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News and Notes

Letters

Himalayan Research welcomes letters from our readers. The following essay by Rasoul Sorkhabi of the University of Arizona comes in response to last issue's Roundtable discussion about Himalayan Studies. We encourage other member/subscribers to share their views.

Toward an Integrated, Popular Himalayan Science

I read with interest "Roundtable: Perspectives on the Development of Himalayan Studies" in *Himalayan Research Bulletin* (Volume XV, No. 1, 1995). Many important viewpoints and informative experiences were mentioned in that report. I am also glad to know that the editors have invited readers to join the discussions on how to develop the status and function of Himalayan studies. Toward this end, I would like to share here some ideas and thoughts that have gradually taken shape in my mind over the past decade as I have been involved in Himalayan geology and the editing of *Himalayan Notes*.

Ives and Messerli (1989) in their well-known book refer to the problem of how to reconcile economic development and environmental conservation as "the Himalayan Dilemma". I believe there is another Himalayan Dilemma facing us, one which is very fundamental, yet less discussed: How to reconcile our academic disciplines and specialized research with the actual state of affairs in the Himalaya and our respective societies. The nature of this dilemma is not confined to the Himalaya and may as well be applied to any branch of knowledge nowadays, but the Himalaya magnifies it. The dichotomy of reductionism and holism, and the dichotomy of specialization and generalism in our studies of the natural world are rooted in many aspects of scientific research and institutions. Reductionist approaches have been critically discussed in the realms of physics, biology, and philosophy of science. The role and impact of 'knowing every thing about nothing' has also been explored by many authors and social critics.

Recently I read two articles — one in *Worldwatch* (Sachs, 1995) and the other in *21st Century* (Huginin, 1995). Those who are familiar with these magazines know that *Worldwatch* is published by an environmentalist think-tank, and *21st Century* is essentially an anti-environmentalist publication. But the interesting thing was that authors of both these magazines' articles held a similar position: They praised Alexander von Humboldt for his holistic, popular attitudes towards natural science, and criticized Charles Darwin for being otherwise. The *Worldwatch* author went as far as saying that Darwin set the trend in motion "our mania for specializing" which "is poisoning our economies and the environment." What both these authors had failed to see was that the theory of evolution formulated by Darwin is indeed one of the greatest syntheses natural science has ever produced, and that Alexander von Humboldt lived in an entirely different age from ours. Were he to return to our world and intend to carry out really original research, he would have been compelled to specialize in a field or two, or else he would have become another Isaac Asimov, not Alexander von Humboldt, of our age. While I did not agree with twisted arguments of these authors, I did understand their concerns, and the fact that their articles, convey almost the same message, appeared almost at the same time in two magazines of conflicting ideologies is very significant. These concerns boil down to the two dichotomies I mentioned above: the dichotomy of reductionism and holism, and the dichotomy of specialization and generalism. I believe these concerns are well illustrated in the Himalayan research fields.

Himalayan studies are 'regional' in nature: each field of study deals with a particular subject but in a vast, complex part of our planet, and connected on immediate levels to other fields. A Himalayan 'regional science'

consisting of many inter-connected fields does not easily fit within the present framework of academic disciplines. There are many examples to illustrate this point. Biologists who study Himalayan birds, plants, and mammalian life do not have to be climatologists or pedologists; however, the habitats of all these life forms are directly related to the climatic zones and soil types of the Himalaya, which are, in turn, related to the geomorphic and tectonic evolution of the mountains. The latter subject—geomorphic and tectonic evolution—seems to be a unified field of study, but it is actually divided into dozens of specialties studied by the geomorphologist, sedimentologist, geochemist, structural geologist, metamorphic geologist, etc. These scientists are living in worlds apart within the present academia. I emphasize Himalayan geology not merely because it is what I am most familiar with, but also because geology is usually thought to operate on a grand time-scale unconcerned with the history of our species and the plight of our life. But the Himalaya more than anything is shattering this myth (Sorkhabi, 1994). Studies in the Nanga Parbat region of Pakistan in the past decade have shown that the mountain-building process that has formed the Himalaya over the past 40 million years or so is now repeating itself. Here we find the world's youngest granites, crustal deformation, and tectonic uplift; also here geomorphic processes and geological hazards are taking place in the highest-energy gradients available on earth. Or consider the recent hypothesis suggesting that rapid uplift and denudation of the Himalayan region may have influenced the initiation of ice ages during the past three million years. If this hypothesis is true, it means that as long as the Himalaya in its present dimensions exist, humans will have to cope with the ice ages. These examples demonstrate that whatever field 25 Himalaya is hooked in a complex way and on a grand scale to other fields. But is this aspect also reflected in the structure and function of Himalayan studies?

Furthermore, Himalayan studies have a multinational aspect. The Himalaya is geopolitically a sensitive, diverse region stretching from Afghanistan to Burma. More than 10 per cent of world's population depends directly on resources from the Himalaya and have thus vested interest in the region. To those living in the West, the Himalaya is a remote region—mentally as well as physically (to Americans more so than Western Europeans, who have a longer history of Himalayan studies). These multinational factors bring

many important social issues and policy questions to Himalayan studies. For example, why spend American taxpayers' money in Nepal or China?—A sort of question which acutely presents itself at times of shrinking government grants. But it is not limited to the industrially developed countries. Policy makers in India also face questions as to which Himalayan research fields should be given priority or how to cleverly resolve their river water issues with Nepal and Bangladesh.

The dilemmas in Himalayan science call for responses and practical solutions. The following are some suggestions:

1. It is necessary to popularize Himalayan science, which means explaining in a plain language the significance of Himalayan studies and fostering the important results of our research. Unfortunately, the popular image of the Himalaya is confined to mountaineering and trekking. Even where a natural, scientific aspect of the Himalaya is presented to the public, this adventurous spirit of climbing high peaks or the esoteric nature of Himalayan travels somehow pops up as though to justify our involvement in Himalayan studies. We need a new image for the Himalaya — one based on realities and understanding that this unique part of our planet provides unparalleled opportunities for science — and yes, also for progress and peace. We need to popularize Himalayan science through articles, books, seminars, exhibitions, courses, documentary films, etc. Most Himalayan research papers (important as they may be) are read by a few individuals around the world, which is like listening to the echo of our voice than being a voice speaking for Himalayan science in this competitive world. Our grants and institutions do not require us to commit ourselves to popularization of Himalayan science, but our science, our time, and professional community does require it.

2. We also need unified platforms and common grounds for exchanging our results and ideas, and multi-disciplinary research for tackling a given problem from various angles to obtain a broader picture. The History of science has shown that many great discoveries have been achieved through cross-fertilization of scientific fields. For example, the Wilson cloud chamber in nuclear physics stemmed from Charles Wilson's study of a meteorological observation. The metal-shadowing technique in electron microscopy was a by-product of studying the moon's surface. Being regional in scope, Himalayan science provides many opportunities for

scientific cross-fertilization at least among Himalayan fields. I do not mean that a study of marriage and family in some Nepalese village, for example, and a study of Himalayan granites should share the same platform. However, various studies of physical geography, geology, geochemistry, geophysics, Quaternary science, archeological geology and geocology of the Himalaya can easily come under a common umbrella at international and national levels. At present there are no such umbrellas. The Himalaya-Karakoram-Tibet Workshops, which have been held annually since 1985 and have drawn participants from various countries, can satisfy this demand with some reforms because so far it has been concerned with hard-rock geology. We may need a research journal specifically devoted for Himalayan geosciences in a broader sense than the existing Himalayan journals. We may also need an international society for Himalayan geoscientists, which is surprisingly non-existent. All these are proven techniques to develop a science and scientific community, yet they are lacking in Himalayan science and our community. At present, most of our associations, research studies, and publications are scattered mini-islands around the world, but the trend-making Science of Global Change and realities of the Himalaya require us to create broader platforms and more extensive networks.

3. Collaboration between native Himalayan and foreign researchers is another important area of cultivation. An encouraging development along this line is the establishment of the Geoscientific Laboratory in Islamabad in 1991 as a joint project between Japan and Pakistan. Such ventures do not always have to be on official levels, which are in fact sometimes very difficult to materialize. Collaboration between individuals or groups based on friendship and mutual understanding can be very fruitful. These collaborations can be achieved through Himalayan scientific projects funded by agencies in the developed countries (such as those by National Science Foundation, the National Geographic Society, the Ford Foundation, etc. in the USA). And I am certain each one of us knows a success story of this kind.

4. The Geoscientific Laboratory mentioned above is part of Japan's Official Development Assistance (ODA) to the developing countries. This is a healthy approach to spending the ODA. If scientific studies in the Himalaya, which involve financial and technical aid to native people in the region, are tied to the ODA granted by the developed nations, a major source for research will be available. This may also give a new image for the ODA, which has at times been criticized for pursuing anti-environmental projects.

In conclusion, the Himalaya has already contributed greatly to human knowledge. (My favorite example being the theory of isostasy, which is a fundamental geophysical principle explaining the gravitational behavior of the earth's mountains and other landforms, and which resulted from the Survey of India in mid-19th century.) Despite the potentials of the Himalaya to provide many 'model studies' in natural sciences, this vast region is still poorly investigated, especially by up-to-date, analytical techniques. Participation of the international geoscientific community is necessary. To achieve better results and to promote and further develop Himalayan science it is necessary to make our studies and efforts more integrative, more popular, and thus more fruitful for our science, our community and the Himalayan lands and peoples.

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Please share your ideas on this or other topics with the readers of *Himalayan Research Bulletin*. Address your correspondence to the Editor (deadline for copy for Volume XVI:1 is May 1, 1996)

Honors for Gregory Maskarinec

A University of Hawai'i faculty member is the first US. scholar to receive the highest award for research presented to a foreign scholar in Nepal. The award was presented by His Majesty, Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev, King of Nepal, this summer.

Gregory Maskarinec, a visiting colleague in the UH Manoa Department of Anthropology, was the fourth scholar to be awarded the Birendra Prajyalank Rr. The decoration is presented every five years on the recommendation of the Royal Nepal Academy. Previous winners have been from Great Britain, Italy and Switzerland.

Dr. Maskarinec was recognized for 15 years of work on traditional medical beliefs and *jhakri* (shaman) texts in Jajarkot District, which the Royal Nepal Academy called an "outstanding contribution to bringing to light an aspect of Nepalese way of life through scientific approach. . .thereby facilitating the researchers of ancient and pre-historic practices and bringing this aspect of Nepalese lifestyle before the world."

Maskarinec, who holds masters and doctoral degrees from the University of Hawai'i, is the author of the recently published *The Rulings of the Night: An Ethnography of Nepalese Shaman Oral Texts* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995) and has received a National Endowment for the Humanities translation grant to complete a bilingual edition of shaman texts.

An article describing Maskarinec's work in more detail, prepared for the University's faculty-staff newsletter, follows.

Translating Shaman Texts Earns Manoa Professor a Royal Award

The first time Gregory Maskarinec witnessed a spirit possession in Nepal, he knelt beside the convulsing child in his Peace Corps classroom intending to administer first aid. It was, he muses now, a typically Western response.

Conducting anthropologic research on the interventions by Nepalese shamans who treat spirit possession might seem equally Western, but it is actually in keeping with Nepal's strong heritage of scholarship. In fact, Maskarinec's subsequent documentation and translation of shaman oral texts earned him the Birendra Prajyalankar, the highest scholarly award presented to a foreign researcher in Nepal, from His Majesty, Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev, King of Nepal.

The UH Manoa anthropologist is the fourth scholar in the world and the first from the United States to receive the honor, which was established 25 years ago. In recommending the award to the king, the Royal Nepal Academy cited Maskarinec's "outstanding contribution to bringing to light an aspect of Nepalese way of life through scientific approach. . .thereby facilitating the researchers of ancient and pre-historic practices and bringing this aspect of Nepalese lifestyle before the world."

The silver plaque (being held for him in Nepal since he was unable to attend the award ceremony on short notice this summer) isn't Maskarinec's first royal honor. A UHM graduate with master's and doctoral degrees in anthropology, he was a King Mahendra scholar at Tribhuvan University. During more than six years of fieldwork in Nepal, Maskarinec began by studying oracles, individuals who become possessed on a regular basis by a single divinity associated with a specific shrine. He switched his attention to shamans, called *jhakri*, when he realized little had been done on the oral texts of these lower-caste practitioners, usually blacksmiths, who speak to spirits and prescribe sacrifices in order to relieve diverse afflictions.

"Shamans have been a central part of the culture but their texts had never been documented," Maskarinec says. Both Nepalese and Westerners characterized the public chants and whispered mantra of the trembling, bouncing shaman as repetitive gibberish. "Why should they be sensible?" Maskarinec explains. "Many spirits are really stupid. The shaman may be addressing a dead snake or an unborn child."

As he collected and taped the incantations, Maskarinec realized they were recited in a form of Nepalese language that predated linguistic influences of the Mogul empire. He worked closely with several shamans to translate three complete oral text repertoires. Each ceremony contains several dozen texts. Long chants set the stage by, for example, describing the world order or reiterating the story of the first witches. Shorter mantra may address specific spirits, such as ancestors, or guard the shaman against curses imposed by unscrupulous competitors. For the shaman, a mantra is not an introspective tool for reaching a higher consciousness, but a resource to be used in conjunction with blood sacrifice and other practices to change the world around them.

Maskarinec describes Nepal's shaman culture in *The Rulings of the Night* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1995). He is working on a second book that will

include a bilingual presentation of shaman texts. His work is supported by a \$36,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, one of the larger grants awarded to an individual researcher.

Much of his writing is done on a small Macintosh computer in his Porteus Hall office. Although commercial fonts are now available, Maskarinec still uses the 48 Sanskrit-like characters he created and assigned to the English keyboard. This blend of ancient tradition and modern technology is characteristic of Nepal, a country that has little problem reconciling an official Hindu religion with ancient shaman practices, a communist government with the presence of a king or tradition of scholarship based in English with understanding based on mysticism.

Maskarinec recalls the lecture on shamanic practices he gave during an international conference in Switzerland. When he began to recite from a particularly powerful chant, the lights in the lecture hall blew and smoke filled the room. The Nepalese and Tibetan scholars in attendance quickly got up and left.

Maskarinec, too, finds it easy to suspend disbelief, especially when he is in mountainous villages of the Jajarkot District, a three-day walk from the nearest field where small planes can land. "When I'm here, I don't believe," he says. "When I'm there, of course I do."

(University of Hawai'i)

Nepal and Tibet Travel Stories Solicited

Two new anthologies of creative travel writing, one on Nepal and the other on Tibet, are to be part of the award-winning *Travelers' Tales* series. For submission guide-lines, please contact:

Nepal Travelers' Tales
1, Napier Lane
San Francisco CA 94133
e-mail: travel@ora.com

Tibet Travelers' Tales
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Menlo Park, CA 94025-5203
Fax (415) 323-1201
Email: kmorris@igc.apc.org

Author's Query

For a book of historic fiction that begins on the '60s Hashish Trail to the Himalayas, I am looking for true stories of spiritual quests, exotica, adventure, and political intrigue in South Asia.

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Kathmandu Post on Internet

The Kathmandu Post is now available on the Internet. As a joint effort between Kantipur Publications Pvt. Ltd. and Mercantile Communications Pvt. Ltd. the Kathmandu Post has become the first Nepalese newspaper to go on line. Due to the expense involved, articles are limited to those which cover Nepal and its immediate neighbors and/or articles considered important by the editorial staff

The address of the Kathmandu Post is: <http://www.cen.uiuc.edu/~rshresth/ktmpost/news-home.html>. If you are new to the Internet this address is usually typed in a box labeled "Location:" or "Netsite:" but may vary depending on the server or browser you are using. Another method of finding your way on line is to use one of the many search engines available through the internet. Again, the specific commands may vary depending on your application, but these can usually be found under 'Internet Search' or 'Search Engines.' Entering "Kathmandu" as the keyword for a search will return not only a path for the Kathmandu Post but several other items of regional interest as well.

1996-97 College Year in Nepal and College Year in India Programs The University of Wisconsin-Madison

The University of Wisconsin-Madison announces its 1996-97 College Year in Nepal and College Year in India programs. These programs provide students with integrated programs of language training, tutorial instruction, and independent fieldwork projects. They begin with ten weeks of intensive language training in the University of Wisconsin-Madison (in Tibetan, Nepali, Hindi-Urdu, Telugu, or Tamil and continue with an academic year of study in Nepal or India that includes additional language-training, tutorial instruction, and an independent fieldwork project. In Nepal the program site is Kathmandu (for Nepali and Tibetan students). In India the program sites are Banaras (for Hindi-Urdu students), Hyderabad (for Telugu students), and Madurai (for Tamil students). A full year of University Wisconsin credit is given for completion of the program, ensuring the quality of credits earned and simplifying the transfer of credits to colleges and universities in the United States. Students have submitted fieldwork projects in such diverse subjects as agronomy, anthropology, art, botany, dance, ecology, economics, film, folklore, geography, history, journalism, linguistics, literature, music, philosophy, political science, religion, sociology, South Asian Studies, theater, and women's studies.

Selection of student participants is made on the basis of the following qualifications: Junior or Senior standing (recent graduates may also apply, provided they have not yet enrolled in a graduate program); good academic standing; academic or career interests that will

be enhanced by a year abroad; ability to withstand and benefit from the psychological stress of living in an unfamiliar culture; interest in and aptitude for intensive language training, and a high degree of self-motivation.

Not including summer school expenses (that will total about \$4,500 for non-Wisconsin/Minnesota students and about \$2,600 for Wisconsin/Minnesota students) the 1996-97 program fees are \$12,000 for Nepal and \$11,000 for India. The program fees cover academic-year tuition, administrative fees, one-way air fare from the west coast to Nepal or India, room, board, and pocket money while on the program. Students who do not qualify for financial aid for the program at their home college may be eligible for aid through the University of Wisconsin-Madison, provided they have submitted the necessary applications by January 1996.

Students have been going to India since 1961 on Wisconsin's College Year in India Program and to Nepal on Wisconsin's College Year in Nepal Program since 1980. Trained University of Wisconsin personnel in Madison and at each site in Nepal and India offer academic counseling and put students in touch with qualified language teachers, tutors, and fieldwork advisors.

Applications and additional information are available from: International Studies and Programs, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 261 Bascom Hall, 500 Lincoln Drive, Madison, Wisconsin 53706. Phone: (608) 262-2851.

Nepal Studies Association News

Minutes of the General Membership Meeting of NSA, 21 October 1995

The meeting began at 6:09 p.m. with a welcome by Naomi Bishop, President of NSA. Approximately fifty people were in attendance, including Executive Council Members Barbara Brower (*ex officio*), Mary Cameron, David Holmberg, Todd Lewis, John Metz, Krishna Pradhan, Nanda Shrestha, and Richard Tucker. Minutes reconstructed by the president.

Treasurer's Report Barbara Brower

We are currently solvent, but our finances would be more secure if all members would pay up. We've continued to send issues to recently lapsed members in hopes of keeping them in mind of the journal. Our

subscribers have been patient through the hiatus in *HRB* production, and member records have suffered somewhat from three *Bulletin* moves and a succession of inexperienced manipulators, so we have been reluctant to push for payment of issues mailed out to