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Street Kids in Kathmandu

Peering into the underside of development.

Drivers hit their horns as they race their cars through the streets of Kathmandu. Every other vehicle is a taxi, an auto rickshaw or a truck and each pumps out a stream of black exhaust that dissipates into a blue haze that hangs over the roads. People wear surgical masks to protect themselves from the pollution but health officials say the masks offer no protection at all. Plastic refuse piles over the rim of garbage dumpsters and trickles onto the streets and the destitute hold aluminum bowls out to the patrons of modern fast food restaurants while barefoot street children run after tourists for change. In some way Kathmandu looks like the scene of a war; but one fought without the use of military. “I think,” says Charles Gay, an American living in Kathmandu for the last 18 years, “that when you pull a medieval society immediately into the modern world that there’s going to be a lot of pressure.”

According to Dr. B.B. Pathna, emergency chief at BIR hospital, Kathmandu has seen a significant rise in suicides. He cites economic stress and the clash of traditional culture with modern culture. “People want more,” he says. “They want education, jobs and wealth. The young don’t want to follow their parent’s wishes. Prices are rising. Demand for luxury goods is rising. And wages are not rising. It all contributes to drug and alcohol abuse, family tension and suicide.”

Kathmandu is growing—in population, cars, buildings and poverty. According to Gahuri Pradhan, director of CWIN, an NGO working in children’s issues, migrants are pouring into the city from the country side. He says that there are three types of people who come: people compelled due to some loss of assets, people who are offered jobs and people who have dreams—people who have heard the development message of a new and better life.

In one example labor contractors from carpet factories recruit villagers. More than fifty per cent of the factories are informal setups. Parents send their children. The kids work 16 hours a day until the middle of the night and start again the next morning at 7:00. Plant managers often beat the children if they fail to satisfy their production standards. Village families also send their

children to Kathmandu to work as domestic servants or in the small tea shops and restaurants in the city. Low income families living in Kathmandu also recognize the economic value of their children and put them to work.

CWIN estimates that five to six thousand kids work on the streets of Kathmandu and three hundred of these are believed to be destitute. Olivea Bertin, a French national and former child-care NGO worker, points to the small shops in the Basantapur area of the city. “Many of the children here are alone. They do unpleasant jobs. They may face abuse from their employers. They are lonely and they miss their families. It’s easy for them to become sad and frustrated. They are the children most at risk. They meet other street children. Maybe one day they have tea together, then a cigarette. Slowly they are exposed and drawn to life on the street.”

“Then,” continues Bertin, “an older foreign man comes along and introduces himself to a couple of children. He says, ‘Come to my house. I’ll feed you, cloth you, educate you and be like your father.’ One of the boys knows what’s going on. The new boy comes with his assurance. They get on the man’s motorcycle and go to his house. The man says the children need a bath. They take a bath and when they come out the man is standing naked in the room. He tells the boys to give him oral sex. The experienced one does it. The new boy panics. ‘What’s going on? This isn’t right.’ But he sees the other boy doing it and he goes and does it. Then they eat, maybe get some new clothes and in some cases a friendship may develop with the man. The next day the boys leave with money in their pockets. They spend it and a week later along comes the old foreign man. He takes the kids to his house, has sex with them for a few days, pays them and lets them out. Then maybe a tourist comes who knows he can find young boys in Kathmandu. He takes them to Pokhara (a small resort town west of the capitol) for a few days of sex in his hotel room. It’s unpleasant work for the kids but they like the easy money and the freedom of their lifestyle. Yet they are children and life on the street can be hard. Police beat them. Sometimes they go hungry. They sleep in the cold. Even if they are repulsed by the old men it’s hard for them to refuse the money. When I first went to see these street kids,” says Bertin, “I told them I wanted to help them and I know they thought I too wanted sex from them.”

Three years ago Bertin established the NGO *Asahaya Balghar* (helpless children’s home). Asahaya Balghar worked with poor rural children who had migrated to Kathmandu. Bertin’s wife was the first to learn that foreign pedophiles paid and manipulated street children for sex. In June of 1996 Bertin became involved with the situation when he attempted to put two accused pedophiles in jail.

Several street children accused Nicholas Hayward, a fifty-year-old British national, of pedophilia. Mr. Hayward, a respected teacher in the British Primary school in Kathmandu, which services the expatriate community and upper class Nepalis, had been living in the city for five years. During that time he set up an unregistered children's home in a rented house. He equipped the house with a guard, a cook, a food stipend and an education stipend. He then recruited street children who were free to come and go from the house as they pleased. In a typical scenario Hayward arrived at his children's home on his motorcycle in the evening, collected two or three children and took them to his residence for his sexual pleasure. The next morning he put them in a taxi back to his orphanage.

At other times Mr. Hayward, known by the children as "Guy," took a group of children to a secluded wooded area in Swayambhu, home of a major Buddhist shrine. Placing one or two kids as lookouts Hayward sat on the ground and had the children masturbate him and give him oral sex. "After ejaculating," says Bertin, "the session was finished and he gave each of the children Rs. 50" (about one dollar). Following the arrest of Hayward, Bertin visited the area to verify the location with twelve-year-old Suntosh, the first child to speak to the police about Hayward. Bertin says the boy was shaking, pointing at the area from a long distance and saying, "Ok, that's it, you've seen it, now let's go."

The following are two testimonial of children (ages 10 and 12) about their experiences with Mr. Hayward. They were recorded in an investigative article published by the Nepali monthly, *Sadhana*.

1) "I was loitering around Basantapur. A white foreigner came by. I said, 'Sir, I am hungry,' and put out my hand to him. When he gave me a twenty rupee note I was overjoyed. He came again the next day. I extended my hand. He gave me thirty rupees. The third day he gave me fifty rupees and said, 'Come with me. I will put you in school.' I followed him. He took me to a house behind the Jhochhe area where I found other street kids like myself. I started living there. After two or three days the foreigner took me into a separate room. He took off my clothes and undressed himself. Then he told me he'd pay me to caress his organ. I did it. Then he put honey on his organ and told me to lick it off. I licked him, all the while feeling disgusted. He scolded me and

told me to hurry it up and started moving himself as he thrust himself into my mouth. After that he first put his finger, then his penis into my anus, moving back and forth. Enticing me with the promise of money he did things like that to me many times, sometimes in Jhochhe, other times in Swayambhu and even at his house in Kuponhole. I ran away after one year.”

2) “My mother died while I was still very small. My father and stepmother beat me up a lot. That’s why I ran away from home and came to Kathmandu. Mostly I slept outside Hotel Annapurna and worked as a garbage collector. Once I was doing the streets, begging, when I reached Bishal Bazaar. A white foreigner gave me Rs. 30....I met him again the next day and he gave me Rs. 50....It was Walaam who took me to Hayward. He sucked Guy’s penis right in front of me and told me to do the same. He took me to Swayambhu too. He used to take 6-7 other boys there. He used to do filthy things to all of us—in our mouths, hands and anuses. He did those things to me for one and a half years. He told me not to tell anyone. Other white foreigners also used to visit where we were staying. They have done dirty things to very small boys, coaxing them with money to get their own way. Guy beat us up many times. He didn’t even feed us properly.”

Bertin arranged for three children to testify against Hayward in front of the police. After listening to the children the Chief Inspector sent a police detail to Hayward’s residence with orders to bring him in for questioning. “The police,” says Bertin, “knew of the case through an NGO but didn’t do anything. Foreigners can do what they want here. The police ordinarily would never have thought to take on a foreigner, especially one with connections in the expatriate community of embassies, development and foreign aid. I’m not sure why they went ahead with it. I came in a suit and tie, speaking fluent Nepali, with a staff, children to talk and a lawyer. I suppose they felt they had someone they could trust.”

When the police arrived Hayward had just come home from work. He was wearing leisure clothes, sandals and had a drink in his hand. The police asked him to go to the station. “He didn’t say anything,” says Bertin, who accompanied the police to Hayward’s residence. “He

didn't ask for a warrant or anything. He looked stunned." He started to step out of the door and then asked very politely if he could change his clothes and put away his motorcycle. "The police," says Bertin, "were very shy and respectful. It was as if they felt sorry for the man."

At the police station Hayward stood before the Chief Inspector, two sub-inspectors and one of the street kids. The Chief Inspector asked Hayward, "Do you know what this boy is saying about you?"

"I know the child," said Hayward. "He was in my children's home. He stayed only a while. He wasn't a good student and I had to send him out." Hayward paused, looked at the ground and mumbled, "I don't know....."

"The Chief," says Bertin, "ordered him into custody and told his staff to phone the press and inform the Home Ministry."

Bertin feared that Hayward would be released through bribery or unjustified leniency. He and his staff put pressure on the police by talking to the press and posting someone at the police station. The expatriate supporters of Hayward packed the police station parking lot with their sport utility vehicles. They came to demand the release of Hayward. Among them were British Primary School staff and the parents of children who sent their kids to school there. "Many of those people," says Bertin, "were deeply offended. They couldn't believe they worked with a pedophile or had their children in a class taught by a pedophile." The British community organized a group of high profile people to come in support of Hayward; among them were the Director of the United Mission to Nepal and the Chief of the World Lutheran Service—two extensive international NGOs providing enormous amounts of humanitarian aid to Nepal. Another was the director of Hotel Soaltee Holiday Inn Crown Plaza, a luxury hotel.

"They were doing this," says Bertin, "defending a pedophile against the testimony of twenty four children."

The next day, June 26, 1996, based on accusations of pedophilia by street children, Bertin put another man, Danish national Lukas Kraefting, in jail. Kraefting, like Hayward, ran an unregistered children's orphanage. But unlike the middle class school teacher authorities had known for years that Kraefting was involved in criminal activities. Before coming to Nepal Indian authorities issued a warrant for his arrest in a dollar smuggling case. Following the issue of that warrant Kraefting fled India for Nepal. Then while in Nepal Kraefting was convicted for

attempting to smuggle US \$500,000 out of Nepal. The case was set aside without punishment, most probably due to the payment of a bribe.

Kraefting falsely claimed to be a medical doctor and of royal Danish lineage. The street kids involved with Kraefting knew him as 'Daddy' or 'Dr. Lukas.' After losing both of his parents ten-year-old Suk Lal and his sister went to Kathmandu. They worked in a carpet factory until police closed the illegal operation. "That's how I started begging," he told a group of Danish journalists who covered the scandal for the newspaper *Extrabladet*. "I met 'Daddy' and he offered that I could work in his house. Daddy read the Bible to us every day and asked which names we would like. If we didn't want a new name he just gave us one. I got Jacob. Others he called Peter, Levi or Paul." After two days Kraefting called Suk Lal to the top floor of his home where the Dane slept. "He wanted me to masturbate his penis, but I was very scared. So scared I peed in my pants. Then he punished me, screamed and yelled, and told me I couldn't leave the room until I had done it to him."

Nawaraj (13), who also spoke with the Danish journalists, spent time with both Hayward and Kraefting. After running away from Hayward's home Nawaraj met Kraefting on the street. "I was hungry," said the boy, "and he offered to take me to his home on his motorbike and give me food." Nawaraj lived at Kraefting's home for four months. He said he had sex with Kraefting four to five times a week. "He commanded me around brutally and threatened me with a beating if I didn't undress. Then he licked my penis and I had to lick his. Sometimes I had to cross my thighs while he rubbed himself between them. Other times he wanted to enter me. He got furious when I refused." He said children were poorly fed and forced to clean the house, cook and scrub the toilet. "But on the other hand," he said, "I attended school. I probably wouldn't have gone to school if I hadn't stayed with Dr. Lukas."

The children also reported that Kraefting would often call several of them up to his room where Kraefting and his Nepali wife would lie naked in bed watching pornographic films. Kraefting made the children suck his penis one by one and if they objected he would beat them with a cane topped with the Danish flag.

Bertin accompanied the police detail to Kraefting's house in an upscale residential area of the city. Kraefting looked down at them from the balcony and then appeared at the door below. He got in the car with the police and said to them in perfect Nepali, "Why have you come to disturb me? I was giving music lessons to the children. What is this joke?" "But he knew," says Bertin.

“Hayward had been arrested and Kraefting visited him in jail.” Kraefting then turned to Bertin and said in fluent French, “What are you doing? It’s not the way to act here. You don’t know how this country works. I’ll be out in twenty four hours. It doesn’t matter if what you say is true or not. It will take some money and I’ll get out so it’s not a big deal. But we won’t forget about you.”

At the police station Lukas stood before the Chief Inspector and demanded to know why he had been taken in for questioning. He said he knew the Inspector’s superiors and that his children’s home was sponsored by DANIDA. (Although Kraefting had received a one time grant from DANIDA he was not officially sponsored by the organization. When DANIDA gave Kraefting the grant the organization had no idea of the purpose of his ‘children’s home.’) The police hesitated and stalled. Bertin stayed. He talked about the kids. He argued. He cited the testimonials he had provided. “They didn’t want to arrest him,” says Bertin. “He was being protected.” But after two hours the order was signed putting Kraefting into custody.

According to the Nepali monthly *Sadhana* one police inspector was known to regularly visit Kraefting’s home for scotch whiskey sessions. That same inspector arranged for illegal meetings between Kraefting and his house staff while Kraefting was in custody, which may have brought about the destruction of incriminating evidence at Kraefting’s house. During the twenty four hours that Kraefting spent in jail his children’s home became officially registered.

The following day, after a meeting between Bertin, the police, Kraefting and another child witness, Kraefting requested to be alone with the police. Shortly afterward Bertin saw Kraefting walking out of the police courtyard. Police cited a lack of evidence as justification for his release. Yet the police, according to Bertin, avoided searching the Dane’s house.

The next day Bertin met with the Justice Minister of Nepal, Bhim Bahadur Tamang, who knew nothing of the situation. They talked for forty five minutes. The minister was shocked but subdued. “I will do my best for the Dane,” he said. “But for the British teacher I cannot promise anything. It will be different for him.”

Bertin estimates that between them Hayward and Kraefting sexually abused 300 children. But the Nepali criminal law lacks a clause for pedophilia and authorities charged Hayward and Kraefting with violation of public offense laws. A month after his arrest Hayward got his release by posting a Rs. 28,000 bail (about US\$ 500). Two days later he flew to England. The Justice Minister later told the Danish journalists, “The British embassy pressured us....I am not proud of the fact that we submitted to the pressure.”

Authorities put Kraefting put back in jail for his conviction in the dollar smuggling case. The judge passed a verdict of one year in jail and a fine of 72,000 rupees (with a promise of a

non-gratia visa stamped in Kraefting's passport when he finished his sentence). Because Kraefting couldn't pay the fine when his sentence had expired he had to serve an additional year.

After the turmoil settled one official of a UN agency told Bertin, "It's good what you did. It really is. But that's not the way to fight. We need to have meetings with officials. That's how we move things here. You are young and idealistic. We were like you and you will change."

When the man finished Bertin asked him, "But do you have kids?"

"Yes," he said, "but Olivea, that's not the point."

There were several similar encounters. Bertin feels the western development and political community was more embarrassed about the issue than anything else. The scene of nervous and rattled foreigners fighting each other, according to Bertin, was inconsistent with the development message of foreigners coming to save a desperate and ignorant country.

Eleven months after the arrests Bertin resigned from the NGO he had established. As for the children, Suntosh (12) will not return to his home in rural Nepal, from where his parents had sent him to Kathmandu when he was six. Bertin says the boy's feelings are complex. Among them might be that he resents his family for sending him off to such a miserable fate in the first place; that he will never be able to relate his experience to his parents nor to anyone in his village; that he prefers the city and freedom of the streets; and that he has feelings of guilt, despondency and bewilderment. "But," says Bertin, "he's strong and clever and might come out of it all right."

Another boy, Hari (11), confided in Bertin that he still dreams of sex with Hayward. "'I want it. I like it,'" he said. Bertin was happy Hari could say what many of the others couldn't. "He was worried about himself," says Bertin. "'What's happened to me?' he says. 'It's been over one year since I've been with him and I'm not dreaming about young girls but an old man.' He's back on the streets," says Bertin, "going with old men. When I see some of these kids now I sometimes think it's the prostitutes searching for the pedophiles."

Mr. Pradhan, of CWIN, says more than half of the street kids reform themselves. "They realize they are not children anymore and must work to support themselves. And they do it." Kids who have sold themselves to pedophiles face a more difficult road. "Many, in retrospect, feel it's immoral," says Pradhan, "whereas they don't think stealing is immoral. Some are very, very sad." Pradhan says that if they are motivated there are facilities to help them.

Twenty to thirty percent of the children, many of which have a history of prostitution, remain uncorrected. "There's a hierarchy that develops," says Bertin. "It's organized. Some of the

leaders force themselves sexually on the younger members. What happens to these kids? They pick-pocket, sell drugs, prostitute themselves, pull rickshaws, steal from homes and many will die of aids. The clever ones set themselves straight and get into some work.”

Mr. Min Badhur Thapa, a sixty-year-old illiterate man, runs a tea shop in Durbar Marg, near the Annapurna hotel. Street children commonly sleep and beg outside the luxury hotel. When asked about the changes in Kathmandu over the last thirty years Mr. Thapa says, “It’s just changing and changing.” He starts to condemn the changes and then he says, “It’s not bad and not good, that’s what I’m trying to say. But the changes are big. Now kids live on the streets. They leave their homes. In the old days that never would have happened. We have all seen suffering. But people are not getting enough out of life. They leave home. They steal. They have empty stomachs. Our people never used to be like this.”

Charles Gay, the American expatriate, first arrived in Kathmandu in 1969. He came into the city from the airport in a jeep. He saw bricked houses with tile roofs, fifteenth century religious sculpture, temples and statues everywhere. “It looked decrepit,” he says. “People let all of that religious art be. Now its all gone because it has money value. You could tell it was a sophisticated culture—in art, land use, architecture, religion. That much was obvious.”

According to Mr. Gay, poverty—if defined as destitution and desperation—has increased dramatically in Kathmandu. “There were none of the tin and plastic shanty towns of the migrants. There were very few beggars and none of the famine and deprivation usually associated with the third world. There wasn’t any migration. Now deprivation is here. Kathmandu has become a third world capital.”

Mr. Pradhan has a similar opinion. He says the tragedies in Kathmandu are due to modernization. “This,” he says, “is the underside of development. We had our problems in the past, but child labor, drugs, empty stomachs—fifteen years ago it was non-existent. There were a few poor children on the street, underprivileged, abandoned. People were very nice to them, I imagine.

“An interesting thing is that in the beginning of the 1980’s, when we started CWIN, the kids were fragile. They approached small restaurants and tea shops. ‘Sir, can you please give me a job cleaning?’ Now they come to Kathmandu, find other street children and follow them. Within three days they are quite tough.”

Sources:

1. Interviews with Olivea Bertin, September/October 1997.
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3. *Extrabladet*, trans., 16,2,97; 17,2,97; 18,2,97; 19,2,97
4. "Kathmandu and the Coming Civilization," Timothy Doyle. Unpublished ms.