land, an escape into profound simplicity and eternal happiness, unencumbered by technological advances and onslaughs. So there was room for virtually every Western tourist to quench whatever craving she had.

The story has taken a new twist today. "Hippies" are long gone, but other Western tourists continue to come: over 136,000 in 1990. The tourist industry has matured. The city is a lot more glittery than one could ever imagine only a couple of decades ago. The past seems to be fading fast, and the future is fuzzy. Yet the city remains a paradox. For instance, glaringly juxtaposed against its countless ancient temples are its fancy hotels with modern amenities, including four casinos all managed by Richard Tuttle, an American casino king of Nepal. While the temples paint for Westerners a testimonial picture of Kathmandu's past artistic glory, modern hotels offer them great comfort with impeccable service that reaches far beyond any expectation of their nostalgic yearning for good service that is rare in most Western societies. Western tourists can satisfy almost any urge of their "imagining compulsion"—be it the pleasure of a medieval flight or the grandeur of utopian simplicity—right in the comfort of first-rate hotels.

KATHMANDU
A Paradigm of Pollution

Kathmandu is now experiencing a new paradox: the paradox of modernity. Deeply ingrained in this new paradox is the raging conflict between the bliss of modernity and the blight of modernization that is most acutely manifested in the form of pollution. Unfortunately, as the city's physical pollution intensifies, the bliss of modernity increasingly surrenders to the blight of modernization. No wonder Shangri-La is sinking fast into the mire of its own modern glory. For a city like Kathmandu that is excessively dependent on Western tourists, the deepening crisis of pollution is like an open Pandora's Box.

A local garbage collector claims the people of Kathmandu "produce too much garbage." Just ten years ago, he used to collect half a tractor load of garbage from Kathmandanap (a central part of Kathmandu) every morning. "These days," he said, "I have to make two, sometimes three, trips. It is becoming impossible to keep this place clean." A Nepali woman entrepreneur recently sent me an e-mail. "Pollution in Kathmandu," she sighed, "is taller than Mt. Everest. If a white shirt becomes brown in a couple of hours because of pollution, I wonder how many sediments of this brown thing one can find in people's lungs. It appears that Nepalis' life expectancy is going to be shortened by pollution."

Like many Asian cities, Kathmandu is a typical paradigm of urban pollution, a symbol of modernity gone awry, a fact that any visitor can verify. Tourists are now being advised to carry and wear a mask to avoid inhaling potentially dangerous air pollutants. The air is thick and dirty. Lost in the ongoing debate over its physical pollution, however, is its filthy past. Lack of sewage system facilities in the face of dense housing has historically defined its urban environment. What is different between the pollution of the past and the present condition is essentially a matter of its nature and degree.

PHYSICAL POLLUTION
Past and Present

It is difficult to gain a good understanding of Kathmandu's present pollution in isolation from its past. With the premise that the past informs the present, let me first offer a brief account of my own observation of the city's physical pollution in the mid-1960s. I take this approach, not because it is personal, but because it is common as well as convenient; it sets a historical context for its present environmental degradation so we can gain a temporal perspective. As a student from outside the valley visiting Kathmandu for the first time over thirty years ago, I was most struck by its rampant rubbish and air filled with pungent odor. Everywhere there was defecation and urination, even right outside people's homes. Few public spaces were immune from physical defilement, not even temple grounds where people went almost every morning to worship their favorite deities. I asked myself: how could the residents spoil the very temple ground that they regarded as most sacred? There was little physical separation between the temples and the toilets.

Splattered with human excrements and garbage, virtually every street looked like a dump yard or an outhouse. The whole city stunk like a rotten carcass, especially during the summer monsoon when the rains drenched the streets, magnifying the manifold problem. Yet the residents were nonchalant about such poor sanitation. To those from outside the valley, taking a trip to the city was invariably seen as a voyage to the world of civilization, far removed from mundane rural life. Kathmandu was Nepal. When asked where they were going, rural folks on their way to Kathmandu would routinely say: "To Nepal." Such was its glow and glory. In reality, however, its physical condition

For some, a journey to the city (Kathmandu) was like traveling back in time to medieval days, . . . for others, a fantasy land, an escape into profound simplicity and eternal happiness . . .