the palace at Deo Patan, which Sivadeva had built, and moved a little further south to Kailaskut, where he built a great darbar with wonderful courtyards. He had houses built there for his ministers and officials. He was vigorous, active and redoubtable, and indefatigable in the pursuit of human ends. He went to Prayagtirtha (probably near Panauti in No. 1 East) and persuaded the local bhairab, Prayag Bhairab, to live near his palace. As a reward he offered him sustenance for a year. The gods, who up to this time were visible to mortals, after his reign stopped showing themselves in their real form.

History has smiled on Amshuvarman too, for though only the grassy mound called Kailas now remains to remind us of his palace, his name has been enshrined in the annals of the Tibetans and the Chinese as well as in those of his own country.

Though the Chronicle is curiously preoccupied with his interest in a bhairab, the sculptured records pursue a more golden path. At the time of his satrapcy it is his military exploits that are extolled. Once on the throne he protests his devotion to the people. "My purified heart has no other ambition but the good of the people. I ask myself how my people can be made happy." As a philosopher he is credited with the introduction of a new Sanskrit grammar, and as a litterateur with the composition of a treatise on the science of words (shabda vidya shastra), and as a financier with the minting of the first coins, heads a winged griffin rampant and tails the same creature with a crescent moon or a radiant sun over his head.

But if Amshuvarman, to the modern Nepalese in search of a national mystique, is the golden king of the golden age of the Lichhavi and famous for his good works, his daughter is more famous still. Amshuvarman secured the allegiance of the people of the neighbouring valleys and made sure of their fealty by carrying off their bhairabs, but his daughter conquered a great nation.

It happened that in those days a Charlemagne arose in the heart of High Asia. His name was Srong-btsan-sgampo, and he ruled the rude tribes of the land of Bod, now called Tibet. Early in his reign he sent sixteen men to Kashmir with orders to learn how to read and write. They came back with the devanagri alphabet.

If he could master an alphabet Srong-btsan-sgampo believed he could master the world, and thereupon he set about doing so with no mean success. He extended his domains as far as Lake Koko Nor in the north, the Hindu Kush in the west, Assam and Nepal in the south and the Chinese marches in the east. He then decided to crown his achievements by marrying into the aristocracy, and sent envoys to China and to Nepal to request the hand of a princess from each country.

Amshuvarman acceded to the request of the Tibetan, although one may surmise that he was not too keen on uniting his family with one of the heathen savages to the north. But the request was, in fact, more like an ultimatum, and he was not



prepared, in the later manner of the Rajputs, to resist and court destruction.

Princess Bhrikuti, or Bri-btsun as she is called in the Tibetan records, was sixteen years of age at the time of her marriage. "She was of a clear complexion and the lineaments of her face foretold a marvellous destiny. She was of perfect virtue and of great beauty, and the appearance of her whole person left nothing to be desired. Her mouth exhaled the perfume of the blue lotus. She was under the sway of her own gravity and grace."

On the long journey to Lhasa she was accompanied by the noblemen of Nepal as far as the Kyerong Pass, where they handed her over to a Tibetan escort. She took with her three Buddhist images and a complete collection of the sacred texts of Nepal.

One imagines the Nepalese girl must have been desperately lonely up there on the roof of the world, but two years later she was to have a companion in her solitude. Srong-btsan-sgampo was ravaging Chinese territory and still demanding a Chinese princess in marriage. The Emperor Tai-tsung at last bowed to the inevitable and the Princess Wen-cheng set out on the long, long trail.

Wen-cheng was as ardent and pious a Buddhist as Amshuvarman's daughter, and between them they converted their husband to the faith. From China he sought wise men, and also craftsmen capable of teaching his people how to make paper and ink. Sages also went to his court from India and Nepal. Viharas were established and Buddhism spread throughout his empire, to find a safe sanctuary that was virtually unmolested until 1957.

Both princesses were deified by the lamas as incarnations of Tara, the Lady of Mercy, who is the special protector of those travelling over rocks or water. In Tibet her name is Dolma, which is as common a personal name to women there as Mary is to Christians. She is one of the most popular of all divinities and a particular patron of the womenfolk.

In their statues the Tara princesses are represented as sitting on a lotus throne, with one leg standing on the ground and the other inclined behind it, and in one hand a blue lotus flower. They are identical twins, only distinguished by their colour, the Chinese princess being white and the Nepalese girl green.

The story of Bhrikuti is a most popular legend, but unfor-

tunately it does not suit the modern idea of Nepalese national identity, and therefore D. R. Regmi discards it as a product of the imagination. His reason is that he does not find it credible that the head of a family taking pride in the illustrious lineage of its mighty solar Kshatriya (warrior) stock could permit his daughter to marry an outsider. So national pride will not allow it to be true, and the history of the nation must be written in more prosaic terms.

It cannot be denied, however, that it was Srong-btsan-sgampo's conquests that brought culture to Tibet. From this time onwards the Newar craftsmen went north from Nepal through the passes, and built palaces and temples in the land of Bod, and beautified them with the fine metal-work for which Tibet is renowned. They are still there to this day.

*The Christian Fathers*

TIME AND again the Nepalese, with innate conservatism, have turned away from change, and this is not really because the country has been isolated for generations and ruled by a stiff autocracy. How could any country be said to be isolated that has sent half a million men to follow the drum to the four corners of the earth, and that has a long, undefended frontier with one of the great cultural nations of the world?

The fact is that the hillmen are conservative by nature. In the mind's eye of every one of them, after he has done his duty, be it the short service of the man who gets little promotion or the long service of an officer, is that little village in the folds of the hills, with its closely cultivated terraces of maize and rice and its gurgling streams, to which he will retire and leave the rest of the world as the memory of a previous incarnation.

Foolish theories have been advanced to account for their ready acceptance of things as they are. Some say they are stupid, but the results of boys educated in English schools in Malaya, bearing in mind the grave handicap of having to learn in a foreign language, have tended to disprove this. I have even heard it said by a learned lady that a combination of shortage of nourishment and the rarified air of the high altitude makes them light-headed and thus their indomitable cheerfulness is the result of a kind of euphoria! But cheerful or not, if they had seriously desired change, nothing short of armed foreign intervention could have saved the Hindu Ranas from being toppled over long ago by the battle-hardened Mongol tribes of the Gurkhas.

The hillmen were not interested in the Nepal Valley, and it was from the Valley, where the priests held sway, and from the Plains that the Ranas drew their sustenance. Many of the innovations which Maharaja Chandra Shamsheer brought about, such as the abolition of suttee (the burning of widows) and slavery, and the reduction in the number of public-houses,

were introduced with grave misgivings as to how they would be received by the people. And the revolution, when it did come, was engineered from abroad, by young men who had gone to India for their education and had been fired with the desire for political freedom in their native land.

Such a man was Tanka Prasad Acharya, who was the leader of the party that planned to blow up the prime minister, Mohan Shamsher, in the king's private cinema in 1940. Saved from execution by his Brahman caste, he lived through the hardships of life in the Katmandu jail to be released by the revolution of 1950 and enjoy his own brief day as prime minister in 1956 at the king's invitation.

Such too was Khadgaman Singh, who was involved in the 1930 plot to assassinate Maharaja Bhim Shamsher and was only saved from the hangman's noose by the fact that the reforming prime minister had abolished the death penalty a few months previously. Khadgaman Singh survived twenty years in chains and emerged a saintly man, with the words of the Bhagvad Gita never far from his lips and ill-will towards none. Too withdrawn from the world to be successful in the rough and tumble of politics, he was given a house and found a wife by the king to spend, one hopes, the remainder of his life in peace. Such men also were the Koirala brothers, who have been in and out of office for the last ten years on the Nepali Congress and National Democratic Party tickets.

The revolutionaries were men who had tasted the liberal education that was being disseminated in India's overcrowded universities and in Nepal's own Trichandra College, which in turn stemmed back to the English idea of freedom of thought and speech. For many of them their first major examination was the Cambridge Oversea School Certificate. But now they have found the inertia of the Valley as hard a nut to crack as the conservatism of the Hills, and their own love of words and ideas, coupled with the clash of personal ambitions, has given them the tendency of creating as many parties as there are opinions.

However, one more symbol of change, which may be more resistant to the inturnd Irishness of the country, is that the Cambridge Oversea School Certificate can now be taken in Nepal itself. In recent years the Jesuit Fathers, who have long been established in neighbouring Darjeeling, have been admitted to the Valley. They have established two boarding-schools

there, a preparatory school called Saint Xavier's, on the outskirts of Patan, and Godavari College, the secondary school situated in the south-eastern corner of the Valley.

At Godavari the good fathers have a fortunate choice. The former Rana country house, which they have obtained, stands in a green vale between the rice-fields to the north and the wooded slopes of Phulchauk to the south. An artificial pond in the grounds in front of the house serves as a bathing-pool, and there is plenty of room for games. It is almost at the end of the road, bordered by big clumps of agaves, that leads to Panchdhara, the five water-spouts at the source of the Godavari river.

In Hindu fancy this source is also the source of the much bigger Godavari river in India. The great Godavari rises near Nasik in the Western Ghats of Southern India, and they say it covers the seven hundred odd miles from Nepal to this point underground, and then emerges to run eastward across Hyderabad, now part of Andhra Pradesh in the new configuration of India, and finally merge its waters with the Bay of Bengal on the Carnatic coast. Every twelve years a *mela*, or fair, is held at the Panchdhara, and many of the pilgrims will have made the long trek up to the Himalayas from the south to see the reputed source of their river. A Mahadeo shrine stands by a cleft in the rock, from which the spring emerges, and the crystal-clear water feeds a pool immediately in front of it, which in turn replenishes the lower pond outside the shrine.

It may be that this *mela* has lent currency to the theory, mentioned by Kirkpatrick, that the Newars are related to the Nairs of the Malabar coast, and that Raja Dharmadatta, who is accredited with the introduction of the four castes of Hinduism into Nepal and the foundation of Pashupatinath, was a prince from Conieeveram, the holy city fifty miles from Madras. Supporters of the theory, apart from the vague similarity of name, point out that both Newar and Nair women, unlike the orthodox Hindu, can divorce their husbands with the greatest of ease. In the case of the Newars they simply place a betelnut on his pillow, and by this sign he knows that he has ceased to satisfy. In reality the thread of such a tenuous argument is soon broken by a careful consideration of their respective languages and other customs.

To the right of the school another track passes a marble quarry and finishes up at the Naudhara, the nine water-spouts

where the temple to Phulchauki Mai, the goddess of the mountain, is situated. Behind her shrine the woods rise up to the nine thousand foot ridge—spruce and pine, interspersed with a profusion of scarlet rhododendrons and azaleas. Like the woods of Sheopuri, they are unfortunately being sadly depleted by the poorly controlled activities of the Tamang wood-cutters.

It is in these sylvan surroundings that the American group of Jesuits, led by Father M. D. Moran, have set up their school. Whilst Yam Bahadur Karki's men nibble away at the village folk, the Catholic priests, like good salesmen, go for the top, and aim to give a good liberal education to the sons of the upper establishment of the country. Though the language, history, geography and culture of Nepal are not neglected, the medium of the priests' instruction is English, and they do not lack pupils.

Father Moran on his motor-bike in the white tropical habit of his order—the same colour as that of the old Newar gubajius—is now a familiar sight to everyone in the Valley. Busy, knowledgeable and hospitable, he is known by all and respected by all but the most prejudiced, nor have long years in the tropics dimmed the enthusiastic directness of his speech and manner, brought over with him from his native Illinois. But Father Moran's freedom of the Valley, which leads the ill-disposed to regard him as a kind of Grey Eminence in the capital, is the culmination of a very long relationship between the Catholic fathers and Nepal. Sitting in his room at Saint Xavier's, amongst the mountain photographs presented to him by his many friends from the various expeditions, he told me something of the early days, when Catholic priests tried to pass through Katmandu disguised in loin-cloths and ashes, and when they repeatedly found their efforts at conversion disappointed.

This early history is only now being related in full in the volumes of papers being edited by Luciano Petech and published in Rome under the auspices of the Italian Institute for the Middle and Far East. It is a fascinating account of missionary activity in Tibet and Nepal, which begins in the early seventeenth century, and it also explodes once and for all the popular belief that the British civil and military officers of the late eighteenth century, in the service of John Company, were the first Europeans to penetrate as far as the heart of Nepal.

At the time the story begins Tibet was considered to be the

more important country by the Christian authorities at Goa, and it now seems definitely established that the first known European to visit Nepal was the Portuguese, João Cabral, journeying in 1628 from Shigatse in Tibet to Bengal. It is possible that the poet king, Pratap Malla, learnt his English and French words "winter" and "automne" from him, but unfortunately he has left no written description of the country. The Austrian Jesuit, Johann Grüber, and the Belgian, Albert d'Orville, who had the ingenious idea of opening up an overland trade-route between China and India to avoid the Dutch privateers in the South China Sea, left no detailed record either, though we know that they came down from High Asia to Agra through Nepal in 1662.

The stories of the latter pair encouraged the Jesuits in Mogor, as the northern part of India under the control of the Mogul emperors was then called, to attempt to establish a mission in Nepal. They were further spurred on by an Armenian merchant, who reached Patna from China via Nepal in 1679 and suggested that the King of Nepal was ripe for conversion. Consequently the Italian Jesuit, Marcantonio Santucci, went there to see for himself. It seems that the Armenian had been over-sanguine, however, for Marcantonio found himself in complete and utter isolation, and after a few fruitless months, he returned, a sick man, to Patna.

After this there is a long pause. The Society of Jesus seems to have lost interest in Nepal. And when the story is taken up again it is by the Capuchins. Tibet was again the main objective, partly because of persistent rumours, originating from Muslim merchants, that there was an ancient Christian community high up in the mountains, degenerate but flourishing. In fact, no such community was ever found, and it appears that the merchants were misled by superficial resemblances between the rituals of Catholicism and Lamaic Buddhism.

The first two Capuchin missionaries to Tibet were Giuseppe da Ascoli and Francesco Maria da Tours. They went into Nepal from Patna up the Sun Kosi valley in 1707 and reached Katmandu from its eastern approaches via Sankhu. Their attempt to pass through the city incognito was unsuccessful, so they were mulcted of a considerable sum in travellers' toll. In Lhasa the mission had little success. The two priests lived in such miserable poverty that in 1709 Francesco set out for India to seek

help, but by the time he got to Katmandu he had absolutely no money left, and being unable to pay another toll, he was held up there indefinitely.

Even in Giuseppe's first letter, sent from Katmandu on March 8th, 1707, the money problem is uppermost, but in that part of his lengthy epistle which describes his entry into the Valley, he cannot avoid a cry of delight at seeing so many unexpected signs of civilization. In these extracts, which I have translated from the Italian, we have the earliest European descriptions of Changu Narayan, Bodhnath, Pashupatinath and the Rani Pokhri in its previous condition.

"Sunday 20th . . . At the top of the pass I found a chowki who, content with four dams, let me go. After the descent I found a most beautiful valley all planted with rice, corn and mustard, and irrigated with sufficient water. After this, I reached the town called Sankhu. It is not very big, but is all built of stone. This town is situated on the right hand on the northern side, and beyond it, on top of two small mountains, stand two square towers, which they call forts, but in Europe they would hardly merit the name of dove-cotes. Such towers are scattered all over Nepal.

"Monday 21st . . . travelling always on the same level ground, I found not far from the said town a fairly large shrine, situated on the left-hand side, on a hill, and with the two towers. Its inhabitants are all dressed like Danes, with shoes on their feet, long hair, and hats on their heads. Then, carrying on, I reached the river called Bagmati, which one crosses on a wooden bridge, although it has very little water in it. This river is held in great veneration by the Gentiles, and I observed that, when they passed over it, they threw some of its water on to their heads.

"After crossing the river I came upon either a temple or a mausoleum, I do not know which, and I was told that it had been built by a race who call themselves Bhotiyas, and who dress, as the aforementioned people, like Danes, in honour of a certain man who, they say, died three times, and who, they believe, is still alive today. This building is really wonderful, being constructed in the manner and shape of a fort, with three outer walls of earth, with their separate bastions, and in the middle a kind of huge cupola, which would serve as a sort of keep. I did not know whether the said cupola was empty or occupied, as although I went right round it, I could see no door,



nor did I venture to inquire for fear of raising suspicions. This building was on the right.

“Going on a little I came upon a big shrine on the left-hand side, with the outside walls covered with the horns of animals sacrificed to that perfidious idol. There are four or five of these big shrines with their own names, not far from one another, and this is Nepal itself, as there is no particular city with that name. All the said shrines are built of brick, though without mortar, nevertheless well-proportioned, at least externally, with windows and doors not much different from those of Europe.

“Continuing on our way along a paved street, broad and straight and embellished with more than a hundred small pagodas constructed in the form of pyramids on either side of the road, we reached the city (where the Raja resides) called Nagar. (i.e. ‘city’. He means Katmandu.) Before entering the city there is a most beautiful square lake of artificial waters, and over it there is a stone bridge of sixteen small arches, at the head of which stands a medium-sized pagoda, and at the end of which there is a house belonging to the King, in which, however, he does not reside. In the middle of the said lake, away from the road, however, stands a stone elephant, on which the present Raja is mounted, sculptured with two small boys looking at the same lake. This elephant is killing a man with its trunk, but I could not find out what it stood for.

“Finally, after crossing this lake, I entered the city, which has neither gate nor walls, and it seemed to me that so many very high mountains around it were quite adequate as outer walls, and entering it my whole heart was joyful as I seemed to have rediscovered a new Europe, as all the buildings are of brick, the streets paved and fairly wide and straight, the bazaars attractive enough, and the people fairly light-skinned.”

This was in 1707, and two years later, as I have said, Giuseppe was languishing in Lhasa, whilst Francesco was held up in Katmandu on his way to seek relief. In fact another pair had already set out. They were Father Domenico da Fano and Brother Michaelangelo di Borgogna, travelling from Chandernagore, near Calcutta. Going one better than their predecessors, they travelled like saddhus, with their half-naked bodies covered in ashes, but Francesco’s unsuspecting and enthusiastic greeting, when they reached Katmandu, let the cat out of the bag, and they too were forced to pay the tax on travellers,

together with Francesco's dues. This was the second mission to Nepal. Like its predecessor it was fruitless, and after two years it was finally wound up.

Five years later, however, a new mission to Tibet was created, which included Nepal as part of its parish. It consisted of five men, all of whom reached the Valley in 1716. Leaving two of their number in Katmandu, the rest of the party pushed on to Lhasa. These two, Felice da Morro and Giovanni Francesco, had more success than their predecessors, in the matter of bodies if not of souls, for they found that the practice of medicine opened many doors to them. Raja Jagat Jaya Malla gave them a house to live in, and such friendly relations were established with Raja Bhupatindra Malla of Bhadgaun—he whose pillar stands in the Darbar Square—that the Brahmans stirred up the people to object and the popular tumult was only pacified when the king assured them that he was not giving the mission any financial assistance.

In 1722, for reasons best known to himself, Jagat Jaya chased them out of Katmandu, and they were forced to retreat to the friendly Bhupatindra's protection in Bhadgaun. But lack of funds and reinforcements compelled them to close the mission in 1731.

Nevertheless, shortly after this the coffers of the order were replenished by an appeal directed at the wealthy Spanish colonists in Mexico, and in 1737 fresh Capuchin missionaries were welcomed in Bhadgaun by Bhupatindra's successor, Ranjit Malla. For his complaisance he was rewarded with a personal letter from the Pope, to which he replied.

Ranjit Malla's letter is preserved in the archives of the Holy Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in Rome. It is in Newari, heavily loaded with Sanskritisms, and shows clearly the friendly esteem in which he held the priests at that time. The terms of easy equality in which he addresses the Pope, giving him the same number of *Sris* as his own self, afford an engaging glimpse into his character. The letter reads as follows:

“Sri Sri Jaya Ranjit Malla, Maharaja, to Sri Sri Benedetto XIV, Pahyahaya (monarch).

“I am well. How are you? I have seen the letter which you have sent me. As far as religion is concerned (i.e. my conversion) I cannot do it now. As far as my subjects are concerned, I do not know what to say to you. I have sent to tell the Padres to carry

on with their instruction. As far as your doctrine is concerned, I have said that in this country they should preach it at the previous place. I have said that, if anyone of his own free will wishes to go that way, he will not be harmed by me.

“In addition, before now there were no European things in Nepal. Now, thanks to you, there are things and there are Padres. Since the Padres have given help to my subjects and have made the people very happy, we are looking after the Padres as much as possible. In addition, send here for the things that you have not got there, and I will send there for the things that I have not got here. You must not have any anxiety about affairs here. You are my friend. I will do all I can. Also, there are no good doctors here. You must send me from there a good doctor and a good craftsman.

“Dated the 1st day of the light half of the month of Bhadra (Aug–Sept) in the year 864 (1744).”

Twenty-five years later this same king bowed before the Gurkhas and was permitted to retire from the bloodshed and strife which had been let loose in the Valley to the sanctuary of holy Benares. He seems to have been a civilized man, and we have more glimpses of him in the long, chatty epistles from Father Tranquillo d’Apecchio. The following passage from a letter dated October 13th, 1750 gives an amusing account of one of the many problems that bothered the Capuchins.

“Since these people, he says, held in great horror the dark-blue or black habit which we were wearing, and the cape, concerning which they said we had elephants’ trunks on our shoulders, and to some extent the cord too, and since we were terrifying everyone, I might almost say including the animals, and because of this black habit many of them insulted us very seriously, the King of Bhadgaun, in particular, often told me that he did not wish us to wear that habit, and that his wish, and the wish of everyone, was that we should wear what some of them used to wear in olden times, that is white Napelese cloth.

“The king,” he goes on to say further on in the letter, “said that his and everyone’s pleasure and wish was that we should give up our black habits, which were held in horror here, and only sometimes some woman will wear black on the upper part of her body to make her skin look lighter, and that we should wear white in accordance with the customs of the country, and our

missionaries of old did so, since many years back they were chased out of Katmandu for the sole reason that they were dressed in black, and afterwards they wore white for some time, and the same King of Bhadgaun gave them full marks. I answered in the name of all of us that, not being contrary to our Holy Faith, we would obey. Hearing our agreement, the king suddenly took robes, girdles and mantles in his own hands, gave one to me first, then to the others one by one in order, and taking us apart, made us change in his own palace.”

Later in the same letter the good Father has his final word on the subject of dress. “But we are amongst people addicted to all superstitions,” he continues, “and often the Gentiles come to our churches to see what we are doing. I would not want them to think that we too have superstitions about the colour and style of our dress, especially as these people have often asked if our God wears black and if He has ordered us to wear black, and concerning the cape, as some have said we have elephants’ trunks on our shoulders, these blind people venerate the elephant, and I would not like them to think that we too have the same veneration.”

In the meantime, not to be outdone by his rival in Bhadgaun, the King of Katmandu, now Raja Jaya Prakash Malla, also demanded missionaries. In December 1741 he allotted them a house in the city, and his desire was fulfilled early in the following year by the retention in Nepal of Capuchin priests who had left Lhasa. The deed handing over this house is still in existence. Apart from the interest of the transaction itself, it is remarkable for the number of inflated and exalted titles which the king has attracted to himself. This is how it begins :

“Salutations ! He whose hair is dusty with the dust of the lotus footprint of Sri Pashupati (Srimatpashupatichorankamaldhulidhusaritashiroruha), who is elevated by the favour of Sri Maneshwari, his patron deity, who is descended from the seed of Raghu, who is the ornament of the Solar Dynasty, whose standard is Hanuman, King of Kings, Protector of Kings, Sovereign of the circle of Kings, recipient of the merciful glances of the Sovereign of the Gods, his patron deity, Lord of the elephants of the Land of Elephants (i.e. the Tarai), conquered by him for their proper value, Sri Sri Jaya Jaya Prakash Malla Dev, Lord and Master of the supreme Emperors, who are ever victorious in battle, has given to the Capuchins of the

Sacred Congregation the house in Wontu Tole, Tulsi Thali, to the west of the house of Jayadharma Sinha, to the south of the house of Dhanju Suryadhan and Purneshwar, to the east and north of the street.”

In the case of Jaya Prakash pride did indeed come before a fall. In spite of all his high-sounding epithets, in 1769 he was cut down by Prithwi Narayan's Gurkhas. But though mortally wounded, he preserved his dignity and rebuked the clansmen who were mocking the three defeated kings, cornered in Bhadgaun. They let his retainers take him to Pashupati's temple to die.

In 1755, when the Gurkha storm was already gathering force, one of the missionaries actually visited Prithwi Marayan Shah in his native stronghold of Gorkha, but he did not remain there. When Prithwi captured Nawakot, however, a mere day's march from Katmandu, the mission sent their man to stay, though they well knew that, fiercely orthodox Hindu as he was, what Prithwi really wanted was a doctor, not a priest. This was in 1764. Attempts to soften the blood-thirsty warrior failed, and when his iron fist grasped the Valley in 1768, the whole of the mission was forced to retire to the Plains, taking with them their Nepali converts, whom they settled at Bettiah, a few miles to the west of Sagauli.

Light is thrown on conditions in the Valley at this time by Father Giuseppe da Rovato, who lived through the Gurkha invasion, and whose "Description of Nepal" was published in Calcutta in 1790 by John Shore, later Governor-General of India. I quote two extracts from his account. The first concerns treasure, because what he said then still holds good now. There are still many people in Nepal today who are convinced that, if only some of the fabulous treasure that lies below the surface of the ground could be discovered, the knotty problem of balancing the national budget would easily be solved. They say that the treasure hoards are guarded by the original inhabitants of the Valley—the snakes.

"They also have it on tradition," says Father Giuseppe, "that at two or three places in Nepal, valuable treasures are concealed under the ground; one of these places they believe in is Tolu, but no one is permitted to make use of them except the king, and that only in case of necessity. Those treasures, they say, have been accumulated in this manner: when any temple

has become very rich from the offerings of the people, it was destroyed, and deep vaults dug under ground, one above another, in which the gold, silver, gilt, copper, jewels and everything of value were deposited. When I was in Nepal Gainprejas (Jaya Prakash), King of Cat'hmandu, being in the utmost distress for money to pay his troops, in order to support himself against Prit'hwi-narayan, ordered search to be made for the treasures of Tolu; and, having dug to a considerable depth under ground, they came to the first vault, from which his people took the value of a lac (100,000) of rupees in gilt copper, with which Gainprejas paid his troops, exclusive of a number of small figures, which the people who had made the search had privately carried off: and this I know very well, because one evening as I was walking in the country alone, a poor man whom I met on the road, made me an offer of a figure of an idol in gold or copper gilt, which might be five or six sicca in weight, and which he cautiously preserved under his arm; but I declined accepting it."

The second extract concerns a pagoda, which seems to have impressed Father Giuseppe more than any other in the Vale. Yet its identity has not been established! He says it is three miles west of Patan, which brings us to Panga, the place from which the bride came to the wedding-feast at Kirtipur that I attended, but there is no temple of any size there. It is a matter that merits investigation. Could he have meant Bungmati, south-west of Patan, the original abode, according to legend, of Machhendranath?

"To the westward also of the great city of Lelit Pattan," he says, "at a distance of only three miles, is a castle called Banga, in which there is a magnificent temple. Not one of the missionaries ever entered into this castle, because the people who have the care of it, have such a scrupulous veneration for this temple, that no person is permitted to enter it with his shoes on; and the missionaries, unwilling to show such respect to their false deities, never entered it. But when I was in Nepal, this castle being in the possession of the people of Gorc'ha, the commandant of the castle and of the two forts which border on the road, being a friend of the missionaries, gave me an invitation to his house, as he had occasion for a little physic for himself and some of his people; I then, under the protection of the commandant, entered the castle several times, and the people

durst not oblige me to take off my shoes. One day, when I was at the commandant's house, he had occasion to go into the varanda, which is at the bottom of the great court facing the temple, where all the chiefs dependent upon his orders were assembled, and where also was collected the wealth of the temple; and wishing to speak to me before I went away, he called me into the varanda. From this incident I obtained a sight of the temple, and then passed by the great court which was in front: it is entirely marble, almost blue, but interspersed with large flowers of bronze well disposed to form the pavement of the great courtyard, the magnificence of which astonished me; and I do not believe there is another equal to it in Europe."

It may seem surprising that, after Prithwi's death in 1775, his son and successor, Pratap Singh Shah, should invite the missionaries to return, but so it was, and invitations also came from the Rajas of Kaski and Palpa in the Western Hills. It is sad to have to relate that, once more, the mission was defeated, not by local hostility, but by lack of numbers and, this time, by lack of enthusiasm too, amongst their own personnel.

After Pratap Singh Shah's death the widowed queen and the deceased king's brother, Bahadur Shah, fought for the succession. During this time Bahadur Shah went to Bettiah, where he formed strong ties with the missionaries, who cured him of a serious illness. On the queen's death he returned to Katmandu and seized the throne, and shortly afterwards Father Giuseppe, now the Prefect at Bettiah, was writing:

"Already I am expecting daily that a letter will come from him asking me to send him some padres, and I will not be able to satisfy him without depriving some other place of the help of a padre."

The end is an unhappy one. The poor padre who was eventually sent, and who was still in Katmandu at the time of Captain Knox's brief sojourn there in 1802 as the first British Resident, was an unfortunate choice. He turned out to be a pathetic wreck of a man, and was eventually excommunicated and committed to jail in India for living in open concubinage, for peculation and for manslaughter by attempted abortion. Knox's remarks form a poignant and laconic comment by the representative of a vigorous new empire on the decline of an old one.

“On our arrival,” he says, “we found the church reduced to an Italian padre and a native Portuguese, who had been inveigled from Patna by large promises, which were not made good, and who would have been happy to have been permitted to leave the country.”

Now the Capuchin missions are a matter of history, and the Jesuits are back in Nepal after a break of over two hundred and fifty years. They are there purely as teachers, not seeking actively to make converts, and anyone who has seen their work for the youth of the influential families of the country may wish them well. From Godavari, if anywhere, will come the practical young men for the professional and technical work which is required to develop communications and resources in this modern world.



## 16

### *Binayak-by-the-water*

JUST AS the Valley of Nepal is ringed with hills and the passes between them, so is it ringed with the seats of the gods in their various categories. Thus we find Narayan standing guard east, west and south—Changu Narayan on Mount Kileshwar overlooking the Manohara river, Ichangu Narayan behind Swayambhunath at the head of the Badrimati river, and Sikhar Narayan to the south near Pharping. Thus we find the tantric Joginis, the guardian goddesses of magical powers, also posted at strategic points—Bidyadhari Jogini, “Fount of Wisdom”, below Swayambhu; Mani Jogini, “the Jewel”, at Sankhu, the Valley’s north-eastern exit; Hingu Jogini, south of Thapathali; and Vajra Jogini, “She of the Thunderbolt”, at Pharping, where the alternative trail to the Plains begins. And thus we find Binayak, the spirit of Ganesh, at Surya Binayak, south of Bhadgaun, at Karya Binayak, east of the Bagmati river, and at Jala Binayak on its western bank. It was at Jala Binayak—Binayak-by-the-water—that I met Bhimbahadur, the custodian of the temple.

Leaving Katmandu by the road that goes past the Customs Shed and the ghats at the junction of the two rivers, Bagmati and Vishnumati, one heads due south, crossing the Vishnumati by the bridge that carries the light railway which connects with the ropeway terminus at Kisipidi. The road keeps close to the river. A track branches off to the right up the hill to Kirtipur, and another, steep enough for steps, leads to Chobar, where the Primaeval Buddha, here called Sri Adinath, has one of his seats. The road then continues southwards, but as the river falls away in its downward flow, the road rises, skirting round the Chobar hill, until, rounding the shoulder at the end of the ridge, it is several hundred feet above the water. Almost without one noticing it a gorge has been formed. It is the spot where the demon, Danasur, dammed up the river in order to

make a lake for his daughter, Prabhavati, to play in, thus causing the second flooding of the Valley.

From this spot one looks back and sees the long range of the snow peaks, which has risen above the intervening hills—Annapurna and Himalchuli, Ganesh Himal, Langtang Himal and Jugal Himal, Dorje Lapka, Pharbi Chyachu and Gauri Shankar. One looks forward and sees the road returning to the riverside beyond the gorge, and where the river emerges, a small three-storied pagoda in its compound. High above the river a suspension bridge carries a footpath between the two banks.

When I entered the compound, Bhimbahadur came to meet me—a young, unlearned, friendly lad, who lived in married accommodation in the perimeter buildings. He walked beside me as I went round the pagoda and led the way up to the roof above the river-bank, where trippers, mostly Indians, had carved their names and left their marks on the walls.

I have said that Binayak is the spirit of Ganesh, and who does not know Ganesh, the Elephant God, whom one meets up and down the length and breadth of Hindu India, squatting like some circus performer, at country roadsides and in city streets and squares, scarlet and conspicuous as a pillar-box, and always open to a verbal letter of request for luck. Here, though, there was nothing so gross as the actual idol, with long elephant face and giant ears, but the one unmistakable sign of Ganesh was the rat, his vehicle. It was a huge rat, a formidable rat, cast in one great bronze piece, with shark-like jaws belying the domesticity of its dog-collar, and upraised in its left fore-paw, as if about to be hurled—a grenade.

The grenade, of course, is the fruit from which the weapon takes its name, and not the weapon itself, and strictly speaking it is a custard-apple, the fruit of Sita, nevertheless the rat—friend rat, diminutive mammal supporting largest of beasts—cannot be said to be a pretty sight. He faces the shrine of the pagoda, which contains not a doll-fetish, not a bhairab, not a lingam, but a great stone. It is a rounded monolithic outcrop of a stone, a boulder standing up above the surrounding soil, which presumably even in the most primitive times was sanctified as nature's own lingam or generative organ. Just as if it were a living creature, it is garlanded with a bridal necklace clothed against the elements and crowned with a serpent-headed crown. As Binayak-by-the-waters it is haloed with cobra-

heads like Narayan-in-the-water at Balajiu, and as a fetish it is overarched by images of the celestial avatars and flanked by bunches of temple-bells. The people of the neighbourhood and of Chobar on the hill above make offerings to the stone, which is credited with regenerative powers, as depicted in the various positions of amorous exercise shown in the eaves of the pagoda, and with magical powers over the world of nature, to which the complicated tantric images on the tympanum bear witness.

Bhimbahadur stood by whilst my eyes ranged over these things, and nodded approvingly when I took photographs. He ventured no information as to the meanings of the images—the bear-like beast, for instance, with human fingers and two snakes disappearing into its mouth, the winged griffin with a bottle in its hands, the sea-horses, the dragons, the dolphins, and the six-armed creature with ant-eater-like proboscis.

He then took me outside to the gorge, which I really think he liked better than his sacred stone. He clambered over the rocks under the bridge and part way up the face of the cliff, where he showed me the narrow entrance to some caves, down which we peered into the darkness. I knew something about these caves from Yambahadur Karki, who true to the title of his own booklet, was a keen amateur archaeologist as well as an educationalist, and if occasion demanded it, a speleontologist as well. Caves being ready-made holes in the ground, he thought it was a good idea to go into them in search of traces of pre-history rather than to go to the trouble of digging up a lot of earth oneself. So into the Chobar caves he went, with torches to show the way and candles to detect foul air, and out he came again, with a good deal of sand in his hair but no evidence of primitive occupation.

Having a horror of holes in the ground, I myself would much have preferred to dig in the open-air, and there is no doubt that for every known legendary and prehistoric site in the Valley, like Mathatirtha and Deo Patan, there must be dozens of others with their potsherds and stone implements and images lying below the surface. And yet there is such a profusion of antiquities above the ground, that it seems almost superfluous to dig down for more. And the one really fascinating quest—to drive shafts into the centres of the Asoka stupas to see what, if anything, they contain—will never be allowed so long as decent piety and reverence survive.

So we crawled into the caves in thought rather than in fact and then descended back to the river-bank. I said good-bye to Bhimbahadur and promised to return with prints of my photographs. This I did a week or two later, much to his delight, and having on this occasion four-wheeled instead of two-wheeled transport, I decided, with the agreement of my companions, to carry on southwards beyond the gorge and temple as far as the road could take me.

The track, for it was hardly more, went down almost to the level of the river. It then began again the same process as before the Chobar gorge, gradually rising whilst the river fell away. But this time it was on a far grander scale, measured in thousands rather than hundreds of feet, for the Bagmati was now heading for the main canyon—the Place of the Cut, which Manjusri sliced with his mighty sword between the mountains of Phulchauk and Champadevi. The vista on the other side of the river became more and more extensive as the ground dropped down beneath us. We looked down at the other Binayak temple, the Karya Binayak, standing in lonely isolation on a mount above a bend in the river, and at the two large villages behind it—Khokna and Bungmati, with their densely packed houses and protruding temple towers, the latter the birthplace of Machhendranath, the Protector of Patan, but rarely visited by any but its own inhabitants—and behind them again, more villages and the earthworks of the new road to the Plains, which the Nepalese are trying to drive over the Three Waters Pass on a more direct line southwards than the one built by the Indian military engineers.

Our road then veered westwards, away from the precipices above the river, rounding the shoulder of Champadevi, crossing a small col, and carrying on for another mile to Pharping. Here we passed the southernmost of the Narayans, beside a pool to the right of the road—Sikhar Narayan, shortened to Sekharan in the popular parlance. There is a stone relief here of the dwarf Vamana taking one of the three steps with which he covered the world. Vamana, the fifth avatar of Vishnu, begged from Bali, who was terrifying the gods after conquering the world, a piece of ground. It was to be no bigger than the area he could cover in three steps. But no sooner had the demon king agreed, than the dwarf grew up. With one step he covered the earth, with the next the sky, and with the other he held his

foot poised over Bali, who rapidly capitulated, placing it on his own head to demonstrate his abject humility. He was thereupon appointed king of the third realm, the underworld.

Close to Sekharan stands Tribhubana College—a brave attempt at a western-type boarding-school in this remote corner of the Valley. It was strange to meet in this far-off place a mathematics master fluent in English, Christian in religion and with war service in the Royal Air Force.

Pharping is the ultimate village at the southern end of the Valley of Nepal, a place of crumbling old houses, which was more important when the main route to the Plains passed this way. In those days it was the last stage on the way in, and travellers spent the night there before tackling the final ten miles into the city. But with the construction of the motor-road to Thankot and the initiation of the trucking service between Thankot and Katmandu, times changed, and now the Pharping route is hardly used. When I made my way out of the Valley by this route at the end of my stay, which is also the end of this story, I had the greatest difficulty in finding porters there to carry my luggage.

Below Pharping lies the ultimate of the Kali shrines too—the Southern, or Right-Hand, Kali, which has this double meaning in the word *Dakkin* because, as one looks towards the rising sun, the south is to the right. The temple is a mere open courtyard, paved with a black and white chessboard of marble, with an altar at the far end, but is no less important for that. It is conveniently situated astride a stream in a vale high above the Place of the Cut, and the blood of the sacrifices, together with the waste offal of the victims, is washed away in the running water. Of course the people are too thrifty to actually abandon the sacrificed goats and chickens, and the rocks beside the tiled sacrificial floor have much the appearance of an open-air slaughter-house. In this way the peasant, who is disinclined to shed blood himself, can, for a consideration, have his livestock killed for him with the approval of the gods.

Here the track ends and the trail begins, but this is not the main trail to the north. To reach that you must go another way out of Pharping, turning right, past the gilt-roofed abode of Vajra Jogini. She is a more homely protectress than the terrible Kali, and does not object to visitors camping out in her halls and on her verandas. The long flight of steps up to her

house leads from the trail up the hillside, and as I made my way up hill and down dale in my final departure from the Valley, it was the kindness and hospitality of the Jogini and of the people who go to her that remained in my mind.

That hospitality remained with me long after the Hills had rolled behind me and hidden the Valley from sight. With three battered old men of Pharping I struck out on my way down to Kulikhani in the pouring rain of the breaking monsoon, then up to Chisapani, where I spent another night at the execrable rest-house. I rose betimes next morning to catch the bus at Bhimpheedi below, and all the way down through the pine-forest my mind was planning and planning to go back into the Hills again and into their most fascinating jewel—the Valley of Nepal.

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