



TRANS-HIMALAYAN TRADERS

Economy, Society, & Culture
in Northwest Nepal

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Note on Orthography

The orthographic complications which normally vex nonlinguistic scholarship involving an exotic language are in this instance compounded by the phenomenon of trilingualism. In the interests of general intelligibility and readability, I have consistently attempted to use English equivalents of local terms wherever possible, sometimes adding the original Nepali, Tibetan, or Kaike in parentheses. Where an indigenous term is used, I have italicized it and added diacritical marks at its first appearance, but place names have not been italicized, and I do not use diacritical marks on familiar place names (e.g., Kathmandu, Jumla).

In the case of Kaike, an unwritten and undescribed Tibeto-Burman dialect, I have transcribed words phonetically (see Fisher 1973), since a phonemic analysis has not yet been done. Because Nepali written in the Devanagiri script is a broad phonetic transcription, I have transliterated most Nepali terms directly into Roman letters, generally following Turner (1931). Tibetan is an altogether different matter, since a direct transliteration from the Tibetan script is incomprehensible to anyone not literate in the language. In Tarangpur only lamas can read Tibetan; few—if any—actually write it (except to copy texts), and what is written is of course classical Tibetan, not the local dialect. In view of these considerations, and because this study is an exercise in social anthropology with little relevance to the constricted concerns of Tibetology, I have transcribed Tibetan terms phonetically also. Although I have generally tried to avoid cluttering the text with distracting diacritical details, where they are used, (˘) denotes long vowels, (ŋ) indicates nasalization, and (.) marks retroflex consonants. To distinguish between categories of social organization and occupations, I capitalize the former but not the latter—for example, Lama lineages and devout lamas; Blacksmith caste and skilled blacksmith.

1

Introduction

It is easy to see that in the long run, not only objects of material culture, but also customs, songs, art motives and general cultural influences travel along the Kula route. It is a vast, inter-tribal net of relationships.

—Bronislaw Malinowski
Argonauts of the Western Pacific

THE RESEARCH PROBLEMS

At its best, anthropology is the studied and stimulating attempt to mine the richness of John Donne's insight that no man is an island—that we are, as Geertz (1973:5) has put it, animals suspended, ineluctably together, in webs of significance that we ourselves have spun. Yet it has taken anthropologists a long time to extend the epigram to the analysis of the societies we live in and observe. Society is not isolable any more than an individual human being is. Webs—cultural or otherwise—are always supported or in some other way connected to the natural world, and cultural webs always merge with other, similar webs at their geographic and conceptual borders. While Radcliffe-Brown (1952) and Marriott (1955) have each raised questions about the definition and analytical viability of traditional anthropological units,¹ it was left for Barth (1969:9) to observe that:

Practically all anthropological reasoning rests on the premise that cultural variation is discontinuous: that there are aggregates of people who essentially share a common culture, and interconnected differences that distinguish each such discrete culture from all others. . . . The differences between cultures, and their historic boundaries and connections, have been given much attention: the constitution of

ethnic groups, and the nature of the boundaries between them, have not been correspondingly investigated. Social anthropologists have largely avoided these problems by using a highly abstracted concept of "society" to represent the encompassing social system within which smaller, concrete groups and units may be analyzed. But this leaves untouched the empirical characteristics and boundaries of ethnic groups, and the important theoretical issues which an investigation of them raises.

The village in the mountains of northwest Nepal which I call by the pseudonym Tarangpur is probably as geographically isolated a community as an anthropologist is likely to encounter today. Yet the ways in which Tarangpur is not economically and culturally self-sufficient are far more interesting than the ways in which it is. This fact led me away from a finely drawn description and definition of Tarangpur society, the delineation of its internal structure, and detailed analysis of its symbolic order, although these are all of course interesting and legitimate topics. My concerns are of larger scale and wider scope. Straddling the larger South and Central Asian Worlds, Tarangpur exemplifies the interstices of the multiethnic society of Nepal, and I therefore attempt to describe and explain Tarangpur's convoluted and changing integration within those worlds.

Tarangpur is a cultural, linguistic, and economic hinge between the Buddhist, Tibetan cultural area to the north, and the Hindu, Nepali regions to the south and west. As such, its people are marginal to both these traditions, and they do not bear any very great affinity even with Magars elsewhere in Nepal—for example, the Magars south of Tichurong described by Hitchcock (1966). While I am concerned with the mechanisms that maintain ethnic boundaries between these mediating mountain peasants and other groups with which they regularly interact, I am not interested here in the similarities and differences between different populations in western Nepal which call themselves Magars.

The word *Magar*—like Gurung, Rai, and Limbu—refers to a "tribe" or "caste," depending on the point of view of the social scientist who is translating the Nepali word *jāt* (Hindi, *jāti*). I do not find either translation satisfactory. The Magars of Tarangpur and its surrounding villages are not tribal in the corporate, territo-

rial, or political sense usually implied by that term; nor, given their concentration in a limited part of Nepal and the lack of traditional relations with Brahmins and other high-caste Hindus, are they a caste in the conventional Indian sense. If a sociological label is required, "peasant," in Redfield's (1953) use of that term, or "ethnic group" (Marriott 1965) is as appropriate as any, but I am skeptical about the utility of several kinds of anthropological labels for a people who are marginal in so many ways. In these mountain communities, Magar is simply a convenient status summation which can be readily and incontestably claimed by anyone (except untouchables) who wants it. I call the inhabitants of Tarangpur Magars as a shorthand device to place them in ethnographic context, not to describe a specific structural or cultural type.

Tucked away in an obscure fold of the Himalayas a two-week walk from the nearest motorized transportation, Tarangpurians are acutely aware of the world beyond their valley and have evolved various strategies for dealing with their remoteness. In each case they exchange their way out of isolation. These multifarious transactions can be interpreted through the processes by which they are maintained and adapted to the environment, as a way of organizing interpersonal behavior, and as an index of social and cultural change. In adopting a transactional perspective I lean heavily on the ideas of Fredrik Barth, whose *Models of Social Organization*, according to Kapferer (1976), marks a "paradigm" shift in British social anthropology, although he has been less influential in America. However that may be, I do not believe in or argue for transactional analysis as any kind of specially privileged or uniquely insightful theory. It is simply an intellectual framework that helps to elucidate the problems in which I am interested and to organize the data I present (which is all that what usually passes for "theory" in anthropology ever does).

Fundamental to Barth's concept of transaction is the notion that in any social relationship we are involved in a flow and counterflow of prestations, which is one way of describing the movement of goods and services. The flow of goods and services is determined by our own and our counterpart's ideas of appropriateness and value. These ideas determine not only what we exchange but which statuses may be combined in a set in a given exchange; only those involving commensurate prestations are relevant counter-

parts in a social relationship. Such ideas also affect the course of interaction in a relationship: the flow of prestations is not random over time, since each party's behavior is modified by the presence and behavior of the other in a progressional sequence (Barth 1966).

By viewing interaction in terms of transactions, says Barth, we can interpret behavior by means of a strategic model. That is, a sequence of reciprocal prestations represents successive moves in a game. Each actor keeps a ledger of value gained and lost, and each successive action affects that ledger, changes the strategic situation, and thus "canalizes" subsequent choices. Barth's game theory analogy is unfortunate because it casts his model in zero-sum terms, whereas the fundamental notion of transactions is reciprocity. The ledger is a personal one, and under certain conditions (e.g., between players from ecologically differentiated, symbiotic zones), the "game" can have more than one winner. Nevertheless, Barth's model does have the advantage he claims for it of depicting a succession of events over time—in other words, it is a model of process.

One measure of the analytical importance of such a concept of transaction is that it provides a way to assess the strength of values. It is meaningless, Barth maintains, to say that something has value unless people in real life seek it in preference to something else of less value. This can only be the case when they act strategically with respect to it—that is, make it the object of transactions between themselves and others.

I believe the transactional model has the additional advantage of providing an analytic framework for the study of change, since it allows for specifications of the continuity that links two situations in a sequence of change. Different analyses of change can then be generated depending on the nature of the continuity described. This study makes explicit certain assumptions about the nature of the continuity that exists between Tarangpur today (i.e., at the time of the research, 1968–1970) and Tarangpur forty years before the ethnographic present—specifically, the striking shifts in the transactional patterns, as measured in changing allocations of time and resources.

I attempt to deal with two distinct but interrelated kinds of transactions in which Tarangpurians engage. One is the transac-

tions in trade—the exchange of material goods (counted and measured as best I could for the present, and estimated for the past) between and across distant but contiguous symbiotic ecological zones. I argue that these economic transactions are the bedrock in which the second set of transactions—those consisting of interactions between adjacent ethnic groups of different cultures—takes place.

Data for the latter (unlike the former) frequently had to be gathered indirectly because cultural interactions could not be so frequently or directly observed. To obtain data on the economic set of transactions (and to understand the village cultural setting generally) required more or less continuous residence in the village for the entire fieldwork period. To fully observe the transactions in ethnicity would have required constant travel with the traders. This would have been not only logistically incompatible with the requirements of obtaining the economic data set but also politically impossible, since the necessary permits to visit the sensitive northern border area could not be obtained. Hence both the data and the conclusions on ethnic interaction are frequently inferred from what Tarangpurians said and did while in Tarangpur. Examples of this kind of material are found in the discussion of culture and impression management in chapter 4.

Data on the two kinds of transactions (economic and ethnic) do not represent unconnected domains but two empirical sides of the same conceptual coin. To discuss the latter while ignoring the former, as is sometimes done in ethnicity studies, is an error I have tried to avoid. A central theme of the book is that economic transactions changing over time have profoundly affected the interactional transactions, which have in turn generated changes in the ethnic identity and orientation of Tarangpurians. Baldly stated, economic change has been the cutting edge of cultural change. Assessing the material in terms of transactions and attempting to place the concept of choice on a par with that of structure (Firth 1954) is one tentative, halting, but determined step away from the paradigm fatigue of structuralism, in both its Radcliffe-Brownian and Levi-Straussian varieties.

A final, obvious fact may be too easily lost in the abstractions: namely, that the problems addressed here—even the question of choice—are, like all anthropological problems, primarily the prob-

lems of the anthropologist and not of the people whose collective lives are the basis for the solutions (people who, like us, just muddle along and struggle through their lives day after day as best they can). As one Tarangpurian said to me, replying to questions which were to him, of course, childishly simple: "We go to the fields, plow, and weed; we put heavy baskets on our backs and go trading—that's it! This is all there is to discuss about our life here."

Attempting to come to grips with the symbiotic links between regions and the bonds between village and nation is not an entirely novel endeavor. But it does warn of a shift away from intensive analysis of the internal dimensions and organization of Tarangpur and toward the manner of its integration into larger networks. Such an intensive internal analysis could be done—even transactionally, in the manner of Marriott (1976)—but that would be another book. The anthropological investigation of choice and decision-making is still in its infancy, but such approaches all too often focus on unnecessarily narrow concerns—whether to use a new kind of seed or whether to plant one crop rather than another, for instance. What I attempt here, in contrast, is to understand why people choose one culture rather than another. The analysis that attempts such an understanding is incomplete, as all such cultural understandings intrinsically are. As in any anthropological enterprise, there are loose ends; in the spirit of Valery, I have not really finished the project, but only abandoned it.

Most of the book grapples with these analytical issues by placing them in the specific ethnographic context of Tarangpur. After the methodological interlude that concludes this chapter, chapter 2 outlines some of the basic geographic and historical facts that have shaped life in Tarangpur. The central point is that the evidence from all sides describes a land and people who are, above all, marginal—politically, geographically, logistically, linguistically, even mythically. Their cultural identity is up for grabs and must be chosen from competing models.

Chapter 3 sets out the fundamental ecological dimensions of the agricultural cycle on which the rest of the economy (and, I maintain, the rest of the culture) rests. The discussion—much of it a quantified and, I fear, tedious analysis of such items as field size, crop yields, and consumption patterns—establishes that a net grain

surplus is generated. I take pains to be clear on this question partly because precision is, *ceteris paribus*, a virtue, and also because if people are making choices in their lives, it has to be shown that there are choices to make. If the alternatives imposed by the environment are so harsh and restricted that sheer survival permits no other course, the basic economic and cultural decisions are preordained; transactions and choice would not exist.

Chapter 4 describes how the grain surplus has satisfied the demand for salt and become the basis for a long-established grain-salt-rice trading system. I describe how this cycle of transactions has led Tarangpurians out of their valley and into cultural confrontations to the north and south. Chapter 5 details a second, coexisting circuit—which has now largely replaced the first—of animals, wool, and manufactured commodities, and compares the cultural implications of following each cycle. Chapter 6 deals with forms of local wealth, generated mostly from the trading cycles (which rest in turn on the agricultural base) and how this wealth is stored, used, and circulated. Chapter 7 returns to the transactions theme and assesses the impact of the different spheres of exchange for the internal social, political, and symbolic life of Tarangpur. Chapter 8 is a summary that concludes with a discussion of ethnicity and interaction in this unusually complicated cultural shatter-zone.

THE PROBLEMS OF RESEARCH

It would be unwise to assess the data that follow without a methodological pause, since the resolution of the theoretical research problems is illuminated by considering the practical problems of research. Anthropological fieldwork is the type of undertaking in which the theoretical scaffolding as well as the tools of the trade must be displayed along with the finished product.

The field research was conducted in Tarangpur village, Dolpo District, Dhaulagiri Zone,² between October 1968 and November 1969.³ Because of Tarangpur's isolation from transportation services, we were never able to take a vacation—a trip to Kathmandu and back, for example, would have required a month in travel time alone. Added to whatever additional time would be spent in "rest and relaxation," this constituted a total far beyond what we

felt we could afford and still get the work done. The full year was therefore spent in the village and its vicinage, except for a survey trek to Jumla, a small bazaar town a week's walk to the west which seemed to us, after several months in Tarangpur, more like Times Square than anything else.

Despite fairly extensive treks in Nepal in the early 1960s, in the Mt. Everest area and to the west and south of Pokhara, I had never been anywhere near Tarangpur and did not even have any clear notion of how to get there. There were small airstrips at Jumla, a week's walk to the west, and at Dhorpatan, a week's walk to the south, but no scheduled service to either. We attempted at every point to keep the size of our expedition at a minimum, so that we would be, if not inconspicuous, at least not egregiously obtrusive. We were too small and impecunious a group to charter a plane, so we took the regularly scheduled Royal Nepal Airlines Corporation DC-3 to Pokhara.

Not knowing whether any food would be available where we were going, we brought with us from Kathmandu what we hoped (optimistically, as it turned out) would be a year's worth of rice and *dal*, flour, peanut butter, sugar, tea, and a can of peaches to open for Christmas dinner. Our Sherpa assistant, Changchu, busily organized the packing of all these items and their distribution—along with our clothing, books, film, typewriter, paper, and other supplies—into what eventually amounted to thirteen porter loads of 35 kilograms each. By the standards of other expeditions, even scholarly ones, this seemed an alarmingly small amount of provisions to keep us going for a year. (The American Mt. Everest Expedition of 1963, for instance, needed more than 900 porters to carry supplies for three months.) Although we were not entirely sure of our ultimate destination—or that its inhabitants would even allow us to live there—we knew that wherever we settled would be so isolated that we could not afford the time (not to mention the energy) for a trip out to collect more supplies.

But there were some advantages, too, in being a small and mobile operation. We were not only less obvious as we passed through the countryside and into the fieldwork area but we were able to muster the few porters we needed. Changchu found thirteen able-bodied men, about half Tibetan refugees and half low-caste *Damāis* (Tailor caste) in Pokhara. Packed into conical wicker

baskets, the loads were hefted onto the back and stabilized by a rope under the basket tied to a leather strap pulled across the top of the forehead, so that the neck muscles provided most of the support:

We proceeded north of Pokhara over a ridge to the Modi Khola (Modi River) and up the Kāli Gandaki River to the zonal capital of Bāglung, took the Myagdi Khola fork at Beni, then went over the pass to Dhorpatan. At Dhorpatan our Damais decided that they would prefer not to cross in their bare feet the snow-covered passes about which we had been hearing ominous stories along the way, and so they quit. We also paid off the Tibetans, and I belatedly regretted my earlier agreement to pay them at half-rate for their empty-handed return to Pokhara. Fortunately, Changchu was able to rustle up eight Tibetan ponies and their owners to take us, for an exorbitant sum, the rest of the way.

From Pokhara to Dhorpatan was a one-week trek, and from Dhorpatan to our destination was another week, but the two legs of the journey were quite different. During the first week we were never far from villages and the supplies and food we could buy from them. But during the second week we were traveling through high, alpine, largely uninhabited country, with only two adjacent villages in our path—Pelma and Yama. We slept in our tent, while the horses were hobbled to graze during the night. The two passes (Janglā Bhanjyāng) near the end of our journey, both close to 15,000 feet high, were already quite deep in snow, and we quickly learned to conserve our strength by letting the horses break trail for us. From the top of the last pass it was a long, grinding, knee-jarring descent to the Bheri River Valley. We headed for the first signs of habitation we saw and dragged ourselves into the village just as darkness fell, only to discover that we were in Gomba, not Tarangpur, which we belatedly saw beyond a stream and around the hillside, another hour's walk away. All of us—horses included—were so exhausted that we decided to sleep where we were and proceed the next morning to Tarangpur.

We were startled to discover that a police border checkpost had been installed at Tarangpur just a few months before our arrival. This was an external presence I had not anticipated, would never have requested, and did not relish, but it did provide unexpected opportunities to observe the interaction of national and local levels

of government. A measure of the remoteness of the area was the fact that even after we had lived in the village for several months, one neighbor thought that we and the Nepali constables were from the same country—for many of the villagers, all people from outside the valley are indistinguishable. Toward the end of our stay, a friend excitedly ran to our house to tell us that five Americans had just arrived from over the pass; I rushed up to their campsite to discover five Japanese dentists on a vacation trek.

In any case, the checkpoint commander was helpful in our search for accommodations. Between his efforts and our own, we finally found a newly rebuilt house right in the middle of the village. In addition to its convenient location, it was the only house in the village with the attractive feature of a ceiling high enough so that I (at 5 feet, 10 inches) could stand erect under it. Believing that ghosts cannot enter a house if they have to bend over, Tarangpurians had always built their houses with low ceilings. But as no ghosts had appeared for some time, our landlord daringly built a higher ceiling, to our considerable relief. The owner suggested a monthly rental of about \$5; we offered \$4 and the deal was closed. Our landlady and her two sons continued to live in another part of the house which had not yet been refurbished.

Our quarters consisted of a single large room, which we subdivided by hanging our tent fly down the middle. Tarangpurians sit, eat, and sleep on the hard dirt floor, so we hired low-caste *Kāmis* (Blacksmith/Carpenter caste) from a nearby village to make us a bed, an enormous desk, and a small table and two chairs for our "kitchen." On one side of the tent fly were our bed, desk, clothes, and medicines, and on the other were the cooking fire that Changchu designed from stones and empty kerosene tins, table and chairs, food, and—within a few days—our four chickens, which occasionally provided us with eggs. Opening onto our single room were four windows, each about the size of my fist; it was so dark inside that we usually needed a flashlight to search for things even during the middle of the day. A smoke hole in the ceiling over the fire added a little more light, but not much.

The first task I set myself was simply to map the village, but the houses are so closely clustered and piled on top of one another, with so many little paths separating them, that I found it impossible to make an accurate map until the Pañchayat (the local govern-

ing body) secretary finally agreed to walk around with me and name the houses. I also wanted to take a complete census of the village, with such details as age, clan membership, place of birth, and preliminary genealogical connections. But I immediately discovered—as I was to find constantly throughout the fieldwork period—that people were reluctant to answer questions. Even if they were willing to answer a question, they would almost always insist—for perfectly good reasons, from their point of view—on initially asking why I wanted to ask the question in the first place. I answered by saying that I was a student (in the "21st grade"), that I had come to learn about their customs and history, and that if they didn't tell me what was going on I would fail in school. They sympathized with my plight, but not to the extent of becoming enthusiastic informants.

Although we had excellent relations with the villagers, who came to appreciate not only our medicines and material goods but also our honesty in dealing with them, most never lost their suspicions of what might come of my knowing too much. Gathering data was frequently like pulling teeth. People in some cultures are very anxious for outsiders to know about them; indeed, I marvel at the good fortune of a colleague who worked in Sri Lanka and found that he sometimes had to ask his informants to stop giving him so much detailed information that he couldn't record it all. My situation seemed more reminiscent of Evans-Pritchard's account of working with the Nuer (1940) or Malinowski's (1922) comments on the Amphlett traders,⁴ although I would not be so harsh.

There seemed to be three major reasons for the Tarangpurians' reticence. First, because outsiders—including other Nepalese—are virtually unknown in the valley, there was an entirely reasonable suspicion and fear that whatever they said could be used against them. I was interested, among other things, in economic questions—amounts of land owned, taxes paid, and the like—and since the villagers shared the universal fear of higher taxes (a cultural universal, no doubt), they saw no advantage in handing out information that might fall into unfriendly hands, even if we ourselves were benign.

Second, a number of Tibetan refugees had passed through Tarangpur in the early 1960s following the political instability in

Tibet in 1959. Indeed, some still lived in Tarangpur or returned to spend the winter months there, and the stories they told of difficulties with the Chinese had made the Tarangpurians very apprehensive about foreign intervention in their valley. As it turned out, we did many of the things the Chinese did when they first arrived in Tibet—handed out medicine, gave candy to children, and were generally polite and interested in local affairs. Many people just assumed that we were the advance guard of an American invasion force, which would arrive after a discreet period to take over the valley. When we arrived, one of their first queries concerned the state of Chinese-American relations. When I said that I personally did not harbor any ill will toward the Chinese, this only confirmed their worst fears. When I later understood their concern, I told them that America and China were bitterest enemies (this was before Kissinger's secret trip to Peking and the subsequent rapprochement), and my reputation and trustworthiness improved markedly.

Third, Tarangpurians believe that natural and human objects are endowed with certain kinds of powers (*shakti*), which must be carefully guarded against dissipation. My request for soil samples met with a refusal that was irate as well as adamant, since taking a sample away would place the power of the soil in jeopardy—a not inconsequential consideration in an agricultural community. Later, even my short-term research assistant, Chandra Man Rokaya—who had been born and raised in Tarangpur and still had family and property there, but who was at the time earning his B.A. in agriculture at a college in India—returned for a short vacation and aroused the collective wrath of his fellow villagers when he too wanted to take some soil samples for testing. I encountered the same difficulty when I tried to inventory the Tibetan books (handwritten or printed from woodblocks) kept in most houses. My efforts to copy just the titles met with great resistance, because it was felt that copying the title would drain away the power of the book.

Still another problem I encountered—which I have not seen discussed in the literature of fieldwork—is the problem of the pathological liar. I discovered that two or three people in the village consistently gave me answers that had nothing whatsoever to do with anything that might be called truth. They gave informa-

tion which seemed reasonable, or at least plausible, but which after cross-checking turned out to be fabricated out of whole cloth. Other informants then admitted candidly that one could not believe anything these people said; but it took me a painfully long time to become aware of that fact.

Under these conditions, the intensive fieldwork techniques I was using—insistence on obtaining information directly from individuals without using special informants—were yielding frustratingly little information. Later, I discovered that working with a young man who was a respected village leader, Takla Tsering Budha, opened doors that I could never have opened myself. Once it became clear that it was acceptable for me to find out certain kinds of information, the data began to flow much more easily. Thus I owe much of my information to the assistance of Takla, whom I paid for his help. I avoided paying other villagers, preferring to interact with them as a friend who could sometimes be helpful—for instance, by treating medical problems or by loaning money without interest. As our landlady's son told us early in the fieldwork, if we gave him ten cents for every relative he named, he would give us an unprecedentedly detailed and extensive genealogy.

I tried—on most occasions successfully—to type up my notes every evening, so that gaps and inconsistencies could be noted immediately instead of after my return to Chicago. At night during the winter, it was frequently below freezing inside the house, so I sometimes found it too cold to type (on such occasions my wife and I read nonanthropological books aloud to each other by the fire) and so delayed consolidating notes until the warmth of the following day. I made two copies of everything: one was kept in a topological file (social structure, religion, etc., although the categories constantly shifted according to my changing perceptions of what the relevant local categories were), and the other was filed in a chronological sequence. I also kept a separate diary in which I recorded my more impressionistic feelings and reactions.

The standard methodological chestnut handed out to anthropologists about to embark for "the field" states that one must learn the local language. In the trilingual case of Tarangpur, this advice was not very helpful. To master all three languages—and acquire enough usable data at the same time—was beyond my linguistic

competence (with one totally deaf ear, I have trouble enough understanding all the English I hear). Of the three languages, I already knew Nepali, had obtained a smattering of Tibetan in London, and of course knew no Kaike, which is spoken only in Tarangpur and two neighboring villages by about a thousand people altogether. The compromise I had to settle for was to collect extensive linguistic data in all three languages (see Fisher 1973, for example), but to rely primarily on Nepali as the main research tool.

My Sherpa assistant, Changchu, was fluent in Tibetan (he had been born in Tibet) and was able to assist in my difficulties with that language. My Nepali was about as good (or as bad) as that of the villagers, so we felt at home conversing with each other. I therefore worked without any interpreters or research assistants. I had planned to bring one research assistant from Kathmandu and so had engaged a young man who had just completed his M.A. in geography to spend the year with us. He unfortunately had to put his own affairs in order before he could leave, he told us, so we left Kathmandu with the understanding that he would join us in a few days. I gave him enough money for his plane ticket to Pokhara and his expenses until he could catch up with us on the trail or in Tarangpur. I never saw him again.

2

The Land and Its People

des ko bhes
kapāl ko kesh
—Nepali proverb¹

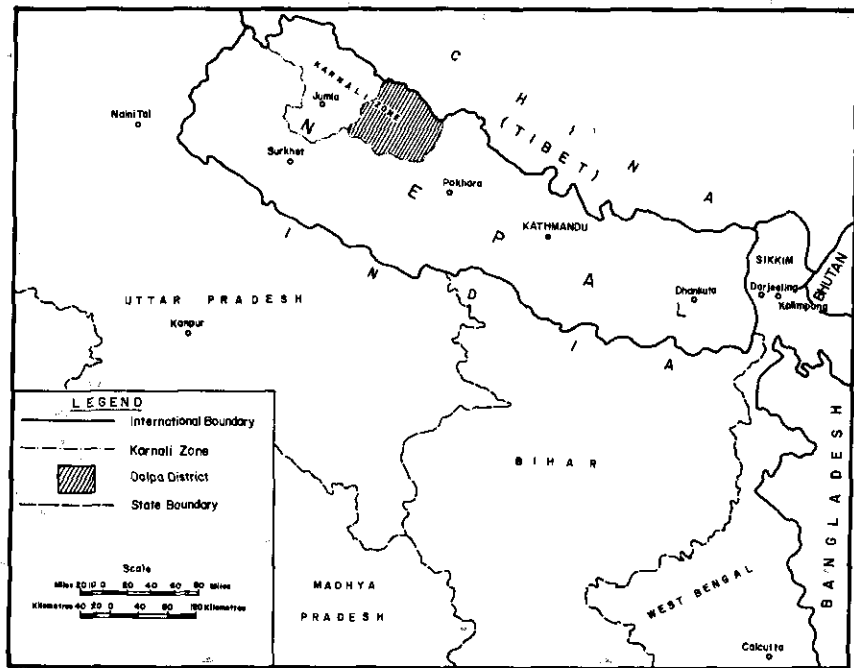
Fashions of the country,
hair of the head. (When in Rome,
do as the Romans do.)

DOLPO DISTRICT

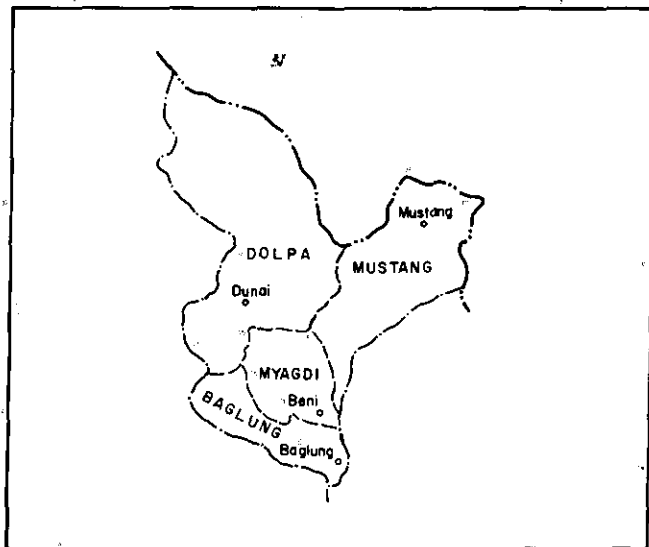
The Physical Setting

Like most of the rest of Nepal, the land that comprises Dolpo District and the areas adjacent to it in northwest Nepal is mountainous, stark, rugged, and remote (see maps 1-3). Pinning down the southeast corner of the district is the massif of Dhaulagiri, which climbs into the sky out of the west bank of the Kali Gandaki River, opposite Annapurna on the east bank. At 26,790 feet above sea level, Dhaulagiri is the sixth highest mountain in the world. This peak and its outliers dominate the topography and determine much of the climate of Dolpo. Within its rain shadow to the north and north-northwest lie many more peaks with relatively arid plateaus at their feet. There are several hundred square miles of such plateaus and valleys, separated from Mustang to the east by the bulge of Tibet which juts into the area in between, and from each other by scores of ridges and peaks in the 20,000-foot range.

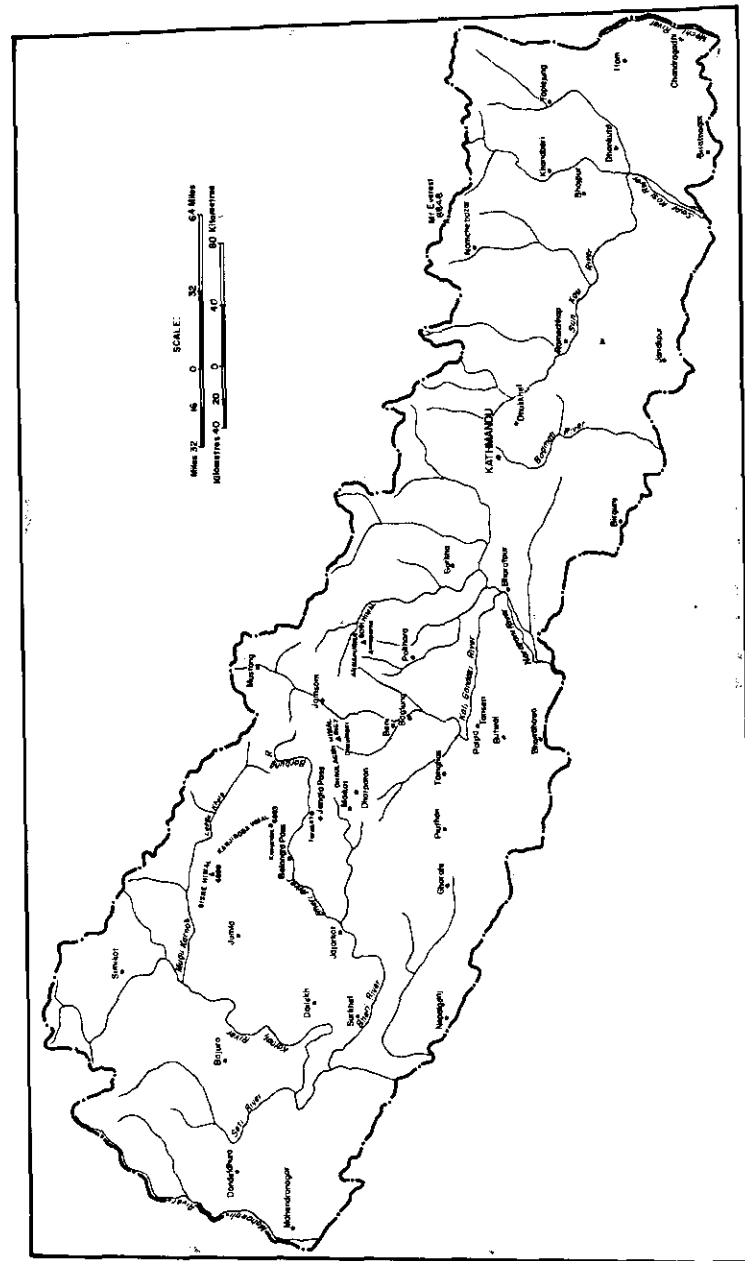
Most of this northern part of Dolpo is drained by the Langu River and its tributaries, which empty through sheer, uninhabited, and normally untraversed gorges into the headwaters of the Mugu Karnali River beyond the northwestern tip of the district. Directly south of this drainage in the north and northwestern tip of Dolpo lie the Sisne and Kanjiroba massifs, the highest summit of which



Map 1. Nepal and Neighboring Countries, 1979



Map 2. Dhaulagiri Zone, 1969



Map 3. Nepal

is above 22,000 feet, and to their south lie the relatively low and hilly flanks above the streams that ultimately become the Bheri River. Turning east again, one crosses the Balangra Pass (less than 13,000 feet) and descends to the Big Bheri River and the hilly slopes above it. The Big Bheri here flows from southeast to northwest, so moving upstream puts one on a direct course back to Dhaulagiri again, until a bend in the river moves the flow east-west along the foot of the enormous ridge complex leading west from the summit itself. After this twenty-five-mile east-west section, the river—which by this time is called the Barbung instead of the Bheri—takes a sharp turn north right under the nose of Dhaulagiri and finds its headwaters in the glaciers north of the mountain, just across the divide from the Langu basin.

There is nothing topographically homogeneous about Dolpo District, and viable ecological adaptations range from irrigated, riverine paddy fields to wind-swept alpine pasture suitable only for brief summer grazing. The only common physiographic denominator that gives the terrain any geographic unity is the inhospitable nature of the landscape to most forms of human livelihood. One estimate (Thakali 1968) gives the following classification of land surfaces:

- 15 percent cultivated land
- 20 percent forests
- 3 percent arable wasteland
- 12 percent grazing land, sloping meadows
- 50 percent mountains, sharp stone ridges, and rocks

These proportions are very crudely calculated but are probably roughly correct, although I suspect the estimate for cultivated land is much too high. As will become evident later, different natural features make for different ecological adaptations and different ways of life.

The Cultural Setting

The political and administrative unit of Dolpo District is a culturally heterogeneous, ecologically plural, multilinguistic entity. In its

southern and southwestern sections, the occasional flat and fertile river valley bottoms and the hilly flanks above them are farmed for the most part by caste Hindus speaking Nepali, an Indo-European language closely related to Hindi and written in the Devanagiri script. Pockets of so-called tribal peoples also inhabit this area, in their own villages as well as in predominantly Hindu villages. This Nepali-speaking area is called *Khasān* (literally, "land of the *Khas*").² The vast, high, cold and dry plateaus of northern Dolpo—separated from the People's Republic of China for well over 100 miles by the ridges and peaks which form the international border—are thinly populated by a farming, trading, pastoral people solidly within the Tibetan Buddhist cultural tradition: they speak Tibetan (a language belonging to the Sino-Tibetan family), dress in the Tibetan style, follow Tibetan Buddhism and/or Bon (the indigenous, shamanistic religion of Tibet), and have Tibetan institutions. In Nepali, these people of Tibetan culture and Nepalese citizenship are referred to as *Bhotias* (and the land they inhabit is called *Bhot*).³

Although its borders are constantly being redrawn (largely for gerrymandering purposes), at the time of the field research Dolpo District was distinguished by the largest geographic area (2,597 square miles) and the smallest population—estimated variously at 20,000 (Regmi Research Project 1968) and 22,075 (Ministry of Home and Panchayat 1966)—of any of the 75 development districts which make up Nepal. Given such a low population density (7.7 or 8.5 persons per square mile, depending on which population figure is used), it is not surprising that vast tracts of land are entirely without permanently settled people. A cluster of villages on the Bheri River in an area known in Tibetan as Tichurong⁴ (there is no equally apt Nepali equivalent) lies isolated from other inhabited regions by just such barren areas.

Starting from Tichurong, it is at least a two-day walk up the Barbung River or its tributary, the Tarap River, to the nearest Buddhist,⁵ Tibetan-speaking village, and it is a day's walk downstream to Dunai, the nearest Hindu, Nepali-speaking village and the administrative capital of Dolpo. Heading south over the two 15,000-foot Jangla passes that lie astride the principal trade and pilgrimage route connecting Tichurong with the rest of Nepal, it is a three-day trip to the nearest villages, which are inhabited by

low-caste Hindus and by Magar farmers who speak Kham, a Tibeto-Burman language not closely related to Kaike (the language spoken in Tarangpur). These farmers constitute but one tribal variant of the hilly, Hinduized heartland of Nepal.

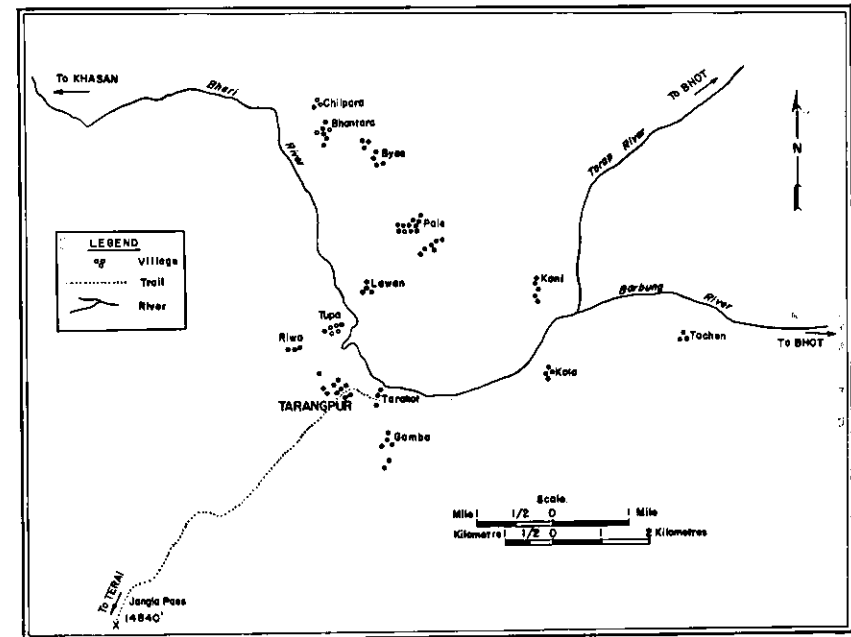
The Tichurong villages lie etched onto extremely steep slopes high above the Bheri River, which in its course chronicles the changing physical and cultural landscape. Its headwaters begin in the melting snows and glaciers north of Dhaulagiri and flow by yak and sheep pastures before reaching some of the Tibetan-speaking villages (where it is called the Barbung River) of upper Dolpo. It continues through an uninhabited stretch, then washes through the valley of Tichurong (where, after its confluence with the Tarap River, it becomes the Bheri River), inhabited principally by Magars, and winds down through the extensive Nepali-speaking hill regions and beyond them to the Hindi-speaking plains and jungle of the Terai. Finally it empties into the Ganges and thence into the Bay of Bengal.

TICHURONG

Internal Variation

The Tichurong villages, located at approximately 28° 53' latitude and 83° 00' longitude, are approximately as far from the equator as Cape Kennedy or New Delhi, but because of the altitude (between almost 9,000 feet and 12,000 feet above sea level), the climate is relatively severe. Temperatures in the summer are commonly in the 80s (°F), but temperatures during the winter are below freezing at night, even indoors. Not only the altitude but also the position of the villages vis-à-vis the sun determine different climates, growing seasons, and so on. Of the thirteen reasonably discrete villages (there are also a few small homestead clusters scattered here and there) that make up Tichurong, six villages, which constitute the Lāwan Village Panchayat, are on the right side of the Bheri; seven villages, which comprise the Tarangpur Village Panchayat, are on the left side of the river (see map 4).

The thirteen villages also vary considerably in size, ranging from 63 people in the smallest village to 365 in the largest, Tarangpur



Map 4. Tichurong

(see map 5).⁶ Tarangpur is in fact one of the largest villages in Dolpo District, and a political and economic center as well. As such, it cannot claim to be "typical" of Dolpo District, or even of Tichurong, not to mention all of Nepal. But from the perspective of economic and cultural change it is something more important, interesting, and arresting: it represents a cultural and commercial stage in which the forces and processes that are transforming this part of Nepal are silhouetted in a more conspicuous, compelling, and concentrated way than in the "typical" village.

Tarangpur's geographic remoteness and social isolation conjure up the image of a small, homogeneous, stable, or even static Redfieldian folk society. But a brief glance at the ethnographic facts compels an opposite conclusion. Linguistically, the village is complex. The mother language is an unwritten Tibeto-Burman language called Kaike, distantly related to Tibetan and other Tibeto-Burman dialects spoken elsewhere in Nepal.⁷ In addition, all adults in Tarangpur speak the two other languages of Tichurong—Nepali and Tibetan. In nine of the thirteen villages, Ti-

Key to House Numbers

The following households (see map 5) had Tibetans living in them during the winter of 1968–1969: 9, 10, 13, 14, 16, 18, 18a, 19, 23, 25, 28, 30, 33, 34, 36, 41, 42, 43, 44, 47, 51, 55, 56, 57, 64, 66, 67, 68, 74, 75, 76, 77.

The following households patronize the gomba at house 5: 10, 11, 12, 14, 28, 50, 51, 52, 60, 63.

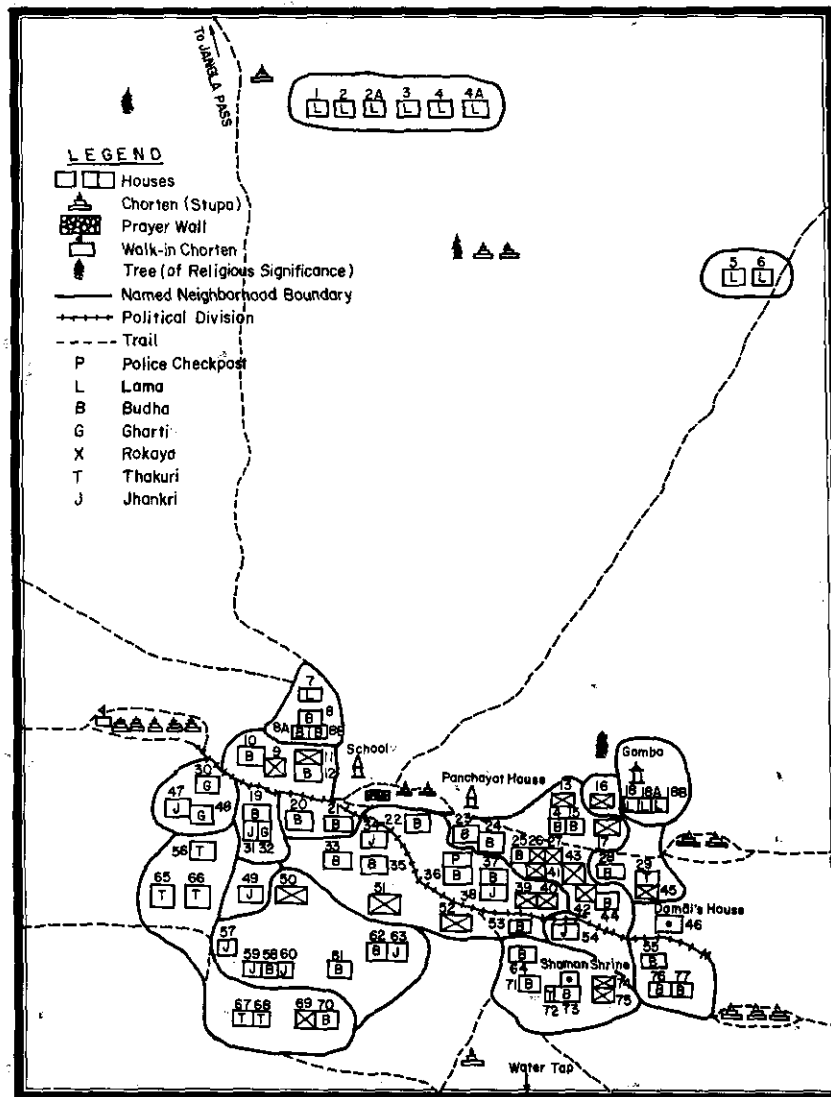
The following households patronize the gomba at house 18: 8a, 13, 15, 17, 25, 26, 27, 36, 41, 42, 43, 52.

The remaining households (except for the Tailors in 46 and the *dhami* (shaman) in 73) patronize the gomba maintained by houses 1–4.

The following households engaged in some form of long-distance trade during 1968–1969: 1, 2, 2a, 3, 7, 8a, 8b, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 18a, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26, 28, 29, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 47, 48, 49, 50, 52, 53, 56, 57, 59, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 71, 72, 73, 76, 77.

betan is spoken; one village (Riwa) is Nepali-speaking; in only three villages (Tarangpur, Tarakot, and Tupa)—and nowhere else in the world—is Kaike spoken. Fluency varies from individual to individual and from language to language, but all Tarangpurians (with the exception of very young children) feel free to express themselves without hesitation in either second language, and in the natural course of life they are required to do so.

Life-cycle rituals (name-giving at birth, funerals) tend to be Buddhist, though a boy's first haircut is Hindu, and marriage is neither; seasonal rituals (*Dasain*, *Sāune Sankrānti*) tend to be influenced by Hinduism, but strictly local deities are also worshipped in many rituals, the most notable being a nearly month-long religious festival in the winter with daily dancing—part of the cult of local mountain gods—which is neither Hindu nor Buddhist but entirely indigenous. The Hindu calendar (*Bikram Sambat*) is used for some purposes (to calculate the timing of Hindu festivals, auspicious and inauspicious months for marriage, school schedules, and other government-related activities), while the Tibetan calendar is used to calculate the beginning of the local New Year, which differs from the Tibetan and Nepali New Years



Map 5. Tarangpur Village.

(both of which are also celebrated, but in a much more minor key). At Lapsa, the indigenous New Year, the senior male member of each clan supervises raising a new "flagpole" on village houses—that is, the old flagpole is refurbished with a fresh juniper branch and white cloth flag (identical to Tibetan prayer flags but with no prayers printed on them) at the top. Celebration of the local deities (there are also household deities and spirits) should be managed by a quartet of ritual specialists: *barphun*, *narphun*, *sildin*, and *patum*. As villagers have become increasingly active traders, however, the number of men willing to perform these duties has declined, and there is now only a *patum* in Tarangpur. Other Tichurong villages have other of these specialists, but no village has a full complement of them. The many celebrations of the local deities throughout the year are held according to the lunar calendar.

Buddhist lamas and two distinct varieties of shaman live in the village. One is the animal-sacrificing *dhāmi* standard in this part of Nepal; the other is the *patum*, who is part priest and part shaman, for he both performs rituals in Kaike and Tibetan that guarantee purity and enters into states of spirit possession. Tarangpurians worship their gods at shrines and natural objects, such as trees, as well as at Buddhist and Hindu shrines and objects wherever they can find them. They acknowledge different gods as having different powers in different locations; hence the gods are not in competition with each other. They have accepted a local version of Pascal's wager: not certain of the limits of any specific deity, they hedge their bets by worshipping them all. Thus their religion is a complex syncretistic configuration of Buddhism, Hinduism, and their own autochthonous cult of village and mountain deities as well as household gods and spirits.⁸ As one informant put it when I was trying to sort out all the different deities that seemed to impinge on Tarangpur life, "all the gods are the same." Tarangpur bears similarities to both its culturally disparate and far-flung neighbors, but it is identical to neither. Nor is Tarangpur typical of all Tichurong in this regard. Within Tichurong, the nearby low-caste Nepali-speaking village is entirely Hindu,⁹ and some of the other Tibetan-speaking villages are more devoutly Buddhist (or Bon) than is Tarangpur.

There are a number of other important ecological and cultural differences within Tichurong. In several villages, for example,

wheat is grown, whereas in Tarangpur it is not; corn is now grown in Tarangpur, but it has not yet spread to all Tichurong villages. Even such a basic fact of life as death is dealt with differently from place to place. Tarangpurians say that funeral procedures vary from village to village, although lamas conduct them all. In Gomba village, a three-day ceremony takes place during which lamas read and pray; in Bantara, the ceremony takes seven days; and in Tarangpur, this ceremony is not held at all. When the body is burned in Gomba, one lama stands 30–40 feet away from the corpse, while the other lamas read and pray on the other side, and this again is not done in Tarangpur. The Tarangpur lamas do not touch the corpse with their hands, whereas in Gomba they do, and in addition the highest lama puts *prasād* (offering to a deity) in the mouth of the deceased. Tarangpur villagers consider their lamas less learned and expert than Gomba's village lamas, and they have fewer ritual implements, such as drums and thighbone trumpets. In Tarangpur, no care is taken over the position of the body, but in Gomba it must be burned in a sitting position. In Tupa and Tarakot, people stop working and return to the village if anyone dies, but in Tarangpur and Gomba they keep on working. Some differences may be doctrinal (Gomba has a Kagyupa as well as a Nyingmapa gomba), but many of the differences are more likely due to different degrees of education, dedication, and commitment. I cannot vouch for the accuracy of the above descriptions, which were all told to me by Tarangpurians, but the important point is simply that villagers themselves do not believe they share an utterly uniform culture within Tichurong. It is by no means a homogeneous area inhabited by ethnically identical people—hence the relative disutility of the term *Magar*. As will become clear, even the Kaike-speakers exhibit great variation among themselves. But because of its topographical isolation and somewhat ingrown social interaction,¹⁰ Tichurong comprises a unit for analysis which is useful, convenient, and—within obvious limits—analytically viable. Taken as a whole it is, despite its internal diversity, a social system.

Transportation and Communication

To reach Tichurong from the capital, Kathmandu, one must first take the forty-minute flight west to Pokhara (or, nowadays, the

road, completed in the early 1970s, which connects the two towns). From Pokhara it is a one-week walk via the Kali Gandaki and Myagdi Rivers to the Swiss-sponsored Tibetan refugee settlement of Dhorpatan, and almost another week straight north from Dhorpatan over the Jangla passes (almost 15,000 feet), which cut through a relatively low western spur of the Dhaulagiri massif, to Tichurong itself. Alternatively, it is a two-week walk from Pokhara up the Kali Gandaki gorge and over the approximately 17,000-foot pass north of Dhaulagiri into Tsharka, and then nearly one more week walking south and west down the Barbung River (which is called the Bheri by the time it reaches Tichurong). The administrative and commercial center of Jumla lies almost one week's walk west of Tichurong, beyond two approximately 13,000-foot passes. There is a good grass airstrip at Jumla (although because cloud conditions obscure the mountain approach, it cannot be used during the monsoon), but no scheduled flights land there. On the other side of a variety of 19,000-foot passes to the north lie the plateaus and valleys belonging to what is, culturally, Dolpo proper (Snellgrove 1967); beyond them stretches the Autonomous Tibetan Region of the People's Republic of China.

With the exception of the passes to Jumla, which are never impassable for more than a week at a time in winter, all the passes leading to Tichurong are snowed in throughout the winter—that is, depending on the height of the given pass, for anywhere between four and six months. Thus the region is quite inaccessible, the only low-altitude route in or out being the long, difficult track down the Bheri River, which—several weeks' march from Tichurong—reaches the flat, alluvial extension of the Gangetic plain called the Terai, with its roads and whatever means of modern transportation ply them. Not only is this river route twice as long as the pass route, but during the monsoon it is frequently impassable because floodwaters carry away the makeshift bridges. There is no single guaranteed route to Tichurong open all year; in the winter, the passes are not negotiable but the river is, and vice versa in the summer.

Distances within Dolpo are equally imposing, and according to one estimate, it takes ten or eleven days to reach the northern

boundary from the southern, and nine or ten days to reach the western boundary from the eastern (Thakali 1968). Compared with distances to villages outside Tichurong—not to mention the time and trouble involved in getting to any place that could be considered, however remotely, a part of the outside world—the region of Tichurong seems minutely shrunk and compact. Using one of the two bridges which span the Bheri in this area, the distance between the two most distant Tichurong villages can be traversed in a brisk five-hour walk.

EARLIER SURVEYS AND EXPLORATION

It is not surprising that there is virtually nothing known about such an isolated and inaccessible region. But it is a testimony to the vigor of ethnographic research in Nepal that no less than three other anthropologists had briefly visited Tichurong (although they had published nothing on the area) prior to my arrival there in 1968. My first publications (Fisher 1970, 1971—the latter reprinted in its present format in 1973) have been followed by Jest (1971, 1975), von Fürer-Haimendorf (1975), and Hitchcock (1978), so a clearer picture of Tichurong is beginning to emerge.

What had been published previously on the area by assorted travelers errant is so brief, misleading, or inaccurate as to be virtually worthless for scholarly purposes. Purna Prasad's *Mero Jumla Yātra (My Jumla Trip)*¹¹ has the merit of introducing the area for the first time to the Nepalese public,¹² and Snellgrove's *Himalayan Pilgrimage*¹³ quite literally put Tichurong on the map, but in other respects these travelogue-diaries display the limitations of inaccuracy and superficiality characteristic of most examples of their genre. More recently, von Fürer Haimendorf (1975:204–222) has sketched a brief but useful overview of the economic and cultural characteristics of Tichurong, including trade. Despite his stay there of only a few days, the broad outline of his account (if not every detail) rings true.¹⁴ For more detailed, accurate descriptive information, one must turn to various publications of the Nepalese government.¹⁵

HISTORY: DOCUMENTARY AND CONJECTURAL

The literary sources improve slightly but almost imperceptibly in an examination of the available historical documents. While it is reasonably unproblematical to portray the "betwixt and between" geographical position of Tichurong, halfway between the Tibetan highlands to the north and the Hinduized valleys to the south and west, the questions of how and when the people came to this valley, and of what historical forces have shaped their past, are far more vexing. It is uncommonly difficult to trace even the barest kind of historical sketch of Tichurong, which is much too far from Kathmandu and a little too far east of Jumla to be frequently mentioned in the inscriptions and documents concerning those places. Tichurong appears to have always been fairly independent of outside political influences and powers, but when it has been dominated by external *rājās* and petty chiefs, these rulers have usually, until relatively recent times, been from the west.

Although we can never know the details of the interaction between Tichurong people and those who have governed them—officially and unofficially—it is clear that both historically and within living memory, the people of Tichurong have deferred to power held by adherents of two entirely different cultural traditions. Just as Tichurong occupies a geographic position part way between the Dolpo plateau and the lower valleys, so it has been caught historically between two disparate cultural and political traditions; one or the other has always dominated, and often both influences have been at work simultaneously in different spheres. For Tarangpurians to be caught in the middle is nothing new. The historical details that follow—many of them discovered in previously unexamined documents in Kathmandu—demonstrate how Tichurong's cultural oscillation between Hinduism and Buddhism has developed over time.

From Tucci (1956, 1962) we learn that in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, west Tibet and a sizable chunk of western Nepal—almost certainly including the valley of Tichurong—were united under the Malla kings, whose two capitals were located at Sinja, northwest of Jumla, and at Taklakot, in western Tibet. For unknown reasons (perhaps related to political unrest on the

plains), toward the end of the fourteenth century this kingdom rather suddenly collapsed. In the meantime, a succession of Rajput chieftains who were fleeing from Muslim invasions in India arrived in western Nepal, which they carved into petty principalities for themselves. By the beginning of the fifteenth century, one of these rajas, Balirāj, whose parents were from Rajputana (Regmi 1961:5), became king of Jumla and "enlarged his fief both to East and West. His glory was known as far as China; the Government of China promised to give him seven *dharnis* (= 17 seers) [between 34 and 42 lbs.] of gold, good horses, brocades, etc. A religious treaty was also signed between China and him and many kinglets both to the East and to the West of Jumla became his vassals and paid tribute to Jumlesvara" (Tucci 1956:122). By the latter half of the fifteenth century, Tichurong may have belonged to the principality of Parbat (also called Malaibam), which touched Jumla on the west and Kaski in the east. Parbat fell to Rudra Sen, who ruled over Palpa, to the south, between A.D. 1440 and 1475 (Regmi 1961:28). Possibly these princes in central and western Nepal owed vague, perhaps nominal, allegiance to the Moghul emperor in Delhi.

There were fourteen successors to Baliraj's kingdom (or twenty-one, according to less reliable documents) before the grandson of Prithvi Narayan Shah, the direct lineal Gorkha ancestor of the present King of Nepal, conquered Jumla from his power base in Kathmandu in 1788. Between Baliraj and the Gorkha conquest, various relatives of the Jumla rulers branched out and became petty princes in different parts of the kingdom, including Tichurong.

Tucci reports that the ninth successor of Baliraj was named "Vikram Sah, whose brother went to Byams Gan (?)" (1956:122), which is almost certainly the location known locally as Byas Gad (Nepali, Byas River), an uninhabited spot at the confluence of the Byas and Bheri Rivers.¹⁶ This chieftain, still remembered in Tichurong as the Byas Gad Raja, was only one of a number of local rajas who were of the same lineage as the Jumla kings. Other brothers of rulers in immediately ascending and descending generations went to locations within a day's walk of Byas Gad, some of which were also unknown to Tucci, although they are clearly

recognizable to anyone who knows local geography. Historians (e.g., Regmi 1961:7) call these rulers the Kalyal-rajās, and it is by this term also that they are remembered today in Tichurong.¹⁷

The thirteenth successor after Baliraj was "Suratha Sah, whose brother went to Tiprkot Tara" (Tucci 1956:122). This undoubtedly refers to the village of Tarakot, or somewhere nearby—the village which, although it is one of the smallest villages of Tichurong, is listed on many maps, almost always to the exclusion of any other Tichurong village.¹⁸ There is no evidence or remembrance now of his reign, but his residence (or that of his successor) may have put this otherwise tiny and obscure village on the map. According to Tucci (1956:127), another *tamapatra* (copperplate) dates Suratha Sah at Saka Eva 1646 (A.D. 1724), so his brother may well have been the father of Badri Sah, who was in turn the father (by his Magar wife) of Vikram Sah, who was eventually defeated by the Gorkhas and who is the only named historical figure generally remembered in Tichurong today.

According to local legend, Vikram Sah, the last raja of Tibrikot (one day's journey down river from Tarangpur, toward Jumla), was born less than 200 years ago¹⁹ in Yelakot, which is now a flat, uninhabited piece of land overlooking the Bhēri River below the Tichurong village of Gomba. Vikram's mother was a Magar woman named Agra Wati, but because his father's first, presumably high-caste wife in Tibrikot was without a male heir, Vikram was called there to be raja. He and the other Kalyal rajās were eventually defeated in 1786 by Gorkha troops commanded by Kazi Shiva Narayan Khatri and Sardar Prabal Rana (Regmi 1961:111), who were fighting for the grandson of Prithvi Narayan. Vikram said that rather than see his kingdom surrendered he would commit suicide, which he did. Vikram Sah is remembered in Tichurong now as blessed with an auspicious fate, because although his mother was of low caste, he nevertheless became an important king. It is believed that the *Gheru* plant, which normally bears fruit and no flower, bloomed when Vikram Sah passed by. After his death, Bhakti Thapa was appointed *subbā* (roughly, "governor") of the region.

Vikram Sah and his fellow rajās were probably subsumed under one of the *bāisi* ("twenty-two") raja states, which "were formerly in a certain degree tributary to the Jumla Rajah; who annually

received from one, as a token of homage and subjection a pair of slippers, from another fish, etc. The princes at the head of them are, without exception, I understand, of the Rajpoot tribe" (Kirkpatrick 1811:283). None of the *baisi* raja states except Jumla that are listed by Kirkpatrick, Hamilton (1819), Vansittart (1915), or Oldfield (1880) lie within Tichurong—or even near it—as far as I can tell.

The kingdom of Gaganiraj (who had given his territory to Baliraj) had been bounded on the east by "Tarikkot" (Tucci 1956:123)—perhaps a misspelling, or a spelling of the pronunciation current at the time (1393), of what is today known as Tarakot. After inheriting or usurping Gaganiraj's territory, Baliraj or one of his successors probably eventually expanded the Jumla kingdom to include Tichurong. By this account, Vikram Sah and the other Kalyal rajās were merely one of "a new aristocracy [which] came into being by the donation of fiefs, etc." (Tucci 1956:130). In any event, it is difficult to reconstruct more than the flimsiest outlines of what happened in a place as small, obscure, and remote as Tichurong, either from Tucci, who is "not interested in establishing the lists of these local chiefs; they ruled over a few villages and had little historical importance" (1956:128) or from Regmi, who prefers to "avoid details and also the description of less important principalities" (1961:5).

The point of this historical résumé is that for several hundred years prior to the Gorkha conquest in 1788 of this part of Nepal, the villages of Tichurong had been under the influence of a series of rajās to the west whose predominantly Hindu outlook displaced the Buddhism that had formerly prevailed. By the end of the eighteenth century, these same villages came under the authority, however loose and indirect, of the predecessors of the dynasty that sits on the throne at Kathmandu today. The grandson of Prithvi Narayan Shah, Ran Bahadur Shah, ruled from 1777 until 1799 (Wright 1877:290–291). During his reign; and during the regencies of his mother, Rajendra Lakshmidēvi, and particularly of his uncle, Bahadur Shah, the *chaubisi* ("twenty-four") and *baisi* ("twenty-two") raja states were brought under the authority of Kathmandu (*ibid.*, 260–261, 282).

Paradoxically, the rule from Kathmandu of the Gorkha conquerors, who were strict and uncompromising Hindus (they ex-

pelled Capuchin monks from Kathmandu, for example) resulted in a cultural realignment of Tichurong back toward Buddhism. In a *Lāl Mohar*—(a document issued by the royal court of Nepal and recognized by its red (*lāl*) seal—dated A.D. 1790 (document 1); the King of Nepal advised the Jumla subba that the Mustang Raja's rule over Tsharka (in Bhot, up the Barbung/Bheri River from Tichurong) was to continue. In another royal decree (document 2) of the same year, the King of Nepal directed the Mustang Raja, whose family was of Tibetan ancestry with marriage ties to noble families of Lhasa, to relay any information about Tarakot to him. These two documents strongly suggest that toward the end of the eighteenth century, the recently established Gorkha kings in Kathmandu placed Tichurong under the general jurisdiction of the Mustang Raja. Thus in place of the Hindu Jumla rajas, the strongly Hindu Gorkha kings began to rule Tichurong. But they administered the area through the equally strongly Buddhist rajas of Mustang, who of course represented an entirely different cultural orientation as the effective ruling group.

Despite an administration mediated through Tibetan Buddhists, by the beginning of the nineteenth century the government of Nepal was already directly scouting its newly acquired domains for whatever valuable economic resources might be found, particularly minerals. A royal directive issued in 1805 (document 3) requested villagers in Tarakot (among other areas) to assist personnel from Kathmandu in locating hot springs and deposits of sulphur, palthar, lead, soda, iron, copper, and alum. In 1837 a land settlement was made in Tarakot, and in 1838 taxes began to be levied on salt, wool, cloth, goats, and woolen blankets (documents 4 and 5).

Royal edicts in the nineteenth century were quite explicit in their detail. Porter rates were set (two annas per day), as were interest charges on loans of food and money (25 and 10 percent, respectively). Fees were stipulated to *mukhiyās* (village headmen who collected taxes in their villages), to priests for performing various *pujās* (worship ceremonies), and for reading texts. District tax collectors were authorized to sack incompetent mukhiyas and to settle disputes over limited trade areas.

In remote country separated from external powers by such unaccommodating terrain, central authority must have been directly

invoked only in matters as important as those involving remuneration to tax collectors and in disputes over commercial and administrative jurisdiction between different areas (document 6). There is no way to determine whether explicit directives of the kind just outlined were adhered to faithfully, but they could have been enforced only by local administrators of unquestioned loyalty to the king in Kathmandu. By the late nineteenth century influence seems to have swung back again to Hindu officials in nearby Tibrikot (Montgomerie 1875).

At higher levels, royal influence was mediated through princes and appointees who retained their positions of power at the pleasure of the king in Kathmandu. There were several devices the king could use to strengthen the bonds of loyalty between him and his underlings. Kirkpatrick noted that "the allegiance of all the tributary chiefs is secured either by hostages retained at Kathmandu, or by allegiances of marriage contracted between them and the reigning family. Thus Ran Bahadur [grandson of Prithvi Narayan Shah] is married to a daughter of the Rajah of Palpa and Bootoul, or, as it is sometimes called, Bootwal" (1811:274).

Without more documentation of the period prior to the elimination of the local Kalyal rajas in 1786, it is difficult to determine how life in a place like Tichurong would have changed with the transfer of ultimate political authority from Jumla to Kathmandu or from Hindus to Buddhists. Taxes seem to have remained constant, but the tax base established after the Gorkha conquest was not heavy. Government tax records show that the population of Tarangpur increased from sixty-one houses in 1846 to seventy-four houses in 1908.²⁰ In 1846 the salaries of chiefs, lords, and headmen were abolished, and Thakuris and other aristocratic groups were warned against taxing people to finance their trips to Kathmandu (document 7). Nevertheless in 1864 tax concessions were made to houses belonging to Thakuri rajputs, and fees were prescribed for temple priests (the reference is unmistakably to Hindu priests; document 8). Thus there was clearly an official bias toward Hinduism; moreover, contemporary local sentiment is strongly of the opinion that intermediary tax collectors and other officials were extremely exploitative and unfair.

Pervasive suspicion of Jumla officials may have been part of the reason for moving the principal government center for Tichurong

from Jumla to Baglung, a small bazaar town just two days west of Pokhara, during a general administrative reorganization of the entire country in the 1960s. Prior to that, disputes were usually taken to Jumla for arbitration (and sometimes to other courts in central and west Nepal), and justice dispensed from Jumla was always suspect.

Beyond the haze of particularistic historical detail in these documents, cultural conclusions may be drawn. We know that from at least the thirteenth century on, Tichurong (if it was inhabited by then) was associated with kingdoms centered in or near Jumla. Not only political power but also the cultural character of the Jumla courts changed over the centuries. Initially the Malla kings seem to have been both Buddhist and Hindu, but by Prithvimalla's time in the fourteenth century Hinduism began to supersede Buddhism, and Regmi concludes that by the seventeenth century a metamorphosis had taken place and "Buddhism in any form disappeared for good" (1961:6). This Hinduization also occurred in attenuated form in Tibrikot District (Dāra) to which Tichurong belonged after the Gorkha victory in 1786.

But Tichurong was always at the cultural periphery, under the sway first of Buddhist, then of Hindu Jumla authorities, but with traditional ties also to the Tibetan Buddhist regions of upper Dolpo. In the late eighteenth and most of the nineteenth century, Kathmandu administered Tichurong through the Buddhist rajas of Mustang. Certainly itinerant and resident Buddhist lamas have been—and still are—a regular and powerful feature of village religious life since the nineteenth century, and probably earlier.

In addition to the documented high-level, official relationships, there have also been unofficial sources of power that administrative reports and royal edicts do not mention. Thus for a number of years before his death in 1963, Nyima Tshering, a wealthy and influential man of upper Dolpo, wielded vast personal power and settled disputes at least as far away as Tichurong, though he held no official political or ecclesiastical status or title (see Snellgrove 1961:82). Like all the permanent inhabitants of this part of Dolpo, Nyima Tshering was culturally entirely Tibetan, although a Nepalese citizen. Thus elimination of local Kalyal rajas after the Gorkha conquest and the subsequent dependence on more remote authority increased the scope for unofficial aggrandizement by

men with sufficient wealth or power. Such men then exercise regional leadership which, depending on the vagaries of local personalities, has been variously both Hindu and Buddhist. Historically, the Tarangpur Magars—neither a full-fledged Hindu caste nor unalloyed Tibetan Buddhists, but always at the mercy of outsiders who were one or the other—had to defer, serially or simultaneously, to both Hindu and Buddhist sources of power, prestige, and influence. Thus Tarangpur's aura of cultural marginality, which is so striking in the ethnographic present and which comprises the conceptual core of this book, is rooted in the historical setting.

Exactly how the people of Tarangpur reacted to and perceived these different cultural traditions and to what extent their own identities were forged between these two great traditions cannot be determined for the distant past reflected in Tucci's documents and government archives. But a study of Tarangpur's contemporary relations with the outside world reveals clues about the way in which Tarangpurians still accommodate themselves to these two powerful—and in so many respects opposed—cultural models.

HISTORY: MYTHICAL

The people of Tarangpur have quite clear notions of whence, how, and why (but not when) they came to Tichurong, but at the level of concrete detail, at least, local origin myths and what is historically known do not, by and large, overlap. The following story represents the Tarangpurians' own etiological perspective on their origin, arrival, and development in Tichurong.

During the time of the Kalyal rajas, political upheavals or fighting of some kind between warring groups forced a woman to flee from an unspecified village about two days' walk to the west, in the direction of Jumla. She successfully escaped from her village but two enemy soldiers were sent to pursue her, so when she reached Byas River, she begged the raja there to grant her protection in one of the two palaces standing there at the time. He was willing to help her by hiding her in one of the palaces and locking the door. Eventually the two pursuing soldiers arrived and asked