

# HIMALAYAN

ENVIRONMENT AND CULTURE



Edited by  
N K RUSTOMJI  
CHARLES RAMBLE

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## Foreword

The Himalayas exemplify an integrated ecosystem which provides a habitat for people of various ethnic origins, languages and faiths. The collection of papers in this volume provides a focus for many matters which concern us as an Institute of Advanced Study. I refer to the interrelation between idea and event, physical environment and human settlement, patterns of social change and directions of policy, historical processes and contemporary situations. The Himalayas through the centuries provided a symbol of the goal and aspirations of the people of this subcontinent. The abode of the snows was envisaged as the dwelling place of the gods, a place of pilgrimage and a place for retreat from the mundane duty of the householder. Myths and legends added dimensions of meaning to the facts of geography. The Himalayas remain for all generations to come the birthplace of great rivers, the place which links us to the infinity of clouds and oceans. These mountains are the key to the self-generating water systems without which the land would be a desert. The very stratification of their rocks is, to my mind, a metaphor, for so much is stratified in our culture. The variety of human settlements, the rich diversity of flora and fauna, the wealth of forests, make this one of the most unique ecosystems in the world.

For centuries the people of the mountain regions have wrested a living from a very difficult terrain. Even so their innate artistry shows itself in dress and ornaments, and in monasteries and shrines, and in a colourful calendar of festivals throughout the year. Hindu, Buddhist, and tribal ways of life have been woven into a fabric as variegated as the border of a Kulu shawl. The patterns of life which survived for centuries have now been transformed by the inroads of contractors. Forests have been denuded. We are not sure what effects dams will have on the secret processes going on in the centre of the earth. The skyline has been broken by crude pillbox structures which offend the eye as soon as the *Himalayan Queen* leaves Kalka station on its way north. A new generation seeks the cities and associates old ways with backwardness, while the search for priceless treasures in the monasteries is often left to overseas scholars. The processes which are transforming the landscape and altering ways of life are indeed various. But only too often does the momentum of change take its own course and we discover the links between the phenomena too late. It is good that experts in anthropology, forestry, geography, geology, architecture, Buddhist studies, wildlife, and economics should pool their insights in an attempt to produce a rounded picture of what is happening in high-altitude regions in India today.



To my mind the themes treated in this volume provide data on the important subject of national integration. Ecological systems seem to present an integrated whole, which social systems often lack. The mountains bear the scars inflicted on them in silence. But the scars inflicted on sections of humanity are different in kind. The legacy we have is not only of beautiful things, landscape, bronzes, and paintings, but of wrong turnings taken and sometimes a sense of grievance that, whether justified or not, calls out for healing. The great message of Mahayana Buddhism remains for all time the all-or-none principle. There can be no liberation unless it is for all. Wounded sensibilities, economic deprivation, the imposition of alien ways or the fear of their intrusion—are matters which cannot be swept under the carpet of good resolutions. They call out for detailed attention, and not only understanding, but appropriate action.

The language of both bridge and barrier has surfaced in some of our discussions. If barriers can be overcome, it is also true that bridges can collapse through lack of care. We have to keep the channels of communication open, whether this is between one community and another, between administrators and private individuals, or between the hills and the plains. If this is neglected, winter sets in—an icy terrain of mistrust which is hard indeed to melt. Resources at the village level must be maximized. For centuries the people of the hills have tried to do just that. The technical expert who thinks he knows better will need to learn from those he seeks to help. We need more field workers, more people willing to go on foot rather than take an aerial view from the helicopter of theorizing. As far as conservation is concerned we need to remember that to conserve is not to fossilize. Planning for development requires both assessment of need and anticipation of consequences. A degraded ecosystem speaks as loudly as the shard does to the archaeologist. We must avoid Himalayan blunders. But how is change to be managed? The variables involved in development processes are daunting, for there are political and economic factors in the picture no less than technological ones.

Some teasing ethical problems are raised in this connection. Is it justified to cause distress to the present generation in order to safeguard the future of those who will come after? Or take this one. Is it right, say, to displace ten families from their homes in order to provide a livelihood for a hundred other families? How is one to resolve these problems of scale which involve human beings? Small projects at least enable us to learn from our mistakes. These are some of the issues involved in matters like the controversial Tehri dam. It is possible to do irreversible things in restructuring the environment. We must be sure we don't make the situation worse than it was before.

Our Ladakhi contributors have brought not only their characteristic wisdom and dignity but a wealth of information about a long literary tradition including the interesting point that high culture and popular



culture can overlap in many ways. The question that lingers is whether traditional institutions can transform themselves today and if so in which directions. If a child has the chance to go either to a modern school or to an institution imparting traditional learning are his parents not likely to opt for the former? This is of course not only a problem which faces Ladakh. Do we need both new wine and new bottles? We have somehow to acquire a scientific outlook without losing the mythopoeic imagination. The greatest scientists were able to do this, and so, oddly enough, is the villager who knows so well how to labour and how to celebrate.

As far as the 'paraphernalia of administration' is concerned we have to see how it can be made responsive to the local needs and the extent to which it can succeed in giving those concerned a genuine sense of participation. The centre-periphery dichotomy was somehow tied up with this dimension of our discussion. The centre-periphery language sounds less invidious than the pyramid model but is still very far from Gandhiji's oceanic circle idea. How strange that two images based on the concept of the circle can be so 'utterly disparate. At the centre of Gandhi's oceanic circle was the individual, whereas the centre in the other model is the locus of political and economic power, that is, of *danda*.

According to some scholars and administrators the option to jump off the wagon of modernization is perhaps no longer a live one. A difficult question thereupon raises its head. What kind of battery of ideas, what kind of ethos is compatible with moving towards a newer and more just equilibrium. And even if we decide on a set of concepts which would be conducive to such an end they would have about as much effectiveness as Esperanto. We need to feel our way, and test our ideas in practice. Going on from this clue I myself think it is all to the good that most individuals, most communities, have a strong sense of identity. What is important is that we should allow others to have theirs as well, and not try to put them down whether through jealousy or fear.

We want democratic processes and modern technology and a due sense of heritage for our citizens in the Himalayan regions and indeed for us all. We seek a style of life which is able to steer a clear course between living in an environment whose harshness is unmitigated, and living in one which is comfortable, but deadly uniform and uninspired. A lot more thinking needs to go into what a meaningful environment involves, for I suspect it goes beyond factors to do with circulation, social space, individual space, and all the rest, and embraces dimensions of living which include all possible human activities. If the contributions in this volume enable us, in however small a way, to have faith in the possibility of navigation between the shoals and shallows that surround us, and give us a fair sense of horizon, it will have served its purpose.



# Introduction

It seems sad, that on the one hand such exquisite creatures should live out their lives and exhibit their charms only in these wild inhospitable regions, doomed for ages yet to come to hopeless barbarism; while on the other hand, should civilized man ever reach these distant lands, and bring moral, intellectual, and physical light into the recesses of these virgin forests, we may be sure that he will so disturb the nicely-balanced relations of organic and inorganic nature, as to cause the disappearance, and finally the extinction, of these very beings whose wonderful structure and beauty he alone is fitted to appreciate and enjoy. This consideration must surely tell us that all living things were *not* made for man.

Alfred Russel Wallace, *The Malay Archipelago*, 1896.

It is understandable that a volume which proposes to cover the domains of culture and environment should produce a wide range of contributions. While such a richness in subject matter is to be welcomed, the outcome may equally be criticized for being too diverse to be of any real benefit. The parable of the blind men feeling the elephant to describe it may well point to one of the major problems of Himalayan studies: a degree of specialization among researchers which hampers interdisciplinary dialogue and prevents a holistic understanding of the situation. Attempts at the latter may all too often founder through lack of a common language and degenerate into a dilute eclecticism.

Yet in this volume we have attempted to embrace a multiplicity of perspectives. Linguists are represented side by side with architects, philosophers with historians, and anthropologists with monks. We have tried to view the Himalayan reality in as many different perspectives as possible, and in the process we may have created our own elephant. It nevertheless remains to be seen what, if any, common ground there is between the contributions, or rather the disparate perspectives which they represent. At first glance this may seem to be a hopeless exercise. It is clear that while some of them are concerned with both culture and environment, most have a narrower focus on either one or the other. In order to determine what it is that they have in common we must include a third factor.

In the Himalayas themselves, as in the present volume, the principal issue is not the simple dyadic relationship between natural environment and human society. It is the more complex interaction of traditional society, the environment, and modern society. Sudhirendar Sharma stresses this point in his definition of the 'total environment' as a composite of three domains: the bio-physical, the micro-social and the macro-social. The relationship between them may be represented by the following paradigm: traditional, especially tribal, societies, present no serious threat to



the environment; their numbers are usually small and their exploitation of natural resources is curtailed by some native code, such as a proscriptive myth or a general religious belief—or, less exotically, by their limited means of exploitation and the fact that they have little scope for large-scale use of the resources. Sooner or later, however, modernization takes place. Modern society and the natural environment are not particularly compatible. The former may manifest itself in the shape of direct consumption of resources (commercial felling, for example, or quarrying) or it may adopt a more insidious form by permeating and dissolving the culture of the indigenous people and, with it, the conventions which made them stewards of the land. This is not to say that modern man has no aesthetic appreciation of the environment; T. V. Singh's paper, for example, tells us of the burgeoning numbers of pilgrims and tourists to Garhwal. But often the aesthetes are casually destructive or the precursors of more aggressive visitors.

This is the ironic conclusion of Alfred Russel Wallace in the passage quoted above (and here we must make certain allowances for his nineteenth-century assumptions and terminology): modern society (civilized man) is better equipped than traditional society (barbarism) to appreciate, whether aesthetically or economically, the natural environment. But the environment must inevitably be destroyed by modern man, and if nature is to survive, civilization must be kept out.

One more or less tacit consensus among the contributors to this volume is that—in contrast to Wallace's conclusion—nature *was* 'made for man', or, at the very least, that man and nature exist in a conceptual relationship from which (as Michael Aris remarks, invoking both the Buddhist scheme and the Nepal polymath Brian Hodgson) neither should be detached. While this volume does not lack contributions on the rich intricacies of the Himalayan artistic and cultural heritage—D. Chakravarty, N. T. Shakspe, Mulk Raj Anand and Thupstan Paldan are just four examples—there are no representatives of the more radical environmental schools, or these assumptions would certainly have been challenged.

Wallace was writing in the nineteenth century, at a time when, although a great deal more of the world's wilderness was intact than it is now, there was scant evidence that civilized man (as he understood the term) could generate any degree of environmental responsibility. Whether out of the gradual maturation of our consciousness or, which is more likely as a matter of sheer desperate necessity, things have changed since his time. The spread of civilization is hardly likely to be checked, but the maturing attitudes of this civilization give cause for hope. 'Resource', for example, is no longer a euphemism for something that can be exploited without let, a vein which can be mined until exhaustion, but rather suggests an



organic matrix that, given due respect and skilful management, will continue to yield its harvests.

While there is a strong case for the preservation of the wilderness for its own sake, without consideration of any possible advantages for people, there is also a body of opinion that such unmanaged wilderness is itself a resource. Dr. Gill has shown us that the urbanization of groups in Himachal Pradesh is commensurate with (among other things) their degree of socio-economic development. The obverse of this picture is that—as philosophers as diverse as Ib'n Khaldun and Bertrand Russell, as well as a generation of sociologists and experimental psychologists have pointed out—social sickness is greatest in areas of highest urbanization. As Tej Vir Singh points out, man needs not just well-ordered parks but the rigour of real wilderness in which he can, at least occasionally, restore his balance and perspective.

Like the wilderness, micro-societies too can be thought of as complete self-contained systems, without reference to 'civilization' and 'civilized man'—although some may quite rightly point out that the notion of groups living in *complete* isolation is largely a romantic myth. There is a number of papers which contain examples of such more or less discrete groups: Sonam Wangmo gives an ethnography of hitherto unstudied Bhutanese community, and my own paper provides one extreme example of social self-containment from Nepal. As long as such societies remain in their traditional form we cannot speak meaningfully of 'good' and 'bad' aspects of their culture except from an ethnocentric or affective point of view. They may seem elaborate and exotic, but they are rarely, if ever, wanton. Infanticide is hardly likely to be practised without the justification of some internal logic, and Professor Fürer-Haimendorf has elsewhere argued convincingly that even head-hunting among the Konyak Nagas had the incidental effect of containing the movements of communities and, among other things, inhibiting the spread of communicable diseases.

However, as soon as a traditional culture comes into contact with civilization the picture changes. The degree to which they are influenced depends to a great extent on their own circumstances and resilience as well as the form in which civilization confronts them. (It may even be argued that as soon as they are in a position to decide—if indeed the choice is there—whether or how much to adapt themselves to the new trends they cease to be truly traditional; traditional forms are not the outcome of conscious selection, and consequently the *decision* to adhere to a particular tradition amounts to cultural make-believe.) For the little community, its cultural forms are precisely what constitute and define it; as soon as its interests begin to be overseen by the modern dominant society, all these cultural components can no longer be accorded an equal, neutral status on the grounds that they are the intrinsic elements of the group. Once integration (or, as some might see it, interference) has begun, it is possible



to make value judgements: culture becomes a resource. To this extent it is the responsibility of the dominant society to cherish those traditions of their wards which are beneficial within the broader parameters of the new social order, while using the same criteria designate and discourage what must be changed.

To state the issue in this way is, of course, to simplify it to an almost absurd level. Some of the problems involved in such a process are suggested by N. K. Rustomji's discussion of the NEFA tribes: on the one hand he presents Varrier Elwin's 'softly-softly' approach to the gradual economic development of the tribes and, on the other, Margaret Mead's bold and perhaps overoptimistic advocacy of sudden change on the grounds that the best things in the society would resurface in time of their own accord. Whatever its difficulties and demerits, the prospect of judicious integration is surely preferable to the remaining options: brutal modernization, on the one hand, with alienation from everything that social cohesion meant, and, on the other, the preservation of small cultures 'for their own good' like (as Michael Aris put it) so many museum pieces, without access to hospitals and schools.

The character of the diversity in unity is not the same as before the imposition of the unity. Traditional societies, like the natural environment, are finely balanced organisms, and any amendment to their interrelated constituents initiates a chain of events leading to their disintegration. S. K. Gupta's and Neeru Nanda's are just two such papers which illustrate the adverse results of unconsidered meddling with the environment, while Tashi Rabgias, P. C. Joshi and Claus Peter Zoller describe the intricacy of three quite different Himalayan societies and warn us of the social fragmentation and alienation contingent upon their dissolution.

The important point here is that the architects of social or environmental change incur a monstrous responsibility for the continued integrity of the domains which they modify. Prodipto Roy and Ranju Dhamala remind us of these responsibilities and imply that the administrators must be endowed with consummate sensitivity and skill. Even those aspects which are intolerable to the macro-society, have a place either in the biosphere or the micro-society. Some of these must certainly go; no responsible society will tolerate infanticide or religious exploitation among its dependent groups any more than it will permit the proliferation of the anopheles mosquito in its forests. But the excision of these features must be compensated by the skilful management of the surviving components—the resources—if the usual downward spiral is to be avoided. Paradoxically, the wilderness must be managed.

The contributions of Professor von Fürer-Haimendorf and Professor Roy Burman to the seminar include the most optimistic perspectives on the past and the future of the Himalayas. Professor Roy Burman's paper is a reminder that the history of the region carries a long precedent for



communication among its diverse populations, as well as between them and the adjoining plains. Such a global view does not of course invalidate the worth of localized studies; rather it supplements them, since the validity of a pan-Himalayan perspective must rest on a sound basis of accumulated local knowledge. A similar synthetic approach to Himalayan studies is advocated by Professor von Furer-Haimendorf, who champions the cause of interdisciplinary research; the collaboration of a wide spectrum of specialists at the outset of investigation is quite another matter than the pooling of conclusion formulated in disciplinary isolation.

It is too much to hope, perhaps, that such an exercise will give the individual a clear view of everything that are the Himalayas; but this way, at least, the blind men will be able to feel their way around together.

For the sake of consistency and the convenience of the reader, sources cited in the papers have in each case been assembled in bibliographies (more or less complete according to the details furnished by the authors), and brief references incorporated within the text. Only the most cumbersome references have been retained as footnotes.

The orthographic spelling of Tibetan words is a perennial source of irritation to non-specialists. All Tibetan proper names have consequently been anglicized, and where the proper orthography is retained it has been standardized according to the Wylie system.

Charles Ramble

# Himalayan Studies

C. VON FÜRER-HAIMENDORF

The Himalayas embrace such a large number of different populations and, of course, different races and types of environment, that it is extremely difficult to comprehend the interaction of the many distinct aspects of this area. But the Himalayas also stand out in the sense that along their range runs one of the dividing lines between different cultures. We all know that in the Himalayas, the linguistic areas dovetail and overlap. There are people speaking Indo-Aryan languages, as well as those who speak Tibeto-Burman tongues, and in quite a small area you very often find the inhabitants of one valley speaking two different languages but on the whole living harmoniously side by side. I think that these could be an example to areas with much larger populations.

But there is also another aspect of this watershed between different Asian populations, namely, that this is the line where two totally different races also meet and dovetail. There are people of the Caucasian race from north India and then there are people of the Mongoloid race, those who came from Tibet and from areas east and north of the Himalayas. Very often we find in small, compact areas people who are racially quite different and yet have developed a kind of *modus vivendi* for living together and interacting peacefully. At a time when politicians talk about racial problems, and we only have to open any newspaper to find references to racial conflicts, it must make us think that it has been possible for populations so different as, for instance, the Mongoloid Tibetans and people who resemble the north Indian population and are descendants of north Indian emigrants, to have lived side by side in peace for many years. Then of course there is also a dividing line between Tibetan Buddhism and the Hinduism which came into the Himalayas largely from the south, quite apart from the distinction between a number of tribal populations and corresponding tribal religions.

The Himalayan region is, on the whole, not yet very well known. One of the reasons for this is that it is really only in the last forty or fifty years that detailed research, expressed in fieldwork, could be done in these areas. Let us look first at the eastern end of the Himalayan region, the area which is now known as Arunachal Pradesh, and which used to be known also as the North-East Frontier Agency. This is a part of India which until only a few years ago was relatively unknown. Very little research has been done in these areas, and indeed today there are large stretches of country which have not attracted the attention of social scientists and anthropolo-



gists. I consider myself privileged that I had the chance to enter areas such as Arunachal Pradesh some twenty-four to thirty years ago and to find people who had not been in contact with the outside world before. We were able then and are still able to study tribal populations who have not been in contact with outsiders, and who have not been living under an administration imposed on them by people with a different cultural tradition but who maintain their way of life, their religious beliefs, and their language undisturbed by anybody else. So it is here that it was really possible and is still possible to undertake studies where we find small, undisturbed societies which had lived entirely on their own, a situation which in a way perhaps resembles the days of exploration when, for the first time, the Pacific islands were entered by outsiders, or when Europeans for the first time entered Mexico or South America and later North America. This is of course a phase which has already partly passed, but if we look at the map of Arunachal Pradesh and think how many of the valleys in these areas are really well known, how many have been studied by anthropologists, how many have been fully surveyed, we have to conclude that there are still large gaps in our knowledge. Consequently I must say that I envy Indian anthropologists who are able to fill all these gaps and to start from scratch to study people who have not been studied before.

Now this is one of the reasons why I think any kind of scientific investigation into the Himalayan areas is important and urgent. The first task is the investigation of populations which are not yet well known and which have not had extensive contact with the outside world. But there are other problems, and in the course of this seminar I am quite sure that they will be discussed in some detail.

Then there is the question concerning the effect of sudden exposure to the outside world on relatively isolated areas. Let me take two examples. One is that of the mountains of Nepal, particularly of eastern Nepal, where people lived until thirty years ago with very little contact with outsiders. They were suddenly exposed to the flood of tourists that began with mountaineering. The beautiful mountains of Nepal have attracted numerous visitors, and with these came also different cultural attitudes and different social conditions. In villages which had been self-contained, there were suddenly more tourists and more mountaineers with their porters than there were members of the local population. This meant that there was a total change in attitudes, a complete transformation even of the economy, because all the money which was poured in by tourism enveloped the primitive local economy.

This is only one example. The other situation which illustrates how outside influences can bring about a total revolution in an economy is that of western Nepal, where the local populations in the high altitudes



were almost entirely dependent on trade with Tibet, based on the exchange of their own agricultural produce for Tibetan salt. An event which had really nothing to do with the situation in Nepal, the occupation of Tibet by China, suddenly cut off their trade; the people in the high altitude regions of Nepal found that their traditional way of making ends meet—important Tibetan salt and bartering it on the southern Nepalese border against Indian produce—was no longer viable. There are innumerable difficulties which have yet to be solved by the economists who determine government policy. So here again we find that, owing to their long isolation, the Himalayas are providing scientists and economists with numerous problems which are of considerable interest, because they are not isolated problems but problems which occur also in other parts of the world.

The question is if it is possible to rely simply on individual researchers, be they anthropologists or economists or students of religion, to follow up these various problems or would it be necessary to organize projects which bring into a single area a number of scholars representing different disciplines and then, by combined work, address the issues which individuals could not themselves deal with. Such projects might give some guidance towards the solution of the problems which have to be dealt with. How should it be done? Which areas should first be studied and investigated? What kind of experts should be brought together and under what sort of guidance and control should they work?

It may be a wild idea though, that such projects are possible at all. On the other hand there is now a feeling that not only the Himalayas but also mountain areas in general present problems which need international action. There is a new Institute, known as ICIMOD (International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development), of which the first centre has recently been established in Kathmandu, not as a Nepalese institution but supported by a number of countries including India, China, the United States, and Germany. The idea is to bring together experts from different backgrounds and to deal with the problem of mountain development. Let us wait and see how the ICIMOD succeeds in fulfilling its objective of giving Himalayan Studies a proper direction.



# India's North-East

N. K. RUSTOMJI

The emphasis in this volume is, quite rightly, on ecology, and when we speak of ecology, we think mainly of conservation of forests. As I see it, I don't think there is much dearth of knowledge on these Himalayan areas. Much research is yet to be carried out, as Professor Haimendorf points out, on areas which are still unsurveyed and have not yet been fully investigated, but the main problem of the devastation caused by the reckless cutting down of trees has long been known to us. All of us know the consequences of such devastation: floods will follow in the foothills and plains lower down; the catchment areas will dry up; there will be subsequent shortage of water; and the wildlife, flora, and fauna of the entire region will be adversely affected. We have all this knowledge and have had it for many years. Very little seems to have been done, however, to stop the process of deterioration. I suppose it might be said that we in India are a philosophical people; we think a lot, we talk a lot, but we do not do a lot. But I don't think that is the only or the complete answer.

I should like to dwell a little longer on this—because to my mind, this is such an important matter—on our experience regarding the wanton destruction of trees in what might be called the lower Himalayas, in the surroundings of Shillong in Meghalaya. When I first went to Shillong over forty years ago, visitors were invariably taken to see what was known as the Enchanted Forest. This consisted of a thick and extensive cluster of trees, regarded by the tribals as sacred groves. They were supposed to be the habitat of spirits for good, as well as spirits for evil, and it was strictly forbidden to cut trees in any of these sacred forests. The Enchanted Forest which visitors used to frequent was a beautiful picnic resort, teeming with orchids and rhododendrons, and quite the loveliest way of spending a day was to wander in the hills among the trees. All that is gone. How is it that, for all these centuries, until forty years ago, these forests still flourished? It was, of course, because of the very strict tribal taboo. If anybody cut a tree in these forests, he would be subject to severe penalties.

The visitors who frequented these forests thought all this was very nice and quaint, that the tribal people had their funny ideas about spirits abiding in forests, but very few realized that the tribal people in all their innocence and simplicity had succeeded in accomplishing what we with all our expertise and all our sophistication had been unable to do. We have seminars and all sorts of organizations to make the public aware of the importance of the forests, but very little is actually done to stop the dete-



rioration of environment. In fact during my last visit to Shillong, the government was actually making a documentary film to focus attention on the terrible effects of the ravaging of the forests, and, at the same time as this film was being made, literally hundreds of overloaded lorries were leaving Shillong—with timber for remote places like Bihar to feed their paper mills. Most of these lorries had defective exhausts and belched poisonous fumes. They could have been easily banned from operation until the defects had been put right and pollution curbed, but nothing was done. We, who suppose that we are so clever and know so much, could not succeed in doing what the tribals, in what we call their ignorance, had done so naturally and so spontaneously. They were able, without any technical know-how, to preserve their forests all these years. Now this is just one small instance of what people whom we call backward and primitive are able to achieve, without many of us realizing their achievement.

I know that, when I first started my work in the tribal areas, many of us seemed very surprised when our officers, with the best of intentions, went into tribal villages and were not welcomed with open arms. Here we were giving them the benefits of what we call modern civilization, giving them schools and hospitals, and they seemed to be suspicious of us. Now it is strange that we should have had this sort of attitude. I wonder how we would feel if a strange people, speaking a completely unfamiliar language, suddenly landed up in Madras, Bombay, or Calcutta, with no notice of what their intentions were, and began to implement changes?

When we go to another country, we have to carry passports and visas. We are subject to inoculation and vaccination against yellow fever and suchlike. Now the tribal people may not have a passport system, or a visa system, and they don't insist that strangers are inoculated or vaccinated, but it has been their experience that when strangers come into their villages they carry infection with them, and if they do not themselves have immunity against such infections, they are endangered. It is not that they are hostile to strangers, it is not that they didn't like us, but their hesitation in receiving us was a perfectly logical way of protecting themselves and their families against infection from strangers. And yet we think of them as children, as ignorant primitives whom we must educate. We have not really been able to educate ourselves to protect our forests, and yet we presume to educate people in these remote areas in various fields, including the preservation of their forests. Is it surprising that they should feel resentful that, when we ourselves are so incompetent in managing our own affairs, we should presume to manage theirs?

As I was going up by train to Shimla once, there was an unscheduled stop for about ten minutes, and we were all wondering what had happened. We got out and found that a cow which had strayed on to the rails had



been killed by our train. Looking at the expression of the people around me, I did not notice the slightest feeling of distress at what had happened. The passengers were curious about the extrication of the animal from under the train, but there was no emotional concern whatsoever. I was travelling with two young men who were coming up for a holiday with their families to Shimla. They were to stay at the Oberoi Hotel. They seemed rich and well-educated, and so I told one of them that I was somewhat surprised that, in a country where the cow was regarded with some degree of sanctity, he should be so little concerned. He was equally surprised at my reaction. For him, there was no difference if a cow, a horse, or a goat had been killed, and he went on to say that this was the trouble with our country: all these old superstitions were holding us back. We should be done with them, the sooner the better for the country. And I thought to myself, is this not the story of the Enchanted Forest repeating itself? There was a time when people had respect and regard for their traditional customs, and those traditional customs were also based on a certain need. Then we presumed to educate the tribal people; we taught them to have less respect for their traditional customs and we brought them to a stage where they are doing as much damage to themselves as we have been doing to ourselves.

I would like to summarize the main points that I think are important for any study of the Himalayas. The first point is that I don't think it is so much a lack of knowledge; we know what is wrong. The real difficulty is that we have been unable as yet to apply our knowledge to practical purposes. Whether we are unable or disinclined I don't know, but I don't think there is any ignorance of what the problems are. We have not strenuously applied ourselves to finding the means of meeting the problem. Whether we like it or not—I was a government official for thirty years, and I know how tiresome we government officials can be—the fact is that, in our system, whatever our ideas may be, much depends on involving the government servant at every level and in every department. For all the devolution of power through Parliament, the Assemblies and our ministerial form of government, the government official still has a very powerful hold. I think that while much has been done in enthusing and making people aware of the problems that are before us, just as much has to be done in involving the government official. I know it is not a very pleasant thing to butter the bureaucracy. Nobody likes doing that. But I am afraid a certain amount of cajolery is sometimes necessary if we really want our plans to be implemented. No system should depend on individuals; it is a bad system that is dependent on single individuals. One may have good individuals and bad individuals, but one's system should be such that it will function well even with indifferent individuals. If I have anything useful to say as a former administrator, it is in urging that



we should try to involve the government organizations, try to enthuse them and inspire them, to carry them with us, because they can be obstructive, as I know too well, and if they want to sabotage a good project, they are perfectly capable of doing so

I should like to make another point. We have a tendency not to do things until we are compelled to. It was very sad that in the north-eastern region we had divided Assam into five states; it is not the division itself that was sad but the long drawn-out manner in which it was done. The government did not act until they were more or less compelled to act, after agitations had sprung up and they found that there was no solution but to give in. So there was no grace in the giving. The government got no credit for it and the people themselves felt that they had lost lives in unnecessary pressurizing. Now I think that, if you feel it is necessary, for instance, to carve out a separate state, you can do a lot through seminars towards moulding public opinion and awakening public consciousness to the need, instead of allowing the people themselves to agitate and hold processions. We should be able to profit from our experience of the last forty years since independence. I do not think it is beyond our capacity, and much can be done to make the public aware of what the government should do, and to bring pressure that will avoid the need for the sort of insurgency that has caused so much distress throughout these borders in Nagaland, Mizoram, and other places.