

## Tourism's Socioeconomics

Tourism in Nepal, therefore, was classed under industry in the very early stages of its development. Today it is looked on as Nepal's single most prized "economic commodity" the selling of which earns the country its valuable foreign exchange and generates a good income in the form of revenue. Among the other spin-offs of tourism are its contribution to employment generation. The economic benefits of tourism for Nepal are obvious enough. Its sheer economic logic sets all other doubts about it aside. Today, everyone necessarily talks in the language of economists and development planners (Veit Berger, 1978; Himal, 2(3), 1989). Some like to call tourism a "smokeless industry" (personal communication: Karna Shakya).

All this has naturally led both the government as well as the private sector in Nepal to work over the years, although not necessarily in tandem, for the promotion and expansion of tourism. In the last thirty years or so, Nepal has witnessed a phenomenal expansion and growth in the tourism sector, reflected not only in the increased number of tourists visiting it (see Summary Table 1), but also in the number of hotels and lodges; the expansion of domestic and foreign air links; and the number of tour, travel, and trekking agencies for servicing tourists. The increase in the number of tourists between 1962 and 1992 has been more than 5,400 per cent. Much of the growth in tourism in Nepal is attributed to the enterprise of the private sector, but this would not

**Summary Table 1: Tourist Numbers and Foreign Exchange Earnings**

| Year | Tourist Numbers | Gross Foreign Total Earnings US\$ (000) | Exchange Earnings Rs (000) |
|------|-----------------|---|----------------------------|
| 1962 | 6,179           | N.A.                                    | N.A.                       |
| 1988 | 265,943         | 63,502                                  | 1,486,837                  |
| 1992 | 334,353         | 61,090                                  | 2,838,100                  |
| 1993 | 293,567         | 72,104                                  | 3,508,041                  |

Source: Nepal Tourism Statistics, 1992/1993

have come off without the government lending support to the idea of tourism growth through a total commitment to it and through providing it with legislative and organisational support.