NAMING CEREMONIES AS RITUALS OF DEVELOPMENT

Kamal R. Adhikary

It is difficult to pinpoint how long the word *'bikās'* (development) has been in the day-to-day vocabulary of Nepalis, but it seems to have been used increasingly both in the national and the local media since the introduction of "*bikāsko mūl phuṭāunu*" (to break-open the fountain of development) in the early seventies. Any one working in Nepal between 1970 and 1989 could have hardly missed the use of the word *bikās,* in political speeches, in the day-to-day business of government offices, in Panchayat meetings and gatherings, in radio broadcasts and in local as well as national papers. A random sampling of the Gorkhapatra, the government sponsored daily newspaper published in Nepali, from 1976 to 1986 showed that there was virtually no day when the paper did not include *bikās* talk in one way or another. *Bikās* discourse can be categorized into three forms:

i. Political speeches emphasizing *bikās* such as "the chairman of the National Panchayat has said that there is need of the skill and working spirit of every Nepali for the nation-building" (Gorkhapatra, 25 Jan., 1977), or "in order to materialize the dream of the martyrs everyone has to be dedicated for the development of the country" (Gorkhapatra, 30 Jan., 1977), or "While inaugurating the Panchayat office at Tārukā Gāuṁ, the Finance Minister said that for the development of the villages we all need to move ahead together" (Gorkhapatra, 29 Jan., 1985), or "Minister Giri has requested the journalists to help contribute to the development of the country" (Gorkhapatra, 2 Feb., 1985), or "the Minister for Local Development said that it is necessary that we need to encourage everyone to be active for the national development, and to think of how we can participate in and contribute to the national development is the most important basis of development" (Gorkhapatra, 27 Oct., 1986).

ii. Editorials or articles on *bikās* themes such as "*Bikāsko Bāṭomā Agrasar Nepāl*" (Nepal on the Forefront of Development Path) (Gorkhapatra, 8 Oct., 1984), or "*Bikāsko lāgi Rājnīti ra yasako Auchitya*" (Politics for Development and its Justification) (Gorkhapatra, 4 Apr., 1986).

iii. News about *bikās* work such as "A drinking water project has been completed in a place where until 1977 women had to go half a day in

order to bring water" (Gorkhapatra, 22 Jan. 1977), or "It was in 2019 v.s. that Late His Majesty King Mahendra had helped form the backbone of *bikās* by volunteering his labor to start the Mahendra Rajmarga" (Gorkhapatra, 6 Sept., 1984).

When I was doing research in Palpa in 1988, I used to hear over Radio Nepal everyday about how Nepal was on the path of *bikās*. It's no wonder that one anthropologist working in Nepal in the eighties observed, "It has become almost a public mantra, repeated by high and low government officials, foreign observers of the contemporary scene and increasingly, the citizenry at large, that 'development' now occupies pride of place in the national agenda of Nepal" (Fisher 1987:29). Despite this, when I asked people, "What does *bikās* mean?" even those who used the word frequently would fumble for a precise meaning, probably because '*bikās*' meant different things to different people. Generally, they would say that it encompasses almost everything that is needed to be done for Nepal and Nepalis. When I jokingly insisted on a precise definition from a senior government official who was the project coordinator for one of the integrated development projects he smilingly answered: "*Bikās* is anything that we do together for the benefit and progress of Nepal and the Nepalis" (Gonga 1989; personal communication). Although this was an impromptu response one can clearly see how it captures the core of the slogans of development: 'doing together' 'for Nepal' and 'for the Nepalis'. What he said summed up what was usually heard from the political leaders and their followers. In any of the speeches relating to *bikās* inclusive phrases such as "we", "all of us" were recurrent. For example, "*we* have to move ahead without fear, threat, or bluff from anybody", "in order to do development *all of us* have to come forward" (Gorkhapatra, 4 Jan., 1985; emphasis mine). In sum *bikās* talk seems to weave all Nepalis into one family of the Nepali nation, and leads one to believe that *bikās* not only accommodates but welcomes all Nepalis.

Similarly, in any discourse of development it is hard to miss phrases infused with nationalist sentiment that directly or indirectly make a plea for the pursuit of a common Nepali identity, a quest for community. In order to achieve this, it seems, the government adopted a two-part strategy. On the one hand, it seems to have assumed that in the process of launching development projects such as constructing roads, digging wells, building schools, and extending education, members of different social and ethnic groups can participate together in building the nation, and thereby acquire a sense of shared goals. On the other hand, the government also seems to have assumed that common identity can be instilled into people

through the discourse of development disseminated through the radio and the most widely circulated papers such as the Gorkhapatra, which "attempts to inform, motivate and change attitudes", and also "aims at generating faith in ...the concept of 'politics of development' " (Verma 1988:41).

Thus the discourse of development always touches, directly or indirectly, on the question of national identity. Central to this quest for a common national identity is the process of "Nepalization" which is implicitly or explicitly emphasized in any discourse or ritual of development. One of the strategies of Nepalization has been to appropriate various symbols of subordinate groups and to give them national prominence. At the local level this process of what Alonso (1988) calls "de-particularization", is illustrated by name-giving ceremonies, in which age-old local settlement names are replaced by "Nepali" names. These ceremonies do not always take place on a grand scale, and as such they may not be noticed by the public at large. However, the process is the same whether it takes place on a small scale or in a grand function given national prominence. A slow change of local names has been going on in Nepal for centuries, since the coming of new settlers inevitably has some impact on the existing names. However, displacing local names with Sanskritized names in a ritual ceremony is comparatively recent, and in the Panchayat period it was considered by the government media to be a sign of development and a way of enhancing national identity. Change of place-names took place on such occasions as laying the foundation stone of a school building, inauguration of school or panchayat buildings (Gorkhapatra, 3 Jan., 1986), or at the initiation of a road or its inauguration (Gorkhapatra, 6 Jan., 1986).

This paper discusses two such name-giving rituals and the popular responses to them. In the imposition of Sanskritized names in the name of *bikās,* we can observe the efforts of the *bikās* state to forge a single— and modern—national identity by anointing places and projects that signify *bikās* with names that invoke the past of the nation-state only, while occluding older, more various ethnic pasts. Local people have by no means uniformly adopted the new names. Their immediate local impact appears to have been minimal as is discussed below. It remains to be seen whether they will be rejected as Magars and others assert their right to use their own languages and make efforts to discover and preserve knowledge of their history.

Place Names as History

No historian disputes that the Magars were one of the first peoples to inhabit the midwest hills of Nepal, or that Palpa and its surrounding districts, which used to be known as Bāhra Magarāt (twelve Magar areas), was and still is the heart of Magar land. Tansen, the name of the district headquarters, is itself derived from the Magar language. In this region the rivers, mountains and villages bear names that reveal the unwritten history of Magars, although all the names have not retained their original forms. In Nepal as in other places "place names such as those of streams, rivers, localities, and mountains often are very persistent" (Witzel 1993:217), and they remain there for ages to come unless they are deliberately changed.

But once the name is changed, its origin also gets lost gradually and it is difficult to trace its history over the course of time. A point in case is that "Tansing" (तानसिङ्), the headquarters of Palpa, began to be called Tansen (तानसेन) only after the revolution of 1951 (Panthi 2041 v.s.) because some modern educated youths, probably catching the fever of modernization, pondered over the meaning of Tansing, and not finding any in Nepali, thought the name should rather have been Tansen associated with one of the Sen kings, probably Tamra Sen, who supposedly ruled Palpa for many years. Local poets and historians, who generally look for the support of state patrons, could not think that place-names do not always originate from the names of rulers, and started writing articles in support of how Tansen must have been derived from Tamra Sen. It was unfortunate that they did not pause to consider that, situated in the heart of Magar country, Tansing might have something to do with the Magar language. Actually in the Magar language 'tansing' means a 'big settlement or a town' (Panthi 2041 v.s.). That's how the name had come into being. All the documents written before 1951 relating to this place have attested that its original name was Tansing. However, once the name was 'glorified' by associating it with the name of a king of the past, the process of obliterating the original name was begun. After a few years the new name entered school textbooks, although villagers around the town continued to use the original name Tansing. Once the government and media spread the new name the old name became a thing of the past nationally, persisting only in very local usage, and even then only partially.

Tansen is an imaginative name evoking the history of a supposedly glorious Hindu king and occluding the history that preceded it. It has nothing to do with the history of the Magar people of this place whereas

Tansing was intimately connected with them. Tansing was a true window to the Magar historical past and, like other place-names, an "important index to the linguistic, cultural, and above all ethnographic history of a settlement" (Malla 1982/83:57). However, such names have been vanishing quickly and in a few years' time they may be legends only. Although older names near the capital or those of bigger places may be preserved in inscriptions under the modern signboards announcing newly created names, the names of unrenowned places and those far away from the capital have been eroded. In the Nepali context, the original names should have been more zealously preserved. As Witzel (1993:217) has argued, the "prehistory and the early history of Nepal are largely unknown" since there have been no large archaeological excavations and there are no written documents concerning many places. "In this situation," as he rightly points out, "it may be useful to try to elicit more information not only from the *unwritten history* contained in legends, etc., but also from language itself, where such information can be found in an 'undiluted' state" (Witzel 1993:217).

Arrival of a new people or new rulers makes a big impact on the existing names. It is a well known fact that "Since the dawn of recorded history the Nepal Himalaya has been the retreat of the Mongoloid Tibeto-Burman-speaking tribes" (Malla 1982/83:59). However, they have been in contact with the Indo-Aryan speakers on and off from the 5th century A.D. in many parts of the Nepal Himalaya including the Kathmandu valley (Malla 1982/83). The influence of the Hindus who migrated from the south into these areas from the 12th century A.D. onwards has brought about many changes in the language and culture of the indigenous people, including the gradual change of place names. For example, the now famous cremation-bathing place Ramdi (रामदि) in Palpa along the Kali Gandaki used to be called Rangdi (राङ्डी), meaning black water (river). As *rang* means black and *di* means water in the Magar language, and as there are numerous names of natural springs and rivers ending in 'di' meaning water all over mid and west Nepal (Witzel 1993), it is evident that Rangdi was originally a Magar name, and that the Magars chose this name because the Gandaki river that flows by this place carries black silt, making the water black. To the Hindu settlers, however, Rangdi must have sounded like Ramdi, the place of Ram, the hero of the epic Ramayana. To them it probably seemed that the name Ramdi could not have been derived from other than Ram, the Hindu god because Hindus associate big rivers with something holy. As it happened the river spread in width at this point, with a flat bank on one side making it easy for

people to take a bath on Hindu religious occasions and also to cremate a dead body according to Hindu rituals. In the course of time even the Magars took the name to be Ramdi. Such changes show the gradual influence of a new culture and language over the indigenous population and an equally gradual acceptance by the indigenous people without any evidence of external pressure. Such changes express a people's slowly changing cultural consensus rather than a planned imposition.

Since the 1960's things have been rather different. Old names have been deliberately changed in order to give them new meanings without any regard to the history associated with them, or even intentionally to replace historical associations with particular *jāti* with "Nepali" ones. This is done in the name of *bikās*. What is interesting is that on the one hand some government-sponsored publications point out that "place-names are intimately linked with the life of the people and they stand for their history" and "they should be preserved for generations to come because they are our linguistic and cultural assets" (Shrestha 2044 v.s.:tha) while, on the other hand, in the execution of *bikās* activities the older names are replaced by new ones.

Naming Ceremonies

The two naming ceremonies discussed below are similar to many other "rituals of development" (Tennekoon 1988) that take place almost everyday at different sites of newly constructed roads, bridges, and office buildings, both at the beginning and at the completion of a project. These two rituals took place in Palpa and Nawal-Parasi districts, on newly constructed highways that cross each other and make a loop-like circle between Tansen and Mungling.

From Ārebhanjyāng to Āryabhanjyāng via the Post Office

Long before the construction of the Siddhartha Rajmarga (Pokhara-Bhairawa Road), Ārebhanjyāng (आरेभन्ज्याङ), a comparatively flat bend on the hill top, used to be a resting place for people walking between Tansen and Ramdi. There used to be a few huts there, mainly of Magars, but hardly enough to be called a village. When I was a child I remember buying boiled yams and sweet potatoes on our way back from Ramdi when I used to insistently follow my mother on her one-day pilgrimage to Ramdi on the auspicious day of Māghe Sagrāṁtī, the first day of the month of Māgh. The local saying is that in the olden days Magars used to grow and sell garlic there. This may explain the development of the place name. *Ārek* means garlic in the Magar language, and as garlic cloves and

leaves are very popular parts of the local cuisine, the place was named Ārekbhanjyāng, a place where garlic was grown and sold. In the course of time, as the population of other ethnic groups increased and the local Magars gradually lost their language to Nepali, the last phoneme /k/ of *Ārek* was dropped from day-to-day usage and it became simply Ārebhanjyāng, retaining at least part of the Magar word, *āre*. This common usage then continued for a long time, surviving many drives of development and modernization, even after the completion of the Siddhartha Rajmarga that passes by it.

During my field work in 1989, when I was going to a Magar village by way of Ārebhanjyāng, I saw a further change of name on a recently opened post office, a symbol of *bikās*. *Bikās* had left its heavy footprint here. Ārebhanjyāng had changed radically. The top of the nose-like hill was flattened. The once all-thatched village had changed into a small town of tin-roofed and thatched houses. Because of the hilly landscape houses virtually hung on the steep slope, putting a tremendous stress on the fragile environment. When I looked down from the window of one of the houses I was almost dizzy. As is usual in settlements along the newly constructed roads in Nepal, there was no provision either of drainage or sewerage. As I walked from one end of the bazaar to the other I saw a signboard: Āryabhanjyāng Hulāk (Āryabhanjyāng Post Office). I was rather curious at this metamorphosis from Ārebhanjyang to Āryabhanjyang (आर्यभन्ज्याङ).

I asked the Panchayat secretary, who had accompanied me: "How come they changed the name of the place?"

He told me that the old name Ārebhanjyāng was replaced with Āryabhanjyāng at the time of the opening of a post office. He said that a post office was badly needed here as the place had grown much bigger. He further said that as soon as it was rumoured that a linking road to east Palpa would be constructed from Ārebhanjyāng, there was a scramble for land. Shrewd businessmen offered the people with thatched huts as much money as they reasonably demanded for the patch of land they owned. Similarly, whoever could do so had unregistered land registered in their names, and houses multiplied day by day. Along with the increased number of people, the volume of business also increased. The local Panchayat asked the government for a small post office, and their request was granted.

The Panchayat secretary could not tell me the exact date when the name change took place. He, however, recreated a picture of what must have happened in the opening ceremony of the post office as he had

witnessed many such ceremonies. He said the Chief District Officer (CDO) was probably invited, as well as the members of the local Panchayat and local people from the bazaar. It was customary to make the CDO the chairman of the ceremony. The speeches of the CDO and the panchayat members, he said, must have highlighted the speed of *bikās* — how from a small village, Ārebhanjyāng changed to a small town, and it would go on growing and developing. And the unveiling of the name of the post office must have taken place and the rationale of the new name must have been given.

In subsequent research I found that the genesis of the new name went back to 1963 when the Roads Department was doing the alignment survey for the Siddhartha Rajmarga. The survey group wrote the name in both in English and Nepali, and curiously, in English the name was written just like its old name, that is, Ārebhanjyāng, but in Nepali it was changed to Āryabhanjyāng. It appears that the first part of the name, *Āre* was changed to *Ārya* by the government agents who were working with Indian engineers. This was, however, hardly noticed by anybody. It was only years later, at the opening of the post office, that the new name was officially brought to public notice mainly by putting it on the post-office signboard. Since then the name was further propagated by the post-office letter head and a seal with the name "Āryabhanjyāng Post Office" that would be stamped on all mail passing through this post office.

When asked why the name was changed some local people explained that the meaning of the old name was meaningful only to those who spoke the Magar language whereas the new name is meaningful to all who understand Nepali. When I asked the Panchayat secretary, who was not a Magar, whether he liked the new name, he said, "Well, it is more meaningful to me than the previous one."

"Do you say Āryabhanjyāng or Ārebhanjyāng, when you talk to other people?", I asked.

"I say Ārebhanjyāng while speaking but when I write the address of this place I write both Āryabhanjyāng and Ārebhanjyāng."

"Why do you write both?

"Because many people do not know that Āryabhanjyāng is the new name of Ārebhanjyāng, and on the other hand the officials of the post office here obviously like people to write the new name. So I write both."

"What have you heard from other local people about the new name?", I asked.

"Some people say that it is a good name, but others just laugh. Some people do not care. Most of the villagers do not even know that the name has been changed to Āryabhanjyāng."

It was very difficult to find what was what just by asking people which of the two names they generally used as people do not always do what they say they do. I thought people had to use one or the other name when they rode a bus that went by Ārebhanjyāng, so I decided to make a two-way trip to this place.

When I rode the bus that shuttled between Tansen and Syangja and stopped at Ārebhanjyāng during my stay in the field I collected information on how people reacted to this new name. Many of them were local people who had to get on and off the bus at Ārebhanjyāng. I heard people asking the bus conductor, "How much is it for Ārebhanjyāng? Give me a ticket to Ārebhanjyāng. Will this bus stop at Ārebhanjyāng? How long will this bus stop at Ārebhanjyāng?" and so on. I counted 18 people saying Ārebhanjyāng, but I did not hear anybody say Āryabhanjyāng.

To me it was clear that the local people did not care for the new name. They continued to use the old name. On the other hand, when I was talking to an agricultural officer who had previously worked in Palpa district, he happened to mention Āryabhanjyāng. He told me that "Ārebhanjyāng has been changed to Āryabhanjyāng" (he was probably unaware that I had been to Ārebhanjyāng several times). As he said it I could see his appreciation for the new name. When I said, "Would not the name mean something else to people who are not Aryans?", he said that Ārya does not simply mean a particular race, it actually stands for a more cultured/civilized people. From that point of view, he thought the new name Āryabhanjyāng was very appropriate. I believe that he showed appreciation not simply because he was a government official, but because he preferred Hindu Aryan or Sanskritized names to non-Sanskritized names. Although I discovered that all government officials did not all consistently use one or the other name in speech, in all government papers it was Āryabhanjyāng, not Ārebhanjyāng. Thus if a local person needed to conduct any business with the government regarding their place of residence, they would have to accede to its new Sanskritized name.

Over the Bridge from Ārungkholā to Aruṇkholā

I found a similar situation of disagreements about and differential use of old and new names at a site on the Narayanghat-Butwal road. It is part

of the Mahendra Rajmarga that was initiated by late King Mahendra by giving his *sramdān* (voluntary labor contribution) to start the road at Giandakot, Nawal Parasi in 1964. I had planned to go to Jyamire, a remote village in east Palpa from Baugha. When going to the village I wanted to take one route, but to return by another route. I was collecting information on the trails and places so that I could plan how to go and where to stop. A school teacher who had taught at Jyamire for a number of years suggested that it would be better for me if I went to Jamire from Tansen by a mountain path and returned by a bus that ran along the bottom of the mountains. While he was giving me detailed directions of the path to be followed, he said, "When you come back from Jyamire, just follow the trail to Ārungkholā (आरुङखोला), from where you can take a bus to Tansen. There will always be some people going from Jyamire and adjoining villages to Ārungkholā. Some people might say Aruṇkholā (अरुणखोला) these days, because the name has been changed recently". As he said it he laughed. From his laugh I sensed that the people who said Aruṇkholā instead of Ārungkholā made a conscious effort to make the new name more popular.

Following the teacher's direction I went to Jyamire along the hills. While coming back I decided to take the trail that would meet the Mahendra Rajmarga. However, people from Jyamire suggested that it was a long way to get to the Highway, and as the trail would be lost along the rivers that cut across it at many places I would do better to take a porter who would carry my bags and also be a companion. They also found a porter for me. I was thankful to them for this suggestion because both of my bags were heavy, and I was completely new to that area. The porter was very friendly, and enjoyed talking. So he was not only a companion but also a good informant and since he was extremely slow to walk, we had plenty of time for discussion. Testing my own proficiency in the Magar language, I asked him, "Aruṇkholā, kudik baje tale, dai (What time do we get to Aruṇkholā ?)"

"Chining ma tale Ārungkholā, hajur (Today we cannot get to Ārungkholā)", he said.

"Aruṇkholā, Aruṇkholā", I pronounced the new name more distinctively. But the porter did not seem to notice the new name. "Yes, Ārungkholā," he repeated.

He said that if we walked fast enough, by evening, we would reach Mityal, another Magar village on the way to Ārungkholā. As he had predicted, by the time we reached Mityal the sun was setting behind the far off mountains in the west. I asked at a few houses on the side of the

trail at Mityal, whether we could stay over night. All of them seemed reluctant to give us a place to sleep. When I was trying one house after another I saw a few young men and a comparatively older man walking down the hill with backpacks on their backs.

I introduced myself to them and asked who they were. They told me that they were working for Redd Barna, (Save the Children), a Norwegian development project in some Magar areas. I told them that I was heading for Aruṇkholā, but that it was almost dark by the time we got to Mityal. The leader of the Redd Barna said that there was enough room in his *office-ghar* (office building), and that I would be welcome to stay with them as many days as I liked. He took me to the rented house, and showed me where I could put my bags and where I could sleep. My porter put my bags on the floor and told me that he would like to return to Jyamire as he was worried about his son, who had diarrhea. "It would not be difficult for you to get a porter from Mityal to Ārungkholā", he added.

I had not realized that he would like to return home from Mityal, and I did not know whether it would be easy to get a porter from Mityal. Nor could I refuse him since he said that he was worried about his son who was sick. I looked inquiringly at Captain Thapa, the leader of the Redd Barna unit .

"Don't worry. We will find a porter for you", he said.

Afterwards the captain introduced me to his staff. Captain Thapa and his associates described the general living conditions of the Magars of Mityal and neighbouring villages. They told me how backward the Magars were in education. Their main source of income, they said, was ginger, but because of its price fluctuation they could not predict how much they would make in a year.

"Where do they sell the ginger? Do they take it to Aruṇkholā?"

"Yes, they take it to Ārungkholā", they said.

"Why do some people say Aruṇkholā and some others Ārungkholā?" I asked them with assumed ignorance.

The captain said that Aruṇkholā was a new name for Ārungkholā, but many villagers did not even know that it had been renamed, and continued calling it Ārungkholā. "*Ārungkholālāī bikās lāgera Aruṇkholā bhaeko*" (Because of development Ārungkholā became Aruṇkholā), added the overseer, and everybody laughed. I changed the subject and asked them what project was going on in the village currently. The overseer suggested to me that if I was interested, he would take me to a village the next day where they were scheduled to start a sanitation project. I said that I would be happy to go. The next morning, however, when the cook brought tea

to our room, he told us that there were a couple of villagers carrying their ginger to Ārungkholā and "they say that they were willing to carry *sāhib's* (sir's) bags if they get reasonable money."

"One of us will carry them if we get Rs. 60.00," one of the two said.

Since it would have been difficult for me to get a porter just to carry my bags without anything of his own to do, I thought, I should go with them. So I agreed to give Rs. 60.00 and left Mityal after a couple of hours.

The path ran along the gravel washed down by seasonal flooding. The same gorge had to be crossed more than a dozen times before we reached the riverbed. The path along the river was equally difficult. We crossed the same river sixteen times, each time taking off our shoes and putting them on again. Finally, we could see the roofs of houses in the distance. Not long after that I saw people in clean clothes approach the villagers I was walking with. They asked them how much ginger they had and how much they would like to sell it for. I was told by the villagers that they were small ginger-merchants, who wanted to settle the price before the villagers got to the bazaar so that they could get the ginger for less. Finally we walked through the north-south line of the bazaar that touched the Mahendra Rajmarga near a newly constructed bridge. Right by the side of the bridge stood a big signboard in Nepali, facing the road, which said: "Aruṇkholā (Ārungkholā)". Both the new name and the old name were given in the same size of letters, but the old name was put in parentheses.

When I asked my porter whether Ārungkholā meant anything, he told me that in *Magarkura* (Magar language) *Ārung* means an *odān* (a triangular appliance on which pots are placed while cooking a meal). It was probably called Ārungkholā, some people say, because at this place the river bends and encloses a portion of land that makes it look like an *odān*. However, the porter said that the name came from the scores of *Ārung*-like stone structures that used to be left all over the bank of the river in earlier days by the people who used to stop over at this place and cook their meals. The Magars started calling this place Ārungkholā because the river-bank used to be full of *ārung(s)*. He said that he himself knew that this place used to be just a few huts. Before the road was constructed villagers from the hills used to walk by this place on their way to different towns in the Tarai in order to sell ginger and to buy salt. As it would take more than a day to reach either destination, and this place was more or less half-way they used to stop for the night at this place. In the course of time some villagers began to settle in this area and the number of huts increased. Once the road was aligned, and the dirt road was

being built, people from nearby hills and Tarai towns began pouring into this place.

From a conversation in one of the tea shops I gathered that when the bridge over Ārungkholā was being constructed village-style hotels sprouted to cater to the laborers, contractors, overseers and engineers. As it is a place from which villagers can take a bus to different points either in India or in Nepal, people realized the future prospects of the place. Shops began to mushroom on both sides of the road. While *ciyā pasal* (tea shops), *bhojanghar* (restaurants), and other shops spread east-west along the highway, petty businessmen who wanted to tap ginger, foodgrains, potatoes, yams and other village products started fixing huts along the north-south trail, through which villagers from the north would come. So the small settlement that originated in temporary huts grew into a triangular town of considerable importance. However, from its unknown origin until the recent past its name, Ārungkholā, remained as it was, until the bridge over the river was completed.

The school teacher who had given me directions told me in his usual smiling way that "the completion of the bridge had to be marked with *udghāṭan, bhaṣaṇ, ciyāpān ādi,* [inaugural speeches, refreshments, etc.]. Following the tradition of Nepal a formal inauguration was necessary." He said that a few days before the inauguration of the bridge some local Panchayat members had casually suggested to the government officials that rather than calling the bridge Ārungkholā pul (Ārungkholā bridge) after the river on which the bridge was constructed, a new name should be given while inaugurating the bridge. The bazaar itself was a symbol of *bikās*. It would need a name suitable to its growth and development. So the old name should be replaced by a new name. It was suggested that Ārungkholā should be replaced by Aruṇkholā because "the previous name was meaningful only to Magars whereas the new name is meaningful to all people" (Nilkantha Adhikary 1996; personal communication). *Aruṇ* which refers to the sun, would symbolically enhance the meaning of the place. The new name sounded similar to the old name, and if the old name was meaningless to the development-oriented people, the new name is associated with light, signifying the glory of the place.

According to local people, the ritual of inauguration was similar to any other inaugural ritual of a *bikās* project—the chairperson explaining and highlighting the accelerated pace of development in Nepal, construction of roads, bridges and the development of settlements such as Aruṇkholā bazaar, followed by *ciyāpān* (tea and snacks).

As in Ārebhanjyāng, local people in Ārungkholā did not immediately adopt the new name in everyday usage. Through use by the government, inclusion in textbooks, on maps, signboards and so on, it may be that in a generation or two the new names will fully replace the old names. But it is also possible that the current assertion of ethnic identity in Nepal, and the activism of the Langhali Movement (Magar Association for the advancement of Magar language and culture) will bring about a revival of the old names. One can hope so, for the new names tell us nothing about the history of places, and as Malla points out in relation to other vanishing names in Nepal, the old names would "enable us to relate these settlements to a cultural stratum" (Malla 1982/83:65) going back many generations.

What's in a Name?

The discourse of development claims that development of Nepal is not for the exclusive benefit of one group or some selective groups. The emphasis is always on "we Nepalis". The endeavor has been to create bonds with shared experiences to bring all Nepalis living in the high hills and lowlands into one fold, one community, or an imagined community as Anderson (1983) would have put it. However, while the *bikās* speeches would lead one to believe that they are genuine efforts to create a family bond, generate shared aspirations and give a sense of belonging to one large community with one goal, in practice one finds a very different picture. The repeated "we" that is supposedly intended to include every Nepali, does not seem to be translated into practice the way it should have been.

Although it is not obvious, a subtle index to the nationalistic assumption of who is a core Nepali and who is a marginal one is reflected in the choice of symbols and the values they represent, and in the particular register in which *bikās*-talk is conducted. The medium of dissemination of the discourse of development is Nepali as it is the lingua franca among the speakers of different languages of Nepal. However, the Nepali that is used in Gorkhapatra is more intelligible to first language speakers of Nepali and among them to those who have Sanskrit background. It is full of borrowed words and phrases from Sanskrit (Verma 1985). This is also true of the language of *bikās* speeches, like naming ceremonies.

This tendency to Sanskritize Nepali is part of the general tendency of Sanskritizing symbols and values of non-Sanskritic origins. The changing of place-names described here is one example of how this is done at a

local level. Why do place names have to be Sanskritized? Because names of non-Sanskritic origin sound, "rude", "barbarous" and "cacophonous" (Acharya 1995 v.s. quoted in Malla 1982/83:61) to 'Sanskritized ears'. They need to be modified or "corrected" by waving the magic *bikās* wand, so that they will be 'melodious', 'meaningful' and 'cultured'. In the naming rituals, described above, the old names are replaced by new ones derived from Sanskrit, symbolic of the values and history of those people who speak languages derived from Sanskrit, and from that time on the new names are propagated through official channels so that people will have to adopt the new names whether they like it not in their interactions with the state.

The apparent rationale is that these new names will have greater prestige and prominence. Thus the other ethnic groups' cultural and linguistic symbols which are not perfectly "Nepalized" do not have the same status as the already Nepalized ones. The implicit message is that to become Nepali is the same thing as to embrace the values and culture of Nepali-speaking groups with Sanskritized tastes and values. That is why, as Malla points out, "Khāsāṅkhu becomes Hanumatī, ...Balkhu is converted into Ratnāvati and Hijākhu had to be called Rudramati" (1982/83:64), and as I witnessed, Ārebhanjyāng and Ārungkholā had to be renamed as Āryabhanjyāng and Aruṇkholā respectively since the original names originated in Tibeto-Burman languages, and hence did not sound 'really' Nepali and were not intelligible to all Nepalis. Therefore, as the justification goes, cultural symbols of marginal groups will have to be replaced by the symbols of dominant groups. This trend of substitution, as Malla rightly points out "is an assertive rather than assimilative process. It takes place, perhaps, when the displacement of the older strata of settlers is complete -- politically as well as culturally" (1982/83:64).

From the government perspective it might seem that to include people of all ethnic and language groups within a single national community is to weave them all into one single culture and identity. However, in a country where there are more than "forty different sizable language and cultural groups" (Sharma 1982/83:1), to try to impose upon them all one value system is a way of furthering hegemony of the dominant group. It is actually to assert "equation of the dominant ethnic identity with the core of the nation, and the location of subordinated ethnic identities at its peripheries, is secured partly through differential power over private and public spaces" (Alonso 1994:394).

As said before, although the state elites may defend the replacement of the symbols of non-Nepali speaking groups by arguing that it is a way of

giving national prominence to previously unknown places it is, in fact, a way of obliterating the culture/language of non-Nepali speakers, and a clear example of the all-pervasive propagation of hegemonic ideology and activities of the dominant group through which they plan to achieve, as Williams emphasizes,

> in effect a saturation of the whole process of living--not only of political and economic activity, not only of manifest social activity but of the whole substance of lived identities and relationships (1977:110).

The official assumption seems to be that Nepal needs development, and for this there must be a unity of ideas and purpose, which is possible only when there is a shared culture and a shared identity, a sense of oneness in every aspect of life. In order to achieve this goal different social, linguistic and cultural groups must accept the dominant values. Although there is also some accommodation and compromise, on the whole, authorities try to impose dominant values.

How successful have these efforts been? I suggest that, in order to answer that question, we need to look beyond the aggregate data of censuses and surveys to local infiltrations of dominant words and symbols like those examined here. My study shows that although two names, original and Sanskritized, may be blazingly displayed on big signboards with government sanction, local people still refer to these places more by the old names, and even those people who know that the name has been changed continue to call them by their old names. Why do people stick to the old names? This retention of the old names can be taken as a form of resistance on the part of local people, despite the fact that in some cases it may have been local people who suggested the new names in order to win appreciation from government officials.

Resistance is not restricted to only one group of the population. If some illiterate Magars such as the porter did not know that the old name was changed, the captain knew the change but just ignored it, and his overseer laughed at it as did the school teacher who first told me about the name change. The bus riders who were a mixed group of different social and educational backgrounds called the place Ārebhanjyāng. But if there was implicit resistance in their insistence on the old name there was little overt resentment or criticism of the name change. It is not difficult to see why. Some people did not see that their criticism would make a difference whereas some others were just afraid to do so openly because, as I have

discussed in another paper (Adhikary 1995), anyone who criticized such activities openly was considered a *bikās virodhī* (an opponent of development), an enemy of the country and outside the community of "we". Look at the following Gorkhapatra warning to the *bikās virodhī*:

> While we, the multitude of Nepalis, playing the same tune of *bikās* in unison, [are] collectively trying to take off on the road of development in a short period ....during this time when the wave of development is leaping ahead, any element that spreads a false rumor and instigates (people) will be despised" (Gorkhapatra Feb. 19, 1986).

It must not be forgotten that simply because people do not speak in opposition does not mean that they do not resent. There are people who strongly resent the erasure of old names, and they do vent their resentment whenever and wherever they think it appropriate to do so.

Once while I was casually talking to Mr. J. B. Joshi, an educationist, historian and social worker of Palpa district, and not himself a Magar, we broached the subject of Hindu Aryanization in the ongoing process of development. Joshi said that he was in favor of change and development. However, alluding to Nepali being an Indo-Aryan language, he said that he regretted the replacement of old names with new Hindu-Aryan names, and in the course of our talk he handed me a draft paper to read in which he expressed his views on the Aryanization of indigenous names. In one of the passages he wrote:

> Aryan culture, civilization, language and religion have deeply influenced the life-style of Nepalese. However, to try to associate all villages and places of Nepal with some actual or imagined Aryan names in an attempt to artificially glorify the place is a great mistake and crime. This results in the distortion of historical truth, never letting the culture and civilization of a particular group emerge from historical darkness. For example, it is known that in Magar language 'Arekbhanjyang' means a place where a lot of garlic is grown. However, when we, the zealots of Aryan culture, change the name of the place to 'Aryabhanjyang' we [falsely] attempt to glorify and give a historical significance to it (Joshi 1989).

Mr. Joshi further said that those people who attempt to replace the indigenous place names with Sanskritic names should also understand that,

In different times, under the influence of different ethnic groups such as Kirat, Magar, Khas, Newar, etcetera, different places have been named differently. From one century to another century, if some names have remained as they are some others have undergone changes under the influence of the tongues of other people. In whatever form they may be in the name of every place there remains attached a history, culture and civilization of a people of old times. To attempt to suppress or to erase them by any pretext is a crime (Joshi 1989).

Mr. Joshi's views are shared by many other people both at the local and national levels. Although it cannot be generalized for the country as a whole, at least where *bikās* projects have been implemented, it seems that government officials have attempted to erase the cultural symbols of non-Nepali speaking indigenous groups and to propagate the symbols of the dominant group, both as a symbol of *bikās* and as one of its means. Malla (1982/83) calls this a process of cultural 'conquest and annexation'. Now the question remains to be asked: Does this approach bring a united identity to all the groups of Nepal? Under this process, can all Nepalis feel that they are equally treated and that they are the equal citizens of Nepal? Probably not. Malla (2041 v.s.) questioned this when he said that Nepal was following a policy of unity through uniformity rather than unity through diversity. Since Nepal is a country of diverse people with diverse values, it remains uncertain whether the imposition of the cultural symbols of one group can give all groups a sense of shared identity and belonging to a national community. In the Panchayat era, by imposing the cultural symbols of one group over many other groups, the politico-cultural policy of Nepal signaled that people could be accepted as equal members of the nation only when they abandoned their own cultural symbols and values.

From the recurrent use of all-inclusive 'we' in the *bikās* talks quoted earlier, one would expect that the model of development envisioned by Panchayati nationalism was to inspire love and respect for all groups and to accommodate them and their heritage with equitable space, as for different members of the same family. However, the practice of *bikās* such as the displacement of age-old place names by new names simply because they sounded different from the language of the dominant group stood at odds with the inclusive rhetoric. Whether deliberately intended or not, such practice did not show a genuine intention to weave all groups into one community with a common aspiration, but to play the politics of development in order to further the values of the dominant group.

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Nacirema culture is characterized by a highly developed market economy which has evolved in a rich natural habitat. While much of the people's time is devoted to economic pursuits, a large part of the fruits of these labors and a considerable portion of the day are spent in ritual activity. The focus of this activity is the human body, the appearance and health of which loom as a dominant concern in the ethos of the people. While such a concern is certainly not unusual, its ceremonial aspects and associated philosophy are unique. ¶ 3. Incarcerated in such a body, man's only hope is to avert these characteristics through the use of ritual and ceremony. Every household has one or more shrines devoted to this purpose.