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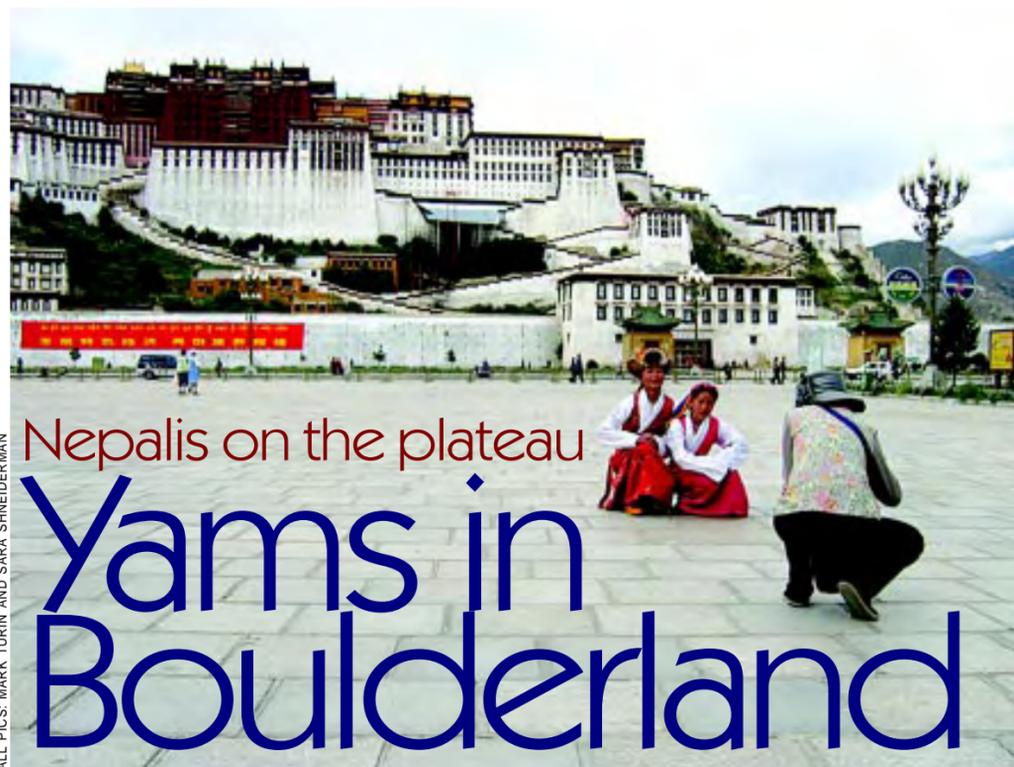
The KM-2030 is the all-in-one workgroup solution for all copy, print, scan and fax needs. As a standard digital copier it offers 20 pages per minute output at 600 x 600 dpi, 'scan-once-copy many' and rotate sort features reducing the need of an additional sorter. Fully configured it offers 20 prints per minute standalone or network printing, Super G3 faxing and convenient scanning. An internal finisher can be installed to produce stapled document sets, keeping the compact design intact. Unlimited duplex copying/printing/faxing are all possible with the automatic stackless duplex unit. All this at a low total cost of ownership thanks to Kyocera Mita's long-life components.

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ALL PICS: MARK TURIN AND SARA SHNEIDERMAN

Anthropologists Mark Turin and Sara Shneiderman explore Nepalis in Tibet.



LHASA – Over the past few months, the Nepali press has devoted a fair amount of column space to the situation of Tibetans in Nepal: are they guests in a host country, refugees fleeing an occupied Tibet or equal citizens in a nation in which they feel at home?

On a recent trip to the Tibetan Autonomous Region of China, we investigated the position of Nepalis there to learn about the relationship between the two countries from another perspective. Nepal likes to think of itself as the proverbial yam sandwiched between two boulders, and Nepalis are sometimes sensitive to the presence of Indians and Tibetans in their country. On our travels, though, we were reminded that Nepalis have also long been residents in Tibet, playing a central historical role both in urban Lhasa and at the border trading posts.

Stereotypes and clichés endure because outsiders idealise countries that they have never visited in a way that natives rarely do. Nowhere is this more the case than among urban Nepalis discussing Tibet: "Lucky you," we were told, "travelling in the Land of the Snows, roaming around the Roof of the World." It seemed that for many of our Kathmandu friends, images of Tibet had fossilised around screen representations like *Caravan* (ironically filmed in Nepal) and *Seven Years in Tibet*. Newar colleagues regaled us with their grandfathers' stories of lucrative trade and Buddhist culture, not to mention a few Tibetan wives. Funnily enough, our village friends from Dolakha and Sindhupalchok held more gritty stereotypes of modern Tibet, focussed around Chinese prostitutes and cheap electronic goods. The latter images are no doubt derived from their regular travel to and from Khasa to work as porters and carpenters in the town, and to bring cheap Chinese commodities down to Barabise for customs-free sale. With these competing notions in mind, we flew to Gonggar airport, a few hours outside Lhasa, on a ridiculously expensive one-way flight.

Contemporary Lhasa is a high-altitude, city-sized Bhat Bhateni supermarket complex with Chinese signboards. Aside from a few token old buildings, the city is largely

unrecognisable from old photos and traditional depictions. The Potala Palace, which looms in the centre of the town, is impressive and isolated, and Chinese tourists flock to the large open square in front to have their pictures taken while wearing woolly Tibetan clothes. When facing the Jokhang, the temple housing the most sacred national icon, we were momentarily taken in by the ancient veneer of faith and piety that surrounds it. On turning around, however, we were confronted with the brightly-lit Yuthok Lam shopping street, replete with flashing neon plastic palm trees, which locals understandably refer to as 'Las Vegas'.

The historical dominance of trade by Newar merchants in Lhasa has been eroded by the wholesale influx of Chinese business, and relatively few Nepalis remain resident in Lhasa. According to the records held at the Royal Nepalese Consulate General in Lhasa, there are 338 official Nepali residents of the Tibetan Autonomous Region who are entitled to Chinese state services such as education and health.

The Royal Nepali Consul General, Shankar Prasad Pandey (see *pic, top*), is an affable man who offered us a warm welcome. His four-year term in Lhasa is almost up, after which he returns to the Ministry of Finance, whence he came. Like Shanghai, the Lhasa mission is not under the jurisdiction of the Nepali Embassy in Beijing, but is run directly by HMG in Nepal and maintains a certain degree of independence. The Lhasa Consulate is steeped in history: initially a military regiment office, it is the oldest Nepali mission abroad. The consuls continue to be a distinguished lot—including

the lost or late Professor Dr Dor Bahadur Bista (served 1972-1975)—and their photos are displayed in the dusty consulate library.

We noticed that several of the past consuls were of *janajati* origin, as evinced by the following surnames: Yakhumba (1961-1964), Ukyab (1975-1977 and 1982-1988), Sherpa (1995-1996) and Lama (1996-1998). As might be expected, there were also several Newar consuls. This all goes to show that HMG clearly realises the value of familiarity with Tibetan language and culture when deployed in its own best diplomatic interest.

Pandey himself, while not from a trading family, has clearly enjoyed his deputation to Lhasa and is impressed enough by the Chinese system to send his son to medical college in Beijing. He and his family live in the 25-year-old consulate compound, directly behind the Dalai Lama's summer palace, the Norbu Lingka. Pandey's lasting contribution to the Nepali community in Lhasa is a large bust of the Great Poet Laxmi Prasad Devkota that sits prominently in the main courtyard of the compound. While local Nepali residents contributed funds for the statue, the Consul oversaw its construction and presided at its unveiling in June 2001 (see *picture, right*). We



learned that the Nepali *samajin* Tibet also sponsored the construction of an Amiko statue in Beijing. Notably, these statues are not of political figures, and the Nepali citizens of Lhasa seem relieved to have a place to call home beyond the reach of the fickle Nepali political scene.

The Chinese, too, have built an eclectic Nepali-style Hindu-Buddhist temple named Tuladhar Bhawani within the consular grounds. The temple is the focal point of the Lhasa Dasai celebrations, at which buffaloes are replaced by sacrificial *torma* (grain effigies) out of deference and respect to local Tibetan Buddhist sensibilities.

The ethnically Nepali community of Lhasa comprises two prominent groups: the established trading families who hold residence permits, and the hotel or restaurant workers who come on short-term work visas. The latter number under 100, at least according to consular statistics, and are sought after by Lhasa hoteliers for their experience of cooking non-Asian food. Almost every major tourist hotel has a few Nepalis behind the scenes preparing cakes, lasagnes and veggie burgers. Some of Lhasa's most popular hotels are even owned by mixed Nepali-Tibetan families, known locally as *kazara*, meaning 'mixed race' in Tibetan. It is apparently derived from the Nepali (and Hindi) *khacchar* for 'mule'. Some of these families have been living in Tibet for more than 300 years, and now speak Chinese alongside Tibetan, Newari and heavily-accented Nepali. While many children attend local Chinese schools, Nepali families may also opt to send their kids to the Gorkha Primary School of Lhasa, established 65 years ago, which has two Nepali teachers and is miraculously paid for by HMG in Kathmandu.

We left Lhasa by road, travelling through Shigatse, Lhatse and Nyalam (known also as Tshongdu or Kuti) and arriving in Khasa (also called Zhangmu and Dram) after three bumpy days. It became increasingly clear, as we drove through the countryside, that Lhasa is no more representative of greater Tibet than Kathmandu is of Nepal. Although



cheap Chinese goods have made inroads into farming communities, the standard of living still seems surprisingly low. Rural Tibetan begging strategies make Nepali street kids appear positively angelic, while the begging Buddhist monks chanting 'Om mani mani money...' are a recurring feature of the landscape.

A dramatic change in weather occurs just above Khasa: the dry plateau ends and the monsoon clouds descend. The town of Khasa is home to a colourful mix of Chinese, Tibetans and Nepalis of various ethnic extractions, all trying to make a buck at the border. A treaty between China and Nepal allows residents living within 30km of the border on each side to cross without a passport or visa. The result is that Khasa has hundreds of Nepali migrant workers while Barabise sees the occasional disappointed Chinese tourist, although we heard that the situation was precisely the opposite 30 years ago. According to a popular local saying, while Khasa is 'China's Rolpa' in terms of

remoteness, this border town has been outfitted with a communications and transportation infrastructure that would be the envy of Kathmandu.

The irony was not lost on us as we crossed back into Nepal and soon met an armed local Maoist leader. Khasa may be China's Rolpa, but in our two weeks of travel in Tibet we heard no reference to Mao or his legacy. When we asked the Nepali Maoist in-charge about his ideological links with Chinese Maoism, he sighed and looked disheartened. "China lost a great opportunity," he said, "I mean, just look at it, capitalism everywhere. We won't fall into that trap." ♦

Mark Turin is Director of the Digital Himalaya Project at the University of Cambridge and is completing a grammar and dictionary of the Thangmi language spoken in eastern Nepal.

Sara Shneiderman is a PhD student at Cornell University and is conducting anthropological research on the Nepal-Tibet border.

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