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DEVELOPING THE SACRED: Local & Global Bikas in the Nepali Bhotkhola

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DEVELOPING THE SACRED:
Local & Global *Bikas* in the Nepali Bhotkhola

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to study the effects of *bikas* on community and culture. Research was conducted from 9-30 November 2010 in the Bhotia village Chyamtang in the Sankhuwasabha district of Northeastern Nepal. The forms of development observed at the site are separated into local *bikas* and global *bikas*, each with their own strengths and weaknesses. Research focused on a two-year old development project initiated by The Mountain Institute (TMI) using medicinal plant cultivation and community participation. Methods for studying Bhotia culture and development took the form of interviews with local healers, religious figures, farmers, and TMI staff. While ancient, their culture is as fragile as it has ever been and is threatened with extinction, much like *chiraito* in recent years, the medicinal plant that is being used for local development. In this way, by respecting Bhotia's culture sanctity, recognizing their need for economic development, and making the people their own change agents, this project is helping to preserve their culture during this collision of global ideas that is pushing and pulling apart indigenous cultures.

Dedication

This paper is dedicated to my family:

To my parents for giving me life, love and trust,

To my teachers and friends at SIT for preparing me for this study,

To Chyamtang village and all Bhotia people for sharing and caring for me,

And to the earth for being family to us all.

Acknowledgements

This research project and paper was made possible by navigating an enormous series of people and circumstances offering me help. From my family's life-long academic support, to SIT Nepal's extensive preparation, I had been on my way to Chyamtang long before I knew it existed. Special thanks goes to Karma Bhutia for being my project advisor and initially leading me down the Bhotkhola rabbit hole and all Bhotia families people for keeping me healthy and happy while I was there. But, most of all, this project would have been impossible without the constant and persistent helpfulness of Jyabu Bhotia.

Thanks so much to everyone,

Pasang Chhedar

“Nature is trying very hard to make us succeed, but nature does not depend on us.

We are not the only experiment.”

—Buckminster Fuller

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Introduction

Far off, below the eastern Himalayas, nestled in the deepest valley in the world, lays an ancient kingdom of Tibetan natives. This region is now known as the Bhotkhola and inhabited by the Bhotia people. In so many ways, their world remains lost in time: secluded from the rest of humanity, speaking an antique language, and living completely off the land for their food and shelter as they always have.

But there remains nowhere on earth entirely untouched or uninfluenced by international forces. It is in fact these remote places that are now changing more rapidly than they ever have before—sometimes evolving their lifestyle and traditions, and sometimes completely dissolving their culture in the soup of globalization. Just in the past decades, the Bhotkhola area and its people have lost their Tibetan affiliation to become part of Nepal, their villages divided into four Village Development Committees (VDCs), their native forests turned into the Makalu-Barun National Park (1992) with their own homes in its Buffer Zone (1999), this land opened to foreign tourists (2003) after always having been restricted, and will be visited this coming February by a team from the Discovery Channel filming a program about their culture.

With these changes in particular, a slew of development projects have began to flood the area. While most of these *bikas* (as development is known as in Nepali) boast practicing local participation approaches for community development, there exists no development project that is not in large part fueled by modernization's academia and economic development agendas. Therefore, in always combining some degree of the local with the global, how can global and local development be accurately distinguished? What does it mean to participate in one's own community

development? And in what ways are different development agents affecting the indigenous cultures they seek to improve?

From November 9 – 30, 2010, research concerning Bhotia culture and local development was conducted in Chyamtang and its surrounding villages in Bhotkhola. Research centered on a project launched in November 2008 by The Mountain Institute (TMI), using local participation in *chiraito* (a local medicinal plant) farming to conserve natural resource, preserve culture, and cultivate livelihoods. In relation to this, the agricultural lifestyle and the healing traditions of Bhotia culture were focused on in order to gauge TMI's progress. Overall, it became apparent that using something culturally sacred as the developing agent as facilitated by the people themselves is more effective in preserving culture and nature while increasing incomes than globally-centered *bikas*. Nevertheless, TMI's project is very young and up against other types of development that are simultaneously pulling the culture apart. It is vital for us at this moment to closely observe indigenous communities around the globe like Chyamtang going through these same processes of evolution so that we can understand and prevent their unintended extinction.

Methodology

This study required research into two aspects of the field site: local cultural knowledge and the effects of different development practices. Besides quotidian observations, this research was primarily collected in interviews with natives. Typically these were one-on-one interviews with some linguistic and cultural translation from Jyabu Bhote. In total, three TMI staff, two farmers from Gumba, two *lamas*, two *bijumas*, and one *amchi* were interviewed, sometimes in conjunction with their families.

In gathering Bhotia folklore, the *lamas*, *bijumas*, and *amchis* were almost exclusively interviewed. This strategy arose because they are the sole knowledge-keepers within the community: Bhotia religious and mythological knowledge was passed down to them through their paternal lineage and other villages had little to no knowledge of Buddhist philosophy or practice. While only these villagers are specialists in this technical knowledge, farming and agricultural work is common knowledge to all member of the community because it continues to be how they support themselves. Thus, no specific group of farmers had to be interviewed because everyone in Chyamtang received and is growing *chiraito*.

In addition to the information acquired from locals, TMI staff members were huge resources as locals themselves, development workers, and as guides between myself and other locals. While everyone in Chyamtang had something to say about their take on development, as social mobilizers with TMI, Jyabu and Pala acted as bridges between their cultural community and the realm of INGO development, a combination offering even deeper insights into the dynamics between the two as well as observations into the participatory aspects of local development. Also, project documents were obtained from the TMI office, I was able to analyze their documents about the project. No such literature was available at the site about any cultural themes, and so the interviews will be read as text so for the purposes of this study.

While in Chyamtang, various obstacles presented themselves for research and interviews. The largest obstacle was time. Not only was the allotted research period a short 22 days for fieldwork, but 10 and a half days of this to be devoted to travelling to the remote field site, leaving only 11 days for fieldwork in the area. I remained mainly in Chyamtang because it is the headquarters of the TMI project,

but if more time had been allowed, most of the 15 villages in Bhotkhola could have been visited, providing much more data and insights. Due to this time constraint, not much depth could be gained, and this paper can be thought of as nothing more than a rough sketch of a culture and a contemporary laying-the-land of the various development systems at play. Another time-related obstacle was the weather and season. In the agricultural societies of Bhotkhola, the climate controls all phases of life. The time in which I stayed in Chyamtang was harvest season, meaning that most residents were working all day in the fields and only available for conversations on rainy days. Furthermore, for a fuller study of their culture, it would be necessary to research in Bhotkhola for at least a full calendar year given the seasonal changes in their practices and religious festivals.

Also, as with any research done by a foreigner, language was an obstacle in this study. For the most part, my Nepali was at an acceptable level for interviewing, especially with the older Bhotia generations that were not educated in Nepali schools. But the translation of both language and cultural concepts made space for error because they speak and conceptualize their culture in terms of their native Tibetanoid language, Bhotia.

Another major obstacle was alcohol and local drinking practices. Far from taboo, it is cultural norm if not expectation for Bhotia people to be both privately and publicly intoxicated from dawn to dusk. This inebriation was particularly virile in regards to the healers and religious figures that my interviewers were focused around. Thus, while these brews have enormous culture significance for the Bhotia, the level sobriety in which the interviews took place can always be brought into question as possible error.

Finally, there are Bhotia peoples' biases towards me, as well as my own, present margins for error. Bhotkhola remains a very remote area, but in the past years a number of foreigners have come to Chyamtang and affect how locals perceived me. The first foreigners to visit were Rand and Dana Jack from Washington State, USA who came as donors through TMI in the fall of 2007. After the visit, they donated \$25,000 for the *chiraito* project. Then, in fall 2009, thirty-year-old Jason Davis came to Chyamtang for a week and a month later for three months. Jason is a master's student from the University of Washington where Dana Jack was his professor. While in Chyamtang, volunteered with TMI and occasionally taught English at the local school. Upon my arrival in Chyamtang, it was hard to articulate to everyone I met that I was in no way associated with Jason or the Jacks. Also thinking of foreigners only in terms of Jason, all the locals assumed that I also wanted to teach English, assumed I couldn't speak Nepali, and were very surprised by my young age. Generally people were very respectful of me coming in the context of school, but it created some barrier that I had the economic and academic superiority to be able to travel to Chyamtang and study them. In my own biases, I expected that everyday people would be more knowledgeable about the details of their Buddhist heritage, that their indigenous agricultural knowledge would do more to conserve natural resources, and that economic development would not do much to strengthen their spiritual heritage.

Research Findings

I. INTERVIEWS

(1) Jyabu Bhote, 15 & 21 November 2010, Chyamtang, Nepal

Jyabu Bhote is a 26-year-old social mobilizer for TMI's medicinal plant project and has lived in Chyamtang his whole life. Jyabu had early interests in change making, community *bikas*, and leadership, because he feels the need for development organizations to work at the local level. While studying in class 10 at the Nepali government school in nearby Lingam, his interests sparked in using local *jadibuti* in development projects. His vision is to conserve natural resources and culture while using them for development, thereby teaching his people to better use what they have.

In 2007, he approached Karma Bhutia, the Medicinal Plant Officer at TMI Nepal, about his work with TMI and expressed his interests. The next year, Jyabu went to a medicinal plant cultivation training in Ilam through *Utsa Pahaadi JaDibuTi Sangsta*—TMI and Karma Bhutia's successfully completed "High Hill MAP Project". In this training, Jyabu learned MAPs agricultural skills such as making nursery beds, planting seeds *chiraito* and *lodshalla*, and caring for seedlings. To learn more skills, other trainings in areas such as Okhealo or Chameli may be attended in the future.

TMI's project in the Bhotkhola area of Nepal began in early 2009. With Karma Bhutia, Jyabu and Pala Bhote, another community mobilizer who attended trainings in Ilam, went into the nearby jungles to collect *chiraito* seeds. Wild *chiraito* is increasingly scarce due to improper harvesting methodologies—Jyabu estimates that, if these processes continued freely, within 10 years there would be no more readily accessible *chiraito* in the area. To encourage conservation practices from multiple angles, Jyabu and Pala worked with the Buffer Zone Leadership to establish a 500

NRs. fine for premature wild *chiraito* collection. Beginning in Chyamtang and Chhumusur to the north, TMI staff distributed 50 grams of *chiraito* seeds to each participating household followed by training in planting techniques. Generally, every household participated in the project, but families that were absent or reluctant during the initial phases were given seeds and trainings later. Jyabu cited that people have responded very excitedly to the project and are currently happy: houses that were unconvinced initially later chose to participate and those that did in the beginning are asking for more seeds. The seeds planted 15 months ago need two more years to fully mature and then can sell 40kg of *chiraito* for 25,000 NRs. If in coming years *chiraito* projects are successful they plan to expand the project to include other local *jadibuti* distribution and trainings.

For Jyabu, the participation of local peoples and culture in development is a necessity for progress. He explained that before beginning the project, TMI staff met with the local healers—*amchi*, *lama*, and *bijumas*—about their MAPs knowledge and the cultural relevance of the development project. At first, many of them were skeptical of TMI's commitment but soon became happy when a shared vision of cultural and community development was expressed. In addition to gathering information about *jadibuti* from these healers, TMI did an exchange with some healers, such as sending the local *amchi* to Tibetan medicine trainings in Kathmandu.

Jyabu's father is a practicing *lama* in Chyamtang. He explained that in the past, before the spread of Buddhism, Bhotia people believed in Bön and later sifted Buddhism into it. Nowadays, while the local *lamas* undergo the traditional Bön training, they believe in Bhuddha. For Jyabu, his religion's personal relevance is to attain more peace (*ananda*) in his life. Buddhism is most important to him as a healing tool. He explained that he and most villagers don't have a daily connection

to Buddhism until they become sick, in which case the *lama* is called and has a mantra to cure anything, even a small cut on one's finger. During his own times being healed is when Jyabu has felt the sense of peace his religion offers.

Buddhism's secondary importance is an ancient tradition that must be preserved and as a form of cultural education within the lineage. Jyabu does not himself know much about the Buddha's life or teachings, explaining that the stories, rituals, and other religious information are contained exclusively within the practicing lineages. Jyabu did not go through the study to inherit his father's role as lama because he went through the Nepali government school system instead. He explained that the amount of local spiritual figures like *lamas* is rapidly decreasing, in large part because of the alternative opportunities that new Nepali schools and outside education is offering the younger generations. Instead, Jyabu's younger brother Yangja is undergoing the *lama* study program: a preliminary two years of training learning oral Tibetan reciting from his mother and learning to read Tibetan from his father before learning about the philosophy and ritual practice. Yangja's mother Lachhring is happy he is continuing in his father's vocation because she says it will save his soul and help nurture the next generation of good lamas.

(2) Pala Bhote, 17 & 20-21 November 2010, Chyamtang, Nepal

Pala Bhote is also a social mobilizer for TMI in Chyamtang. Recently he travelled north of Chyamtang to Chhumusur, a Bhotia village where *chiraito* had been distributed in the same manner and at the same time as in Chyamtang, to observe their progress. Chhumusur is a small village with around 30 homes halfway between Chyamtang and the border and is of equal ethnicity, language, religion, agroforestry and other cultural aspects. They have a higher economic income and are "more developed" than their neighbors to the south, in large part with the help of past

chiraito harvesting. Pala explained that being a small town, conservation efforts made by the local leadership, and agricultural differences contributed to Chhumusur having established a pre-existing “conservation routine” for wild *chiraito*. With this, trade with China has been long-since established. In contrast, it did not work to establish a majority of *chiraito* preservation practices in Chyamtang’s more than 100 houses, leading to its present scarcity. Besides lack of trade leadership efforts and deficiency in local cultural and agricultural knowledge about *chiraito*, possibly the largest factor in Chyamtang’s comparatively poor harvesting is difference in climate. While culturally identical, Chhumusur is at too high of an elevation to grow rice and wheat and therefore turned to other profitable crops like *chiraito* to sustain themselves. As a result, more teachings and trainings on *chiraito* were necessary in Chyamtang. But still improvements could be made in Chhumusur, such as Pala’s advice to locals to retrieve more seeds by not drying *chiraito* on the slanted bamboo roofs.

Other economic differences between Bhutia villages can be seen in regards to *alainchi* (cardamom) harvesting. Everyone has been growing millet, rice, and corn for basic food subsistence since before they can remember. But, as these crops are planted year after year, the soil yields less annual harvest. As a result, each year more of the forest is slash and burned to grow more millet. *Alainchi* is both *jaibuti* and *masala* (spice) and can be seen in sacks on the backs of mules all around Bhotkhola on its way to India. Currently, *alainchi* is sold for 875 NRs./kg, *chiraito* 625 NRs./kg, and millet for only 30 NRs./kg. Most of the *alainchi* is still being collected from the wild, but as its farmers grow people are starting to plant their own fields. The present undertaking is that while local people figured out a long-time ago how to harvest grains like rice and millet, they are only just now learning how to work with many *jadibuti*. And as opposed to the ancient trial-and-error routine of indigenous

agricultural knowledge, farmers are being inspired to learn new skills from success in other places, such as Ilam and Darjeeling.

Pala explained the ways in which economic growth and *bikas* encourage the conservation of culture and biodiversity. It is difficult to conserve in hard times—villagers prematurely harvesting *chiraito* in the nearby jungles because the need for more income is too great. Pala said their culture needed *bikas* to do *puja*, needed *bikas* to do any conservation. If development can be done properly at the local level, then people will stay at the village and maintain the culture instead of leaving to urban areas as so many Bhutia youth now are.

On the other hand, some Nepali development projects are a threat to cultural preservation. For example, as hospital and health posts are being built in villages, people are beginning to turn away from local healers and their traditional practices. Five years ago, there were more *lamas*, *bjiuwas*, and *amchis*, but now their children are going away to urban cities for schooling and jobs instead of continuing their age-old lineages. Through his conservation development work with TMI, Pala hopes that as the *chiraito* project expands, people will begin to see its importance and stay.

(3) Chhering Bhotia, 18 November 2010, Gumba, Nepal

Chhering Bhotia is the participant leader for the TMI project in Gumba where he lives, a thirty minutes walk west of Chyamtang. He is also the leader of two other local societies and said TMI appointed him because he is the friendliest man in Gumba. The project started six months ago in Gumba and after two months the planted seeds began to yield small *chiraito* plants. While some residents were initially absent, in the end, all thirty-four houses in Gumba was given seeds and currently have growing plants. For Chhering, the success of this TMI project is most important for the future generations by giving them more crops to sustain

themselves. He believes that in bringing MAPs businessmen into the area and establishing a market could promote its natural conservation and harvesting in the village. Chhering also felt that *chiraito* was an important aspect of Bhutia culture because it is a medicine and part of their wealth of *jadibuti* resources and knowledge.

(4) Thongmik Bhote, 18 November 2010, Gumba, Nepal

Thongmik Bhote is a farming villager in Gumba and grows millet, wheat, and recently *chiraito*. Thongmik believes that *chiraito* is an important part of culture. He greatly enjoyed learning about *chiraito* planting in the TMI trainings and is generally happy with the plant because it requires little care while having a high economic value. But, a challenge as the project progress will be to deal with the notorious *chiraito* thieves that come from the south and have contributed to its overharvesting in the past. Nevertheless, he explained, *bikas* are needed in the community because the people do not have a year-round sustainable food supply. Fortunately, he felt that the entire district has liked growing *chiraito*.

(5) Karuk Lama, 18 November 2010, Lingam, Nepal

Karuk is part of a lineage of lamas that is over twenty generations old. He calls himself a Buddhist lama but underwent the traditional Bön-Po study and meditations. He saw the TMI project as going well because a natural harvest is not enough, and the more medicines, the better! The many *jadibuti* of the Bhotkhola are culturally significant and medicinal valuable because they are sacred—it is their purity that makes them effective medicines. This sanctity is in no way damaged by the TMI project or in being grown locally and sold. In fact, he explained that money is good for the sacred because it helps to protect and expand its power. He hopes more *bikas* will arise in the community so that some day the Buddhist *gumbas* their religion needs can be built. For now, they are too poor for that to be possible.

(6) Kija Bhutia, 20 November 2010, Chyamtang, Nepal

Besides his daily agricultural work, Kija Bhutia is the headman of Chyamtang village, which he says has approximately 130 homes and over 700 residents. Previously his father was also headman, his mother now lives in Darjeeling, and his brother is TMI's Karma Bhutia. Kija sees the positive effects of *bikas* as a necessity for Chyamtang because there are so many problems there, particularly due to its remoteness. The most important projects would be to fix the school, then create some rain cover for the fields, and building a road. He has a small nursery bed of *chiraito* outside his home and is excited for the project because he sees how it has increased the wealth of his people to the north in Chhumusur. Kija also felt that within Bhotia culture, their religion was the most important piece to preserve because it is ancient. He also felt that Chyamtang really needed a *gumpa* and that local *bikas* could help them raise enough money to build it.

(7) Kami Lama, 21 November 2010, Chyamtang, Nepal

Kami is the senior lama in Chyamtang. He is very proud of his religious heritage and gets out all his ritual materials to explain their functions. In regards to the history of Bhotia people and culture, Kumi explains that in the past his resided in Tibet as part of a Tibetan caste called *Khamba*. More than fifty generations ago, they began to migrate southwards from Tibet to their current home more in response to outbreaks of leprosy in Nepal needing Tibetan healers' medical attention. Later, they could not return to Tibet and were given the scheduled caste name Bhotia by the Nepali government to attain citizenship.

(8) Ngang Ridar Bhote, 22 & 25 November 2010, Chyamtang, Nepal

Besides begin a trained *bijuma* and shaman, Ngang Ridar Bhote is Chyamtang's senior *amchi*, a job that fills up most of his time. Though he initially learned Tibetan

medicine from his father, Ngang has attended three separate *amchi* trainings in Kathmandu (7, 8, and 16 years ago) and received qualification certificates for each one. He is Karma Bhutia's uncle and the participant community leader for TMI's project in Chyamtang.

Ngang also told the story of the Bhotia people's migration to Nepal. After coming to the Bhotkhola from Tibetan, all Bhotia people were united in their own kingdom with their own king. Sharing the same religion, language, and currency, they became close friends with their Tibetan neighbors, exchanging both culturally and commercially. Ngang spoke of this reign as a prosperous time, one in which the king used his subjects' tax money only to build *gumbas* and temples in their name. While throughout time new kings and regimes came through the Bhotkhola state, it was not later until Nepal was united under one rule and became a nation-state that these native people's identity changed and became known as Bhotia.

It is unclear in this history when Bönism and Buddhism melded together into their present dharma. But Ngang explained that at first there was only Bön-Po, a religion founded by and centered on a figure named Guru Rinpoche. Referred to by Ngang as a "senior Buddha", Guru Rinpoche was a spiritual master who dedicated his life to working compassionately in the world, creating various temples in Nepal, and attaining liberation. Similarly to Gautama Buddha who followed a parallel path and founded Buddhism, from the Bön perspective, Gautama was sent to the earth as one of Guru Rinpoche's agents and thus, Buddhism seamlessly fits into Bönism without contradiction.

Finally, Ngang described the origin myth of the Bhotia people. In the beginning there was nothing and after the world was one huge lake. On the lake foam and spume began to form and from that mud, rock, and earth were created.

From the earth grew a large tree. On top of the tree appeared a green bird referred to as *jhjung kbayu ngumoo* (meaning literally in Bhotia “the bird named green”) and given much importance. The bird begins to tell a story, saying, “I see something in one house. I see a large house with a very rich man who is a king. In his home he has fire, many animals, and food.” From this point, the world as it is today came into being.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In separating traditional or indigenous knowledge (IK) from other classifications of knowing, scholars link peoples’ historical interconnectedness with their environment to the assimilation of the indigenous perspective. The International Center for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) uses the term *traditional knowledge* to define: “the knowledge, innovations, and practices of indigenous and local communities around the world...developed from experience gained over the centuries and adapted to the local culture and environment...[it] is mainly of a practical nature, particularly in such fields as agriculture, fishing, health, horticulture, and forestry” (2008). In the way that ICIMOD understands the ways in which traditional knowledge and practices sustain mountain people’s communities, health, and replenish their environment, their definition highlights the agricultural-centric and practical nature of indigenous knowledge. They continue by citing the concrete ways that traditional knowledge can be positively applied for conservation and development because it is fundamentally sustainable.

Gurung (2000) provides another definition of indigenous knowledge that further bases culture and behavior within environment, saying:

“Indigenous knowledge is knowledge linked to a specific place, culture or society, dynamic in nature, belonging to groups of people who live in close contact with natural systems. Knowledge of their physical environment is embedded in epistemologies and belief systems, usually naturalistic and radically different from those of scientific systems.”

This definition marks indigenous knowledge as primarily distinct from other terminology such as local or traditional knowledge because of its integration in natural systems. Moreover, this knowledge is distinct from scientific systems because the naturalistic elements are embedded into their belief systems, all together setting up a sharp anthropological contrast between the outside developer and the indigenous. Thus Gurung ends his definition saying, “the spiritual beliefs, cosmologies and worldviews are therefore a vital part of the whole system, which must be understood by outsiders attempting to understand the ways in which ethnic groups have managed their environments.” Furthermore because of this deep connection to nature, research on such systems of knowledge reveals that communities possess a great deal of knowledge about their environments and how to manipulate them to best meet their needs (Brokensha et al., 1980; Richards, 1985; Chambers et al., 1989).

Recognizing the power of this knowledge, many development projects now seek to work with or take advantage of IK in their implementation. But this can work well when the ideological barriers between culture and development are broken down and their interpenetration recognized. In fact, the development rhetoric in Nepal has become part of the way Nepali’s know themselves (Pigg 1997.) Within this, they understand development as social activities that bring modes of

engagement into being and expect access to new social realms through the *bikas* process. So, indigenous knowledge no longer exists within a vacuum and Nepali culture already contains development within its definitions. But, nevertheless, Pig explains the importance of culture and development complementing each other: “Development, as a modern project, seeks to modernize other through its system of universalizing categories and standardized practices. An ethnographic account of development needs to ask how these universalizing procedures operate in a specific context” (1997).

In Upper Arun, this site-specific development is being achieved using an agent of culture, *chiraito*. This method situates the development in the community from inside-out, combining the people’s own technical agricultural knowledge and heritage with the facilitation of the TMI. If we were to think of indigenous knowledge in a vacuum, one could argue that *chiraito* would have always been conserved because it is regarded as sacred (Rappaport 1976). And while that may have been true, the Bhotia communities contact with globalization and development in the form of the international herbal medicine market pushed them to harvest in the plant improperly in their pursuit for more economic development. Thus, it becomes appropriate for an INGO to come in and work to conserve the plant while increasingly livelihoods. Indigenous knowledge is fluid and, as it comes into contact with global development, risks precious wholesome practices being changed and with the cultural and sacred knowledge being lost.

Discussion/Analysis

The purpose of this research was to observe and analyze which *bikas* in Chyamtang and around Bhotkhola were simultaneously preserving and enhancing culture in their quest for economic, health, or education development. It was found that local *bikas*, like TMI's *chiraito* project were able to accomplish this by utilizing something culturally sacred as the agent of development as executed by the community themselves. But some *bikas* on the other hand, such as Nepali schools and the prospect of a road have culturally fragmenting side effect. This transpires because these development project are more global *bikas*—ones externally fabricated and generated without the collaboration of the local culture or people.

Everyone that was interviewed for this study agreed that *chiraito* was both sacred and culturally valuable because it is a local *jadibuti*. But more than simply an herbal medicine, as we may think of it in the western world, the Bhotia conception of culture itself is intimately intertwined with these kinds of medicines. Bhotia people place their religion as the central and encompassing feature of their culture, saying it was the most important aspect because it is ancient tradition. Yet, while proud and conscious of its value, the common villager in Chyamtang generally had no daily personal connection to his or her faith and knew relatively nothing about Buddhist/Bön philosophy or history; it was merely their tradition and it is only the *lama* that knows such information, they would say. But at some point in the conversation, everyone would cite that they thought of their religion and its use when they were sick because it is how they became healthy again. So in this, *chiraito* seemed had an even greater power for the way Bhotia people know themselves in

the way that they equate their culture with their religion, and their religion with healing. For these reasons, the Bhotia people were very pleased and excited about having their own *chiraito* crops.

Nevertheless, neither their indigenous knowledge of its medicinal properties nor its importance to Bhotia people was enough to conserve this plant in the past. Currently, *chiraito* is categorized as a critically endangered MAP because it is exclusively collected in the wild despite having a descent hold in the international herbal medicine industry¹. Around Chyamtang, these market pressures led to premature over-harvesting by both locals and thieves from the south. Though, this is not universal in Bhotkhola as with Chumusur to the north, on the other hand, was able to sustain its wild *chiraito* supply. Economic deficiencies in Bhotkhola have led to other practices that harm the environment such as the slashing and burning of forests. Despite growing many subsistence crops such as millet, wheat, oats, potatoes, and maize, most Bhotia people struggle to maintain a year-round food supply because as the land continues to grow these same crops its yields less and less harvest. These agricultural practices can be considered IK because they are carried from generation to generation within a local context and modified based on trial and error. But as with the site and epoch specificity of IK, these practices that may have been appropriate and benign in past contexts have suddenly become malignant in the globalizing world. *Chiraito* collection was arguable modest in the past and only under the newfound market demand became in peril. And slash-and-burn practices were most likely relatively harmless in the past when villages remained small and the

¹ Dhawan & Joshi reported in 2005 that the demand for *chiraito* was increasing 10% annually and recommended the critical need for research and conservation. At this rate, *chiraito* in Bhotkhola would have soon been extinct and, with it, the medicinal and sacred knowledge of the plant.

forests extensive. But, in the past twenty years, the inhabitants in Bhotkhola have come to live in the Buffer Zone of a political privatized national park with laws and regulations. In this process of bringing in global conservation ideologies, the Bhotia people are the midst of transitioning from the natives of their land to the local custodians of valuable natural resources and government property.

During this collision of old and new, within the dynamics and culture and development, the time became appropriate for an organization like TMI to come and offer solutions to momentary errors in the evolution of their IK by educating them about premature harvesting in order to preserve resource while also providing villagers with seeds and training to increase their livelihoods with their own *chiraito*. This project was implemented with a high level of community participation, all the way from Karma Bhutia within TMI, to Jyabu and Pala the social mobilizers, to the villagers using their technical agricultural knowledge into action by executing the work by themselves and for themselves.

Other *bikas*, on the other hand, act more externally than internally, like an imposition of the global on the local in which their culture becomes put up for review against modernization. For example, a key goal of the Nepali development agenda is to provide education opportunities for all Nepali children. As a result, in past decades small government primary and secondary school have been built around the country offering classes conducted in Nepali and English language. Aside for the practical achievements of these schools, it remains and admirable and necessary goal to equip even the most remote places with the opportunity for basic education. But nevertheless, in Chyamtang I observed ways in which these schools were dislocating Bhotia culture in the process. While very ancient and culturally engrained, Bhotia religion is in a particularly fragile state all of a sudden. Religious

knowledge and practice is confined to the specialized families that have been its keepers for generations. In the past, the passing of these traditions through the paternal lineage was probably the most stable and effective means of maintenance. But since then, Bhotia people have found themselves living within the borders of a developing nation-state with its own plans. All of a sudden their children must go to school in languages that are not their own, learning curriculums designed by what is essentially another race and culture. Five and ten years ago, there were more healers, *lamas*, *bijumas*, and *amchis* in Chyamtang than there are now. The greatest reason cited for this decline is the youth migration to urban areas or foreign countries, predominantly in order to study or facilitated by the new academic realm of Nepali government schools. A noble goal it remains, but the effects of pulling local away from their homes has a dramatic impact on Bhotia culture: if a *lama's* only son moves to Kathmandu and another local or family member does not miraculously step in to take his place, all the family religious knowledge and heritage is lost forever. And since this knowledge is only contained within the families, if this process continues, the life of their religious traditions could soon be hanging by a thread. The hope is with projects like TMI's, more factors pulling people into the community will arise to counteract the factors pushing local outside. For example, every healer and religious figure interviewed responded that they thought *bikas* created a positive impact that was needed in Bhotia communities and that they hope, through development programs, that they could accumulate enough new wealth to build a *gumba*, which they currently don't, in order to practice and house their religion and teach more youth about its traditions.

Similarly, other well-intended external or global *bikas* have culturally draining side effects. For example, the building of a hospital in Chyamtang would provide

beneficial health care but could also damage the practicing healers and conservation a *jadibuti* they rely on to cure disease. Another example would be building a road, a piece of development that would probably change Bhotkhola more than any other. Being remote, a three days walk to the nearest road, in so many ways defines Bhotia culture: their lifestyle, their landscape, their poverty, and the preservation of their culture. Most locals interviewed mention a road as something they are lacking and many said it was one of the most valuable pieces of development they could receive. But could literally opening up the world to these people for the positive also open a can of worms that push and pull many away from their culture? On the way back from Chyamtang, two gentlemen from Kathmandu were walking the trail who had come to inspect extending the road from Num to Hatiya and later through Chyamtang to the border at Kimathangka. So it seems we will soon find out how Bhotia culture will change in these delicate times

The point is not to label one kind of development as good and another as bad, but to notice the manner in which the global and local are conversing, the way they come from different and complementary knowledge bases, and to see how the two can collaborate and both participate in development. It is the recommendation of this research that the development projects can completely their goals while preserving culture by contextualizing their universal project and, in this, put the receivers of this development as agents of their own change. In the mean time, more research on and close-observance of these drastically changing communities around the world can teach us a great about how successfully and simultaneously improve and conserve.

Conclusion

To the outside, Nepal is a Third World country. Marginalization and categorization in the way had saturated Nepal with NGOs, INGOs, and local development projects at every far corner. In the northeastern corner, the Bhotia community is feeling the whirlwind of healthy and destructive effects from various forms of *bikas*. One such project sought to facilitate development using a culturally valuable agent, *chiraito*, with its natives' natural lifestyle, subsistence farming. By acting almost entirely locally, this young project is successful in navigating the modern transformation of global *bikas*.

We are in a time when old and new, local and global are unstoppably colliding, converging, and re-assimilating. Throughout this process, some practices and ideas that have worked well in the past are turning detrimental. This paper recommends that the role of development should be as mediator between these two forces in this time of dramatic transition. Within this collaboration, we can even work to develop something sacred and bring an integral form of development to communities full needs and context.

Appendix/Appendices

A. GLOSSARY OF TERMS

<i>amchi</i>	A practitioner of Tibetan medicine.
<i>Bhotia</i>	Caste name given by the government of Nepal denoting Tibetanoid language and people living natively within its borders. (also <i>Bhotiya</i>)
<i>Bhotkholā</i>	The homeland of the Bhotia people in the northern part of the Arun river valley (also called Upper Arun) and below the Himalayas at the border to China. Now in the Sankhuwasabha district of Nepal, this houses 15 different villages in 4 VDCs—Pawakhola, Hatiya, Chepuwa, and Kimathangka.
<i>bijuwā</i>	A shaman/priest in Bön-Po. Subordinate to <i>lama</i> but assumes many of the same functions except for sacrifices which <i>lama</i> cannot perform.
<i>bikas</i>	Development in Nepali
<i>Bön-Po</i>	Tibet's most ancient religion combining early forms of South Asian shamanism, paganism, animism and later incorporating Buddhism.
<i>chiraito</i>	Medicinal plant native to the temperate Himalayas and used in a huge variety of ailments, including treating stomach aches and infections, headaches, fever, skin problems, and scorpion bites. It is classified as critically endangered by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources.
<i>gumpa</i>	Buddhist temple
<i>jadibuti</i>	Medicinal plant in Nepali.
<i>lama</i>	A priest in Buddhism/Bön-Po.
<i>MAPs</i>	Medicinal and Aromatic Plants
<i>NRs.</i>	Nepali Rupees
<i>puja</i>	A ritual or ceremony in Nepali
<i>TMI</i>	The Mountain Institute
<i>VDC</i>	Village Development Committee

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