CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION:
PLACE, HISTORY AND THE GOOD LIFE

‘Kipu shyo, yagpu shyo (May the good life and well-being come to you)!’ This is one of the most popular blessings the Langtangpa seek from their friends, elders and religious specialists. When asked what they wish for in the future, some say better education for their children, while others want more development projects in the village. Forty-year old Tashi, one of the village’s two postmen, hoped for more tourists so he could supplement his meagre income by working as a trekking guide. But Tashi was also worried: ‘Sometimes their Nepalese guides will “cut” chicken to cook for the tourists, and that is not good. Killing is not allowed in Langtang; it’ll anger Langtang Lirung and then bad things will happen.’ Nyima had two daughters in boarding schools at Kathmandu under the sponsorship of a German couple, and she was trying to find another sponsor for her youngest child.

Apart from desiring more material benefits and more tourists, most of my informants never failed to mention the current moral crisis that the village faces: political strife, lack of cooperation, and the perception that people have become more selfish. As they seek kipu through their ever-expanding social and economic relationships, the Langtangpa strive to find their own place in Nepal and the wider world, and how—both individually and as a community—to best deal with the current challenges. In order to describe their pursuit of the good life in all its complexity, the methodology I have adopted in this book has been both diachronic and synchronic: to spatialise historical development and to historicise spatial experience. This has allowed me to analyse the Langtangpa’s pursuit of the good life by placing it against the relationally constituted nature of both socio-cultural development and changing, contested meanings of place. For the Langtangpa, kipu, to a large extent, refers to material well-being, e.g. more water taps in the village, the availability of electricity, enough food for the family, comfortable houses, owning a hotel. Good health and blessings from the numerous deities of the land are also essential for a good life. This is not surprising: the ‘good life’ for most people must entail the attainment of a significant level of material comfort. This is even more so
for communities such as the Langtangpa who live in a harsh environment, and who have a long history of engaging in demanding physical labour where food shortage and the deprivation of material goods is not uncommon. Almost all the elderly villagers would, in their youth, have plied the dangerous mountain paths between central Nepal and southern Tibet and endured the hardships of long-distance trade. Even those in their late 20s still remember an extremely difficult childhood, especially memories of agonising hunger.

As I indicated in Chapter 4, *dug* or *dukkha* (‘suffering’) has become an intricate part of the Langtangpa’s social memory, and is often mentioned when they compare their present living conditions with that of the past. That is why *bikās* has become such a pervasive social discourse in Langtang, for it is primarily about material things, and the image of material deprivation looms large when the Langtangpa look back on the days before the arrival of tourism. I elaborated in Chapters 3 and 5 how the Nepalese state, since the 1950s, has relied on the promise of development as a source of its legitimacy, which in turn has opened the floodgates to the massive inflow of foreign aid into the country. One of the main aims of this book has been to describe the Langtangpa’s conception and pursuit of the good life in the context of this history of development. But what I want to argue is that even though the good life as conceived in the idiom of *kipu* overlaps significantly with *bikās*, they are not synonymous. We must not conflate pursuit of the ‘good life’ with ‘development’. I shall elaborate on the importance of this distinction in the concluding section. But first, it needs to be pointed out that for the Langtangpa, *kipu* both encompasses and exceeds the acquisition of material benefits that the practice of *bikās* basically entails. To make this important point, I will start by describing a key diagnostic event.

**Spatial Experience and Social Relations**

One of the most vivid images I carry away with me from Langtang is the proceedings of the 10th Village Council Meeting (*gāū parisad sabhā*), for it encapsulates the various tensions and dilemmas that the Langtang community currently grapples with. As a rule, all those present at public meetings are allowed to speak on issues concerning the village, especially regarding the performance record of the Village Development Committee (V.D.C.). On this occasion, most of the participants were