made it look like anything but the world of Civilization.

To be sure, people everywhere have affected their environments in one form or another. In fact, the ability to "tame" nature has long been interpreted as a key indicator of technological achievements and human progress. Within the framework of Cultural Geography, cities are the most glaring cultural artifacts of such achievements and progress: the taming of nature. In this sense, Kathmandu is no exception. But the focus here is not on nature-taming per se, i.e., the growth of Kathmandu as a city, as a distinct cultural landscape. Rather, it deals with how its residents over the years have treated what they have created out of the valley's nature, namely, the city itself and its physical environment. Particularly at issue is its growing pollution.

Kathmandu's dense population was partly responsible for its physical pollution. But at the core resided the residents' garbage practice. It is tenable that dense living conditioned their poor attitude toward waste disposal. Regardless of the causal roots, the fact was clear. People would throw garbage, including children's feces, out the window into the streets without any concern for pedestrians. Since my friends from my hometown Pokhara had learned how to negotiate the physical relationship between the street space and local residents' waste disposal practice (habit), they warned me not to walk in the middle of the streets in order to avoid being hit by the garbage tossed out the windows. They advised to walk close to the houses to minimize such risks. In addition, every so many houses shared a small courtyard-like space, filled with every foul object one could imagine. The house in which my friends lived also shared such a space that could be aptly characterized as a filth disposal yard. The stench from the yard was too strong to leave the window facing the yard open for any extended period of time.

**This is a quick glimpse into the past. But what about the present?**

Throwing the trash out the window seems to have subsided, along with street defecation. But Kathmandu's pollution problem has actually worsened. Few would dispute that the problem is partly attributed to the city's rapid population growth. Its geographical limitation has done little to impede its demographic growth. According to the 1961 census, Kathmandu had a total population of 121,000. Thirty years later, in 1991, the figure had jumped to 420,000. Currently, there are probably 500,000 people living in Kathmandu alone, or close to fifty percent of the valley's total population. The city was already dense, and is now getting denser by the day.

But, again, the population alone can't explain the gravity of its environmental degradation.

No less insidious is modernization, a term that is commonly used to describe Western habit formation among the indigenous people. With modernization—or Westernization as some might call it—has come the ever-penetrative culture of consumerism. So there is little mystery to the exponential growth of solid wastes and air pollution in the city. In the wake of growing affluence among what loosely can be called "the middle class," the culture of consumerism is running amuck. As the per capita income of this small segment of the population has increased many times over the past few years—largely due to the ongoing inflow of foreign aid—the level of consumption has risen dramatically. What we are witnessing is an explosion of consumption for the sake of consumption. What is more, consumption is often defined not only by how much people actually consume, but also by what, and in what form, they consume.13

Back in 1979, I stayed with a Kathmandu family for several weeks. The level of consumption in the family was modest, nothing excessive. Throughout the year they grew various vegetables in their small yard to supplement their food requirements. Meat consumption was limited in terms of both quantity and frequency, rarely more than two times a week. And the meat came straight from a local butcher so it was always fresh. The family had access to a motorcycle that came with the husband's government job.

Since then, I have stayed with the same family several times during my field research in the country, in 1983, 1984, 1988, and two times in 1994. By 1988 and 1994, a dramatic change had occurred in the family. The husband had resigned from his government post in the early 1980s to launch his own development consulting firm. The amount of food intake was much higher than before. So was material acquisition. Not only had meat consumption become almost a daily affair, but the amount per serving had also increased. Moreover, the form of consumption had changed. The meat now came from some shopkeeper's cooler, frozen and wrapped in plastic bags with heavy toxic smell.