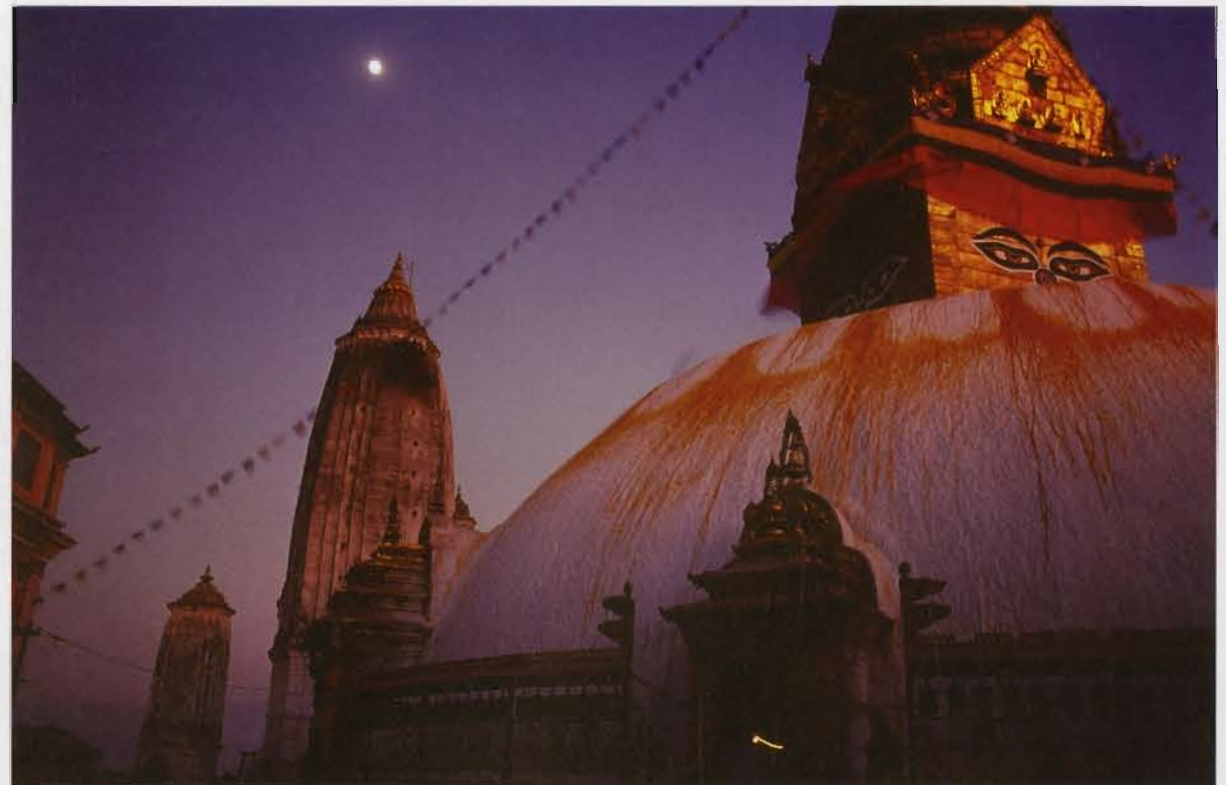




Bhotia woman



Swayambhu Stupa

Part Three

Society

The Himalaya hold the religious and cultural traditions of Hindu, Buddhist, and Islamic civilizations, as well as of numerous tribes and ethnic groups. A meeting of spirit and material subsistence exists within these diverse societies, defining a traditional order for mountain life. It has led to the devout character of the Himalayan people, to the design of local communities, and to the establishment of historical theocracies in the mountains. It permits the distinctive cultural patterns and an astonishing array of lifestyles; and it shapes a landscape in which the textures of human society are interwoven in a traditional world of sacred places and powerful natural forces. But the demands of modern times and global trends have become dominant in many localities, instilling new forms of social organization and forging new appraisals of life that may create conflict as well as provide opportunity among the mountain communities. In this ever-changing world, Himalayan societies struggle between tradition and modernity.

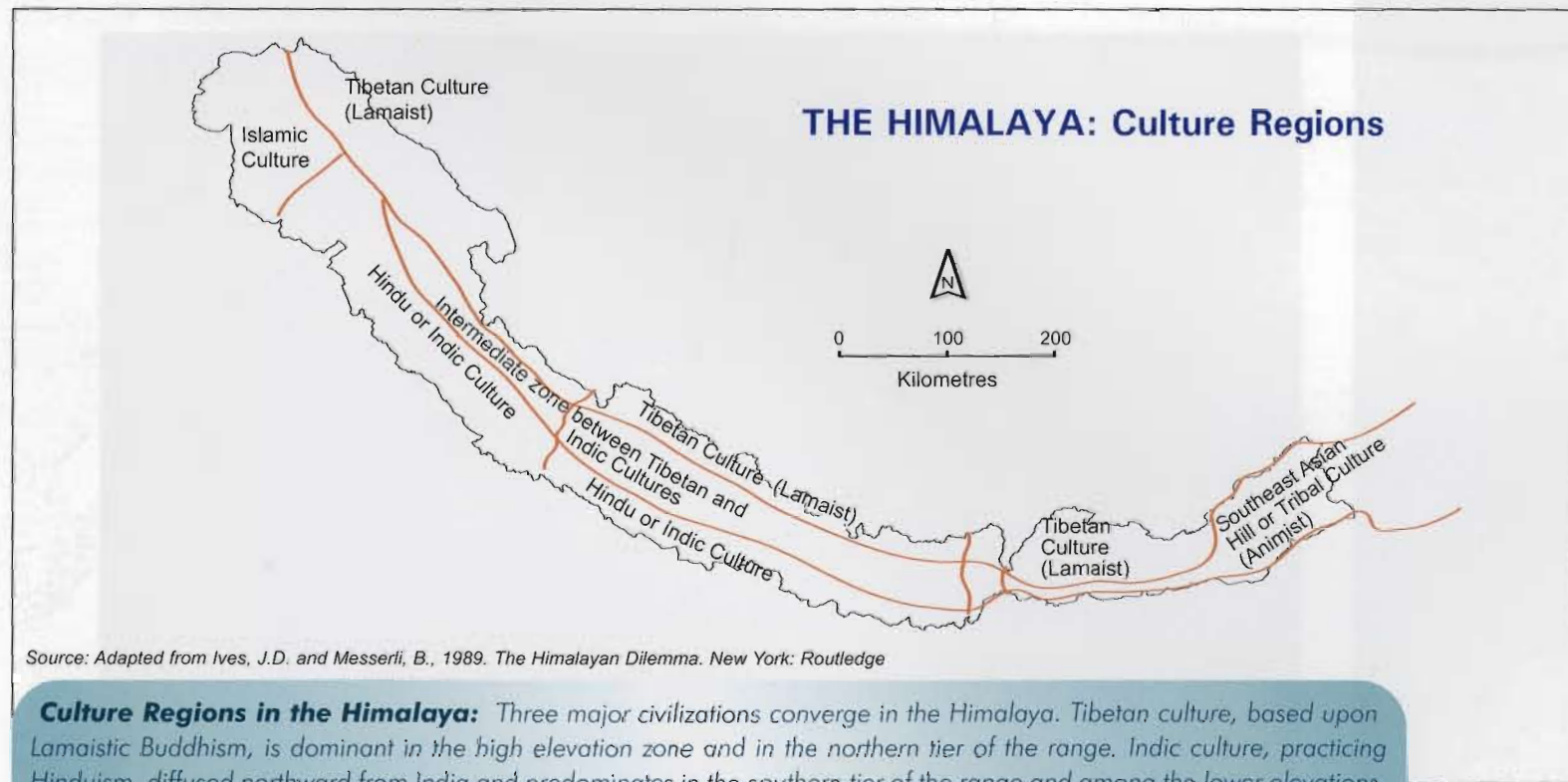
The ancient religious books of India date the settlement of the Himalaya to the early Vedic times, before the age of Christ, although little is known about the actual origins of the initial inhabitants. The early chroniclers infused the

mountains with a mythological outlook. The deity Shiva is believed to reside atop Mount Kailas, which is sacred to both Hindus and Buddhists, and many of the Himalayan peaks are the abodes of other deities. The Himalayan rivers, especially the Ganges, are revered as powerful spiritual places, and devout practitioners commonly make pilgrimages to their headwaters. The great rivers delimit a sacred geography that shows the Himalaya to be a truly celestial realm, within which native people find a spiritual order and guidance for life.

The religious bond that mountain cultures traditionally



A painting at the entrance of a Buddhist monastery, Sermathang village



Source: Adapted from Ives, J.D. and Messerli, B., 1989. *The Himalayan Dilemma*. New York: Routledge

Culture Regions in the Himalaya: Three major civilizations converge in the Himalaya. Tibetan culture, based upon Lamaistic Buddhism, is dominant in the high elevation zone and in the northern tier of the range. Indic culture, practicing Hinduism, diffused northward from India and predominates in the southern tier of the range and among the lower elevations. Islam is found in the westernmost sector of the Himalaya. The high degree of cultural diversity produced by the convergence of these major civilizations is further augmented by the numerous tribal traditions found throughout the mountains.

have with the mountains is manifested in the magnificent structures of the Hindus, Buddhists, and Muslims, in the ceremonial markers that everywhere adorn the landscape, and in the religious propitiations of people throughout the mountains. The Hindus understand the Himalaya to be the northern boundary of sacred India, or Bharatavarsha, just as the modern geologists consider it to be the tectonic delimitation of the subcontinent. The Buddhists, too, view the mountains as sanctified land, containing treasure places of legendary power - containing a kind of knowledge that is fit only for those with the proper spiritual training. In the Indus Mountains in the west, the Muslims lay claim to long-held cultural territory that holds their religious history, mosques, and ancestral places. The animistic traditions of tribal people all across the range find spiritual resonance among the summits and valleys, caves, forests, and rocky outcrops, which harbor deities of both good and bad intention. These diverse religious beliefs imbed the mountains within the cultural histories of the resident people, thus creating a native geography that ultimately affirms the territorial rights and obligations of Himalayan societies.



EARLY CIVILIZATION

The western Himalaya witnessed the migration of Aryan people as early as 2000 B.C., most likely from the steppes of central Asia. The Aryans settled the Indus Mountains in Kashmir before moving onto the plains of northern India. Little is known about the people they conquered, but the linguistic evidence suggests that the earliest tribes most likely originated in the far-off Dravidian societies of southern India. They lived autonomously in the mountains by hunting and gathering, possibly supplemented by slash and burn agriculture, before being conquered by the Aryans. An Indo-Aryan civilization emerged in the period 2000-1200 B.C., as chronicled in the Aryan text, the Rig Veda. The later societies of the western and central Himalaya are documented in the Sanskrit literature of the Puranas and Mahabharata. These accounts describe a process of acculturation between

the people of the mountains and the plains, most notably during the time of the Khasa people, when Hindu traits were assimilated into highland tribal life. The consolidation of Hindu influence in the Himalaya occurred in the 15th and 16th centuries, when coalitions of Rajput principalities were established across the range. A dominant Pahari culture emerged in the central Himalaya.

The high altitude zone, meanwhile, was settled mainly from the north by Tibetan peoples. The 7th century witnessed the geographic expansion of Tibetan society into the western Himalaya, where it became dominant in Ladakh and Zaskar. The Tibetan Empire reached its zenith during this period, extending as far east as Turkestan, and formed the influential Ladakhi dynasty as a vassal state. The Tibetan forces also invaded the central Himalaya, and by A.D. 640



The fortress of Phalabang, western Nepal



Hard-to-reach meditation caves in the predominantly Buddhist trans-Himalaya zone – For the Tibetans, the Himalaya are filled with places of sacred power and spiritual insight

areas under Tibetan control, which gave great power to the high-ranking religious clergy. In the Hindu areas, meanwhile, the local rajas governed as absolute sovereigns. In Nepal, the Hindu princes eventually succumbed to the expanding power of the king of Gorkha. The modern state of Nepal traces its origins to this Gorkha empire, which by 1815 had extended its territorial control across the Himalaya from Sikkim to Kangra.

The convergence of Hindu, Buddhist, and, in the west, Islamic, civilizations provides the cultural arena within which most Himalayan societies developed. The influence of these great traditions on mountain life are immeasurable, imbedded in religious beliefs, family and community organization, artistic and folk traditions, and economy and politics. Between the middle of the 19th century and 1947, when India gained its independence, Himalayan society was also greatly influenced by colonial powers. In what has in Asia come to be called the Great Game, much of the mountain territory was coveted and disputed by the British, Russian, and Chinese empires. Each sought the mountains for their own imperial gain. The influence of the British on mountain life was great, for they directly controlled large areas of the western and eastern Himalaya, and had much influence on the internal affairs of Nepal and Bhutan. The British sent surveyors into the mountains to chart and map the territory and to identify their economic potential in terms of forests, agriculture, and minerals. Numerous skirmishes occurred early on between the British forces and the armies of the Himalayan kings, notably in Bhutan, Nepal, and Sikkim, heightening tensions among the competing rulers.

During their occupation of the mountains, the British opened up much of the range to colonial trade, drawing upon the traditional trade routes - especially the lucrative Silk Route - while also establishing new ones. Timber resources in the mountain forests were exploited, trees cut to provide

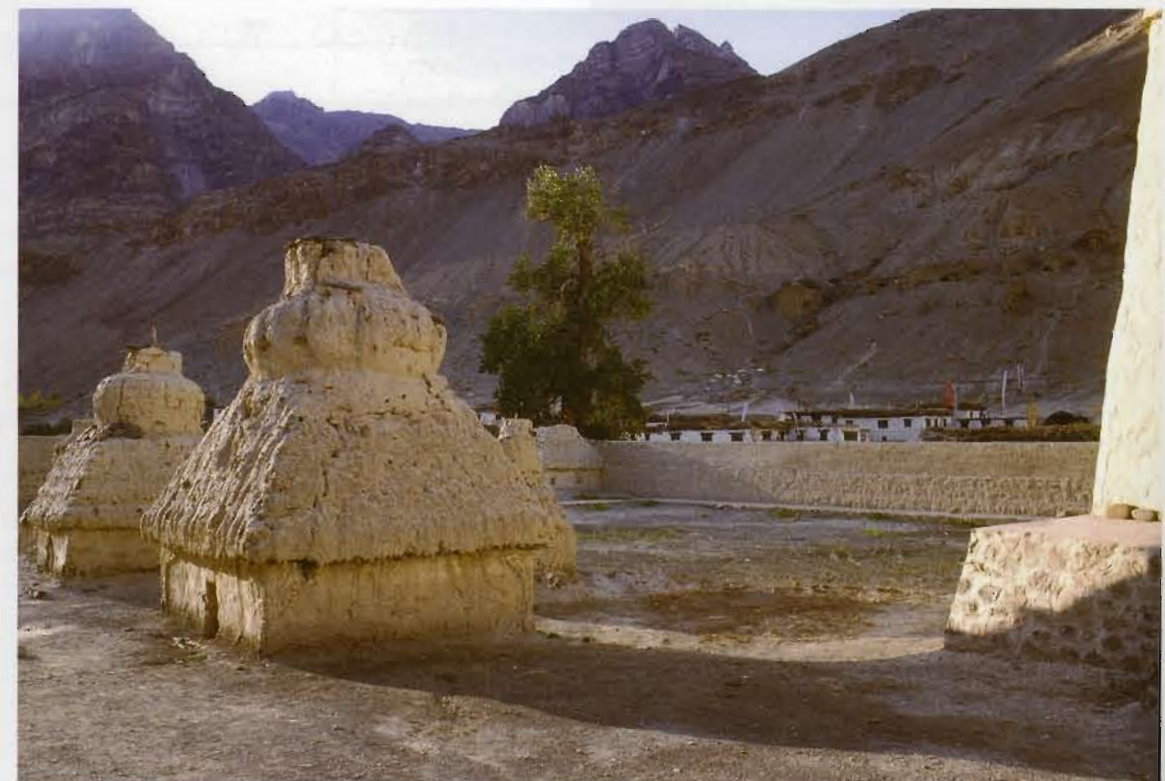
materials for building railroads, and new regulations were imposed on villagers' use of forest reserves. The British introduced new forms of agriculture, notably the apple orchards in Himachal Pradesh and tea plantations in Darjeeling. Where the British did not control directly, they did so through their influence on the local rulers. Gradually, as the colonial resolve of the British firmed, society and economy in the mountains became oriented toward the southern plains and even abroad. This new outlook continued after the withdrawal of the British from South Asia in 1947, and the establishment of the modern nation states in the Himalaya. Today, the independent countries of Bhutan and Nepal, as well as the adjoining Indian Himalayan territories, struggle with the enormous challenge of bridging their pasts, including the colonial component, with their quests for a more prosperous future.

POPULATION

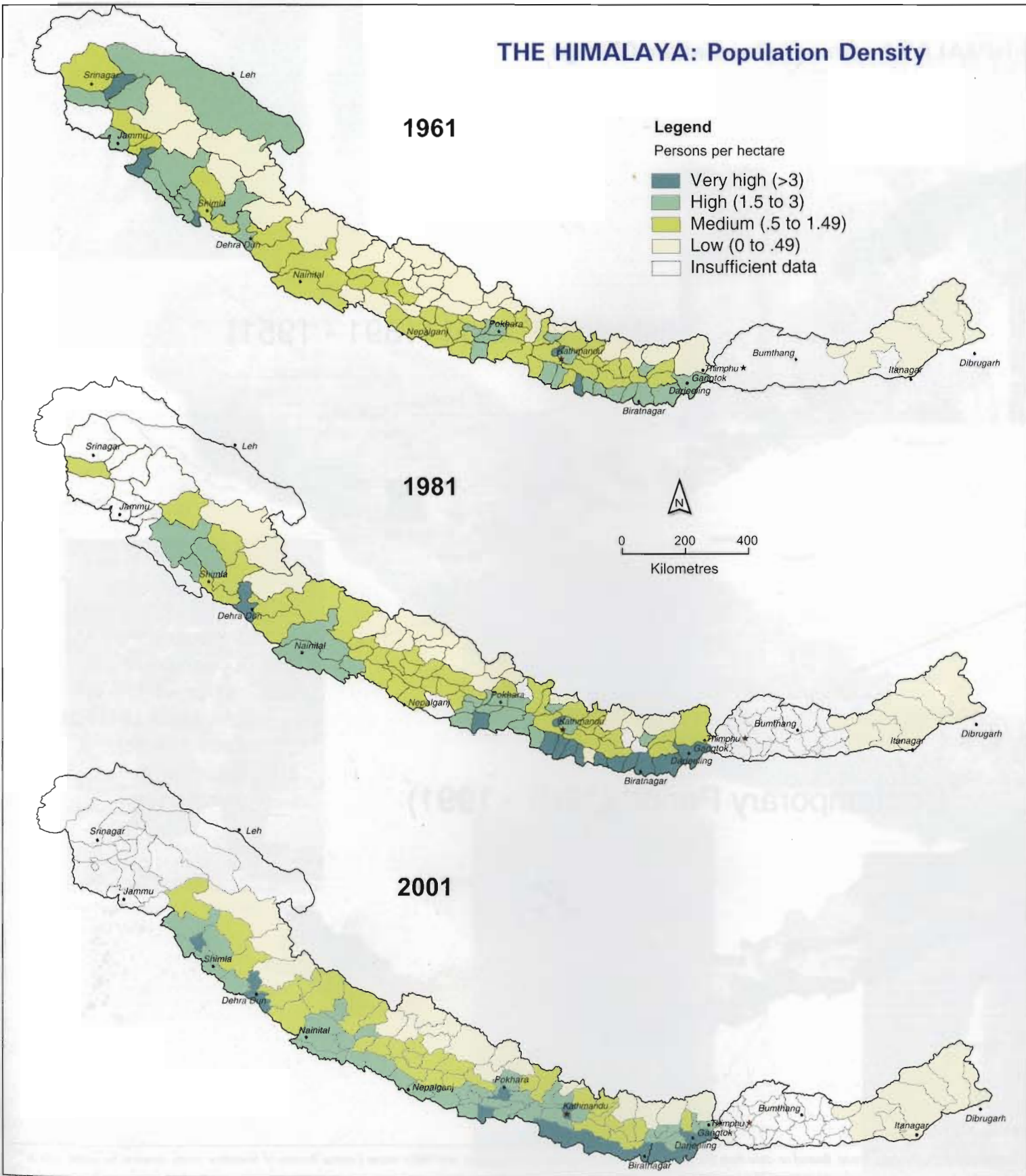
Among the dilemmas that modern Himalayan societies face are the impacts of the burgeoning population. The human numbers were kept in check during the early times by high mortality rates and by cultural practices, such as

took control of much of Nepal as far south as the Kathmandu Valley. A series of Tibetan feudal states was established in the trans-Himalayan valleys, notably in such places as Mustang, which continued as autonomous societies until fairly recent times. The Tibetan and Hindu influences intermingled most conspicuously in Nepal, where society today is marked by its unique syncretism of Tantric Buddhist and Hindu practices. The scattered tribes living in the eastern Himalaya, meanwhile, have retained much of their cultural autonomy and tribal traditions, residing largely outside the sphere of the major cultural invasions.

The medieval period in the Himalaya was marked by the consolidation of political power among the Hindu princes in the lower regions and of the Tibetan kingdoms in the northern mountains. Both subjugated the native populations, forcing villagers to produce crops, build infrastructure, maintain armies, and establish monuments and temples for the good of the petty kingdoms. Land taxes were introduced, and a rural aristocracy prospered amid widespread poverty. A monastic order was imposed in the



The famous Chorten at Tabo, Spiti Valley, is over one thousand years old.



The Himalaya - Population Density: The number of persons per square kilometer has increased along with overall population growth. This translates into increasing pressure on available farm land and forests, as well as on water resources. In the mountainous districts, where much of the land is taken up in slopes and is therefore not conducive to agriculture, the population densities become even more acute.



A flat-roofed adobe is common among houses in Tibetan-dominated villages of the arid, trans-Himalaya zone.

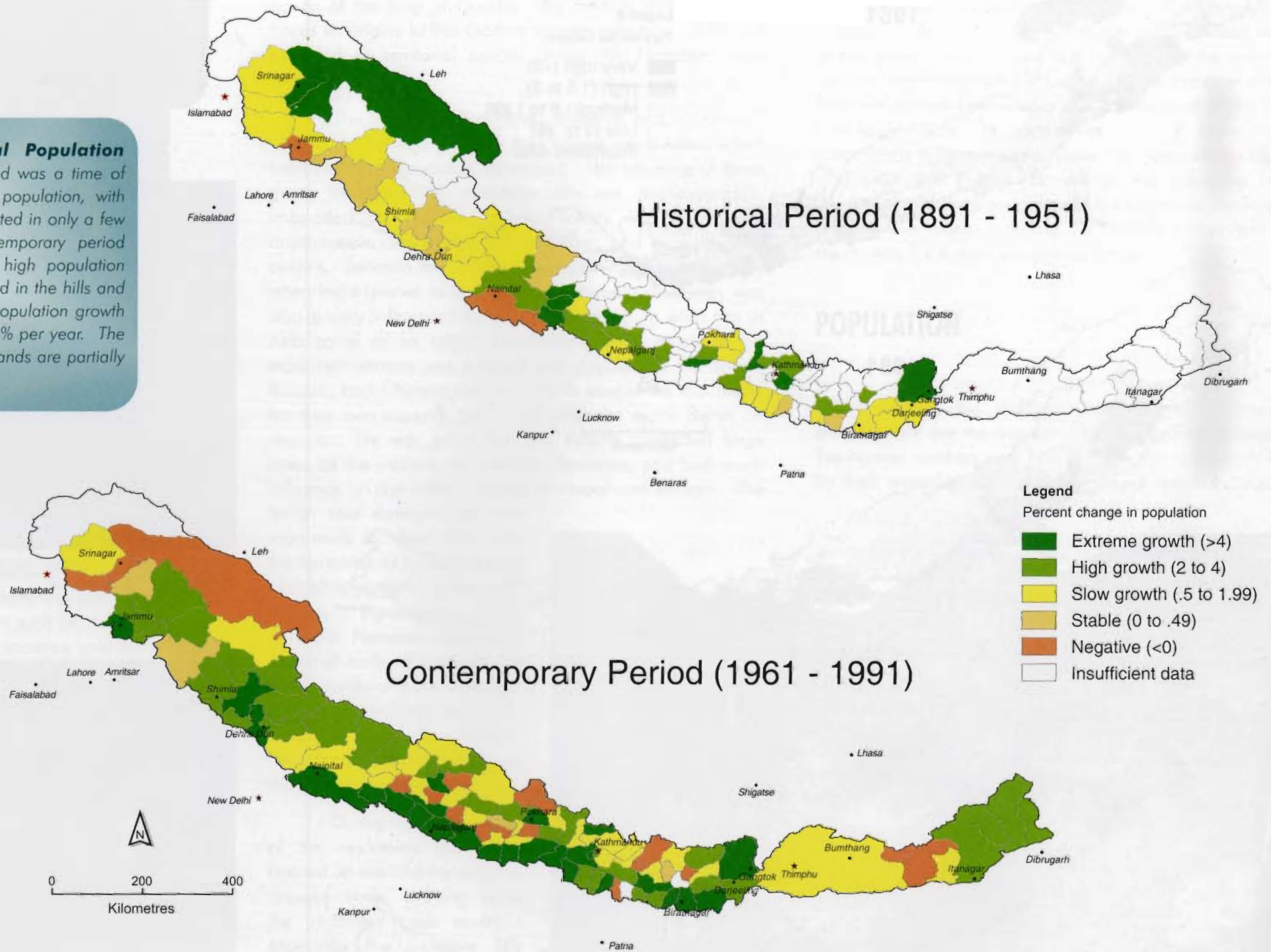


Mud and thatch homes of a Tharu village in the lowlands

Source: Zurick, D. and Karan P.P., 1999. Himalaya: Life on the Edge of the World. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. Based on data from Census of India, HMG Nepal Central Bureau of Statistics, Government of Bhutan Census Report. Updated with information from various government censuses for 2000.

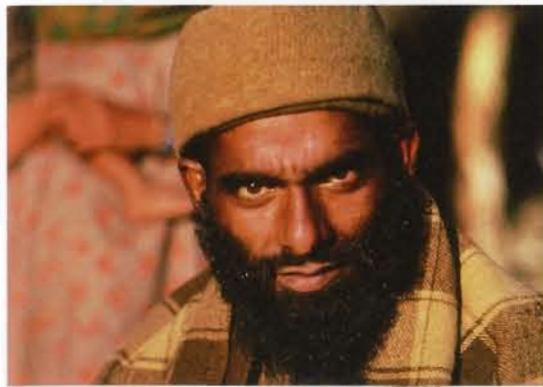
THE HIMALAYA: Annual Population Change

The Himalaya - Annual Population Change: The historical period was a time of slow growth in the mountain population, with significant rates of growth reported in only a few scattered districts. The contemporary period corresponds to the phase of high population growth. Much of this is centered in the hills and Terai region of Nepal, where population growth rates in some districts exceed 4% per year. The high rates of growth in the lowlands are partially a result of migration.



Source: Adapted from Zurick, D. and Karan P.P., 1999. Himalaya: Life on the Edge of the World. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. Based on data from the Census of India, India District Gazeteers, and HMG Nepal Central Bureau of Statistics (note: timeline for some data is less than total period).

THE HIMALAYA: Ethnic Groups



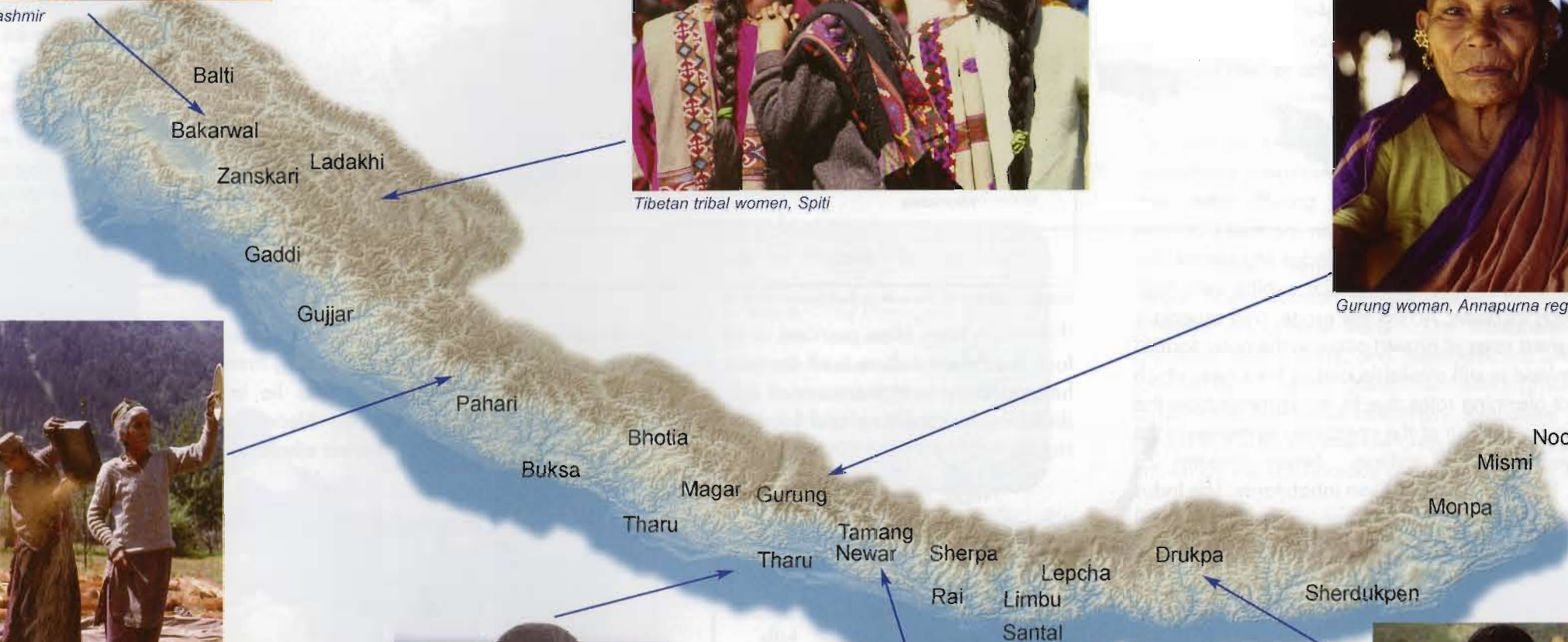
Bakarwal herder, Kashmir



Tibetan tribal women, Spiti



Gurung woman, Annapurna region



Garhwali women threshing wheat, Sangla Valley



Tharu farmer, western Terai



Newar shopkeeper, central Nepal



Drukpa girl, central Bhutan

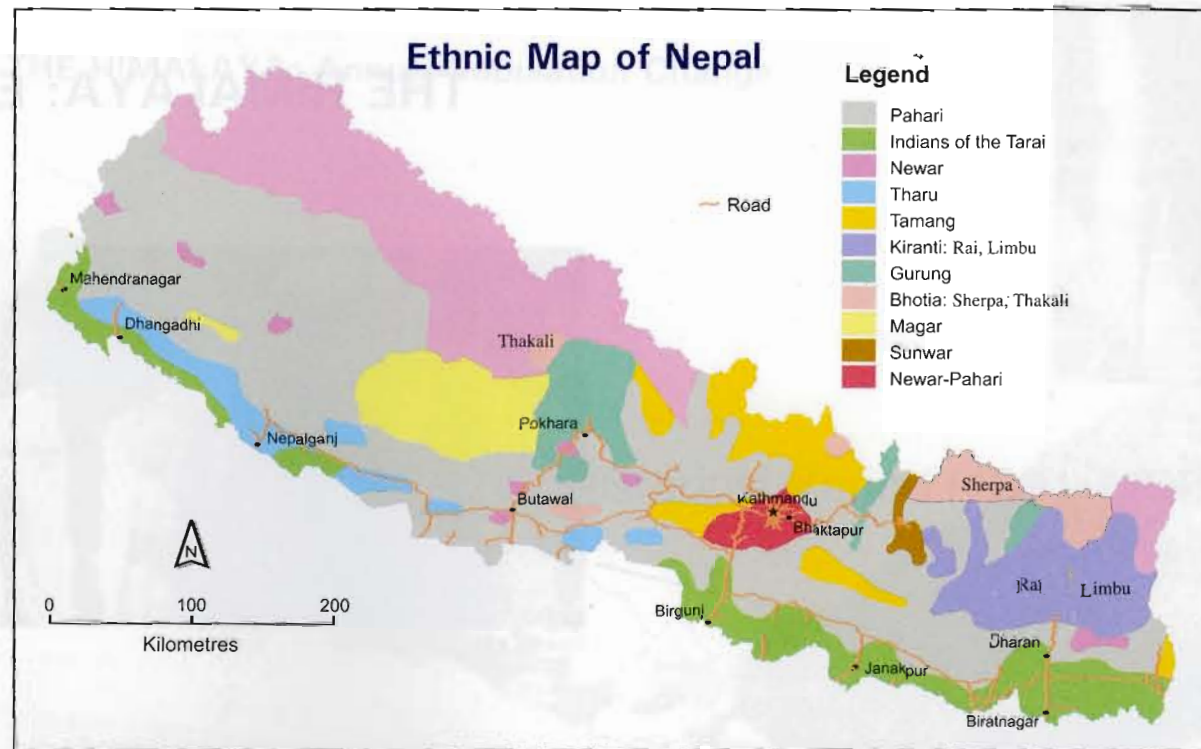
Source: Compiled by the authors from various sources.

polyandry that acted to limit family size. Beginning in the latter part of the 19th century, though, large gains were recorded in the numbers of people living in the mountain localities. Overall, an estimated 17 million persons resided in the Himalaya in 1891, based upon the first census in the mountains. By 1951, the population of the mountains reached 25 million, and by the beginning of the 21st century it surpassed 50 million. The steady increase in population between 1891 and 1951 occurred unevenly, with colonial hill stations, road corridors, and fertile agricultural zones recording the highest rates of growth. Much of the concern about the negative impact of population growth, though, centers on the events since 1951 when the largest increases in human numbers have been reported.

In the last half of the 20th century, more than 25 million people were added to the Himalayan landscape. Nepal witnessed some of the highest growth rates, with several of its districts reporting population increases at rates greater than four percent per year. The Indus Mountains, the lower elevations of Garhwal, and Sikkim exhibit very high rates of population increase. Across the range, and especially in Nepal, the highest rates of growth occur in the outer foothill zone where farmland is still available and in the cities, which are expanding at alarming rates due to in-migration from the countryside. The population of the combined territories in the Indian Himalaya is over 20 million. Nepal contains 23 million persons. Bhutan has two million inhabitants. The Indus region of northern Pakistan contributes an additional 4.3 million persons to the total. Important as they may be, the Himalayan population is more than simply demographic statistics. It is an extremely diverse collection of people of varied backgrounds. Maintaining this cultural diversity is one of the chief tasks at hand for the Himalayan states.

CULTURE AND ETHNICITY

With few exceptions, the ethnic diversity in the Himalaya is tied to specific geographic regions. The major religions of South Asia coalesce and maintain a unique expression in the western areas of Kashmir and Ladakh. The Indus mountains and the northern portion of Kashmir are Muslim areas, Ladakh retains its Tibetan Buddhist heritage, and the southern part of Kashmir and the adjoining areas of Himachal Pradesh are predominantly Hindu. The largest ethnic group in the Garhwal and Kumaon regions is the

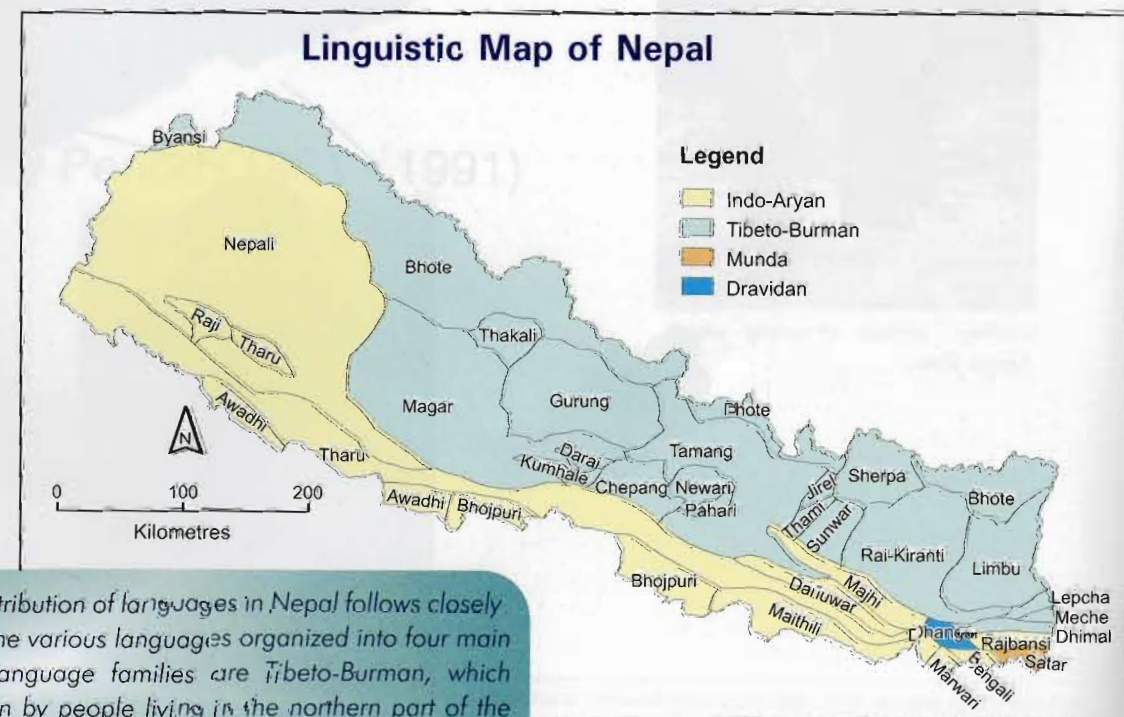


Source: Compiled by the authors from various sources

'Pahari', a term often ascribed to hill dwellers in general. In fact, the Pahari culture itself contains a great deal of internal heterogeneity, with members of different castes ascribing to distinctive occupations and food taboos according to ritual status.

reside in the Nepalese Terai. These are mainly immigrants whose origins lie in India. Altogether, Nepal contains 93 different ethnic and caste

Nepal comprises perhaps the most remarkable mosaic of religion and ethnicity in the entire Himalaya. While Hinduism is dominant throughout Nepal's lowlands and middle hills, Buddhism prevails in the high elevations. Many places actually exhibit a Buddhist-Hindu syncretism, in which the religious practices, deities, and temples are shared by devotees of both traditions. Significant numbers of Muslims, meanwhile,

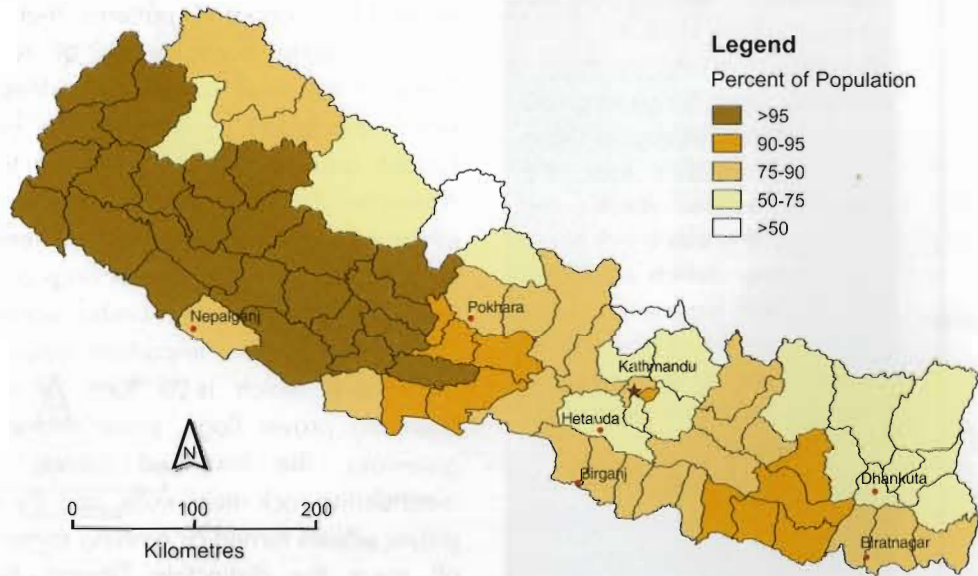


Linguistic Map of Nepal: The distribution of languages in Nepal follows closely the distribution of ethnic groups, with the various languages organized into four main language families. The dominant language families are Tibeto-Burman, which contains the Tibetan languages spoken by people living in the northern part of the kingdom, and Indo-Aryan, which includes the national Nepali language.

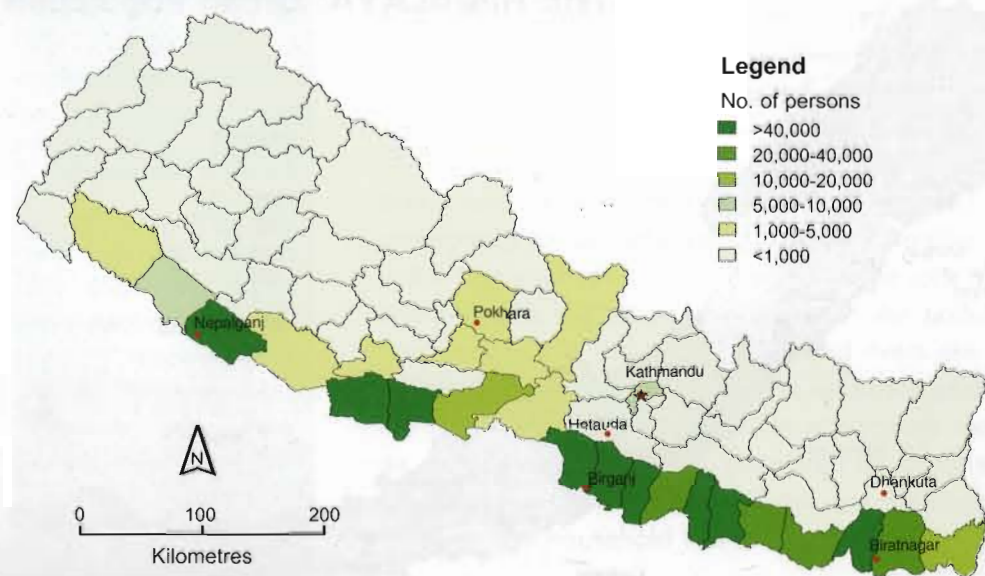
Source: Adapted from Gurung, H., 1998. Nepal: Social Demography and Expressions. Kathmandu: New Era Publications

Ethnic Map of Nepal: Nepal is one of the most culturally diverse places in the Himalaya, a result of the many tribal traditions in the kingdom, as well as of the convergence of Tibetan and Indic realms. The ethnic map of Nepal reflects the fact that the various tribes have long settled in specific territories. Many groups are associated with particular mountains. The Sherpas live in the shadow of Mt. Everest Mt. Everest, which they call Chomolungma. The Gurungs live near Annapurna, and the Magars are found mainly along the southern flanks of Dhaulagiri. The main groups are located on the map, but there are numerous other small ethnic populations with their own languages, customs, and religious practices.

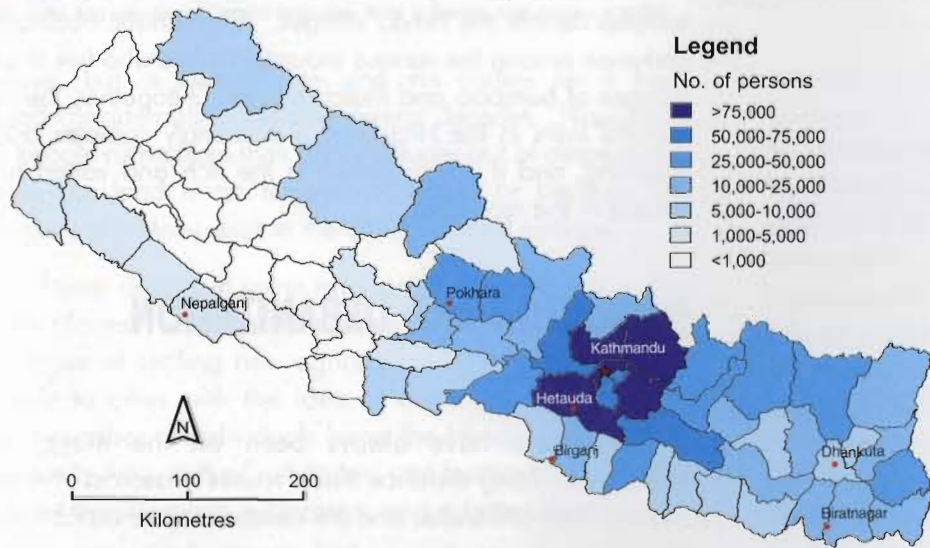
NEPAL: Hindu Population by District, 1991



NEPAL: Muslim Population by District, 1991



NEPAL: Buddhist Population by District, 1991



Religions in Nepal: The three maps show the distribution of the major religious groups in Nepal. The Hindu and Buddhist populations are longstanding. 'Discrete waves of small Muslim settlements have taken place since the 1400s in Nepal, the most recent of these being immigration to the Terai districts of Islamic people from India that began in the 1970s.'

Bhutan remains overwhelmingly Buddhist and its native Tibeto-Burman people, known as the Drukpa, share fundamental cultural traits. The Bhutanese language, the distinctive native dress, and the traditional arts and crafts are fostered by the central government which promotes the idea of a distinctive Bhutanese nationality. Nepalese immigrants who settled in the Bhutanese lowlands in the early 20th century are known as the Lotshampas and constitute the country's largest

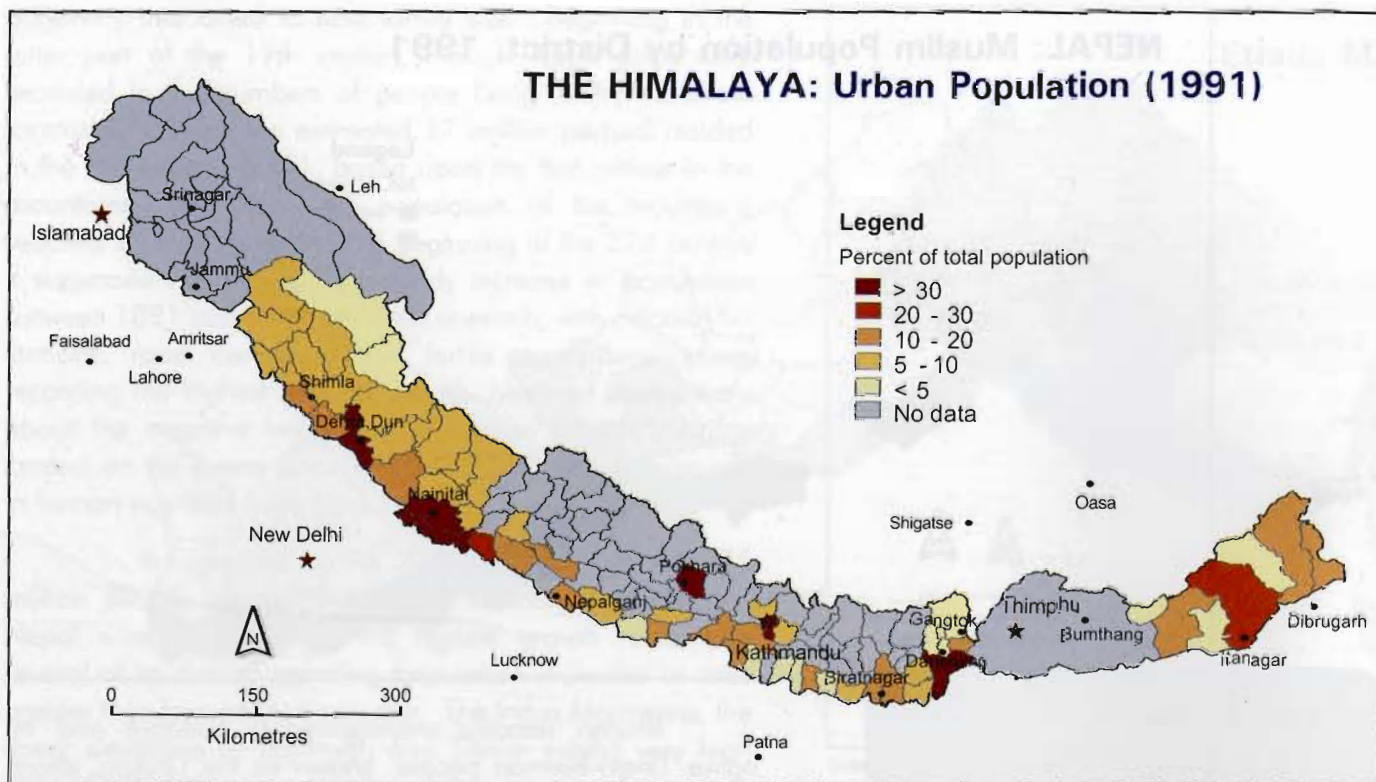
Source: Compiled from HMG-Nepal government statistics, and adapted from Gurung, H., 1998. Nepal: Social Demography and Expressions. Kathmandu: New Era Publications

groups and over 100 languages and dialects. The dominant ethnic group in Nepal in the hills is the hill caste population, which includes Bahun, Chhetri, and Thakuri, as well as the artisan castes. Other significant ethnic groups in Nepal include the Sherpas in the Mount Everest region, the Gurungs on the southern slopes of Annapurna, the Magars south of Mount Dhaulagiri, the numerous Bhotiya (Tibeto-Burmese) clans residing mainly in the trans-Himalayan valleys, the Rai and Limbu tribes of the eastern hills, and the Tharus who inhabit the Terai lowlands.



Wangdue Dzong, Wangdue, Bhutan

Birendra Bajracharya



Source: Adapted from INDIAN HIMALAYA: A Demographic Database, 2002. Almora: G. B. Pant Institute; and ICIMOD, 2003. Mapping Nepal Census Indicators 2001 & Trends. Kathmandu: ICIMOD

ethnic minority. Darjeeling and Sikkim also contain an overwhelming population of Nepalese migrants some of who have intermixed with the native Lepcha population.

The earliest ethnic minority population in Sikkim is that of the Lepchas who originate in Assam but have lived for centuries at the base of Mount Kangchenjunga. The eastern Himalaya contain a large number of tribes practicing animistic traditions. Some of them, such as the Monpa, Sherdukpen, and Khampti, have adopted Buddhism. The overall tribal character of Arunachal Pradesh reflects the great concentration of ethnic groups who maintain their own language and traditions such as shamanism, shifting cultivation, clan dress, and other forms of material culture.

The latitudinal diversity of Himalayan culture is enhanced by the vertical distribution of lifestyles. Rice farmers of the Himalayan valleys live in tight clusters of homes made from traditional stucco and thatch. Agro-pastoral people live higher up in the mountains, among stone and slate-roofed villages, and combine their grain farming with semi-nomadic livestock grazing. A common feature of these groups is their seasonal migration to the high elevation pastures, where they keep flocks of sheep and goats during the summer months. The trans-Himalayan valleys, meanwhile, are settled mainly by

Tibetan peoples. They live in flat-roofed, adobe structures, and grow high-altitude grain in irrigated fields, raise potatoes, and keep herds of yak and goats. Only one group of Himalayan people - the Bakarwal - remain fully nomadic. They move continually through the landscape of the Indus Mountains in Kashmir, ranging between highlands and lowlands as the season changes. Some Himalayan valley groups, such as the Thakali and Newar, are best known for their trading and mercantile skills, while other highlanders are renowned as mountaineers (the Sherpa) or as mercenary warriors (the Gurkha soldiers recruited from the Gurung and Magar tribes).

The human diversity in the Himalaya is manifest in the architecture and temples, in the clothing, jewelry and body tattoos worn by villagers, in the ceremonial practices, spiritual observances, and rites of passage, in language and dialect, and in the plethora of items that people place in the landscape. The shapes and materials of homes reflect the practical needs of villagers as well as their supernatural beliefs. In the cold and arid trans-Himalayan valleys, the houses are built of stone with flat roofs to dry grain in summer and to store firewood in winter. A huge array of house styles is found in the middle hills, ranging from the simple thatch and stucco dwellings of the Paharis and the oval shaped hill houses to the elaborate, multi-storied wooden structures of the Newars.

Urban Population of the Himalaya: Although the majority of people living in the Himalaya are still rural, the number of towns is growing and so too is the percentage of urban dwellers. This is especially notable where roads are common. It is also a trait of the larger valley districts located in the southern mountains. In the eastern sector of the range, where population size is relatively small, the percentage of urban population is greatly influenced by the towns that have sprung up at the base of the Himalaya overlooking the Brahmaputra Valley.

The handwoven textiles, which are prominent in the mountain villages, display particular colors and patterns that denote specific ethnic backgrounds of residents. Some of the most exquisite tapestries in the world are found among people living in Ladakh and Spiti, and among the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. Women of the distinct ethnic groups wear their wealth differently as jewelry. The huge golden ear rings and nose rings worn by Rai and Limbu women are characteristic of the important cultural value of jewelry, which is a form of savings. Fluttering prayer flags, stone chortens and gateways, the inscribed tablets of the meandering rock mani walls, and the copper prayer wheels turned by running stream water all mark the distinctive Tibetan Buddhist realm. Meanwhile, sacred cremation places, sculptured stone deities, and pagoda-roofed

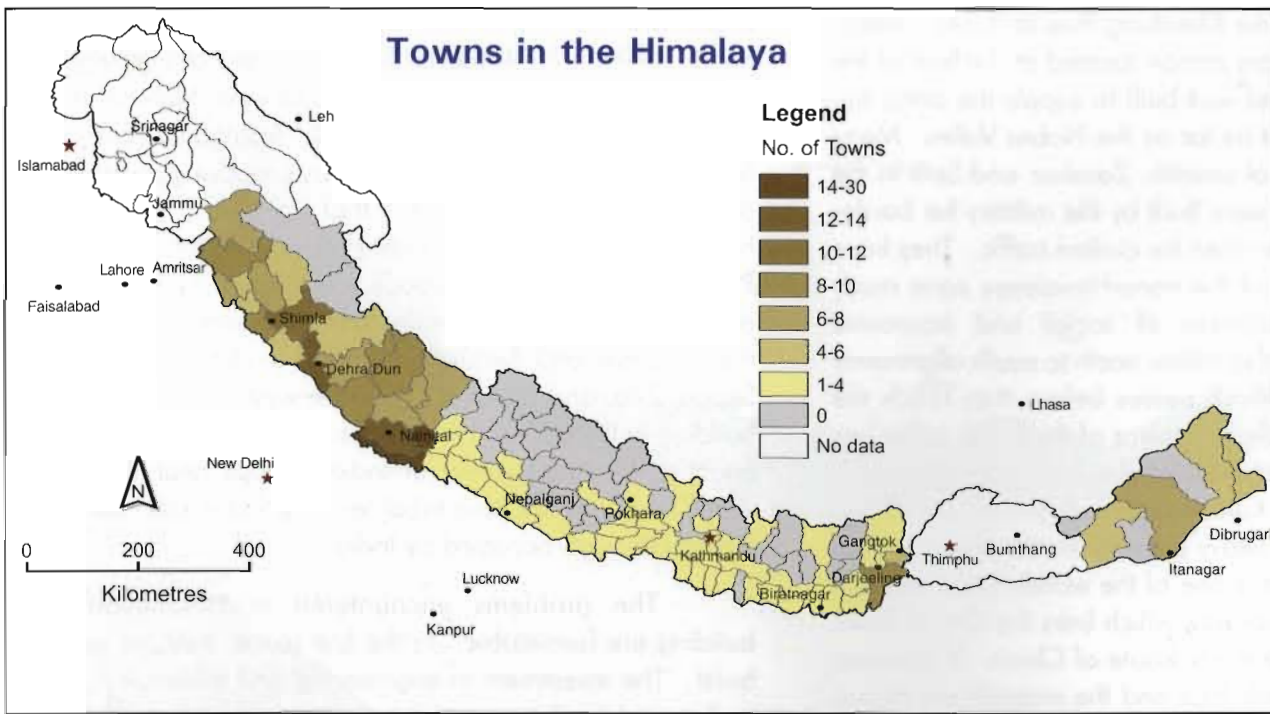
temples denote the Hindu villages. Shamanistic traditions are common among the various mountain tribes who live in simple villages of bamboo and thatch homes. Altogether, the mix of cultural traits in the Himalaya is stunningly complex and far-reaching, and it is manifested in the rich and varied human society in the mountains.

MIGRATION AND URBANIZATION

People have always been on the move in the Himalaya. Long-distance trade routes crisscross the range, linking Tibet and India, and the caravans have exchanged salt for grain across the rugged terrain for many centuries. Smaller mercantile routes also connect villages within more tightly-bounded mountain settings, influencing the long-standing ties between highland and valley settlements. The seasonal migration of herders, which is a hallmark of high mountain culture, is an important adaptation to the environment, requiring people to move considerable distances on a regular basis. The herders trade animal products for grains and vegetables produced by sedentary farmers. Marriage also traditionally requires a new spouse to leave home and to move to a new residence.

These age-old reasons for moving from place to place add up to the fact that migration is nothing new in the

Towns in the Himalaya



Towns in the Himalaya: Many of the larger towns located in the Indian Himalaya were established by the British as hill stations during the colonial period. But the number and size of new towns are increasing along with population growth and modernization trends. The towns attract migrants who seek employment and an improved standard of living. All the major towns lie along important roadways.

Source: Compiled and adapted from Sharma, P. (ed.), 2001. *Market Towns in the Hindu Kush-Himalayas*. Kathmandu: ICIMOD; and ICIMOD, 2003. *Mapping Nepal Census Indicators 2001 & Trends*. Kathmandu: ICIMOD

Himalaya, but its current rate and the causes for it have changed considerably in the past several decades. Nowadays, many people move from their home villages out of desperation, because the land is no longer productive or because few economic alternatives exist in the crowded rural settings.

Food deficits in some rural areas force people to flee to other places. Some people move to other rural localities in the hope of settling new agricultural land. Others make their way to cities with the idea of improving their lives. A growing number of individuals leave the Himalaya for places elsewhere in Asia, in the Gulf States, and further abroad in the search for employment, education, and a better lifestyle.

The Paharis of Garhwal and Kumaon in the western Himalaya have been moving onto the southern plains in significant numbers since the middle of the 19th century. Many of them were drawn to the employment opportunities offered by the British. The highland-lowland migration stream is more recent in Nepal where migrants first began to flow out of the hills onto the Terai in steady numbers beginning in the 1960s, when the government initiated a land resettlement scheme in the lowlands. In 1971, the highlands of Nepal contained 62.4% of the country's population, but by 1991 that had declined to 53.3%, mainly as a result of out-migration to the lowlands and cities. The Terai, Inter-regional migration map which received 75% of the migration flow

originating in Nepal in 1991, also gained in population because of immigration from India. The border between Nepal and India is open for both nationalities, and many undocumented Indians find advantages in living in the towns located in Nepal's Terai zone. These migrations are turning the Terai into one of the most densely settled areas in the Himalaya, and transforming its society to a hybrid of Nepalese and Indian influences.

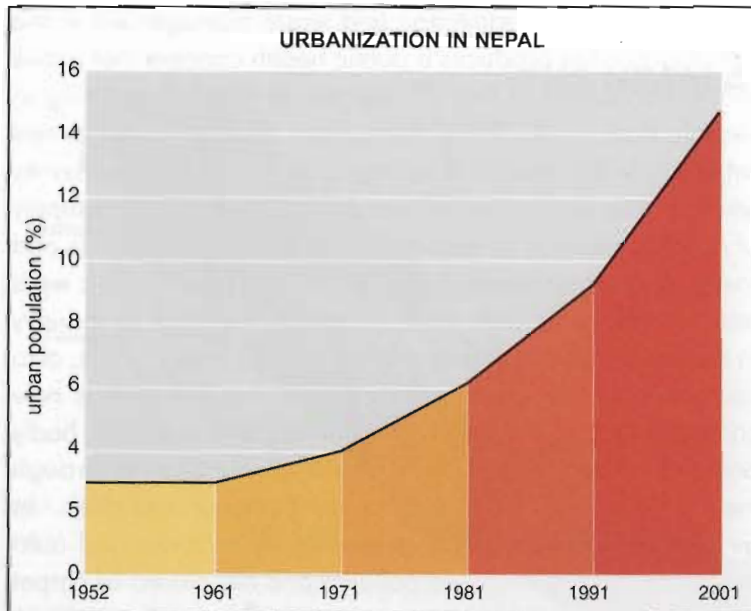
The great majority of migrants settle in the relatively new towns and cities. These places are growing at a very rapid rate, in most cases without sufficient infrastructure or planning. As recently as 1981, less than one in ten Himalayan persons lived in a town or city. By the turn of the 21st century, the percentage of urban population had doubled to twenty. In 1954, Nepal listed only ten localities with over 5,000 persons; the 1991 census showed 33 such urban places and in 2001 the number of designated towns and cities stood at 58. Nepal's urban population, meanwhile, increased from 9.2% in 1991 to 12% in 2001. Bhutan has a smaller percentage of urban population, less than 5%, but that too is increasing, while the urban population in neighboring Sikkim grew from 2% in 1951 to 16% in 1981. In the far eastern regions of Arunachal Pradesh, the population remains primarily rural, while the western Indian Himalaya contain some of the range's largest cities (Srinagar, Dehra Dun, Shimla, Mussoorie, Nainital).

The lack of sanitation and waste management in the Himalayan cities produces a public health concern that grows with urbanization. Over 70 percent of the people living in Nepal's Kathmandu Valley dump their garbage in the streets (where only 40 percent is collected) or along the river banks where it piles up to create local disease hazards. The supply of drinking water is inadequate in most of the large cities and towns, and urban residents still rely on antiquated public wells and springs for potable water. The concentration of industry in the towns, which attracts migrants to the jobs it offers, also contaminates the urban environment. Air pollution is now commonplace in the large towns, and rivers are often badly polluted. Kathmandu, which was relatively pristine through the 1970s, is one of the world's most contaminated cities. Its air is thick now with smog generated by factories and auto emissions, and its rivers are polluted and discolored by carpet factories and household waste.

Some of the Himalayan towns have ancient origins as pilgrimage centers or the capitals of feudal kingdoms. A few, such as Shimla and Darjeeling, developed under the British as hill stations. Most of the new towns, though, stem from regional economic development occurring in the mountains. Large development projects such as the hydropower schemes require large administrative and labor forces, which settle in the area to create new towns. Many people migrate to these towns to seek work in the new industries being created there. They work in factories, build roads, or undertake all sorts of menial labor. Most of the towns are spurting up along the new roads. In Nepal, for example, such places as Dhankuta and Dharan in the east, Dhunche north of the Kathmandu Valley, and Dailekh in the far western region all owe their



Migrant workers from India find seasonal employment in the Himalayan foothills.



Source: Adapted from UNEP, 2001. *Nepal: State of the Environment 2001*. Bangkok: UNEP-RRCA.P



A new road, hydroelectric plants and incipient industry have created a mini-urban corridor along a section of the Sutlej River in Himachal Pradesh.

recent development to transportation inroads into the mountains. In the western Himalaya, which enjoys a relatively advanced road system, the new towns are giving the mountains a determinedly urban and industrial look.

TRANSPORTATION

The Himalayan roads are engineering marvels, traversing mountain passes, crossing rivers, cutting through the hard rock cliffs of canyons and steep ridges. The highest road in the world starts in Leh in Ladakh, rises 2,000 meters

in 15 kilometers, crosses the Khardung Pass at 5,340 meters, and ends in the Indian army station located at the foot of the Siachen Glacier. The road was built to supply the army, but the public can travel on it as far as the Nubra Valley. Many of the newest high roads of Ladakh, Zaskar, and Spiti in the Indian western Himalaya were built by the military for border defense, but most now are open for civilian traffic. They have made the remote valleys of the trans-Himalayan zone much more accessible for purposes of social and economic development. The roads that follow north to south alignments often must cross over difficult passes before they reach the plateau zone. For example, the towns of the Indus valley are reached by road only after climbing the Zoji La from Kashmir or the Rohtang Pass from Kulu Valley. Both passes are closed much of the year due to heavy snow or avalanches. Across the Indus River in Pakistan is one of the world's great modern roads - the Karakoram Highway, which links the Grand Trunk Road of South Asia with the Silk Route of China. It traverses the 4,880 meter Khunjerab Pass and the magnificent Hunza Valley, covering some of the most rugged terrain in the world. Altogether, about 15,000 kilometers of roads have been built in the Indian Himalaya since the early 1960s.

The first roads were built in Nepal beginning in 1953 and were limited to the Terai and the Kathmandu Valley. A road link between Kathmandu and the outside was completed in 1956. By 1964, Nepal had only 289 kilometers of roads. Limited financial resources and the rugged mountain terrain held a check on road construction throughout most of the kingdom until the late 1960s to early 1970s, when a flurry of road-building efforts began. The Chinese and the Indians built many of the early roads in Nepal, both countries seeking to gain strategic inroads into the mountains. By 2000, the country had over 2,500 kilometers of paved roads, most of which are located in the hills and lowland Terai. The roads serve Nepal's modernization interests which require making distant rural areas more accessible for social and economic development. Still, about a third of the country's population has no access to roads. Most recently, road building has begun into the heart of the High Himalaya, connecting Tibet with Nepal and India, and opening remote valleys in the trans-Himalaya to the rest of the country. One of the most ambitious road projects will traverse the Kali Gandaki Gorge - the world's deepest valley and some of the harshest terrain in the Himalaya, connecting the remote district of Mustang with the lowlands in the south and Tibet in the north.

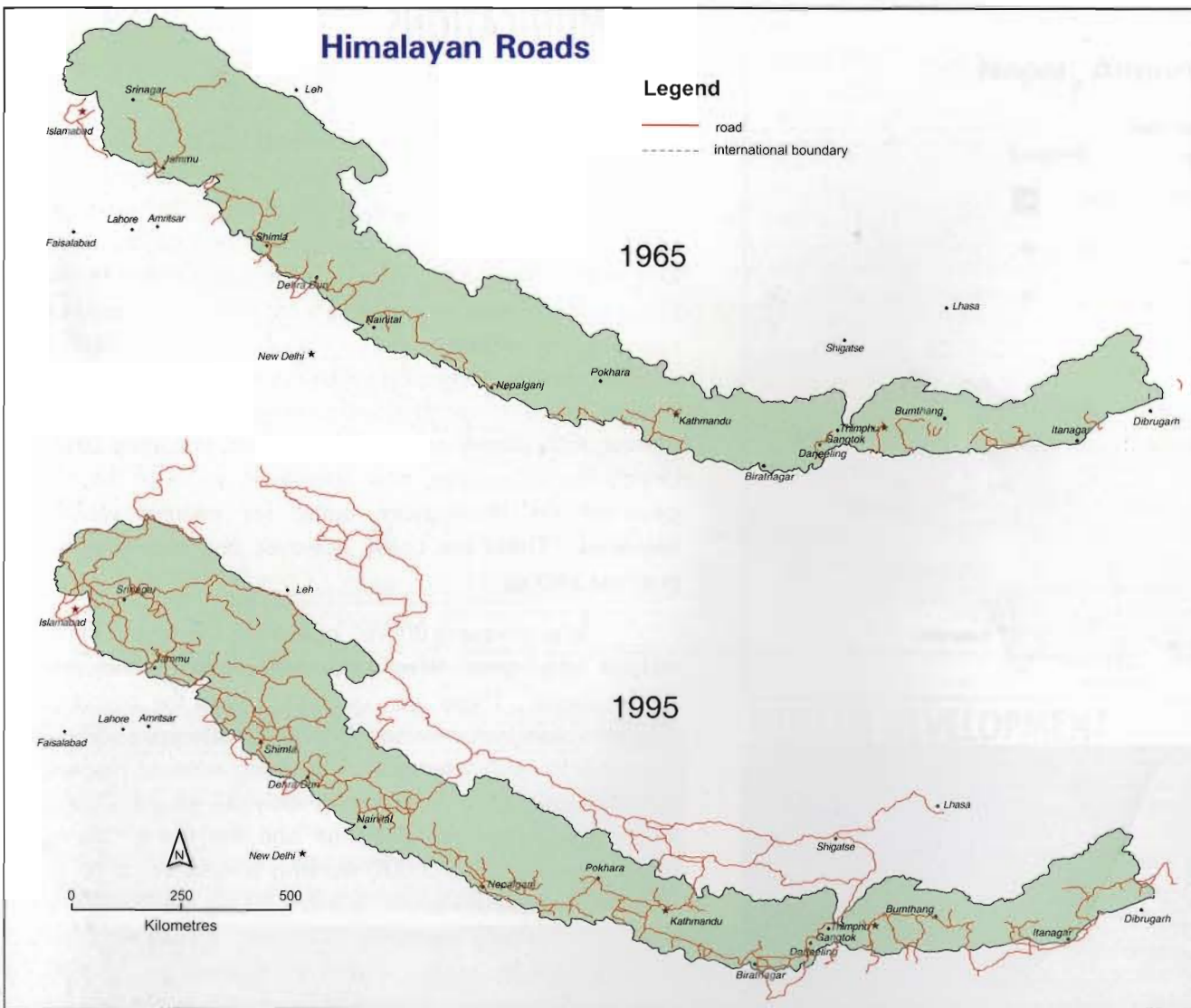
The eastern Himalaya remain the least accessible part of the range. The maps of the area are notably empty. Bhutan

began road construction in 1959 with the assistance of India, and in 1990 had less than 1,500 kilometers of highway. The longest stretch of road is the East-west highway which connects the capital Thimphu with Tashigang (546 km.). Much of the remainder of the country's roadway contributes a network of feeder roads that connects the district headquarters with the East-West Highway. Much of Arunachal Pradesh remains without roads. The major highways in the easternmost Himalaya are limited to the important valleys of the Subansiri and Brahmaputra, and lead to such towns as Seppa, Ziro, and Pasighat. As in the west, much of the road-building in the eastern Himalaya supported military purposes, enabling the deployment of Indian troops near the border with China in a fractious tribal territory that is still claimed by China although occupied by India.

The problems encountered in Himalayan road building are formidable. In the first place, they are costly to build. The investment in engineering and materials is great, and most Himalayan countries rely on donor assistance to build their roads. Most roads at some point cross major rivers, requiring the construction of costly bridges. Many of the current bridges were built as temporary affairs and have passed their design life. The heavy rainfall in the summer causes numerous landslides along the road alignments. The debris clearing, repairing undercuts of road embankments, replacing asphalt surfaces, and numerous other seasonal maintenance tasks are simply beyond the resources of the Himalayan countries. In Nepal, between 1980 and 1993, environmental damage to roads resulted in 2.5 billion rupees of repair work. As a result of the high maintenance costs, the roads in many mountain localities are in bad shape.



An iron bridge spans a river in the northwestern Himalaya.



Source: Compiled by David Zurick. Adapted from Zurick D. and Karan P.P. 1999. *Himalaya: Life on the Edge of the World*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press

A number of alternative modes of transportation exist that augment the roads. Historically, the movement of people and goods across the Himalaya depended upon the role of trails and porters, and these still constitute the main way of getting around in most parts of the mountains. The plateau regions and the wide valleys of the western Himalaya are crossed by pony caravans, which are a primary means of trade and travel in many places in Ladakh, Zaskar, and Spiti, as well as in the valleys and plateau lands north of the Himalayan crest in Nepal. The steep trails in the mountains, however, often cannot be traversed by pack animals, and human porters, therefore, have traditionally carried the weight of goods on their backs. On some of the busier trails in Nepal, upwards of a thousand porters may pass in a single day. Suspension bridges are an important feature of the foot trails and mule tracks, allowing the safe crossing of rivers and

gorges. In recent years, the importance of ropeways has increased. The first ropeway in Nepal was built in 1927 to ferry goods into the Kathmandu Valley. Since then, numerous large and small ropeways have been constructed in the Himalaya, greatly reducing the burden of portering heavy goods up steep inclines in heavy traffic areas.

The steep terrain of the Himalaya has not allowed much in the way of rail transport. One narrow gauge railway in Nepal links border towns with India, and is used mainly

Himalayan Roads: The period 1965-1995 ushered in a road-building frenzy in the Himalaya. In the western and eastern sectors, much of the road construction was targeted for military purposes and many of the roads remained off limits to civilians until the late 1990s. Elsewhere, the roads were part of national or regional economic development initiatives. With roads comes increasing accessibility for purposes of market development and the delivery of social services, but roads also bring problems, notably environmental instability. The road cuts in steep regions contribute to landslide problems and soil erosion. They also make it easier for illegal timber cutters to expand operations in the remote forests.

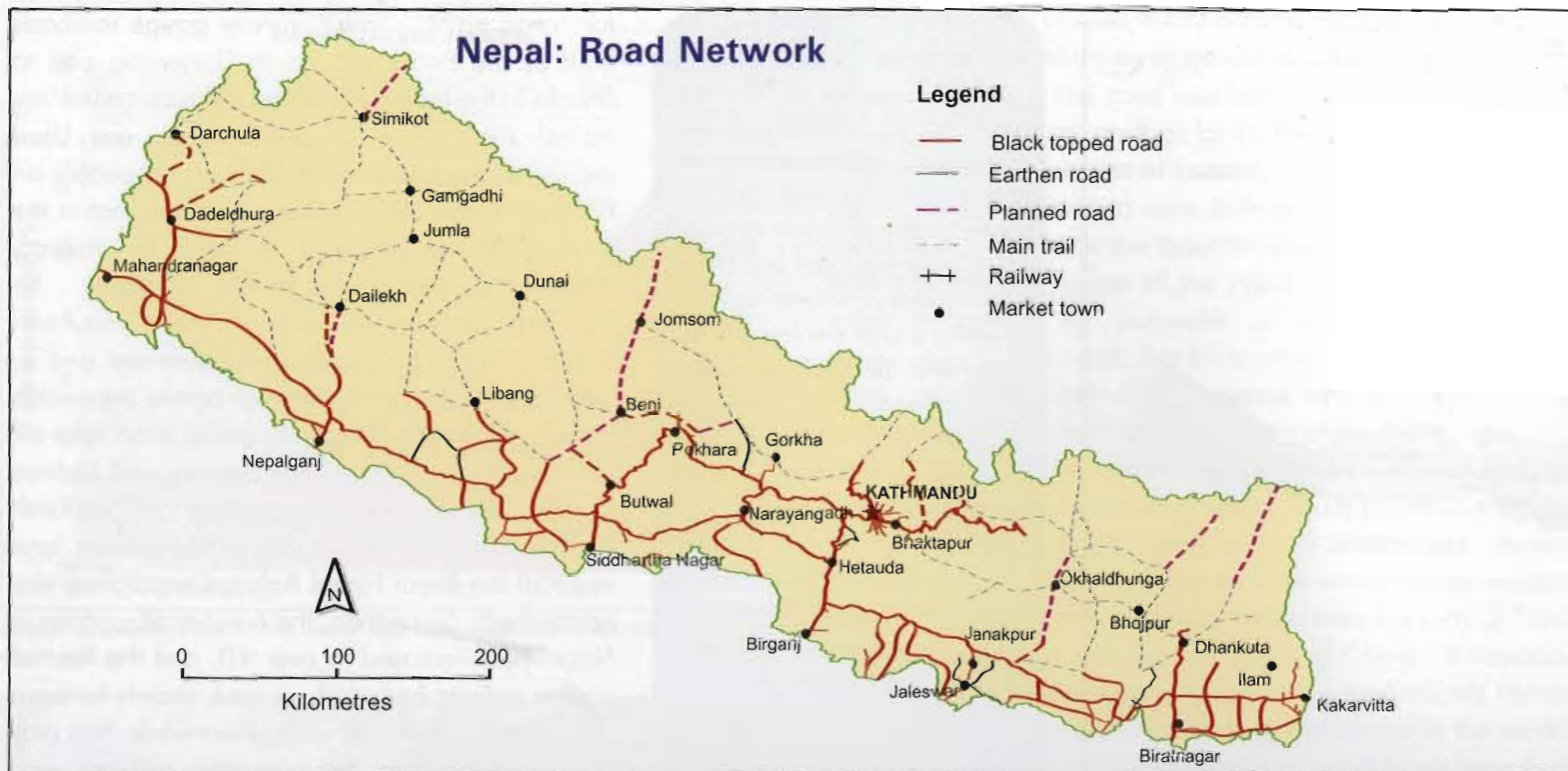
for cargo traffic. Small, narrow gauge railroads built by the British still go to Darjeeling and to Shimla in the Indian Himalaya. The so-called 'toy trains' that move on these lines are used exclusively for passenger traffic, mainly people on holiday. A railroad goes as far as Pasighat in the eastern Himalaya, and is used for military transport as well as for civilian purposes. Air transport plays a key role in many mountain localities, both for passenger movement and to ferry food and other necessities across impossible terrain. In Nepal, the small, grassy short take-off and landing (STOL) airstrips provide vital lifelines to many villages. Air transport began in 1950 with the construction of the airstrip in Kathmandu, and in 1958 the Royal Nepal Airline Corporation was established. Since then, the number of airstrips in Nepal has increased to over 40, and the fleet of private airlines has mushroomed, mainly to serve the tourism industry. Bhutan, meanwhile, has only one airport in Paro, but numerous helipads exist across the country, used mainly for emergency or governmental purposes.



Much of the Himalayan region lacks roads and the trails are too steep even for pack animals. Porters carry the heavy loads in these places.



Bridges have improved considerably in the past few decades, making travel easier in parts of the Himalaya.



Source: ICIMOD, MENRIS data, compiled from various sources.

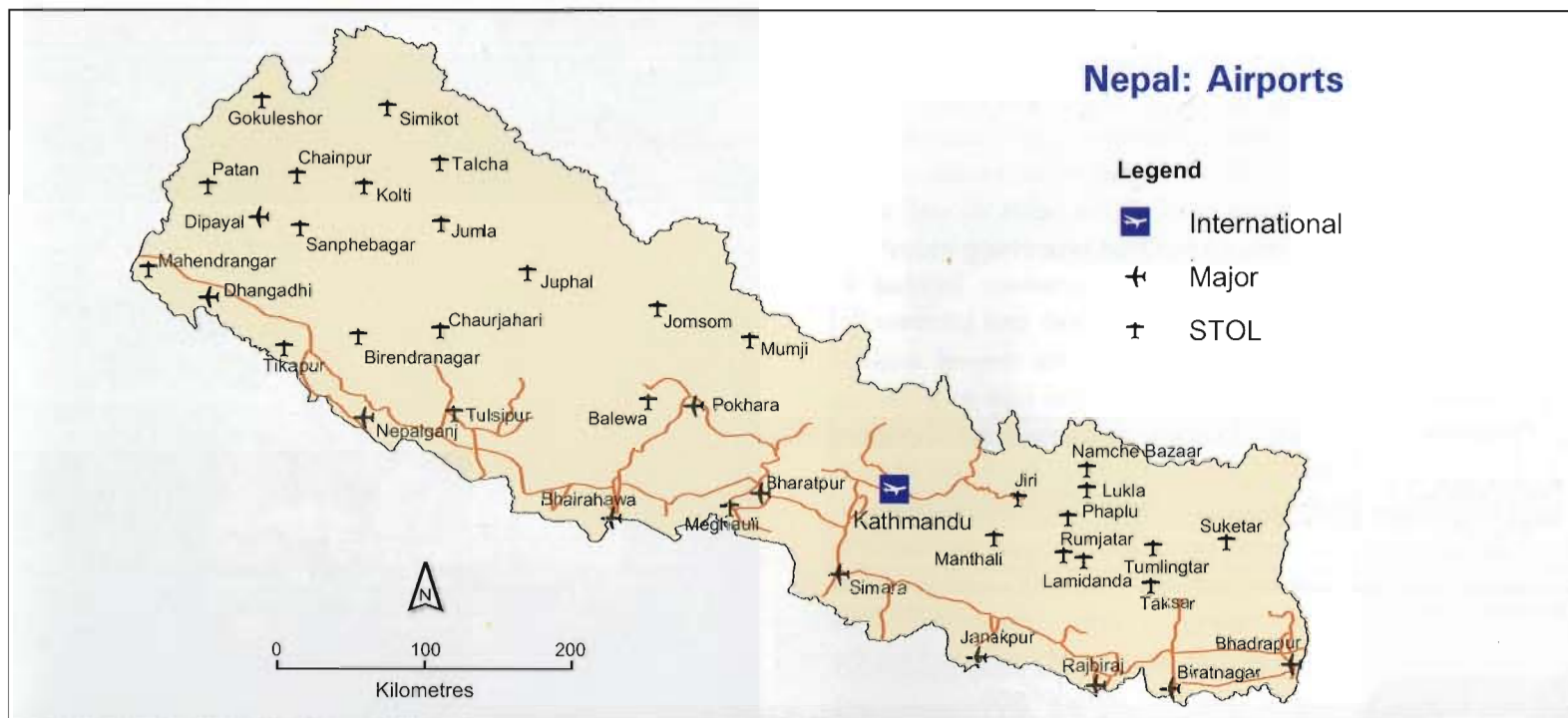
COMMUNICATIONS

The remote and scattered population of the Himalaya, combined with the lack of motor transport, makes the need for communication especially vital among the mountain communities for purposes of human development and government participation. Large areas of the Himalaya are still not covered by postal services. Buses are used along roadways to dispatch mail, and air deliveries reach the remote airstrips. Otherwise, villagers rely on the unscheduled services of volunteer or government-paid runners to obtain printed mail. A few private mail services, including DHL and United Postal Services, now operate in some of the capital cities of the Himalayan region for express worldwide deliveries. These are costly, however, and mainly serve the business sector.

Telecommunications operating in the Himalaya include telephones, telegraph, wireless radio, and satellite transmissions. These are common now in the cities, along with television transmissions, but the rural areas, particularly those with no electricity, remain without adequate communications. For example, only 55 of 75 districts in Nepal are served by telephone and the entire country of Bhutan has less than 3,000 working telephone connections. The communication sector is more highly developed in the western Himalaya, especially in Himachal Pradesh, which is better served by electricity and by government as well as private telecommunications exchanges. Satellite telephones and television dishes are still rare in the mountains but can be found where electricity is available. Small hydropower stations provide electricity, and parabolic dishes bring a global system of television programs to the remote villages. Most of the Himalayan towns and the villages along the roads are served by print media in national and vernacular languages, as well as in English in the large cities. The Indian districts are served by the national Hindi newspapers as well as by local tabloids. Nepal has numerous small weekly newspapers, many of them aligned with political parties, as well as the national private daily papers such as the Kantipur and Kathmandu Times, and the government papers Gorkhapatra and Rising Nepal. Bhutan is served by the weekly national newspaper Kuensel, which is published in Thimphu.



One of the longest suspension bridges in Bhutan over the Phochu river, Punakha.



Source: Adapted from HMG-Nepal Topographic Survey Branch map

Nepal - Airports: Some of the most remote places in Nepal are served by air, with planes landing on dirt airstrips in very rugged terrain. During emergencies, such airstrips may be the only lifeline to the rest of the country. Many of the mountain airstrips are seasonal and close down in the winter or in the event of high winds or threatening storms.

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

The United Nations Human Development Report provides an index of variables (life expectancy, education, income) which, taken together, comprise a measure of the development of human society. In the U.N. calculations for 162 countries, the Himalayan region fares badly. Nepal came in at 129, followed by Bhutan at 130. India and Pakistan measured a bit better, at 115 and 127 respectively, but their Himalayan territories contain some of those countries' poorest districts. The United Nations calculations, which emphasize material wealth, is contested by Bhutan, which proposed its own 'Gross National Happiness Index' in its Human Development Report 2000 submitted to the United Nations. In the Bhutanese view, the goal of development is a happy society, which must consider the spiritual and emotional, as well as material, factors. Nonetheless, the common United



Satellite dishes powered by small hydro-electric installations bring the world to the remote mountain villages.



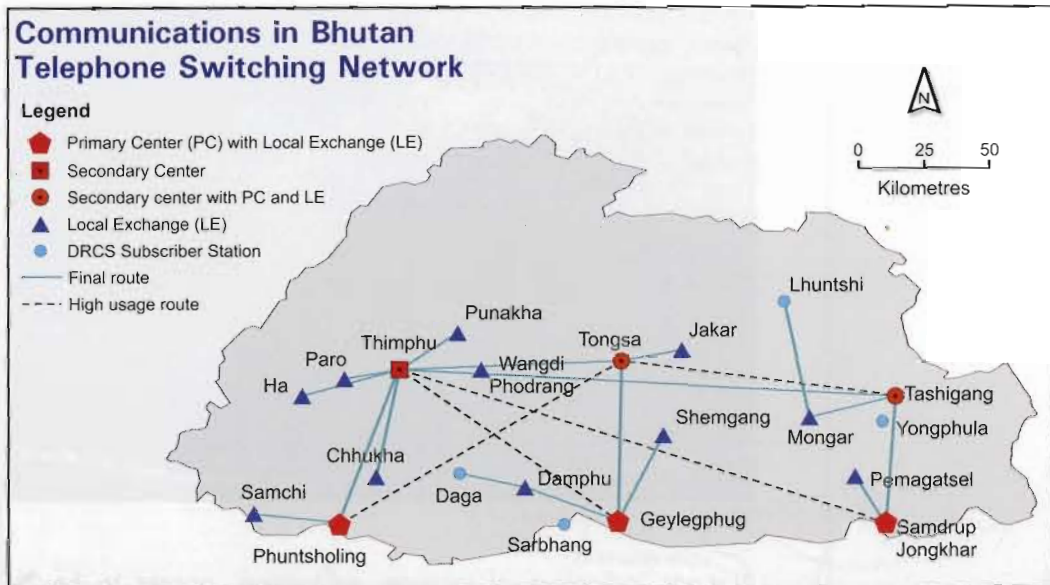
Helipad in the Himalaya

Nations indicators of income, education, access to health service, and life expectancy represent worthwhile, if not exclusive, goals for national development, even in Bhutan.

Poverty and Employment

Although the bulk of the Himalayan population remains agricultural, the traditional farming systems cannot absorb the growing workforce. The result is increasing poverty. The development challenges in the region, therefore, include the creation of alternative economic opportunities in the non-farm sector. Currently, the region experiences levels of income poverty among the lowest in Asia. Nepal's GNP per capita in 1998 was \$200, ranking it alongside the poorest countries in Africa. Over half its population lives on less than a dollar a day. India's overall GNP per capita is US\$370, but its Himalayan region includes some of its poorest places (Sikkim, for example, reports a state per capita GDP of around \$215, while Arunachal Pradesh reports per capita incomes less than US\$200). The per capita GNP reported by Bhutan is a higher, US\$594, and the emphasis Bhutan places on conserving its natural capital (e.g. forests, water, soils) leads the country to conclude that, when natural capital is included, the per capita wealth in Bhutan increases to US\$16,500.

Although the official overall unemployment line in the Himalaya is quite low - less than 5%, its total workforce is underutilized by about 50%, due in part to the seasonal nature of farm work. It is this latter figure that is most important in modern times as more people seek a living in the towns and industries. In Nepal, the active work population includes 22% laboring in services and less than 14% in



Source: Royal Government of Bhutan, 1992. *Seventh Five Year Plan (1992-1997), Vol.1. Main Plan Document.* Thimphu: RGOB, National Planning Commission

Communications in Bhutan: Traditional telephone networks in Bhutan, as well as elsewhere in the Himalaya, do not reach very far into the remote areas. These systems are gradually being augmented by wireless and satellite-based communication systems.

manufacturing. The workforce participation of women in Nepal has almost doubled since 1971, while that of men has decreased. Nonetheless, poverty is alarmingly high throughout the country. In 1996, the percentage of population living below the national poverty line ranged from 23% in the urban areas to 56% in the mountains. Agriculture, meanwhile, has largely stagnated and many mountain districts are now food deficit. Nepal's overall sluggish economy has led to slow income growth (1.4% per annum during the past 25 years) for everyone. The underemployment problem is compounded by the labor migration from India, which fills menial jobs as well as entrepreneurial roles. In Bhutan, meanwhile, the GDP grew at a rate of 7.3% per annum during the 1980s, and at 5.9% between 1990 and 1998. The mining, manufacturing, and energy sectors of the national economy contribute a significant proportion to this growth in wealth, from 4% of the national GDP in 1980 to 25% in 1998. These increases have led to new jobs in the industrial sector in Bhutan.

The economic prospects in the western Himalaya vary considerably from one place to another. The decades of instability in Kashmir have led to economic stagnation in all sectors of the economy and to very serious levels of income poverty throughout the state, as well as to other forms of

human misery. Himachal Pradesh and Uttaranchal, however, fare better. The rural sector in Himachal Pradesh has invested heavily in commercial agriculture, notably orchards, which provides work in the fields as well as in the associated fruit processing industries. The hydroelectric schemes located in both Himachal Pradesh and Uttaranchal provide employment for menial workers as well as for technical and engineering staff. Tourism, too, plays an important role in the rural service economy of both states. Throughout the Himalaya, cottage industries, such as handicrafts, paper-making, textiles, and food processing, are promoted as sustainable sources of livelihood for the rural mountain populations.

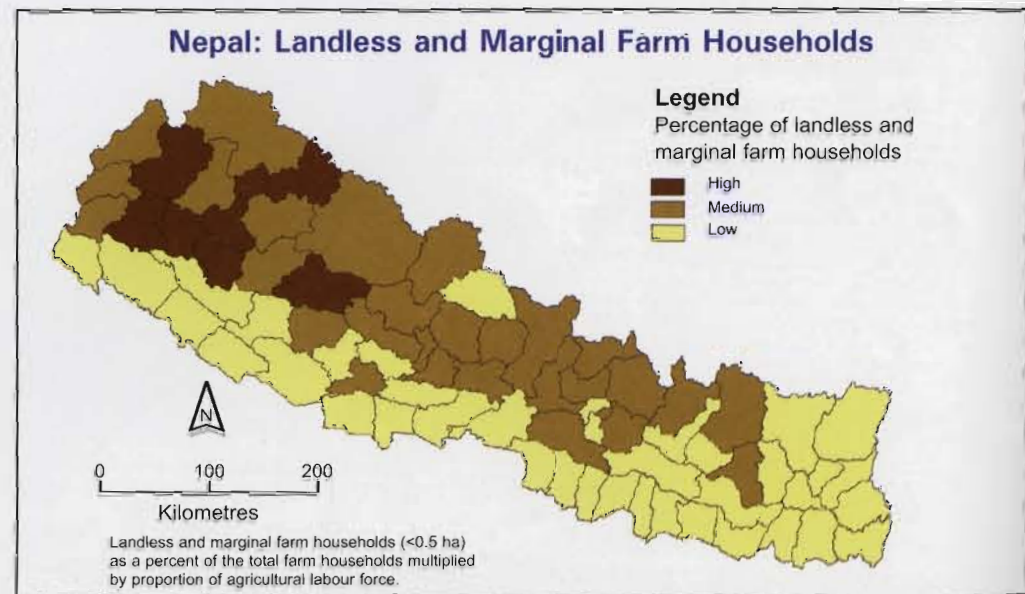
With the growth of urban places, the prospects for employment in the industrial, service, and trade sectors have increased in some areas. A small proportion of town dwellers is engaged in household industries (in the Indian Himalaya this ranges from 0.3% in Arunachal Pradesh to 4% in Sikkim), despite its heavy promotion by government policies. The largest concentration of urban workers in the Himalaya is in trade and commerce and in the service sector. These categories account for two-thirds of the urban workers in the



Human poverty is at its greatest in some of the remote villages in western Nepal.

Indian Himalaya. Similar rates prevail in Nepal. Impediments to urban employment throughout the range include the lack of training and low educational levels, as well as the low

Nepal - Percentage of Landless and Marginal Farm Households: The problem of landless farmers occurs where population densities are high and agricultural area is limited. This is particularly acute in places where the rural elite controls a significant proportion of the available farmland. In Nepal, the western districts report high rates of landlessness. These also are some of the poorest districts in the country. Landlessness has also become a concern in some of the lowland Terai districts, which have experienced high rates of migration in recent decades.



Source: ICIMOD, 1997. *Indicators of Development - Districts of Nepal.* Kathmandu: ICIMOD

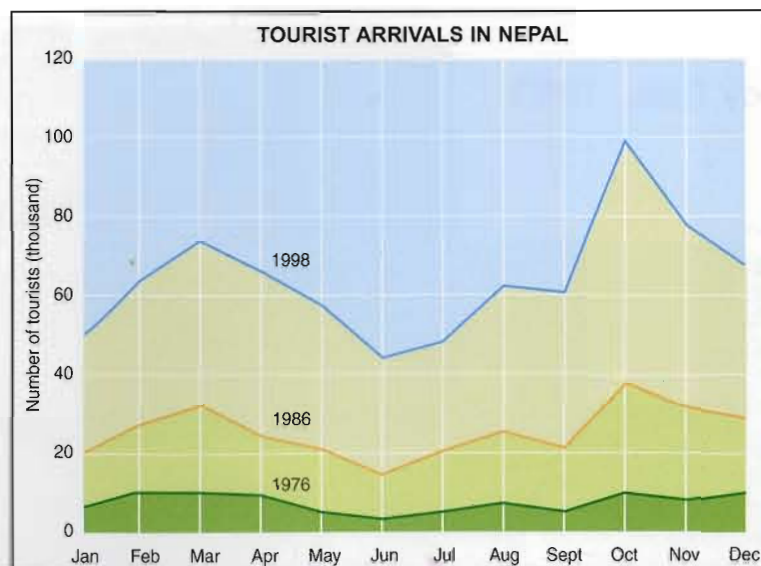
wages paid to employees. With continued high rates of rural to urban migration, and where most immigrants move to the cities in search of jobs, it is clear that employment generation becomes even more important. In Sikkim, where people increasingly seek livelihoods in the cities, the poverty rate increased from 36% in 1988 to 41% in 1994, highlighting the need for job creation in the towns.

Education

Historically, the education levels in the Himalaya have been low, and they continue to be among the lowest in the world, but recent decades have seen significant improvements in classroom enrollments and adult literacy. This change recognizes the fundamental role education plays in human development. In Nepal, the adult literacy rate increased from 8% in 1961 to 45% in 1997. In a recent survey, parents in Nepal unanimously ranked education as the top priority in their children's future. Bhutan has witnessed similar strides in education, with its adult literacy rate increasing from 10% in 1970 to 48% in 1994. Still, less than half the Bhutanese population can read or write, and education remains a top priority for both countries. Gender inequity also needs to be



Tourism services provide employment in many parts of the Himalaya.



Source: Adapted from UNEP, 2001. Nepal: State of the Environment 2001. Bangkok; UNEP-RRC.AP

addressed alongside the efforts to improve overall literacy. In Bhutan in 1990, the boy-girl ratio in primary school was 61-39. This has improved somewhat, but women are still seriously under-represented in schools at all levels. In Nepal, the gender imbalance is reflected in the fact that the literacy rate for men is 62%, while for women it is only 28%. This discrepancy is even greater in the remote mountain villages. Some of the highest education levels are reported in the Indian Himalaya where schools and teachers are more numerous. For example, Sikkim's adult literacy rate is almost 70% and about 83% of all children from 6-17 years' old attend school. The literacy rates are lowest in the Indian regions among the tribal groups and where urbanization levels are also low. The districts of Arunachal Pradesh, for example, report literacy rates as low as 9% in the West Siang district.

The expanding demand for schools means that the institutional infrastructure of education will need to be developed. Currently in the Himalaya, there are too few teachers and schools. Bhutan has always faced a shortage of teachers, which it meets in part by employing expatriates, mainly Indians, in its schools. The teacher training institutes in Bhutan, however, are expanding their capacity to meet the new demand, and the number of graduating teachers increased there from 487 in 1998 to 713 in 1999. The public schools in Nepal likewise are poorly equipped and the teachers often are not properly trained. As a result, the quality of public education is sadly lacking. This has led to an increasing number of private schools, including costly boarding schools, and many parents choose to sacrifice elsewhere in order to send their children to better schools. In

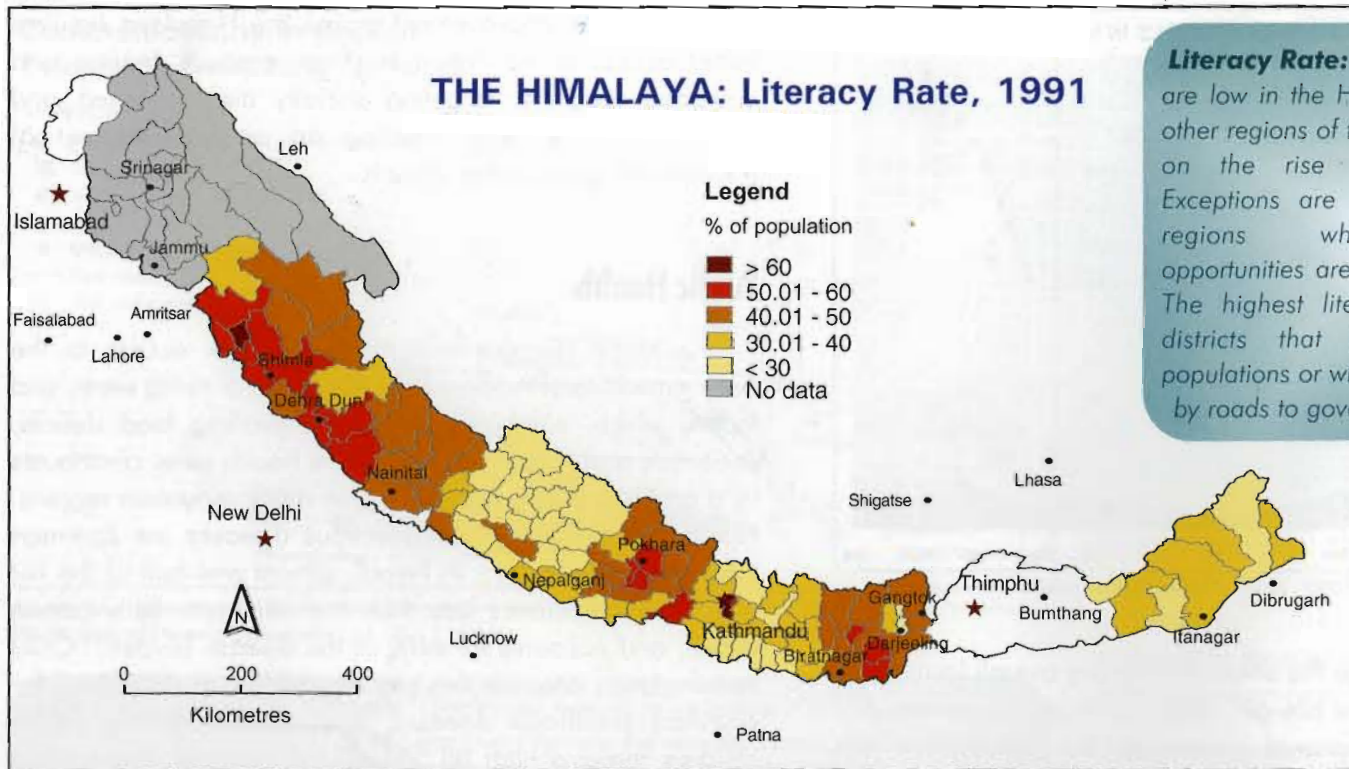
sum, education improvement across the Himalaya requires better access to education facilities, properly trained and equipped teachers, targeting socially disadvantaged and minority groups, and creating an accountable set of educational goals in the schools.

Public Health

Many Himalayan communities lack access to the basic amenities of modern life - electricity, drinking water, and toilets, which, combined with the prevailing food deficits, sanitation problems, and inadequate health care, contributes to a growing public health crisis in many mountain regions. Nutritional deficiency and infectious diseases are common throughout the range. In Nepal, almost one-half of the hill population consumes less than the minimum daily caloric intake, and accounts for 68% of the disease burden. Child immunization rates are low, placing children at special risk for common childhood diseases, and anemia among young children remains high (in Sikkim, for example, the anemia rate for children below 3 years is 77%). The most common diseases and disorders in the Himalaya include diarrhoea, iodine deficiency (leading to goiter and cretinism), tuberculosis, leprosy, and various vector-borne diseases such as malaria and encephalitis. The prevalence of HIV/AIDS is not well documented, but is believed to be growing, especially in mobile urban societies.

Fortunately, many of the common diseases and disorders are manageable through effective disease intervention, prevention, and curative health services. The Himalayan people traditionally rely on local healthcare givers, including faith healers and ayurvedic practitioners. Modern allopathic systems associated with national health services became important across the range during the 1950s. Today, the public health sector in the mountains remains inadequate due to the shortage of trained health personnel and drug supply. The shortages are compounded by the fact that much of the Himalayan population is widely dispersed among remote villages in very rugged terrain that is not accessible by motor vehicle. Nonetheless, important successes have been achieved in the area of public health.

Infant mortality rates in the mountain districts are high compared to other developing regions in the world, but they are coming down mainly due to improvements in pre-natal maternal care, sanitation, and child immunization. Nepal's infant mortality rate dropped from 172 in 1971 to 98 in



Literacy Rate: Overall literacy rates are low in the Himalaya compared to other regions of the world, but they are on the rise almost everywhere. Exceptions are in the most remote regions where educational opportunities are virtually non-existent. The highest literacy rates occur in districts that have large urban populations or which are or connected by roads to government centers.



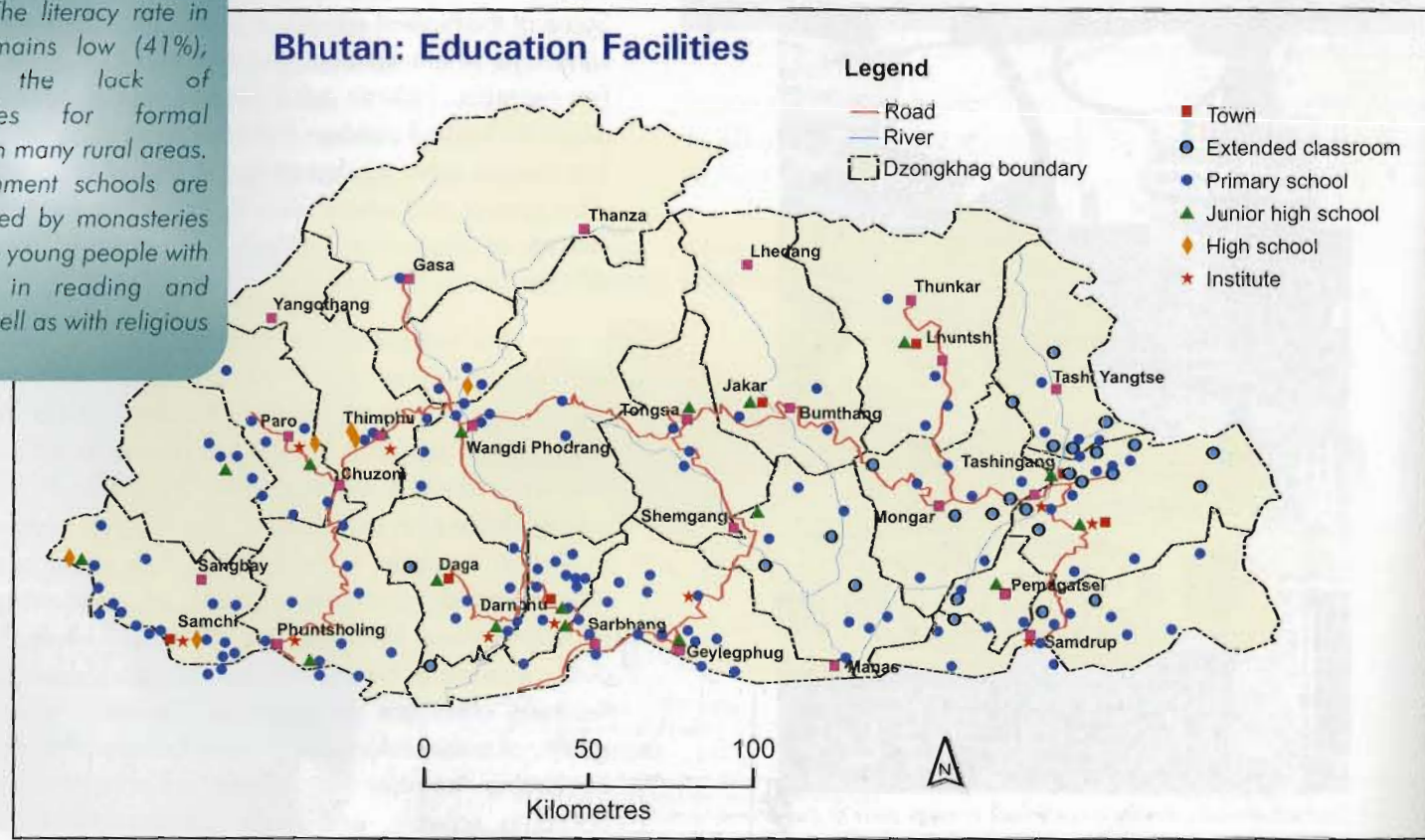
School facility in the Terai

Historically, the region has been controlled by an assortment of tribal coalitions, feudal principalities, monastic orders, or colonial regimes. The establishment of modern nation-states has resulted in new institutional arrangements for organizing mountain societies. New democratic initiatives are widespread, but in many places civil society is threatened with violence. Kashmir, for example, has been embroiled in civil unrest and military action since the independence of India

Source: Adapted from INDIAN HIMALAYA: A Demographic Database, 2002. Almora: G. B. Pant Institute

1994. Bhutan's rate dropped by half in a single decade, from 142 in 1984 to 71 in 1994. Sikkim's infant mortality rate dropped from 60 in 1990 to 51 in 1997. Diarrheal diseases, which commonly afflict young children, are prevented by improving access to safe drinking water and enhancing cleanliness and hygiene conditions in the home. The number of well-staffed and maintained health service posts is far below the number required by the mountain population. This remains a high priority among the Himalayan regions, but the lack of financial resources impairs the delivery of health services. Most people continue to live many hours or even days away from a health clinic of any sort. Few specialized medical staff work outside the major metropolitan areas. To overcome these problems, the Himalayan countries have placed emphasis on training village health workers and community health volunteers who provide basic medical health and share information toward disease prevention.

Education Facilities in Bhutan: The literacy rate in Bhutan remains low (41%), reflecting the lack of opportunities for formal education in many rural areas. The government schools are supplemented by monasteries that provide young people with instruction in reading and writing as well as with religious training.

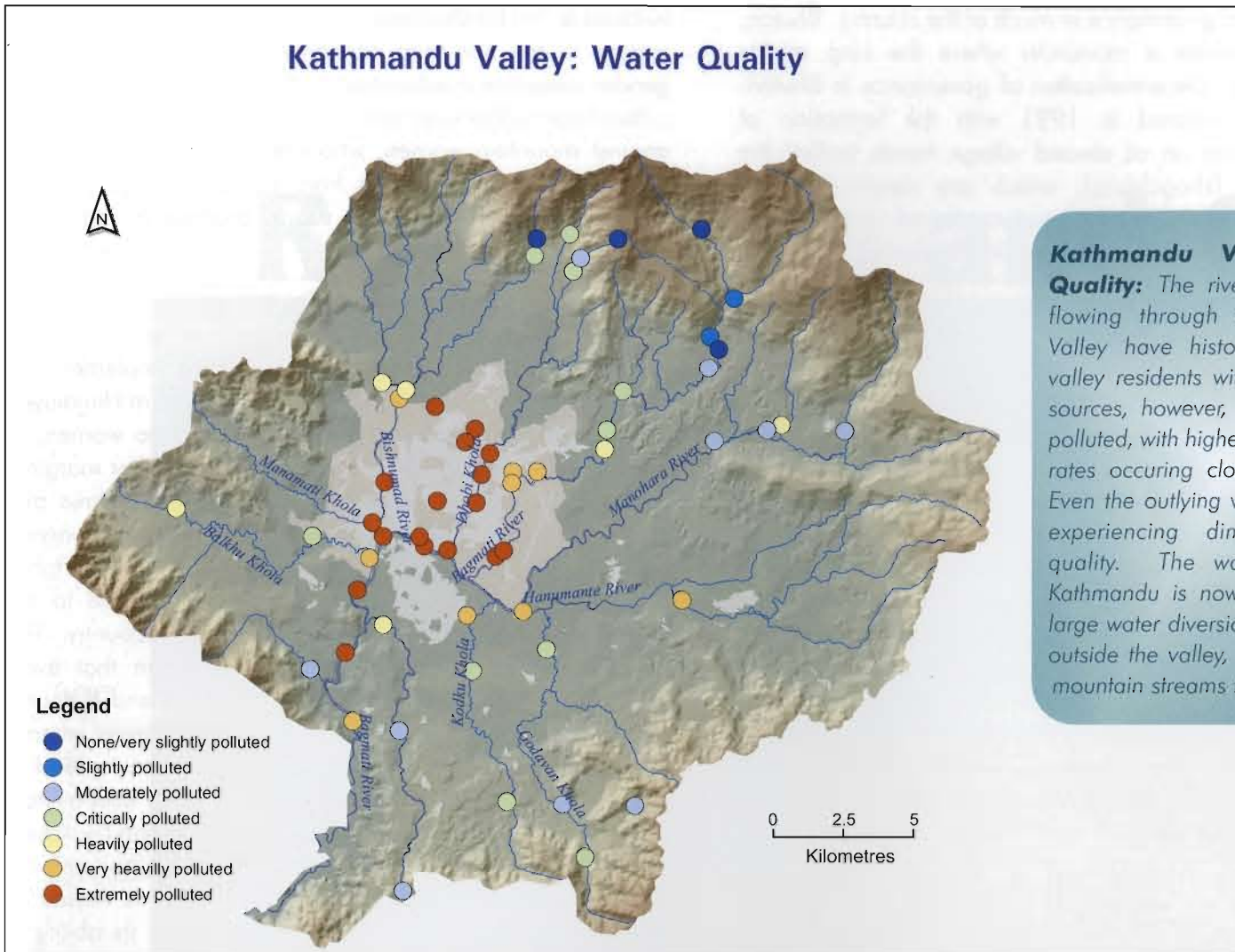


Source: Royal Government of Bhutan, 1992. Seventh Five Year Plan (1992-1997), Vol.1. Main Plan Document. Thimphu: RGOB, National Planning Commission

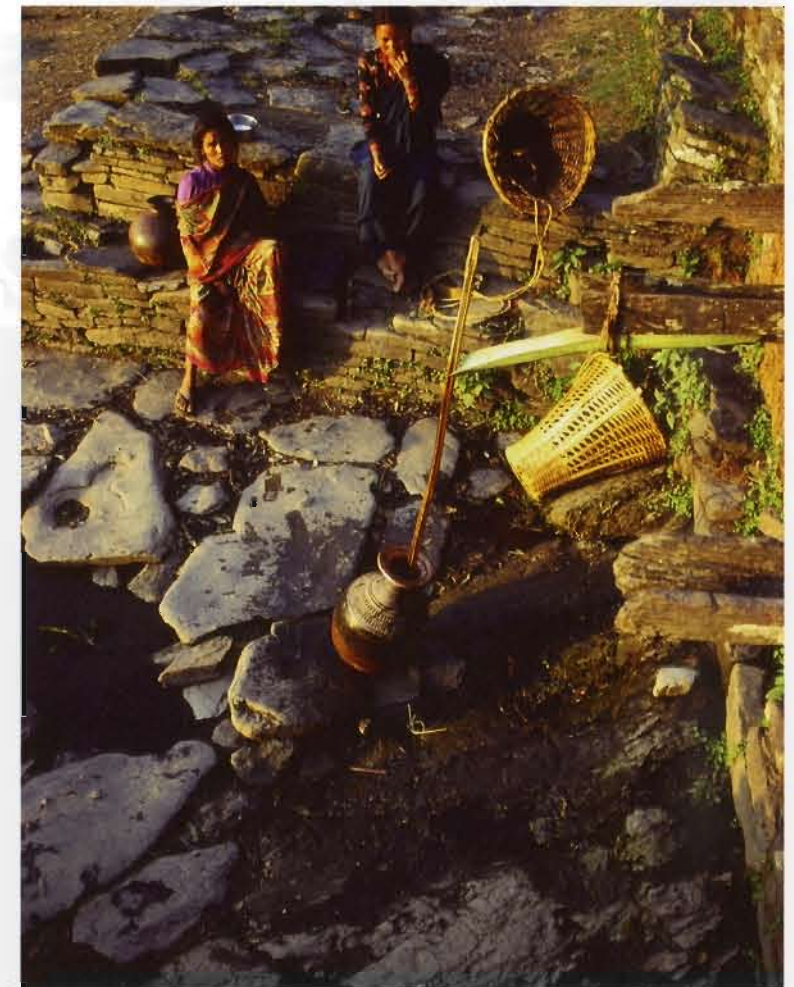
GOVERNANCE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The satisfaction of basic human needs and the preservation of the mountain environment depend upon the participation of Himalayan people in their own governance.

Kathmandu Valley: Water Quality



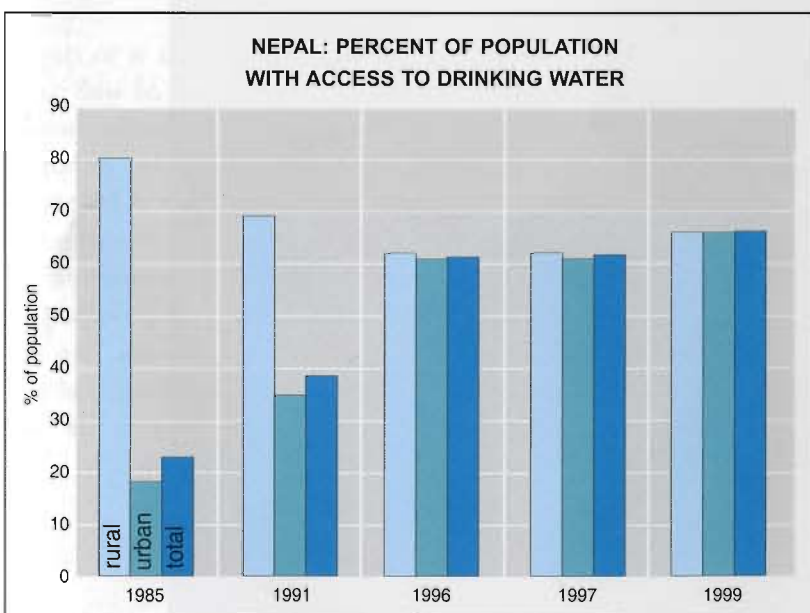
Kathmandu Valley Water Quality: The rivers and streams flowing through the Kathmandu Valley have historically provided valley residents with water. These sources, however, are increasingly polluted, with highest contamination rates occurring closest to the city. Even the outlying valley, though, is experiencing diminished water quality. The water supply for Kathmandu is now augmented by large water diversions from sources outside the valley, among the high mountain streams to the north.



Women spend hours waiting at the village spring to fill the household water vessels.

Source: Adapted from UNEP, 2001. Nepal: State of the Environment 2001. Bangkok: UNEP-RRC.AP

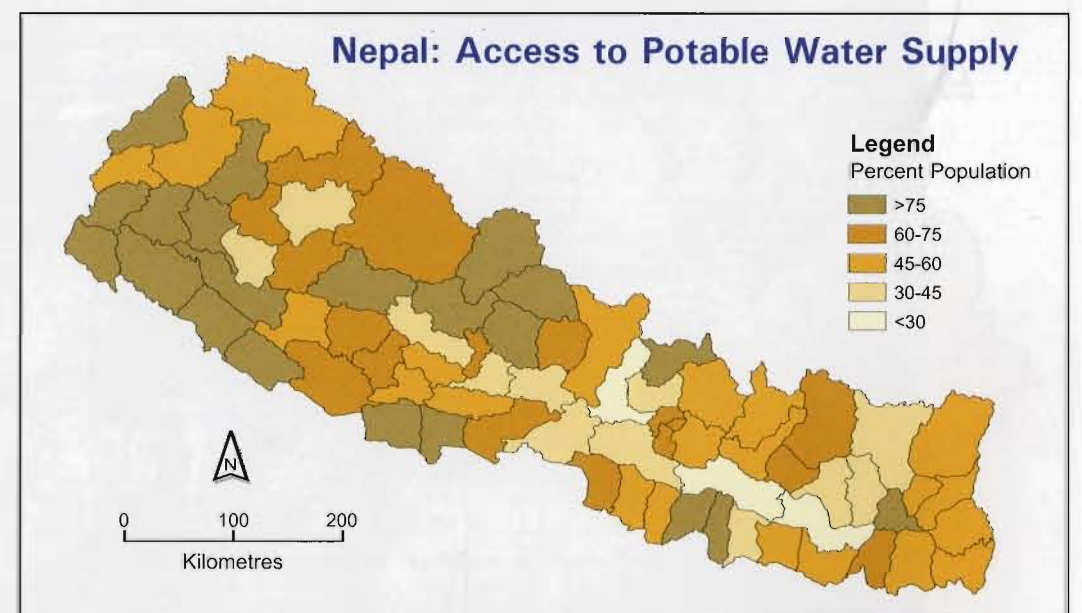
NEPAL: PERCENT OF POPULATION WITH ACCESS TO DRINKING WATER



Source: Adapted from UNEP, 2001. Nepal: State of the Environment 2001. Bangkok: UNEP-RRC.AP

Access to Potable Water in Nepal: Drinking water supply systems in the villages rely upon local springs and streams. The water is diverted to households by plastic pipes, which may carry water above ground for several kilometers from its source. Reliable and safe drinking water is a high priority in many rural areas, where declining water tables or pollution may threaten the potable water supply. This is a particular problem in the most densely settled rural localities.

Nepal: Access to Potable Water Supply



Source: Adapted from UNEP, 2001. Nepal: State of the Environment 2001. Bangkok: UNEP-RRC.AP

and Pakistan. Separatist activity in Darjeeling, directed toward autonomy, created civil unrest throughout much of the 1980s. Bhutan evicted tens of thousands of minority Nepalese (the Lotshampas) who now live in refugee camps in eastern Nepal. Tribal agitations in the eastern Himalaya serve to keep that part of the range mainly off-limits to all but Indian military personnel and government. Most recently, in Nepal, a Maoist insurrection threatens the peace and security of the country. Under such conditions it is difficult to achieve an effective local system of governance.

Amid these large controversies are local questions about public administration, social discrimination, and indigenous and general human rights. The Indian Himalaya operates basically within the country's system of parliamentary democracy. Practically, though, the mountain regions in India have little influence on national political affairs. This under-representation was one of the driving forces that led in 2000 to the establishment of the new Indian state of Uttaranchal, located in the Garhwal-Kumaon region (formerly part of the state of Uttar Pradesh). Good governance is absent in Nepal mainly because of the unstable political climate. Nepal has held three elections since democratic reforms in 1990, which formed a new parliamentary democracy, and no government has run its full term. The Maoist insurrection that began in 1996 and flared into nationwide violence in 1999 continues

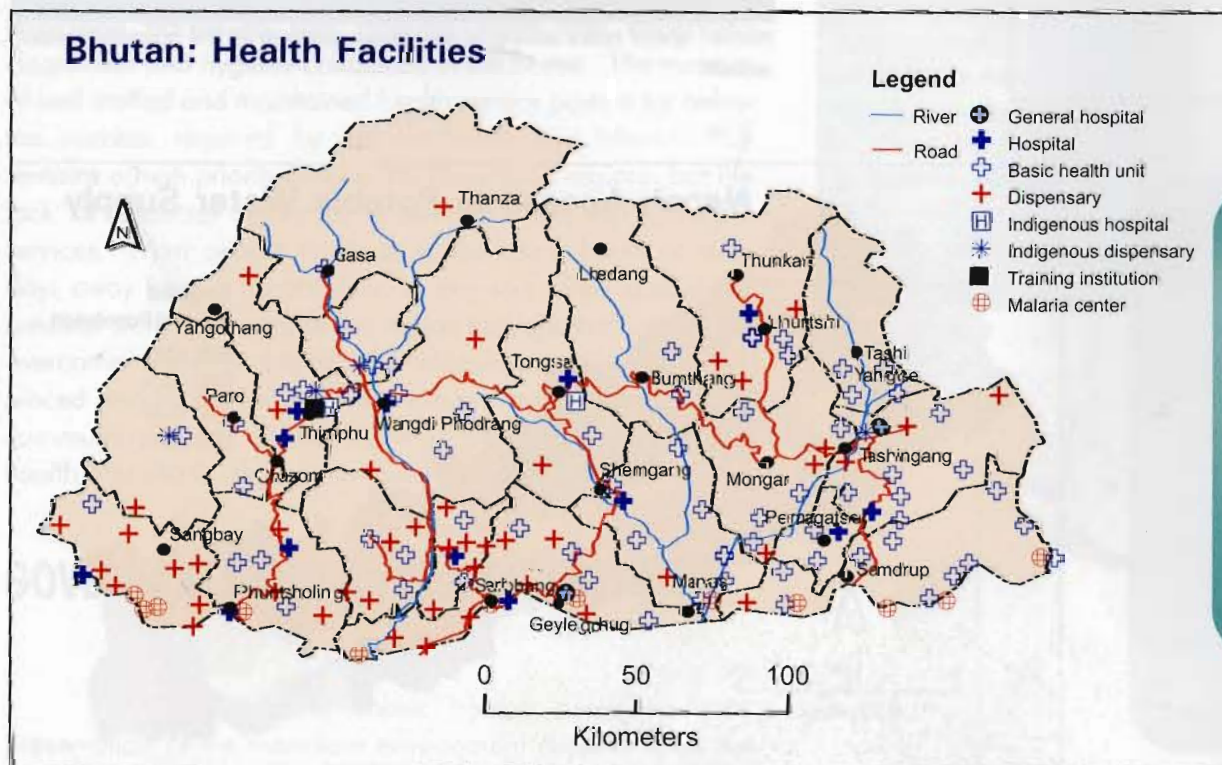
to suppress local governance in much of the country. Bhutan, meanwhile, remains a monarchy where the king retains absolute power. Decentralization of governance in Bhutan, however, was initiated in 1991 with the formation of committees made up of elected village heads (called the Geog Yargye Tshogchung), which are responsible for mobilizing local development, and continued in 1998 with the devolution of executive authority in the elected Council of Ministers.

Himalayan women traditionally hold greater independence and higher status than do women in the South Asian plains. This is most true among the Tibetan-Buddhist cultures and such ethnic groups as the Thakali and Sherpa where women are major decision-makers in the household. Women, of course, also do a great deal of the work in the mountains. The 1992 National Agricultural Survey in Nepal found that women are responsible for up to 71% of farm labor and 57% of all subsistence work. Yet a 1997 study showed that only 23% of women were allowed to dispose of their earning in capital transactions. The work of women goes largely unrecorded in the economic data and does not necessarily lead to their empowerment in the family. A major form of wealth in the mountains is land. However, land inheritance practices among Himalayan cultures often are prejudiced against women, and hence they are the most

vulnerable to landlessness and poverty. The absence of women in the non-farm economy is due in large part to gender inequities in education and training, as well as to the cultural norms that keep women at home. The discrimination against mountain women, who often are unaware of their basic human rights, ranges from domestic inequity to the violent trafficking of girls to supply brothels in India and elsewhere.

The cultural norms of the Himalayan societies are generally conservative, and the attitudes and values held by many mountain leaders make it difficult to implement the principles of human rights upon which the modern Himalayan states are purportedly founded. This applies to women, to low caste groups, to ethnic minorities, and to other marginal members of society. Nonetheless, human rights' laws and legal procedures exist throughout the Himalaya, with varying degrees of implementation and efficacy. The human rights' record in Nepal is currently difficult to assess due to the unstable political climate and civil unrest in the country. The governments in the Indian Himalaya maintain that every citizen has the right to social justice, equality, and a decent standard of living. This is difficult to insure, however, when a large proportion of the mountain population is unaware of its rights or, as in the case of Kashmir, civil unrest and military action overwhelm the human rights' cause. Bhutan cautiously places the national sense of peace, happiness, and security above the needs of the individual. This policy is viewed by some as repressive, but a positive outcome is its ability to minimize the corrupting influences of modernity and globalization.

One of the main tasks in the Himalaya is to devise ways of maintaining traditional life and culture, as well as of preserving the natural environment, while implementing programs needed to reduce poverty and to enhance opportunities for human and social development. A balanced development is needed to achieve this goal, one that expands economic opportunities while safeguarding environmental resources and fostering responsible systems of governance. The mountains, for all their imposing appearances, are not immutable. The Himalayan region, in fact, is a fragile place, where society and nature are deeply challenged by the new demands of a modern, mobile, and global society.



Health Facilities in Bhutan: Government-sponsored health units are found scattered across the countryside of Bhutan, but many of these are poorly-equipped and without adequately trained personnel. As a result, many people go without modern health care and rely on traditional village healers.

Source: Royal Government of Bhutan, 1992. Seventh Five Year Plan (1992-1997), Vol.1. Main Plan Document. Thimphu: RGOB, National Planning Commission