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SOME BACKGROUND NOTES ON GURUNG IDENTITY IN A PERIOD OF RAPID CHANGE

Alan Macfarlane
King's College, Cambridge

The Gurungs are the predominant group living in the Annapurna region of central Nepal, but they are surrounded and to a certain extent interpenetrated by other groups.[1] Some of these are also Tibeto-Burman peoples and are scarcely distinguishable from the Gurungs in language and culture. The Tamangs, Thakalis and the inhabitants of Lower Manang and Mustang are all obviously from the same roots as the Gurungs and indeed many of them claim to be Gurungs, have the same priests and similar rituals, and speak mutually intelligible languages. The relations between the groups are very close and intermarriages quite frequently occur. The Magars, living to the south and west are culturally like the Gurungs, so are the Bhoteas and Tibetans to the north. The labels attached to people are to a certain extent random and recent. This is both a problem and an opportunity in the process of ethnic identity.

It is clear from their language and from the physical characteristics that the Gurungs originally came from further north. Almost certainly, many thousands of years ago, their ancestors lived in the high mountains of western China. The course of the long

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[1]These notes are based on fifteen months fieldwork in 1968-1970 in the village of Thak, near Pokhara. The enormous changes that are occurring behind a surface of continuity has become obvious in recent visits in 1986, 1987 and 1988. I was given great help in my observations by Sarah Harrison and numerous Gurung friends, in particular Badrasing, Bhuwansing and Indrabahadur Gurung, to whom many thanks. This short account is based upon *A Guide to the Gurungs* by Alan Macfarlane and Indrabahadur Gurung, to be published later in 1989 by Ratna Pustak Bhandar in Kathmandu.

migration over forested mountain ridges is only remembered in myths and legends. Some suggest that the main route was down to Burma and then westward through Assam and eastern Nepal to their present settlements, where they have been for over seven hundred years. Other legends tell how the Gurungs were wandering shepherds who came down through the high pasture of Tibet, through the kingdom of Mustang to settle the southern slopes of the Annapurna range. These two versions are supported by those who wish to maintain the Tibeto-Burman roots of the Gurungs. Those who wish to stress the superiority of the 'four Jat', or to claim a higher general Hindu status for the Gurungs, suggest a dual origin. In this, the 'four jat' are said to come from the south, from northern India, and the 'sixteen jat' met them as they respectively came down from the north. It is believed that whichever way the Gurungs migrated down to Nepal, they came to a single village where their traditions and culture were confirmed. They then dispersed to their present settlements. Thus myth shades into history, and both become absorbed into present debates about identity.

Gurung economy, society and religion has constantly been changing. But there are grounds for believing that current changes are more rapid and far-reaching than anything that occurred up to the Second World War. We may briefly look at a few of the agents and dimensions of these recent changes to note the multi-layered impact of the pressures upon the Gurungs.

One very significant pressure comes through education. Every village has within the last thirty years been given access to a school and education is compulsory to fifth grade. Most children go to school for some period. Although there is as yet little equipment -- paper, pens, maps and books -- children are introduced to other languages (Nepali and English), mathematics and science. Education gives them a vision of a world outside the village and the possibility, indeed encouragement, to leave the village. Parents usually place an extremely high value on education. They make great sacrifices to educate their children. As village schools do not go to tenth grade, so children either have to walk very long distances to regional High Schools, or board where they are placed. A growing number of parents have taken the drastic step of selling their land and moving to the towns to enable their children to attend school and university.

The life of children alters dramatically when they leave for schools in towns. Even if their parents stay in the village, the child's roots wither fast. The bazaars, tea-shops, video cinemas, cars and buses enlarge their world, and although they may return quite frequently to the village, they rarely take any part in the work of the farm. The town schoolboy is usually easy to distinguish from the village boy by his smart clothes and shoes. He is being trained to join an urban bureaucratic way of life that as yet can only provide a modest number of jobs for the flood of qualified young people.

Thus, as in many parts of the world, education has an enormous effect, altering family dynamics, sucking people into the towns, alienating them from their place of birth, changing their language.

Alongside education, there is the radio and cassette recorder. One of the most characteristic forms of Gurung entertainment in the past was singing and dancing. Traditionally the songs were in the Gurung language. Curiously, the usual theme of these songs in this arranged-marriage society was love. For instance, there were flirtation songs where boys and girls would sing in turn, each trying to outdo each other in teasing innuendo, called "doves playing" songs. Within the last twenty years such Gurung songs have almost totally disappeared in many Gurung villages. The young tend to sing Nepali "pop" songs which they have heard on the radio, sometimes buying the lyrics as small books. These are the songs which accompany the popular "theatre dances" still performed in many villages.

The most elaborate dance is the "garda sheba", which is often thought of by Gurungs as one of their quintessential and distinguishing customs. It is described as a traditional Gurung dance, though it originally came from the south. It tells the story of a Thakuri king's wife who committed 'sati' after her husband's death. It is danced after the harvest is over, between January and March. A dance master instructs two young girls who are usually aged between nine and sixteen. On the first evening the girls go into a trance and are possessed by a goddess. They stand, swaying slowly from side to side, flicking their fingers, sinking onto their haunches and up again, turning one way and then the other. The dance is accompanied by a drum and a slow, low chanting by the men in the Gurung language. The girls wear beautiful costumes with necklaces and bracelets of gold, garlands of flowers, and gold filligree head-dresses. The dance may go on uninterrupted for up to twelve hours and the whole event lasts for three days. The "garda sheba" may be danced a dozen or more times a year.

All this is changing fast. The "garda sheba" is dying out in many villages. The old men no longer remember the words, a dance master and the girls to do the dance cannot be found. Also disappearing rapidly is the "rodi", where the young people gather to sing and dance. Like other young people's dormitories in Nepal and India, the purpose of the "rodi" was to segregate groups of young boys or girls of roughly the same age, usually between fourteen and seventeen, who formed an age set of close friends. This "rodi" group worked together in the fields during the day and in the evening friends of the opposite sex would be invited to the "rodi" house to sing and dance with them. The Gurung "rodi" traditionally met in the house of one of the parents of one of its members, or in the house of another adult who was prepared to become the "mother" or "father" of the "rodi". The adult would oversee the conduct of the young people, would be present during the evening

when guests were invited, and would sleep with them at night. A "rodi" might be male or female. Basically, they acted rather like boarding schools, taking children away during adolescence and allowing them to grow up under the influence and discipline of slightly older and more experienced young people.

This useful and innocent institution is dying out quite rapidly in the villages most penetrated by Hindu values and town pressures. For a while they were subjected to criticism as being somehow immoral and the Gurungs became defensive about them. This phase seems to be over, but a larger threat lies in the fact that communal work and communal values are declining as many young people leave for the towns or for work in India, and village work is increasingly done by wage-labourers. The organisational role of the "rodi" is thus eroded.

In fact, the very division between "labour" and "leisure", "work" and "play", which is now strongly felt is probably novel and the result of western pressures. In the past, the boundaries between these were fluid; singing and flirting enlivened field work, and in the evenings the young might combine singing and dancing with podding beans or teasing and carding wool. This helps to explain why very hard work is still undertaken with such cheerfulness.

Another major area of change in the last twenty years has been in the areas of health and diet. Most of the serious epidemic diseases have now been reduced or eradicated through vaccination campaigns; the elimination of polio, diptheria, smallpox, tuberculosis and, most recently, measles, have been the objects of these campaigns. Infant mortality rates have been reduced by over a third in the last twenty-five years and are now at the reasonably low level of about 80 per thousand livebirths.[2] Piped water, oral rehydration techniques, and vaccination campaigns have all contributed to this.

Primary health care is being extended into the villages. Twenty years ago there was hardly any health provision outside the towns. Now there are health posts in every district, although they are still desperately short of medicine and equipment. Since much of Gurung ritual and religion revolved around the curing of disease, this penetration of western medicine is clearly having a very marked effect on the role of the local priests.

While the Gurungs are generally healthier than they were, it is probable that their diet is changing quite rapidly, and for the worse, at least in the villages. When they were

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[2]Chandra Prasad Gurung, 'Infant Mortality in Nepal: A Logit Analysis of Kaski District in Western Nepal' (Univ. of Hawaii Ph.D. thesis, 1988), p. 209.

mainly shepherds and herders they had a high protein and calcium diet of milk and meat, with additional meat from hunting. The ample carbohydrates were provided by buckwheat, maize and rye, which they grew in cleared forest land. As they have moved down from the higher pastures, they have concentrated on rice, millet and maize growing and reduced their animal husbandry. Thus carbohydrates have tended to dominate while their protein intake has declined rapidly. When I worked in the village of Thak in 1969 an average Gurung family ate meat two or three times a week. In 1987, except at major festivals, village families eat meat only two or three times a month. The decline in meat eating has been partially compensated for by the more extensive use of vegetables.

These recent rapid changes are acting on a group who have always been changing and adapting. To a casual visitor the villages give an unchanging appearance, as if they had existed in their present form for centuries. In fact, there has been very rapid alteration in the mountains. Accounts of the Gurungs written in the nineteenth century describe an economy that depended mainly on pasturing sheep, on long-distance trade over the Himalayas in which they acted as middle men in the exchange of salt from Tibet for rice from lowland Nepal, and on growing certain high altitude crops such as buckwheat. They were also keen huntsmen, did some mining and went abroad to serve as soldiers in foreign armies. At that time they lived in small settlements in the high forest, at between 7000 and 12000 feet, burning clearings for their crops and taking their great flocks of sheep onto the high pastures in the summer when the snow had melted.

During the following hundred and fifty years the Gurung population grew steadily from about 30,000 to its present total of roughly 200,000, and new villages were built on lower slopes where rice could be grown in flooded fields. They were now further from the pastures and the flocks dwindled. From the early nineteenth century the British began to recruit them into the Gurkha regiments. During the First World War approximately 7,000 Gurungs were recruited from West Nepal into regular battalions. Even in peace time many thousands of Gurungs were serving abroad, and after 1947 they were recruited into both Indian and British regiments. Army pay and pensions now formed an income as important as that from agriculture. Retired soldiers built large stone and slate houses in the hills and their relative affluence pushed up the price of land.

At one stage in their history, the Gurungs seem to have been ruled by petty princes. For instance there was a prince who ruled part of the Lamjung region from a fortress at over ten thousand feet, the ruins of which still lie in the forest. After the unification of Nepal in the middle of the eighteenth century, these rulers lost much of their power. Instead, Gurung villages were more or less self-ruling communities, policing themselves under the guidance of hereditary chiefly families and meetings of the elders. They paid few taxes to the government, and in return the government did almost nothing for them and interfered little.

This tradition of very light government was retained with the introduction of a system based on the Indian panchayats in the 1950's. Now the ruling families have been replaced by an elected council for a specific area or 'Panchayat'. Higher level regional and national councils also have elected members, through the provincial and up to the national 'Panchayat'. Conflicts are referred up these levels, depending on their seriousness, but a very large proportion of everyday business is settled at the village meeting.

Although the rapid inflow of foreign aid has made the State far more important for villagers than it used to be, it is still true that government is light. There are no permanent representatives of central government, the police or other officials, in most Gurung villages, and taxes are minimal. Bureaucracy is growing as new forms for registering births, deaths and marriages, land purchases and so on are introduced, and Gurungs resent the condescending and unhelpful manner of some of the desk-bound bureaucrats in the towns. In general, Gurung villages are a model of a how a people left to themselves can order their own affairs peacefully without much government interference.

A feature of Gurung society is the low incidence of crime. It might be expected that in remote mountain terrain, far from the reach of central authorities, and with no indigenous police force, the law of reciprocal threat would have existed. But in fact there is no evidence of this. The Gurungs do not normally carry weapons of any kind. Their famous kukri is only seen on infrequent occasions when they have to kill an animal. A few have a hunting gun, but otherwise this famous martial race lives unarmed.

Crimes of violence are practically unknown. For instance, during a twenty year period in one area not far from Pokhara with a population of about five thousand persons, there had only been one domestic murder and one serious theft. Serious assaults are practically unknown, and villages can go for many years without a single criminal case being prosecuted or any individual being fined or imprisoned. Children, of course, occasionally steal small things, but in general the people are honest. One can be fairly sure that if one leaves something lying about it will be carefully returned.

This is not the result of fear and repression. The Nepalese police force is tiny and mainly situated in towns. Whole villages never see a policeman from one year to the next. Though it is widely believed that a suspect in custody may be physically beaten by the police and consequently people prefer to settle conflicts without involving them, in general it is not fear of the State that keeps the Gurungs so orderly. It seems rather to arise out of the fact that people respect each other and wish to do as they would be done by. Crimes would bring loss of merit in the after-life and make one a social outcaste. In such a communal society, an individual who was shunned by his or her companions would find it very difficult to live in the village.

One central feature of Gurung life has for over a century been the migration out of Nepal to serve in the famous Gurkha regiments of Britain and, later, India. Here the patterns of movement and the effects of army service have also changed very considerably over time.

At the peak period of army recruitment, in many Gurung villages the majority of men undertook military service. This exposed them to outside influences and gave them access to cash which would otherwise not have been available. For instance, it was estimated that in the village of Thak in 1970, about one third of the total village income came from foreign army service. These remittances, from serving soldiers and the pensions of those who had retired from the army, raised them above the level of subsistence farmers and helped to make them one of the most prosperous groups in Nepal.

The effects of military service on the social and cultural life have been surprisingly mild. Soldiers introduced certain goods -- radios, sewing machines, pressure lamps, tartans and velvets. But they did not return and try to transform the culture and society, or if a few did try they found their ideas ignored. Although they conformed with little difficulty to life in Hong Kong or England, mastering trains and buses, telephones and shops, yet within a few days of returning to the village they seemed to put aside most of the notions from other parts and were re-absorbed into a world of hard physical work, magical ritual and communal rather than individual goals. They did not fret at the long delays and apparent inefficiencies of village life, but took their place alongside those who had not left the village as respected elders who upheld the Gurung traditions.

There has recently been a change in the nature and volume of this inflow of cash to the villages. Whereas previously the foreign army pay and pensions were used to buy land and build houses in the village, both of which acted as a way of redistributing wealth and pushing up the value of agricultural land, this is now decreasing. Retired soldiers, especially those with the larger pay and pensions from the British Army, are finding it more profitable to invest in land and houses in the towns where they can also educate their children and enjoy the relative luxuries and ease afforded by "civilization". If we add to this the continued scaling down of British recruitment to the Gurkhas, 1948 -- 37,000, 1965 -- 15,000 and 1980 -- 7,000 men, it is clear that the Gurungs in the villages can no longer rely on the steady inflow of money as in the past. To a large extent this is being replaced by work in the Indian army, which now employs at least 40,000 Gurkhas, and even more importantly by civilian work in India and Arabia.

In the last twenty years the pace of change has gathered momentum. There is evidence of growing poverty in the hills, both absolute and relative, and a growing dependence on the outside world. The diet has deteriorated, the paths are not as well kept,

fields are being left to revert to scrub, gold ornaments have been sold off, clothes are less adequate. It is difficult to quantify this, but one indication is that total grain production in Thak has dropped by a half in the years between 1969 and 1987, while the population has remained constant. This is mainly caused by less intensive and satisfactory use of the land. Land has gone out of cultivation, some has been eroded and swept away by landslides, but most importantly far fewer animals are kept and as a result there is too little manure to keep the fields in good heart. From being more or less self-sufficient in grains, this, and many other villages, are now buying grain from the nearby markets.

The total population in the Gurung villages has increased, but not so much as one might have expected because of very considerable out-migration. In Thak, the balance has shifted so that blacksmiths and tailors constitute a very important part of the work-force, working the lands of the absent Gurungs. Share cropping has increased hugely in the last twenty years.

This share-cropping for absentee or elderly owners reflects the very large increase in out-migration. This is one of the most dramatic changes in Gurung villages, from temporary absences, soldiering in foreign armies, to permanent out-migration to the towns. Ironically, the towns, such as Pokhara, are becoming more mongoloid as the hill peoples settle in them, while the hills are becoming more indo-aryan as Brahmins, Chetris and the service castes raise their large families and take in the marginal lands. Only at the time of the memorial service for the dead does one tend to see a Gurung village looking as it used to look, with the richly dressed town dwellers coming to visit their country cousins. The "village" has to be conceived of now as essentially dispersed. All this is less true of the remoter villages, but even there the pull of the towns is felt.

A major mechanism of this dislocation, as we have seen, is education, which attracts the wealthier to the towns and quickly turns their children into citizens who would find it unsatisfying and physically exhausting to return to the villages. Scarcely any of those from Thak who went off to Pokhara to school in the 1970's have returned to the village, nor have they tended to become soldiers. Mostly they have gone to factories and offices in India or Arabia where they can make some use of their skills.

As to the cause of the decline in the villages which has turned a number of them from rice-surplus to rice-deficit economies, there are various theories. One is that ecological degradation, the monsoon rains leaching and scouring the overworked, steep mountain sides has inevitably reduced the productivity of the soil. There is clearly something in this, but even more important would seem to be an economic explanation. The opening up of the flat land in the Terai, along the southern border of Nepal, combined with improved roads up to the market towns, such as Pokhara which lie on the south of the

Gurung area, has had a very strong effect. It is now more efficient, cheap and easy to grow crops in the Terai than it is in the hills. A "rational" village boy can see that his labour is far more productive working for wages in the town, in India or Arabia, or even more so in a foreign army, than on a farm in the hills. With money he can buy food and other necessities. He can earn from three to fifty times as much a day as he would in the village, and the work will be less exhausting. Indeed, if these young men did not go off, the villages would be more impoverished because the farms would have to be sub-divided between all the sons and there would be no cash income from outside the village. Without this, it would be impossible for villagers to begin to pay for the necessary goods from the towns. In Thak, in 1987, the average annual expenditure per family on food and other goods from Pokhara was five thousand rupees, much of the cash coming from sons working abroad.

Thus the villagers are reacting with economic good sense to the market forces from outside which are coming to bear on them, the Gurungs are as ever learning how to adapt and change, as they did in their previous transformations from shepherds to settled cultivators, and from farmers to soldiers. Now, using the villages as a base, they "hunt and gather" all over the world, but their new territory is not the high pastures and thick forests of the nineteenth century, but the streets of Hong Kong, Bombay or Pokhara. Their survival, of course, is not merely an economic matter, but also, more deeply, a cultural one, maintaining a feeling of identity, a shared set of customs and language, which marks them out in an increasingly competitive and crowded world.

Just as they have adapted to the world market and to world religions, they have adapted to becoming part of a wider language group. Whereas most villagers spoke Gurung most of the time twenty years ago, now every child learns Nepali and the songs and everyday speech reflect a strong move towards the new language. Gurung children brought up in the towns can often not speak Gurung any more.

Flexibility and adaptability are important devices, but it may be wondered how far one can bend before one is no longer what one was before. What does it mean to be a "Gurung", if one no longer practices Gurung agriculture, uses the language, or employs the Gurung priests? This is a current concern among the Gurungs themselves and there is much discussion, in particular about the core Gurung institution, the "pae lava", the memorial service for the dead. If this is totally modified, many feel that nothing will be left and the "Gurungs" will have ceased to have an independent existence; their dances, their songs, their young people's dormitories, their language, their priests and their funeral ritual will have withered and they will merge into an amorphous mass of part hill-folk, part townsmen.

The controversy over the "pae" is part of the central struggle to maintain "Gurunghood" within Nepal which is mainly being fought out on the ritual plain. Alongside language, the most important defining characteristic of the Gurungs are the, myths and rituals surrounding their "poju" and "klebri" priests.[3] These are of ancient origin and distinguish the Gurungs from other groups. During the past thirty or forty years however, they have come under increasing pressure from two major world religions. Hinduization has long been present in the army, where the Gurungs were officially classified as "Hindus" and given Brahmin priests. But it has now also penetrated more deeply into the villages. The number of Brahmin rites had increased enormously in Thak between 1970 and 1989. Secondly, the influence of formal Buddhism, and particularly lamas, has increased dramatically. An example of this increase is the decision by certain groups in many villages no longer to use the "poju" and "klebri' and their blood sacrifices in the "pae lava", but rather to have the shorter, cheaper and bloodless lama rite.

Yet the story is not as simple as that. There is still an enormous demand for poju and klebri, not only in the hills, but in Kathmandu, Pokhara and in the Terai. Just as the Gurungs can be pluralistic in their economy and society, so they seem to be quite able to mix languages and religions as the context demands, without any particular sense of strain or contradiction. That amazing flexibility which was one of their major attractions as recruits in foreign armies, also applies to their ritual and religious system.

Nevertheless there is still a cost in the process of "nation building", of unification of language and culture. How can one become part of a larger whole without losing one's own group identity? Just as each European country faces this problem in relation to a unified Common Market and unified cultural and political system, so the Gurungs, and presumably all the other groups in Nepal, feel it in relation to "Nepal".

There is certainly a danger of cultural extinction. Yet the signs are of an increasing interest in the past and in what it means to be a Gurung, of how best to maintain an ethnic identity while adapting and becoming a citizen and a member of larger political, religious and linguistic groupings.

Much of this description has been based on life in relatively small villages of a few hundred people. These are the communities in which the majority of Gwrungs still live,

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[3]There is not space here to give any account of the enormously complex and elaborate Gurung myths and rituals, partly described in Bernard Pignède, *Les Gurungs: une population Himalayenne du Nepal* (Paris, 1966) and S. S. Strickland, 'Beliefs, Practices and Legends: A Study in the Narrative Poetry of the Gurungs of Nepal' (Cambridge Univ, Ph.D. thesis, 1982).

but there are a growing number of Gurungs, perhaps a third or so of the total, who do not live in villages in Nepal. Though they maintain many Gurung customs, they do not live by agriculture and they lead lives which are fundamentally different from their relatives in the hills.

There are firstly over seven thousand Gurung soldiers in the British, Indian and other armies, who are posted in many parts of the world. Subject to a strict and hierarchical discipline, they are separated for long periods from their wives and children. Though they often enjoy the comradeship and certainty of army life in a closed institution, and appreciate the possibility of eating and dressing well, of saving money and contributing to a good pension, they are also often lonely and bored in foreign camps. Whether in Dehra Dun, on the Assam frontier, in the Falklands or in Berkshire, they perform with great efficiency and a good spirit, but in a world of timed routines and mechanical western values which is very far from the fluid rhythms of their village upbringing.

A second even larger group are the Gurungs who are working abroad as civilians, particularly in India. There have always been such people, but as population pressure mounts in the hills and opportunities for foreign army recruitment declines, the numbers have increased rapidly. The majority are in Bombay, with others in Calcutta, Delhi and Arabia. Young men in their early twenties will go and live in tiny flats with their friends. For instance, there are more than forty boys from the village of Thak in Bombay, working in factories, and as drivers and watchmen. Many of them later take their wives and children, so any chance of saving or sending money back to the village will be minimal. The contrast between the dirt, noise and crowding of such a city existence and the life in the hills is very sharp.

The third group are those who have retired, mainly from foreign army service, but have not gone back to the village. This is again a recent phenomenon. If we take the village of Thak, in 1970 only two or three families had retired to towns in India or Nepal. By 1987, in Pokhara alone there were forty-six households from Thak, most having retired on pensions. These ex-army men had amassed considerable wealth by Nepalese standards, and in their middle thirties are starting a second life. But though they have experience of living abroad as well as capital, many find it difficult to know what to do other than to buy land and build a smart house. Of thirty Thak men who had retired from foreign armies, permanently living in Pokhara, one third were doing nothing in particular, other than living off pensions and invested capital. The rest were engaged in various jobs; farming, army welfare work, and as drivers. What was noticeable by its omission was much involvement in local government and bureaucracy, or in local trade and industry such as shopkeepers, entrepreneurs or small businessmen. Some Gurungs

feel that the bureaucracy is an alien world controlled by Brahmins and Chetris in which they have little chance. Nor do they tend to use their savings to set up businesses, except for a few concerns such as the Ex-Servicemen's Bus Company. On the whole they lack the experience and the institutional framework to employ their energies and capital productively in the towns, yet they are reluctant to distribute or invest it in the villages.

As we have seen, much of their wealth goes on education. It is the aim of every father to educate his children, and particularly sons, up to tenth grade and if possible beyond. Otherwise, the life for many, particularly women, is one of a new found leisure, where water, firewood and food are now bought with cash and instantly available, very expensive but no longer requiring much physical effort. Women's tasks, in particular, are very much lighter. Yet it would seem that for many who are used to the insistent rhythms which give meaning to life in the village and army, the semi-retired existence in Pokhara can be boring and empty. People complain of the anonymous, individualistic existence where the warmth and community feeling has gone, where the dangers of drugs, crime and sex threaten the young, and where the Gurungs feel second-class citizens, the prey to unscrupulous people after their savings. Yet prices are going up so fast, and the future hopes of their children so pressing, that they feel they cannot afford not to live there. Their children also find it more stimulating than village life.

It is interesting to find that not all of them are totally committed to town life. A number of Gurungs who have settled in Pokhara have kept land in their village. Some of them talk about going back there to live once their children have finished their education and can support themselves. If roads are constructed into the hills, some think that the villages near to Pokhara may become viable again. In that case they would be happy to return to their village farms.

The skill of the Gurungs lies in blending these lives. Through their constant movements, reunions and partings and through the strength of the family, they hold together the worlds of Hong Kong, Bombay, Pokhara and the village. They adapt well and never entirely surrender to the pressures of any single environment, carrying their good humour, tolerance, practical skills and religious beliefs with them wherever they go.