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JOHAN G. REINHARD, New Lenox, Ill.:

Film E 2195

Kusunda (Nepal) – Construction of a Lean-To during Hunting

Author of the Publication: JOHAN G. REINHARD

With 2 Figures

Summary of the Film:

Kusunda (Nepal) – Construction of a Lean-To during Hunting. General scenes of a village and houses of the Kusunda are followed by scenes showing the Kusunda sharpen arrows, stalk through the forest, shoot an arrow, dig for tubers, and construct a lean-to.

Inhalt des Films:

Kusunda (Nepal) – Aufbau eines Windschutzes während der Jagd. Der Film zeigt zunächst ein Kusunda-Dorf und seine Häuser, dann folgen Aufnahmen von Kusunda, die ihre Pfeile spitzen, durch den Wald pirschen, einen Pfeil abschießen, Knollen ausgraben und ein Schutzdach errichten.

Résumé du Film:

Kusunda (Népal) – Construction d'un abri pendant la chasse. Des prises de vues d'un village et de maisons Kusunda sont suivies de scènes où des Kusunda aiguisent leurs flèches, marchent à travers la forêt, décochent une flèche, déterrent des tubercules et construisent un abri.

General Preliminary Remarks¹

The Kusunda were until recently a nomadic hunting and gathering tribe which roamed widely throughout the middle hill region of Nepal. They lived by hunting with bows and arrows, gathering forest produce, and trading and begging in villages. Today this tribe is nearly extinct. Of those few Kusunda still alive, most of those married have taken spouses from other castes and many of these Kusunda are themselves offsprings of such unions. Most know little of Kusunda customs of

¹ The research upon which this article is based was supported by grants from the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research and the Austrian Academy of Sciences. Film material was contributed by the Institut für den Wissenschaftlichen Film, Göttingen.

the past, and only a few still speak the Kusunda language, which appears to be unrelated to any major language family in Asia. The term „Kusunda“ is applied to them by outsiders, and they prefer to call themselves *gilong dei mihaq* (people of the forest) or *ban raja* (kings of the forest) in Nepali.

Due to the disintegration of this tribe, it is difficult to present a coherent picture of their past culture, and they are so widely dispersed that significant variations in customs exist at present. The situation is further complicated by the Kusunda claim of belonging to the twiceborn Thakuri caste. Hence they claim to have Thakuri clan names and to follow (or have followed in the past) many Thakuri customs. Although most Kusunda have become settled to the extent that they remain in one village for at least a few years and engage in agriculture to some extent, a few Kusunda still possess bows and arrows and hunt for a part of their subsistence.



Fig. 1. River valley near Gorkha in which Kusunda live and hunt

Background to the Film

There is general agreement among the few surviving Kusunda as to some customs of the past, especially those relating to hunting. They claimed that, although they would shoot most game animals, they ate only birds and animals which lived in trees. They refused to eat meat from most domesticated animals, refused to drink milk and use butter, and considered cow dung to be polluting. The men did the hunting and much of the gathering, while the women took the game to be traded in the village for food grains, cloth, etc., or to beg, if no game had been procured.

The Kusunda used only one type of bow (*tul*) and one type of arrow (*myyu*) and claimed not to have used any other hunting methods, such as trapping. The bow (ca. 140 cm) was made of bamboo and the unfeathered arrow (ca. 160 cm) of a reed. Both were hardened over a fire before being used. The iron arrow points (*ubu*) were made by village blacksmiths and sharpened on stones before hunting. The unusual length and lack of feathering of the arrows was said to be due to their being used primarily to shoot birds while they roosted in trees. This was done



Fig. 2. Kusunda with bow and arrows

at dusk or after dark, in which case torches were carried. Thus the arrows were often shot relatively short distances vertically and did not require feathering. However, the Kusunda also frequently hunted in the daytime, usually in small groups of two or three men moving in a rough line along a hillside. It was felt that any game moving in front of the hunters would eventually be overtaken. The game shot was considered the property of the hunter, to be distributed as he saw fit.

If hunting and trading were successful, the Kusunda would camp for one or more weeks. They constructed lean-tos (*wabi*) of branches and leaves, if natural shelters

such as overhangs and caves were not available. Men built the lean-tos, while women used a bill-hook to cut and gather the branches. They were simply constructed with one pole (ca. 6'–10' long, depending on the size of the family) set on top of two forked sticks (ca. 4' long), which had been sharpened and stuck into the ground. Two other poles were set against these to act as supports, then branches were laid vertically on one side against the top horizontal pole. In a dry spell there usually was little else for protection, since the purpose of the lean-to would only be to keep off dew. If the weather was more inclement, then branches often were placed horizontally under and over the vertical branches to form a stronger and more waterproof covering. These branches were not, however, tied.

The Kusunda used sharpened sticks or short handled hoes (*shingka*) to dig for wild yams (*itaq*). The two most commonly eaten yams were *Dioscorea deamonia* (*dattsi*) and *Dioscorea sativa* (*qom*). Honey was obtained by smoking out the bees. Numerous berries and fruits supplemented the food supply. Bamboo baskets (*qaiptu*) were used to carry goods while traveling and net bags (*hamanji*) were used, especially while hunting, to carry game and miscellaneous tools¹.

Notes on Making of the Film

The film was made on June 6, 1968 in and near the village of Satobati, Gorkha District, Central Nepal. The two Kusunda appearing in the film, TEG BAHADUR (age ca. 60) and GANESH BAHADUR (age ca. 30) both speak the Kusunda language and actively engage in hunting. They claimed to have first settled in the mid-1950's. Both speak Nepali and they own a small piece of land. The scenes in which the arrow was shot and the lean-to was constructed were reenacted for the film.

Technical data: camera: Bell and Howell Model 70-D; lenses: Switar 16 mm, Bausch and Lomb 25 mm, Yvar 75 mm; camera speed: 24 f/s; film material: Kodak Plus X, black and white negative film type 7231.

Description of Film

A general view of the village of Satobati is followed by scenes of Kusunda houses, the first of a more traditional family and the second of a more acculturated one. Two Kusunda walk through rice fields and sharpen arrowheads near a stream. They stalk through the forest, then one shoots an arrow and retrieves it. One man digs for tubers, then another is shown smoking a clay pipe. Branches are cut and the poles for a lean-to are set in the ground. After the lean-to is finished, the two Kusunda return to the village.

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¹ For further information on the Kusunda see REINHARD [1] and REINHARD and TOBA [2].

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Filmography

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Sources of the Figures

Fig. 1 and 2: photography J.G. REINHARD.