

## Relating to Khumbu

### *Negative Impacts*

1. Degradation of National Parks. Direct impact - a recent newspaper report (Kathmandu Post: June 14, 1994) said that four hotels built in the vicinity of the Chitwan National Park are responsible for cutting firewood from the protected park area and for causing its degradation. Hotels are also said to have been a threat to the security of the rhino population in the park. Similarly, the Langtang National Park is also said to be facing degradation of the environment from the 800-man contingent of national park guards stationed in the area, because the guards themselves are said to eat up the scarce natural resources of the high alpine valleys. The implications of this for the Mt. Sagarmatha National Park area is but obvious. Felling trees in the Khumbu region is one of the main problems contributing to its environmental degradation.
2. Agricultural decline. Direct impact - Sherpas were good agriculturists until some decades ago. They produced surplus potatoes and buckwheat. Their increasing preoccupation with tourism has meant that agriculture is left to their women, or to the Sherpas from Solu, on

mutually agreeable terms. Haimendorf says that the real basis of Sherpa traditional culture rested on agriculture, which no longer seems to be true in the changed context.

3. Decline in the number of lamas in the monasteries. Direct impact - Buddhist monasteries have been the focus of Sherpa cultural and religious life for centuries. Today, however, the lure of the tourist dollar is so powerful that it is attracting all young Sherpas away from their monasteries. It has been a hallowed Tibetan Buddhist society practice to send the second son in the family as a young monk-novice to the *gomba* where he learns Tibetan and is trained in the ways of the monkhood. This has become a thing of the past. In the early seventies, Haimendorf found just four lamas serving in the Tengboche monastery. Similarly, there has been a decline in the number of lamas serving as village priests (Haimendorf 1975: 102). There is also a general decline in the Buddhist faith, according to him. In the past, Sherpas used to spend liberally in the maintenance of *chortens*, *mani* walls, and on having stones carved with the sacred Buddhist *mantra*, *om mani padme hum*, on boulders. These days, this is heard of less and less.
4. Decline of traditional crafts. Direct impact - Fisher has observed that Sherpa crafts, consisting of wood bowls, low Tibetan tables, and woollen products, such as rugs, are fast beginning to disappear. Their place is being taken by manufactured goods from Kathmandu because of the greater cash flow and the lack of patronage for traditional crafts. Many of the curio pieces sold in Khumbu to the tourists as Tibetan are either made in Kathmandu or in India.
5. Commercialisation of art: Direct impact - Haimendorf explains this commercialisation from the instance of the art of Khumbu's well-known and noted mural-turned-*thanka* painter, Kapa Kalden (now deceased). There was suddenly such a demand from tourists for Kapa Kalden's *thanka* paintings that he had a hard time to cope with the supply. As a result, commercialisation set in and his art and his paintings deteriorated in quality (Haimendorf 1975).
6. Sherpa demography. Direct impact - The demographic pattern of Khumbu has greatly changed since tourists started descending upon the area in the 60s. All young and able-bodied Sherpas of working age group have to live away from Khumbu for most of the year. This has affected the quality of Sherpa village life, says Haimendorf. With increased personal affluence, Sherpas have been abandoning the practice of fraternal polyandry and taking to monogamy. Polyandry was a traditional method of keeping the population in check and preventing the partition of family property. This had helped to maintain an

ecological balance and to prevent overexploitation of natural resources. Because of the absence of Sherpa youth, Sherpa village life is not as vibrant culturally as it used to be in the past according to Haimendorf.

7. Family break-up. Direct impact - Sherpa men live away from their families for prolonged periods, which forces their wives to live a lonely life. It has even resulted in family breakdown.
8. Gender Problem. Direct impact - Sherpa women are faced with the prospects of carrying out all of the household work themselves. Many Sherpa women are left unmarried, since their men are being wooed away by American and European women as husbands, or are rendered widows because of climbing accidents involving their men.

### *Positive Impacts*

1. National Park promotion idea. Direct impact - tourism activity in Népal has been responsible for the birth of the idea (1973) and establishment of national parks in different parts of Nepal, with a view to protecting its unique natural heritage in plant and animal life and the environment. The Sagarmatha National Park was first notified in 1976, and an act was passed in 1979 which gave it a legal basis.
2. Continued traditional habitat occupation. Direct impact - despite the Sherpas' much wider dispersal, and many of them building up their businesses as well as houses in Kathmandu, they have not abandoned their homes, lands, and property in Khumbu. Khumbu has provided them with a remarkable sense of belongingness and cultural focus. The tourist attraction to Khumbu has helped them to build a cultural identity around Khumbu. Sherpas may not care to cultivate their land themselves, but they are conscious enough not to let their lands slip into the hands of outsiders permanently.
3. Increased popularity of the Mani-Rimdu festival. Direct impact - the popularity of the festival has increased with the coming of the tourist and has received international publicity. It has brought largesse and tourist munificence for restoring, rebuilding, and extending the *gomba*, and also for paying the cost of some rituals performed in it.
4. Increased living standards of the Sherpas. Direct impact - owing to the new prosperity from the tourism trade, Sherpas eat better, dress better, and have better houses to live in. They are better educated and better travelled, both at home and abroad. Their nutritional status has much improved over the past.