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# HIMAL

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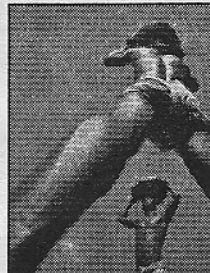
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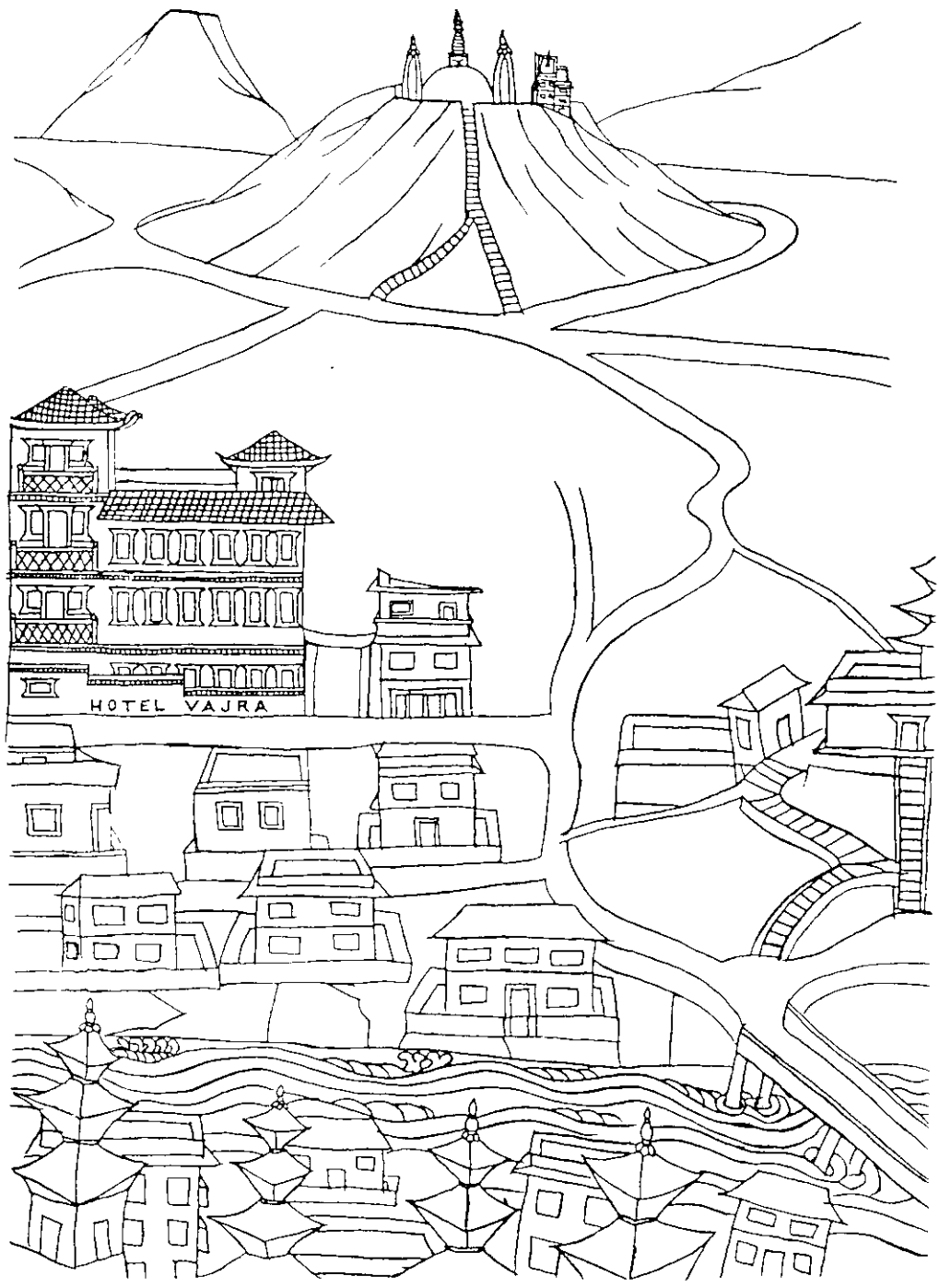


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**Vajra** (literally--flash of lighting), is an artists' condominium, a transit home for many, providing a base during months of hibernation and creative inspiration. Its isolation, graphic splendour and peaceful ambience, make an ideal retreat from the clock of pressure.

Ketaki Sheth  
*Inside Outside*

I stayed a week at the **Vajra**, by which time I had become so fond of it that I stayed another.

John Collee  
*The London Observer*



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### Trendy Retro-Ethnocentrism

Sigrun Eide Odegaard has raised an interesting topic for discussion on the specific group called "travellers" (May/June 1997). As reflective travellers, however, we feel misrepresented by her article. Our main points of contention are with the generalisations she makes, the distinctions between tourists and travellers, and the multiplicities of constructing the "authentic".

We found the application of traits such as "filthily dressed", "miserly", and "naively orientalist" to all who travel on a limited budget to be ethnographically unsound. Trendy retro-ethnocentrism qualifies Westerners to "bash" other Westerners.

Travellers are not a homogenous group: men and women of varying ages and nationalities obviously embody diverse characteristics. True, we have encountered the "neo-colonialist" traveller who brags about having "done" a country, often meaning little more than hitting the highlighted points in the Lonely Planet guidebook. But we have also met intelligent people who have deeper interests in a place stemming from prior studies or personal background.

Despite Ms Odegaard's simplistic attempt to tear away the distinction between "travellers" and "tourists", they do constitute different groups. Usually, monetary and time budgets define this distinction and thus lead to different experiences of a place.

The Lonely Planet guide to travels on a "shoestring" caters to those who simply do not have the money to afford expensive accommodation, especially if travelling for an extended period of time. "Travellers" land in a place with little more than a guidebook which points out areas where cheap accommodation can be found. "Tourists", on the other hand, have limited time and larger budgets; therefore, travel itineraries, often organised as group tours, are prepared in advance to maximise the amount of sights "seen" in a place. Tourists do not want to use precious time deliberating on where to spend the night, while travellers accept this as part of the routine.

Places like Kathmandu's tourist area, Thamel, exist in many major Asian cities. These locales are loaded with guest houses and cheap restaurants and are testimony to the existence of a traveller



culture. The conformity of the menus and prices reflect a complex interplay between what many travellers like and what local restaurateurs believe Westerners want. Because a large variety of Western foods now exist in these cheap restaurants, a traveller has overwhelming choices of local versions of such foods.

Strikingly, many of Thamel's restaurants offer only one option of 'native' cuisine expensively priced under the homogenising title "Nepali food". This strange occurrence cannot simply be blamed on xenophobic palates of travellers as alluded to by Ms Odegaard, but as a cyclical evolution of local perceptions of what Westerners want and the traveller's choice of a Western meal on a predominantly Western menu.

Our final point addresses authenticity as a 'contested zone' among Westerners in a foreign land. Travellers who believe that they are getting a more real-life local experience than tourists are splitting hairs. Neither groups could or should consider themselves pioneers in a place – the packaged tours and the Lonely Planet guidebook itself are evidence that the path has been trodden.

However, it needs to be recognised that a traveller's ideas of what encompass an authentic travel experience will differ from an 'authenticity' sought by the anthropologist. The experience of travelling at one's own pace via local transportation, meeting other travellers, and "seeing the sights" is what often makes up the core of a traveller's experience. How much one wishes to learn about the culture or history is up to the individual. On the other hand, an anthropologist might spend a few years establishing relationships in order to understand a local perception. But anthropologists themselves realise the problematic nature of searching and creating a single "authentic Other".

We do not think that travellers are really guilty of not seeing "the countries as they exist", as Ms Odegaard suggests.

*Alysia Han, Morgan Schwartz  
Raleigh, North Carolina*

### Food for Mind and Body

Since a few misunderstandings have occurred in the editing of the letter I entrusted to the "Mail" Section (July/August 1997), bearing a direct relation to

the nature of our Lord Gautam Buddha's teachings, please publish the following explanatory note.

Your commentary "Buddhism on the Mainland" (May/June 1997) mentions a "population seeking some spiritual sustenance". An inkling on the real nature of the "sustenance" you refer to is therefore required.

The immense and ever-growing annals on Buddhism are remarkable for their all-pervading silence about *anis* – Tibetan Buddhist nuns. While literature about *anis* is rare and incomplete, Buddhist literature signed by *anis* is non-existent. *Anis* are also similarly absent in the celebrated pantheon of monks, lamas, Dalai Lamas and colleagues, seekers on "the Path to Enlightenment".

Those who do research and are sustained by the teachings of our Guru should not only speak in defence of human rights but, at the same time, also in His name, effectively work for the re-establishment of Gautam Buddha's original *Sangha*.

In the times of Arhat Buddhism, originally established by our Lord Gautam Buddha, Buddhist nuns attained the paths to enlightenment. This has been historically recorded. However, for nearly one thousand years till the present day, the Dalai Lama caste, originally established by lamas, has excluded women – Buddhist Nuns – from investigating the paths of education, intellectual reasoning and teaching.

The practical instructions by the Dalai Lamas have always been taken as exclusively the privilege of lamas. During the past thousand years, the larger population seeking "sustenance" was traditionally relegated to poor schools, originally established by anonymous, self-sacrificing 'lay' Buddhists who, full of compassion for the masses, managed, one way or the other, to teach people how to read and write. As for *anis*, till the present time, many remain illiterate.

According to our Beloved Teacher, Arhat Mauriya, right knowledge feeds mind and thought, just as right food nourishes brain and body. So, the food for mind and body should also be the right of the *anis*, together with specialised training for the writing of Buddhist texts and the teaching of lay Buddhist people. A clear understanding of the Paths to Enlightenment, sheltered under the original teachings of Gautam Buddha is absolutely necessary at present, because



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of one all-important fact: Buddhism is not Lamaism.

*Maria de Fatima Machado  
Kopan Phaika  
Kathmandu*

Editor's note: The reference to Kopan Monastery in the earlier letter by the correspondent was an editorial error.

### No Asylum Sought

I would like to point out a significant error in the box item "Refugee Has Her Day" of the July/August 1997 issue. While the other facts mentioned were correct, the last sentence which states, "...Ms Sharma has been granted political asylum in the US", is totally false and baseless. I would like to mention to you that the above statement has created difficulties in my day-to-day work.

*Mangala Sharma  
Anarmani, Jhapa  
Nepal*

The error is sincerely regretted. Editor.

### Wrong Recognition

After reading the item on Bhutan in your July/August issue, we would like to offer our opinion on the certificate given by the mayor of San Francisco recognising Mangala Sharma's services to Bhutanese refugee women, as well as the Amnesty International award she has reportedly received. We are surprised to learn that Ms Sharma counsels women torture victims and works to educate Bhutanese women regarding their rights, for, as far as we know, she visits the camps hut once or twice a year, accompanying foreign guests from the donor agencies.

We refugee women from the camps are not aware that she has ever conducted trainings on women's rights or counselled torture victims, and would like to have some details to confirm that all this is indeed true. Since Ms Sharma claims to be the voice of the refugee women, we would like to know what she does in her frequent travels overseas. When our own sister has manipulated our situation for her self-promotion, what can we expect from menfolk? This is saddening.

Lastly, we Bhutanese refugee women residing in the camps wish to request international organisations and persons concerned to come to the camps in Jhapa to get acquainted with the facts before conferring such certificates. They can also confirm what information they have with the help of the UNHCR office in Jhapa. Finally, we ask them not play with the

sentiments of refugee women, for they are already frustrated and depressed.

*Chandrika Timsina, Leenu  
Dahal, Sapana Sharma, Binu  
Rai, Hemkanta Dahal  
Beldangi I & II, Goldhap and  
Timai Camps, Jhapa, Nepal*

### Unpopular Nazi in Tibet

I would like to add something about Ernest Schafer's expedition to Tibet about which there was mention in the short piece "Nazis in Tibet" in the Jul/Aug 1997 issue.

When their application to visit Tibet came to me from the British government, I recommended that we should not support it, but I received a message from the highest quarters that it was necessary to do so because Himmler was behind it and apparently we were then appeasing the Germans.

I saw quite a lot of the party, but did not hear of any approach by them to the Tibetan Army. It would probably have been fruitless as all policy was eventually influenced by the great monasteries. At the same time, it would be inaccurate to say that the Tibetan Army was under British influence. Certainly, it drew on India for supplies of arms and was once receiving training from British officers – at least a few of its officers were. But by 1939, it was run down and inefficient and had no links with India.

Schaefer tried to persuade me that

Britain and Germany should combine to control the world, but during his visit, when Germany invaded Czechoslovakia, I made it clear to him that I did not want to meet him again. He panicked and fled to Shigatse from where he wrote to the German press about being surrounded by hostile influences. He and his party managed to leave India just in time in a special plane sent for Herr Otto Schackel. The party made themselves unpopular in many ways, both in Lhasa and Shigatse.

But that is only part of the story.

*Hugh E. Richardson  
Fife, UK*

Editor's note: Mr Richardson was the last British agent in Lhasa. After the British left India in 1947, he continued as India's representative in Tibet until the Chinese invasion forced him to leave.

## CALL FOR PAPERS

# Conference on South Asian Mediocrity

Himal is organising a conference on South Asian Mediocrity, to take place in Spring 1998. The conference will seek to identify and explain the levels of mediocrity found in all aspects of South Asian life, from scholarship to business, from politics to media, from architecture to public health. The gathering will strive to survey the levels of mediocrity and understand why South Asians lag ever-further behind in terms of our economies, culture(s), intellectualism and self-image.

Scholars and specialists from across disciplines and from all South Asian countries will come together to present papers that are not necessarily restricted by theme, country or orientation. Because of its open-ended nature, and in order to plan the conference, we ask those interested to send in concise outlines of proposed papers for consideration. Views about particular themes that need to be covered or the manner in which presentations need to be made are also welcome. Please restrict yourself to a page in single-space.

Watch this space or the magazine's web site for conference details.

Address your paper proposal to:  
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Readers are invited to comment, criticise or add to information and opinions appearing in HSA. Letters should be brief, to the point, and may be edited. Letters that are unsigned and/or without addresses will not be entertained. Include daytime telephone number, if possible.

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India • Pakistan

## FIFTY SOMETHING

**NOW THAT THE** breathless television extravaganza of the 50th anniversary of Independence of India and Pakistan is over, we can perhaps take a more sober look at the past half-century. Satellite television proved once more that the medium is the message with its up-beat look at the anniversary – carefully glossing over the fact that what we were really commemorating was 50 years of Partition.

Other than a big bash of Indo-Pak businessmen and celebrities in London to kick off the jamboree and New Delhi's *The Asian Age* remembering that there was also a Pakistan, the anniversary was marked separately in the countries that gained independence by cutting themselves apart. In India, there was a celebration of India, and in Pakistan it was a celebration of Pakistan. Not for another 50 years, it seems, will these two nations separated at birth learn to think of each other as twins and celebrate a birthday together.

What of the other South Asians who had no 50th celebration this year, who were all taken along for the independence ride by satellite tv programmers in mid-August? Sri Lankans are, actually, gearing up for their own 50th bash on February 1998, while Bangladesh marked its 25th anniversary of independence from Pakistan earlier this year.

Nepalis preen at never having been colonised, but they too had to gain 'independence' from the Rana prime ministers in 1950 and from the Shah kings in 1990.

And so, as part of the golden jubilee, we were treated to the astounding sight on regional satellite broadcasts of multinational companies and their wannabe *desi* counterparts falling over each other to wish happy birthday – mostly to India because that's where the market is. True, there was Macleans toothpaste claiming that it was "spreading smiles across Pakistan", but most went with Nokia, the Finnish cellphone company, which was "proud to connect the people of India on the 50th year of their independence". And so it went: paint companies, detergent manufacturers, ball-point pen wallahs – all subsidising Rupert Murdoch in order to wish clients on their side of the border a happy anniversary.

It all proved what was evident all along: for more than half the populations in Pakistan and India who live in poverty 15 August was a mere reiteration of unfulfilled promises. Promises of an end to a life in squalour, promises of communal harmony, promises of true grassroots democracy, and promises of alternative development models and decentralised decision-making. For about half a billion people of the Subcontinent, the real tryst with destiny is the daily struggle for survival. In the final analysis, it

hasn't mattered much for them whether the ruler sitting in New Delhi is a viceroys or a khadi-clad, Gandhi-capped, Nehru-jacketed politico.

Watching Madhur Jaffrey taking a culinary tour of the Subcontinent to commemorate the anniversary, and finding at the flick of a remote that V Channel was offering 150 free tickets to a freedom concert, one wondered who was benefitting from all this independence. Certainly the elite and upper middle classes, those who can afford the television sets and cable fees on which to watch the parade go by. All this surficial and oversweet abundance of theme songs, walkathons and television clips – so reminiscent of American feelgood television – have but one target: Yuppy India, which now forms a mass large enough for advertising to target with commercial messages.

The India of the village, tribal, scheduled caste, the desert, the forest, the mountain, was far from the minds of the producers of the independence hoopla. This was freedom reduced to a soap opera. And as a sociological phenomenon, there is no saying what political repercussions are in the offing as saccharin patriotism peddled by satellite enters millions of households in India, and beyond in the rest of South Asia.

Perhaps we will know it is finally time to celebrate independence when on 15 August 2057, Tata congratulates the people of Pakistan and Habib Bank felicitates the people of India.

Sri Lanka

## TEARS, BUT NO PROTESTS

**A STRANGE ELEMENT** in Sri Lanka's long-drawn civil war, now in its fourteenth year, is that despite the blood that has been shed and the limbs that have been lost on both sides of the lines, there has been little in the form of protest. The country has not seen angry demonstrations with ordinary people taking to the streets, refusing to offer their sons as cannon fodder. Despite the yearning for peace among people of all classes and communities, the carnage continues to be accepted with stoicism.

Why? There are two reasons. On the Tamil side, there is fanatical motivation. Velupillai Prabhakaran, the leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), has been able to inspire his fighters in a way that few guerrilla leaders in contemporary world history have been able to. The glass cyanide capsule that LTTE cadres wear round their necks and bite if captured, tells its own story. So also the numerous suicide killers who have blown themselves up for the Liberation Tigers.

50  
years  
in pursuit of  
a vision



On the other side of the bloodied fence, the young men fighting the war for the Colombo government most often do so because they have nothing else to do. Unemployment has long been the country's biggest problem and although most politicians and, indeed, many other Sri Lankans would like to think that patriotism inspires most of the soldiers (and sailors, airmen and policemen) at the front, the reality is that they are fighting for their pay.

The money, by prevailing standards in the country, is good. A frontline serviceman of the lowest rank earns a minimum of SLR 6000. Besides, he is fed, barracked and clothed and gets many perks such as free cigarettes – which non-smokers sell in the open market. All this makes up for much more than what the soldier can expect in the lower rungs of the job market, assuming that a job can be found. Even with the good pay and perks, however, there are desertions by the thousands.

But that is not the whole story. Despite the poor state of its economy and the billions being guzzled up by the never-ending war, Sri Lanka looks after its war dead and disabled much better than do most richer countries. The family of a soldier dying in the fighting is immediately paid SLR 100,000 compensation. He is promoted one rank immediately and his pay continues till the time he would have reached the retiring age of 55 years. After that, a pension begins.

Many of the young men fighting an intractable enemy on the government side are not married. If they die, therefore, it is the parents who get the compensation. Every month in this way, the cash flows into thousands of village homes. This is no small amount in the poor hinterland, and hence helps take the edge off much of the resentment that arises at the death of a son or husband. To say so is not to imply that the loss of a loved one in a useless war in which over 10,000 servicemen and many thousands, including civilians, on the Tamil side have been killed, is of no consequence to the families that have lost a member. Far from it. Grief is very much a factor. But the economic cushioning has without doubt helped temper the anger.

Then there are the ceremonial funerals in hundreds of villages dotting the countryside. When the body of a serviceman killed in the fighting is recovered, it is returned to his family and interred with what the forces call "full military honours". An honour guard, band, gun salute, flag-draped coffin and all the panoply of a moving military ceremony – it is all provided. Such an event draws big crowds from the surrounding countryside and there is hardly a dry eye when a comrade-in-arms presents the folded national flag to the next-of-kin at the end of the ceremony. Senior officers have said that bereaved families often offer another son to the fighting forces.

These, then, are the reasons why the massive loss of lives in a civil war that has cost Sri Lanka so much in blood and treasure has not driven people to the streets in anger. Where the LTTE is concerned, families of conscripted young men and women made to fight and die by Mr Prabhakaran are undoubtedly resentful about the loss of their loved ones. But open rebellion



is not possible given the 'fascist' methods used by the Tigers to run the territory they control. But a day of reckoning will come and this is one reality that the LTTE will have to live through when the war ends.

The Tigers, too, honour their dead, especially the "martyrs" going out on suicide missions. But the rebels cannot do it quite in the style of the national forces. And though there is less monetary featherbedding for families of dead Tigers, the rebels, too, provide special rations and other facilities for the families of their dead.

And so the war goes on and on, and with it the bloodshed. There are private tears for the dead and disabled. But no protests.

**Dead Tigers:**  
The LTTE lost 126 cadres in a battle in early August.

## Pakistan

# MQM BY ANY OTHER NAME

**THE MOHAJIR QAUMI** Movement (MQM) announced on 26 July that it was changing its name to Mutahida Qaumi Mahaz (United National Movement). The proposal is not new. It was first floated in 1991, and party chief Altaf Hussain had even appointed a "Chief Organiser" in Islamabad to oversee the opening of national offices in the other provinces. Soon afterwards, however, Mr Hussain had to flee to London, following a split in the MQM which made it unsafe for him to remain in Karachi. (The split delivered Mr Hussain's MQM-Altaf and MQM-Haqiqi, led by former party stalwart Afaq Ahmed. Both factions have their political base in the Sindh cities of Karachi and Hyderabad.)

The name-change was formally announced at a press conference by Senator Ishtiaq Azhar, convenor of the MQM's Coordination Committee. The 30-member committee has been expanded to include three more people, one each from Punjab, NWFP and Balochistan.

The change of name may be viewed by some as

RAHAT DAR



Altaf Hussain (second from r) at MQM rally in Karachi prior to his London exile.

a positive step in the context of Pakistani politics, for it clearly represents an attempt to have a wider ethnic appeal than the Urdu-speaking 'refugee' community which forms the group's base. Certainly, the announcement was welcomed by parties like the right-wing Jamat-e-Islami, from the ranks of which a great proportion of the MQM membership is drawn. In fact, the rise of the MQM in Hyderabad and Karachi meant the Jamat downfall in those cities, and this may explain why the Jamat would welcome the MQM announcement. A nationwide focus would dilute the MQM's support base in the two urban centres.

Meanwhile, the name-change could help save face for MQM-Altaf's coalition partner in Sindh, the Nawaz Sharif-led government. With violence in Karachi having resumed, the intelligence agencies are once again gunning for the MQM, which they hold responsible. This has been a trifle awkward for the Sharif government, which has had to hold high-level meetings on the law and order situation in Karachi minus MQM representation, to stop information leaks. Many believe that the change of name is an eye-wash to release pressure on the Sharif government, since it can now claim that its junior coalition partner has rejected ethnic politics and its old programmes.

The slogans raised by MQM-Altaf supporters at the press conference called by Mr Azhar were quite different from those they used to recite earlier. Now, rather than focusing on the *mohajir* identity, they were calling for unity between Pakistan's various ethnic groups: "Sindhi Punjabi bhai bhai", "Mohajir Pathan bhai bhai", and so on. But will the name change really mean a parting of ways with the politics of ethnicity? After all, the MQM's 24 sitting members in Sindh Provincial Assembly and 14 in National Assembly were all elected on the basis of their *mohajir* (refugee) identity.

How far this new sentiment will wash will be evident when and if the new MQM (retaining its old initials, and its old flag) starts a membership drive in all the provinces. However, an earlier effort, in late 1991, to increase membership through a change in

policy while retaining the old name yielded no results. Then, a rather convoluted attempt was made to revise the definition of *mohajir* – which in Pakistan has come to mean Urdu-speaking – to include all refugees and migrants, including the Punjabis who had migrated from Jullunder in India, for example, or the Pathans who had come to Karachi from their native NWFP.

That attempt at widening appeal failed abjectly, and it seems unlikely that a new name with old acronym and flag will succeed. Meanwhile, the MQM-Haqiqi has said that if Altaf Hussain's MQM changes its name, it will drop the 'Haqiqi' from its own and be known simply as the Mohajir Qaumi Movement. In that case, there will be two MQMs, one apparently standing for national unity and the other for the rights of the Urdu-speaking *mohajirs*. Since the latter ideology is what forms the support base of Mr Hussain's faction, the change may end up benefitting his rival, who presently heads a much smaller group.

### South Asia

## MIGRANTS, REFUGEES AND THE REGION

**WHILE THE PROBLEM** of economic migrants and political refugees is hardly unique to South Asia, the Subcontinent stands out as a region that has been unable to find a solution to it. This has resulted in acrimony between neighbours who are already burdened with enough socio-economic problems of their own – not to forget the suffering of the displaced people and migrants themselves.

There are some refugee issues that have more or less solved themselves through sheer passage of time. Hindu, Muslim and Sikh refugees created by Partition have had to come to terms with their displacement. Refugees who fled Burma in the 1960s to India and Nepal have likewise become reconciled with their new situations, and this is true also of the Indian Tamil repatriates. The Tibetan refugees, while many still yearn to return to the high plateau, are well settled and economically secure.

However, there are millions of South Asians who have crossed frontiers whose presence is problematic to host countries and can invite instability in their place of refuge. As geographically the largest and most central country of South Asia, India has played host to most refugees and migrants. According to Partha Ghosh, Director of the Indian Council of Social Science Research in New Delhi, post-Partition India has taken in 15 million people migrants from its neighbours. These have come from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Burma, and the number does not include the long-term economic migrants from Nepal.

The most serious problem for the Indian state, doubtless, are the Bangladeshi settlers who have ranged far and wide within India, building up significant enclaves in Bombay and Delhi, and inhabiting large tracts of the Brahmaputra Valley. The 1981 Indian census revealed that in eight border districts of West Bengal, the population grew by over 30 percent between 1971 and 1981, compared to an average 20 percent elsewhere. The population of one northern town leapt from a mere 10,000 to 150,000.

Indian census estimates put the number of Bangladeshis who have migrated to India at 1.7 million between 1961-71 and 0.6 million in the following decade, the latter figure not including another 0.6 million said to have entered Assam during the same period. The government of India claims that 78,441 were intercepted at the border between 1992-1994.

While humanitarian concern for this migrant population is most proper, there is no doubt that the presence of a large number of foreigners has the ability to queer the pitch of politics in the host country, particularly when political groupings try to take short-term mileage through electoral rolls. Chauvinistic groups can manipulate public perception and generate a backlash against foreigners, as has happened with the Bangladeshis, as also with Sri Lankan Tamil refugees in South India.

In Nepal, nearly a hundred thousand Lhotshampa refugees who fled Bhutan for fear of persecution have been accommodated in camps run by UNHCR. Nepal also hosts about 15,000 Tibetan refugees and has provided shelter to a small number of Afghan refugees.

It is Pakistan which hosts the largest single block of refugees, however. There were some 3.3 million refugees from Afghanistan in the country in 1990, and UNHCR has spent more than USD 1 billion since 1980 on its Pakistan programme alone. By the beginning of 1997, 2.6 million Afghans had returned (another 1.3 million from Iran) but not before turning around the economy and ecology of northern Pakistan.

Looking at the larger questions of migration and the political dislocation that they can cause, the province of Sindh alone has a migrant population of 2.5 million, of Bengali origin, who arrived in the 1980s from Bangladesh. These migrants are seen as a political menace and political risk by the state.

Stranded Pakistanis, better known as Biharis, are languishing in 66 camps scattered all over Bangladesh, in conditions of squalour and hopelessness. Bangladesh will have nothing to do with this population and Pakistan has dragged its feet in taking in the very people considered 'loyal' to it in the 1971 liberation war. Altogether 1.6 million Biharis have been relocated to Pakistan, but despite commitments made and agreements signed, another 2.4 million (a total of 41,000 families) remain in Bangladesh.

According to authorities in Sri Lanka who handle rehabilitation, in February 1997 the country had about 756,000 displaced people, most of them Tamil, and many who have been displaced several times

over. About a hundred thousand are thought to be in refugee camps and elsewhere in South India, while another hundred thousand have migrated to the West.

The problems of migrants and refugees, then, are twofold. On the one hand is the societal instability that emerges when an alien population enters an area, for reasons economic or political. The other is the question related to human rights – and the very right to life – of the migrants and refugees as human beings.

Since there is agreement that political stability is a prerequisite for economic advancement, the question of migrants and refugees is critically important if the Subcontinent is to look forward to a brighter quality of life for its citizens. For, the existence of disgruntled host populations and fearful 'guests' will constantly undermine movement towards economic stability.

Obviously, the solution is for countries not to create economic and political conditions which induce the mass outflow of populations. Such an idealised scenario will take time to materialise. In the meantime, it is important for governments and peoples of all South Asian countries to exhibit concern for the well-being of refugees and migrants who suffer and languish within each of their borders. The backlash against the foreigner must stop. The SAARC organisation itself must show some initiative in this regard, perhaps by taking up the recommendation made by the Kathmandu-based South Asia Forum for Human Rights for a regional protocol or charter for the protection of refugees, migrants and stateless persons.

-Batak Vora

In late July it was reported by a Kathmandu newspaper that the Thimphu government had finally shown some inclination to discuss repatriation with the Nepali government. The next day, the Nepali foreign ministry, without putting it in so many words, said that there had been no progress. That was that.





# RED STAR OVER SOUTH ASIA

**I**n the more impoverished parts of South Asia – from the western hills of Nepal to the badlands of Bihar, in the forests of Andhra Pradesh or the marginalised hinterlands of the Brahmaputra valley – Maoism is no idle intellectual pursuit. Body counts from its practice are too near to home for comfort, and the deeper issues it raises too close to everyday living to ignore.

Nepal, for instance, has seen more lives lost in the year-and-a-half-long Maoist "people's war" than were doomed in the entire 1990 "people's movement" which ushered in parliamentary democracy. The village populace is terrorised in the pincer of Maoist violence and police retribution. Yet this sudden rise in the terror thermometer had, till recently, merely resulted in an embarrassed silence in Kathmandu's corridors. Only when the present left-right coalition government proposed enacting a draconian "anti-terrorism" bill, which would affect urban liberals and politicians more than the Maoists, did the issue merit public debate.

South Asia's modernist elite are by now so distanced from the countryside that no emotional chord is struck when rural folk die needlessly and cruelly. Deaths in Bosnia are more immediate to Delhi drawing rooms than killings on the Bihar Plateau. Because downtown Kathmandu has as yet to see a serious bomb blast, the terror in the hills of the central-west districts does not even constitute distant thunder.

The rural poor are so alienated from the state and its structures, so despairing of relief, that the ideology of revolt is seen as the only salvation. Maoist cadres are born of deep-seated causes: wildly inappropriate education, joblessness, conspicuous consumption of

the upper classes, cultural alienation, ethnic anger etc. But these challenges cannot be confronted and eradicated with violence, whether from the state or the Maoists.

The trite response of the uncommitted to rising Left extremism is to call upon the government of the day to resolve the problem through so-called political means. But "political resolution" requires tackling the "root causes" of despair and underdevelopment, and few politicians have the wisdom or sagacity for that. A "political resolution" requires astute statesmanship imbued with a deep sense of justice. In none of the Maoist hotbeds of South Asia is such a polity in sight.

The most members of the establishment will do under the circumstances is mouth easy development slogans, with no trace of commitment or understanding. Their tendency will be to let an insurgency simmer in low boil as long as it does not harm national institutions and urban centres or damage large-scale physical infrastructure such as power grids and highways. If those get targeted, then the fashionable clamour for "political resolution" vaporises, and the political establishment, business and academia discreetly look the other way while the army, police or paramilitary engage in mop up.

When an elite loses its creativity, it falls back on the easy path of repression. In this, they are assisted greatly by the current crop of politicians everywhere in the region who are self-serving, increasingly cut off from those that they represent, and incapable of constructive engagement. Moreover, if swift action and surgical precision is not guaranteed and the effort becomes a prolonged, resource-consuming warfare, it only adds fuel to the Maoist fire.

*Image above is taken from a 1993 All India People's Resistance Forum publication on the movement in Bastar, Madhya Pradesh.*

If the establishment class brings about ruin through hypocrisy, the ideologues of the extreme Left more than make up for it with their rejectionism. For they disparage elected parliaments as nothing but meeting places for idle chit-chat. They maintain that the poor and the oppressed do not have the wherewithal to even begin to use such democratic infrastructure or procedures. In an inequitable world, such institutions are fated to be manipulated by the rich and the powerful to maintain their status quo hold over the means of production, thus perpetuating exploitation in a more palatable form. To use the more colourful expression of Nepal's Maoists, parliament is like a butcher shop "where they display a goat's head but sell dogmeat". Radical change through armed uprising, say these ideologues, is the only language the exploiters take seriously.

To an impoverished mass wallowing in a sea of fatalistic despair, this is heady wine; but it leaves too many unanswered questions. A revolt born of a sense of unfairness could conceivably be countered by a just apportioning of national resources. But the ideologues of the far Left would do well to really understand world history, their own societies, and what Mao meant, before pushing their poor cadres and supportive villagers into the cauldron of terror.

Look around, and you will see that the Maoist ideology of revolt has taken root only in societies where old civilisations are almost a spent force, creaking under their own dead weight in the face of the modernist onslaught. After all, it was the failure of a decrepit Confucian polity that could no longer keep Western mercantile capitalism at bay, coupled with the ravages of World War II, which led to the spectacular success of Maoism in China. A common Han culture allowed much of the contradictions in society to be defined in terms of economic class rather than caste or ethnicity. Once the issues of economic equity were resolved through a Maoist levelling, society could go back, as China has now, to business as usual. This is why the land of Mao today hardly supports Maoists, be it in the jungles of the Philippines or of Andhra.

Turn your sights, then, to the erstwhile Hindustan where, too, an enfeebled and deeply fractured society grapples with the pulls of modernity. But then, the simple doctrines of class struggle seem hardly adequate in a Subcontinent where the economic classification is super-imposed upon by a myriad of other distinctions – of caste, language, region, religion, ethnicity, and now, nationality. Can the genie of revolt escape from the bottle and spread across the land when it can only read the taxonomy map of class struggle?

In other words, South Asia's Maoists are sadly out of touch if they believe that their crusade will cover the whole Subcontinent as it did the Han mainland. For there are enough other pressures at play which will dilute or divert what may even start out as a Maoist movement. Thus, rebels of the Indian Northeast or the JVP Sinhala Buddhists in Sri Lanka may have sworn by the Red Book, but ultimately they have followed an ethnic agenda.

The forces of religious extremism ('fundamentalist', if you will) or nationalistic fanaticism, ironically, drink from the same well that the Maoist would, only to churn out cadres of the far-right rather than the far-left.

Maoist uprisings have often quickly acquired religious and ethnic overtones or been marginalised by religious extremism. The same individuals who may have turned out Maoist, then, provide the foot soldiers of the Babbar Khalsa, the Shiv Sena, or the various *jamaats*. If there were no Taliban, there would surely have been the Red Brigade. Fight against economic injustice, incidentally, has been easier through the religious metaphor of Islam with its strong commitment to an equitable universal brotherhood than through a class-defined Maoist one.

To be sure, there will be a few areas where classic Maoist strategy can in fact be applied, such as in the killing fields of Bihar or the forests of Andhra. However, there is little likelihood that insurgencies will spread as they come across barriers that transcend the class divide. In which case, it is so easy for the state forces to isolate any insurgency and keep it from 'infecting' other regions.

Assume – and it is a very big assumption – that the Maoists wrest state power. What next? Given all the constraints within complex societies, what can they do within a realistic time frame that would make a difference? Willy-nilly, they would have to come back to issues of professional management, meaningful education, reformed and capable bureaucracy, a justice system with integrity inspiring faith, a banking and tax structure that is fair and efficient, as well as a whole gamut of reform measures. The Maoists dismiss these as unrevolutionary and renegade reformism.

Deep-seated problems can be resolved only by engaging injustice in society head on, openly and fearlessly, overground and in broad daylight, maintaining a moral upper hand on every front and a transparency in every issue, every inch of the way, much as Gandhi did. Covert hit-and-run movements cannot do this because they engage the enemy not in its area of weakness, which is the moral front, but in its area of strength, which is military might.

Furthermore, the very sociology of underground brotherhood militates against them. Like all romantic drift, the Left movement too is caught in a dilemma between purity and pragmatism. Born as a protest movement within the Left, the Maoists naturally have had to spend more energy on keeping the flock of true believers intact rather than to spread and grow. To keep schisms from emerging, they have to keep exit costs high, which means descending to the nadir of retribution against both the wayward insider and the popular outsider. Unable to engage in the creative issues of societal reform, they have ensured that, to enhance their self-image of revolutionary purity, the destructive spiral of violence, and only more violence, will become the glorious never-end of Maoism in South Asia.

– Dipak Gyawali

# The Chinese Way in Telangana

*The early days of the Telangana Movement in southern India serves as a measure of subsequent Maoist efforts in the region.*

by Stephen Mikesell

**M**aoism first appeared in the Subcontinent in the course of the revolutionary peasant movement that spread in early 1947 in the Telugu-speaking Nalgonda and Warangal districts of eastern Hyderabad, known as Telangana. Up until the 1947 transfer of power by the British, Telangana was under the despotic rule of the Nizam of Hyderabad. The cadres of the Communist Party of India initiated the Telangana Movement during the Second World War as a genuinely indigenous mass campaign against the landlords and the state aristocracy.

At first, the communists maintained a facade of cooperation with the Indian National Congress in the state, pledging to support Hyderabad's accession to India, and aiming the revolt at ending the illegal exactions and other landlord excesses. However, the "intense particularism" of the Telugu-speaking people and general peasant discontent encouraged the communist leadership to expand the movement to an attack on the government.

A chain reaction of village revolts led to the establishment of *gram rajis* (village 'soviets'), complete with people's courts and militia, land seizures, and the expulsion of the landlords and local officers of the Nizam's government. A full-scale guerrilla army was quickly recruited and virtually all of the Nalgonda and Warangal districts, encompassing 3000 villages, 3 million people, and an area of 16,000 square miles, came under communist control.

Maoist ideas were first brought to India by the Andhra Provincial Committee of the Communist Party in the neighbouring Telugu-speaking section of

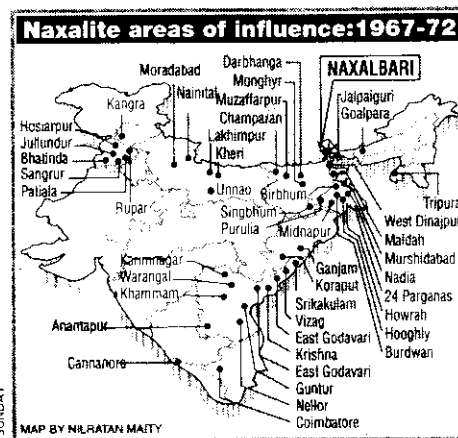
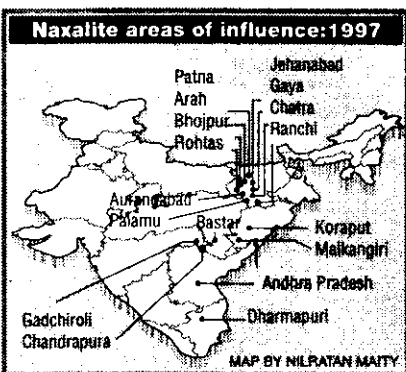
the then Madras State, Andhra, when it sought to import revolution to its side of the border in 1948. Mao's four-class theory, which promoted uniting all the progressive forces in an agrarian revolution against imperialist monopoly capital and its local allies, the feudal landlords and comprador bourgeoisie, and which thus tolerated wealthy "nationalist" peasant classes, suited the Andhra communists. This was because they were dominated by Kamma landlords in possession of 80 percent of the land in the fertile delta area.

The Andhra communists declared that Mao's "new democracy" should serve as a "guidance to India". The Indian revolution was presented as analogous to the Chinese revolution, requiring a prolonged "people's war" in the form of an agrarian revolution culminating in the capture of political power by a democratic front. This was to be different from the Russian revolution. The Andhra communists thus proposed to unite the entire peasantry, including the rural bourgeoisie or rich peasants, under the leadership of the working class for "guerrilla warfare (the Chinese way)".

## The Movement Stumbles

The Telangana Movement began to falter in late 1948 when the CPI made this shift from targeting the traditional local enemies, especially the aristocracy, to imperialism, as represented by the Nehru government at the Centre. They called on their former enemy, the Nizam, for protection against the state. When the Indian army marched into Hyderabad in 1948, and proclaimed an "Azad Hyderabad," the Andhra communists were joined by the Razakars, a private army representing extremist Muslim sentiment, against the "fascist troops". Within a few days, the Indian army quelled all resistance, except for the communists, who resorted to hit-and-run guerrilla tactics.

To subdue the communists, the army brought in 60,000 troops and used the strategy tried by the British in Malaya, of forcing the peasantry into special camps so as to remove the guerrillas' base of support. The army killed nearly 4000 cadres and militant peasants and jailed another 10,000. The populace was terrorised by the police and military, and property worth millions was looted or destroyed.





Unable to mobilise the people, remnants of the guerrilla army got involved in a series of "indiscriminate and unnecessary terrorist actions against non-military individuals". This brought much disrepute to the leadership. All in all, the efforts to stir the masses to violence by power of example led only to individual terrorism, which resulted in further isolation and repression of the party. Its membership quickly shrank from 21,000 to 7000.

It was the taking up of the Chinese line that led the Telangana Movement to stumble in late 1948 and suffer its terrible reversal in the early 1950s. Beginning as a mass peasant movement to achieve certain economic demands, the movement expanded into a liberation struggle to overthrow the Nizam. However, when the crusade expanded into a struggle against the Indian Union, it lost the support of the peasantry, which merely wanted the overthrow of feudal relations and not a fight against the Indian army for an abstract "people's democracy".

In their subsequent analysis, the party leaders conceded that the degeneration of the movement into terrorist tactics contradicted and was incompatible with the spirit of partisan struggle. Where partisan struggle aims to overturn the regime in close conjunction with mass struggle, developing according to the growth of mass consciousness and initiative, the terrorist tactics end up as nothing more than destruction of particular individuals by squads acting in isolation from the people. This, in turn, creates the illusion that the main evil are individuals rather than the regime.

Looking back, the leaders said that the party should have limited its action to defending the gains of the Telangana peasantry when its democratic initiatives such as the retaking of land came under attack from the Centre and its armed forces. This would have strengthened the hands of the fighting people and peasants and isolated the Indian government in its support of the feudal landlords. It was definitely a mistake to turn the movement into a liberation war against the Congress Party without securing wider support, which was unavailable in the context of the euphoria surrounding independence and what seemed then to be the Congress's liberation of the country from imperialism.

### Transplanting Mao

The Telangana communist leaders also came to recognise great flaws of transplanting the Maoist formula to the Subcontinent. Partisan war was sheer necessity for the Chinese peasant, as the urban working class was small and the cities were in foreign control in pre-revolutionary China. In 1927, the Chinese revolutionary army was already 30,000 strong, and it was backed up by a friendly Soviet Union, which provided help for the final offensive. The lack of a good and unified communications system kept the enemy from carrying out concentrated and swift attacks on the liberation forces.

In the Subcontinent, by contrast, partisan struggle alone, no matter how widely extended, cannot ensure victory over the enemy. Guerrilla forces are invariably


small and poorly armed, and even if they create liberated zones, they will be surrounded by hostile forces. The government's armed forces are well organised and widely distributed, and a well-developed communications system allows forces to be easily concentrated against guerrilla activity.

Despite the mistakes of its Andhra leadership, the Telangana Movement is the only example of armed insurrection in South Asia which actually "liberated" any significant area and started an experiment in an alternative way to organise society and politics. The movement pushed the question of agrarian revolution to the forefront, compelling unwilling Congress leaders to embark on reforms, albeit half-heartedly. It forced the pace of the states' reorganisation on a linguistic basis, demolishing the unprincipled and arbitrary division made by former British rulers. The Movement helped the Communist Party emerge for the first time as an effective, widely-recognised political force.

Most importantly, perhaps, the Telangana Movement made the Indian communist movement confront the theoretical and ideological questions concerning the strategy and tactics for a people's democratic revolution in India: the role of the peasantry in such a revolution, the place and significance of partisan resistance and rural revolutionary bases, classification among the peasantry and the role of revolution among different strata, the place of the working class and urban centres, the meaning and import of "working class hegemony" and the Communist Party's role in realising it in a primarily agrarian society.

Today, the Maoist line is commonly described in the press as "far left" or "extreme left" due to its strong rhetoric, tactics and sectarianism. Yet, in its identification of imperialism as the enemy and its strategy of uniting the various democratic forces, including peasant landlords and national capitalists against imperialism, feudalism and monopoly capitalism, Maoism actually represented a development of the "right line" in an old struggle of left versus right tendencies within the Indian communist party that had been going on since the 1920s.

Thus, the Indian communists found themselves allied with the Congress Party in battle against British imperialism when following the "right line". Whereas, at times when the "left line" was ascendant, it was bourgeois nationalism represented by the Congress which was the enemy.

The Andhra Central Committee's adoption of Maoism set it against the national communist leadership both at the time of the Telangana movement, when the national leaders were following the "left line", and subsequently, when it readopted the "right line". While ostensibly promoting the Telangana movement, the national leadership had actually set itself against it, as the shift from the immediate objectives of the movement to anti-imperialism meant that it abandoned the mass basis of the movement, thus dooming it. 

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# Nepali Cart Before Horse

*Managers of the newest leftist insurgency in South Asia, Nepal's Maobadi are exploiting the failure of the state by putting their reliance on degenerative violence rather than organisation.*

by Shyam Shrestha

When the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) declared a "People's War" in February 1996 and attacked police posts in some areas in the Nepali hills, it came as a surprise to many. After all, the United People's Front, the political organ of the CPN (Maoist), was still involved in constitutional politics. And although the Front had boycotted the 1994 general elections, its strong showing in the first election held in 1991, where it emerged as the third largest party in parliament, had had people believe that the extreme leftists would not actually act upon their rhetoric of armed revolt.

This is the second *Maobadi* rebellion in Nepal. The first was the "class-enemy annihilation campaign" of 1971, carried out by the Coordination Centre, the embryonic organisation of what was to

become the Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist-Leninist). Also known as the "Jhapa Movement", after the southeastern district where it was centred, this short-lived uprising was influenced by the Naxalites in Naxalbari, just across the border river of Mechi. The rebels went on a gruesome spree, chopping off the heads of some local landlords before they were brutally suppressed by the then Panchayat regime. (The CPN (ML) merged in 1991 with the Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist) to become the Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist-Leninist), which is the dominant partner in Nepal's ruling coalition at the moment.)

The present-day *Maobadi*, who accuse the ruling communist party of being revisionist and reactionary, are well aware of what happened to that earlier revolt. Their armed operations indicate they have refined on the shortcomings of the *Jhapa* Movement in that their actions seem more coordinated, with the central leadership retaining overall control.

The Maoists are active in eastern and central Nepal, but the epicentre of their movement is the two contiguous districts of Rolpa and Rukum in the western mid-hills. This area is served neither by roads nor development activities. This poverty-stricken area is inhabited by Magars, a very 'backward' ethnic group which continues to be sustained through migrant labour in India. A region ruled historically by feudal princelings, the area even today retains a medieval relationship between the rich and the poor – a classic setting for Maoist activity.

Over the 18 months of armed struggle in which close to a hundred people have been killed, it is true that the Maoists have succeeded in carving out a distinct political identity. But it is one that is based more on isolated acts of violence and the bravura of a few devoted cadres rather than on the revolutionary upsurge of an oppressed people.

When the insurgents trained their guns on the rural elite, and those identified as 'informers', they found favour among sections of the rural populace in the areas where they operate. However, it is signifi-

From *The Worker*,  
publication of the Communist  
Party of Nepal (Maoist).





cant that Maobadi have had negligible influence on Nepal's sizeable urban working class.

### Gory Glory

The rise of the Maoist movement can be attributed directly to the failure of the leaders of the 1990 People's Movement to respond to the hopes of the masses. Despite the expectations engendered by the Movement, which ushered in democracy, not one of the several governments that have held power since then has done anything to deliver the rural peasantry, making up the bulk of the population, from the exploitative land relationships existing in the villages.

The marginalised peasantry thus finds it convenient to vent its anger at the local landlords and rich peasants – the class immediately above it and the one that represents to it the state with all its shortcomings. The Maoists have exploited the situation by attacking this very class in the name of "People's War". If the militants do not invite extreme repression and avoid having to fight stronger forces of suppression, their insurgency is likely to grow and continue for some time to come.

In that sense, the Maoists' most visible achievement in the first phase of their "People's War" has been the establishment of the politics of armed struggle. However, it seems they have over-emphasised violence, and in the process have forgotten the fundamental tenet of Marxist thought regarding its use. Doctrinally, Marxists opt for violence only as a last resort when all other ways to seek social progress have failed. Violence can only be a reaction to attempts by the ruling class to wipe out the peaceful struggle of the people with state terror. Mao, too, upheld this Marxist concept of using violence only to end violence.

Nepal's *Maobadi*, on the other hand, seem to understand the application of violence quite differently. They plead that armed action is a must from the very beginning of the struggle; it is something which can be applied at any time and at any place. There is no need to concentrate this highest form of struggle on concrete situations. The principle of armed struggle is accepted absolutely and a cult of violence propagated, with the Maoists boasting of the number of violent incidents and glorifying in the unnecessary deaths of their heroic cadres. "War, war, and war! From the beginning till the end!" is their battle cry.

And thus it is that the taking away of life has become acceptable and commonplace. In a country where earlier even five deaths would have created a nationwide distress, today, even as scores die, the polity refuses to be shaken out of its somnolence. In February 1997, Maoist-related violence had already been relegated to single column space in newspapers even as the leadership declared the start of a "second phase of operations" at the end of the first year of the "War".

### Naive Revolution

There have been blunders aplenty by the Maoist leaders over the past two years. Most important was the inability to judge if the people were prepared for armed revolt. Even in the impoverished areas where

there has been enthusiastic popular support, the militants did not work to educate the masses, nor to prepare them for the struggle to come. There was no thought to whether the public would be able bear the reprisals that were to follow soon enough. What the Maoists presented, therefore, was a sure recipe for anarchy, and a people in poverty are now doubly burdened by terror, perpetuated by the revolutionaries and the police.

The leaders' impatience to get on with armed struggle may have also lost them a voice in Kathmandu's political arena. For when they went underground with their well-established political organ, the United People's Front, the Maoists forfeited the avenue to apply political pressure above ground even as they continued their underground campaign. The Maobadi also made the mistake of lumping together everyone who disagrees with them. So, they have attacked both "class enemies" and those who do actually speak their own language. This has led to their political isolation, and also affected their public image.

On occasion, the Maoists have also displayed extreme naivete, such as when they raided the rural branches of the government-owned Agricultural Development Bank and destroyed loan records. The goal was to "liberate" poor villagers of their loan commitments, the Maoist leadership seemingly unaware that banks maintain copies of their records outside the branch office, too.

### Indulging the Revolutionary

The Maoist movement has now publicly moved into its second phase, and it has been marked by revenge killings of those involved in doing away with real or suspected Maoists. As part of this agenda, both policemen and local exploiters have been killed. The plan is to generate an atmosphere of statelessness whereby they can easily step in and take over the administration.

To some extent, this plan has succeeded. In some areas, people live under a twin administration – the government's and the Maoists'. This was greatly evident in the poor voter turnout in the local-level elections earlier this year in districts like Rukum, Rolpa and Jajarkot. The Maoists had announced a boycott, threatening to kill those who won the elections, and so in 42 village centres no one even dared file nominations. Elections could not be held in more than 70 village centres.

While such scare tactics may have succeeded in creating an aura of unquestioned authority around them, the Maoists do not sense that their revolutionary militancy and armed revolt also can be used, and is being used, by the former autocratic forces for reviving their lost powers. Although police action has killed 26 party militants, only one leader of significance has lost his life till now. The State's strategy seems to be to keep the militancy at a controllable level, while not finishing it off entirely by decimating the leadership just yet.

The Maoist bogey is thus kept alive as the government goes about reviving the much-hated Public

*In a country where earlier even five deaths would have created a nationwide distress, today, even as scores die, the polity refuses to be shaken out of its somnolence.*



**By neglecting Mao's "mass line", the "People's War" is bound to degenerate into a war without the people.**

Security Act which was used with such devastating effect by the Panchayat regime before 1990. The government is also using the Maoists as the pretext to enact an Anti-Terrorist Act, although there is stiff opposition to it. These acts would give wide-ranging powers to the police, the army and the intelligence agencies, which, because of Nepal's peculiar political arrangement, would mean ultimately power to the Royal Palace.

It is likely that until these legislative measures have been successfully implemented, the government will strive to keep Maoism alive in the hills, by continuing its crackdown on the grassroots cadres while giving free play to the top leadership. As soon as it gets the powers it is seeking, a violent suppression of the Maoists can be expected. They will be indulged no more.

#### **Holier-than-thou**

The Maoists are isolated today due to their own policy of regarding all those who criticise them or who disagree with them as enemies. This holier-than-thou attitude could be their undoing, through sheer isolation. They seem not to have grasped the significance of the fact that even though practically every left group in Nepal has protested the violent repression of the Maoist movement, not one has indicated support for the "People's War".

The Maoists have a false sense that they are on the right track only because of the abject failure of mainstream parliamentary politics over the past couple of years. This cumulative failure includes the signing away of Nepal's hydropower options to India, the horse-trading to maintain coalition governments in

power, the outright corruption of those who till a few years ago used to call themselves revolutionaries and democrats, and the inability to give a new push to development activities even as market forces move in to take over the hinterland.

This failure makes the Maoists all the more self-righteous and vociferous, but they are making their own mistakes. Nothing in their activities indicates that the Maobadi are trying to involve the local populace. They are taking to shortcuts and sloganeering rather than trying to raise the awareness level of the people to that of the leadership. The public is not being prepared to act for itself.

Mao Zedong's direction was that the revolutionary leadership should wait patiently until people are ready for action. Meanwhile, they should constantly educate the people and do whatever possible to arouse and prepare the masses for struggle. No action, howsoever well-intentioned, should be initiated until the people are prepared to follow. This is Mao's famous "mass line", and without this the "People's War" is bound to degenerate into a war without the people.

An objective and conscious revolutionary movement is not possible and a revolutionary theory to suit the country cannot be developed without understanding how Nepali society and the class struggle is developing. Nepal's Maobadi of today are moving ahead in the blind hope that all will turn out well once a class struggle has begun.

*S. Shrestha is editor of the Nepali-language left monthly Mulyankan*

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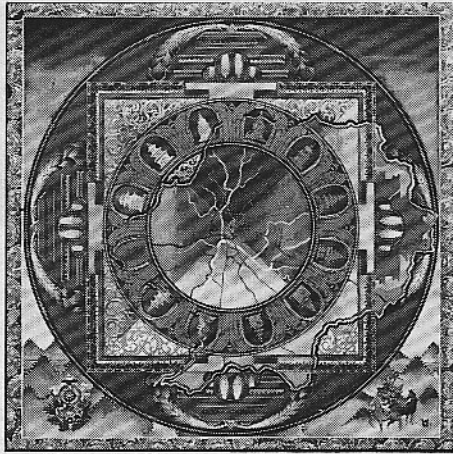
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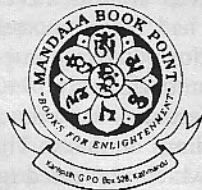
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## Anatomy of a Struggle

# A BYPASS FOR INDIA'S DISEASED HEART

by Shishir K. Jha

*...the battle must break out again and again in ever-growing dimensions, and there can be no doubt as to who will be the victor in the end – the appropriating few, or the immense working majority.*

– Karl Marx in "The Civil War in France", 30 May 1871.

The 1990s have been a period of great euphoria among the ruling classes of India, for all the wondrous opportunities made available through 'liberalisation' of the economy. While the steady economic and political surrender to the consumerist demands of the elite and to Western capital continues, the 400 million Indians who are trapped in poverty can only dream revolutionary dreams.

Amidst the sheer persistence of the country's monumental social, economic and political ills, the Indian Left, and the Maoist movements in particular, have faced a daunting task in mobilising the resistance of the rural and urban working classes. And it is the state of Bihar, otherwise unceremoniously dismissed as "the diseased heart of India", which has defiantly kept India's revolutionary hopes alive with over a quarter of a century of Maoist struggles.

The deciding historical event which largely explains today's social conditions in Bihar – and the continuous revolutionary reaction – was the enactment of the Permanent Settlement Act by the British East India Company in 1793. This Act fostered and consolidated a specific relationship between the zamindars who had control over land and those who did not. Right up to the early twentieth century, the Permanent Settlement Act helped the upper-caste land-owning classes to continue their traditional dominance over the land in return for handing over a tenth of their total rental income to the state.

This Act also sowed the seeds of agrarian struggle,



Patna graffiti illustrating the writings of revolutionary poet Muktibodh (see page 46).

which has manifested itself for over 150 years in the Bihar-Bengal region. Peasants and tribals of the Chotanagpur region in the southern part of present-day Bihar, for example, were engaged in resistance throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century. In 1820-21, the Ho tribal peasants of Chotanagpur rose twice against money-lenders, zamindars and British rulers. The Oraons, another tribal community, rebelled in the years 1820, 1832 and again in 1890. To quell the ferocious Kol revolt of 1831-32, the British called in troops from as far afield as Calcutta, Danapur and Benares.

The Santhal Uprising of 1855-57 was widespread, covering Bihar, Orissa and Bengal, in which the Santals were often joined by the lower caste peasantry. As many as 10,000 rebels were massacred in a final gruesome battle which crushed the uprising. The heroic struggle at the turn of this century by the Mundas of the Ranchi area inspired folkloric visions of a new society, which survive to this day in the form of songs and popular tales.

The baton of the peasant struggle was carried to the plains of North and Central Bihar during the early parts of twentieth century. Here, the agrarian protests often revolved around the issue of *bakasht* lands, lands that had been repossessed from tenants by zamindars for putative non-payment of rent. From the 1920s until the early 1940s, this land alienation was considerable – between 2.5 to 3.5 lakh occupancy holdings annually. This, together with produce rent which prevented tenants from selling directly in the market and thus take advantage of increasing market prices, and an increasingly ecological burden on the peasantry, the structural features were in place for mass upsurges against the zamindari system.

The peasantry was mostly led by the Bihar Pradesh Kisan Sabha (BPKS), formed in 1929 by a charismatic leader, Swami Sahajanand Saraswati. The Kisan Sabha and the emerging Socialist Party together led a peas-

ant organisation whose membership had grown to four lakh by 1939. The BPKS's demands were all-encompassing: the abolition of the zamindari system, cancellation of all agrarian debt, establishment of a system to transfer land to the tiller, and employment for landless peasants.

However, both before and after Independence, the peasantry were repeatedly betrayed by the conservative Congress leaders of Bihar. The Kisan Sabha could not muster enough strength to push the Congress into accepting its demands. The Sabha's over-dependence on a few leaders, like Swami Sahajanand, and its stronger ties with the tenants and middle peasants at the cost of the landless and agricultural labourers were its major weaknesses. The first wave of peasant struggle in the plains of Bihar, although unsuccessful in itself, did clearly put the writing on the wall.

### Flaming Fields

The spectre of radical change haunts the semi-feudal interests of Bihar, and of India generally. The Congress party, which came to dominate Bihar's political scene after Independence, offered token measures to address the land problem. Without any shame or pretension, the Bihar Assembly passed extremely watered-down legislations, among others the Bihar Land Reforms Act (1950) and the Fixation of Land Ceiling Act (1962), which had enough loopholes to render them meaningless.

Because of the deep collusion between the state's governing elite and the semi-feudal landed interests to deny the peasantry their minimum share of land and its produce, the pre-Independence rural class characteristics of Bihar did not change dramatically. Merely, the British Raj was exchanged for an Indian Raj. Landlords, rich farmers and money-lenders were still ranged against tribal communities, poor and landless peasants and village artisans.

Such callous indifference was bound to ignite a reaction, and 25 years of silence in the countryside, following the BPKS-led agitation of the 30s and 40s, was broken in 1968 with a clarion call for militant peasant struggle issued by the Marxists-Leninists. This was a loud echo of the 'Naxalbari' struggle of the previous year. An armed struggle in the countryside against semi-feudal interests combined with area-wise seizures in order to finally capture state power was the leitmotif of these revolutionaries.

After the first wave of peasant struggles dominated by the middle peasantry ended in the mid-1940s, this time it was the poor and landless peasantry who are militantly asserting themselves. The new radical grouping which emerged was critical of the "parliamentary" tendencies in the Indian communist movement, and believed that the Communist Party of India and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) had betrayed their revolutionary role. The Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist), officially formed in 1969, emphasised the pivotal role of poor and landless peasants in smashing the edifice of the semi-colonial, semi-feudal Indian state.

The first congress of the Marxist-Leninists, held

in Calcutta in May 1970 and inspired by Mao Zedong's Chinese revolution, adopted a full-fledged programme of action. The congress held that the "principal contradiction" of the period was between feudalism and the broad masses of the Indian people. Resolution of that contradiction would lead to the settlement of all other contradictions.

The districts of Muzaffarpur and Bhojpur were the first places in Bihar where the silence of the peasants was decisively broken. Heroic lower caste figures like Jagdish Mahto, Ram Naresh Ram, Bhutan Musahar, Rameshwar Ahir and Nirmal Mahto, were some of the early leaders struggling to ignite that single spark that would light the prairie fire. By the late 1970s, many central and some northern districts of Bihar were raging with the flames of peasant struggles.

Unlike Naxalbari in West Bengal, the place of its genesis, the Marxist-Leninist struggle in Bihar has endured. Unlike the other communist parties, the one persisting and defining theme of the Marxist-Leninist struggle here has been its ability to draw the sustained participation of the poor and landless against the arrogant, brutal and corrupt ruling classes. The state's fertile fields have been kept in flames by three dominant Marxist-Leninist parties, among half a dozen others. These are the CPI (M-L) Liberation, CPI (M L) Party Unity and the Maoist Communist Centre.

Some of the mistakes committed in the early days of the struggle, from the early to mid-70s – such as extraordinary dependence on annihilation of class enemies and neglect of mass movements – have been apparently rectified, though much organisational and ideological re-direction may still be needed in order to launch and sustain a major struggle.

### Belchi to Hahaspur

Bihar's economy is overwhelmingly rural-based, with 74 percent of the population of 100 million relying on agriculture for survival. Sixty-four percent of the people belong to the 'backward' and 'scheduled' castes, 21 percent are Muslims and 'scheduled' tribes. Between 85-90 percent of the state's rural households own less than 5 acres of land each. The 'backward' and 'scheduled' communities have nursed a historical grievance against the upper castes who make up 15 percent of the population but have until recently largely dominated the economic, cultural and political structures.

Four strategies came to dominate the Marxist-Leninist struggle for the heart and minds of Bihar's people. Perhaps the most successful has been the relentless combat on social issues. The constant battle waged by the lower caste rural poor in acquiring social dignity, or *izzat*, has been immeasurably successful. The Marxist-Leninists have thus been able to help deal a devastating blow to the cultural heart of feudalism.

Secondly, the focus has been on the seizure and distribution of surplus land under the illegal possession of landlords, *mahants* (religious heads), and other big landowners, which amounted to about 1.4



million acres statewide even after the implementation of 'land reform'. This is perhaps the most intense and violent of all the struggles, and success has been partial and concentrated in a few districts of central and south Bihar such as Patna, Bhojpur, Nalanda, Gaya, Jehanabad and Palamu. It is because of the challenge put up by the feudals against the concrete actions to seize land that the Marxists-Leninists have felt the need to arm groups of peasants.

Thirdly, the activists have mobilised a struggle for minimum wages of agricultural labourers. Even the minimum wage of INR 16.50 per day during non-harvesting periods and 10 percent of the crops during harvesting periods are not given to agricultural labourers. The struggle around wages can, however, create counter-productive tensions when the middle peasants are not able to pay the minimum to agricultural labourers. This has been a potentially divisive issue, for the Marxist-Leninist strategy clearly depends on uniting both these classes.

Finally, the activists have in the last decade succeeded in pressuring local administrations to undertake development projects in the 'backward' areas. Meanwhile, the rural population has been mobilised to monitor and ensure that the crores of rupees allocated for digging wells, building roads, providing of warehouse facilities, and so on, are not squandered. While forcing the "comprador-bureaucratic" capitalist structure to be directly accountable to the people, the Marxist-Leninists also want to intensify the contradictions within it.

All these activities have been directed against Bihar's ruling classes. They are like the "baron of old" who, in the words of Karl Marx, "thought every weapon in his own hand fair against the plebeian, while in the hands of the plebeian a weapon of any kind constituted itself a crime." Placenames such as Belchhi (1977), Parasbigha-Dohiya (1980), Pipra (1986), Kansara (1986), Arwal (1986), Khagri-Damuhan (1988), Tishkhora (1991), Bathanitola (1996), Ekwari (1996), and Habaspur (1997) among many others, are deeply etched in the mind and memory of Bihar's poor and landless peasants. Names like these mark the moments when the landed interests struck barbarically and mercilessly at the rural poor, killing thousands.

Since the early 1980s, the big landlords, in connivance with the Bihar state apparatus, have even organised themselves into private armies, or *senas*. The purpose of these well-equipped feudal war parties – with names like Ranvir Sena, Kunwar Sena, Sunlight Sena, Brahmurishi Sena, Lorik Sena, Bhumi Sena – is to strike terror among the peasantry in order to force their militancy to backtrack. Many such *senas* have, however, been liquidated by the different wings of the Marxist-Leninist parties of Bihar.

### Land or Votes

CPI(M-L) Liberation, led by its general secretary, Vinod Mishra, is perhaps the revolutionary organisation of Bihar that has travelled the greatest political distance. In a "rectification" programme launched in 1977, the

group moved away from an emphasis on "annihilation of individual class enemies" to a concerted attempt at organising mass peasant movements under the umbrella of a "Kisan Sabha". In 1982, this group took an even more radical step by deciding to enter the thickets of parliamentary struggle under the banner of the Indian People's Front.

At its Fifth Party Congress in 1992, the CPI(M-L) Liberation itself decided to come out into the open and participate in all kinds of progressive mass organisations and parliamentary forums. The group's overall electoral success has been waxing and waning. It won one parliamentary seat in 1989 and has one seat, won by a 'fraternal' Assam party, the ASDC, in the present Parliament. It sent seven members to the Bihar State Assembly in 1990, but this number was down to six in 1995, when the party polled around a million votes. The Indian People's Front was dissolved in 1994 because, it was claimed, it was absorbing and diverting the energies of the mother, Liberation, organisation.

It is too early to say whether the Liberation group was well-advised to enter the parliamentary fray, but it certainly signals a sharp break from its earlier ideological moorings. On the one hand, the obvious benefit is a national presence and the possibility of intervening and giving shape to country-wide debates. On the other hand, there is the fear that electoral pursuit will dilute the struggle over land, thus compromising the very core of the Marxist-Leninist ideological agenda. The desire for easy electoral victories, it is said, will provide to some a reason to excuse themselves from the harder struggles on the ground. Other Marxist-Leninist organisations in Bihar, like the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) and the CPI(M-L) Party Unity, have refused to enter the electoral arena because of this perceived danger.

While the debate over strategy continues among the Marxist-Leninists, the stakes are becoming higher with each passing day. For arrayed against the peasantry this time are not only the Congress with its class interest but the centrist and very corrupt Janata Dal and the right-wing Hindu fundamentalists.

Ultimately, the Marxist-Leninist ideology will triumph or be defeated depending on the skill with which they use their parliamentary and extra-parliamentary options. While it is important not to let go of the down-to-earth struggle against exploitation of the peasantry, they must work to establish a national presence as opposed to strong presence in a few states like Bihar, Andhra Pradesh and Assam (under the banner of ASDC).

The call by the CPI(M-L) Liberation for a "National Left Federation" of all communist parties may produce the urgent strengthening of India's anti-systemic forces. Much is riding on the success or defeat of the different communist strategies as they play themselves out in Bihar. Whether they will destroy or triumphantly restore the diseased heart of India is yet to be seen.

*Shishir K. Jha is PhD candidate at Syracuse University, New York.*

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# The People Behind the People's War

The philosophy of "Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tse Tung Thought", which caught the public's imagination in Naxalbari 30 years ago has now moved south to the forests of Andhra Pradesh.

by R.J. Rajendra Prasad

A year after his ideas ignited the plains of Naxalbari close by the West Bengal border with Nepal, Charu Mazumdar, the revolutionary, came to Andhra Pradesh to spread his radical ideas. But here, the kindling did not light.

Coming to Srikakulam in 1967, Mazumdar tried to organise a movement that had been launched by Vempatapu Sathyanarayana, secretary of the district committee of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist). The movement collapsed completely in 1971, and Mazumdar's plans for Andhra were to be fulfilled only when Kondapalli Seetharamiah, a teacher in a Railway School in Warangal, founded the CPI (M-L) "People's War Group" (PWG).

Mr Seetharamiah, known as 'KS', remained Secretary of Central Organising Committee (COC) of the PWG until he was expelled by the Party in 1992. In his mid-70s today, he leads a retired life but does not hesitate to castigate his successors in the PWG for their failure to understand Mao Tse Tung Thought.

## Dalam Revolution

The PWG's goals are to motivate the people to wage war and capture political power through armed insurrection. It rejects the politics of parliamentary democracy on the ground the oppressed masses have no chance to win an election without money and muscle power, available in plenty with the exploitative classes. The PWG traces its ideology to Mao's dictum that "power flows through the barrel of a gun" and adopts tactics of guerilla warfare with an armed cadre divided into *dalams* (squad) which maintain a string of hideouts. The PWG is said to have obtained arms from insurgents in Indian Northeast as well as from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam in Sri Lanka.

The Communist Party of India as well as the CPI (M) criticise the PWG, maintaining that the masses will never achieve political consciousness as long as armed *dalams* are around to force a revolution. Other Marxist-Leninist groups maintain that rather than go underground, the appropriate goal is to build a broad, 'above ground', militant, mass movement on land issues.

As long as he held power within the organisation, KS ran the PWG with an iron hand, expelling dissent-

ers such as K.G. Sathyamurthy and Mukku Subba Reddy, both members of the Central Organising Committee of the PWG who were strong on ideology. Under KS, in 1988, one *dalam* kidnapped four officers of the Indian Administrative Service in East Godavari district to secure the release of undertrial Naxalite prisoners. In 1994, a PWG unit got on to a train in Ghatkesar near Hyderabad and set it on fire, killing 20 passengers. Actions like these were justified as part of revolutionary strategy.

KS was, however, accused of practicing casteism (he belonged to the Reddy upper caste while those in the PWG he allegedly victimised belonged to the lower castes). After two years of debate, KS was finally expelled, accused of having taken inconsistent ideological decisions. Today, the PWG is headed by Muppala Lakshman Rao, alias Ganapathi, a school teacher of Beerpur village, Karimnagar District. He is secretary of the organisation's COC.

## Andhra Disaperados

The PWG has been the most militant of the dozen or so revolutionary groups operating in Andhra. It has established a base in the Dandakaranya forest region on either side of the Godavari river, in the north Telengana districts of Adilabad, Karimnagar, Warangal, Nizamabad and Medak of Andhra Pradesh, in Bastar of Madhya Pradesh and Chanda of Maharashtra.

From 1981 to 1996, a total of 1140 leftist "extremists" have been killed in so-called encounters with the police. The facts behind these encounters have been questioned by various civil liberties groups. The police generally do not allow relatives to claim the dead. Recently, an association was formed to help claim those killed in encounters, with the pro-PWG folk singer Gaddar heading it. The association seeks justice by moving the courts to admit writ petitions and to give directions to the police. It is clear, however, that this is going to be an uphill task. A judicial enquiry into the death in encounter of Madhusudhan Raj, secretary of state committee of CPI (M-L) Janasakthi group (a rival to the PWG) upheld the police version after the family of the victim as well as the Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee boycotted the

Poor Charu





enquiry.

A total of 1805 people were killed by the Naxalites during the same period of 1981-1996, most of them belonging to lower castes, such as washermen and cobblers. The PWG justified these actions by saying that they had targeted police informants. This charge has been denied by the people of the villages where the killings took place.

The PWG killed a Deputy Inspector General of Police, K.S. Vyas, as he was jogging in a Hyderabad stadium, and a Congress Member of Parliament, Magunta Subbarami Reddy, at his residence in Ongole. In Nizamabad, another Congress MP, M. Baga Reddy, escaped recently when a landmine exploded after his jeep had passed. Four Congress workers in the following jeep were killed. In 1996, the PWG blasted the Sirpur Utnoor Police station in Adilabad, killing all 14 policemen sleeping inside.

The Andhra Pradesh High Court has suggested that a peace commission be set up to solve the problem of Naxalite violence and the State's response to it. However, no headway has been made because it is difficult to get someone who enjoys the PWG's confidence to serve in such a commission. The PWG was banned by a Congress (I) Government in 1992 and the ban remains in place today.

#### **China's Chairman**

Why does PWG flourish in Andhra when its brand of politics is ailing elsewhere? A principal reason is perhaps the area's history of armed struggle, against the Nizam of Hyderabad state and the big zamindars. (See earlier article, "The Chinese Way in Telangana".) Perhaps an indirect legacy of the Group's activism has been the growing awareness among the people of the need to narrow the difference between the upper and lower classes. This is evident in events such as the 1996 elections, when a powerful Reddy candidate for Parliament was defeated in Warangal by a Lambada, a Scheduled Tribe candidate, or when a powerful Velama candidate was defeated by a handloom weaver in Karimnagar. Both won on a Telugu Desam ticket.

For all its ideological fervour and speaking the language of the gun, victory is nowhere in sight for the PWG. It has, at best, about 30 dalams of 15 people each based in the forests. Till now, the state police has found itself competent to handle the situation, with just a little help from a few companies of the Central Reserve Police Force and the Indo-Tibetan Border Police. It also seems clear that the PWG's much-vaunted hold on the districts where they have strong presence is based on fear and intimidation. The result is that the Group's call for the boycott of general elections is consistently ignored.

The Group's assessment is that India is still ruled by the comprador bourgeois classes, who run the country at the beck and call of US imperialism, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The various revolutionary communist groups attribute the collapse of the Soviet Union to the ineptitude of Gorbachev rather than to any weakness in Marxism-Leninism. They say that ownership of land in the hands of a few is central to the exploitation of the toiling masses. In keeping with these 'radical' views, the PWG boycotted celebrations of the 50th anniversary of Indian independence.

The PWG is presently trying to internationalise its appeal. It attended an international seminar organised by the Workers Party of Belgium in Brussels in May 1996, along with 60 organisations of 40 countries. There, reports say, PWG leaders held talks with CPP of the Philippines, the PCP of Peru, TKP (ML) of Turkey, the Marxist-Leninist organisations of Senegal, and others.

Hopefully, however, the Group perhaps realises the pitfalls of importing revolution in whatever form, as its own experience indicates. After the Srikakulam movement which was started in 1967 collapsed in 1971, the PWG leadership assessed that they had made a mistake with the slogan: "China's Chairman is Our Chairman". Because the Savara and Jatapu tribes of the district could not identify themselves with a Chinese chairman.

*R.J. Rajendra Prasad writes for The Hindu from Hyderabad.*



*Romantic imagery from Naxalbari Is Not Only the Name of a Village, 1996.*

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# Sri Lanka's 'Thrasthawadi'

*The Janata Vimukthi Peramuna presents itself as a Marxist organisation, and the affinity with Maoism was initially quite obvious. But it can never sustain itself on imported ideology married to terror politics.*

by Sasanka Perera

A long and drawn-out crisis confronted the left parties of Sri Lanka in the 1960s, particularly after the Trotskyite Lanka Sama Samaja Party entered into a coalition alliance with Sirimavo Bandaranaike's Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) in 1964. This action led to a series of splits within the collective Left movement, and disgruntled young radicals such as Rohana Wijeweera went on to found the Janata Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP, the People's Liberation Front) in late 1967 as a movement dedicated to armed revolution.

Wijeweera had started his political career as a youth sympathiser of the Ceylon Communist Party (Moscow Wing), and was later attracted to Maoist politics while a medical student in the Soviet Union. When his student visa was not renewed as a result, Wijeweera returned to Sri Lanka in 1964 and joined the Ceylon Communist Party (Peking Wing) which had split from the CCP (Moscow Wing) the year previously. But soon Wijeweera and his radical colleagues lost confidence in the Peking Wing's ability to foster armed revolution. They also saw the party's preoccupation with trade union politics as indication of its unwillingness to grant the peasantry its legitimate place in revolution.

In the initial phase of its emergence, the ideology of the JVP, or more correctly its operational slogans, were a collection of ideas borrowed from Stalinist Marxism, Maoism, and a romanticised throwback to the Cuban revolution with cult emphasis on Fidel Castro and Che Guevara. However, the movement appealed to educated Sinhala rural youth mainly because it articulated their fears, especially regarding rising unemployment. In fact, the JVP never had a political ideology in the strictest sense, only a set of popular slogans camouflaged in Maoist and Guevarist

rhetoric. At the same time, from its very inception, the JVP also indoctrinated its cadre with a very clear anti-Indian bias.

The JVP planned for an insurrection based on the Cuban model, in which a sudden armed uprising by party cadre would lead to a popular revolution. So it initiated an insurrection on 5 April 1971, attacking over 70 police stations countrywide. At that time, the media did not even have a name to call the rebels, and at first they were known awkwardly as "Che Guevarists". Later, a Sinhala term "thrasthawadi", meaning "terrorist", was coined and also used in English.

The insurrection failed in spectacular fashion in a country where, even though there was growing unemployment, the pre-requisites of a revolution were generally lacking. Besides, the rebels were badly trained and equipped, and lacked funds and foreign support. Colombo's authorities brought the situation under control within a couple of weeks, with military assistance from countries as diverse as Pakistan, India, Singapore, Yugoslavia, England, the United States, Egypt – and the People's Republic of China, which firmly supported the crushing of the rebellion. The military killed a few thousand rebels, and many more surrendered or were arrested, to be tried under the draconian presence of a Criminal Justice Commission. Many were handed long prison sentences in 1975-1976.

## Terror Begets State Terror

The JVP received a second lease of life after the defeat of the SLFP in the parliamentary elections of July 1977. Fulfilling an election promise, J.R. Jayawardane of the newly elected United National Party (UNP) government freed JVP prisoners in November. The



Rohana Wijeweera



Che Guevara



Fidel Castro

organisation seemed to transform itself into a mainstream political party, abandoning the advocacy of armed revolution and engaging in parliamentary politics. In fact, the Front took part in two important elections, the District Development Council Elections of 1980 and the presidential elections of 1982, in which Wijeweera put himself forward as a candidate.

This "mainstream phase" was soon to end, however. In December 1982, the UNP government decided to extend its rule without holding general elections on the basis of a rigged referendum. This clear breach of democratic faith disillusioned the JVP leaders, who had tried to work within the electoral process in the hope of gaining some legitimate parliamentary representation. In August 1983, soon after the widespread anti-Tamil violence of the previous month, the UNP government proscribed the JVP and two other leftist parties for allegedly orchestrating the violence with the aim of toppling the government. Ironically, much of the violence against Tamils had been the handiwork of UNP members assisted by the party's trade union, the JSS (Jatika Sevaka Sangamaya).

The JVP leadership went into hiding and the organisation remained underground and in the background until 1987, when Indian armed forces landed in northern and eastern Sri Lanka on the mandate of the so-called Indo-Lanka Accord, the purpose of which was to contain the Tamil Tiger-led insurrection in those areas. The JVP's well-established anti-Indian

position now became the key to its growth and legitimisation. The organisation even gained a certain nationalist aura for its prophetic genius in opposing Indian expansionism. The JVP was thus handed its new set of slogans; it appealed to the Sinhala masses by depicting the Jayawardane government and Tamil political formations as pawns of Western and Indian imperialism out to divide the country.

From a self-proclaimed radical left youth organisation, the JVP rapidly metamorphosed into a fiercely nationalistic, Sinhala-centric outfit. The JVP called upon the "patriotic masses to rally against the traitorous UNP government in order to save the motherland". Even though the party continues to deny it, during this time the JVP also formed the Deshapremi Janata Vyaparaya (Patriotic People's Movement) for the specific purpose of carrying out military action, including assassinations of political enemies. With the much-hated Indo-Lanka Accord providing the required impetus, the JVP was ready, once again, to use armed rebellion to capture state power.

The Front's use of threats, intimidation and political violence escalated in two phases, with the provincial council elections of 1988 and the presidential elections of December 1989. The JVP regarded the provincial councils, established by Parliament in 1987 through a constitutional amendment, as anti-Sinhala and anti-national. Its terror tactics made for very low voter turnout, as low as 8 percent in the JVP-dominated Hambantota district in the Southern Province.



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The tactics used during the presidential elections were even more brutal, and protest actions were widespread, although they were never quite spontaneous. Industrial strikes crippled the country, and in April 1989 the Front succeeded in shutting down the country for six days. That year, the JVP also started using landmines against the military and police in the South, with devastating effect. There was increased killings of innocents, said to be was due to the JVP's decision to arm criminal elements.

Only 55 percent of the registered voters cast their votes in the presidential elections, marking the lowest turnout in any Sri Lankan general or presidential poll. Ranasinghe Premadasa of the UNP was elected president with only 27 percent of the vote.

It was also in 1989 that JVP leaders made a significant tactical error: they challenged the security forces head on. Perhaps frustrated by the fact that army and police personnel had not deserted and joined its ranks en masse, the Front now demanded that all members of the security forces and police resign from their posts. Those who did not would be killed together with their families, it warned. In some places, the threat was carried out. For the first time, the armed forces and police had their own reason to eliminate the JVP.

The JVP developed a false sense of invincibility, over-estimating its own power and capabilities. Whatever heroic halo it had soon disappeared, however, as its use of terror became increasingly excessive and irrational. The year 1989 saw not only the worst of the JVP's violence, but also the unleashing of counter-terror by the government. The full extent of state power had never been used to combat the JVP during Jayawardane's presidency, but the situation changed dramatically with Premadasa's assumption of office. A state-sponsored reign of terror soon overtook in scale and brutality what the JVP had been able to achieve.

The terror of the JVP, meanwhile, came to an abrupt end with the military's capture of their leader Rohana Wijeweera and his deputy Upatissa Gamanayake. The rest of the top leadership was also soon eliminated, as those captured were summarily executed. For all practical purposes, by 1990 the JVP was non-functional, its organisation in disarray.

### **Operational Ideology**

Even as its top two leaders were killed, however, JVP posters appeared in many parts of Sri Lanka, claiming: "Just because two plates are broken, the hotel will not be closed down."

The "hotel", it appears, is not closed, even though it is not clear who is running it. Even as there was wholesale elimination of the Front's uppermost echelons, there were a few leaders who survived. Some, such as Somawansa Amarasinghe, escaped to England, from where he now claims through fax messages to be the JVP's rightful leader. District-level leaders who managed to escape the state's dragnet are unwilling to accept such claims from overseas.

Presently, the JVP appears to be trying to settle its internal conflicts with the goal of re-asserting itself. It

is once again preparing to prove its amazing ability to spring back after devastating suppression. One reason for the organisation's resilience is that the JVP never maintained a dogmatic ideology, but rather a set of slogans that changed according to the socio-political climate.

For instance, the 1971 JVP was sympathetic to the concerns of the minorities, whereas the JVP of the late 1980s opposed any concessions to Tamils. Today, too, it opposes the devolution package proposed by the Chandrika Kumaratunga government, which would grant substantial autonomy to Tamil-dominated provinces. The JVP uses the Sinhala nationalist argument that the package would divide the country.

In other words, the JVP has the ability to offer the masses, and specifically Sinhala youth, what they want to hear even if such positions violate the very Marxist principles the movement claims allegiance to. In the context of the devolution debate, the JVP is opposed to any notion of self-determination, which forms a bedrock principle of Marxist thought.

On the other hand, the aspirations that the JVP represents are very much a part of contemporary Sri Lankan reality. As long as the frustrations and the anxieties of the youth persist on the scale at present, political formations such as the JVP will continue to be there to exploit and articulate the rage. Under such circumstances, there is also no reason to import standardised ideologies such as Maoism or Marxism.

Today, the JVP once again gives the impression of having become a legitimate political party, claiming to have learnt from its mistakes. But the Front, as with the UNP (presently out of power), has yet to show any kind of public remorse for the death and destruction it caused in the late 1980s. Far from apologising, the JVP's general secretary Tulin Silva claimed in a recent interview that his party had never indulged in any violence. According to him, all the mayhem was the work solely of the UNP.

This kind of vulgar revisionist rewriting of recent history will not have an effect on the people who suffered. Their memories, at least, cannot be revised as easily. For them, as victims of torture and beatings, and for thousands of women who have become widows, the track record of the JVP, and its partner in violence, the UNP, will be a constant reminder of politics gone berserk.

In real terms, as far as the rank and file are concerned, the JVP was and will continue to be a party of Sinhala Buddhist rural youth, representing their frustrations and their loss of faith in mainstream political parties. Given current trends, the organisation is unlikely to register a significant electoral victory without publicly expressing remorse for its violent activities, and without dealing with the murderers and torturers in its midst, and surely not without a clearly formulated plan of action for the future.

*S. Perera teaches anthropology at the University of Colombo. He is the author of the book Living with Torturers.*

# SHARBAHARA

## Class Hatred in Rural Bangladesh

*What started out as class war on behalf of the proletariat has degenerated into gang war in support of landlords and petty politicians.*

by Afsan Chowdhury

**M**aoism is no longer flagging its little red book in Bangladesh as it did in the late 1960s and mid-1970s. But a militant grassroots vigilante movement, sometimes moonlighting as freelance heavies for hire in the rural areas, still makes regular news. Mostly active in the southern and north-western regions of the country, the movement is a splintered one. However, the various parts are often lumped together and called the *sharbahara* (the proletariat) groups. They are symptoms more of peasant rage than politics.

The militancy draws its popular and mythical roots not just from the traditional communist movements of the Beijing variety but from the much more recent Sharbahara Party (SP) which was most active in the 1970 to 1974 period. Founded by Shiraj Shikder, an engineer, SP was only one among the many parties of the left, but it caught popular imagination arguing for a red Bengal at a time when most leftists were confined to just arguing. The party fought both the Pakistan army and the Awami League mainstream regulars in 1971. Afterwards, it battled the government of Sheikh Mujib till his death in 1974, under circumstances never well explained.

### 1971 Aftermath

The 1971 war created a crisis, fragmenting the already divided Maoist movements of what was till then East Pakistan. Pakistan was supported by China, while India and the Awami League naturally fell into the Soviet camp. Many Maoist groups therefore supported the Pakistan army, which was at that time engaged in a killing spree. This support gave the Maoists a bad image, and the memories linger.

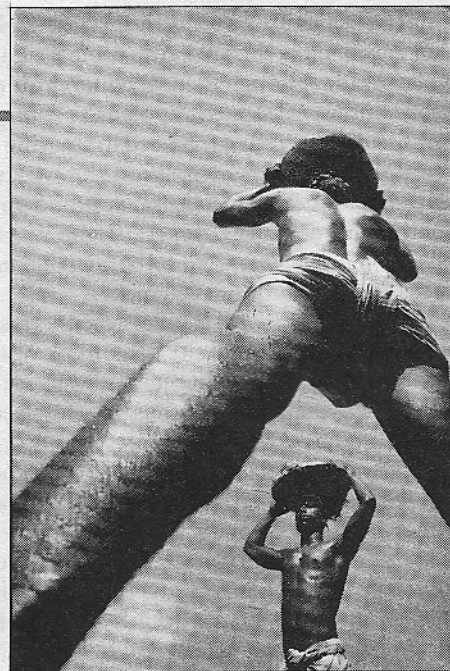
While the Maoist movement in the neighbouring

parts of India petered off in the early 1970s, it fared better in Bangladesh as popular opposition to Awami League rule mounted in the early days. Indeed, the Maoist movement grew rapidly during the early era of Sheikh Mujib's rule, though its factional splits and ideological differences defied all understanding. The movement included the East Pakistan Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist), which had been endorsed by Mother China herself and which clung to Pakistan even after 1971. (China recognised Bangladesh only in 1975, following Sheikh Mujib's death.)

The Sharbahara Party suffered a grievous setback in 1974 when its leader Siraj Shikder was killed, following which many of its remaining leaders were eliminated. A visibly victorious Sheikh Mujibur Rahman said in Parliament, "Where is Siraj Shikder now?" That declaration marked simultaneously the peak and last recognition of Maoism in Bangladesh.

An abortive coup attempt led by Col (ret'd) Taher, a war hero and admirer of Chairman Mao, and supported by a breakaway radical section of the Awami League which called itself the Gono Bahini (People's Army), was probably the closest the radicals ever got to power. But they were outwitted by Gen Ziaur Rahman, who had Col Taher arrested and later hanged along with many of his followers. Ironically, it was the colonel who had ousted a ruling group on 7 November 1975 and installed Gen Zia in power.

Sheikh Mujib was an enemy of Maoism, and he had been replaced by Gen Zia, who was under threat from the Indians and the Soviets. It was therefore the duty of Maoists to support Gen Zia. So went the logic, and so practically ended whatever there was of Maoism in Bangladesh.



NOZESH AHMED/QUEST FOR REALITY

## Revolutionary Thuggery

In the years immediately following, police action diminished the Maoist groups and they became marginalised in national politics. But the sharbahara syndrome or movement – not the party with its overtones of rural Maoism – continues to defy peaceful as well as belligerent attempts to finish it off. It exists, albeit without any significant political, theoretical or mass base.

Says Abrar Chowdhury, a professor at Dhaka University, of the sharbahara: "There is really no serious party network or movement. Some people who are in total conflict with mainstream politics are still involved with militant Maoism. What sustains it in the rural areas is class hatred.

It is the movement of the disgruntled and dispossessed in the villages, barely operating within political lines."

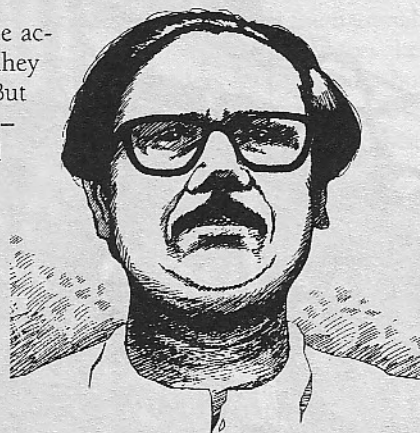
Surprisingly, some young people do still join the movement, attracted by the revolutionary promises and what they see as the failure of mainstream politics to provide answers in a terribly impoverished land. But the different Maoist groups survive not as part of a national movement but by relying on local support, a sort of Maoist version of rural factional politics. They are said to be active in local level elections and toll collection, where leaders require muscle and guns for "multi-purpose cooperative activities".

For many, there is little difference between sharbaharas and bandits. In fact, they are not even willing to call them Maoists. Md. Sohrab joined the movement after dropping out of a local college. He ran away after a year and now says that the party he joined is run by rural politicians of the kind who are removed from reality. He says, "They really live in Mao's world. They have no sense of the present. They are driven by violence."

Tasneem Siddiqui, of Dhaka University's Department of Political Science says that while many young people are drawn to the movement they become rapidly disillusioned. But then those who want to leave the party find themselves prevented. Renegades, it is said, are liquidated if caught. A typical Maoist caucus will include recruits ranging from campus youths, deserters from village feuds, militants without much ideological commitment, and certainly a few with criminal records.

"While it is true that many are guilty of what are called revolutionary crimes, the number of people who use the sharbahara or Maoist banner to practice thuggery is not small," says Rafique Alam, a senior leader of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party. *Bhorer Kagoz*, a national daily which recently ran a series on the sharbahara phenomenon, reported that many are patronised by local landlords, essentially as hired guns. Politicians of all varieties also have to come to an understanding with these elements in order to survive.

Besides the landowning classes and local politicians, the other category which has links to the Maoists are the non-governmental organisations work-



Mujibur did not like Mao.

ing in the rural areas. They often hire ex- or present cadres because it ensures both safety and acceptance at the village level. Besides, educated Maoists have a good public image at the village level. "Naxals (Maoists) make good NGO workers," concedes Souren Biswas, an NGO organiser. There have been moves to rehabilitate the sharbaharas, but these have floundered, with many returning to the shadow life.

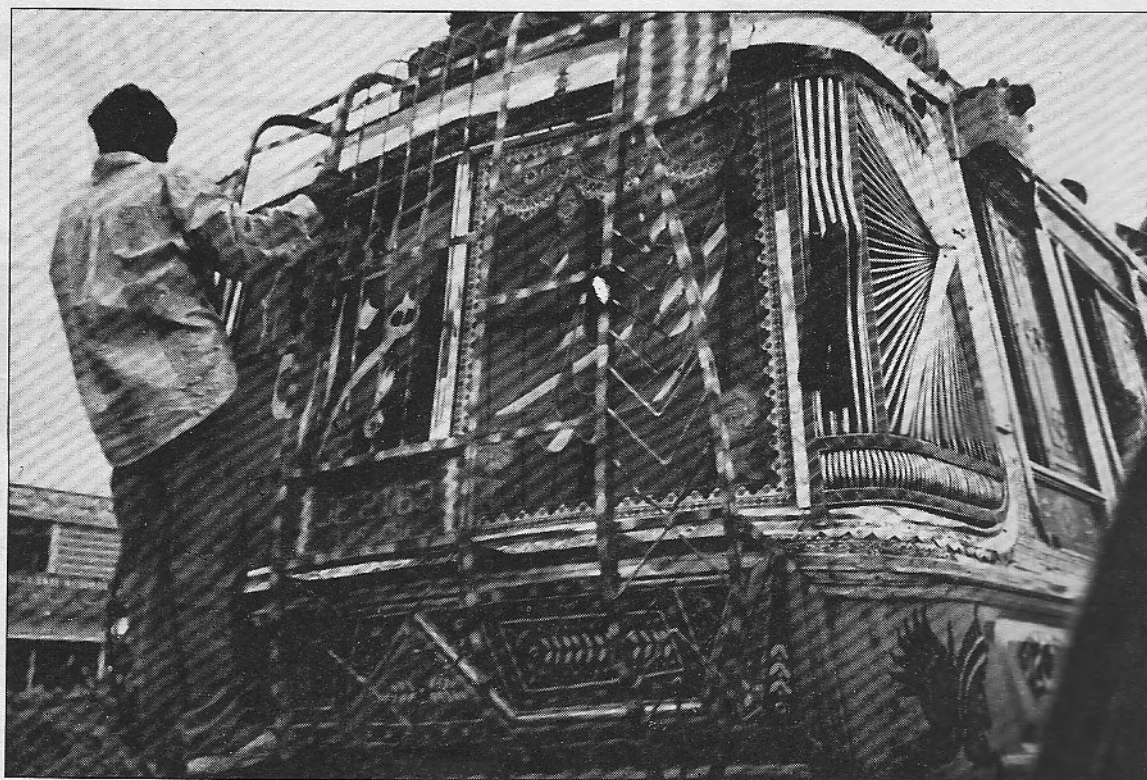
In some cases, remoteness has helped keep the sharbahara movement alive. Take, for example, Barisal division which was also the birthplace of the original Sharbahara Party. The vast badlands of the *char* (land left behind by a receding river) in the coastal area and low presence of the police means that the groups are able to survive purges.

Though never a threat to the establishment, the sharbahara manage to remain in the spotlight because of the clashes and killing which occur every month. In the Jhenaidah, Jessore Magura and Kushtia belt of the country's northwest, the influence of the East Pakistan Communist Party (M-L) lingers to this day. Deaths due to clashes with police and rivals factions make regular news. The Maoists of this area maintain contacts with Naxalite groups across the border in West Bengal.

### Idealism to Realism

While the sharbaharas survive as renegades, the Maoist phase in Bangla politics is definitely over. Splintered and surviving in isolated pockets, those who call themselves Maoists in Bangladesh today are more of a law and order problem than a political challenge to mainstream politics. The Idealist Seventies which drew the young to politics has been replaced with the Realist Nineties, with individual economic prosperity the driving force for the young. And that has cut off fresh blood supply considerably to the sharbahara movement.

The absence of successful Maoist insurgencies in the rest of South Asia has not provided much inspiration to Bangladesh's Maoists either. On the other hand, the continuing activism of the sharbaharas such as they are is but a mirror to the frustration of the millions of the rural poor who feel they have little stake in the existing system. The only option, for some of them, is to hit out.



*Trying to ride the state's coattails to power, Pakistan's ageing Maoists concede that they misjudged the nature of their country and population.*

by Mazhar Zaidi

**D**own at the Anarkali Bazaar teashops in Lahore, the aged leftovers of what was once the Left of Pakistan have time in their hands. When they tire of the television screens at home, they come here to debate the merits and demerits of the pro-China and pro-Russia decisions made so long ago by their respective factions.

Ironically, this is perhaps the only place in the country where you can hear such discussion, for there is hardly a trace of the Left remaining elsewhere in the polity. The Maoism that permeated the political thinking of the intelligentsia in the 1960s, if not mainstream politics itself, today survives only in teashop gossip of late-night Lahore.

Ironically enough, the decade-old history of Maoism in Pakistan had very little to sustain, anyway. Listening in to the conversation, one realises that even the staunchest Maoists today accept that their analyses and politics "back then" were misconceived.

#### **Romanticised Parallel**

The paradox of Maoism's short-lived history on the Indus plain is that it was born in the very womb of the Pakistani state. The fountainhead of Maoism lay in the establishment which it was out to eliminate. For, instead of springing up among the masses to fulfil an

ideological appetite or stemming from philosophical discourse, Maoism came to Pakistan simply because the government had aligned itself with China in the context of regional politics.

Against the backdrop of a growing relationship between General Ayub Khan and the US administration of President Lyndon B. Johnson, Foreign Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto pushed through a dramatic shift in the country's foreign policy in the early 1960s. The Indo-China war of 1962 had already brought Pakistan and China close as both had a common enemy in the region. But it was the 1965 Indo-Pak war which actually paved the way for a strong alignment between the two adversaries of India.

This also laid the groundwork for Maoism in a country where, since its conception in 1947, communists had been the state's first target. As Imtiaz Alam, a former Maoist leader who later developed differences and formed his own Punjab Lok Party, puts it, "The state level friendship between China and Pakistan certainly provided an overall psychological atmosphere and it did play a very important role in the development of Maoism." But, he adds, "There were other factors as well."

Beyond the state-level friendship with China, Maoism's growth can be attributed to the much

# HOW THE LEFT MISSED THE BUS PAKISTANI



romanticised parallel that the Pakistani communists drew between their society and that of the Chinese. Says Mr Alam, "It was intellectually stimulating to deviate from the Russian line and explore the Chinese model since it apparently had some similarities with our conditions. The Chinese way of revolution attracted a lot of intellectuals here because Pakistan was also an agriculture-based society. Also, by the mid-1960s, cracks in the USSR model were already visible. The emergence of a strong bureaucracy disillusioned some of our young communist leaders."

However, the romanticised parallel proved quite incorrect. "In this thesis we were basically confusing China's semi-colonial experience with Pakistan's neo-colonial experience," says Khalid Mehmud, one-time Maoist who later left the party.

Whatever the intricacies of the Maoist debate at that time, the fact remained that the Communist Party of Pakistan, banned in 1952, discovered the environment suddenly conducive to its activities in the 1960s. After the 1965 war, Pakistan was flooded with Mao badges and caps along with bundles of red books. The small underground communist groups were only too happy to use the cover provided by the Sino-Pak friendship to take the message of Mao Zedong to the masses.

The communists of West Pakistan who, in the wake of the official ban, had joined the obscure centre-right Azad Party, resurfaced to form the National Awami Party (NAP). Immediately, a debate began within the NAP over the Moscow-Peking split. As was the case in every other South Asian country with a communist movement worth the name, the party broke up into two groups. One was led by Abdul Hameed Khan Bhashani, who preferred to go the Chinese way, and the other by Khan Abdul Wali Khan, who found it difficult to sever ties with the Russians who were supporting him from neighbouring Kabul.

### Provincial Communists

Those who advocated NAP's alignment with Peking sought to take advantage of the popularity of China for its support in the 1965 war. They thought this would help the NAP enlarge its support base without developing direct antagonisms in a society not quite responsive to left-wing politics. In opposition to the pro-Peking Maoists was the Russian school, which based its arguments on a somewhat stronger footing.

The Russian experience had relevance for Pakistan, said this faction, because the Soviets put an emphasis on population diversity within their country. This was not a problem that had to be addressed seriously by the Chinese, given their largely homogeneous population. Thus, the Chinese model failed to take the "national question" of Pakistan into account, meaning the tackling of provincial aspirations, and merely emphasised the unitary integrity of the Pakistani state as a regional ally of China.

Because Maoism did not offer much guidance on the question of ethnic identities, the leftist groups from the smaller provinces tended to become disenchanted with the Peking model. They preferred to

stick to the pro-Russian Wali Khan, who laid special emphasis on the national question and the rights of the smaller provinces. Leading left-wing nationalist leaders such as Ghouse Bux Bazinjo, Khair Bux Marri and Sardar Atta Ullah Mengal from Balochistan and Hakim Ali Zardari from Sindh supported Wali Khan, who himself belonged to the Frontier Province.

"In a country where diversity is still a fact, it was a blunder to ignore it," recalls Khalid Mehmud. Maoism, therefore, paid its price, as is clear from the fact that it only made limited progress in the province of Punjab and in the metropolis of Karachi – both were areas where nationalism has never been an issue since they always retained the lion's share of power in the Pakistani state.

Thus, the Maoists positioned themselves incongruously with the bigger nationality groups, in Punjab and Karachi, even though their ideology should have put them with the smaller, more oppressed, nationalities.

### Debates Within

Even when given the opportunity to chart out their own course, the Maoists of Pakistan were found wanting. In 1970, Abdul Hameed Khan Bhashani, who was leading the Chinese group and was one of the few Maoists with a strong support base in his hometown in East Pakistan, was kicked out of West Pakistan by the governor-general, Musa Khan. Strangely enough, upon returning to the East, Bhashani chose to support Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's Awami League rather than contest elections with his own party. Many of Bhashani's old colleagues still find this decision extremely strange, for he seemed to have missed an opportunity of posing a credible challenge to the Awami League.

Back in West Pakistan, many of Bhashani's comrades took a similarly curious decision when they joined Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party (PPP), which had by then managed to mobilise a mass movement against Ayub Khan's martial law regime. The Left hoped to use the PPP's mass platform, and thought it strategically wise to work with the man who had been the architect of the China-tilt of the Pakistani government. The list of those joining the PPP at that time included the names of leading Maoists such as Malik Meraj Khalid, Tufail Abbas and Zareena Rana. Today's human rights crusader Mubashir Hassan, at whose residence the PPP was actually formed, was himself known for his inclination towards Maoism.

By 1977, most of the Maoists who had joined the PPP with the hope of using it as a mass platform for radical change had lost their grip on party affairs. Tired and disillusioned, many of the leading Maoists found some comfort in the increasingly popular Frankfurt School, with its emphasis on sociology and culture in political thought. Choosing to lower their sights from mass-based national politics, the Maoists began to form small groups whose interests turned more towards culture, language and local economic issues. Essentially, these Maoists had decided to do away with their past.



The largest and most active of such groups was the Punjab Lok Party, which had Imtiaz Alam, Zubair Rana and Lakht Pasha now advocating change of the system from within. Perhaps the biggest contribution of Punjab Lok Party, in its brief flicker from 1978 to 1984, was to put aside borrowed Marxist jargon and seek answers in the study of local social realities and economic requirements. It was also this group which initiated a debate on change from within after a thorough self-criticism of the Left's history.

While some Maoists found a niche for themselves in the state order, the indecisive ones were swept away by the Afghan revolution and the subsequent rise of Soviet influence in Pakistan. The 1980s proved a barren decade for Maoism. Those who had

joined the PPP faced extreme repression under General Ziaul Haq, while those who had stayed pure were completely sidelined by the onslaught of Russian influence.

Back at the Anarkali tea-shops today, there is a consensus which eluded Maoists in the past. To paraphrase what these tired fighters have to say, "We never really tried to develop something from our own culture and land. Most of the time our politics and thought were determined by events outside of our culture. And that's why we could never get anywhere in this country."

*M. Zaidi reports for The News in Pakistan.*

# The (North)East Is Red

*"Mao and Chou En-lai were great leaders. Your Nehru was not."*

by *Subhir Bhaumik*

The year was 1966. The Cultural Revolution was at its peak, and both the Naxalbari uprising as well as the great offensive by the Burmese Communist Party were still a year away, when Thuingaleng Muivah and Thinoselie Medom Keyho of the Naga National Council (NNC) led 300 Naga rebel fighters to China for weapons and training.

While the rebel rank and file learnt the rudiments of guerrilla warfare, the Chinese put Muivah and Thinoselie through an intensive course in "Ideology" and "People's Warfare" at the College of Diplomacy, Beijing, where dozens of foreign revolutionary leaders underwent ideological orientation at that time.

The instructors at the elite college soon enough recognised which of the two Naga rebel chieftains was more receptive to "Marxism-Leninism and Mao Tse Tung Thought". More than 20 years later at Oxford, Li Feiyu, a teacher at the College of Diplomacy recalled, "Thinoselie was a soldier. His interest in politics was very limited, while Muivah was very bright."

Within a year, Thinoselie returned to fight the Indian army in the Naga Hills, where a separatist campaign has raged for more than 40 years now. But Muivah stayed on until he had thoroughly imbibed "Mao Tse Tung Thought". He now leads the National Socialist Council of Nagaland, or NSCN, the strongest

of the Naga rebel factions, while Thinoselie has remained with the nearly-defunct NNC. Speaking to this writer at his rebel base last year, Muivah said, "Mao and Chou En-lai were great leaders. Your Nehru was not. One must follow their revolutionary example."

Muivah remains convinced that "China is the only hope for revolutionaries", although he is somewhat defensive while talking about the withdrawal of Chinese support to revolutionary movements across Asia and the growing ties between Beijing and even military dictatorships such as the one in Burma. "This may be a temporary phase," he explains.

Whether Muivah is right or wrong, the fact remains that a whole generation of leaders of North-east India's ethnic separatist movements still live in the shadow of China, even though today it is a Big Power rather than the epicentre of revolution. Says Paresch Barua, commander-in-chief of the separatist United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), "Mao's texts are basic readings for any revolutionary."

Unlike Muivah, Barua has never been to China.

It is a reflection of China's geopolitical interests that its involvement with Indian revolutionary groups has been limited to the Northeast. Beijing has never been too keen on supporting Indian communist groups like the CPI (M-L), despite their avowedly pro-Maoist outlook. Even in the case of the "Spring

Thunder of Naxalbari" the Chinese only expressed moral and political support for the movement. On the other hand, between 1966 and 1976, they trained and armed at least nine batches of Naga, Mizo and Manipuri rebels, about 1200 men in all. The Nagas and the Mizos were trained in large groups of 200 to 300 guerrillas, the Manipuris in small batches of around 20 each.

Says one Indian intelligence official who brought about the surrender of a whole group of China-returned Mizo fighters: "The Chinese realised before long that most of the Naga and Mizo rebels they trained were not interested in ideology. They found out that training a Muivah was not enough. So they started creating nuclei of pro-Maoist movements and the 17 Meitei Ojhas was the first experiment."

Manipur's rebel People's Liberation Army (PLA) grew up around the core of this group of Meitei (valley-dwelling Hindu Manipuris) Ojhas ('pioneers' in Manipuri). Beijing provided them with guerilla warfare training but did not provide arms, saying that Mao Thought was the best weapon. The PLA proved adept at increasing their support base while resorting to weapon snatching for arming their cadres. Almost an entire guerrilla army was created with looted arms.

The leaders of the PLA continue to regard Mao as a cult figure of revolution. "The Chinese were dismayed with the Nagas and Mizos, as they were with the Kachins in Burma later. They wanted a more ideologically committed group, which they found in the Manipuri PLA leaders," says R. Sanjoubha, Manipur's leading political analyst.

The PLA was, however, the last of the Northeast guerrilla groups to be trained by the Chinese in the 1970s, for as relations between New Delhi and Beijing began to improve, the latter discontinued support for the revolutionaries of the Northeast.

What most restricted the appeal of Maoism in the Northeast hills was the absence of a clear class cleavage in the region. Added to that was the influence of

the Church on Naga and Mizo politics, and its opposition to Maoist ideals. As a result, Maoism never got to seep too deep into already powerful politics of ethnic separatism in Northeast India. The Naxalites from further west did not find much of a base here, and their influence was limited to pockets such as in the Karbi Anglong hills of Assam where they penetrated the local autonomy movement.

Most leaders of these separatist or autonomy movements were happy simply to use the Maoist tactics of guerilla warfare while generally ignoring its political ideology. The Mizo National Front pointedly refused to use Maoist rhetoric even though hundreds of its guerrillas were trained in China.

Asked why the NSCN or other rebel groups did not organise along Marxist-Leninist lines, Muivah says, "Ours is primarily a struggle on the nationality question. We are not Indians but have been forced to become one, and our main contradiction lies with Delhi, not amongst ourselves. Marxism-Leninism and Mao Thought should be carefully applied, with local conditions in mind."

Maoism is no longer even what it used to be in the Northeast. Said Bisheswar Singh, the founder of the Manipur PLA, just before his death, "China was a great inspiration to us, and Mao still is. But there is a limit to his appeal now." ▽

S. Bhaumik is BBC correspondent for eastern India.



Thuingaleng Muivah

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# NO Revolution Democracy

by Peter Limquenco

**T**he French Revolution did not need an ideology. Recent uprisings in Mexico and Peru have shown that oppressed people rising up against their tormentors do not necessarily need to call themselves Marxist-Leninists or Maoists.

If poverty, oppression and government neglect gets unbearable, the people have a choice either to take up arms or to move elsewhere. It is more likely that they will take up arms because usually such people have nowhere to go. Ruling elites who have no concerns for social justice and equity, driven as they are only by greed and the quest for power, should not be surprised when peasants, workers and ordinary people decide enough is enough. And the banners need not be red, they can be green or blue or pink.

However, it is also a fact that such outbursts usually cannot rise from the district or regional to national level without the underpinnings a doctrinal base. An ideology of national scope, however, must be scientific enough. And it may be of the left or the right. Let us not forget that it is not the monopoly of the left to be a progressive force. The period of history when the left had the exclusive role of trying to transform society in a progressive way has passed, partly because of what has happened in those countries that called themselves communist. There are movements from the right which have been progressive as well, such as the Portuguese colonels' coup in

1975 which toppled the fascist dictatorship of Salazar and unleashed political and economic reforms.

## China and Asia

In the past 500 years, there have perhaps been only two persons who have managed to captivate a worldwide audience with what they wrote: Adam Smith and his *Wealth of Nations* in 1776 and Karl Marx a hundred years later with *Das Kapital*. The world today still revolves around these two men. Each created an ideology, a school of thought, and a method of analysing society. What the founder wants and what the follower makes of it are, however, two different things. The followers tend to transform an ideology into religion, irrespective of the founder's intention.

A look back at the rise and spread of Maoism in this century has to start with an understanding of the impact of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. When the Soviet uprising triumphed in the second decade of this century, there was a big debate about whether the revolution would spread to the developed world first before catching on in the 'backward' countries. At that time, delegates from China, India and Japan questioned the assumptions of the Communist International and argued forcefully that the peasantry was very much a revolutionary force.

When the Chinese revolution started in the 1930s, Mao Zedong was trying to chart his own path to revolution, one which was quite different from the Bolsheviks'. The Russian revolution took place in Petrograd and in Moscow, very much the result of an urban working class revolt. Mao and his associates knew that the Chinese experience had to be quite different.

However, to their ultimate distress, the communist movements of the developing world tended to structure themselves according to the colonial pecking order. So, the Indonesian communists essentially answered to the Communist Party in Holland, which in turn answered to Moscow. In the Philippines, the Communist Party took its cue from the US Communist Party which likewise looked to Moscow. It was not much different in the Subcontinent.

But it was different with the Chinese. Even before the triumph of their own revolution, the Chinese communists had started organising overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia: trade unions in Thailand, ethnic Chinese working class in Singapore and Malaysia,

1976: Mao is dead,  
long live Mao.



# without Democracy without Revolution

and to a lesser extent ethnic Chinese in Indonesia and the Philippines. The leadership in Thailand's Communist Party was always of ethnic Chinese composition. Wang Hongwen, the youngest member of the infamous Gang of Four, was actually born in Thailand to Chinese parents.

Perhaps the only other country besides China where Maoism actually ruled for a while was in Cambodia. The Cambodian Communist Party under Pol Pot (see page 37) started to distance itself from Vietnam even while they were jointly fighting the Americans in the early 1970s. When they entered Phnom Penh in 1975, the Khmer Rouge started its experiment with a Cambodian version of Maoism. The result was what has come to be known as the Cambodian holocaust, which shocked even the supporters of Cambodian communism.

Earlier, Cambodian Maoists had also been working with Thai communists, launching joint operations against villages inside Thailand. But the Thai comrades were shocked by the zeal of the Cambodians who proceeded to shoot villagers riding motorcycles thinking that if they could afford the machines, they must be class enemies.

## Uncle Ho vs Uncle Sam

In Vietnam, things took a different turn because the country had its own communist visionary, Ho Chi Minh. But even so, the Chinese had a strong influence on Vietnam, and Vietnamese communists used southern China as a refuge. In the Philippines, the small Chinese communist branch helped train guerrillas to first fight the Japanese and later local feudal landlords. In what was then Malaya, the Communist Party was run by the Chinese branch.

That was the setting when the Vietnam War escalated in the mid-1960s and China itself was going through the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution. The main slogan of the Red Guards was that US imperialism was a "paper tiger" and that armed struggle was the only way to fight it. And they were happy to let the Vietnamese do the fighting. But when the Paris peace talks began, the Chinese Communist officialdom was unhappy that the Vietnamese were negotiating peace with Uncle Sam – it was contrary to the concept of valiantly defeating imperialism in the battlefield.

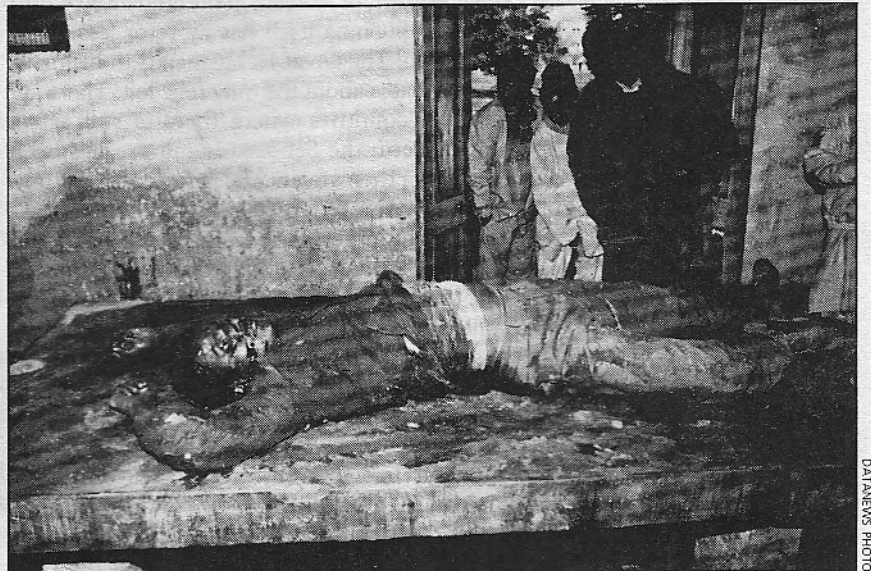
The Vietnamese, always fiercely independent, argued that they had a two-track policy: in the battle-

field, *fight*, in the conference room, *talk*. The Chinese were displeased and the Vietnamese were puzzled: here they were fighting imperialism and they were being accused of revisionism! As the Vietnamese Communist Party started pursuing a more independent line, the country was automatically pushed into the Soviet camp.

To a large measure, therefore, the spread of Maoism in Asia was dictated by efforts to export the Cultural Revolution and Cold War geopolitics. The Red Guards orchestrated riots in Hong Kong as an attack British and Portuguese imperialism, and smaller demonstrations were organised in Burma by ethnic Chinese. The Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI) was the largest communist party after the Soviet and the Chinese parties, and was pro-Chinese in the fight against the Soviet wing. Interestingly, despite its Maoist leanings, the PKI never advocated armed struggle to seize power. And that may be why they were wiped out in military-backed pogroms in which a million people were killed in 1965.

The Sino-Soviet split had repercussions on communist movements all around the world. This falling out of two fraternal nations was repeated within the communist parties of almost every country which had a communist party, with pro-China and pro-Soviet factions emerging in almost pre-determined fashion. In hindsight, we can see that this split postponed real

Police dead in Maoist action, Gaya, central Bihar.



DATANEWS PHOTO

Image taken from *Oppression and Reaction, a publication of Madhya Pradesh Maoists.*

revolutions within the countries of Asia, as the communists busied themselves defending China or the Soviet Union instead of doing their own homework. There was a fragmenting of the communist movement Asiawide.

### Mao and Maoists

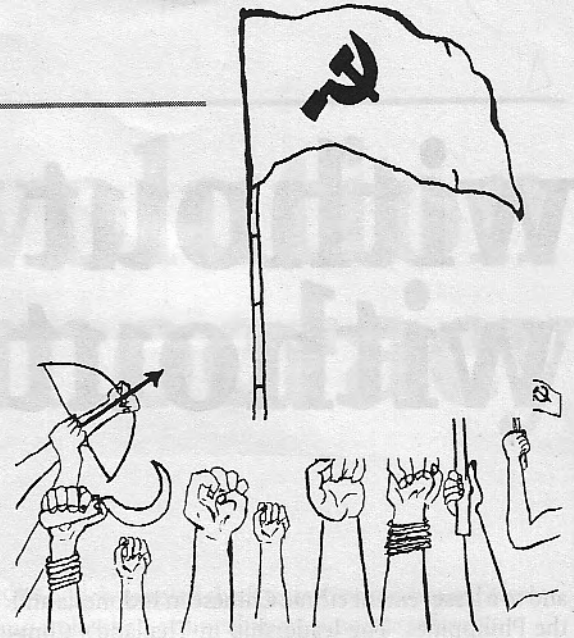
There is no doubt that Mao Zedong was a true revolutionary. But one must separate Mao Zedong from the people who today call themselves Maoists. One thing that revolutionaries worldwide have taken most seriously about Maoism is the famous dictum included in the Red Book: "Political power comes out of the barrel of a gun." When you carry around a phrase like that it soon transforms itself into a religious credo, a mantra for violence. However, although violence has been used by political movements of both the left and right, the political violence of the left has usually tried to be clear about its role: the target has to be a class enemy, and political violence has to have a political end.

But in many revolutionary situations, violence has degenerated into a fetish; it has become an end in itself, and hurts the very people who are to be saved. In the Philippines, for instance, Maoists would shoot ordinary traffic policemen on the streets, unmindful of the fact that he was just a working class cop doing his job of regulating traffic. There was the expected backlash from the public as, far removed from political ends these so-called revolutionaries began to show their colours as mere criminals and killers. Purges within some Maoist parties have been more ruthless, brutal and arbitrary than even the violence against class enemies.

Today's political parties of the left will have to be independent. That is the first condition. They cannot take orders any more from any one, not Moscow, not Beijing, not Havana, not Pyongyang. Of course, the parties will have to take into account international factors such as globalisation and interlinked cross-border issues, but their concentration must be on redeeming situations within their own countries and populations.

What remains of Maoism in the globalised world is a mixed bag. China itself has more or less abandoned Maoism. The Great Helmsman is in his mausoleum and that is about the only relic left. There are a handful of countries where there is still active Maoism. In Peru, the Sendero Luminoso has been decimated after their violence became too indiscriminate, leading to a reaction by alienated peasants.

In the Philippines, the Maoist groups have split and the Chinese don't even bother with the remnants that call themselves Maoist. The majority of those who split away think that the objective conditions are not the same and the system is no longer feudal but an underdeveloped capitalist mode of production. In Sri Lanka, what you'd call real Maoism was finished off a long time ago when the first JVP uprising was crushed in 1971, ironically, with Chinese military help for the Bandaranike government. The second uprising in 1988 was essentially a violent grab for power that tried to ride the crest



of a popular anti-Indian sentiment.

In India, the Naxalite movement had its supporters in some parts of the country and was building up some momentum before it was crushed, but India is so vast that the impact of Naxalites was to a certain extent exaggerated by the media and there was never really much danger to the state. Today, the People's War movement in Andhra Pradesh and Bihar are either escalations of caste violence as each side tries to take revenge for a previous massacre with an even bigger atrocity, or it is a limited uprising against the state security apparatus, which has become the symbol of local oppression.

In Sri Lanka, Nepal or India, the legal process is still an option and the avenues for parliamentary struggle are still open. It may be a very distorted parliamentary system, but it represents a way to come to power through the ballot rather than the bullet.

For any serious political movement of the left of today, the lessons of history are quite clear. First, we may draw lessons from the Bolshevik, Chinese, Vietnamese and Cuban revolutions but we cannot duplicate any of them. Each revolution has its own cultural, historical and economic context. The second lesson of this century's experience with communism is that there is no revolution without democracy and there is no democracy without revolution.

Maoists have long known how difficult it is to convince a peasant to take up arms. Because he has to leave his family, his land and his crops in the field, grab a gun and fight. If you cannot even convince a person to vote for you, it is more difficult to convince him to come fight for you. The realistic path for the left is to embark on a long process of education not only of their own people but also of society at large. To begin with, rather than raise the gun, communist movements must work to understand the nature of their national societies. The overall heightened level of consciousness can then be used for political mobilisation. Trigger-happy Maoism will not serve the people, not in Nepal, Vietnam or the Philippines.

P. Limquenco was till recently former senior editor of the *Asia Times in Bangkok* and is now editor of the *Journal of Contemporary Asia*.

# Cambodia's Maoists Outdid Mao

by Satya Sivaraman

In late July this year, international television networks flashed pictures of a sensational 'show trial' of Khmer Rouge leader Pol Pot being conducted by his own mutinous troops. As the world watched, his former comrades in arms denounced Pol Pot, now old and frail, accusing him of treason. He was sentenced to lifelong house arrest.

It was easily the kindest 'punishment' ever meted out to anybody in the nearly five-decade-long history of the extremist group, notorious for its barbaric methods of executing both enemies and old friends. Many observers suspect that the entire trial, willingly lapped up by the international media, was a farce – probably the brainchild of Pol Pot himself and meant to assist the Khmer Rouge in its efforts to re-enter mainstream Cambodian politics. By publicly distancing themselves from their leader, who led the Khmer Rouge's genocidal spree in the mid-seventies, the group stands a better chance of being accepted back into the fold by ordinary Cambodian citizens.

Over two decades ago, in 1975, when the Khmer Rouge came to power by routing US troops during the Indochina war, many within war-weary Cambodia welcomed them as harbingers of peace and stability. Their hopes were dashed bizarrely when the Khmer Rouge launched a programme of abolishing cities, executing intellectuals (often identified as such because they wore spectacles), and turning the country into one large agrarian commune.

In the words attributed to one of the Khmer Rouge leaders at that time, Pol Pot's attempt was to "outdo even Comrade Mao". The results were horrendous, as tens of thousands of urban Cambodians perished in the countryside due to starvation, hard labour and torture. In its last days, before a group of Khmer Rouge defectors backed by Vietnamese troops overthrew it, the Pol Pot regime executed hundreds of its own cadre suspected of turning against the leadership.

Though the media popularly likes to call the Khmer Rouge 'communist' or even 'Maoist', the group's ideology (if one can call it that) was in a league of its own. Though initially part of the larger Indochina Communist Party under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh during the 1940s and 1950s, the Khmer Rouge broke away accusing the Vietnamese of promoting their own interests over Cambodian concerns. In the 1960s, the group did move closer to

Mao's China, where it found patronage and even ideological inspiration, but under Pol Pot's leadership the Khmer Rouge developed a dubious ideology of extreme nationalism (particularly anti-Vietnamese), combined with utopian ideas of forming a moneyless, cityless and ideologically pure peasant society.

Though a self-proclaimed champion of the peasantry and responsible for the killings of thousands of 'bourgeois' intellectuals, Pol Pot, whose real name is Saloth Sar, himself never did a day's work on the farm. He was a failed student of radio engineering in Paris during the early 1950s.

Historians argue that what really brought Pol Pot and his bunch of fanatic nationalists to power was the infamous bombing of the Cambodian countryside by the US air force claiming to be attacking Vietnamese troops in the area. Between February and

August 1973, US B-52 bombers and other aircraft dropped over 250,000 tonnes of bombs on Cambodia, estimated to be 50 percent more than the total tonnage dropped on Japan during the Second World War, including the two atom bombs.

"That is what really drove the Cambodian peasantry into the

arms of the Khmer Rouge, which was only a marginal force in Cambodian politics at that time," says a senior official in the Cambodian foreign ministry, who himself served in the Khmer Rouge two decades ago. Ironically, it is the United States which is now heading the international chorus for an international tribunal to try Pol Pot for crimes against humanity.

On the other hand, some Maoist groups in South Asia tend to dismiss all criticism of Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge as the result of Western propaganda. While it is true that the global media seldom mentions the responsibility of Western governments, and the United States in particular, for the genocide and tragic civil war in Cambodia, there is no denying that the Khmer Rouge leadership was so blinded by its utopian ideology that it chose to eliminate thousands of people rather than accept that its ideas were wrong or inadequate.

Mao Zedong said, "Revolution is not a tea party." Sure, but revolution should not be a slaughterhouse either. △

S. Sivaraman is a journalist and filmmaker presently based in Chiang Mai in Thailand.



# Producing Women

**AFTER THREE** decades of television in India, women have finally begun to enter the production arena in a big way. They are no longer just pretty faces on screen, for today Indian women are involved in every department of television production: in directing and producing shows, handling cameras, designing settings, script-writing, coordinating, you name it.

Partly, this has been helped by the unshackling of the television medium and the rise of innovative satellite and terrestrial companies. Natasha Badhwar has been with New Delhi Television for over two years now. She says, "In all honesty it never occurred to me that I was taking up a profession which was considered a male domain. It was something I found challenging and adventurous and I didn't think particularly that professions may be 'marked' by gender."

Ms Badhwar chose camera-work because she loves the outdoors and was excited about putting together what she saw in a news or feature capsule. The first year was not without tension, however, because of the attitude of her male colleagues. "I'm sure some of it was due to the fact that I was a young girl being entrusted with a big responsibility," she says. "I used to feel alienated among the team of eleven male colleagues, but now I understand them."

There are limits to Ms Badhwar's expectations of her job, however. She says, "Working ten hours a day and having to travel at short notice seems nice only because I'm 26 now. I can't imagine how people balance such working hours with a family. The job's far from glamorous."

Megha Joshi, too, found it hard to gain acceptance as a freelance art director before ultimately establishing herself in the trade. Says she, referring to male colleagues, "One has to learn to relate to them and if possible even share a smoke. One has to slowly earn mutual respect so that they don't dismiss you 'as a woman'."

Describing her work, Ms Joshi says, "It's not easy work. It's messy work, involving mud, paint, cement. But the money is

good – from thirty thousand rupees to anything above, depending on the complexity of the design," says Ms Joshi.

Traditionally, men have been preferred in production since it involves odd hours and running around. The gender preference, however, is shifting. Says P.C. Lahiri, Vice-President at Zee Telefilms, "When we recruit, the emphasis is not on gender but the freshness of the mind. We are looking for those who are adaptable, enthusiastic, alert and eager to grow."

Not so, according to Saba Diwan. Due to in-built social bias, she says, "Women are not really encouraged to go into the technical aspects of TV production." An established film-maker, Ms Diwan finds it amusing that such bias extends even to the equipment. Handling a camera is considered arduous work and is still associated with men.

But women have begun to brave it out in the men's world of video film production, and what Ms Diwan calls "small humiliations" on the job are on the way out. If things are already changing in television production, perhaps it is management's turn next.

- *Roop Mallik (Women's Feature Service)*



BICKAS RAJANAR

## No to Mobutu

"**WE DON'T** want Mobutus here", says an editorial in *The Sunday Times* of Colombo, responding to a speech made by President Chandrika Kumaratunga in which she suggested that South Korea and Malaysia have been able to develop due to authoritarian rule. Of sufficient interest, we excerpt the editorial *in extenso*:

*The President's open espousal of authoritarianism as a spur to economic development smacks strangely of the late President Jayawardane's vision for Sri Lanka. Having had a taste of JR's Executive Presidency and yet lambasting JR's dictatorial style*



# Fast Track Energy

**LET THERE** be light. But there wasn't. Alas, it was realised, for there to be light there must be power. So it was sought from near and far, and forward they came with promise of power.

As advancing technology and development take a hold of Bangladesh, the country begins to feel the thirst for electricity. Already, there is a 1400 MW power deficit nationwide, and various parts are facing brownouts every day. Man-hours are lost, industrial productivity plummets.

To respond to the growing crisis, the previous government of Khaleda Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party opened up the power sector for private investment. Before long, multinational bidders homed in. Three years and a change of government later, the first two private power sector deals have been signed.

Enron International & Associates, having already made some sparks fly in Maharashtra and Nepal, signed the first agreement with the Bangladesh Power Development Board (PDB) in the third week of May. Under the agreement, Enron and its associates – Wartsila Diesel and the New England Power Company of the US and Bangladesh's Fortune Limited – will set up a 100 MW barge-mounted power plant on a build-

own-operate basis at Hariipur in Sylhet, and begin to supply power to the national grid within 10 months. Under the agreement, the government will buy all the power generated for at least 15 years.

This is the first private power development venture by a consortium of international producers under the private power policy enunciated by Begum Zia in October 1996. Enron says that it will import naphtha petroleum to drive the Hariipur power plant initially but will switch to Bangla natural gas by the end of 1998 to reduce generation costs. A PDB spokesperson said that of the 15 companies that had responded to the tender call for three barge-mounted power plants, Enron's bid was the most "competent".

Enron will supply power at BDT 2.45 per KW-hour (USD 0.06), which compares favourably with PDB's oil-based generation costs of over BDT 4 per KW-hour (USD 0.09). The government has opted for barge-mounted power units because of quicker setup possible and what is called "power augmentation transferability" by the experts.

Enron's 10-month countdown started in June. As per the agreement, the government will absorb any loss incurred from

delays that are due to political or social disturbances beyond the control of the private developers. On the other hand, the foreign associates will have to pay damages if they fail to fulfil their contractual obligations.

Enron has provided a USD 10 million bank security which the government can encash if the developers fail to honour the agreement. Initially, the developers will mobilise their funds through commercial credit but they will also have the option to tap the local capital market.

Meanwhile, another agreement has been signed for a 100 MW power plant for Sitakunda, Chittagong, with Smith Cogenerations, and negotiations are underway for a third 100 MW power plant, to be based in Khulna. Both contracts will use the 15-year Enron agreement as a model. Beyond these projects, the government plans to set up two more plants, one a 300-450 MW plant at Meghna Ghat and another a 200 MW plant at Hariipur.

The 'fast-track approach' in closing the deals on the first two plants has been impressive, for the negotiations began only in April, at the initiative of the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources. While some might worry about the hurry, one thing is clear: those who want to avoid load-shedding in the years ahead, head for Dhaka.

– Talat Kamal



President Kumaratunga appears to be paradoxically haunted by the late President Jayawardane's ghost.

It was Felix Dias Bandaranaike, then the elder Ms Bandaranaike's super-minister, who once said "a little bit of totalitarianism" was a good thing. At least he spoke his mind. But what the people of Sri Lanka went through only those who lived through those times will know.

Are we right in seeing in President Kumaratunga's comments the beginning of a new vision of her own veering into what we can only assume is a shift into a dictatorial mode? Dictatorships may throw up some good economics but let us not forget the darker side to their shimmering faces. Aren't we seeing what is happening in South Korea today, with two ex-presidents in jail for corruption?

Does our President want to emulate such a corrupt system? Set against the few examples she perhaps dreams of, there are

several others which have bubbled up from time to time where dictators have transformed themselves into petty kings while the people under them lived like beggars. If she tunes in to CNN or Sky News television she will see what is happening to a despot like Mobutu in Zaire (now again Congo), a man who bled the country dry before finally having to run away from his palaces at home.

There are many other dictators of the Mobutu-kind who have unleashed untold suffering and damage. Let President Kumaratunga take a lesson from such happenings and quickly erase from her mind any thought she may harbour of moving away from the democratic path, whatever its shortcomings – stepping away into an abyss of no return.

History may judge her in whatever way she deserves – that is yet a matter to be seen. But let her not be judged as a despot.



## Pakistan Flip-Flop

**THE UN** Security Council is all set to be expanded, which leaves Pakistan's foreign policy managers in a bind. The United States has given what seems to be a nod to the inclusion of India as a permanent member in the Council, and this is being viewed as a nightmare for Pakistani foreign policy. The whole fabric of geo-political realities in the South Asian region would be disturbed. India, in the Pakistani view, remains a flagrant violator of Security Council's own resolutions on Kashmir.

The US announcement to enlarge the Council with Germany, Japan and one member state each from Asia, Africa and South America came in the wake of a meeting between the US chief delegate Bill Richardson and the Indian Ambassador Prakash Shah in New York on 15 July. A deal is said to have been struck at that meeting, with India having bartered its signature on the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) for a permanent seat. This has complicated the issue for Islamabad because it has always made its own accession to the CTBT or NPT conditional on India's own signature.

Commenting upon the US proposal, Pakistan's Foreign Office (FO) says that it does not construe it as endorsement of India's bid for a permanent station at the Security Council round table. The FO spokesman says, "As yet there is no consensus on the expansion in the category which is regarded by NAM (the Non-Aligned Movement) as an anachronism. We share the view of the non-aligned states that proliferation of the centre of privileges is contrary to democratisation."

Pakistan, he says, favours expansion in the non-permanent category only, with 10 more members included by rotation on a regional basis.

This, however, is only the latest presentation of a meandering policy. It is true that Benazir Bhutto in an address to the General Assembly once said that Pakistan did not favour the induction of more permanent members into the Council. But a few months later at an official banquet in Tokyo, she reversed her stand and said Pakistan would be happy to see Japan occupying a permanent seat.

At the recent non-aligned summit in Delhi, Foreign Minister Gohar Ayub Khan pleaded for the sovereign equality of nations in the United Nations, while back

home in the National Assembly he said he favoured Japan and Germany becoming permanent members. But then again, later, the Foreign Minister chewed no words in opposing the Indian bid for a Council seat. Foreign Secretary Shamshad Ahmed has maintained a similar stance, and it is expected that Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif will put up a big fight against Indian inclusion when he addresses the forthcoming session of the General Assembly in the fall.

Independent analysts in Pakistan say that since different aspirant regions and nations of the world will be involved in a bruising battle to decide who has the better claim to the regional permanent slots that are to open, Pakistan should stand firmly by the principles that all the 21 Council members – or at least 16 of them barring the present Permanent Five – ought to be elected by the 185 member states. Any betrayal of this principle, they warn, would consign the United Nations to the dustbin of history *a la* the League of Nations.

The Islamabad analysts are of the opinion that criticising India on Kashmir – the mainstay of Pakistani diplomacy – will not be enough to prevent India from achieving its current objective. What, therefore, could be Pakistan's bargaining chip?

If barter is the name of the game, say some, the answer may lie in recognition of Israel by Pakistan. And strangely enough, only last month the religious parties in Pakistan started to discuss the merits and demerits of recognising Israel. But will it be enough to deny India the coveted chair at the Security Council roundtable in New York? Some think not.

– Nadeem Iqbal

## Chicken vs Pizza

**A COUPLE** of years ago, an overseas businessman was stunned to be escorted by his local host to a Pizza Hut in Karachi. The fast food eatery is marketed in Pakistan as a place for fine cuisine. And with prices to match, that is what it has become, at least for many fast-track executives and the younger set.

The dozens of homegrown pizza parlours of Karachi and Lahore are being given a run for their money by the multinational food franchise. The first branch, which opened in Karachi a few years ago, had Lahoris feeling left out. But the franchise has spread out its corporate ten-



# Bit of a Bother with Brothers

**ANURA BANDARANAIKE**, son of two prime ministers and scion of Sri Lanka's Bandaranaike dynasty, was celebrating 20 years as a parliamentarian. He organised a *tamasha* for himself, and as we all know none of these back-scratching, head-patting events are complete without a visiting VIP.

Anura chose Benazir Bhutto.

Savour the scene. The politically ambitious son of an assassinated prime minister (Anura's dad, Prime Minister SWRD Bandaranaike, was shot dead by a Buddhist monk in 1959) inviting the very political daughter of a judicially executed prime minister of a neighbouring country to be chief guest at a celebration described by the editor of the government-controlled *Sunday Observer* as exhibiting "the political manhood of Anura Bandaranaike".

The parallels don't end there. Benazir had a rival in her brother, Murtaza Bhutto. Anura's is his sister, incumbent President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga. Chandrika's relations with her brother, who for long regarded himself as the natural successor to the leadership of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) their father founded, is as strained as Benazir's was with Murtaza before his untimely death.

Unlike the Bhutto matriarch, Nusrat, Sirima Bandaranaike, now 80 years old, is still in the political shipstream. She holds the formal position of prime minister in her daughter's administration. She is also the *de jure* leader of the SLFP, although she has

tacles since then, and today there are two aforementioned huts in Karachi, and two in Lahore, one of which is touted as "South Asia's biggest Pizza Hut".

The rush when a new Hut opens in the Pakistani cities makes one wonder if this is the same country that is home to the venerable naan and tandoor. Lines stretch for blocks, and the rush of customers forces the traffic police to deploy extra cops.

But now the pizza novelty is fading, and so are the crowds. They're rushing across the street to Kentucky Fried, a more recent entrant, and one that caters more to local tastes, for less money. Pizza, after all, does not excite the Pakistani taste buds with the same energy as chicken. "Pizza is

no real power under a constitution which has the president head both the state and the government. As far as the SLFP is concerned, Chandrika is *de facto* party leader who calls all the shots, hardly bothering to even consult her mother.

Like Nusrat, Mrs Bandaranaike makes no secret of her partiality for her son, who is now a frontbencher of the United National Party (UNP), which his father quit to found the SLFP when he judged he had no future in the UNP, then led by Don Stephen Senanayake.

Solomon West Ridgeway Dias Bandaranaike, to give Anura's father his full name, did not have to wait long to realise his ambition of becoming prime minister. In 1956, barely six years after he had quit the UNP, he was swept to power on the crest of a wave of nationalism. Old intimates of SWRD say that he firmly believed his luck changed when his son, Anura, was born.

SWRD enjoyed office for little more than three years before he was assassinated. His widow, Sirima, unwillingly thrust into politics, did much better serving two terms from 1960-65 and 1970-77 on the throne before starting her third wallflower tenure

in 1994.

no more than a local naan with some topping," says a young mother who swears by Kentucky Fried.

Says an upcoming young architect, "At Pizza Hut you have to eat with a knife and fork, which is a drag." At KFC, its hands-on, recalling its "finger lickin' good" campaign. With a branch each in Karachi and Lahore, and more set to open, KFC is clucking contentedly, having pulled many customers from the pizza shack over into its coop.

All this would surely have made the long-dead Colonel Sanders stroke his goatee in merriment – or twirl his moustache, keeping in view the country he has just colonised.



R to l: Mamma Sirima, Baby Anura and Friend Benazir

Like Nusrat Bhutto in Pakistan, Sirima Bandaranaike eventually tilted for Chandrika as rivalry between son and daughter took its toll of the SLFP. Just as his father had done before him, Anura read the writing on the wall and quit the SLFP to enter the cabinet of President D.B. Wijetunga at the tail-end of the UNP's 17 years in power, which ended with the general elections of August 1994. The resulting paradox is that he now sits in the parliamentary opposition while the party of his father, mother and sister is in office after nearly two decades in the wilderness.

At her Colombo press conference, Benazir dwelt mainly on the "trauma and tragedy" of her own life. She was asked what her advice to Anura Bandaranaike was. Benazir's response: the involvement of outsiders in family disputes always made matters worse. She would therefore prefer to keep out of the Bandaranaike squabble. But one Sunday newspaper friendly to Anura did have her saying that political families should forget their differences and unite.

Mamma Sirima would certainly like to see her son back in the SLFP, a fold he departed on two occasions. So did daughter Chandrika on one occasion. Whether the matriarch, now in her twilight years but soldiering on despite many infirmities, would be able to do that in her lifetime remains to be seen. But there are some punters placing their money on Anura Bandaranaike winning the leadership of the opposition UNP, a position that eluded their father.

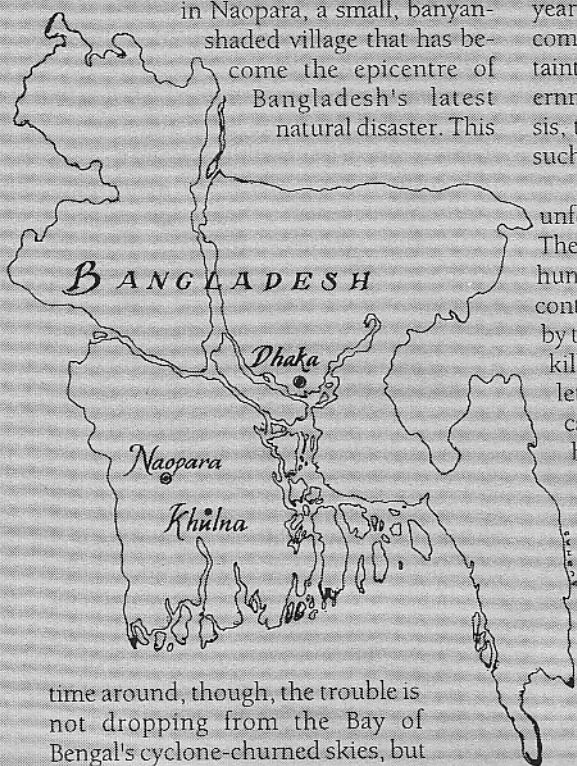
Although neither Anura nor Chandrika attempt to hide their dislike for each other, mother Sirima strives manfully to serve as a buffer between her warring offsprings. That perhaps explains why Chandrika was invited for the grand finale of Anura's twenty-years-in-Parliament celebration. The president politely told the organisers that she would be out of the country at the time – shopping for a college for daughter Yasodhara in Britain.

# Bitter Twist of Arsenic

**THE SPOTS** appear slowly, small scabs of thickened skin on the palms and the feet that later crack open and bleed. Soon, an unshakable fatigue sets in. Some people suffer headaches, chest pain and stomach cramps. Some, like Anil Chandra Das, a once-hearty 50-year-old Bangladeshi farmer and merchant, lose their hearing.

"We would try talking to him but he wouldn't answer," recalls daughter Ila Rani Das, 16. "He just lay in bed all day and we looked into his eyes. Then one day he didn't open his eyes anymore. We all began to cry."

There has been a lot of crying recently in Naopara, a small, banyan-shaded village that has become the epicentre of Bangladesh's latest natural disaster. This



time around, though, the trouble is not dropping from the Bay of Bengal's cyclone-churned skies, but gurgles instead from the depths of the fertile Ganga delta itself. Wells in Naopara, like thousands of other wells in eastern Bangladesh, have been found to be tainted with arsenic.

Nobody knows the extent of the evolving disaster, but some experts think that almost half of the country's population is at risk. A study conducted in early 1997 found that water from 34 southern districts, with more than 50 million population, had dangerously high levels of arsenic. "Ninety percent of Bangladeshis drink from deep tubewells," says Bilqis Amin Hoque, a water specialist at the Centre for Health and Population Research in Dhaka. "This de-

velopment is a shock."

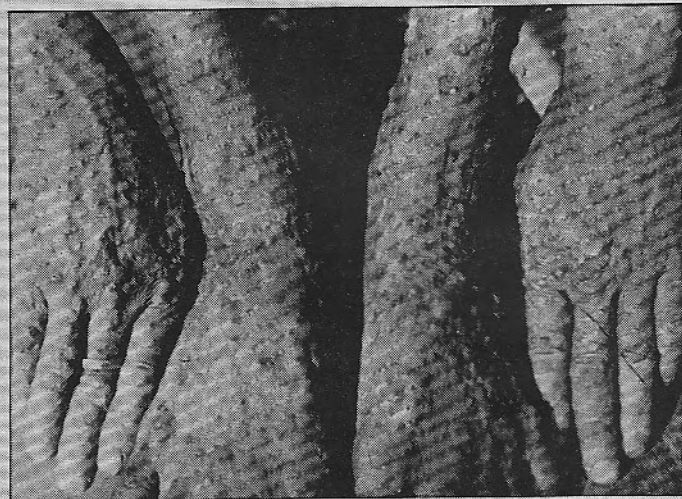
"This is not a minor problem," Bangladesh's Health Minister Salahuddin Yusuf declared during an interview last year, in which he admitted that 15 million compatriots might be at risk from drinking tainted water. Perhaps exhibiting the government's attitude towards the growing crisis, the minister then added, "But it is not such a major problem either."

The real magnitude of arsenosis will unfold only slowly, according to doctors. The concentrations of arsenic found in hundreds of Bangladeshi wells – the worst contain 200 times the maximum limit set by the World Health Organisation – do not kill outright. Instead, a buildup of the lethal chemical over months or years causes a wide array of increasingly debilitating diseases, from cancer to neural disorders, and, possibly, even diabetes.

"This is a staggering tragedy exactly because it is progressive, and the results are so hidden," says Herman Gibb, an expert of the US Environmental Protection Agency who has studied similar cases of arsenic contamination across the border in West Bengal, where a million more people may be affected. The arsenosis epidemic in eastern Bangladesh and West Bengal, Gibb says, is probably the worst in the world.

The culprit behind this stealth health crisis? The conspiracy-loving press blames everything from killer chemicals oozing out of industrial fertilizers to toxic pollutants drifting down the Ganga from India. One spate of articles even blamed millions of imported electric poles coated with arsenic-based preservatives.

But the cause is more mun-



dane, if profoundly more ironic. The arsenic percolating into hundreds of wells of eastern Bangladesh is a naturally-occurring toxic mineral. As long as the arsenic remained submerged in groundwater, it was inert, but the aquifers shrivelled with well-drilling and irrigation in the 1970s. The arsenic, exposed to the air for the first time, becomes water-soluble, and like tea in a tea-bag it now seeps out of the sediments with every monsoon flood.

The bitter twist, of course, is that having spent billions modernising its agricultural sector, Bangladesh has unwittingly been poisoning itself. Government engineers, financed largely by foreign aid, have sunk nearly 3 million tube wells since 1971.

"This is nobody's fault because nobody knew this would happen," says Ishaq Ali, a public health engineer who has tested 300 wells in Khulna and found a third of them contaminated. "We have addressed hunger, but created another misery in the process."

At the moment, there seems to be no easy or affordable solution to the arsenic plague. So the government has resorted to capping tainted wells and, where it can, drilling deeper ones. "They capped my well so now we are drinking from the pond," explained Hafiz Rahman, a tough, 70-year-old farmer whose arsenic-induced lesions have healed somewhat since he began quenching his thirst from a murky pool outside his doorway. Neighbours have followed suit.

Meanwhile, his neighbour Anil Chandra Das did not survive the ravages of the poison. He died in March. A few months later, his son Shamol, too, perished to arsenic.

– Paul Salopek



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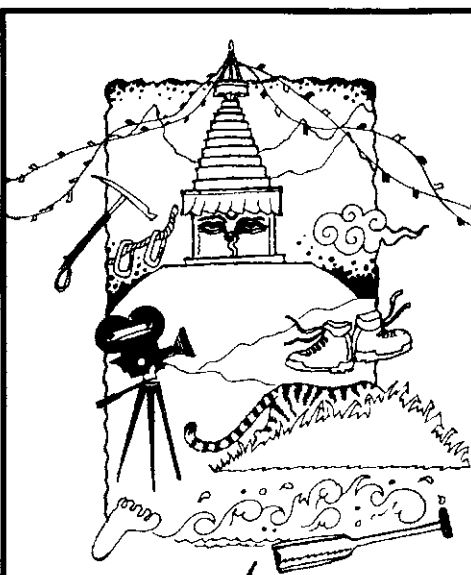
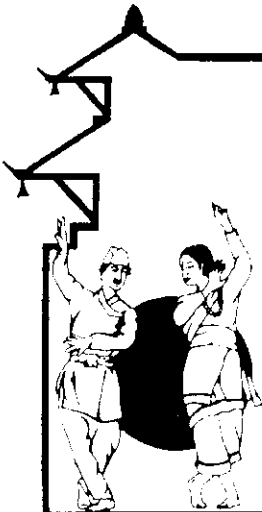
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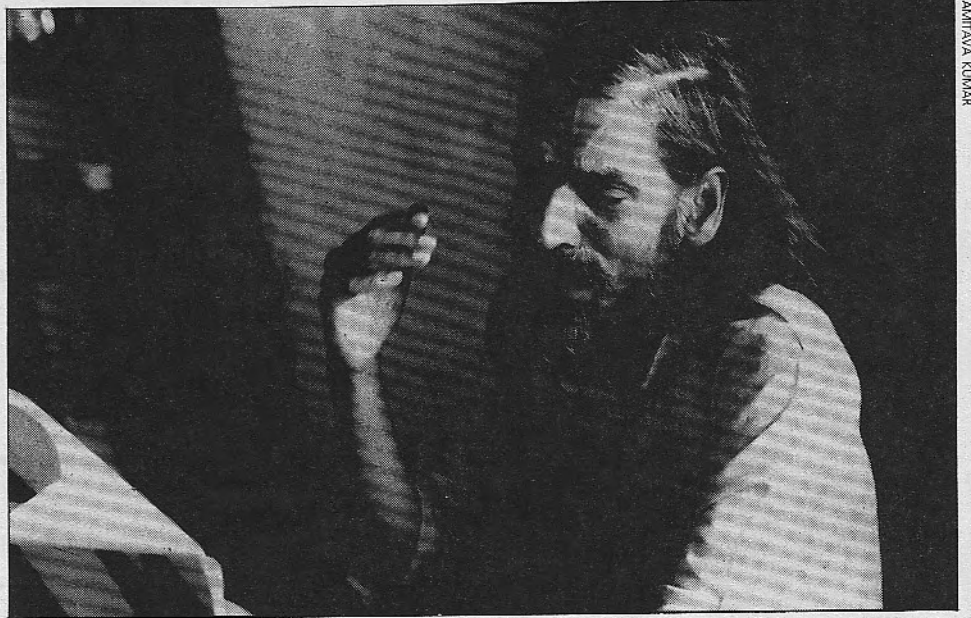
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# Hindi Poet Alokdhawanwa

## The Parliament of Poetry

by Amitava Kumar

*"Till now poems have been written only about going to jail, while for any right-thinking person no poems have been born for blowing up jails."*



AMITAVA KUMAR

Switching on the tv one night in a single-room apartment in the United States, I find myself face to face with Alyque Padamsee, the Bombay ad-man, selling soap. It is a documentary by Werner Volkner, with Mr Padamsee holding forth on the desire of the Indian housewife for Liril soap. Another ad-man, Mohammed Khan, comes on to provide a packaged a vision of India where "the guilt is gone". Indians, he says, do not mind spending more and more money on consumer products.

But, of course, there is the other India. Even filmmaker Volkner was aware of this: while Padamsee hawks his wares, the camera pans over the sight of men washing their bodies at roadside hydrants. The crucial question is not where reality lies, but in what ways and where it gets discussed, and who raises a voice in protest. As a way of answering these questions, I am offering in translation the poems of the contemporary Hindi poet, Alokdhawanwa.

As the Patna-based poet writes in his long piece "Janta ka Aadmi" (Of the People), there is an oppressive,

institutional apparatus that silences the clamour of protest:

*They are professional murderers  
those who choke and strangle to  
death the naked news  
in the shadow of sensational  
headlines  
they show themselves again and  
again the serfs of that one face  
the map of whose bathroom is  
bigger than the map of my village.*

*The publishing houses of this  
country like the pale worms  
found in the icy cracks:  
on the banks of the river Hooghly,  
before taking his own life  
why had the young poet screamed*  
- The Times of India

This silencing of protest has a particular relationship to poetry. Alokdhawanwa poses the question: "Why is it that every time the question of poetry/is unable to catch up with the question of the common life?" To him, the answer is clear. There are those who have patronised the construction of a "museum of poetry" where they conserve a bloodless, vapid, aes-

thetic ideal. For Alokdhawanwa, the prospect of the common poet of the people stepping into this space of the affluent *akademi*-culture suggests the startling image of the poet's corpse in the capitalist's fish-tank:

*Amidst poems like fine tobacco  
capable of collecting a crowd of  
failed, old female-lovers  
my shepherd face smelling of  
sheep  
must have seemed very  
unexpected to you,  
as much as  
in Sahu Jain's fish-tank  
instead of the fish, afloat, the corpse  
of Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh.*

The revolutionary poet, dead, in the fish-tank of the best-known capitalist patron of literature speaks powerfully of the place consigned to protest poetry in the institutions of the arts. (Muktibodh, who died in 1964 after a long illness, enjoys a stable reputation as a revolutionary, epic writer of Hindi poetry.)

Who is this poet who protests the practice of poetry as high art, who writes, "Till now poems have been writ-

ten only about going to jail/while for any right-thinking person/no poems have been born for blowing up jails?" It is in Alokadhanwa's social milieu, and in the political geography of the land of his origin, that we can locate the terms of his identity.

Alokadhanwa has been writing poetry for more than 25 years but has published no more than a handful of long poems. He has no collection in his name. Manglesh Dabral, a writer in Hindi, says: "He has remained outside debates and symposiums and he has also not stepped into the so-called mainstream of poetry that is flowing through a few, selected cities. He has many incomplete poems, whereas today the tendency is to write and get something published immediately. Alokadhanwa shows a great restraint in even getting his complete poems published."

In the 1980s, with the spread of the Naxalite movement, Bihar had emerged as the crucible for a new kind of struggle and consciousness. In a region of chronic poverty and caste-class exploitation, the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) presented a different world, in which ill-fed and ill-clad people rose up in arms, flinging a challenge to an oppressive, agrarian order, claiming "jote boye kate dhan, khet ka malik wahi hisan" (those who till and sow and harvest, only they are the owners of the land). Srikakulam and Telengana, which had become legendary names associated with popular struggles in the earlier decades in other parts of India, were reinvented in a fresh period of struggle just when their invocation had begun to seem an act of mere nostalgia. Alokadhanwa has been a witness as well as a partisan in this rediscovery.

In Bihar, conditions are such that even the Public Works Department of the state government has a special Naxalite cell. This unit has been entrusted with the task of constructing roads in areas where peasants are rebellious. Those who do not have access to roads that will take them to schools or hospitals finally get roads so that the police and the army can take swift action if the property of the landlords is in any way threatened.

Who will build roads to the huts of the people Alokadhanwa writes about? I cannot easily distance my-

self from that other, more humane, and more militant because it is more humane, message that Alokadhanwa offers about whom he can reach with his poetry:

*From the machine that cuts ice to  
the machine that cuts human  
beings  
against the bright, inhuman  
glamour  
my poetry passes through the  
middle of burning villages  
with rapid fire and sharp shrieks  
near the burnt woman  
it is my poetry that reaches first;  
when while doing this my poetry  
gets burnt in different places.  
And there are those who are even  
today using poetry for carrying  
corpses,  
filling the oxygen of new  
metaphors in the lungs of words,  
but for him who has been born  
during the curfew,  
whose breath is hot like the  
summer wind  
in the mind of that young  
coal-miner  
it is like a brand new gun that my  
poetry is recalled.*

Far from the prone figure of the burnt woman, far also from the furnace that is the mind of the militant coal-miner, to return for a moment to the coolness of the television screen where Alyque Padamsee boasts of his knowledge of what the Indian housewife wants. Mr Padamsee tells us that he imagines the Indian middle-class woman "daydreaming" while taking her bath "which is the only time when she's alone". To this woman, Mr Padamsee offers a "freshness soap".

Meanwhile, in his poem "Bhaagi Hui Ladkiyan" (Girl in Flight) Alokadhanwa imagines a struggle between fantasies and the actualities that surround young women in India. For the poet, the sole purpose of exploring this tension lies in the depiction of oppression – and the freedom won by a girl in flight, through her own agency and will, rather than the fragrant enticement of a soap manufacturing company:

*Chains of the home  
become so much more visible  
when a girl runs away from home.  
Are you faced with memories of*

*that night  
which one sees again and again in  
old films  
whenever a girl runs away from  
home?*

*...  
She is not the first girl  
who has been in flight  
and nor is she going to be the last  
one  
now there must be other boys  
and other girls too  
who will run away in the month of  
March.*

Throughout "Bhaagi Hui Ladkiyan", Alokadhanwa prefers to read love, particularly the love of women, as protest, because "she can do anything/only giving birth does not mean being a woman". The poem is also an condemnation of patriarchal repression:

*You will erase that  
you will erase a girl in flight  
from the air of her own house  
you will also erase her from there  
which is her childhood inside you  
from there too  
I know  
the violence of superiors!*

The poem also develops as a stinging critique of the masculine traffic in women and the economy of gendered control. It rebukes the mode of production that relies on the subjugation of women and the repression of desire:

*You!  
who  
keep your wives separate  
from whores*

Criticism of Alokadhanwa's "Bhaagi Hui Ladkiyan" in *Samkalen Janmat*, a magazine of radical cultural criticism, in the words of its late editor, Maheshwar:

*Your women are running away only in the pages of their diaries. But where are they fleeing in real life, these women? In real life, women are being confrontational and their assertiveness is increasing by the day. Women have begun to realise that they are struggling under the collected weight of patriarchy, feudal oppression and capitalist-consumerist power... Where are these confrontational women? You say that they are fleeing in their diaries and we are witnessing that they are not running away anywhere. At this time, compared to fleeing, they would consider getting headed a better option.*



*and keep your lovers separate  
from your wives  
how you are struck with terror  
when a woman wanders fearlessly  
searching for her own self  
together in whores and wives  
and lovers!  
Now she can be anywhere  
even in those nations to come  
where loving will be a full-time  
job!*

In "To Posterity", Bertolt Brecht offers a poignant but careful assessment of the role of poetry:

*In my time streets led to the  
quicksand.  
Speech betrayed me to the  
slaughterer.  
There was little I could do. But  
without me  
The rulers would have been more  
secure. This was my hope.*

That hopeful confidence which Brecht risks, and which Alokdhana seems to share, leaves unanswered one question, namely that of literacy. I have with me a photograph of a wall-painting only a few miles from Alokdhana's flat in our hometown, Patna. On that wall are painted a few short lines from a poem by Muktibodh, the same poet named in "Janta ka Aadmi". The poem reads: "Right to equality/The challenge of equality/Or else/Struggle and assault."

The wall-painting was done by cultural activists engaged in a literacy campaign in Bihar. Alokdhana is a part of this campaign; but how hopeful can he remain that he will produce readers for his verse? Rather than readily proclaiming that the subaltern masses are obliging the writer of protest by reading his or her rebellious signs, it is crucial to draw attention to the silencing of literary protest through a culture of illiteracy.

This is the phenomenon that the Uruguayan writer, Eduardo Galeano, has called "indirect censorship". This mode of censorship works by denying creativity to the vast majority of people and honouring a small handful of specialists. Alokdhana has protested in his poems against the dead museums of poetry. One should attach to that protest, a criticism of the enforced impoverishment of culture by denying to millions the right to read and write.

In India, it is not only the poor and the unlettered who remain unaware of the poetry of protest. How many political poems find their way into the school curricula? My teachers in high school in Patna felt it was necessary that I memorise what William Wordsworth had written about daffodils, a flower I had not even laid my eyes on, while I was to remain oblivious of the words of Bhikari Ram, a Musahar poet near my birthplace, singing in Hindi:

*Sudhama's wife weeps and  
complains:  
Days are lean,  
No sattu to eat,  
No hut to live in.  
Days are lean,  
No shoes on our feet.  
Days are lean.*

Where poetry feeds into a tired aestheticism and remains a slave to obsolete, colonial standards, it is not surprising that Alokdhana should protest also against being a poet. One of his poems ends with the words, "This is not a poem/this is a call to open fire/that all those who use the pen/are getting from all those who work the plough." His "Open Fire Poster" is, in a way, what it calls itself and hence different from a poem: a poster calling on intellectuals to bear arms and fight with the poor and the exploited.

At the same time, however, there are clear ways in which this text works specifically as a poem. For example, it protests against the marginalisation of poetry itself: the poet, after all, is allowed only as far as the peripheral district towns. The centre is always kept out of poetry's reach, and the protest is articulated from far outside the parliament's walls:

*If those people ever grant me  
entry into their poems  
it is only to blindfold me  
and to use me  
and then leave me outside the  
borders  
they never let me  
reach the capital.  
I am grabbed  
by the time I begin to reach the  
district towns.*

The poems are not offered so much as strategies to attain the cen-

tre as they are to serve as testimonials or records of damaged lives. For instance, the poet presents the loneliness in the space of the nation-state which can boast of cheap cigarettes but not a community. "It is not the government - it is this country's/cheapest cigarette that has kept me company." In its appeal to feeling and effect, precisely under conditions of deprivation that make any sense of the personal impossible (the poet's mother, let's not forget, is only a "five foot iron stick - on which hang two pieces of dry bread"), poetry inscribes its difference.

Neither a poster, then, nor simply a poem, this post-colonial writing confounds with its cunning rationality and its rage. It reminds of James Mill's colonial condemnation back in 1840 of both poetry and Indian culture: "Poetry is the language of the passions, and men feel, before they speculate. At this first stage the literature of the Hindus has always remained."

At the same time, Alokdhana's writing voices a protest against the post-independence nation-state. It does so by opposing the sanctimonious language of law:

*Now between my daughter and  
my strike  
there is not even a hair's breadth  
difference  
when the constitution is on its  
own terms breaking my strike and  
my daughter*

In being neither simply posters, nor only poems, and in its opposition to the language of the oppressors, former or present, Alokdhana's writings avoid the conditions of being either propaganda or advertising. As a writing of protest, this poetry leans its shoulders into history against the door closing in its face. The space it is trying to open is against the inhuman claustrophobia of increasing restrictions on the living, in particular those illiterate millions around Patna unable to read this poet. △

A. Kumar teaches at the University of Florida at Gainesville and is author of *No Tears for the NRI, a book of poems (Writer's Workshop, Calcutta)*.





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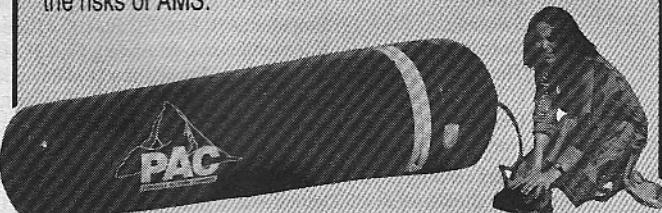
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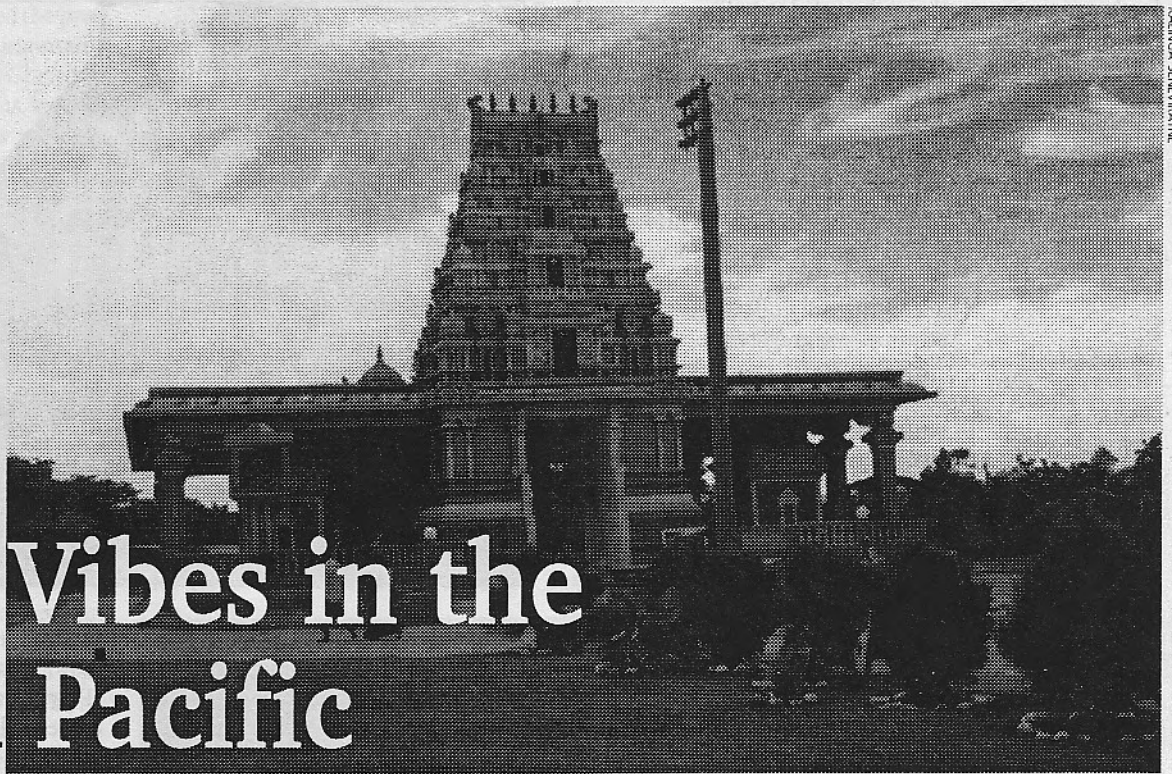
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KALINGA SENEVIRATNE

# Good Vibes in the South Pacific

*Fijians, both indigenous and Indian, are tired of the race-based politics of the last decade and want a new beginning. They seem to have got it.*

by Kalinga Seneviratne

Ten years ago, on 14 May 1987, Lt Col Sitiveni Rabuka stormed the Fijian Parliament with his troops, arrested the entire Indian-dominated Cabinet and declared himself leader of a military government. The putsch was staged, he said quite simply, to restore control of the country to indigenous Fijians: "Everyone is welcome to come and live here as our guest, as long as Fijians run the nation."

For three years, Prime Minister Rabuka governed by decree and then he rammed through a constitution in 1990 which the Indian opposition likened to an apartheid period document. Under it, the Indo-Fijian parties were relegated to a position of serving as a "permanent opposition", with no hope of achieving power through the ballot.

A decade later, Prime Minister Rabuka has come full circle. In May, he conceded to demands and agreed

to the concept of a multiracial cabinet. In July, both houses of Parliament passed constitutional amendments to that effect. Opposition leader Jai Ram Reddy of the National Federation Party (NFP) said after the parliamentary vote that he was "very happy for our country and all the people of this country". The nation's main daily, *The Fiji Times*, carried a front page picture of Mr Reddy warmly shaking hands with Prime Minister Rabuka. The amendments also include, for the first time in Fiji, a bill of rights.

Some had thought, with the many examples of failed statesmanship all over the world, that Fiji would never be able to bring itself back from the brink. Today, however, the polity seems set to mend itself.

## Constitution and Race

Situated in the South Pacific, Fiji is made up of more than 300 islands,

about a hundred of which are uninhabited. The 1996 census put the country's population at 772,655, consisting of Melanesians (indigenous Fijians), Indians (or South Asians), Polynesians, Ratumans, Chinese, Europeans and those of mixed-race.

The Indo-Fijians are descendants of indentured labourers brought to the islands by the British, beginning in 1879, to work in sugar cane plantations. Since then, sugar has become the country's main export and the backbone of the economy, while the Indians through hard work, education and enterprise have become a powerful economic force. When Fiji was granted independence in 1970, political power was transferred to the indigenous community, while the migrant (Indian) community held the economic power.

Ever since the Great Council of Chiefs ceded Fiji to the British Crown in 1874, on the understanding that

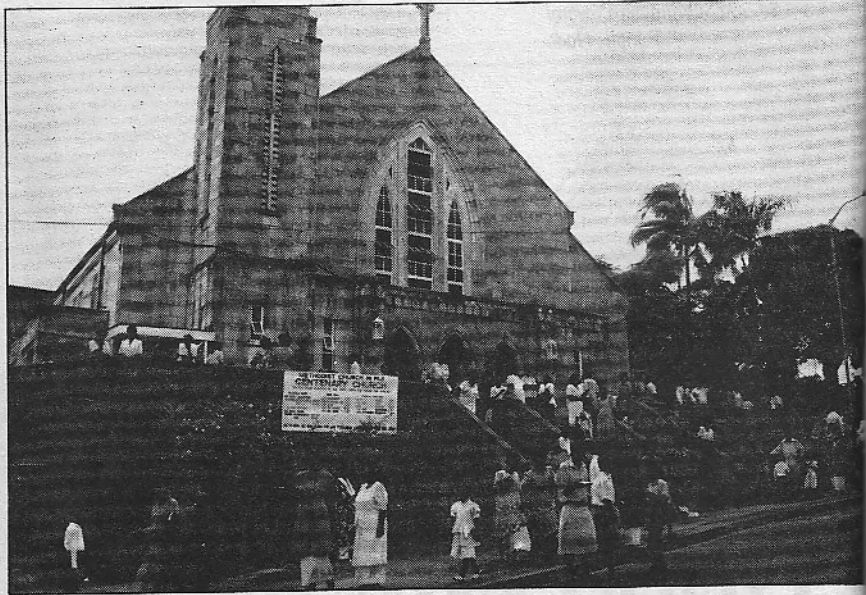
Suva's main Methodist church after Sunday service.

the rights of the indigenous people would be protected, race has played a major role in the constitutional history of the country. As the British were departing, Indians who made up the majority population by a thin margin wanted voting on a "Common Roll", whereas the indigenous Fijians argued that they would have a say in the governance only through a "Communal Roll" where voting was ethnically segregated.

The 1970 constitution was a compromise with members chosen under both rolls. However, it gave rise to a situation in the 1987 elections where the Alliance Party representing the indigenous community got only 24 seats while the combined Indian-dominated opposition – consisting of the NFP and the Fiji Labour Party (FLP) – got 28 seats.

This was what precipitated Col Rabuka's coup and, later, the 1990 constitution. According to its provisions, the Lower House had 70 seats, 37 of which were reserved for Fijians, 27 for Indians and 5 for General Electors. The voting was done entirely on a communal roll. Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei (SVT) – the political party aligned with the Great Council of Chiefs and now led by Col Rabuka – won two elections under the 1990 constitution.

"It was a racist constitution imposed on the people by presidential decree, with entrenched discrimination against the Indian community," says Mahendra Chaudhry, leader of the FLP. Under pressure from the opposition, a constitutional



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review commission was finally appointed by the government in 1995, headed by former New Zealand Governor-General Paul Reeves, with Canberra-based Indo-Fijian historian Brij Lal and indigenous Fijian businessman and former parliamentarian Tomas Vakatora as members.

Their report was submitted in late 1996, and a parliamentary select committee began to prepare a blueprint for a revised constitution. While many indigenous provincial councils rejected the key recommendations relating to voting rolls, the Reeves Report gathered support within Col Rabuka's own party, and in the community at large. Under the amended constitution, there will be 71 seats in parliament, out of which 23 will be reserved for indigenous Fijians, 19

for Indians, three for General Electors, and one for Ratumans (Polynesian mixed race). Voting for these will be on the communal roll, while the other 25 seats will be contested on an open roll.

The new provisions also enshrine the principle of multiracial government, which requires the leader of the party with the highest number of seats to invite other parties which have won a specified number of seats, to join the government. Though this requirement will not be active until the general elections slated for 1999, Col Rabuka has indicated his intention to form a multiracial cabinet.

### The Colonel's Turnaround

In a fortuitous turnaround, it was Col Rabuka, the very man accused of promoting the growing racial divide, who came to lead the movement for the revised constitution. He played a key role in persuading the Great Council of Chiefs and the sceptics within the SVT to back the amendments.

The Prime Minister was helped greatly by a change in the leadership of the Methodist Church, which claims membership of more than two hundred thousand of the population, primarily indigenous Fijians. Earlier, the church was closely identified with the 1987 military coup and attempts to declare Fiji a Christian state, which would have excluded the mostly Hindu and Muslim Indo-Fijian community.

The Rev Ilaitia Tuwere, the church's new president and a liberal

Indigenous yuppies in Suva and (opposite) sugarcane farmer Kamlesh Prasad.



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theologian, publicly opposed the proposal for a Christian state, maintaining that it would go against Christian principles. He said, "Fiji is now a nation that urgently needs national unity and development at all levels. Because of this it is necessary to involve all powers at work in our community. It is for this reason we support religious freedom."

After the parliament's decision, partially as an attempt to pacify those in his party who felt the paramountcy of the indigenous population had been bartered away, Col Rabuka declared, "We lost some things we would have liked to retain, but on the other hand so did everybody else." For his part, NFP leader Mr Reddy said that there were now "very good vibes and a general realisation that we need to work and move forward together." The new model adopted by the parliament was ideal for any multicultural society, he said.

Mr Reddy explains that it was demographic factors which paved the way for the historic compromise on the race issue, a different climate having developed in the country since 1987. Indigenous Fijians are now the single largest group and growing fairly rapidly, while the Indian population has been shrinking due to erosion at both ends – lower growth rates and emigration.

Says Mr Reddy, "Before the military coup we were 48 percent (of the population). Now we are 43 percent. Projections are that in 10 years it could be as low as 35 percent. The demographic change has made the Fijians a lot more confident." This, Mr Reddy believes, is why the Indigenous Fijians were willing and ready for some form of power-sharing.

### Moods and Trends

Demographic trends support Mr Reddy's analysis. The results of the 1996 census, recently released, shows that for the first time since the 1901 census, indigenous Fijians form a significant majority, having overtaken Indo-Fijians who are down to 46 percent from a high of 51.1. The country's population has grown by 8 percent during the last decade, but the Indian component has actually declined. At the last census taken just before the coup, Indians made up 48.7 percent of the population and indigenous Fijians 43.6 percent.

During the last decade, 53,800 Indo-Fijians emigrated, most of them doctors, engineers, lawyers, accountants, teachers, managers and businessmen. The majority have gone to Australia, New Zealand, Canada or the United States.

"The attempt by the post-coup government to divide the races in Fiji was very strong. They tried to divide trade unions, political parties and so forth along racial lines. These policies were based on the thinking that it is race that brings people together," observes Tupeni Baba, an indigenous Fijian and a Cabinet minister in the government overthrown in 1987. Mr Baba believes that the worsening economic situation in Fiji is what forced Col Rabuka and his supporters to

achievements for the community as a whole, it's been slow in coming." His point of view is supported by a UNDP study on poverty in Fiji, released in March, showing that indigenous Fijian households overall had the lowest incomes, while the average income of Indo-Fijians in the highest bracket was 42 percent higher than the highest income of indigenous Fijian households.

"Our people are more likely to sit back and be complacent, whereas Indo-Fijians are more likely to be wanting to improve their status. They are more competitive," observes Nina Seru, an indigenous Fijian youth leader.

The failure of race-based policies to uplift the economic profile of



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rethink their strategy of cementing indigenous Fijian control over the country.

"There was a realisation by Rabuka and other protagonists of the coup that a racial government consisting of (indigenous) Fijians alone cannot run the country; there's an economic price to be paid. That realisation is a good one," says Mr Baba, who is now Professor of Education at the University of the South Pacific in Suva. "The coup-makers were finally confronting the consequences of their action. Their own people were the ones suffering badly."

Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi, a young Fijian chief tends to agree with Mr Baba's view. "They didn't lift the economic profile of indigenous Fijian significantly... In terms of concrete

indigenous Fijians, lack of investment by Indo-Fijians in the local economy, and the flight of both their capital and professional skills overseas, along with the demographic changes taking place in the country, are the elements, then, which combined to create the current mood for reconciliation and compromise. The concrete manifestation of all this is the newly amended constitution, which makes multiculturalism the new national credo. The communities of Fiji may yet be able to come up with a workable and historic compromise in Fiji, under which Asia and the Pacific will co-exist and prosper. ▽

*K. Seneviratne is a Sydney-based journalist.*

# Meghalaya, Not Himalaya

*The main cause for the floods in Bangladesh is not located in the Himalaya.*

*The Meghalaya Hills have a decisive role in explaining the Bangladesh floods.*

*Bangladeshi villagers do not perceive monsoon floods as a critical hazard.*

by Thomas Hofer

Every year during the monsoon season, the Himalayan region appears in the headlines because of large scale flooding in the plains of the Ganga and Brahmaputra. In general, this is also the time to go through the annual ritual of accusing the peasants of Nepal and the nearby mountain regions for sending down the floods in ever-higher volumes. They are to blame, it is said, because it is the deforestation in the Himalaya which leads to devastating inundation, particularly in Bangladesh.

The truth is, it has never been clear to what extent the floods are a natural phenomenon occurring through history, and to what extent human activities – either forest-cutting upstream or building of embankments downstream – have played a role in increasing the inundation in

modern times. It is not even clear that the floods are increasing in frequency and intensity over the decades, as is claimed.

However, this lack of scientific confirmation has not deterred politicians, engineers and journalists from engaging in passionate condemnation of upstream inhabitants for the inundation, particularly in years when the floods are high. Blame for the Bangladesh floods became a geopolitically sensitive matter because the Ganga and Brahmaputra are both international rivers. Even more interesting was the fact that plans for flood management and even flood control, involving vast sums of foreign aid, were activated on the basis of incomplete knowledge.

The hypothesis regarding the domino-effect of human activities in the Himalaya on the ecological

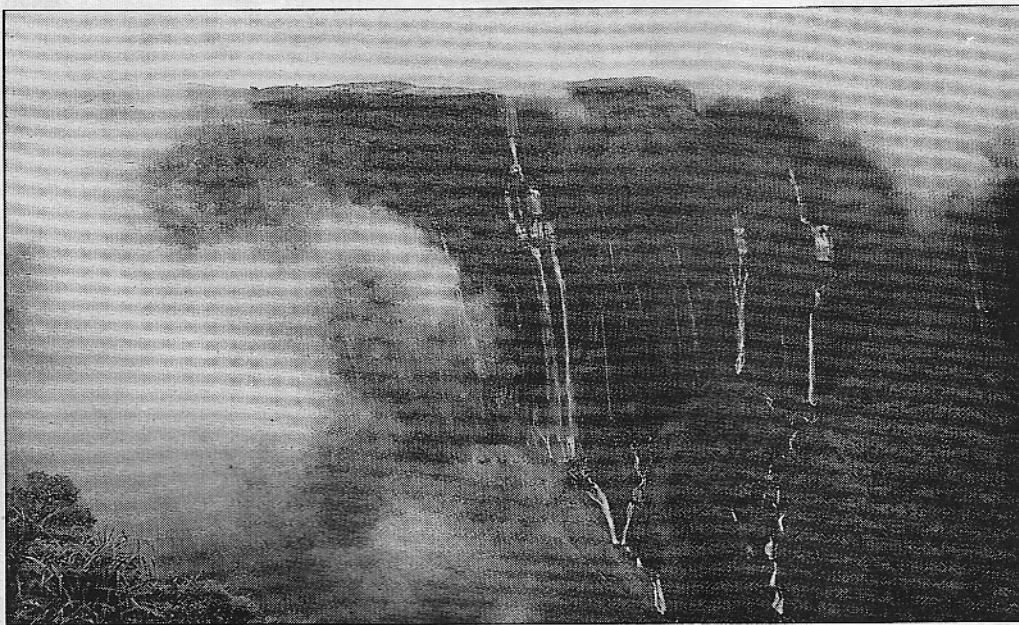
processes in the lowlands can be summarised by the following, superficially convincing, sequence: population growth in the mountains → increasing demand for fuelwood, fodder and timber → uncontrolled forest removal in more and more marginal areas → intensified erosion and higher peak flows in the rivers → severe flooding and siltation on the densely populated and cultivated plains of the Ganga and Brahmaputra.

Such a supposedly scientific chain of events has served as an expedient tool for both the plains politician and his counterpart in the hills. For the former, it has been useful in times of flood-related crises to pin the blame on the peasantry of a remote region. His hill counterpart, meanwhile, was amenable to accepting the blame because bad science was presented to him as *fait accompli*, and also because the aid agencies funded reforestation programmes in the bargain.

The Himalayan Degradation Theory, as it came to be known, was proposed in the early 1970s based on anecdotal information, and was immediately picked up by the media, bureaucracy and the aid community for its plausibility. However, as empirical research was carried out through the 1980s, holes began to appear in the fabric of the hypothesis. It turned out that explanations for floods were not really that simple, and that the inhabitants of the Himalaya had less to do with the ecological processes in the lowlands than what had been too easily assumed.

Unfortunately, such was the inherent attraction of the Himalayan

Meghalaya's terrain transports water swiftly into Bangladesh.



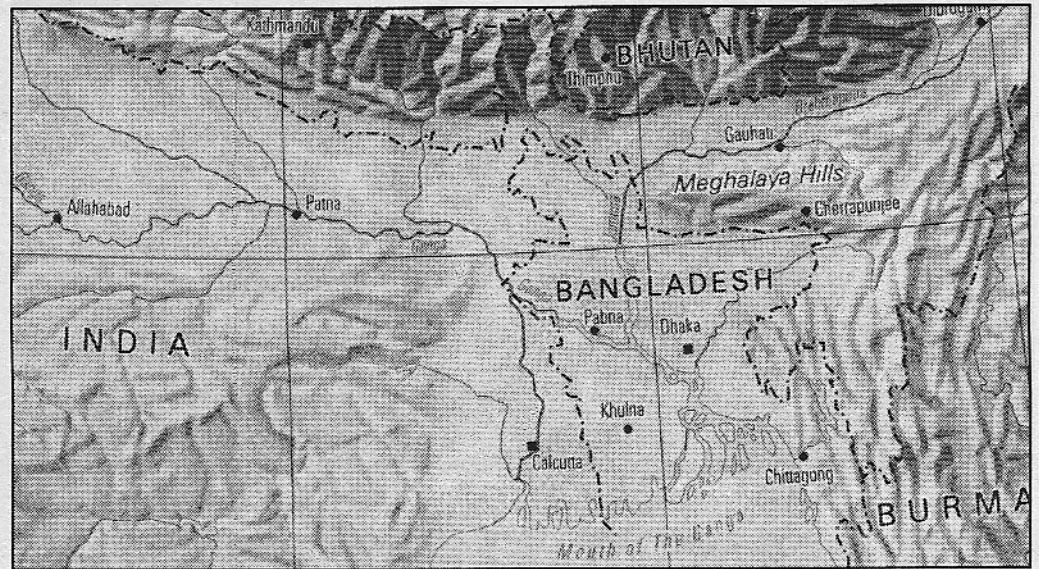
Degradation Theory that the increasing accumulation of scientific evidence against it failed to gain publicity. This remained true even after, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, two publications came out which did a creditable job of presenting the case against the Theory; they were *The Himalayan Dilemma*, edited by Jack D. Ives and Bruno Messerli, and *The Citizen's Report of the Indian Environment*, edited by Anil Agarwal and Sunita Narain. The two reports confirmed that it was not possible to prove on the basis of available data that the Himalaya contributed to floods in Bangladesh, nor that there has been any increasing trend in flood frequency or flood volume.

### What the Data Says

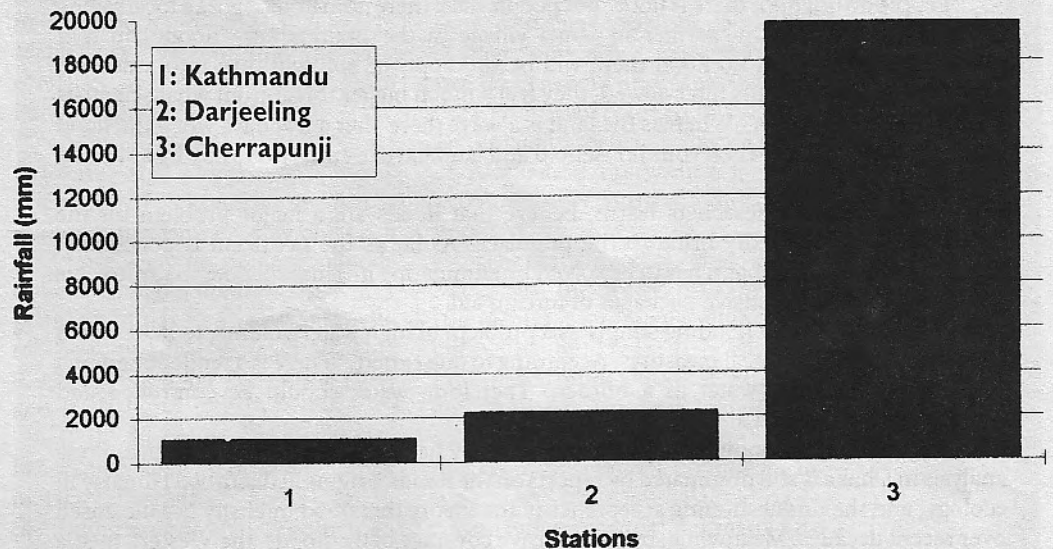
Data collected and analysed between 1992 and 1996 by a Bangla-Swiss team now provides scientific evidence to further disprove the Himalayan Degradation Theory. It also provides new suggestions as to the cause of Bangladesh floods, and indicates that the perception of the Bangladesh peasantry regarding floods displays considerably less panic than the engineers, politicians and even academics in Dhaka. The detailed scientific results of the study, of which this writer is principal author, is to be presented in a book next year, *The Floods in Bangladesh: Processes and Impacts*, published by the United Nations University Press.

The study, which was a joint effort of the University of Berne, Department of Geography, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, and the United Nations University shows, firstly, that floods in Bangladesh and India are largely independent of human activities in the upper catchment areas. Neither the frequency nor the volume of flooding has increased in Bangladesh over the last 120 years. Precipitation and runoff in the Himalaya do not seem to be important causes of the floods in Bangladesh. The rainfall patterns in the Meghalaya Hills, however, seem to be decisive. Comparing the three major river systems, the Meghna catchment is of primary importance, followed by the Brahmaputra catchment. The Ganga catchment plays only a minor role in Bangladesh floods.

Before providing the details of



RAINFALL MAY-SEPTEMBER, 1974



the study, it should be stated that the water resources of the Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna basin are shared by China, India, Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh. The availability and sharing of water is therefore a geopolitically very sensitive issue, and so even when there is reliable hydrological data available it tends to be treated as classified information. Climatological information is less restricted, but the "station density" is very low, especially for the Himalaya.

All in all, this makes it difficult to pursue scientific studies of the region's

water-related problems and to investigate the framework of highland-lowland interactions, which can therefore only be based on case studies rather than systematic analyses. In that context, and as far as the Himalayan catchment area is concerned, the present study has restricted itself to the region which may be called "Ganga Himalaya". No conclusions can be formulated for the "Arunachal Himalaya" in the east, which feeds the Brahmaputra before it enters Bangladesh via Assam, due to the near-total lack of access to data for this area.



### Cloudburst in Nepal

An opportunity presented itself in the monsoon of 1993 to study the correlation between heavy rainfall in Nepal and the flood mark in Bangladesh. An extended cloudburst on 19-20 July 1993 in eastern and central Nepal had catastrophic effects on the local population and infrastructure. Several districts were hit by floods and landslides, and many people died or became homeless. There was widespread destruction of crops, and flash floods destroyed the main highway into Kathmandu, cutting off the capital for days. Due to very high sedimentation, the life-span

of the Kulekhani Reservoir was reduced from 50 years to about 25 years.

Data shows that there were two flood periods in Bangladesh in 1993, one from 18-25 June and the other from 10-26 July. Both events were the result of heavy rainfall in Bangladesh and, significantly, were concentrated on the Meghna and Brahmaputra systems. Western Bangladesh, that is, the Ganga system, was almost completely unaffected by flooding. What significant floods there were in Bangladesh that year, therefore, were concentrated on a different river system than the

one into which the Nepali deluge of July emptied. In other words, the 1993 flood in Nepal had no connection to the floods in Bangladesh.

In order to further support this finding, and to estimate the effect of the Nepal flood on the hydrology of the Ganga in Bangladesh, the water level graph of the Ganga at Hardinge Bridge was analysed. Hardinge Bridge is located approximately 600 km downstream of the flood-affected areas of Nepal in 1993. Assuming an average flow velocity of 1.5 m/sec, the flood wave from Nepal should have reached Hardinge Bridge five to six days later, around 25 July.

It is indeed the case that a short-term, very moderate fluctuation of the Ganga's flow was recorded from 24 July to 30 July, with a peak on 27 July. This situation may be interpreted as a result of the Nepal floods, but can just as easily be attributed to the intense local rainfall from 20 July to 24 July, recorded at Pabna in western Bangladesh.

In any case, it is clear that the flood flow of the Ganga's Nepali tributaries had levelled off over the course of their passage from the hills and through the plains, and had only a very small effect, if any, on the discharge of the Ganga as it entered Bangladesh. The short-term peak of the Ganga on 24-30 July was not significant in terms of constituting a flood in Bangladesh.

It is thus clear that even an extraordinary flood event of rare dimension in the Himalayan foothills of Nepal has almost no impact on hydrological conditions in Bangladesh. The effect of the 1993 cloudburst in Nepal having had almost negligible consequence on the Ganga discharge at Hardinge Bridge in Bangladesh, we must conclude that the Ganga Himalaya does not contribute significantly to the floods in Bangladesh.

### Rain in Meghalaya

Through the testimony of millions of schoolbooks, the small town of Cherrapunji in the southern slopes of the Meghalaya Hills has attained mythic status as "the place where it rains the most in the world". It is interesting, therefore, that no one has thought to study a possible link between heavy rains in this region of Meghalaya and downstream flood-

## Flood Perception

A STUDY WAS conducted to see how the views on flooding differed between farmers, politicians, journalists, engineers and donor agency representatives in Bangladesh. The result showed that farmers were the least concerned of all. For them, floods were a part of life which their ancestors and they had learned to adjust to. They also knew the benefits that floods brought in terms of fertility to the soil.

"People do not die if there is flood, but people die if there is no flood," goes a local saying in Sirajganj District. One farmer in Simla village in the Brahmaputra floodplain told researchers, "If there is no flood there will be no crop, the soil will turn into a desert." According to the peasants interviewed, they feel a much bigger threat from what scientists call 'lateral river erosion'. Whereas the land is always there after a few days when the flood recedes, nothing is left when your household and land have been carried away by a shifting river.

Politicians, the researchers learnt, believe that floods are a major problem for the suffering they supposedly bring to the populace. As far as the politician is concerned, therefore, the flood problem has to be solved by eliminating it. This will potentially involve large projects and expensive packages of foreign aid.

Engineers, too, see flooding simply as a problem of high water volume, to be resolved by implementing technical measures. According to one expert, "There is a tendency among engineers to perceive water as a burden. Therefore, water should be controlled and conducted to the ocean as soon as possible."

For journalists, flooding is the season for catchy headlines and over-statements. Press analysis in Dhaka is still dominated by reports on the floods' origins in disturbed Himalayan ecology, and the unquestioning acceptance of the theory that flood intensity has increased over recent decades. Meanwhile, by its exclusive coverage of the floods, the Western media has helped define monsoon flooding as the main problem of Bangladesh, which is hardly the case. The problem of river erosion is addressed by the Dhaka press but ignored by the Western reporters.

Influenced as they are by the politicians, engineers and journalists, the donor agencies have tended to focus their attention on floods and the search for a technical solution. Thus, while the farmers may be quite happy to live with floods but want assistance to tackle river erosion, landlessness and economic problems, the donors tend to come up with more aid for flood mitigation. The great flood of 1988 galvanised the international community on this score, with the G-7 summit of industrialised (aid-giving) nations in July 1989 calling for, "effective, coordinated action by the international community in support of the Government of Bangladesh in order to find solutions to the major problem (flood) which are technically, financially, economically and environmentally sound."

When it comes to perception of floods and their danger, therefore, few heed the wisdom of villagers, even though it is they who have to live with the flood. It is clear that while making decisions relating to flood mitigation and related development activities, the views of the scientist, engineer, politician and journalist must all be taken into account, but without neglecting the most important perception of all – that of the inhabitants of the floodplain.

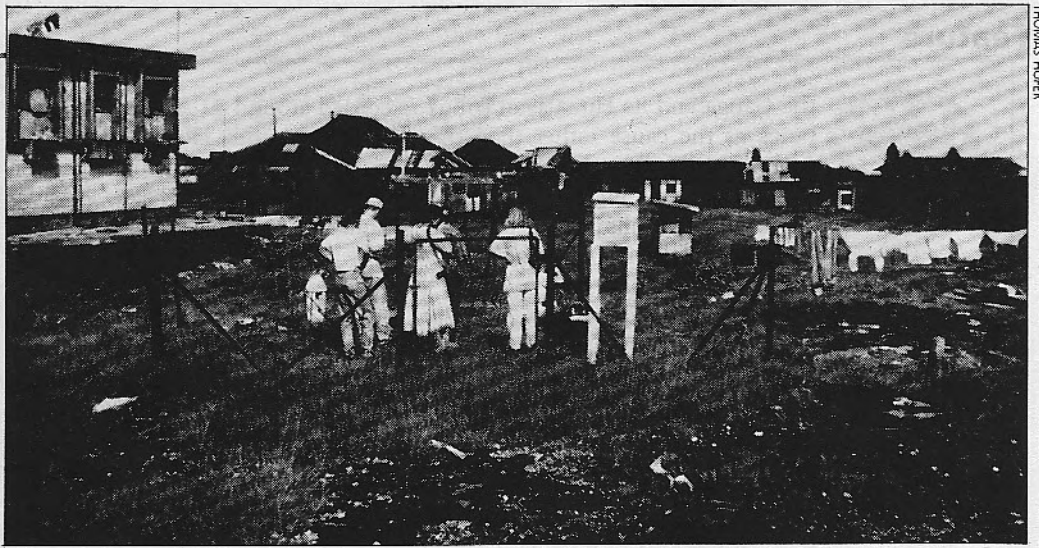


ing – in Bangladesh. For, the precipitation in this region of Meghalaya can only be described as massive, and far above the average rainfall anywhere else further up the catchment areas of the Ganga or Brahmaputra.

The average monsoon rainfall (May to September) in Cherrapunji amounts to 9527 mm. In some years, it can be much higher; there was 19,728 mm of deluge during the same period in 1974. It helps in the understanding when one realises that this amounts to more than the height of a six-storeyed building. By contrast, Pokhara Valley, which is said to have the most rainfall in the entire Nepal Himalaya, records an average annual rainfall of only 3800 mm. It is much less for regions closer to the Ganga-Brahmaputra delta, such as Kathmandu Valley and Darjeeling.

Comparing Cherrapunji rainfall data with flood occurrence in Bangladesh proves instructive. The rainfall in Cherrapunji was far above normal from July to September in 1974 and 1988. These were also two major flood years in Bangladesh in the last two decades. In 1978 and 1986, which were years of very low flood in Bangladesh, the rainfall in Cherrapunji was also below average.

The Meghalaya Hills are located adjacent to the vast floodplain of northeastern Bangladesh. They form a first topographical barrier for the humid monsoon winds on their way up from the Bay of Bengal to the Himalaya. It is natural, therefore, for these hills to get very high rainfall in the summer. The hills have shallow soils and rocky surface, so the runoff is immediate when it rains. As a result, and in spite of the comparably small area, a considerable volume of



*The weather station at Cherrapunji: This station records the highest rainfall in the world.*

water pours down from Meghalaya into the Meghna floodplain to the south, and to the Brahmaputra in the north, which too has a very short distance to go through Assam before it enters Bangladesh.

The high average hydrological flow from the Meghalaya Hills and the obvious correlation between high rainfall in Cherrapunji and high flood in Bangladesh indicate that deluge in Meghalaya is an important, perhaps even decisive, cause of flooding in Bangladesh.

#### **Brahmaputra Flood**

The collected data indicate that floods in the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam may have a connection with floods downstream, but floods in the Ganga plain of India do not seem to be related to floods in Bangladesh. This is seen in the flood figures for 1988 and 1978.

Both Assam and downstream Bangladesh were hit by severe floods in 1988. The fiercest flood wave in the Brahmaputra Valley coincided with peak flooding in Bangladesh. A satellite image of 16 July of that year,

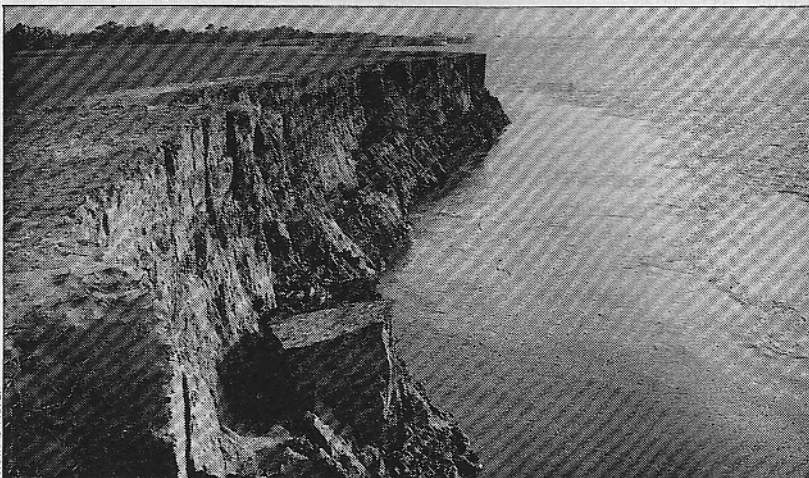
which was not even taken at the height of the flood, shows an almost constant line of flood patches along the Brahmaputra through Assam down to Bangladesh.

In the 1978 monsoon, the inundation in the entire Ganga plain of India was far above average: at least 40 million people were affected by the catastrophe. In Bangladesh, however, flooding remained far below average; only a few, regionally limited flood events were reported from the western part of the country. Flood on the Ganga seems significant for all of Bangladesh only when it peaks simultaneously with the Brahmaputra flood.

The statistics show that, climatologically, the dry years in the west (the Ganga catchment) often coincide with humid years in the east (the Brahmaputra/Meghna catchment), and vice versa. The extent of flooding in Bangladesh in a specific year corresponds to the climatic conditions in the east and to the level of flooding in Assam rather than to the climatological conditions in the west or the flooding on the Ganga.

There also seems to be a historical and sociological reason why the Brahmaputra's significant flooding as it relates to Bangladesh has been neglected while the Ganga's has been highlighted in general writings and in the media. The Brahmaputra, flowing as it does through only a brief tract of the Indian Northeast before entering Bangladesh, is not as widely known as the Ganga. The latter, on the other hand, flowing as it does through the heartland of historical Hindustan, is fully part of the South Asian cultural pantheon. This may serve to explain why, when a flood hits Bangladesh, the public looks to

*Riverbank erosion along the Brahmaputra.*



the Ganga and its Himalayan tributaries as the cause rather than the Brahmaputra. This, then, can partly explain why the hill peasant of the Himalayan foothills is blamed whenever Bangladesh is inundated.

**Bangladesh Deluge**

The role of rainfall *within* Bangladesh in triggering or exacerbating floods also seems to have been overlooked as experts and lay persons alike seek answers in upper catchments. High rainfall in Bangladesh, after all, is a typical feature before and during heavy floods and without doubt contributes significantly to inundation.

Again, the extraordinary flood of 1988 provides an interesting case in point. As a result of the position of the monsoon trough over northern Bangladesh and Assam, the northern part of the country got heavy rainfall that year, while the south remained almost free of precipitation. Rainfall in Sunamganj in northeastern Bangladesh was extraordinary: over six days, from 24-29 August, 960 mm of rainfall was recorded at this station, which is almost 20 percent of the average annual rainfall in this area. The period of nationwide flooding in 1988 was between 20 August and 6 September, with the peak re-

corded around 31 August.

More study is required to pinpoint the exact correlation between localised rains and heavy inundation, but the connection seems clear.

**Puzzle Pieces**

In summary, the data shows that the Bangladesh floods are influenced by a combination of regionally differentiated rainfall patterns. The influence of the Ganga Himalaya is not important because the catchment is at a distance from the Bangladeshi floodplain. As a result, the peak discharge from heavy rainfall or cloudbursts which are carried down by the Himalayan tributaries such as the Kosi or Gandaki level themselves out by the time they join the "base flow" of the Ganga and subsequently arrive in Bangladesh.

The contribution of the Arunachal Himalaya to a flood on the Brahmaputra cannot be assessed due to lack of data. The Meghalaya Hills, however, seem to play a decisive role due to their location close to the floodplain of Bangladesh and because of the high rainfall and rapid runoff. Finally, it can be said that the rainfall within Bangladesh itself is a significant factor.

The Himalaya, at least the part

located in the Ganga catchment, seems to have negligible impact on floods in Bangladesh. If this statement is accepted, then the habit of blaming mountain inhabitants for the flood catastrophes far downstream must be abandoned. This would also considerably improve the political climate in the area. This does not relieve the mountain people of their responsibility to use their environment in a sustainable manner, however.

A lot of questions about rainfall, flooding and mitigation measures remain to be answered. The present study has merely added some pieces to the complex puzzle as to why Bangladesh floods. Also, it has contributed to the further devaluation of the Himalayan Degradation Theory. Now, researchers are required to move ahead with the task of sharpening their understanding of the hydrological regime of the Ganga-Brahmaputra region. This can only be achieved through the permanent and free exchange of scientific data among the states of the region.

*T. Hofer is physical geographer at the Department of Geography, University of Berne.*



**VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT**

**Vac.97/11 Rangeland Management Specialist**

The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), which has its headquarters in Kathmandu, Nepal, was established in 1983 to address the problems of economic and environmental development in the Hindu Kush-Himalayan (HKH) region covering parts of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal, and Pakistan. ICIMOD is an independent organisation governed by a Board of Governors and funded by some 20 countries and donor organisations. Its mandatory activities are (i) Documentation and Information Exchange, (ii) Research, (iii) Training, and (iv) Advisory Services. Activities are implemented in close collaboration with partner institutions in the regional member countries. ICIMOD now wishes to fill the above position in its Mountain Natural Resources Division.

**Qualifications**

- Post Graduate academic background or equivalent in pasture or range management or related subject.
- At least 10 years experience in pasture or range management, with experience in the HKH region.
- Proven capabilities in writing articles, papers and documents for different target groups.
- Proficiency in computer applications; knowledge of GIS desirable.

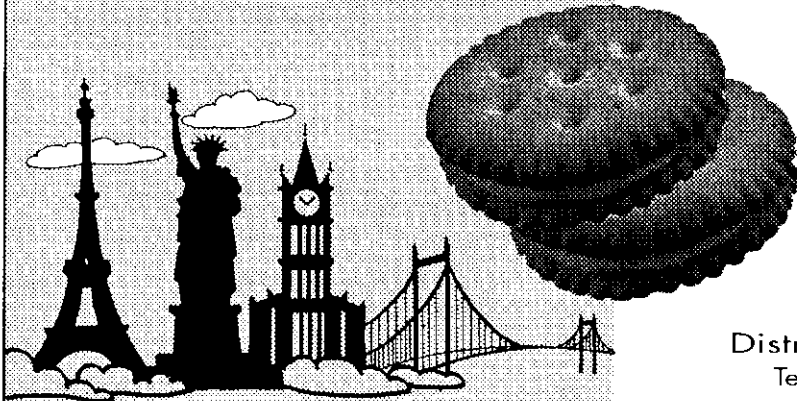
Detailed Terms of Reference is available on request. **Female Candidates are strongly encouraged to apply.**

- Remuneration** : Salary and benefits are based on a modified UN System.
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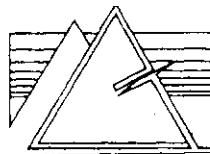
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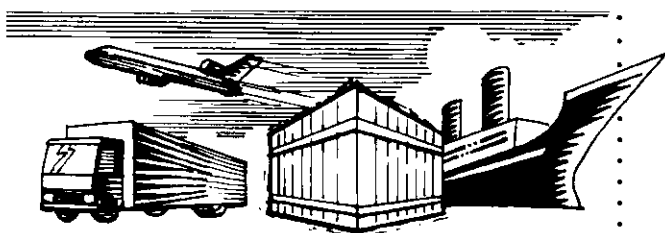
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# FESTIVAL OF SOUTH ASIAN DOCUMENTARIES

# FILM SOUTH ASIA '97

18-21 SEPTEMBER

Himal South Asia is organising **Film South Asia '97**, the first ever South Asian documentary film festival from 18 to 21 September, which will showcase the best of what filmmakers from this region have to offer.

Out of a total 125 entries, the following have been selected to be screened at Film South Asia '97.

The list also shows the country where the film was shot, name(s) of director(s), year of production, whether a premiere, and length. All films produced in and after 1995 are in the competitive section. All films are subtitled in English.

1. *Aadavallu Ekamaite* (When Women Unite: The Story of an Uprising) – India. Shabnam Virmani. 1996. 80 minutes.
2. *Aan Poove* (Male Flower) – India. P. Balan. 1995. 20 minutes.
3. *Achin Pakhi* (The Unknown Bard) – Bangladesh. Tanvir Mokammel. 1995. 67 minutes.
4. *Ajit* (The Unconquerable) – India. Arvind Sinha. 1996. 28 minutes.
5. *A Ja Khate* – Nepal. Morten Nielsen, Frantz Rosenburg & Neena Brinck. 1997. 24 minutes.
6. *Amrit Beeja* (Eternal Seed) – India. Meera Dewan. 1996. 43 minutes.
7. *And She Dances On* – Pakistan. Shireen Pasha. 1996. 60 minutes.
8. *Ashgari Bai: Echoes of Silence* – India. Priti Chandriani & Brahmanand Singh. 1997. 45 minutes.
9. *Bereavement* – Sri Lanka. Sharmini Boyle. 1995. 30 minutes.
10. *A Boy in the Branch* – India. Lalit Vachani. 1993. 27 minutes.
11. *Creeks of Conflict* – India. Krishnendu Bose. 1996. 40 minutes.
12. *Darubrahma* (God's Own Tree) – India. Sudheer Gupta. 1997 (Premiere). 138 minutes.
13. *Faces of Eve* – Pakistan. Shireen Pasha. 1995. 25 minutes.
14. *Fate Worse Than Floods* – Bangladesh, India & Nepal. Bjorn Vasnes. 1997. 48 minutes.
15. *Father, Son and Holy War* – India. Anand Patwardhan. 1995. 120 minutes.
16. *Freedom from Fear* – India. Indraneel Kaul. 1997. 25 minutes.
17. *Free to Sing? The Music of Suman Chatterjee* – India. Sudipto Chatterjee. 1996. 56 minutes.
18. *Halfway Home* – India. Ananya Chatterjee. 1995. 26 minutes.
19. *Himalayan Herders* – Nepal. John & Naomi Bishop. 1997 (Premiere). 76 minutes.
20. *I Live in Behrampada* – India. Madhusree Datta. 1993. 46 minutes.
21. *Kahankar: Ahankar* (Story Maker: Story Taker) – India. K.P. Jayashankar & Anjali Monteiro. 1995. 38 minutes.
22. *Ka Phor Sorat* (A Cremation Ceremony) – India. Raphael Warjiri. 1997 (Premiere). 33 minutes.
23. *Marubhumi* – India. Amar Kanwar. 1995. 52 minutes.
24. *Meals Ready* – India. Surajit Sarkar & Vani Subramanian. 1996. 46 minutes.
25. *Muktir Gaan* (Song of Freedom) – Bangladesh. Tareque & Catherine Masud. 1995. 80 minutes.
26. *A Narmada Diary* – India. Simantini Dhuru & Anand Patwardhan. 1995. 57 minutes.
27. *Om Mani Padme Hum* (Hail the Jewel in the Lotus) – India. Mahadeb Shi. 1996. 53 minutes.
28. *Pastoral Politics* – India. Sanjay Bamela & Vasant Saberwal. 1996. 29 minutes.
29. *Red Earth* – India. Rahul Roy. 1996. 48 minutes.
30. *Sacrifice of Serpents: The Festival of Indrayani in Kathmandu, Nepal* – Nepal. Dirk Nijland, Bert van den Hoek & Balgopal Shrestha. 1997 (Premiere). 108 minutes.
31. *The School That Karmi Soren Built* – India. Ananya Chatterjee. 1996. 30 minutes.
32. *The Seeds of Malabar* – India. Rajeev Vijayragavan. 1996. 22 minutes.
33. *Snakes and Snake Charms* – Pakistan. Nazimuddin. 1996. 25 minutes.
34. *Sonamath* (Very Ordinary Gold) – India. Shejo Singh. 1996. 38 minutes.
35. *The Spirit Doesn't Come Anymore* – Nepal. Tsering Rhitara. 1997 (Premiere). 38 minutes.
36. *Taj Mahal: Not a Love Story* – India. Ramesh Menon. 1996. 28 minutes.
37. *Tantra Mantra* – India. Alex Gabby. 1996. 74 minutes.
38. *Teyyam: The Annual Visit of the God Vishnumurti* – India. Erik de Maaker. 1997. 56 minutes.
39. *Tu Zinda Hai* (To Be Alive) – India. Shabnam Virmani. 1995. 50 minutes.
40. *Vapours of Empire* – India. Gilbert Loreaux & Mukul Mangalik. 1996. 26 minutes.
41. *Voices of Children* – Bangladesh. Tareque & Catherine Masud. 1997 (Premiere). 30 minutes.
42. *Wait Until Death* – India. Supriya Sen, Samit Basu-Mallik, Tathagatha Banerjee & Jayant Chakrobarty. 1995. 55 minutes.
43. *Wounds of War – Bonds of Peace* – Sri Lanka. Anoma Rajakaruna. 1996. 24 minutes.

The films will be judged by a three-member festival jury made up of internationally noted filmmaker **Pankaj Butalia** from New Delhi, Pakistani theatre, television and film personality **Salman Shahid** and Bangladeshi photo-journalist and educator **Shahidul Alam**.

The best film will be awarded a plaque and a prize of USD 2500. The second and third prizes carry purses of USD 1500 and USD 1000.

Tickets will be available from 10 September onwards from the festival office at Film South Asia, Himal South Asia, Patan Dhoka, Lalitpur. Phone +977-1-522113. Fax +977-1-521013 email [himalmag@mos.com.np](mailto:himalmag@mos.com.np) <http://www.himalmag.com>



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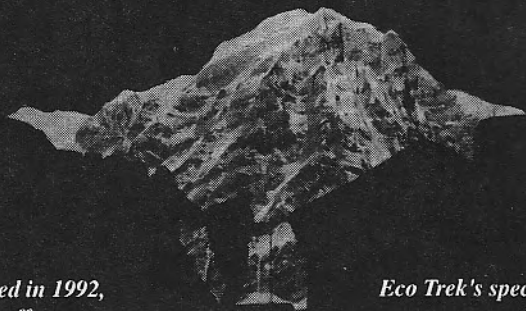
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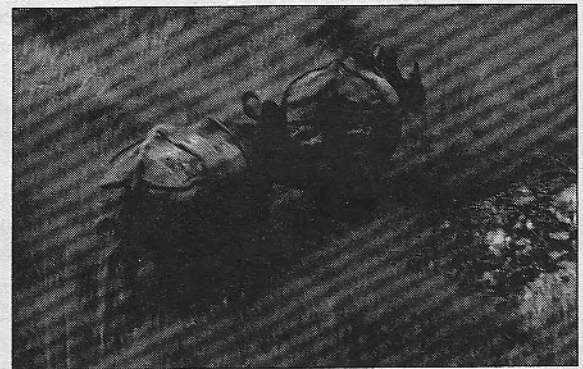
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The Sindh Provincial Government has just established a **Sindh Language Authority**. Its chairman is Hameed Sindhi. That's logical.

Glad to hear that someone else is trying to get at the **Bengali television** market. Zee tried it a couple of years ago and backed out. A Dhaka construction magnate and banker, Abul Kher, is said to have teamed up with Star TV to target a cross-border Bengali-speaking audience scattered over Bangladesh, West Bengal and Tripura. Maybe this will be a harbinger of times ahead when targeted cross border television will similarly rope in other regions of South Asia, such as Tamil, Punjabi, Pushthu, and so on.

Mr Kher's Bengali channel is going to be called **SAARC TV**. Now, either he is planning to go South Asian before too long, or he has overreached for his Bangla TV, which he could simply have called *Bangla TV*. Have heard that there is some grumbling over at the SAARC Secretariat about the misuse of the name 'SAARC' by all and sundry, from magician's associations to Rotarians. Do you not think that the bureaucrats over in that ungainly Secretariat building in downtown Kathmandu should be raising hell? But saar, they are all diplomats. What to do?

My **new terminology beeper** just went off. The term it has located on its radar screen is 'Indianness', a cypher for 'Indian Identity' and used at a seminar on the subject at Udaipur in mid-June by the Kumarappa Institute of Gram Swaraj. Okay, so what does Indianness consist of? Pat comes the brahmanical reply from Dr Vishwambharnath Upadhaya, Vice-Chancellor of Kanpur University, "Bhoogol, bhav, bhasha." That translates as geography, depth of feeling and language.

What do you do with a **real estate developer** guilty of advertising fraud, by announcing a "Paradise in Dehra Dun" and showing a lovely picture taken straight out of a picture postcard of the Canadian Rockies? Ask for a "Free site visit" as promised and demand a round-trip Air Canada ticket to British Columbia!



A SAARC team was off to demonstrate regional amity on the **high snows**, I was told, and so I did some research. Who, where to? The destination is the top of Mount Gya in Himachal Pradesh. The expedition was flagged off by Mulayam Singh Yadav, UP-wallah who also happens to be Defence Minister of India. It was organised by the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute in Darjeeling to commemorate *India's* 50 years of Independence. The 28-member team includes three climbers from Sri Lanka and two each from Nepal and Bhutan. I can imagine that it was not possible to have a Pakistani along when blood still flows on Siachen ice, but what wrong have the Bangalis done to be excluded? So close to Darjeeling, that too.

India will never become a **mahaan world power** if it turns petulant at every turn. Now, the Indian government has refused to allow filming in India of Salman Rushdie's novel, *Midnight's Children*. *Arrey yaar*, grow up!

Talking of **grown-up men**, Bangladeshis of the male variety seem to be having a lot of fun. According to a report published in late July, and which has all the trappings of serious research, "some 51 percent of married men in Bangladesh said they have experienced pre-marital sex, while 18

percent admitted having sex with other women even after marriage". Far be it from me to accuse Bangladeshi men of lying about their sexual adventures, but, give me a break!

*The Asian Age* reports from Kathmandu on 4 August, "Even as lashing rain keeps people indoors here in Nepal's **Vqapwtal**, groups of brightly-clad village women make their way to the watery paddy fields that dot the valley." I love the colour of what those village belles are wearing, and the thought of them frolicking in the paddies, the rain pouring from the skies, makes me feel almost like a Bangladeshi male in full form. But I have to first find Vqapwtal, and my map of Nepal does not show it. Can anyone help?

Truly disturbing confirmation of the **dangers of penmanship in Pakistan** came my way with the latest issue of the *National Gazette and Monographs' Communication* which is a modestly produced but very useful monthly compilation on the information media and publishing out of Islamabad. The July issue alone had the following announcements: Senior Sub-editor of *Jang* Karachi, Manzar Imkani shot dead by unidentified assailants; Farasatullah Khan, *Jang* correspondent in Daska, shot and critically wounded; renowned educationist Ashfaq Ahmed shot dead in Gulberg, Lahore; Javed Rana, senior news editor of *The News* Lahore shot dead. Thank heavens for the one announcement of a natural death, that of senior freelance journalist Rana Iqbal.

The basketball-loving (supposedly), log-housing living (also supposedly) monarch of Bhutan is properly called **His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuk** of the Dragon Kingdom.

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Whyfore, therefore, he is being called "His Excellency Jigme Singye Wangchuck" by The Asian Age in a news item on how Bhutan has agreed to allow the Sankosh river to be diverted all the way to Farakka. Whyfore indeed, I tell you.

The **Naga people** of India's (they might not agree) Northeast met for eight days to try for conciliation among the various politicised factions. Where did they meet? Atlanta GA, whose only claim to fame in recent years has been the holding of the 1996 Olympics. So what do the Mizos do if they too want to "relinquish old antagonism, give up old grudges and build upon the best of (Mizo) heritage"? I am afraid they will have to wait till after the year 2000, when all Mizo factions can troop to Sydney NSW, but only after the games are over. Such is logic.

There is a supposedly-independent newspaper published by an **expat Indian in New York** which survives handsomely on the handout of UN agencies. It is known as *The Earth Times*, and its job is to surreptitiously publish puff pieces on UN aid agencies without the earth knowing who paid. And so, here is a recent article lead, written by a Daniel J. Shepard in the paper, "Major improvements in access to health care have accompanied Nepal's democratically elected government assumed power five years ago..." Reading on, the money for this one seems to have come straight out of UNFPA coffers.

Any person who calls himself an intellectual is not one. Does not have enough intelligence, which is the first prerequisite of being part of the intelligentsia. 'Intellectual' is something that you call others, much like 'environmentalist', never yourself. I think all SAARC countries have this category, which indicates the depth of mediocrity in this region, which is why I support the announcement by Himal's editors that they are organising a **conference on South Asian mediocrity**. Be sure to have a panel on those who call themselves intellectuals, including the entire membership of the All-India Conference of Intellectuals. Boy, that must be one big membership glob of self-important,

bombastic, stuffed-shirt, paan-chewing (though not in itself a contrary trait, but in association with the others it can be lethal) non-intelligentsia.

Saw an AFP picture of a **tea conference** in Colombo. A lady tea-picker was demonstrating her craft, with what looks like a specially crafted helmet with place for the basket tumpline. I think this is an admirable idea, if it works, and should be replicated – ah, that developmental word – in the other tea-pickin' areas such as the Nilgiri, Darjeeling hills and Assam valley.

The *1997 Progress of Nations* of Unicef has a full-page picture of a Muslim man with a raised arm supposedly against a kurta-clad woman with hands covering her face. This picture is supposed to depict "The intolerable status quo: violence against women and girls". Photo-editor has to be given a course in cultural sensitivity, I say. The photo can hardly depict a man engaged in beating, for the mechanics of the act requires a posture quite different from what is shown. If anything, that is a South Asian posture when a man is leaning relaxed against a wall. For all we know, he may be singing a *gazel* off key, and she might be saying with her gesture, "I can't stand it!"

Whichever among you thought **Pakistani women** were made of docile stuff think again after you hear this. *The News* reports from Islamabad, "A woman car driver thrashed a traffic police sergeant when he challenged her for running a red



light at Khyber Plaza chowk. Instead of leaving the spot, the woman...tore the sergeant's uniform and sat on his motorcycle. She left the spot in anger to the amazement of onlookers."

Glad to note that there is at least the semblance of a debate among journalists in Karachi on the propriety of their receiving **subsidised residential plots** from the Sindh government. The practice goes back to the 1960s, writes Imran Shirvanee in *The News*, and the latest offering was at the hands of former First Husband Asif Ali Zardari on it. Well, if they are at least talking about the propriety, Pakistani journalism cannot be all that bad, can it?

– *Chhetria Patrakar*



Media file

## CONCERT REVIEW by Afdhel Aziz

## Cousins in Colombo

After weeks of hype on television and radio, rapturous applause greeted the Colonial Cousins as they walked on to the big square stage in the middle of the cavernous Sugathadasa Stadium in Colombo. This applause was expected, given the heavy rotation of their videos on MTV Asia. Their brand of mature adult contemporary pop has struck a chord with many Lankans who have a penchant for ballads and music of the mellower kind.

After some preliminary small talk with the audience, the twosome launched into "Alright" from their debut album, a funky boppy tune with feelgood lyrics. Hariharan really opened up and let rip on the vocals - his reputation as a fine singer in the bhajan and ghazal traditions are clearly well deserved. Lezz, Stevie Wonderesque in his plaits, was the communicator.

Highlights of the show included

the spiritual "Krishna", its moving message somewhat spoiled by Lezz plugging the song's inclusion in the MTV Viewers Choice award. Even though his songs don't sound like advertising jingles, I guess the pitchman in Lezz couldn't resist the soft sell. Then there was a hypnotic rendition of "Indian Rain", locked down by a unified bass that throbbed throughout the stadium. (Though if you listen closely to that last song, you'll find a direct ripoff of melody from "Norwegian Wood" by the Beatles.)

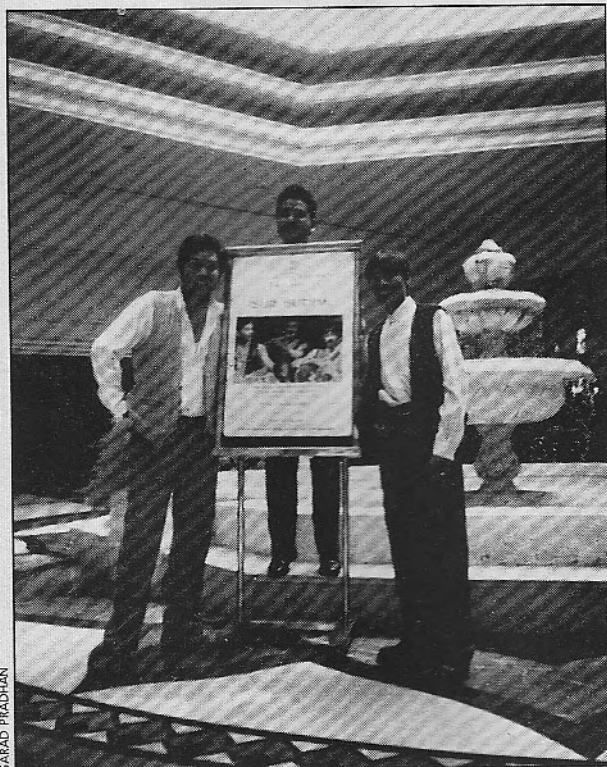
Initially, this reviewer thought that the whole fusion 'thing' was some sort of a gimmick, but it comes across well when the Cousins do it. It helps educate the audience when the artistes respect the traditions of the music. The Cousins have the knack of writing songs with very open structures which allow them to pursue the intermingling of influences. Both are sincere, if slightly

restrained, performers.

It was perhaps too much to expect guitarists Vernon Reid from Living Color and Vishwa Mohan Bhatt to accompany Hariharan and Lezz to Colombo, but the backing musicians proved excellent, including a soulful flautist and an agile percussion section.

After the success of the duo's MTV Unplugged project, it will be interesting to see what comes next. Perhaps the Cousins could use their newfound pop success to bring to prominence the work of other Indian classical artistes, Hari Prasad Chaurasia for example, whose work has been limited to releases on the Real World album. Their role should change from being local popsters to that of leaders of a New Asian School, spearheading the introduction of South Asian music to the rest of the world. Then everything really will be "Alright".

Surendra, Prem and Bijay at the Lanka Oberoi



SARAD PRADHAN

## Himalayan Dreams

Fans of Sursudha and their music attended their recent "peace concert" in the Lanka Oberoi with some anticipation. It was also an occasion where the group was to release their newest CD, "The Third Eye", which is supposed to represent the threesome's love of Buddhism and evoke the flavour of Lumbini, the Sakyamuni's birthplace.

Sursudha comprises of Prem Rana "Autari" (flute), Surendra Shrestha (tabla) and Bijaya Vaidya (sitar) who began performing 11 years ago and have travelled the world touring their albums. As musical ambassadors for Nepal, they performed admirably. Their music is steeped in the myths of the moun-

tains and valleys, which they evoke in the minds of the audience. "The Third Eye" comprises nine tracks, and has titles like "Nirvana", "Shanti", "Chaitya" and "Bodhimarga - The Path of Enlightenment".

Drawing heavily from images and concepts of Buddhism, the concert was a musical meditation, a contemplation of the component parts that make up the faith. Track 3, entitled "Vihara" is actually recorded live in a monastery, with the sound of monks performing devotional exercises and brisk chants. Lithe and flowing, "The Third Eye" is indeed a rewarding and refreshing break from the hustle of daily life of the Subcontinental on the go.



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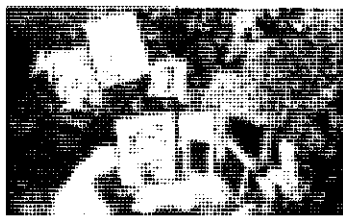
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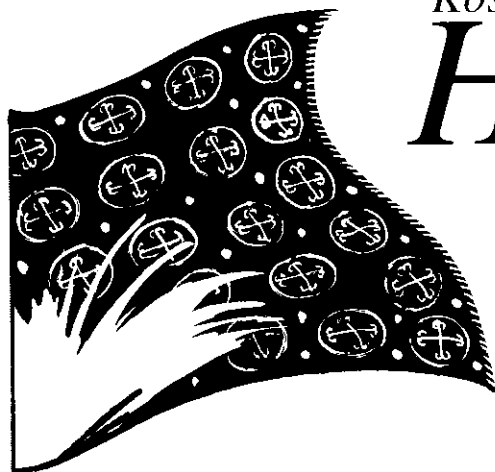
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# The Goddess of Big Things

by Jyoti Thottam

If Ayemenem were really as lush, magical, and dreamlike as some reviewers of *The God of Small Things* would have us believe, it would have to give up its name.

Because Ayemenem, unlike Gabriel Garcia Marquez's Macondo or William Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County, is a real place. The peculiarities of life there that inspired Arundhati Roy will continue well after the clamour around her novel dies down—witness the obscenity charges pending in another tiny Kerala town.

It would be easy to dismiss the lawsuit as another plot twist in Ms Roy's Cinderella story. But this complaint does accomplish one thing: it brings *The God of Small Things* back to the place that lives in its pages, and in doing so, forces readers to look beyond the tired categories they have been using to think about South Asian English literature.

The lawyer who brought the suit may be extreme in condemning the book as obscene, but he is not alone in judging it according to a different set of standards from those used in the drawing rooms of Delhi and New York. For millions of Malayalis, it doesn't matter that *The God of Small Things* is the hottest new South Asian novel. What does matter is that it smashes a large hole in the wall protecting their culture from the rest of the world.

The Malayalis who left Kerala in the late 1960s and early 1970s built miniature Ayemenems in every corner of the globe, and this book is being passed around them with the urgency of village gossip. Unlike Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh*, Ms Roy uses Kerala as more than just a setting. Its recitation of leave-taking and return, its tracing of the intricate patterns of propriety, and its evoca-

tion of scandal—the Malayali Angel of Death—resonate deeply for people from Kerala.

## Rushdie Test

This sense of place is missing from most of the mainstream criticism of the book. In the West, the reviews follow certain conventions for writing about South Asian literature. First, *The Rushdie Test*: how does this writer's wordplay, fantastical scenes and multi-cultural references compare to Salman? Then, what does this novel "say about India"? Whatever the specific time and place of a novel, critics reliably draw some neat conclusions about the sorry state of caste/class/gender/communal relations from the plot of a South Asian novel.

This formula allows for praise that is empty of understanding. Alice Truax, writing in *The New York Times Book Review*, offered a particularly egregious howler. Mistaking the kinship term "kochamma" for a surname (from Rahel's grandaunt Baby Kochamma), she writes, "Even as the Kochamma family seems to be withering before our eyes, the story of the family is flourishing." Peter Popham, in the *Independent* of London, finds in literature a reason (finally!) to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Independence: "Indian English goes from strength to strength. It has risen to the challenge of evoking the phantasmagoria of India."

*The New Yorker*, for its part, chose to mark the anniversary with a special fiction issue. Charlie Rose, an

influential American talk show host, was to celebrate the day with Roy, Rushdie, and Gita Mehta for good measure. Raving about books, it seems, has become a substitute for thinking about everything else that happens in South Asia.

While the critical response back in India has been more varied and less shallow, an acceptance of the categories imposed by Western publishers is poisoning the discourse about South Asian literature in English. The Subcontinentals may not be seduced by any so-called exoticism, but they may be quick to react against metaphor as too rich, too vivid. They may not make facile comparisons of one South Asian writer to another, but they will keep careful tally sheets of the advances. They may not presume that one novel speaks for an 'Indian' experience, but they may also be unwilling to admit how little South Asians from different parts of the region actually know about each other.

## Malayali Critics

The eager reaction of Malayalis to the book has given rise to some unlikely



alternative critical voices. A doctor from Toronto, P.K. John, posted an informal review on the Web noting that "Arundhathi is known as Susi Mol in family circles. Susi Mol's book uses some American innovations to get attention or break the rules." He then describes the scene of Estha's molestation and a bawdy song about a monkey with a red bum. However, he praises the love scene between Ammu and Velutha as "handled with great care and tenderness".

Similarly, a review by the Malayali author Manorama Mathai begins with an assertion of familiarity, a mention that he knows the author's family, and continues with a touch of condescension: "I thought the incest scene at the end was unnecessary but probably, it was one of the things that people look for nowadays."

These 'local reviews' have their own problems, particularly their proprietary air over the author and her story, and they certainly do not represent any Malayali consensus about Ms Roy's work. However, they do at least offer some new ideas. Mr Mathai criticises the use of a child as narrator; Mr John notes the importance of the servant-mistress relationship.

Outside the mainstream press, the possibilities open up for many interpretations. What would happen, for example, if one began to think about this book as one written, specifically, by a woman? Ms Roy articulates, through the character of Baby Kochamma, how women are both the enforcers and the victims of social norms. Or by a mother? The tender intimacy and sensuality of Ammu and Velutha's affair is matched only by the passionate closeness of the

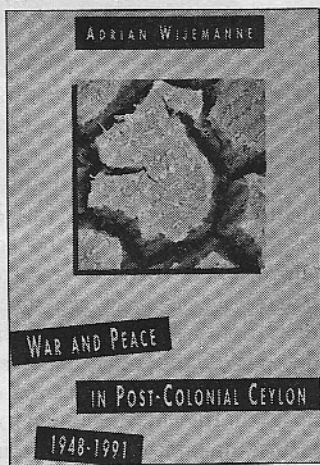
relationship between Ammu and the twins.

Of course, the various aspects of a writer's consciousness, as a woman, as a Malayali, as an Indian, as a South Asian, as a member of the English-speaking elite, never exert themselves in isolation. In the best literature, these arbitrary allegiances are present on every page and challenge the reader to separate one from the other. Whatever one thinks of *The God of Small Things*, this book and its attending bluster has proven the necessity of discarding another set of Laws, the ones that tell us what should be read, and how. And how much. △

*J. Thottam is a freelance writer in New York.*

**BOOK REVIEW**

## Breaking Up Is Hard To Do



### War and Peace in Post-Colonial Ceylon 1948-1991

by Adrian Wijemanne  
 Orient Longman Limited, New Delhi, 1996  
 INR 180 ISBN 81 250 0364 9

reviewed by **Thomas Abraham**

As expected, the 10th anniversary of the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord in July did not invite public celebration in Colombo. It is not difficult to see why. The agreement pledged peace. Instead, after broken promises from everyone involved, all it led to was fighting on a scale more bitter than anything ever before experienced on the island.

While the anniversary is not an occasion for the popping of champagne corks, it does, however, pro-

vide an opportunity to look back on the events of a decade ago and reflect on what went wrong. It is also an occasion to look to the future and try to see a way out of South Asia's most intractable civil war. Adrian Wijemanne's book is an interesting contribution to the debate on a solution to Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict.

Mr Wijemanne was a civil servant in Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) during the 1950s before he moved to Europe where he now lives. He has a

solution to the ethnic conflict that has the advantage of being clear, concise and rational: split the island into two, give the Tamils the state of Elam they want, give the Sinhalese the Sinhala state they want, and let the two live happily ever after. The proposal's disadvantage is that it is difficult to imagine any Colombo government having the courage to propose to the Sinhalese that the country be divided. It is equally difficult to see the Sinhalese people agreeing to this freely.

The Indo-Sri Lanka agreement, which was a relatively modest proposal to devolve power to a Tamil majority provincial council in the island's north and east was enough to trigger an insurgency by the JVP which took nearly four years and tens of thousands of deaths to quell. The bloodbath that would follow an announcement that the country was about to be split is unimaginable.

But this does not detract from several penetrating observations that Mr Wijemanne makes on the nature of modern nationalism. He asks a question that every political leader on the Subcontinent faced with separatism needs to answer: Is it worth risking precious human lives in the interest of preserving political structures and national boundaries inherited from the British empire?

Mr Wijemanne writes that those who want to see resolution of secessionist conflicts must recognise that "human life is more important than political or geographical structures". He adds, "States and state structures are the handiwork of man and there is nothing irrevocable about them. There is nothing sacrosanct about the state, be it unitary or otherwise." This is a principle that ought to be emblazoned in letters of gold across the facades of every government building and parliament house across South Asia.

Mr Wijemanne also reminds us that the founding principle of a democratic nation state is the consent of the people. It is this consent which holds the state together. Once it is withdrawn, no force of arms can hold the state together for long. "The elementary fact is that the glue which binds a society together and supports the state is the freely given consent of the governed. Consent by its very nature is voluntary and cannot be secured by coercion or legislation. Such efforts may produce a temporary acquiescence but not the permanent bond of freely given consent."

### Theoretical Elegance

Mr Wijemanne, like many who are in favour of a separate Tamil state in Sri Lanka, argues that the Sinhalese and Tamils are two separate nations yoked together artificially by the British into a single state. "The unitary state bequeathed by the departing imperial power was regarded as the most essential part of society. But it contained a fatal flaw – it was not a state based upon a nation; it was a state superimposed upon two nations by an imperial power." He writes that there was no "Ceylonese" national identity to back the new nation state. "For the vast majority of the population, of both races, the concept of a 'Ceylonese' nationality was simply non-existent and unknown."

Besides the fact that there was no common identity to underpin the Ceylonese (later Sri Lankan) nation state, asserts the author, the Tamils clearly deprived the Sri Lankan state of its legitimacy by indicating that they had no wish to remain within it. This was unambiguously expressed during the 1979 general election, when the Tamils voted massively in favour of the TULF, which had in its

election manifesto pledged to "secure, if possible by constitutional and peaceful means, a separate, independent sovereign state for the Tamil people in their homeland which comprises the northern and eastern provinces."

The TULF received nearly 70 percent of the vote in the Tamil-majority northern and eastern provinces, and Mr Wijemanne writes that "the true significance of this enormous electoral victory of the TULF was played down then and continues to be played down to this day."

Given that the Tamils have spoken in favour of separation, Mr Wijemanne asks whether it is "right for the Sinhala people to insist on maintaining the entity created by an imperial fiat and thus inexorably reject the claim of the Tamil people?" The answer, to him, is "self-evidently, unambiguously clear... The Sinhala people have no imperial standing or right to enforce a former imperial master's fiat... The Tamil people are fully justified in desiring a state of their own and likewise the Sinhala people are entitled to a state of their own."

The solution proposed is to agree to create a state of Elam comprising the northern and eastern provinces of the island, and a rump Sri Lanka with the island's remaining Sinhala-majority provinces. This is a theoretically elegant and morally justifiable position, but it is more or less impossible to put into practice. In the same way that a nation state cannot exist without the consent of all the people who comprise it, it cannot be broken up either without the freely given consent of all the different people within it, unless one is willing to pay the price of terrible bloodshed.

From the bloodbath that accompanied the partition of India and Pakistan, to the horrible human suffering that has followed the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia, history demonstrates that, in the words of an old pop song, breaking up is hard to do. The only successful, non-violent example of break-up of a nation state in recent times has been the velvet divorce between the Czech and Slovak republics. This split succeeded because people on both sides desired it.

### Srilam

Mr Wijemanne puts forward many arguments demonstrating that agreement for divorce will be good for the Sinhalese people. They will benefit economically from the resources released by the termination of the war; the end of the conflict will bring an enormous psychological and moral relief, not to mention an end to the death of countless young Sinhalese soldiers; and so on. The author is also candid about the difficulty of persuading the Sinhalese to give up their claim to the whole island of Sri Lanka, and the blow this will be to their psyche.

Having said all that, Mr Wijemanne concludes that there is no choice but to go ahead with the divorce, as it is the only way left to end the conflict. He holds out the hope that the states of Sri Lanka and Elam will develop political and economic links. One day, like parts of the European Union, they will choose to enter into a new alliance, in a state whose name the author proposes might be "Srilam".

Division of the country is not an option for the practical-minded Sinhalese politicians, however. In a democracy, they will require the consent of the people before taking such a bold step, and it is impossible to conceive of the Sinhalese giving this consent. The truth of the matter is that, for better or worse, the Sinhalese and Tamils of Sri Lanka have been joined together by history, geography, and a common political system. Like two Siamese twins who cannot be separated.

Despite the erudition with which Mr Wijemanne presents his case, his plan cannot work, for the Sinhalese and Tamils cannot wish each other away. What they can, and must, do if they are to dwell in peace, is to sit down and talk about ways in which they can live more comfortably with each other within their common island home. Ten years ago, one such attempt was made and it failed. One can only hope that after a decade of war, both sides are weary enough to give it another try. △

*T. Abraham, London correspondent for The Hindu, was based in Sri Lanka in 1987-90.*

*Is it worth  
risking  
precious  
human lives  
to preserve  
political  
structures  
and national  
boundaries  
inherited  
from the  
British?*

# Abominably Yours,

**I**t was at a recent kitty party at the Rumdoodle Bar that we found out how difficult it has become to find mates for our daughters. South Asia's handsomest hunks, its choicest bachelors, are being lured away from under our noses by farang women. Ever since that close shave with Nehru the loss of King of Sikkim to Queen Hope and Sonia's successful interception of Rajiv, this drain on the Subcontinent's male genetic pool has been gathering pace.

Then when Jemima squirrelled away Imran (on whom all of us had a secret crush ever since he single-handedly demolished India in a test match) we knew this whole thing was getting out of hand. The threat is still real: notwithstanding recent spy satellite pictures of Diana being nuzzled by Dodi al Fayed, it looks like the Princess of Wales' heart already belongs to a certain Pakistani cardiologist.

When is this going to stop? Over *raita*, we agreed that if it doesn't our choice of males will soon be limited to Sita Ram Kesri lookalikes. What we need is a proactive approach, an action plan to bring out the best in the men we have left. Just look around you, they either have biceps or brains, never both. And if they do, you can be sure they already have one-way tickets outta here. Those who remain are either potential bride burners with pot bellies, mosque demolishers in khaki shorts with chopstick legs, hirsute frontiersmen who look like Taliban deserters, or skinny nose-pickers with sideburns greased in coconut oil.

But all is not lost. With some effort our malefolk could probably be redeemed. What needs to be done is set examples, pick role models that Chopstick Legs and Coconut Face can look up to and emulate. One way to do this is to organise pageants, first statewide and later subregional, to select a Mr Subcontinent. After all, if we can have the annual Miss Hindustan contest to pick the silliest female in the country, there is no reason why a competition cannot be held to choose the Man with the Mostest.

However repulsive the thought, since the alternative is accelerated hunk haemorrhage and further erosion of South Asia's Y chromosomes, I think the idea merits consideration. The male-dominated SAARC Secretariat

could take the lead since this is a matter of vital relevance to the South Asian region. Sponsors should not be hard to come by: manufacturers of products preferred by South Asian males would fall over each other for the chance to be associated with an enterprise as noble as this:

- "Unicorn Brand Potency Capsules Is Proud To Be A Sponsor Of The Mr Subcontinent Contest, Stay Virile Till You Are Senile with Unicorn."
- "Beehive Moustache Wax, Co-sponsors of Mr Subcontinent, Never Lets Your Handlebars Droop. Also Good for Beards and Chest Hair."
- "And finally, Mr Subcontinent Is Brought To You by Ghanashyam Ghee, Maintaining Your Love Handles for 50 Years of Independence."

Just like Miss World's Swimsuit Round, the Mr Subcontinent pageant will have an Underpants Parade sponsored by Jockey. Clad in their A-Fronts, contestants will waddle down the catwalk exposing cellulite hoarded carefully over the decades and layers of lard kept for insulation against the extremes of temperature of the Indus-Ganga Plains.

"Beauty is just skin dip," shall be the slogan of the Mr Subcontinent event, taking into account the practical difficulties that are bound to be encountered. The most crucial round in the contest will be the Interview, where a female MC will try her damndest to throw the nervous contestants off-guard with tricky questions:

**MC:** Our next exhibit is the voluptuous Mr Balbir Pehelman. That's a great underwear outfit you have there, Balbir, the fabric really brings out the contours of your A-front very nicely. It looks very flattering. So tell me Balbir, darling, what is your favourite colour.

**Balbir:** Our country has so many battered women and street children, and I would like to make their life a little easier by helping them cross the street. Because the traffic is so bad, and some drivers are so careless.

**MC:** I see, that sounds simply marvelous. So what is your ambition in life?



**Balbir:** Yellow.

**MC:** Right, I see. Balbir, who is the person you admire the most in the world?

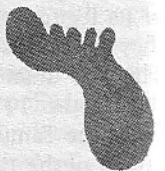
**Balbir:** I would like to be respected for my mind, and not my body. Because my body is only the outside of the real me inside.

**MC:** (Shuffles papers, checks notes.) OK, fair enough. One last question, Balbir, what are your views on arranged marriage?

**Balbir:** Mother Teresa.

Future Mr Subcontinents will then serve as role models for males throughout the region and perhaps boost their chances of being completely repulsive for prospective groom hunters from the West.

Even as we speak, our most eligible bachelors (married or unmarried) are being targeted shamelessly. And our last line of defence must be to put guys like Sachin Tendulkar, Rahul Gandhi, Anura Bandaranaike and Pranoy Roy under 24-hour armed guard to prevent them from being lured away under our (and their wives', where applicable) noses.



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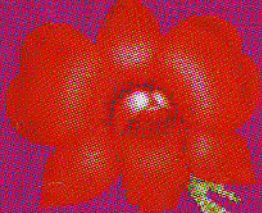
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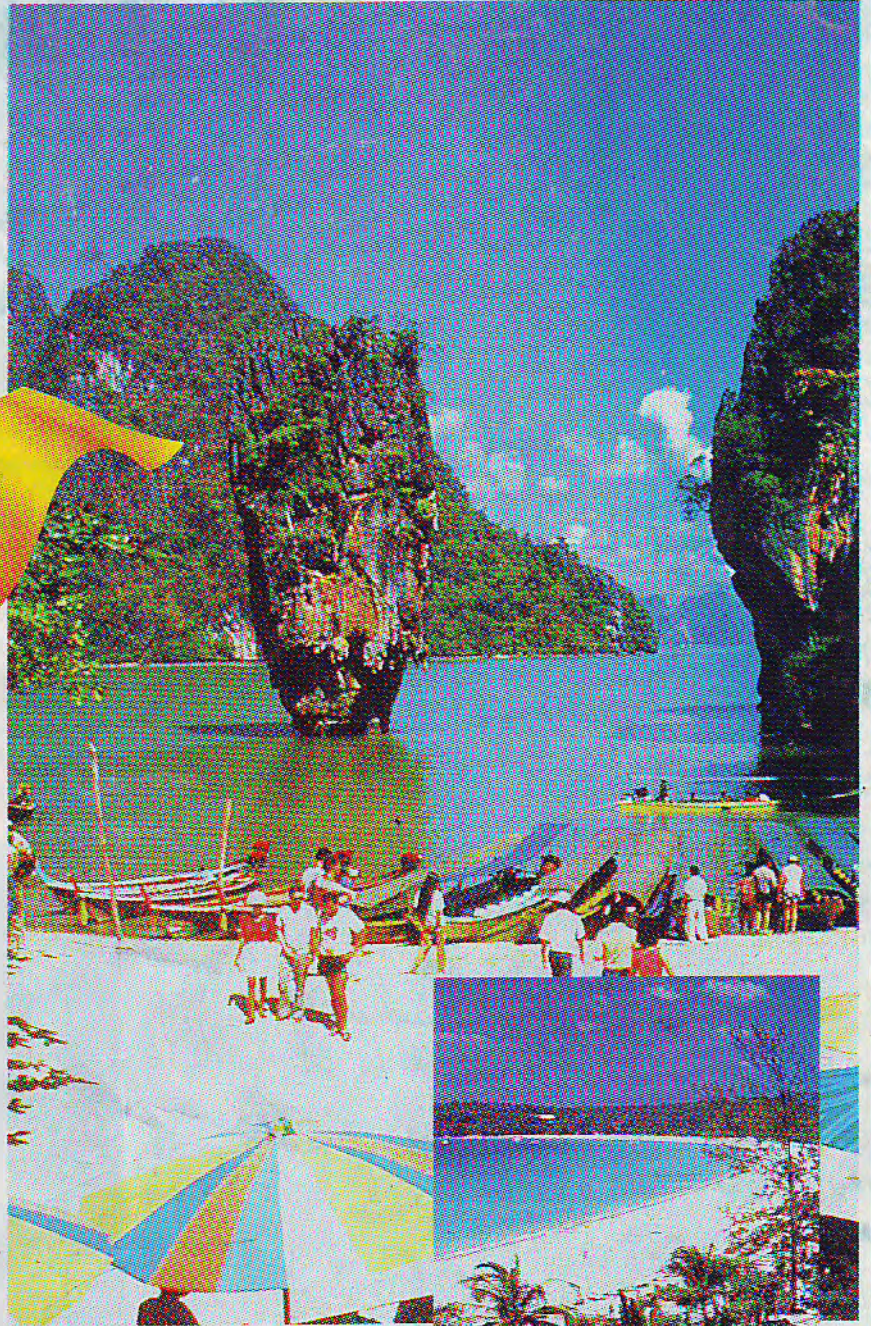
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