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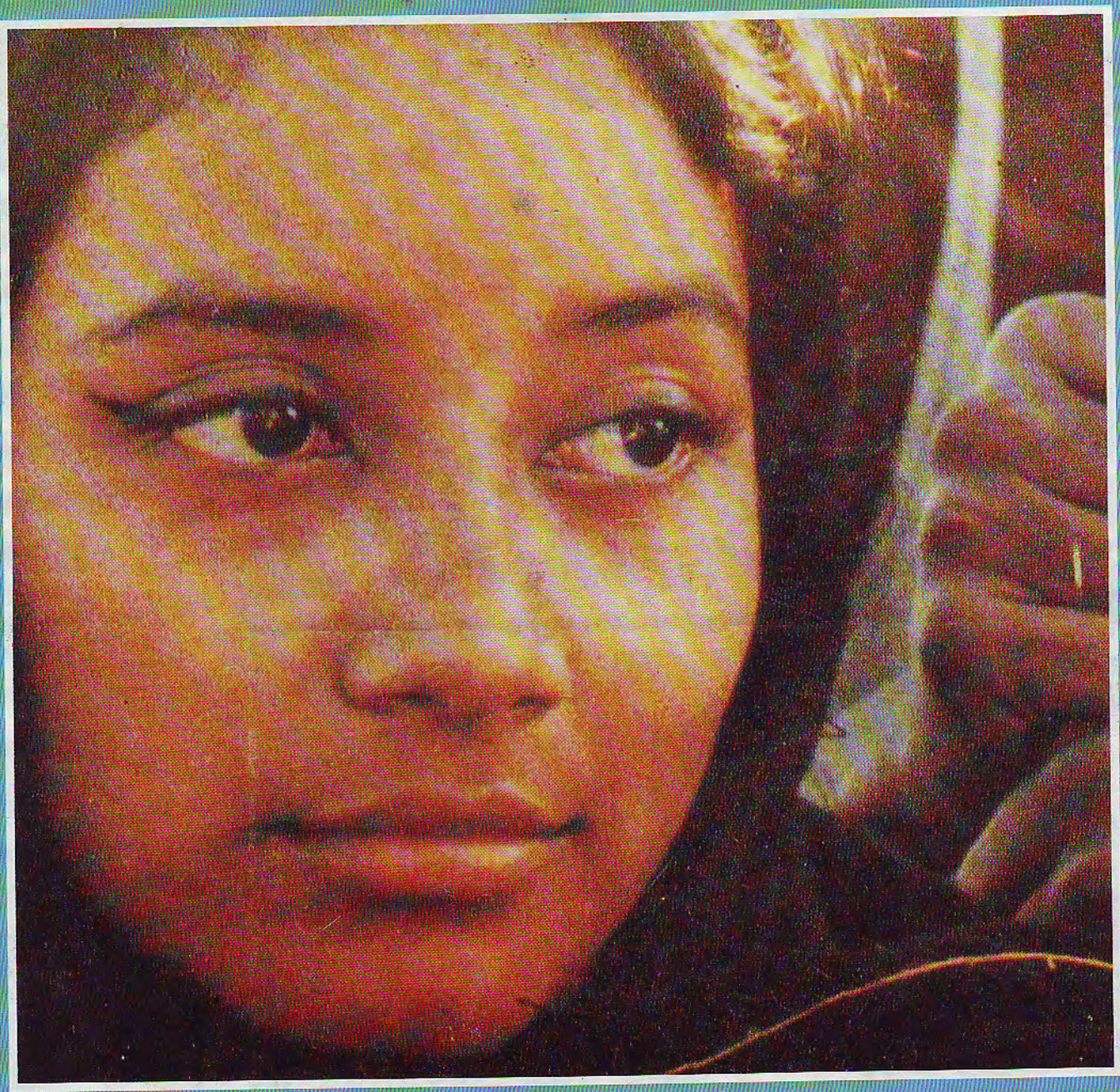

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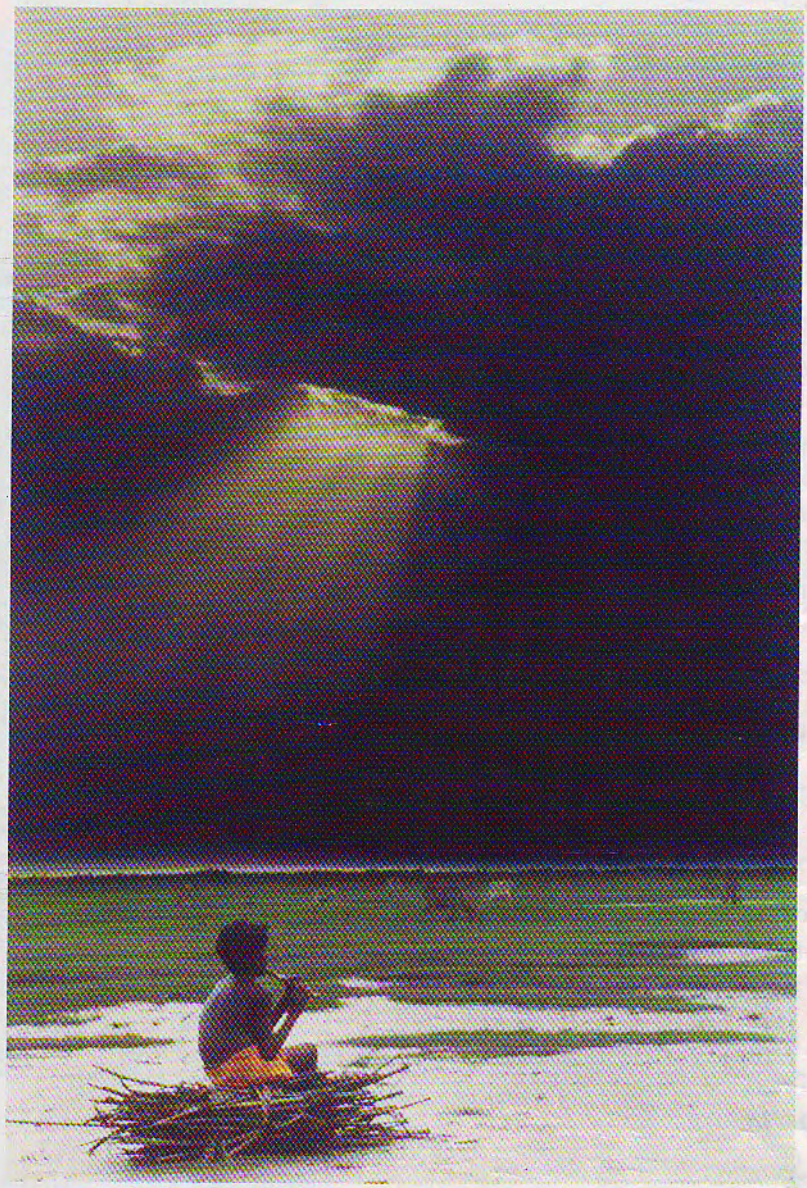

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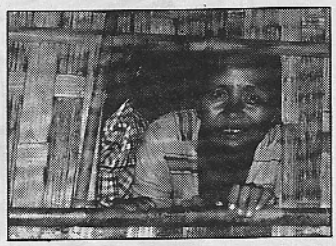

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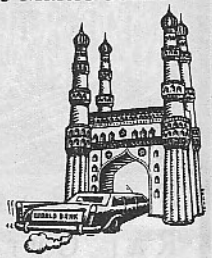

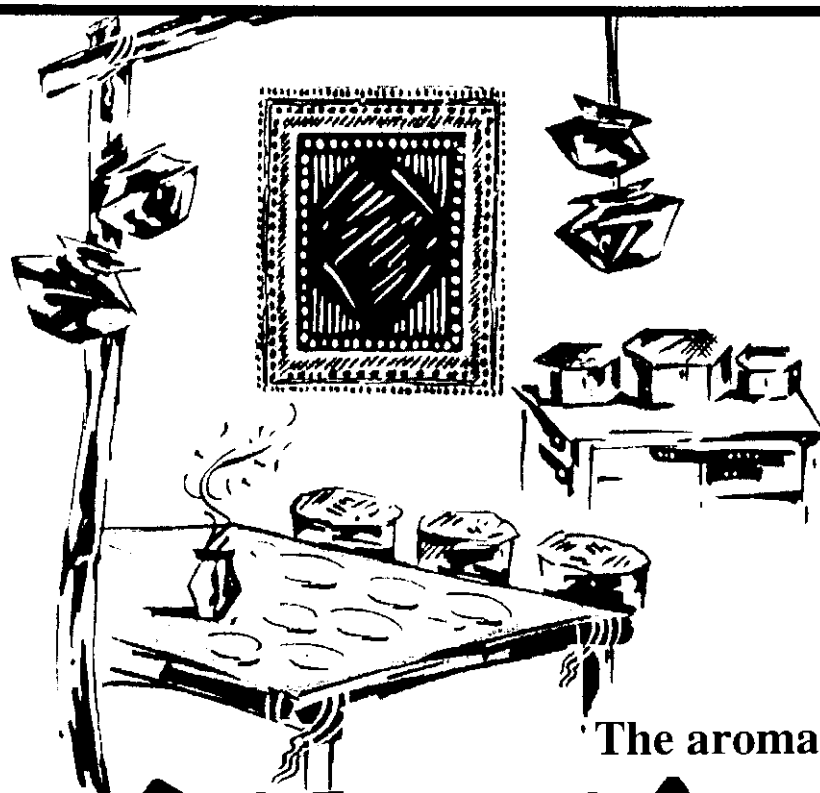

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Mock Empathy

It appears that John Mock did not read my article ("Belligerent Villagers of Khunjerab", March/April 1997) before writing the so-called rejoinder (July/August 1997). He is off the mark and seems to have been guided by the American "been there, seen that" mentality.

I do not know why Mock felt the need to clarify that Karchenai Valley is not used by Shimshalis but by Avgarchi Wakhis when I have made no claims on the matter. Mock was indeed present at the launching of Khunjerab National Park (KNP) Management Plan, but unfortunately he was not part of the 90-minute-long discussion that our group of journalists had with the delegation from Shimshal. I can assure him that the Shimshalis are indeed very, very resentful of the method of formulation of the Management Plan. I also stand by my statement that they would like to control everything that happens within the boundaries of KNP.

I will not argue with Mock's statement that Shimshali literacy stands at 33 percent because of my own ignorance of the exact status, but I would like to point out that I did not write about any KNP Plan suggesting the inclusion of Shimshal valley in the Park. I only wrote that the Management Plan will include a separate chapter on Shimshal dealing with the valley's problems, demands, etc. Because of his lack of knowledge of Urdu, Mock perhaps failed to follow the proceedings accurately.

I also did not write that Marco Polo sheep had ever been reported in Shimshal, as Mock deems necessary to clarify. Neither have I accused the Wakhi people of decimating this endangered animal - I have only commented on its endangered status. On the matter of Furzen Dur, he is merely nit-picking. I admit my words that the valley "is totally bare [of birch trees]" was an overstatement; but only to emphasise that the Shimshalis are not yet acquainted with the word "sustainable" and that the few trees that are left simply do not warrant the name "Birch Valley".

Moreover, if there are some few trees left, it is not because the Shimshalis understand the need to conserve them, but because there are no roads to remove the timber. They do not always, as Mock says, "avoid destroying a scarce resource". Chikar in the far east of Shimshal is a good example of where they have completely destroyed the willows.

The letter seems to flow from John Mock's empathy for the Shimshali people. I, too, like them, but one must not try to gloss over the weaknesses of one's friends.

Salman Rashid
Lahore

Judicious Decision

It was terribly disheartening and annoying to learn from the interview in "Everest Mulaqat" (July/August 1997) that the unsuccessful attempt to scale Mt Everest this year by Pakistan's ace climbers, Sher Khan and Nazir Sabir, drew adverse reaction in Pakistan. Such reaction shows appalling ignorance about mountaineering.

Only last year, for example, some eight mountaineers, including two renowned climbers, Scott Fischer and Rob Hall died during separate expeditions to Everest. Ironically, it was Rob Hall who had said admonishingly to his team before setting off from Base Camp that scaling the Everest was only part of the challenge. The real test was to do it and return safely.

Sher Khan and Nazir Sabir showed good sense, as would be expected of seasoned climbers, in deciding to forgo the last 200 metres to Everest's summit in deference to the weather which had begun to turn foul. If Fischer and Hall had acted likewise at the critical moment, they would most probably be alive today, as would many others who have perished in Everest expeditions. Having resisted the pressure of setting off in unfavourable weather, Sher Khan and Nazir Sabir can now look to another opportunity to achieve their goal.

Instead of castigating them for turning back, as if it were a cowardly act, the Pakistani public should be pleased that the climbers acted sensibly and avoided a disaster. That many in Pakistan should be so ignorant about mountaineering is unbecoming of a country that possesses some of the world's highest mountains and where the best climbers of the world come to climb. Pakistan Television (PTV) should do programmes to educate the public about mountaineering. The Alpine Club of Pakistan should collaborate with PTV and the print media in this regard.

Hopefully, the Pakistan government would be forthcoming with funds to sponsor the next expedition even if it no longer coincides with the country's 50th year of independence. Hopefully, too, the next time the Pakistani climbers would not be subjected to extraneous pressure, and the media would do a much better job of covering a climbing expedition as it should.

Sher Khan and Nazir Sabir did the right thing to wait for a better day. Wouldn't it have been far worse if they had perished, and perished because of bad judgement or because of pressure from people who know so little about mountaineering?

Nazir Kamal
Islamabad

Revenge the Only Palliative

It is clear from the opening essay in the September/October issue, "Red Star over South Asia" by Dipak Gyawali, that latter-day Maoist insurgencies in Nepal and India have much in common with those in Peru and other traditional mountainous regions of South America. The writer has creditably identified the hopeless nihilism that these movements seem to feed on, and the sources of that nihilism, and the hypocrisy of developmentalist states in dealing with it.

The fact is that globalisation without strong state mitigation is essentially a death sentence for traditional communities in economically marginal regions. It is only natural that some of the people living there would recognise that fact and prescribe revenge as the only palliative available - thus pronouncing their own death sentence on the society that is destroying them.

With regard to the "appeal of Maoism" that Gyawali mentions, it seems few in the 1990s can see a Maoist utopia

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as an attainable goal. That utopia is only useful as a standard against which the existing situation can be tried and found guilty.

It is the tragedy of the times that the sort of sincere concern and honest dealing on the part of the state that could represent a way out for marginalised communities is in such short supply.

Jim Williams
Berkeley, California

Revolutionise Bureaucracy

The article "Red Star over South Asia" couldn't be more accurate. Gyawali touches on a theme that the masses have been struggling with for thousands of years. The lower and middle classes of society ache for a just, equal society. Unfortunately, this has been an elusive goal so far because all we have been able to come up with as an answer is "bureaucracy". Communist Bureaucracy, Capitalist Bureaucracy, Dictatorship Bureaucracy....

It has been individuals like Mahatma Gandhi, Buddha, Aung San Suu Kyi, Thich Nat Han and a thousand others whose names have never been recorded in history books that have discovered and fought for a new social order. Who have, as Gyawali has stated, faced the problems "head on". But to really change a society it takes the power of the whole community to discover and fight for something better. Fight firm and fight long. And therein lies the problem, the struggle of the ages.

So far history has taught that this kind of change can only be accomplished when the community can stand behind a charismatic leader like one of those listed above. If there is none, people quietly ease themselves into lives of pettiness, egoism, apathy and sloth. The day a community (either a village, city, state, or country) resolves to reform itself rigorously, righteously and permanently with or without any kind of "leader", is the day the Maoist movement and all other "extremist" movements will cease to exist. It is also the day when people like Gandhi can devote themselves to the fulfillment of living their own lives in peace.

I have lived in Nepal's western hills, an area heavily impacted by the Maoist movement, and greatly appreciate Gyawali's comments on the schism between the intellectual/political elite in Kathmandu and the desperately poor living in villages. His comments of apathy on the part of the Kathmandu elite couldn't be truer. For the poorest of the poor in the remote districts of Nepal, it will be a painfully long time before Nepal's dysfunctional bureaucracy is able to see them. Unless, of course, it does something revolutionary like look a little further.

Chris Murphy
American Peace Corps,
Kathmandu

Not the Way It Was

Satya Sivaraman's article on Cambodia, "Cambodia's Maoists Outdid Mao" (September/October 1997), was an important contribution to Himal's last issue on Maoism in the Subcontinent. Having lived last year in Cambodia with my husband and two sons, I am aware of the horrors inflicted on the Cambodian people and society by the Maoist Khmer Rouge.

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.

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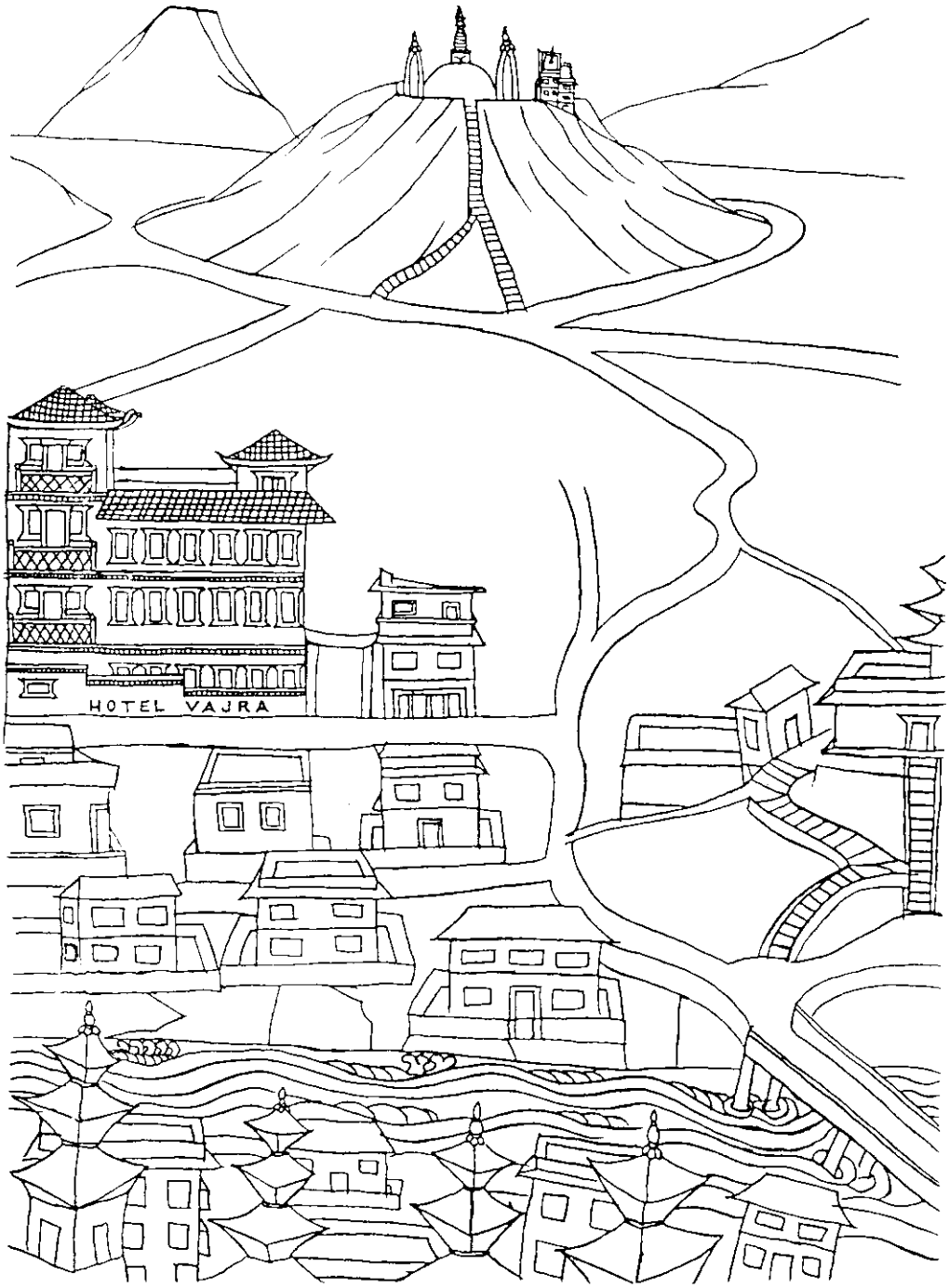

Vajra (literally--flash of lighting), is an artists' condominium, a transit home for many, providing a base during months of hibernation and creative inspiration. Its isolation, graphic splendour and peaceful ambience, make an ideal retreat from the clock of pressure.

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

in Kathmandu, the Vajra

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However, I have two points of disagreement with Sivaraman's analysis. First, he grossly miscalculates the number of Cambodians killed by the Khmer-Rouge when he writes: "The results were horrendous, as tens of thousands of urban Cambodians perished in the countryside due to starvation, hard labour and torture."

It is a well-known fact that over a million, the majority of whom were urban Cambodians forcibly evacuated from Phnom Penh at the start of the Khmer Rouge takeover in 1975, perished in the nearly four-year rule of the Khmer Rouge. Just outside the city of Phnom Penh, there is one site alone referred to as "the Killing Fields" with the skulls and bones of nearly 20,000 Cambodians killed during the Khmer Rouge period. In addition to the Cambodians who were killed or who perished in the countryside, more than a million left the country as refugees.

The second point is with regard to Pol Pot's rise to power: Sivaraman underscores the important role played by the massive US bombing of Cambodia during the Vietnam War in bringing Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge to power: "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." But to principally blame the US for bringing Pol Pot to power is far too facile an explanation for Cambodia's demise. King Sihanouk, and the Cambodian people themselves, also played a decisive role which is the hardest reality for the Cambodians to come to terms with.

Christina Files
Kathmandu

No Cars, Please

In answer to Siddharth Ghosh's letter in the July/August issue which runs the pedestrian Yeti into the ground for preferring the old Ambassador over *bideshi* cars, I say a pox on both of them. The question is not whether we should be driving an Ambassador or a Maruti, but why we shouldn't build good public transport and dispense of the automobile altogether.

If any public transport system killed even a minuscule fraction of the millions of people slaughtered worldwide by the automobile, the whole thing would be shut down until the engineers found out what was wrong. If any public transport system ran so inefficiently as the automobile, with its lifetime average speed, calculated by Ralph Nader to be a sluggish five miles per hour, it would quickly be replaced by the other more efficient and much safer systems already in existence.

The automobile epitomises the worst elements of private market capitalism by forcing each individual to privately reproduce the transport system at a cost of three days' labour a week, worse than the tax on the feudal serf who had to work the master's land one day a week, and certainly the opposite of the freedom it pretends.

The automobile wastes vast resources for its manufacture and operation, and it is destroying the environment on a global scale with its emissions. Its noise, traffic and fumes ruin the quality of urban life, and its highly subsidised and expensive roads destroy urban communities (usually of the poor who lack the political clout to resist their incursions) and eat up rural farmlands.

Quoting Vandana Shiva in a recent interview: "Because of these new car models there is suddenly on the streets of Delhi a new intolerance by the motorists for both the cows and cyclists. So for the first time the sacred cow in India, which used to be such a wonderful speed-breaker, is now seen as a nuisance. For the first time, I've seen cows being hit and hurt. These guys just go right past, and if the cow is sitting on the road, they don't care. We can't afford to have a sacred car rather than a sacred cow.

"The other thing they're working very hard at doing is to try and make cyclists - including all the people who do servicing and sell vegetables on every street - declared illegal because they're getting in the way of the fast cars. It means robbing the livelihood of millions of people who are more ecological, who are helping save the climate for all of us."

There is one reason that the automobile is ubiquitous, despite the existence of far faster, more efficient, safer, more comfortable and convenient, and more community- and environmental-friendly forms of transport; and that is the gigantic profits it gives oil companies, road contractors, the automotive and steel industries, the finance interests behind them, and the gigantic propaganda campaigns and political manoeuvring that these industries have been involved in to force such a sham on us and make us imagine that we like it.

Stephen Mikesell
Birmingham, Alabama

Recognition Deserved

After going through the "Mail" column in your September/October issue, I on my own and on behalf of the victims of torture would like to assure that the recognition accorded by the Mayor of San Francisco to Mangala Sharma of BRAVVE was not undeserved. The people who made the claim otherwise in their letter are not even to be found in the refugee camps given as their address. This points to some mischief makers who are out to discredit the work of BRAVVE.

M.B. Gurung
Beldangi I Refugee Camp,
Jhapa, Nepal

Enclosed along with the above letter were a number of hand-written notes from people testifying to the good work being done by BRAVVE.
This matter now stands closed. Editor.

Bamiyan Buddhas Safe

I am surprised that news of the Taliban high command's rebuttal of the stated intentions of front-line commander Abdul Wahid to destroy the Buddhas of Bamiyan

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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had not reached *Chhetria Patrakar* in Kathmandu by the time he wrote his column, "Mediafile", in the July/August issue. It seems bad news travels faster than good news.

Let me put the columnist's mind at rest: senior Taliban leaders have told me that they have no intention of blowing up, or even harming this relic. Being in a position of editorial authority within the BBC, even before the 'news' of Commander Wahid's intentions had broken, I had discussed with colleagues the possibility of doing something to preserve the Buddhas of Bamiyan. We had decided to deal with the matter of preservation of cultural heritage generally, and not to address the case of the Buddhas directly. There is an Afghan saying: "Better not to tell a madman not to burn down a haystack". If he had not thought of doing it before, he will when you tell him not to!

The BBC Kabul correspondent later interviewed Maulvi Wakeel Ahmad, senior spokesman of the leader of the Taliban movement, on the subject of the Buddhas. He made clear that the Taliban had no intention of blowing up the Buddhas. At the same time he took care not to offend the feelings of Taliban soldiers on the front, who had been responsible for the statement in the first place.

Maulvi Wakeel Ahmad also gave an interview on the BBC Pashto service, in which he clearly stated that as no one was worshipping the Buddhas of Bamiyan, there was no need to destroy them.

On balance, in this case it was probably better that the subject had been aired, because we were able to elicit a clear denial from a senior spokesman of the movement. However, it is prudent to exercise caution in pushing the Taliban into a corner on such sensitive subjects.

Sometimes, once the Taliban are seen by their followers to adopt a certain position on a subject, this can give them an added excuse not to back down on that issue. This may have happened with regard to other matters, such as girls' education and female employment, on which the Taliban's intransigence is well known. The Buddhas of Bamiyan might easily have descended into such an issue, in which case the more international pressure was exerted, the more the Taliban position would have become entrenched.

John Butt
BBC Afghan Education Drama Project, Peshawar

Sri Lanka on Islam

THE RELIGION OF Islam, in his humble opinion, carries in its teachings the principle of tolerance, said Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar when he heard of the "alleged threat" to the Bamiyan Buddha statues. Calling together ambassadors of Buddhist and Islamic countries, Kadirgamar said that "with great respect and humility and with limited knowledge of the teachings of Islam, I do not think it could be possibly be that Islam would encourage the destruction of objects held sacred by other faiths... It is difficult to imagine that anyone would, in the name of Islam, seek to harm objects held sacred by the followers of another faith... It is well known that Islam is a tolerant religion. It is this tolerance, among other factors, that makes Islam the great religion we consider it to be. It is, therefore, difficult to imagine that anyone would, in the name of Islam, seek to harm objects held sacred by the followers of another faith."

More on Harrer

THE TRUTH OF Heinrich Harrer's Nazi past ferreted out by writer Gerald Lehner, as it came out in the German magazine *Stern* and in Himal *(July/August 1997)*, had varying reactions from different quarters.

The *Beijing Review*, as it would, gloated over the discovery that, as it put it, "The Dalai Lama is a Nazi dupe who fell prey to certain influences of the Hitler regime as a schoolboy." Which only goes to prove what *The New York Times* had to say, that the long-kept secret of Harrer "may now be undeservedly used in China's campaign to discredit the exiled Tibetan." While suggesting that the Dalai Lama's influence may have "touched even an erstwhile Nazi" such as Harrer, the newspaper ended by saying, "The pity is that Mr Harrer did not tell the truth about himself long, long ago."

Reuters reports that the Harrer disclosures complicated the political agenda of the film *Seven Years in Tibet* just as it was being released. Powerful Jewish groups, outraged at the turn of events, suggested that the film producer Mandalay Entertainment add a voiceover (the production actually having been completed) to make up for the new revelation, otherwise "Brad Pitt (may) inadvertently become a poster boy for Fascists and Neo-Nazis." So Mandalay had Pitt as Harrer return to the sound studio, and suddenly remember his secret past as he watched Chinese generals arrive in Tibet. In a mournful voiceover meant to salvage the USD 70 million blockbuster, Pitt observes, "I shudder to recall how once, long, ago, I embraced the same beliefs, how at one time I was no different from these intolerant Chinese." Tut tut.

Meanwhile, zealous reporter that he is, Lehner has continued with his investigations and dug up the fact that Harrer has been keeping contact with his Nazi friends right through the post-war years, one of them, a war criminal who carried out medical experiments on prisoners at Auschwitz, whom Harrer last met in 1994. As *The New York Times* noted, "Grieve afresh for luckless Tibet."

Surefire Seller

BESTSELLERS NEED NOT necessarily be popular, points out reader **L. Balasubramaniam** from Bodakdev, Ahmedabad:

Sitting in my friend's bookshop in Ambedkarnagar which overflowed with books by Ambedkar, Baba Phule and other *dalit* writers, I asked conversationally, "Which of these sells the most?"

"*Manusmriti*," my friend replied most unexpectedly.

I was mystified. "That's a strange preference for the people of Ambedkarnagar," I said.

"You see," he explained, "this is a politically very active colony. Every day, some dalit meeting or the other takes place here. Making a bonfire of *Manusmriti* is a mandatory item on the agenda of each of these meetings. For this purpose people come here and buy this book in bulk."

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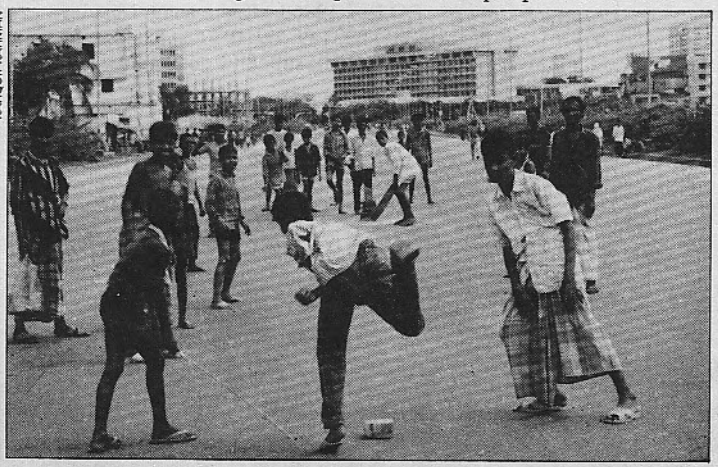
HARTAL IN THE TIME OF WAR

THE GENERAL ELECTIONS held last year merely changed the seats of the belligerent parties and not the state of political war within Bangladesh. For the moment, the political tension in Dhaka is explained by the simple fact that Begum Khaleda Zia is mad at Sheikh Hasina Wajed for being the Prime Minister, a post she held once. Earlier, before the June 1996 elections brought her to power, Sheikh Hasina used to be similarly incensed towards Begum Zia for the same reason.

It seems that violence and vegetables sprout aplenty in Bangladeshi winters. As the chill of winter sets in, the country's political climate also begins to heat up. A rocket launcher is found hidden inside one of Dhaka's overhead water tanks, and the word is spread that it was meant to finish a major leader of the Government party. Begum Zia, on a trip to her constituency in North Bengal, narrowly misses injury as a marauding truck sideswipes her vehicle - an assassination attempt, cries out her Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP).

Violence from both sides is promised and feared. Young men are being groomed for mayhem and hand-crafted bomb production is on the up. The BNP and Awami League (AL) have by now accused each other of everything possible under the sun, including treason, smuggling, cohabitation with anti-liberation forces, conspiracy with India, protecting thugs in forever-young "youth wings" and so on. The vitriol is poured out eagerly by both sides, and the mutual hate level is at an all-time high. One might even have enjoyed the drama if it did not hurt the people so.

What hurts the people most, but apparently does not bother the political parties as perpetrators, is the *hartal*, or *bandh*, as it is alternately called in other parts of South Asia. Hartal and its variants such as sit-ins, obstructions, mass picketing sessions, and all manner of street agitations, are the basic nutrients of Bangladeshi politics. The people have become exhausted by this process of coming to power, but as yet have found no way to articulate their disgust.



RAFIQUR RAHMAN

Cricket in the time of hartal.

At one point in time, during Sheikh Hasina's agitation to overthrow BNP, it is true that the body politic had begun to question the efficacy of hartals. But the stepping aside by Begum Zia under public pressure after a zero-credibility election gave hartals a new lease of life. And now, Begum Zia has begun using the hartal wand for similar effect.

When asked about hartals and all that they portend to the ordinary person, Dhaka politicians reply lamely, "What else can we do?" This is not only a declaration of despair but also a reflection of the poverty of the culture in which politics has flourished. The continued reliance on an agitation tool that is more than a century old shows nothing but bankruptcy of political imagination.

The arguments are always the same. The party that is out of power, and so the one to call a hartal, will explain that "if the government is reasonable and if demands are accepted, there would be no hartals", while the one in power will maintain that the demands are impossible to accept without compromising national interests. When the roles are reversed, the parties merely change sides but the contentions remain the same. Hence, a party in power will say it represents the interests of the people, while once in power, it will lay claim to representing the interest of the state.

Bangladesh's political parties are also driven by the sense of their own legitimacy as opposed to others. The BNP took to the streets against Hussain Mohammed Ershad and used hartals to build up a mass agitation. But hartals suddenly became anti-national when the Awami League took to calling hartals. The BNP claimed that its own hartal politics were legitimate because Gen Ershad had come to power by overthrowing a legitimate government. (It is of course another matter that the BNP had come to power through a coup and their rule subsequently made *halal* by a rigged election.) So, for the BNP, its own hartals represent genuine expressions of public resentment while hartals against it do not.

The Awami League, on the other hand, bases its legitimacy on the fact that it not only led the liberation war but also a two-year-long agitation to establish democratic rights that brought it to power in 1996. For the AL, the BNP can never be legitimate because its existence is grounded in the 1975 military takeover that followed the assassination of Awami League founder Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Further, says the League, it is a party of power-seekers without a political past, a party which defends the interest of the anti-liberation war groups of 1971, a party which hobnobs with Islamic fundamentalists, and so on.

Says the AL, Begum Zia's BNP lacks the legitimacy to call hartals. Hartal, a weapon of the people, should only be used by democratic parties.

Now in the opposition, the BNP has taken note that hartals do hurt the economy. So the garments sector, fully geared to export, has been exempted. Rickshaws also ply the streets although not officially allowed by the hartal committee. For its part, the Awami League has mobilised hundreds of musclemen to beat up the hartal makers to discourage them from doing exactly what they had been doing some time before.

Politics in Bangladesh is a strange classroom where one learns the same things again and again. Only the teachers alternate.

PAKISTAN

ACCOUNTABILITY FOR ALL

BY MID-DECEMBER 1997, Pakistani investigators must prove that the money in four Swiss bank accounts frozen in September by the Swiss government, was misappropriated by Benazir Bhutto from the government of Pakistan during her two prime ministerial tenures. Both tenures had ended prematurely, when her government was sent packing by two different presidents on charges of corruption and mismanagement of economy.

The investigators have a tough task before them, since none of the accounts or off-shore companies identified in this case are in Bhutto's name (they are held apparently by her husband Asif Zardari and mother Nusrat Bhutto). Also, there are discrepancies (for example, in dates) in the documents held by Prime Minister Mian Nawaz Sharif's recently-established Ehtesab (accountability) Cell, as evidence of illegal money making.

Unless they can manage to substantiate their claims within the three-month deadline given by the Swiss government, the accounts will be un-frozen, and in the process give Bhutto a "not guilty" clearance. The task of proving these illegalities is being carried out by the head of the Cell, Senator Saifur Rehman, under the direct supervision of Bhutto's arch rival, Nawaz Sharif. Rehman, besides being a wealthy businessman, is also a close associate of Sharif.

The damaging allegations have put Bhutto and Zardari on the defensive. An angry Bhutto, caught on the wrong foot as she returned to Pakistan after a visit to her children in Dubai, first denied the charges as "baseless and untrue". She later admitted that the accounts could be hers. "We have accounts all over the world. We are rich people. Those accounts may or may not be ours," was her weak defence when grilled by journalists in Karachi.

Nawaz Sharif and his party-men are jubilant at having managed to put Bhutto in the dock even if this turns out to be temporary. But many feel that their jubilation is misplaced in a country where corruption is rampant, and where accountability is selectively applied to those in the opposition. In such a situation, Bhutto's calls for a more equal process of accountability have sympathetic ears, even among those who do not support her politically.

Gunning for political opponents and proving their misdeeds would carry a lot more weight if accountability began at home for the government. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, himself a very wealthy man, along with many of his political colleagues, faced several charges of loan default and financial misdeeds before they were returned to power, and were also accused of laundering money through fake bank accounts. The cases were shelved after his government returned to power. The accountability commission, meanwhile, seems to be targeting only opposition politicians and the businessmen and bureaucrats close to them, even as the head of the Ehtesab Cell has himself been accused of financial misdeeds.

And what of the people who vote these bickering parties in and out of power? There is increasing disillusionment with politics, which is reflected in the diminishing percentage of registered voters exercising their right of franchise: only 30 percent in the last elections in February 1997, one of the lowest turnouts ever.

We have accounts all over the world. We are rich people. Those accounts may or may not be ours.

The core problem lies with the destruction of political institutions in the country, which allows wholesale corruption to go unchecked. Individuals in successive governments (Pakistan has had four in eight years), including the present one, must take the blame for this state of affairs. Accountability must be a continuous process carried out through independent organs of the state, and the law must be applicable across the board. Considering that his own government is not allowing this to happen, Nawaz Sharif's rejoicing over the fact that Pakistan has dropped from second to fifth in Transparency International's list of most corrupt nations may be a trifle premature.

While Benazir Bhutto will certainly not be the first Pakistani politician so tainted, the financial extent of the scandal is probably the largest in Pakistan's history. However, politics must continue, so while Bhutto's detractors will continue to rail against her, her supporters will continue to stand behind her.

NEPAL

KING AND COUNTRY

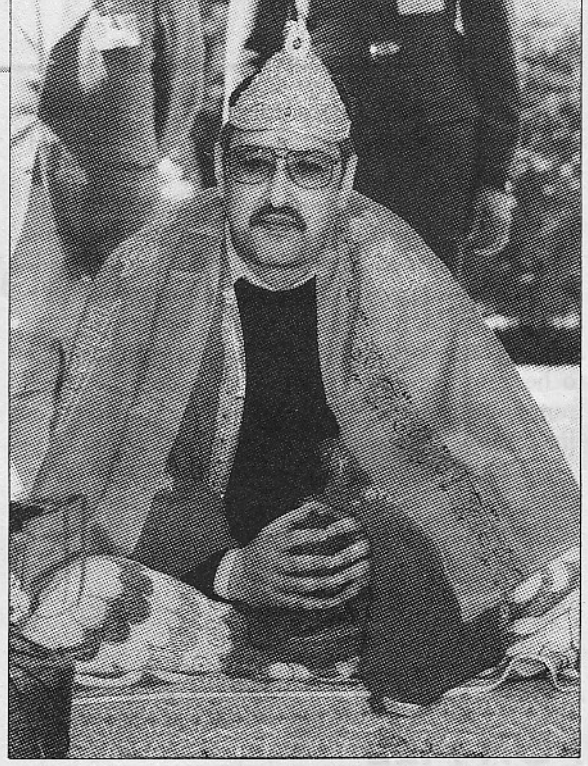
WHILE THE ALOOFNESS from the public behind dark glasses - the signature of King Mahendra - has long been abandoned by his son King Birendra, his advisers over at the Narayanhiti Royal Palace in Kathmandu have not been able to stitch new clothes for the monarchy in the seven years of democracy. Rather than tailoring a useful social and cultural role for the monarchy, which would make its position unassailable much like the royalty of Spain, Japan or Thailand, the king's advisers have been much too timid, and have lately been engaged in unnecessary brinkmanship.

This stands amply exposed in the way they had the Nepali monarch attend to Hindu conservatives in India in October. The king and his queen, Aishwarya, made a trip to Hardwar-on-Ganga to inaugurate a convention on Hinduism, attended among others by the radical leadership of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, the Rastriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the Bharatiya Janata Party. This was an incongruous political gesture from the king for he cannot have been unaware of the narrow-minded and reactionary Hinduism espoused by those present, which is so different from the syncretistic hill Hinduism that has evolved in Nepal.

It is important for King Birendra not to exaggerate his country's Hindu-ness, for Nepal is less 'Hindu' than is believed by many (the population itself is about 70 percent Hindu rather than 90 percent which is the general belief). However, the very demarcation between who is Hindu and who Buddhist is so blurred in these hills of the Central Himalaya that such categorisation may be impossible and even irrelevant. The obscure edges between the two main faiths should be allowed to remain fuzzy, and the monarchy should help in that.

Meanwhile, outspoken Hindus of India who take pride in Nepal's identity as "the only Hindu kingdom in the world" should know, especially in these days of politicised religion, that Nepal is a developing country with diverse population groups, one that is governed very much along secular lines, with constitutional guarantees of religious freedom. The decisive interpretation of the provision in the new constitution of 1990 which refers to the Nepali state's Hindu-ness is that Nepal is a "Hindu kingdom" not because the population of Nepal or the national polity is 'Hindu', but because the country has a king who is Hindu.

Nepal's monarchy commands unquestioning respect from almost the entire population, and is the ideal institution to promote progressive activities in the social, economic and cultural arenas. The monarchy as a whole or individuals within it could easily don roles as patrons and promoters in a variety of areas from education to public health, agricultural advancement to tourism and environment. They could bring their image and position to bear on day-to-day issues that will benefit Nepal's overwhelming poor.



King Birendra wears Ram-nam shawl *and 'crown' offered by Shankaracharya of Kanchi in Kathmandu in early 1997.*

CHANDRASHEKHAR KARKI

Unfortunately, even without the dark glasses, the monarchy continues to project an aloof persona. Past experience has shown how the Nepali public values greatly a natural smile, an impromptu gesture from King Birendra (as seen on Nepal Television), but they come too few and far between. This is because the king is not allowed to mingle. The 'handlers' of the monarchy have yet to understand the changed situation and develop a self-confidence in developing a non-political, cultural role for the king.

The king's brother Prince Gyanendra, otherwise sometimes controversial, is perhaps the only individual to have picked up a 'theme' for himself in national affairs. During the Panchayat years, he actively promoted wildlife conservation, but he too has been 'wasted' since Panchayat's demise, unable to raise a profile due to fear of political backlash of commoner politicians.

Keeping a very correct posture of non-involvement in politics, it should be possible for the Nepali royalty now to venture into the cultural arena. Such a new role would also provide an opportunity for the royalty to make up for the ruination brought upon the country by its active role as part the Panchayat system. It is the statis of the Panchayat years since the mid-1970s, after all, which explains the socio-economic rockbottom conditions that Nepalis are experiencing today.

King Birendra is secure enough in his kingdom that he is free to explore what non-political agenda he may promote as ceremonial head of state. Those who feel insecure are in the circle around the king, who have lost the reflected power they wielded during the Panchayat years. The interest of these individuals lies in the palace continuing to play a political game, for that is where they can play Machiavelli. It is up to the king and his family to define a new social and cultural role for themselves, one that renders them socially productive – rather than don religiosity in a neighbouring country.

Announcement !!!

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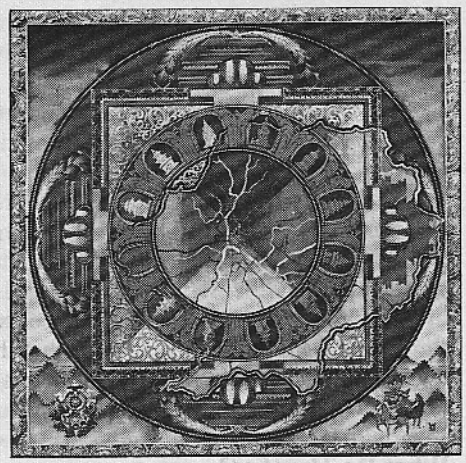

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Power to Change

DOCUMENTARIES JUST NEED A CHANCE

by Kanak Mani Dixit

There are people who make films that can make a difference in the lives of the Subcontinent's millions. They produce in a particular genre which the mass public hardly ever gets to see. Which is a pity, for unlike all other media, this kind of film has the ability to force change; it has the power to alert, to raise to anger, to energise to action. This kind of film goes under the unprepossessing title of 'documentary'.

While it is true that the documentary has always been treated as a poor cousin the world over, in South Asia it is hardly even allowed in through the door. Documentary-makers make up a minuscule minority among those who work with the moving image in these countries. India has the most documentarists, but this is perhaps only because it of its size. Nepal has barely begun to discover the documentary, while the committed non-fiction filmmakers in all of Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka can be counted on one's fingers. This absence of the documentary among what the people get to view is cause for anguish for those who understand the direct link between what people know and how they act.

The documentary uses celluloid film or, increasingly, videotape, to document a situation or a story. To that extent, filmmakers are journalists with information to share and opinions to express. They are quite different from the propagandist who makes films for government information and broadcasting departments, the journalist who provides straight reportage, the technician who makes films of touristic destinations, or the archivist who shoots development projects.

For a subcontinent mired in inequity and poverty, confronted with rapid and unnerving modernisation, steeped in superstition and afflicted with political ennui, it is the documentary that has the ability to make the audience sit up and take notice. The audio-visual media, though fleeting and ephemeral, has a unique power of persuasion compared to print and radio. The ability both to see and listen brings a viewer closest to what can be experienced through real-life experience, except that the packaging of a film means that the presentation is that much more concentrated and forceful.

What Do They See?

Every day, South Asians by the millions throng cinema halls. By the millions, they rent out videos and play them to friends and family. And by the tens of millions they sit rapt before the television screen, watching what BTV, Doordarshan, NTV, PTV and Rupavahini have to offer on the government side, and STAR, V, Zee, CNN, and so on, via the satellite beam.

The bulk of what the uncomplaining South Asian population watches on celluloid, videotape and television is pure, unstrained entertainment. There is nothing wrong with being entertained, of course, but there is very little else available, aside from the day's politicised or propagandist news bulletins on TV. The only other fare - educational and development programming on government television - is lacklustre and a waste of effort, especially in an age when choices are no more than a flick of the remote away.

To be sure, this is true not only for South Asia. The difference is that there is not enough variety in the spectrum available to a Subcontinental audience. Nowhere in the column upon column of cinema and television schedules available daily does the eye come upon the word 'documentary'. This absence represents an incredible waste of opportunity to provide the cinema, video and television audience with something that is not only interesting but has social content also.

The experience of showing documentaries to both urban and rural audiences has revealed without doubt that there would be an audience in sufficient numbers, if only they were allowed to be screened. The public may be ready, but the proprietors, producers and programmers are not. Certainly, the song-and-dance fare is much more lucrative, but there is also a timidity among those who command the air-

waves and celluloid stock to show films that have a point of view, which the documentary *will* have. Commercial and political interests thus converge in keeping documentaries at bay, even though the public may be visually literate and ready.

This is all the more saddening since the audio-visual media can be so easily ingested; it is much easier to get even an uninitiated audience to watch a documentary than to get it to read a serious book or listen to a radio commentary. The situation must change, of course. South Asia is squandering a potent agent. It is foolish not to use documentaries to assist in the growth of knowledge, understanding and social activism in the Subcontinent.

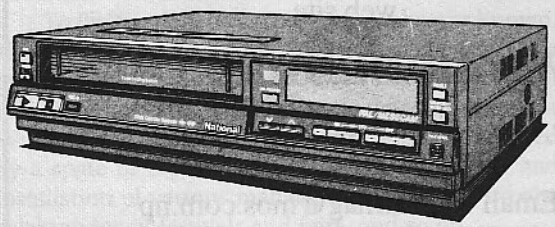
What Should They See?

There are three channels through which documentaries can be shown and a market developed.

The Cinema. Screening documentaries to a cinema audience is probably the most powerful use of a captive audience, as the makers of commercials have known for long. Many countries still have the laws in their books requiring cinemas to show documentaries before the main show. A revival of these rules will certainly be resisted by hall owners, but their opposition should be overruled in the larger interest of society. It would not do, however, if documentaries of the insipid government 'information' kind were forced down the throat of an exasperated public. A proper selection mechanism, outside of government and also free of the commercial and film industry pressures, would work.

The Video Cassette. There are hundreds of thousands of video cassette decks attached to television screens all over South Asia, from the remotest monastery in the Tibetan plateau to the islands of Andaman and Nicobar in the Bay of Bengal. These machines are there almost exclusively to run feature films, which tend to be long-winded Hindi potboilers and bad copies of action thrillers from the West. With the screening hardware already in place, it is a small step for some enterprising entrepreneurs to try and cater to that market with interesting documentary offerings.

The success of "video magazines" in India in the 1980s before satellite television nudged them aside indicates that a good proportion of consumers would be willing to see something in addition to filmi entertainment over its video decks. The knee-jerk reaction, "But nobody will watch documentaries," is based on experience with dull educational and developmental productions passed off as 'documentaries'. Biting social commentary, high-quality footage of real-life situations, and the 'stories' that they do present, can make documentaries as riveting - and sometimes more so - than Madhuri Dixit whirling around a tree.

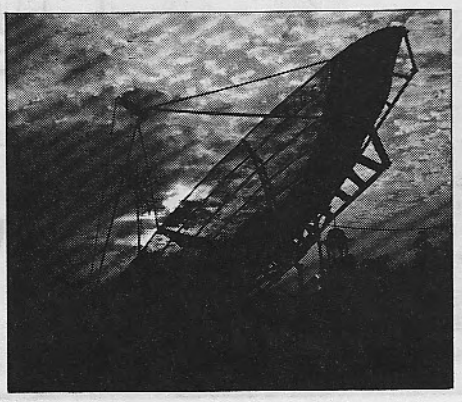


Television. TV programmers are reluctant to carry documentaries because of the political terrain these films often traverse. Even in India with its larger market and more conducive freedom-of-speech conditions, the going has been tough for documentary-makers, with the courts often having to actually direct the exhibition of films that have even won national awards. Airing potentially controversial documentaries is even more difficult in the other countries.

This is where the role of groups to lobby both national and transnational television for quality television becomes crucial. In pressing their demands, these groups must speak up not only for more sensitive news coverage, in-depth talk shows and discussions, and good programming for children, they must also strenuously ask for air time for documentaries.

It is possible for the national intelligentsia to at least impress their views upon programmers at the national stations. But satellite channels are out of reach of even the most elite among viewers on the ground. Furthermore, while the reach of satellite television is regionwide, the consumers are scattered and separated by borders, economic extremes and linguistic divides. That is why activists lobbying television stations in each of their countries must also band together across borders for a subcontinent-wide effort to bring public service programming into the satellite channels. In the absence of this, commercial priorities and the interests of the affluent classes among the largest linguistic group (read "Hindi") will define what all South Asians watch.

Uncertainty about the viewership potential is what seems to keep the commercial satellite channels from showing documentaries. But the point to be made is clear: satellite channels that are making free use of the airwaves for private gain must not be allowed to get away with 24-hour commercial pro-



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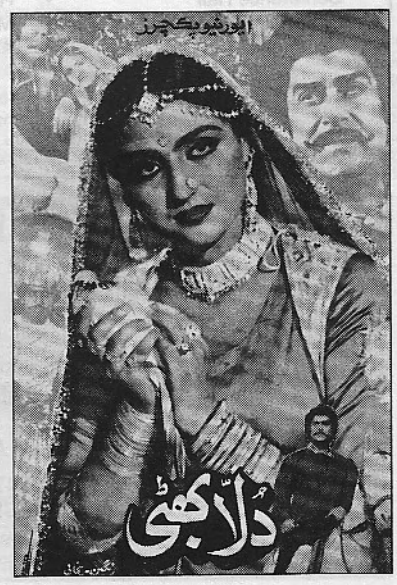
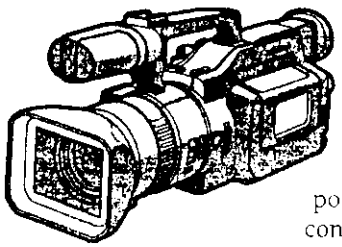


Where there is the will: The documentary can be shown on the video deck, on television, and in the hall just before Dulla Bhatti *comes on strong.*



The "Digicam" can do wonders for the documentary.

gramming. How to effectively pressurise them is, of course, the challenge.

The alternative to commercial television is public television - either autonomous stations set up by governments or independent stations which survive on philanthropy and public support. If this is overly ambitious for the existing conditions in South Asia, then at the very least pressure has to be put for public service programming within existing broadcast schedules of the satellite and terrestrial stations. The lobbying must start and move quickly to high gear, for the channel barons and uptight bureaucrats are not about to voluntarily provide air time for the public good.

Brave New World

While the audience for the documentary is bound to grow over the years from today's tiny sliver of city-based film club membership, the quality, number and variety of documentary films all must increase if their audience is to grow. There is great opportunity at hand for this to happen now because the cost of producing documentaries continues to plummet. Today it is possible to make broadcast-quality films all by oneself using digital cameras. Editing can now be done on the hard disk of a computer, and prices everywhere are in free fall. This is the documentary filmmaker's heaven, if there ever was one.

With lower costs, enhanced production quality, and a large potential audience, the world (or South Asia, at the very least) is at the documentary-maker's feet. As time goes on, s/he must forsake the English language which for the moment is the documentarist's near-universal language in the Subcontinent. S/he must reach out in the vernacular to the vast audience that is there and waiting. The success achieved by the press in the various regional languages all over is a precursor of things to come in the other media, including videography, and the serious filmmaker will have to take note sooner than later.

Those who make documentaries are people with social conscience. More often than not they are highly educated individuals with great ego, granted, but also with a sensibility and sense of caring for ordinary people and the natural environment. Like the good investigative journalist in the print media, the documentary director is a person who feels the urge to travel the lonely, difficult and time-consuming road of research, filming, editing and exhibition. The moment of glory, if it comes at all, arrives all too briefly and before audiences that are as yet too small.

And yet, what these makers of documentaries have to say - unlike the blockbuster filmmakers in Bombay or Lahore or Madras who work with budgets thousand times larger - brings together the full power of the audio-visual medium to bear on a subject. Documentaries represent the climax species, the highest form, of audio-visual media. A societal conspiracy today keeps this media from fulfilling its promise. But we can confirm that once the documentary is allowed to be seen in the Subcontinent, the public will catch on. It will begin to demand. And this will change the face of the region, for that is what documentaries have the power to do.

CLASSIFIEDS

Historical Perspective

Films in Search of a Movement

A study of the history of the documentary film in South Asia, including the advances made after independence in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

by Mitu Varma

FILMS DIVISION OF INDIA

Harishchandra Sakharam Bhatwadekar (Sawe Dada) and his camera (below).

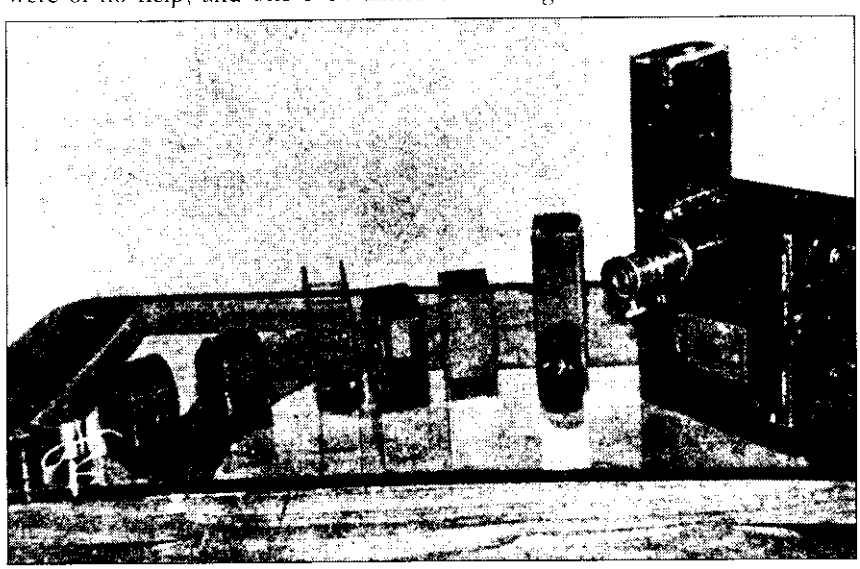
It all began a hundred years ago on a rainy monsoon evening, or to be more precise, at 7 pm, 7 July 1896, when a representative of the Lumiere brothers set up a makeshift theatre at Bombay's Watson's Hotel and exhibited his repertoire of films on everyday subjects: *The Arrival of the Train*, *A Sea Bath*, *Demolition*, *Leaving the Factory* and *Ladies and Soldiers on Wheels*. Also shown was a film on *The Entry of Cinematographe*. This was among the first screenings outside the historic show at the Salon Indien in Paris in December 1895, which marked the beginning of cinema and the motion picture industry.

Seated among the enthralled audience which had paid one rupee apiece for entry was Harishchandra Sakharam Bhatwadekar. He became so enamoured of the new art that within a couple of months he had made arrangements to screen shows of his own. He imported a motion picture camera from London for 21 guineas and made two films: one on a wrestling match and another on the training of monkeys by wandering minstrels. The films were sent to London for processing and screened in an open air theatre in Bombay in 1898. These, the first "topicals" or factual films to be shot in India, were the precursors to the documentaries that were to come later.

To Bhatwadekar, or Sawe Dada as he was known, also goes the credit for making the first newsreel of a public event. He filmed a reception held in honour of R.P. Paranjpe, the first Indian to become a Senior Wrangler at Cambridge University. This was followed by a spate of topicals depicting the coronation and installation of various maharajas, the Delhi Durbars, celebrations of festivals and fairs, and so on.

Then, another great moment arrived in 1910 when Dhundiraj Govind Phalke, or Dadasaheb, walked into the America India Picture Palace at Sandhurst Road in Bombay to see *The Life of Christ*. The film so impressed him that he decided to make one on the life of the divinity Krishna.

Dadasaheb was eminently qualified for the job, having had vast experience in drawing, painting, photography, printing, engraving, lithography, moulding, architecture, music and stage acting. But he had no money, having just quarrelled with his partner at the Laxmi Art Printing Works. He was all of 40 years and with no source of finance. His friends were of no help, and one even talked of sending



FILMS DIVISION OF INDIA

FILMS DIVISION OF INDIA

Dhundiraj Govind Phalke (Dadasaheb)

Dadasaheb to a lunatic asylum. Finally one friend, Yeshwantrao Nadkarni, agreed to provide the finance if Dadasaheb could prove himself up to the task.

A topical might not be proof enough, thought Phalke, so he decided to make a film centred on a theme. He planted a pea in an earthen pot and waited for it to grow. He recorded its growth over a month and a half with a camera he had imported from England for five pounds. It was a 200-foot film that ran barely for two minutes and was titled simply *The Growth of a Pea Plant*. When it was shown in an electrical shop, the use of the time-lapse technique dumbfounded the audience and prompted Nadkarni to sign over the money immediately. Thus, out of a pea pod, was born the Indian documentary.

Dadasaheb, of course, went on to lay the foundations of the Indian film industry and made a number of features. But this did not mean he abandoned shorts and documentaries. In 1913, he produced three shorts, among which was *A Game of Matchsticks*, the first animation film to be made in the country. He also made a documentary, *How Films Are Made*, to demystify the genre.

FAB India

Newsreels came next in the development of the documentary. Among the first of these was a short film made by Bombay's Imperial Film Company on the devastating earthquake that hit Quetta in the mid-1930s. The film had a synchronised running commentary and was used to appeal for relief funds. In 1938, Wadia Movietone and Chicago Radio got together to cover the Haripura Congress session in which Subhash Chandra Bose was elected President. The two-reel film was made for a regular newsreel service that started off with great promise but folded up within a couple of months because of lack of support.

The two persons who made notable contributions to the development of the documentary genre during this period were P.V. Pathy and K.S. Hirlekar. Both had studied cinematography abroad, Pathy in France and Hirlekar in Germany. The latter was behind the first attempt to organise the newsreel service and also tried to get government support for making educational shorts and newsreels.

The real fillip to documentary, however, came with World War II and the British colonial government's realisation of the propaganda value of film. As the war neared India, the British became desperate for men and material. It was then they set up a Film Advisory Board (FAB), to carry out propaganda.

J.B.H. Wadia of Wadia Movietone, well known for its stunt movies and features, was appointed Chairperson of FAB. Wadia was as firm a patriot as any, but he also had strong anti-Fascist views. At his recommendation Alexander Shaw, a documentary-maker from England, took over as Chief Producer. Between the two of them, Wadia and Shaw managed to produce a string of good documentaries that were not at all connected with the war effort. Shaw later wrote that he got wide support from Indian politicians, journalists, intellectuals and women's organisations who saw the vast potential the medium offered for the country.

Some time later, in a reorganisation exercise the government wound up FAB and set up two units, Information Films of India (IFI) and Indian News Parade (INP), the latter producing newsreels. As part of its propaganda exercise, the government also invoked the Defence of India Rules requiring exhibitors to include 2000 feet of government-approved films at every show.

An important name during this period was that of Erza Mir, Producer-in-Charge at the IFI. His *Whispering Legions* and *Voice of Satan* were well-acclaimed films as was his series, *Our Heritage*, a visual compendium of India's cultural wealth. With the coming to power of Nehru's Interim Government in 1946, IFI was wound up. And so, when the country became independent in 1947, there was no official filmmaker to record the event.

Compulsory Screening. India's independence provided a subject for quite a few documentaries. P.V. Pathy persuaded Ambalal J. Patel, a film businessman, to organise two cameras and some sound equipment to record the handing over ceremonies at independence. During the week following 15 August 1947, three documentaries were released by independents in some theatres of Delhi, Bombay, Madras and Calcutta. The films were given to cinema proprietors free of cost and were screened at matinee rates. A.K. Chettiar of Madras collected footage from around the world and made *Mahatma Gandhi*, which Pathy edited. Another film, *15th August 1947*, was made jointly by Bombay Talkies and Film Classics of Madras by compiling earlier footage.

Then there was *India's Struggle for National Shipping* sponsored by Somati Morarji of the Scindia Steamship Navigation Company and directed by the talented Paul Zils. Zils, a refugee from Hitler's Germany who had spent the war in a detention camp, emerged as one of India's leading documentary filmmakers after independence. Not only did he make noteworthy films like the three-reel *Ripening Seed*, on unwed motherhood, *Kurvandi Road*, the first Indian-made short to be televised in the US, and the UN-sponsored *Mother, Child and Community*, but he was also responsible for organising the documentary movement in the country.

The government of free India had not forgotten

how the British had made use of the power of films during the war. It also saw the value of films in informing and educating the vast numbers of mostly illiterate citizens. In 1948, it set up the Films Division (FD) under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting as the official organ of the Government of India for the production and distribution of information films and newsreels. A lot of personnel from the IFI and the INP were absorbed into the FD.

The Films Division also benefitted from the British rules of compulsory screening, since the newly drafted Cinema Licensing Rules were modelled on the Defence of India Rules used during the war years to exhibit propaganda films. Hence, it became mandatory for every cinema hall to show films made by the Films Division at each and every show and also, as earlier, to pay for it.

During the hiatus before the FD was established, independent filmmakers used to cajole exhibitors into showing their shorts before the intermission in the cinema halls on a consideration that was paid either by the producers or sponsors of the shorts. With the formation of the FD, independent makers felt the need to consolidate their position. Paul Zils was the key motivator in forming a Short Film Guild that sought fruitful collaboration between the FD and independent makers. Zils wrote extensively about the making of documentary films in India, organised documentary film festivals in Bombay and Delhi, and set up the Indian Documentary Producers Association (IDPA).

Zils also provided training to a number of associates and colleagues who went on to become noted filmmakers themselves. Among these was Fali Billimoria, originally a student of medicine, who was brought into the industry by Zils and later became his professional collaborator and partner. His film, *A Village in Travancore,* won a number of national and international awards, as did his *The House That Ananda Built*, which was the first Indian documentary to be nominated for the Oscars.

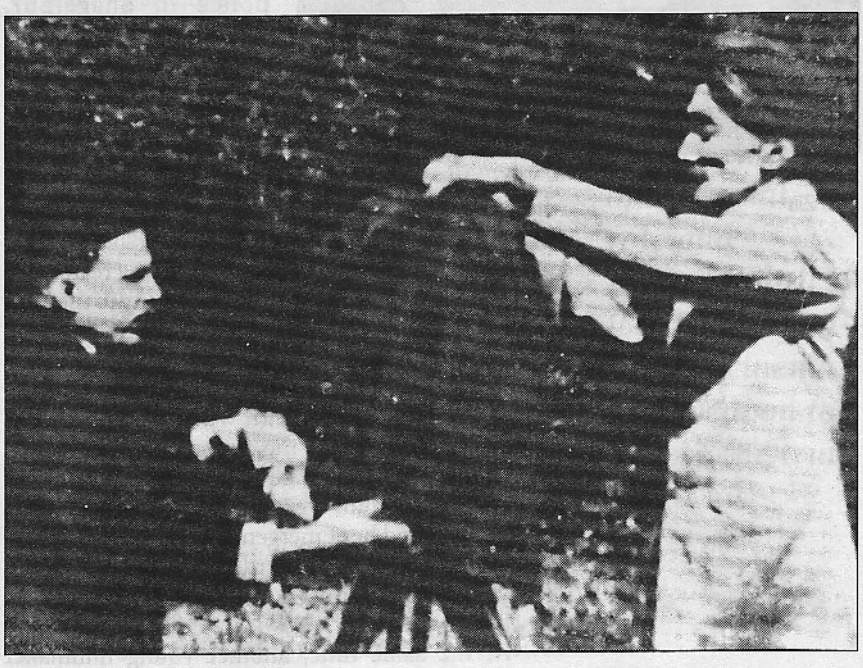
Another brilliant filmmaker of this time was Hari S. Dasgupta, who spent three years learning films in the US and apprenticed under Jean Renoir. After returning to India in 1948, he made a lyrical film on the Chilka Lake in Orissa. He also shot two versions of Konarak in black-and-white, one of them with Claude Renoir on the camera and scored by sarod maestro Ali Akbar Khan. Dasgupta's *Panchthupi: A Village in Bengal* is considered by many critics as a forerunner to Satyajit Ray's *Pather Panchali*. (Incidentally, Ray was a one-time scriptwriter for Dasgupta.)

Other noteworthy films by Dasgupta included a touching documentary on rural artisans *The Weavers of Maindurgi*. Tata Industries commissioned him to make *The Story of Steel*, shot by Renoir and interspersed with haunting melodies by Ravi Shankar on sitar. Dasgupta also made a moving biographical sketch of the singer Bade Ghulam Ali Khan Sahib.

Despite some very fine productions, private producers got short shrift from the government. It accepted only a very few independent productions for distribution, and so they sought patronage of corporate houses, state governments and some statutory bodies like the Tea and Coffee Board and the Khadi and Village Industries Commission.

Social Conscience. The FD, which had fallen back after an initial creative period, found new bearings in the 1960s when Jean Bhownagary was asked to take over as Chief Adviser at the specific request of Indira Gandhi, who was Minister for Information and Broadcasting. He brought fresh energy into the organisation, lending support to new and experimental efforts and even allowing anti-establishment films to be made.

A number of competent filmmakers like K.S. Chari, S.N.S. Shastry, Pramod Pati, K.K. Kapil and T.A. Abraham came to fore at this time. Their films included the hard-hitting *Report on Drought*, Pati's experimental *Explorer*, *Trip* and *Actual Experiences I & II*, and a critical look at family planning programmes. Films on art and culture, biographies and personality films, children's films, educational and motivational films were churned out by the FD, in addition to the usual newsreels.



FILMS DIVISION OF INDIA

Dadasaheb (left) in action.

By far the most significant filmmaker nurtured by the FD at this time was S. Sukhdev, a former assistant to Paul Zils. Sukhdev was determined to marry art to activism. He made his debut film *The Saint and the Peasant* in 1958 on the Bhoodan and Sarvodaya movements launched by Acharya Vinoba Bhave. Armed with a portable arriflex camera and a Nagra tape-recorder, Sukhdev ventured out into the field, making vigorous political statements with documentaries like *After the Eclipse* and *Miles to Go*. As he once wrote, "For an artist who is aware of his social role and responsibilities, it is his duty to use the cinema as a weapon to expose the truth about his society."

Sukhdev experimented with form, as in *India 67*, where unconnected shots were put together based on the principle known as 'wheel montage'. But he is best remembered for initiating the investigative, politi-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Paul Zils

cally-aware documentary. Beyond the fact that he died at the young age of 43, what was tragic was that towards the end Sukhdev was churning out government-sponsored tracts for the FD (see article on pg. 25).

Sukhdev's protege, Tapan Bose, however, picked up the gauntlet and along with his associate Suhasini Mulay directed *An Indian Story*. Made with very little money, the film took a searing look at the blinding of prisoners by the police in Bhagalpur, Bihar. The film was banned and the makers had to save it through a court order. Bose and Mulay's next film, *Bhopal: A Genocide*, focussed on the Bhopal gas tragedy, presenting a tale of technological development gone awry.

But it was Anand Patwardhan who created the environment which granted respectability to the kind of films made by Bose and Mulay and who moulded this genre into a movement. Patwardhan, a young political activist who had studied cinema in Canada, made his debut in 1974 with *Waves of Revolution*. It was a film that captured the discontent of the Indian people of the time and spoke for Jayaprakash Narayan's movement. The film went underground when Mrs Gandhi declared her Emergency in 1975. *Prisoners of Conscience*, made by Patwardhan during the Emergency, had to be smuggled in bits and pieces for processing overseas.

At the same time, another young filmmaker Utpalendu Chakravorty was pawning his wife's jewellery to make *Mukti Chai*. Shot mostly with a hand-held camera, the documentary described how civil liberties had been compromised in the country right from the days of the Rowlett Act under the British to the proclamation of the Emergency. In 1974, Gautam Ghose made *Hungry Autumn*, probing the causes and repercussions of the famine-like situation prevalent in West Bengal.

Patwardhan, meanwhile, went on to make *A Time to Rise* and *Bombay, My City*. The latter was judged the best documentary film of the year by the government, described as "a powerful and lucid essay on the politics of space and structures that have dictated the blueprints of our country's irrational development". In its very next act, the government banned the film, and Patwardhan went to court (see interview on pg 28). The court directed the government to telecast it, which it did over Doordarshan at midnight without giving notice. Much wiser, Patwardhan got his next two films, both dealing with communalism, telecast over Doordarshan on prime time through court orders.

In Memory of Friends was based in Punjab when militancy was ascendant. *Ram ke Naam* was about Ayodhya. In both, Patwardhan interviewed people living in the region of conflict, showing how they were totally non-communal in their outlook and how passions were whipped up by outside interests to suit their own purposes. *Father, Son and Holy War*, about the role of macho-hood in communalism, rounds off what Patwardhan calls his 'trilogy'.

Reaching out to Viewers. Censorship, problems of financing, limited distribution facilities and government control of the media are problems common to most independent filmmakers in India today. A minute of raw stock alone costs INR 700 to 800, and the cost of post-production facilities tends to be prohibitive. Sponsors are rare to come by, with satellite television and the industrial houses preferring not to be associated with uncomfortable, anti-establishment films. Meanwhile, documentaries continue to be shown to a limited circle of film societies. Although even this could make a difference as the cumulative numbers are not insignificant, the audience remains an elite one.

It is important to reach out to the larger audience, but most filmmakers do not have the resources or energy of Patwardhan to go to court every time to get their films shown. Meanwhile, explains filmmaker Pankaj Butalia, who has made *When Hamlet Came to Mizoram*, and the award-winning *Moksha* (on Hindu widows in Benaras), viewers are reluctant to see documentaries that do not have the pace associated with the commercial feature.

Besides, says Butalia, the urban middle class which has the money and clout to dictate trends is usually indifferent to the realistic fare of the documentary. It does not help either that most of these films veer towards a left-of-centre viewpoint. Explains Butalia, "If you are concerned with what is happening in society, it naturally pushes you to left of centre."

Whatever the difficulties they face, films that question, probe, and raise consciousness are here to stay. Among these are films on environmental and developmental issues. Ranjan Palit and Vasudha Joshi's *Voices from Baliapal* effectively tells the story of ethnic communities opposing government plans for a military base in their midst. There is Patwardhan and Simantini Dhuru's *A Narmada Diary*, on the movement against the Sardar Sarovar Project. Anwar Jamal's *Bhagirathi Ki Pukar* tells of the havoc that can be wreaked with the construction of the Tehri Dam.

Of course, over and beyond the activist film there are also documentaries of different genres being made, in ever-more variety. Some remarkable ones include Nandan Kudhyani's *Rasyatra* on Mallikarjun Mansur, the doyen of Indian classical music, a masterful evocation of the man and his art. Reena Mohan's *Kamla Bai* is a warm and respectful portrait of a remarkable old lady who was also India's first screen actress. The late Sudhanshu Mitra's *The Disappearing Poem* documents the slow but sure march towards

extinction of the Agharia tribals of Madhya Pradesh.

Women to the Fore. Yet another dimension has been added to the activist-documentary movement by the participation of women filmmakers. Starting with Meera Dewan's powerful *Gift of Love* (1982) on the premeditated murder of a dowry victim, women filmmakers have introduced an additional dimension and depth not only to films dealing with the condition of women, but to other burning issues of the day. Says critic Maithili Rao, women have always been custodians of India's rich oral traditions which has made them carriers of culture and honed their story-telling skills. "Modern technology has given them new tools to tell their stories, making the personal into the political in the very process of purposeful story telling," she says.

Deepa Dhanraj's films cover a wide range with a strong feminist point of view. *Molkarin* is on the unionisation of women workers in Pune; *Yeh Sirf Kahani Nahin Hai* (This Is Not Just a Story) is on domestic violence; *Sudesha* is the story of women activists of the Chipko movement; *Something Like a War* takes a look at the bias of family planning programmes against women; and *Kya Hua Is Shaher Ko* (What Happened to This City) probes the bloody communal riots in Hyderabad (Deccan).

Madhushree Dutta's *I Live In Behrampada* looks closely at the caste and class relationships in a particular Bombay neighbourhood which led to the communal carnage during the riots of 1992. Suma Josson's *Bombay Blood Yatra*, on the same riots, exposes the failure of the administration.

The list of spirited women who make documentaries can go on and on: Manjira Dutta's *The Sacrifice of Babulal Bhuiyan*, on the death of a colliery worker; Sumitra Bhave's *Bai and Chakori*, on marginalised women's fight to retain dignity; Sagari Chhabra's incisive *Now I Will Speak* on the plight of rape victims; and Nilita Vachani's *Eyes of Stone*, which probes into the psyche of a woman given to fits of demonic possession.

Feature Documentaries. It is the feature filmmakers who have crafted some of the finest documentaries in India. Much before Anand Patwardhan arrived in the scene, Shyam Benegal made his first documentary, *A Child of the Street* (1967). It is the story of a nine-year-old juvenile's vagrancy which ends in the safe haven of a rehabilitation centre. Benegal's *Indian Youth: An Exploration* and *Horoscope for a Child* again reflected his concern about India's young, the latter showing a fair degree of investigative flair.

Among other cinematographers, Kumar Shahani produced a notable film on spastic children, *A Certain Childhood*. His *Fire in the Belly* is a strong critique of the man-made Maharashtra famine of 1971. Mani Kaul made two intensely subjective films: *Dhrupad*, on the most ancient form of Hindustani classical and vocal music and *Siddheshwari* on the classical vocalist of the same name. He also made the lively *Nomad Puppeteers of Rajasthan* and the sombre *Arrival*, on the influx of migrant labour to Bombay. Vidhu Vinod Chopra, a big name in Bollywood today, made the moving *An Encounter with Faces* on abandoned and homeless children. The film won him many prizes as well as an Oscar nomination.

Satyajit Ray himself made many important contributions to the documentary genre. He preferred to make films on personalities which appealed to him, and they included Rabindra Nath Tagore, Bharat Natyam dancer Balasaraswati, painter Binod Bihari Mukherjee, and Ray's own father Sukumar Ray. Ray was not averse to using dramatisation, and in fact he sought to reinterpret Grierson's definition of the documentary as a "creative interpretation of reality". To him, reality was not confined to the tangible aspects of everyday existence.

In the eyes of Ray, the 'cinema verite' and the 'face to face' technique were both suspect as he believed no human being would behave normally when faced with a camera and microphone. Believing thus, he wrote, "It is the sensitive artist's subjective approach to reality that ultimately matters and that is true as much of documentaries as of fiction films."

What is remarkable is that the feature films made by these great cinematographers of India were all firmly rooted in reality. Some even had elements of the documentary in them. For their unwavering attention to real-life situations, the move from documentary filmmaking to producing acclaimed features seems to have been but a natural progression.

"For an artist who is aware of his social role and responsibilities, it is his duty to use the cinema as a weapon to expose the truth about his society."

Pakistani Movement of Two

When Pakistan became independent in 1947, it had very few facilities to make films as most of the industry and infrastructure had remained with India. The government set up the official Department of Films and Publication (DFP) in 1948 for canning archival footage about the creation of Pakistan and producing newsreels. The first films had to be sent abroad for processing.

Soon enough, however, the DFP was churning out its quota of propaganda films. As in India, Pakistan adopted the colonial government's regulations for compulsory screening of such films in theatres. These regulations are still in force. Although the DFP obviously does not encourage the critical, investigative documentary, it has made some good films. Of these, the most frequently mentioned is *Boat Bridges*, shot in Sind and interspersed with recitation of Ghulam Farid's poems in the resonant voice of Asad Amanat Ali.

Started in 1964, Pakistan Television (PTV) has played a key role in keeping the documentary alive in the country. The station experienced a creative period in the 1980s, producing a string of fine productions including: *A Ball Named Tango*, on the manufacture of footballs; Zahir Bhatti's *Silhouettes of Fortune*, on water buffaloes; *Thar-Land and the People*, on the Thar desert and its inhabitants; *Life in Stone*, on stone sculptures depicting the life of the Buddha; and *Threadline Pakistan*, a history of weaving in the country. PTV also spawned the talents of Shirin Pasha, who debuted with *Cholistan* in 1980, which was a touching film on the search for water by desert dwellers. Pasha is considered one of the most competent docu-

mentary makers in the country today.

The National Film Development Corporation (NAFDEC) is a government body with a brief to produce documentaries, but its contribution over two decades of existence has been negligible - no more than four films. NAFDEC's track records only goes to prove the old truism, that government bodies will always tread warily when it comes to backing documentary projects and they would rather tie their hands in embarrassment than support critical, consciousness-raising films.

Amidst all the government-sponsored filmmakers of Pakistan, one man stands out for addressing social concerns starkly and without compromise. Mushtaq Gazdar is an independent producer based in Karachi, where he runs his own production unit, Films D'Art. Gazdar has addressed feminist themes as in the award-winning *Noorie*, about the dilemmas facing a middle-class girl. His *Girl Child Not Wanted* explores women's secondary status in Pakistani society. Gazdar has also made a film on drug addiction (*The Killer*), another contrasting the lives of rich and poor children with the ironic recitation of a prayer as accompaniment (*Prayer*), and one on the influx of the Sind peasantry into Karachi (*The Concert on the Footpath*).

"It is the sensitive artist's subjective approach to reality that ultimately matters and that is true as much of documentaries as of fiction films."

The films of Pasha and Gazdar have both faced censorship problems. Gazdar's films have never been exhibited in the cinema, and he has had to rely on festivals abroad for an audience. There is little or no sponsorship from the private sector. Besides Pasha and Gazdar, there doesn't seem to be a documentary "movement" as such in the country.

Italians in Lanka

Like its subcontinental neighbours, upon independence Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) too decided to set up a Government Film Unit (GFU), in 1948. The difference was that it invited two Italians - Guilo Petroni and Frederico Serra - to help in the task. Initially, the GFU owned only two 35mm cameras salvaged from the surplus stock of the British army. The GFU films, which had to be processed in Madras, were distributed in theatres and schools throughout the country.

Even with the limitations of equipment, Petroni and Serra made some very fine films. Both filmmakers were influenced by the neo-realism movement in Italian cinema and they brought elements of it into their Sri Lankan films. Significant among these were Petroni's *Hill Capital*, on the hill city of Kandy, and *New Horizons*, on the government's land reclamation and settlement schemes. In the latter, the stark depiction of the lives of poverty-stricken villagers in the arid zone earned Petroni many plaudits. Before long, he was deported by the government on suspicion of being a communist.

Serra started out as a sound engineer, but proved his abilities as a filmmaker with *Royal Mail*, a delightful treatise on the country's postal service. Ralph Keene was another significant filmmaker in the GFU, whose *Heritage of Lanka* and *Nelugama*, depicting the life of a fishing community, are regarded as highlights of Sri Lankan filmmaking.

One of Sri Lanka's best-known documentarists was Lester James Peries, whose *Conquest of the Dry Zone*, on the fight against malaria, won a special mention at the Venice Film Festival. George Wickramasinghe, too, won a string of awards for his works, including *Kandy Perahera* on the colourful annual festival. Irwin Dassanayake made *The Living Wild* on the abundant wildlife in the island, which won an honourable mention at the Vancouver Film Festival back in 1959. Pragnasoma Hetiaracchchi's *Rhythms of the People*, a lyrical treatment of folk arts of southern Sri Lanka, also won a certificate of merit at Vancouver film festival. Hetiaracchchi is also acclaimed for his film *Makers, Motifs and Materials*, on Sri Lanka's traditional crafts.

In later years, the GFU went into decline as each government of the day insisted on using it as an instrument for political propaganda. On the other hand, neither have independent filmmakers been able to make significant contributions, although there are a few notable exceptions. Among these are Sangadasa's *Towards a Desert*, on increasing deforestation, and Dharmasiri Bandaranaike's *A Dream of the Desert*.

The civil war which has so embedded itself in the psyche of the nation has produced few searching documentaries. And though social concerns are visible in the documentaries that are made, it can be said, like in most parts of South Asia, in Sri Lanka, too, there appears to be as yet little sign of a "movement" for the making and appreciation of documentary films.

Workshop in Dhaka

The 1971 liberation has been a recurring leitmotif in Bangladeshi films. Before the country emerged independent in 1971, Zahir Raihan made *Jibsin Thekay Naya* (Glimpses of Life) depicting the rise of nationalism in the then East Pakistan. During the liberation war, Raihan made two other documentaries, *Stop Genocide*, a strong statement against the Pakistani army's mass killings, and *A State Is Born*, recording the country's bloody birth.

These, along with Babulal Chowdhry's *Innocent Millions* and Alamgir Kabir's *Liberation Fighters*, are films which have touched many a Bangladeshi's heart. The latest film on this theme is the well-received *Muktir Gaan* (Song of Freedom), made in 1995, superbly put together from archival footage by Catherine and Tareque Masud. *Muktir Gaan* has the distinction of being probably the most-watched documentary film in South Asian history, running to full houses in commercial cinema halls and to overflowing crowds in makeshift rural screenings *(see cover image of this issue of Himal)*.

After independence in 1971, Bangladesh too set up its own Department of Film and Publication (DFP), which, along with Bangladesh Television (BTV), went on as expected to produce propaganda shorts. It was only in 1984 that independent filmmakers moved in to make meaningful documentaries.

It began with Morshedul Islam's *Agami* (Towards) and Tanvir Mokammel's *Hooliya* (Wanted).

The audience was provided by the politically and socially aware middle classes looking for something more than the escapist fare of commercial cinema. The connoisseur public's growing interest in this variety of alternative cinema has been nudging this trend into a nascent movement.

Documentaries received a significant fillip through several film workshops which were organised in Dhaka over the course of the 1980s. One such, [illegible]ted by the German documentarist Christof Huebner, led to the production of two important films in 1986. These were *Dhaka Tokai*, depicting the travails of child labourers, and *Dhaka Rickshaw*, on the role of pedal-power in the life of the metropolis.

In 1991, another workshop produced the landmark *Starring Rosy*, which portrayed the life and struggle of a junior artiste in Bangladesh's commercial cinema. Huebner and the Goethe Institute in Dhaka helped organise yet another exercise that ended with the screening of *One Day in Krishannagar* in 1993, on a fisherfolk's village of that name.

A defining moment came in 1990, when young, committed filmmakers interested in producing quality films at low cost banded together to form the Protishabda Alternative Communication Centre (PACC). The films produced by PACC have tended to focus on investigative political coverage on the one hand, and feminist themes on the other. Child labour, too, has been of special concern to Bangladeshi documentarists. Shahanshah Alam Tutul's *Ananya Pathey* (The Path Not Taken) is considered an important contribution.

PACC's maiden production *Michiler Mukh* (Face in the Millions) is a stirring report on the national political crisis of 1990 and the movement towards democracy. The film was scripted and directed by Zakir Hossain Raju, also the Founding President of PACC. Raju's second film *Durer Jatra* (Miles to Go) takes a close look at the 1991 election and draws the conclusion that a free election does not necessarily mean power to the people. With *Ekjon Bulur Aakhyan* (Tale of a Woman), Raju recounts a woman's release from a failed marriage. His next film, *Beloved Wife*, describes atrocities committed against women.

The difficulties in Bangladesh are the same as elsewhere. When the PACC found the 35mm and 16mm film out of reach, it resorted to using the video camcorder. But they hardly have access to sophisticated equipment and technology available in the country, confined as it is basically to the DFP, BTV and 10 or so NGOs. Says critic Ziaul Haq Swapan, "The handful of enthusiasts engaged here in the 'creative treatment of reality' are fighting in two ways - towards democratising politics as well as the art form they are engaged in."

My Tryst with Documentary

by Tapan Bose

MY FILMMAKING CAREER began almost three decades ago when I got an offer from S. Sukhdev, one of India's leading documentary filmmakers, to assist him in the production of a film on the freedom struggle of Bangladesh. It was August 1971. The armies of General Yahya Khan were already rampaging through the cities and villages of what was then East Pakistan, killing and terrorising the civilian masses. Nearly eight million panic-stricken Bengalis had fled to the Indian states of West Bengal and Tripura. I left my job as a sub-editor at the United News of India and teamed up with Sukhdev. I have never looked back.

Making the film on Bangladesh's freedom struggle was a unique experience. Sukhdev, an ethnic Punjabi Jat from India's Punjab, was appalled by the mindless violence let loose on the Bengalis by the predominantly Punjabi army of West Pakistan. He blamed it on the macho culture and tradition of valorisation of violence in Punjabi folklore.

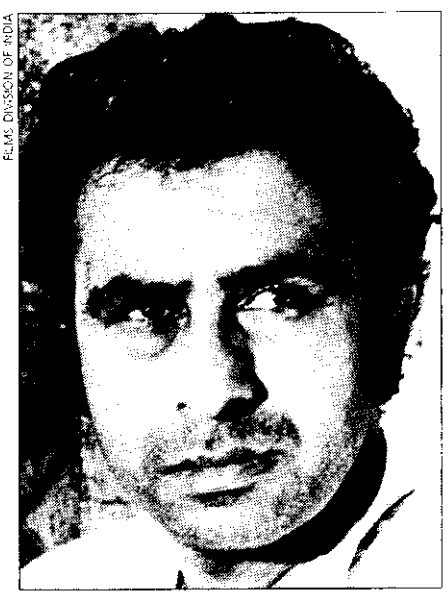
Sukhdev's original idea was to make a film exposing the meaninglessness of violence. He was producing the film with his own money. Back then, no Indian documentary filmmaker made a film with his or her own money. Almost everyone worked for the Films Division of the Government of India or the publicity departments of the state governments.

Government Monopoly

The Films Division had the monopoly over distribution of documentary films in cinema halls all over the country. Sukhdev's film was not sponsored by the Films Division and there was no guarantee that they would buy it after it was made. The Films Division in fact already had camera teams at the East Pakistan border and newsreels were being shown in the country and Indian embassies abroad. The television market was non-existent in the country, and we had no experience of the overseas market.

We were working with limited raw stock and 35mm equipment rented from a Bombay firm. Our work was hampered by the lack of money as well as by the heavy equipment that we were using for shooting. Whenever we ran out of film, Sukhdev used to rush to Bombay to appeal to the owners of Ramnord Laboratory for an additional loan of raw stock. He negotiated desperately for credit with equipment hire firms and borrowed money from loan sharks at the exorbitant rate of three percent per month to cover the cost of shooting.

Calcutta was then overcrowded with foreign TV crews with their ultra-light 16mm gear and deep pockets to hire vehicles and charter aircraft. Their "exposed" was flown to various destinations in Europe and the US daily. TV networks processed and printed the exposed films the same day and the "visuals" were presented to the "first world" public the very next day. Even India's Doodarshan was buying footage from these networks. Evidently, there was a market for news footage of the war in East Pakistan.



FILMS DIVISION OF INDIA

S. Sukhdev

Sukhdev tried to pre-sell the film to the External Publicity Division of the government. They were interested in a film that focused on the problems being faced by India because of the massive influx of refugees. Desperation drove Sukhdev to accept the offer. The External Publicity Division gave us some raw film and 50 thousand rupees. We agreed to show them a rough-cut by the end of October. The film was to precede Indira Gandhi's visit to Europe to mobilise international opinion in favour of a possible military intervention. History was being made before us.

Labour of Love

We were convinced that the courage and determination of the Bengalis would ultimately triumph over the brute force of West Pakistan. In the eyes of the destitute Bengali refugees in the makeshift "Boira camp" on Khulna border, we saw the determination to make the ultimate sacrifice. The immortal lines of Rabindranath Tagore's song, - *O'aamar sonar bangla, aami tomai bhalobasi* (Oh, my golden Bengal, I love you) - which rent the air of every refugee camp, sustained our faith as much it sustained the refugees themselves. We were innocent idealists, and we were committed to tell this story on film. Sukhdev was the filmmaker and I was his disciple.

It was clear that our film had to be different. We could not limit the film only to the refugee issue. Sukhdev said we must be honest about what we were seeing and what we felt. We decided that our film was going to tell the story of the Bengali people's love for freedom - the love for their language, poetry, song and culture. When we admitted to the External Publicity Division that we were not going to make a film on the refugee issue, they got angry and refused to give us any more funds.

Our film, *Nine Months to Freedom*, was completed two months after Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's return to Dhaka. By then, we had run out of money. Creditors were breathing down our neck. The External Publicity Division was threatening us with legal action. Everyone told us that we were too late. The birth of Bangladesh was already an old story. But we were not to be defeated. We believed that a film which told the story of a people's indomitable

urge for freedom and a people's love for their culture was dealing with a universal theme and would appeal to the viewers all over the world.

Nine Months to Freedom was an hour-long documentary. It was shot in 35mm colour but it did not qualify for release as a "short before the main feature" in the regular shows in film theatres. We had a film and no scope for showing it to wider audiences. With Sukhdev's encouragement, I took the unprecedented step of hiring a film theatre and released the film commercially. I borrowed money and rented the morning show slot of Delhi's Shiela cinema for two weeks. The gamble paid off, and we filled almost 80 percent of the theatre's seating capacity.

In Bombay, we released the film at Regal cinema where it ran for almost 12 weeks. However, our share of the gate money from the commercial release was too little to pull us out of the financial crisis we were in. But it was a tremendous triumph. The film was later invited to the Cannes, Moscow and Berlin film festivals. It was purchased by Japan's NHK TV in 1993, and the money helped us pay off some of the creditors.

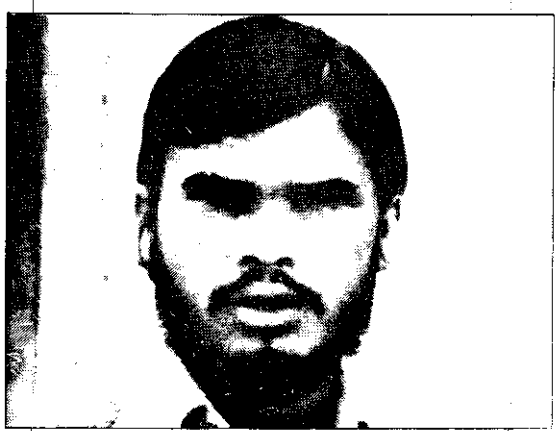
East Bengal to Khalistan

To survive, Sukhdev returned to making advertising films that sold soap and soup. It was a strange shift. With him, I too moved from uncompromising idealism to crass commercialism. These "quickies" as we called them were made and re-made until they satisfied the creative directors of the advertising agencies. The creative directors, in their turn, were controlled by the sales managers of the manufacturing companies. The product was god and the "pack-shot" the ultimate revelation of its glory. The only good part was that there was no shortage of money. But how long could you go on making one-minute commercials. We were desperate to make longer films. But the experience of making *Nine Months to Freedom* deterred us from venturing into another independent film.

Finally, an opportunity arrived. It was June 1974. Railwaymen had given a call for an all-India strike in support of their demand for higher wages. Indira Gandhi was Prime Minister, I.K. Gujral her Minister for Information and Broadcasting. He called Sukhdev and offered him money to make a series of documentaries which would explain why the railwaymen's strike was bad for the country.

These were to be 'independent' films made under the banner of United Film Arts, the company owned by Sukhdev. Sukhdev agreed to make the films as proposed. He felt convinced by Gujral's argument that the strike would destroy the fragile economy of the country and bring enormous hardship to the ordinary people. But I was not convinced. It was clear that there would be nothing 'independent' in this enterprise. The films would propagate the government's point of view and paint the workers as villains without giving them a chance to explain their position. Time had come for a parting of ways and I left Sukhdev, the person who had taught me everything I knew about filmmaking.

Seven years later, in 1981, in collaboration with Suhasini Mulay, I made *An Indian Story* on the blinding of undertrial prisoners in Bihar's Bhagalpur district. The film exposed the nexus between the landlords, the police, the politicians and the bureaucrats. It was banned by the Film Censor Board. I challenged the ban in Bombay High Court and got the order quashed.



Still from An Indian Story.

But unlike *Nine Months To Freedom*, this film was not released in any theatre in India for the simple reason that no theatre owner was ready to show it. It was seen by only a limited number of viewers, the film society circuit and other interested groups. However, *An Indian Story* was shown in many international film festivals, and won some awards and acclaim. And commercially it was a greater success, since it was purchased by several television stations overseas. But India's own Doordarshan never showed it, though the film was given the National Award for best documentary of the year 1982.

In 1985, Suhasini and I made a film on the Bhopal gas tragedy. The film *Beyond Genocide* was again banned by the Film Censor Board. Back to Bombay High Court we went and got the ban lifted. It seemed that this 80-minute long film might meet the same fate as that of *An Indian Story*, but we were determined that it should be shown in the country on the national network of Doodarshan. When our offer was turned down by Doordarshan, we challenged the refusal in Delhi High Court. After two years, the court finally ordered Doordarshan to show this film and it was finally shown on the fourth anniversary of the Bhopal disaster, at 10:30 in the night.

In 1987, we started making a film on the Khalistan movement. The film was completed in 1989 and we called it *From Behind the Barricade*. The Film Censor Board wanted us to remove all visuals of the damage wrecked on the Golden Temple by the Indian army action. The Board's contention was that the film would undermine the nation's integrity and arouse communal passions. We appealed to the High Court of Delhi. It has been almost ten years and the appeal is still pending.

Constricted Space

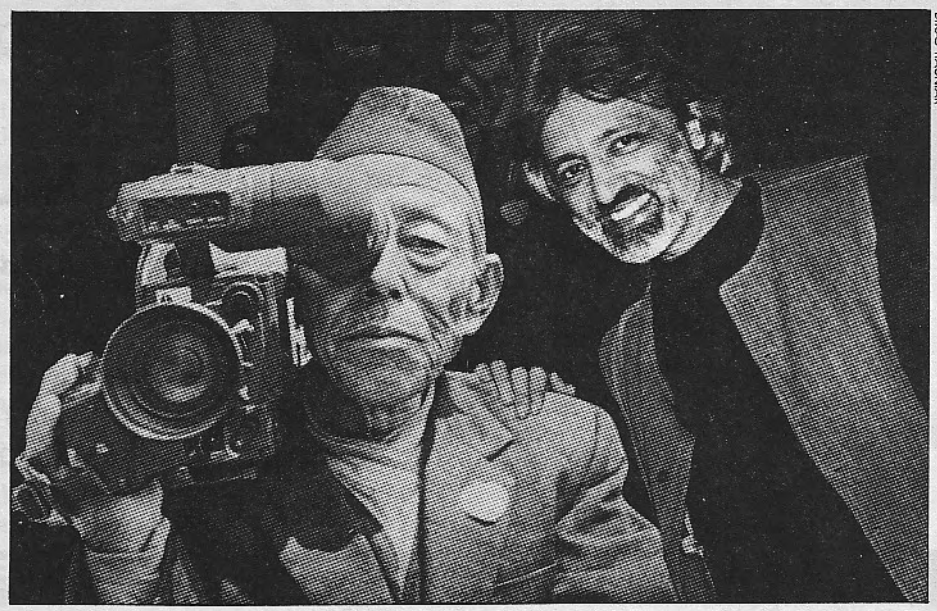
In my experience, the space has shrunk for independent films which deal with so-called controversial issues of personal freedom, group rights and focus on the injustice perpetrated in the name of the nation by the majority against the minority. Thanks to globalisation and the proliferation of satellite TV channels, more money has become available to filmmakers to make documentary films. But the question remains, in a world where the television channels are ultimately controlled by the advertising agencies, what space is available for films which really question the dominant value system.

In 1992, I walked away from a contract with Britain's Channel 4 because I disagreed with the Commissioning Editor's demand that my film on the *adivasis* (indigenous people) of Jharkhand should stick to only the religious and cultural aspects of their life. After *Jharkhand*, which I managed to complete in 1993, without the support of Channel 4, I have virtually stopped making films.

But there is still my film on Kashmir to be made.

T. Bose is presently Secretary General of the South Asia Forum for Human Rights, Kathmandu.

The Filmmaker Activist



BIKAS RAUNIAR

Anand Patwardhan with image of Ram Bahadur Tamang, icon of Film South Asia '97.

Anand Patwardhan is the best of the investigative, consciousness-raising, activist documentary filmmakers who are making a mark in India today. In fact, it is said, he helped fashion the very genre. The following interview with Patwardhan was taken by *Mitu Varma.*

▲ ***What do you perceive as the predominant trends and themes in South Asian documentary cinema today?***

Unfortunately I can't speak for South Asian cinema as a whole as we have so little South-South cultural exchange that filmmaking and filmviewing neighbours are largely unaware of what is happening across the border. We normally only meet and see each other's films on rare occasions when invited to a festival organised by first world countries like Japan or Germany or Australia. That is why documentary festivals like the Bombay, Dhaka and now Kathmandu are so welcome. I really hope that such festivals begin in Pakistan and Sri Lanka and other countries of the region as well since I have enjoyed and learnt a lot from the few exchanges that have taken place so far.

▲ ***Which country in the region according to you has the most exciting documentaries on offer and why?***

Speaking largely out of ignorance I would say India, for the only reason that it is the largest country; it is culturally and economically diverse and despite dictatorial episodes like the Emergency it has remained more or less democratic. The consequence is that while critical cinema has not been encouraged or nurtured it has at least been allowed to emerge.

▲ ***Have financial constraints, lack of distribution outlets and minimum profitability reduced documentary filmmaking to a marginal activity?***

Undoubtedly financial constraints exist but these cannot be directly correlated to the emergence or non-emergence of meaningful cinema. Terrible films have been made from huge budgets and great films from minuscule ones. The reduced "profitability" of documentary filmmaking has ensured that many of those who gravitate towards it do so with a motivation other than money. In my own case, after more than 20 years of making films in 16mm, I have begun of necessity to make films in an amateur Hi-8 video format. Film, as any form of expression, is defined by its limits and so whatever these limits are, financial, technical or political, the challenge is to continue producing something of value.

Lack of distribution outlets, on the other hand, is a much more damaging constraint and forces the documentary filmmaker to either accept his or her fate in the margins or else move into the arena of political activism. Filmmakers who believe in the value of their work must take to the streets if need be in order that people see and discuss what they have made. They must see that their films have local language versions so that they are accessible to the audiences that the films are about. Distribution has to be by any means necessary. Otherwise, the time and money spent on production is surely unjustified, except perhaps as a means of personal therapy.

▲ ***How do you market your films, and how do you get across to the larger audience?***

From the very beginning, the films I made were related to and, in a sense, a part of the people's movements that I filmed. So the distribution of these films was integrally related to the health of the movement, but on occasion it has continued beyond the scope of the movement itself. *Waves of Revolution* on the JP Movement in Bihar went underground during the Emergency and was used widely by advocates of democracy in India and abroad. *Prisoners of Conscience* on political prisoners in India was used by the newly emergent post-Emergency civil liberties movement to lobby for the release of Naxalite prisoners still languishing in jails. *A Time to Rise* is still used by the Canadian Farmworkers Union, *Bombay Our City* by the movement for the Right to Shelter, the trilogy on religion and communalism by those who are fighting for a secular and democratic India, and *A Narmada Diary* by those who believe in sustainable development.

While the use of these films by the movements they describe should have been an obvious and natural phenomenon, unfortunately this did not happen automatically, and required serious effort on our part. Very often movements have severe financial and manpower constraints and their plea to us is: "You are the experts in this field. You take care of showing the films to the people." So over the years I've got into this activity. Some years

ago we created the Samvaad Trust, buying 16mm projectors, recently acquiring a video projector as well, learning about sound systems, renting power generators when necessary, travelling all over the country doing screenings and having discussions.

Simultaneously, as film prints grew to be too expensive to distribute we started to sell video copies of the films by mail order and by keeping them at certain progressive bookstores, and by word of mouth. Several thousand copies of these films are in circulation all over India, not counting the pirate tapes of which we know that thousands exist (many activists not feeling the necessity of buying an official copy).

As for reaching really large audiences, nothing can compete with television. So, along with the grassroots screenings and video sales, we have fought and won three court cases so far to get my films, *Bombay Our City*, *In Memory of Friends* and *Ram Ke Naam* shown on Indian (Doordarshan) TV's national network. In the UK until Channel 4 took an abrupt turn towards the commercial, several of my films were shown, albeit at a late night slot. As for income generation, some of the films have won cash prizes at film festivals, some royalties from previous work continue to trickle in, and in the US many of these films circulate in the universities.

▲ *You did go to court to get* Ram Ke Naam *shown on Doordarshan, but they telecast it without prior information to the viewers.*

Actually, because of the experience I had with *Bombay Our City*, which was shown at midnight following a court order to telecast it, we subsequently argued in court that the films must be screened at prime time in order that they reach the largest viewership. Following the court order to this effect, both *In Memory of Friends* and *Raam Ke Naam* were shown at prime time, just before and after the national news. It is true that Doordarshan did not publicise the screening but sections of the press wrote about the controversy. Indeed the right-wing Hindutva forces were so incensed by the telecast that they lodged a protest in Parliament. This was also widely reported. Ratings later published showed that 18 percent of the viewership had watched *Ram Ke Naam*, which is a huge number in a population as large as India's. For almost the first time I felt that one of my films had made a real political impact.

▲ *Do you think satellite TV will have a beneficial effect in this regard?*

To hope that privatised, multinational and consumer-controlled TV will bring relief to thinking and concerned individuals or to a public force-fed on inanity is like hoping for Murdoch to become Guevara or Ambani to become Gandhi. Surely the writing is already on the wall, or more appropriately, on your TV set.

At least while we had a state-run television I could argue in court that my constitutional right to freedom of expression was being violated as was the public's right to information. Now I will be politely informed that "market forces" have determined that there is no slot for my films.

By the way, not only does the same conservative, smooth talking right-wing mentality that existed in Doordarshan persist in the world of private TV, the same personnel also do. The same Mr Basu who blocked my films on DD now sits at the head of Star TV and the same Mr B. Ghosh likewise.

▲ *Do you agree with the view that your* Prisoners of Conscience *and Utpalendu Chakraborty's* Mukti Chai *set off a whole new movement in documentary filmmoking in India? Since these films, left-of-centre, anti-establishment, consciousness-roising films seem to have become the mainstay of most independent documentary filmmakers?*

Our films were the product of our times. I think that the trend in cinema in India has little to do with individual films and more to do with felt needs.

▲ *Your films are highly political anti-establishment indictments. Do you see your art as a means of making a political statement?*

Obviously, but I see Amitabh Bachhan and Nana Patekar films as also making political statements. It's just that their politics are opposed to mine. It's curious though that the right-wing agenda even when it openly advocates fascism is seen as legitimate entertainment while the mildest advocacy of the democratic principle is immediately branded as 'political'.

▲ *Could you elaborate on the process of creotion for you?*

Being born lazy, it is only when something strikes me as horrendous or as breathtakingly beautiful that I start putting pen to paper or eye to lens. So the strong point of view is both cause and effect. Yet, I don't want to close myself from reality or to set out to create my own reality but instead prefer to be shaped by it. So I write no script at the initial stage and the films take shape at the editing table over a long period of time.

▲ *What films are you currently working on?*

Curiously, at a time when I have absolutely no source of funding I have fallen into making four films - all being shot on Hi-8 video. The camera I own and tapes are relatively cheap but finding the means to edit all this is a nightmare. Ideally, I would like to acquire a low-end Avid type of home computer-based system. Then things will become viable. The films are on: 1. beauty and the multinationals, 2. fisherpeople, deep sea trawlers and aquaculture, 3. Enron and the privatisation of power, and 4. the life and death of Vilas Ghogre, a friend and dalit singer and poet who hanged himself in protest against the police killing of 10 dalits in Ghatkopar recently.

The Jury Statement

This is a shortened version of the more detailed report made to Film South Asia '97 by the Festival Jury, which comprised of noted filmmaker Pankaj Butalia from Delhi; Colombo-based journalist and educationist Nalaka Gunawardene; and theatre, television and film personality from Lahore, Salman Shahid.

The independent South Asian documentary is still in its infancy and needs to be nursed for some more time. Initiatives like the Bombay International Film Festival for Shorts and Documentaries, as well as Film South Asia, can go a long way in establishing fora at which voices from the Subcontinent can be heard. Over the last decade in which documentary film festivals have established themselves in India, they have already generated a desire in Indian documentarists to interact with their environment on film and video. We hope that Film South Asia will play the same role for other filmmakers from all over the Subcontinent.

Since Kathmandu has seized the initiative, we hope it will become a permanent venue for such a festival – that its popularity will grow over time. We look forward to the day when film festivals the world over will flock to Kathmandu to see the best of South Asian documentaries.

Our initial fears and expectations on seeing the list of strong entries from India was that all the top awards would be cornered by Indian films. But something unexpected happened. Two films from other countries stormed their way into the final reckoning – making it impossible for us to take any decision other than the one we have taken, in all objectivity. And so, we announce the following awards.

For its powerful recreation of the euphoria of an event long forgotten by the world, the Jury would like to make a Special Mention of the film **Muktir Gaan** by Tareque and Catherine Masud.

There were three strong contenders for the "second best film" category – so strong that we preferred not to choose between them. The films and citations are:

For its ability to make connections between patriarchy and communal aggression – to draw upon a huge reservoir of images that suggest as well as reinforce this relationship, the Jury awards the prize of Second Best Film of the Festival to **Father, Son and Holy War** by Anand Patwardhan.

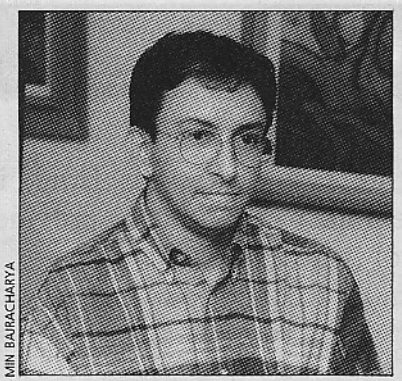
The subject matter of poverty and economic deprivation is common to many documentaries. However, only rarely is a film able to build a substantial argument that details the chain of circumstance that binds people perpetually to their situation. For the sincerity and commitment with which it approaches and explores the politics of "rice" in South India, the prize for Second Best Film of the Festival goes to **Meals Ready** by Surajit Sarkar and Vani Subramanian.

Creativity and control are not easily found in filmmakers. Which is why the alternating between restless energy and control strike such a fine balance in a film about a man we all knew but rediscover in this film. The prize for Second Best Film of the Festival goes to **Nusrat has left the building... but when?** by Farjad Nabi.

Coming to the main award, the Jury would like to state that one of the important signs of a good documentarist is his or her ability to pick up seemingly insignificant subjects and breathe life into them through painstaking efforts and elaboration of small details. It is rare to find a film in which a filmmaker makes so many right choices throughout the film – where the camera attains a proximity even while it never loses sight of a crucial distance without being intrusive.

For an extraordinary portrait of a traditional Tibetan faith healer and for the sensitive exploration of relationships within his family, the Jury awards the prize of Best Film of the Festival to **The Spirit Doesn't Come Anymore** by Tsering Rhitar.

(L to r) Nalaka Gunawardene, Pankaj Butalia and Salman Shahid.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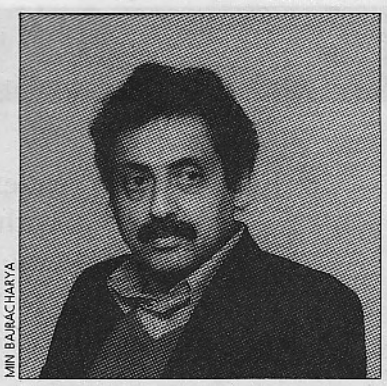
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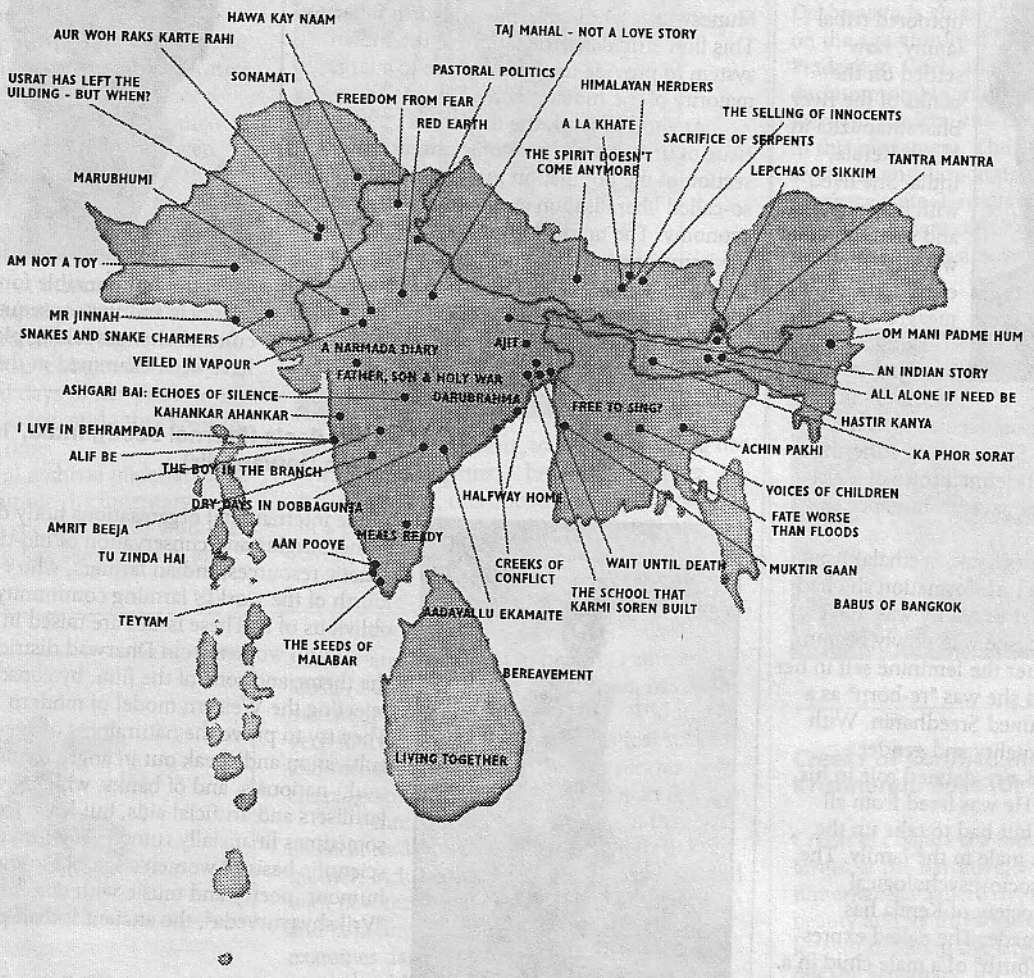
A report on FILM SOUTH ASIA '97



HIMAL MAGAZINE organised Film South Asia '97 in Kathmandu from 25-28 October 1997. This was the first-ever festival of subcontinental documentaries, and an opportunity to showcase the high standard and variety that are available. There were strong entries sent in from all over, and a large number of producers and directors attended the festival. This gave the event a truly subcontinental flavour.

The primary criteria for selection of films among the many entries was subject: they could be made by anyone (including non-South Asians), but they had to be about South Asia or South Asians. Beyond this, the selection panel went first by overall excellence, but also considered regional balance and thematic variety.

Altogether 135 films were submitted to Film South Asia '97, and 55 were selected for exhibition. A rough categorisation of the films shows the following: there were 20 social commentaries, 10 ethnographic portrayals, nine about personalities, nine on environmental subjects, two historical, and five in other categories.

Divided by country, 36 films at FSA '97 were from India, eight from Pakistan, four each from Bangladesh and Nepal, two from Sri Lanka and one from Thailand. Looking at the geographic rather than country-wise distribution, the 55 selections do seem to cover much of South Asia. This is illustrated by the map given above, in which the offerings at Film South Asia '97 are placed according to their approximate location in the Subcontinent. (The distorted nature of the map itself is the result of an earlier exercise by the editors of Himal to 'see' the countries of South Asia differently.)

The three-member jury *(facing page)* awarded the prize for the Best Film to *The Spirit Does Not Come Anymore* by Kathmandu's Tshering Rhitar. Three entries were awarded the second-best film prize: *Nusrat has left the building - but when?* by Farjad Nabi from Lahore, *Meals Ready* by Surajit Sarkar and Vani Subramanian, New Delhi, and *Father, Son and Holy War* by Anand Patwardhan, Bombay. *Muktir Gaan* by Tareque and Catherine Masud from Dhaka earned a Special Mention.

Fifteen films from the festival have been selected to be part of Travelling Film South Asia, and they will trek around the Subcontinent and the world over the first half of 1998. The next Film South Asia Festival is slated for September 1999.

In the following pages, we describe some of the documentaries of FSA '97, with the hope that they will indicate the range and depth that filmmakers have already achieved. In the years ahead, we look ahead to even 'more' and 'better' documentaries of South Asia.

Aan Poove (Male Flower), India, 1995
P. Balan (dir)

Seethalakshmi was born into an uprooted tribal family, now settled on the banks of the river Bharathapuzha in North Kerala, India. She lived with her parents and six sisters, who together eked out a meagre livelihood working as seasonal labourers in paddy fields or as casual labourers in the nearby tile factories. She grew up adhering to the traditionally well-defined roles of a girl-child in a society that gave prominence to male-children.

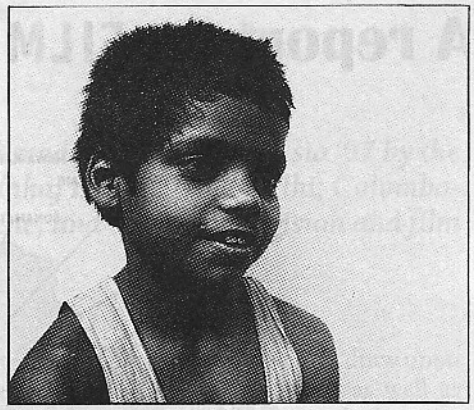
About three years back, Seethalakhsmi discovered a strange transformation she had been undergoing. Her sexuality was in an ambiguous flux, and she was slowly becoming a male child. Later the feminine self in her slowly vanished and she was "re-born" as a male child and renamed Sreedharan. With the transformed sexuality and gender relationship, he had a re-defined role in his family and society. He was freed from all feminine bondage, but had to take up the responsibilities of a male in the family. The film examines the socio-psychological advances that the society of Kerala has supposed to have made. The naked expressions of joy at the "birth" of a male child in a family explodes the myth of gender equality.

Ajit (The Unconquerable), India, 1996
Arvind Sinha (dir)

Ajit is an eight-year-old domestic in a Calcutta household. He is one of the nine children of Muneswar, a landless farmer in North Bihar. This film articulates the failure of the Indian system to provide the basics of life to a large majority of the Indian people.

At another level, the film takes up the issue of unrestrained consumerism in one section of the population in the wake of the so-called liberalisation and opening up of the economy. The marked growth of vulgarity in the name of entertainment in the media is a fallout of economic liberalisation. The film mirrors the influence of all this on impressionable minds, especially those of children.

The invasion through the skies with the



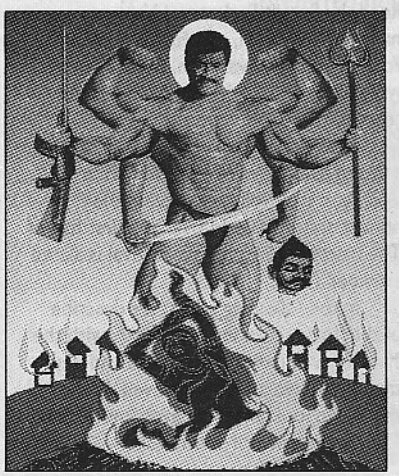
advent of innumerable foreign television channels and the consequent social and cultural changes taking place in the country have been examined in the film.

Amrit Beeja (Eternal Seed), India, 1996
Meera Dewan (dir)

While international organisations hotly debate issues like farmer's rights and conservation of bio-diversity and plant genetic resources, Indian farmers, who comprise one-fourth of the world's farming community, are totally oblivious of it. These issues are raised in *Amrit Beeja*.

Rural women from Dharwad district of Karnataka set the theme and tone of the film, by conscientiously rejecting the Western model of modern farm technology. They try to prove the naturalness of age-old methods of cultivation and speak out in angry terms of the influx of multi-nationals, and of banks, which give loans only for fertilisers and artificial aids, but leave the poor farmer sometimes financially ruined. The film celebrates the scientific basis of women's age-old knowledge, while using humour, poetry and music with text inspired by "Vrikshyayurveda", the ancient Indian plant science.

Father, Son and Holy War, India 1995, Anand Patwardhan (dir)



Father, Son and Holy War explores the possibility that the key to the psychology of communal violence against "the other" in India could lie in male insecurity, itself an inevitable product of the very construction of the notion of "manhood".

The first part of the film "Trial by Fire" portrays personal battles of some brave individuals against the tide of fanaticism and the "purifying" fire rituals of the upper castes and the communal fires that raged in Bombay in 1993 after the demolition of Babri Masjid.

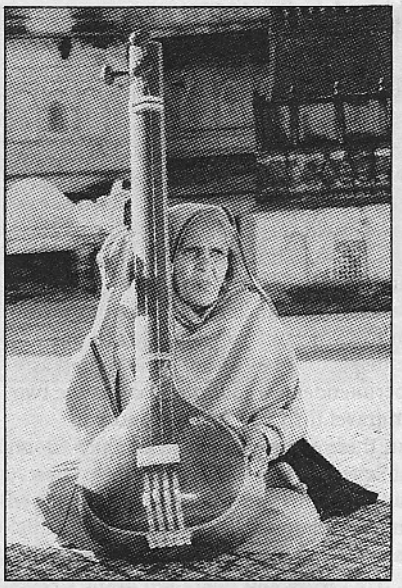
"Hero Pharmacy", the second part, traces the development of "manhood" in the Indian psyche on both sides of the communal divide. Hindus have been brought up to believe Muslims are invaders who raped their women, destroyed their temples and practised forcible conversion. Today a section of the Hindus want revenge. But the Muslim minority, despite fears of genocide, are not about to take things lying down. The result is carnage.

Fate Worse than Tragedy
Bangladesh, India and Nepal, 1996
Bjorn Vassnes (dir)

The film is about floods in Bangladesh, and different strategies used to cope with these. The main focus is on the Flood Action Plan, one of the biggest environmental experiments in history, which will affect the fate of about a hundred million people, who believe they *need* the floods because the floods give them everything they need: water, fertile soil, fish, etc.

At the same time, the film attempts to show that the flood problem cannot be solved without a regional approach. The big difficulty is that the rivers run through more countries than one. What happens in the Himalaya and northern India has consequences for the farmers and fishermen of Bangladesh. And the biggest problem for Bangladesh is not too much water, but too little, especially after India built the Farakka barrage.

Ashgari Bai: Echoes of Silence
India, 1997
Priti Chandriani & Brahmananda Singh



At 86, Ashgari Bai is probably the oldest expo-nent of the dying art of 'Dhrupad', the most orthodox form of Indian classical music. She is also probably the only woman to have espoused this austere and invocative form of music which has invariably been regarded as the most masculine of Indian classical music genres. And she has been conferred national awards, including the Padmashree.

Ironically, however, she remains a curiously anonymous and lonely figure today, battling against insurmountable odds in a small town of Madhya Pradesh in India. Trained by a disciplinarian teacher, Ustaad Zahur Khan of Gohad, Ashgari Bai today misses the good old days of her patron, Rajesh Veer Singh Judev, and other exciting associations of her time.

With almost nil archival material on her available, the 45-minute documentary captures memories she can re-live with the tingle of a thousand lost sensations in an almost-abandoned fort, today. Showcasing her wit, her forthrightness, her charm and her indomitability, this documentary is a portrait of a precious gem of India who insists on living life on her own terms.

Aur Woh Raks Karte Rahi
(And She Dances on), Pakistan, 1996
Shireen Pasha (dir)

Distinct and individual in her art, Tehreema Mitha, a classical dancer in Pakistan, has been dancing professionally since 1991. Within a very short time, she has gained critical acclaim and recognition as one of the few serious choreographers and trained dancers in Pakistan.

Tehreema received training in the classical tradition of Bharat Natyam from her mother, Indu Mitha, and she has experimented with new techniques and developed a creative and contemporary style of her own. The film examines dance in a social context and spotlights Mitha's dance, her constant struggle for excellence in her work and balance in everyday life.

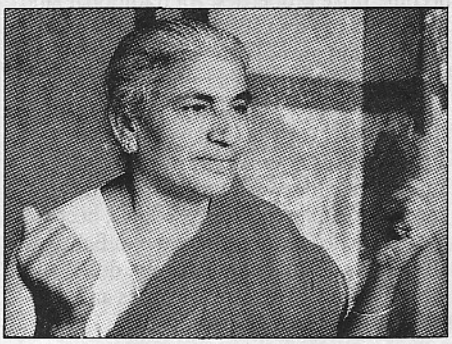
Meals Ready, India, 1996
Surajit Sarkar & Vani Subramanian (dir)

"Meals Ready" - all across South India, these two words beckon the tired and hungry into eating places both small and large; inviting them to a multi-course meal that is centred around rice. The film explores the rice market in South India and uncovers the social and economic factors that influence the growing and selling of rice these days.

The film discovers that the unequal bargaining power of growers, financiers and buyers has a direct link with the divides of power and privilege that cut across rural Tamil society - be they the hierarchies of caste and gender, or politics and religion. Any market-led economic change that ignores these divisions only threatens to deepen the inequalities that exist in rural society.

Dry Days in Dobbagunta, India, 1995
Nupur Basu (dir)

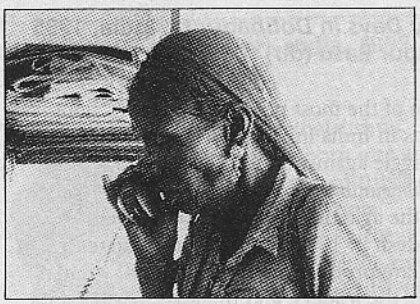
One of the most powerful women's agitations in India in recent years has been the struggle against liquor. *Dry Days in Dobbagunta* is about this struggle. It focuses on the agitation that began in Andhra Pradesh in 1991, and forced the state to declare prohibition in 1995. Rural women were the leaders, and the main participants in this movement. The film also looks at the women's anti-liquor struggle in another southern state, Karnataka, and the extreme impoverishment of rural communities due to the increasing alcohol dependence of the men.



Creeks of Conflict, India, 1996
Krishnendu Bose (dir)

Creeks of Conflict is a film that operates at two levels: at the narrative, where the story of Bhitarkanika Sanctuary, its bio-diversity, its beauty and its threats are unfolded, and at the level of debating the larger issues. In sketching out the sanctuary, the film focuses on the flagship species in this mangrove forest - the Olive Ridley Turtles and captures the full cycle of nesting to hatching of these endangered turtles. The other focus of the film is the threat to this sanctuary from various sources like commercial aquaculture, the coming of mechanised fishing, supported by jetties and bridges, and the missile base nearby.

The film throws up the ideological and power equations determining the 'development' patterns in India and the scant respect paid to the indigenous population's need in this pattern.



***Sonamati* (A Very Ordinary Gold)**
India, 1996, Sehjo Singh (dir)

When the desert of Bikaner in Rajasthan becomes irrigated, barren tracts of land become prize properties. All traditional land holding deeds are cancelled and a new dispensation introduced. Unintelligible government notices determine villagers' fates, families are realloted land and maps are redrawn. The trauma all this causes to the villagers is not of concern to the bureaucrats. Illiterate Sona Bai, with her knack of reading between the lines, becomes the natural leader of the women in fighting officialdom. With confidence she deals with the authorities. There are victories and setbacks but the fight does go on.

***Free to Sing? The Music of Suman Chatterjee*, India, 1996**
Sudipto Chatterjee (dir)

Suman Chatterjee is a Bengali political singer from Calcutta whose music has taken Calcutta by storm. His music is highly syncretic and has traits from diverse sources both eastern and western. His political stance, critical of the right as well as the left, has put him in a unique position which has made him a persecuted and an immensely popular singer at the same time.

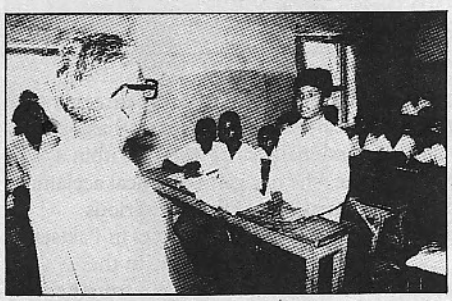
Free to Sing? is an interview-based film, not only of Suman, but also of Calcutta's citizens, poets, journalists, artists, intellectuals, fellow musicians, as well as the the legendary American folk singer/activist Pete Seeger (who plays the title music as well). The film is generously interlaced with song sequences and scenes from Calcutta. Besides being a cartography of a map that is larger than Suman, it also comments on the globality of protest music, hybridity as a valid artistic mode of expression, human rights, and Third World politics.

***Marubhumi*, India, 1995**
Amar Kanwar (dir)

Marubhumi is the story about water in India's desert-state of Rajasthan. It strings together glimpses of the history, politics and development of water harvesting in ancient and modern Jodhpur.

The story in the film is based on the narratives of two old men in their 70s, both residents of Jodhpur city - Liaquat Ali Khan, who was the Municipality Chairman of Jodhpur in 1964, and Y.D. Singh, who was Famine Inspector in 1964 and who retired as the Superintendent of Jodhpur Zoo. As the two old men travel through the water story of Jodhpur, there comes a point when they decide to even revitalise the traditional water harvesting system and demonstrate the wisdom of the desert folk.

The film includes rare archival footage of famine, relief work and migration in the 1920s in Rajasthan as well as archival footage filmed during the construction of the first British dam built in the Indian desert.



The School That Karmi Soren Built
India, 1996, Ananya Chatterjee (dir)

The film is about the life and times of Karmi Soren, an unlettered Lodha tribal, and her struggle to establish a school in her village. Laterally, the film contests the orthodoxy that women, like peasants, cannot represent themselves, but need to be represented; second, that television must cater to the lowest common denominator, i.e. essentially the medium not the message deserves its attention; and lastly, that left-wing politics are addressed to the wretched of the earth.

Recognition of the school established by Karmi was important to the Lodha as it would ensure an uninterrupted flow of funds to pay the teacher, offer scholarships to their children and give them easier access to higher education. But her appeal fell on deaf ears and the issue got buried beneath vested political interests and government apathy.

The wide-spread media attention that the film received forced the West Bengal government to reopen the files. The school was finally recognised with effect from May 1997, exactly a year after the film was shot and 27 years after it had been established.

***Muktir Gaan* (Song of Freedom)**
Bangladesh, 1995
Tareque Masud & Catherine Masud (dir)

Twenty-five years in the making, this film began with the ambition of Lear Levin, an American filmmaker, to make an epic documentary in the tradition of Robert Flaherty on the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971. Levin and his crew came across a troupe of travelling musicians, members of a larger cultural movement known as the Bangladesh Mukti Sangrami Shilpi Sangstha, who were traversing the zones of war singing songs of struggle to inspire the guerrilla cadres and the millions of refugees. Levin, who did not know any Bengali, followed this troupe and captured the spirit of the Bengali people through 20 hours of beautifully photographed footage. However, he became so caught up in filming that he returned to the US only just as the war was coming to an end. he was unable to get funds to complete the project and for 20 years, the footage lay in storage in his basement in New York.

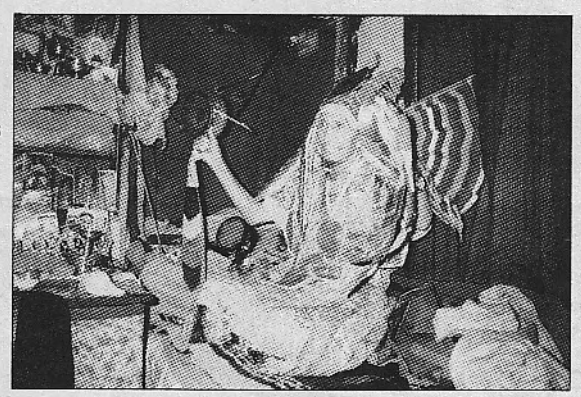
In 1990, the directors tracked Levin in New York with the intention of making a film based on his footage. It took five years to complete the film, which supplements Levin's footage with archival material on the major events of the war from around the world.

***I Live in Behrampada*, India, 1993**
Madhushree Dutta (dir)

The communal riots that reduced Bombay into two distinct communities in December 1992 and January 1993 also created an underclass of citizens. During this time, Behrampada, a slum colony in the city's western suburb with an 80 percent Muslim population, was cast as the main villain. In the upheaval that followed the riots, the inhabitants of the area were straitjacketed into stereotypes and cast aside.

I Live in Behrampada attempts to document what the residents faced and their search for the complex truth - why? The film also traces the history of the area which was first inhabited in 1950 and grew as the inhabitants turned the slimy marsh into solid ground. Today, in the face of rapid development, the 'son of the soil' has become an intruder. Is the dividing line language, culture and religion or class?

The Spirit Doesn't Come Anymore, Nepal, 1997
Tsering Rhitar (dir)



The Tibetans' belief of curing diseases by invoking certain spirits/protectors has been practised and socially accepted for over a millennium now. In the Tibetan tradition, this art is mostly inherited by the healer's son - sometimes by a daughter, who hereditarily possesses this inborn channel which only needs to be opened to be initiated as a healer. This is how the tradition is continued.

With a history of 13 generations of continuous spiritual healers in his family, 78-year-old Pao Wangchuk is frustrated that his son does not want to continue the lineage. Karma, like many youth of today, is given to drinking and the easy life, and can't live up to the demands of being a spiritual healer. In the conflict between father and son, Pao constantly complains that Karma is wasting away his life, and is worried that the family lineage will die out. But Karma doesn't care. He resents, and is frustrated by, his father's constant complaining and mistrust.

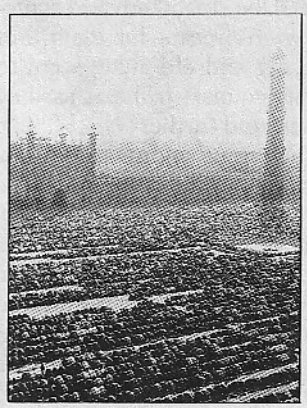
Nusrat has left the building...but when?, Pakistan, 1997
Farjad Nabi (dir)

The film *Nusrat has left the building...but when?* can best be described as a "docudreama" which charts the flowering and decay of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan's musical soul. The film does not have any narration or dialogue and conveys its content through a collection of images evoked from the music and qawwalis of the 'real' Nusrat and, later, the post-Peter Gabriel synthetic version. Much of Nusrat's music in the film will be heard for the first time by an international audience. This early music recorded without any electronic gimmickry, sometimes live at a shrine, was drowned out by the better-known manufactured ostensibly sufi music with its drum machine heartbeat. On the roller coaster of crass commercialism, Nusrat's metamorphosis from a genuine popular artiste to a mass produced exotica of the east, left behind many disillusioned listeners and devotees in its wake. Perhaps for the first time this film will give voice to the other side of the song.

Mr Jinnah: The Making of Pakistan
Pakistan and India, 1997
Christopher Mitchell (dir)

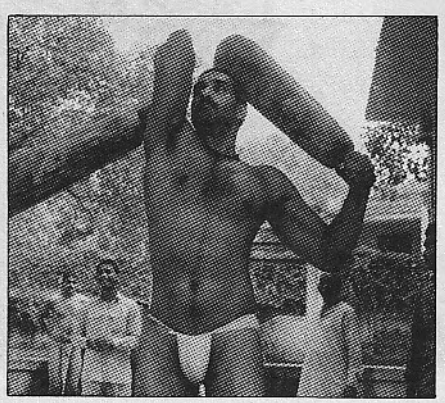
Little is known of Quaid-i-Azam Mohammed Ali Jinnah. Even less is known about his belief in human rights, women's rights, minority rights and, above all, the rule of law. *Mr Jinnah* rectifies that ignorance, and tells an extraordinary human story. *Mr Jinnah* is the only film to recount the not-much-familiar tale of the founding of Pakistan, giving a perspective to Partition that has never been seen on television.

Using the recollections of those who knew Jinnah - political allies and opponents, friends, and the first-ever interview with his only child, Dina, previously unseen archive footage, and extensive location filming in South Asia, the film explores the complexity of Jinnah the man, and the turbulence of the times he lived in. How did this westernised ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity come to embrace Muslim separatism? What was the enthusiasm he generated among some Muslims, and the opposition in others?



Red Earth, India, 1995, Rahul Roy (dir)

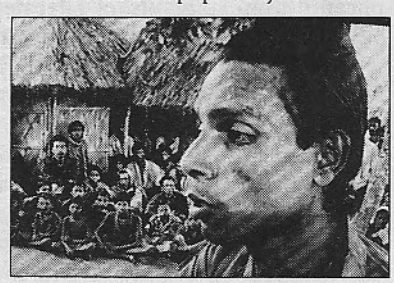
Neeraj, a young man from Varanasi, aspires to become a famous wrestler. Ratan Patodi, from Indore, publishes a monthly magazine on the art of Indian wrestling - a tradition he asserts is disappearing. Near New Delhi's Jama Masjid, Khalifa Barkat is putting a group of young boys through the grind. He abuses, cajoles and pushes the young wrestlers as he introduces them to the art of wrestling.



How are these *akharas* organised? What kind of masculinity are they defining? How do the wrestlers look at themselves and at the male bonding they are a part of? *Red Earth* attempts to unravel the wrestling way of life - the physical and mental disciplining by which wrestlers become 'real men'.

Achin Pakhi (The Unknown Bard), Bangladesh, 1995, Tanvir Mokammel (dir)

Lalon Fakir (?-1890) was a unique figure among the *bauls* of Bengal. Known to have lived for 115 years, Lalon's lyrics have enchanted the people of Bangladesh and of West Bengal for generations. Bauls, the troubadours of Bengal, with their mystic songs and inimitable life style, have always been an object of curiosity. Baul songs, depicting asceticism and transience of life, also express the pathos and pangs of the downtrodden subaltern people. But even among the exotic bauls, Lalon's position as a folk-philosopher and as a composer of songs, was unique. A hundred years after his death, Lalon still has immense popularity on both sides of Bengal and, in fact, his influence and popularity has been growing. But surprisingly, very little was actually known about Lalon's life and much of it was shrouded in mystery. The film aims to find Lalon's persona, his philosophy, and tries to explore the lyrical beauty of Lalon's songs.



Canada *Chalo*

"GO WEST, YOUNG man!" advised someone once. It wasn't meant for them, but Pakistanis, young and old alike, seem to have taken this counsel to heart as they move west, west and further west.

Earlier, they went in droves to "London" (meaning anywhere in the UK) - the young and the affluent for "higher studies" and the young and the old able-bodied as skilled and unskilled labour. The next wave of labourers and job-seekers streamed to the Gulf countries, a phenomenon captured in the catchy title of a 1970s Lollywood (Pakistan's Lahore-based film industry) film called *Dubai Chalo* - Let's go to Dubai.

Then it was Lady Liberty that drew migrants to try their luck in the land of the free and home of the brave. And now, although the numbers of applicants for the US "green card" have not exactly dwindled, the rush is on for Canada. For students "it's half the cost of studying in the US," as one parent points out. "And the education is just as good."

For job-seekers, Canada's relatively more open-door policy makes it an attractive option. "Canada has been inviting applicants from migrants of all categories, skilled and unskilled labour and white-collar workers, because they want the land to be *abad* (populated) right now, they have too few people and too much land," explains one potential migrant, who is thinking of re-locating along with his wife and four children.

Another "populate Canada" scheme that has got people thinking is the country's policy of granting citizenship to anyone who can invest 250,000 Canadian dollars there - an amount that is not too difficult to muster up for someone with a relatively affluent background in Pakistan.

"It's cold out there, but at least our children will have a secure future," says the clerk in a government department who is planning a "rekky" trip over to the Rockies. Like many others, he plans to accept the 'golden handshake' that is being offered by the Pakistan government using funds loaned by the World Bank in an effort to "downsize" monolithic government departments.

Canada, admits the successful advertising executive, is the destination of his young musician son. "He (the son) is totally disgusted with the (Nawaz Sharif) government's attacks on culture and their decision to ban pop music programmes from both state-controlled television channels."

Consulting agencies advertise their specialty in newspapers and on the Internet, with promises of successful transfer to Canada. To take advantage of the advertising revenue, newspapers have taken out supplements titled, for instance, "Canada: A Guide to Immigration".

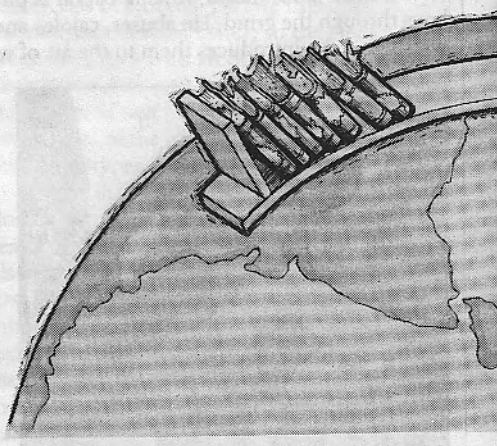
Meanwhile, far away and down under, Australia also beckons. Because of growing interest, the Australian High Commission in Islamabad has felt it necessary to issue warnings against false information regarding immigration application procedures. When Canada is peopled with Pakistanis, there is no doubt, the next call will be "Australia chalo".

East Asia over South Asia

MAHBUB UL HAQ, the Human Development Druid who now holes up in Islamabad running a Human Development Institute, in recent pronouncements has decried the state of education in South Asia.

He writes in *The News*, "It is time that we face up to the blunt truth that nearly one half of the world's illiterate adults live in three countries of South Asia, namely, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh." The Subcontinent, he says, has emerged by now as the most illiterate region in the world, falling behind even Sub-Saharan Africa after starting ahead 40 years ago.

Comparing South Asia to East Asia, Haq says that more than the volume of investment, it is the strategies that are important in education. East Asian countries, he says, spend more on basic education, as much as 70 percent, and believe firmly that higher education must be financed by the private sector. "The role of the state is to provide basic education to all, not higher education to a privileged few." In stark



Fishermen as Prisoners of War


MUKUL SHARMA

Pakistani fisher-POWs at Porbandar police station, Gujarat.

humari jaat machimaar
humari naat machimaar
hum sab machimaar ek
(Our caste is fishing, our occupation is fishing, we all fishermen are one.)

SO GOES A sentiment of the fisherfolk of Varanwada village, in the Union Territory of Diu in western India. This would be as true for the fishermen from Pakistan's Sindh province further up the Arabian Sea coast. For these thousands of fishermen, the ocean is their shop floor. They have been workers of the sea for generations and fishing is their sole occupation.

But this is a fact that does not impress either the Indian or the Pakistani government. Marine security agencies of each country routinely pick up fishermen of the other for violating maritime waters, despite the fact that the two countries have yet to agree on the demarcation of that sea boundary. Once captured, the unfortunate fishermen (and crew of captured boats) do not know when they will be released. Often, they are not set free even after completing their term of incarceration set by the courts in each country. Instead, they are kept waiting for an "exchange" - a periodic swap of imprisoned fishermen between the two countries that began in 1987-88, much like an exchange of prisoners-of-war.

The Suffering

Naushad Ali is one Pakistan citizen looking forward to the next exchange. He was caught along with eight others in Indian waters in October 1989. They have all gone through the tortuous process of captivity, police custody, court case and jail. And, now, even after completing their sentence, they languish in police custody in Porbandar. Naushad Ali's plaintive question, "Why should we bear this pain because of tensions between two powers?"

Sikander, Nizamuddin and Nissar are brothers, while Didaar, Ashiq Ali and Muhammad Azhar are their cousins and Muhammad Yakub their uncle. They are from Pakistan's Sindh, and were all arrested in 1994. They've all gone through imprisonment and they still do not know what wrong they have committed. Says Didaar, "Every one of us brothers has three, four children back home. All of them are now begging on the streets. They are dying of hunger."

The story is not much different for Indian fishermen caught by the other side. Dhanji Harji Rathod of Varanwada, wrote to his family from Landeo Jail in Karachi, "In our fate, there was only jail. Jail was our destiny... They caught us by force in the ocean. For five days we were kept in the boat itself. Then they took us to this jail. We got one cup of pulses and two pieces of bread to eat. Bread was baked only on one side. May even our enemy not have to suffer such imprisonment."

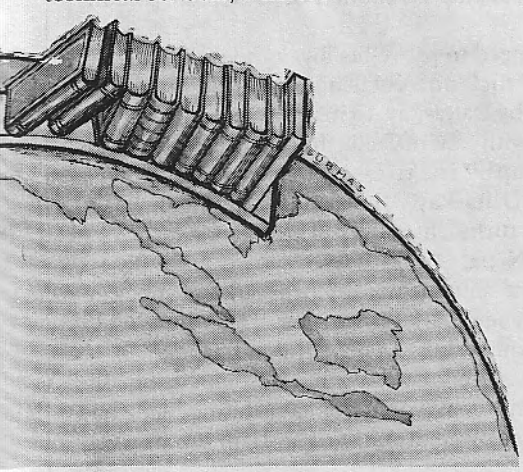
The worst sufferers from Varanwada must be the children who went with their fathers on the boat, and who are now serving time in Pakistani jails. Twelve-year-old Nanji Murji was one of the children released by the Pakistani government some months back (his father has yet to be repatriated). The 7th grader was captured in 1994 when during a school holiday he had gone to sea with his father for the first time. He spent five months in prison before being sent to the Idhi Centre. He recalls, "The centre had good eating-living facilities but there was no freedom, no friends. I felt like crying, and really missed my mother and sisters. And I used to write letters to my father in the other jail."

Pain, trauma and sorrow - this has been the share of the fisherfolk and their families on both sides of the border. They are victims of geopolitical hostilities and suspicions which are far removed from their own lives. As a fisherman of Varanwada put it eloquently: "We fisherfolk of India and Pakistan have no problem with each other. We have no conflict. We go there, they come here, we together catch fish. If we meet each other on the ocean, we greet each other and share our food. This is only a problem of power, of state, of coast guards, of navy."

-Mukul Sharma

contrast, South Asia has built an inverse pyramid in education, spending less than 50 percent on primary education.

East Asia realised early the importance of technical education, which the Subcontinent did not. Around 20 percent of secondary school pupils in East Asia go on to technical schools, whereas in the Subcontinent the figure is, shockingly, less than two percent. While East Asian countries forged alliances between government-run schools and private and non-governmental institutions, South Asian governments have hurt private initiatives by nationalising schools and colleges, says Haq.



"There is simply no doubt that spread of basic education at a rapid pace is the most critical issue for South Asian development," writes the development guru. "The recipe for a major educational breakthrough is fairly established by now: universal primary education plus widespread technical education." But how? Wait for the 1998 Report on Human Development in South Asia, says Haq, which will be "devoted exclusively to analysing the current educational profile of South Asia and presenting a concrete plan of action to universalise primary education within a decade." The good professor believes that the financial requirements of such an ambitious goal can be met.

Uncle Sam Renews Interest

US SECRETARY OF State Madeline Albright visited the Subcontinent in November, making up for the fact that no Secretary of State has come by since George Shultz was here in 1983. Bill Clinton will travel to India and Pakistan in 1998 ("and perhaps one other country"), the first US President to make the trip after Jimmy Carter in 1978.

So what's going on, and why is South Asia suddenly such a hot destination for rulers of the only remaining World Power?

The person to ask is Karl Inderfurth, Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs. On 22 October, he told the US House of Representatives International Relations Sub-committee on the Near East and South Asia that the changing US approach reflected new realities in the region.

BIKAS RAUNIAR

According to Inderfurth *(above)*, the Clinton Administration was taking a fresh, comprehensive look at the region, for "South Asia has entered the global mainstream, both economically and politically, as never before."

So the US is "boosting its engagement" in South Asia. But is it even a good thing?

Expecting the naysayers, Inderfurth added, "However, our new engagement in the region does not mean we intend to be interventionist. South Asia's problems must be solved by South Asia's people." In which case, all right!

SUBHAS RAJ

Druk Fish Revere Monarch

OH, HOW THE mighty have fallen! Sunanda K. Datta-Ray, former editor of *The Statesman*, Calcutta, is now a (doubtless well-paid) editorial consultant with *Straits Times* in faraway Singapore. He contributed an article to *The International Herald Tribune* on trout-fishing in Bhutan, full of unnecessary royalist sentimentalism and subservience to the man whose patronage he has enjoyed over the years.

The subject of Datta-Ray's unashamedly glowing eulogy was, of course, King Jigme Singye Wangchuk, whose regime Datta-Ray consistently defended to the hilt when the former was in the thick of depopulating his country of its Nepali-speaking Lhotshampa peasantry.

But it seems Datta-Ray still feels the need to prove his loyalty to the Bhutanese ruler at every given opportunity. So, in an article on trout fishing, wherein King Jigme turns up over the years to be interviewed by Datta-Ray, to instruct Datta-Ray's child Deep in angling, and to ply father and son with cans of Coke, the one-time editor finds time to take a jab at the hapless Lhotshampa. "The rivers that Deep and I fish were the preserve of negligent royalty," writes Datta-Ray. "Nowadays, King Jigme has to watch out for more sinister fishing in the turbulent waters of ethnicity churned up by illegal immigration into Bhutan from Nepal..."

Continuing, Datta-Ray reports how the Bhutanese trout turn "coy and superior" when confronted with Datta-Ray's line. (Incidentally, he is author of *Smash and Grab: Annexation of Sikkim*. So, Datta-Ray also knows how to be anti-establishment.)

"It often happens!" Datta-Ray's Bhutanese guide says in consolation, but the writer will have none of it. He writes: "I am sure it would not have if King Jigme had wielded the rod. The trout would then have bowed in gratitude and lain submissively at the royal feet."

How a Dam Is Done In

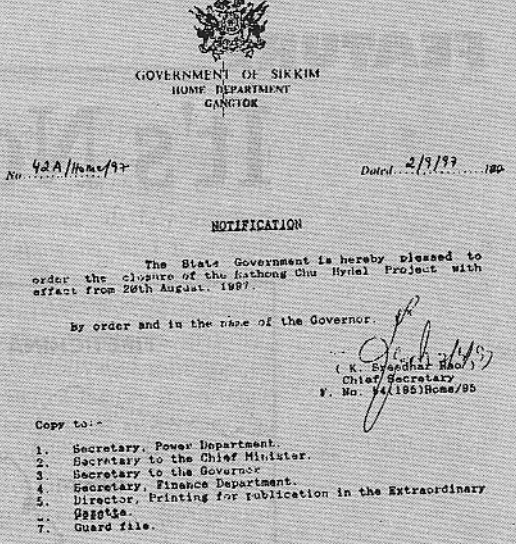
IT MUST BE a curiousity to many to see how a government will finally, say, cancels, a hydropower project when the pressure gets too much. What we have seen with mega-projects like Narmada or Tehri is the "government side" buying time, obfuscating, promising and not delivering (as in the case with Mr Deve Gowda as Prime Minister and Sunder Lal Bahuguna as person-on-fast on the banks of the Bhagirathi), and so on.

But now a state government in India has actually pulled the plug on a project. And we were interested to know how it was done.

A strong monastery-backed lobby in Sikkim, identified with the Bhutia and Lepcha 'original population', has for a few years fought the Gangtok government's plans to dam the Rathong Chu, which flows through Sikkim from its source at the base of the Khangchendzonga massif. The catchment area is held in great reverence by the indigenous Sikkimese, who were greatly perturbed that the spiritual nature of the site would be disturbed by a dam-building exercise with its environmental, economic and demographic fallouts.

While a case was pending at the Supreme Court in Delhi, repeated representations were made to the government of Chief Minister Pawan Kumar Chamling, who has made it a point to show his sensitivity to the ethnic sentiments. The Gangtok officials tried the usual prevarication, but the opponents proved too tenacious and the 30 megawatt project had to die. And so, at a large gathering of lamas and lay people from all over Sikkim at the Paljor Stadium in Gangtok on 20 August, the Chief Minister announced: "To honour and uphold the sentiments, religion and culture of the Sikkimese people and to save the environment, the Rathong Chu Hydel Project is being scrapped."

Added Chamling, taking on a heroic posture, "We are willing to sacrifice for Sikkim and Sikkimese. Let our chair go.



GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM
HOME DEPARTMENT
GANGTOK

No. 42A/Home/97 Dated 2/9/97

NOTIFICATION

The State Government is hereby pleased to order the closure of the Rathong Chu Hydel Project with effect from 20th August, 1997.

By order and in the name of the Governor.

(K. Sreedhar Rao)
Chief Secretary
Memo No. 44(185)Home/95

Copy to:-
1. Secretary, Power Department.
2. Secretary to the Chief Minister.
3. Secretary to the Governor
4. Secretary, Finance Department.
5. Director, Printing for publication in the Extraordinary Gazette.
7. Guard file.

We will not continue staying in our chair doing bad things for the people."

But still, what is the mechanism to stop a project? Apparently, all it takes is a notification by a state's Chief Secretary (in this case, K. Sreedhar Rao), "by order and in the name of the Governor", with copies to various departments, stating that, "The State Government is hereby pleased to order the closure of the Rathong Chu Hydel Project, with effect from 20th August, 1997".

That's all there is to it.

Liberation Tigresses

OVER THE LAST half year, women rebels belonging to the 3000-strong Vituthalai Pulikal Makalir Munani (Women's Front of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam) have increasingly been at the forefront of do-or-die battles between Tamil Tigers and the Sri Lankan army.

What is not clear is whether this is the result of "gender sensitivity" in the LTTE ranks, or whether there is a severe lack of fighting men in Jaffna. Either way, writes Sarita Subramaniam of Inter Press Service from Colombo, the LTTE has the dubious distinction of fielding women in the battlefield in a way that no other armed group in the world has in recent times.

To this extent, it can be said that the LTTE has a powerful "double-liberation ideology" - that of achieving a Tamil state and of promoting Tamil womanhood through initiation into battle. For the ideologues of the LTTE, its female cadres are the ultimate symbols of women's liberation. And in a society that continues to be fiercely male-dominated, use of feminist oratory seems to have acted as a powerful magnet for women to join the Women's Front since its founding in 1983.

As LTTE chief Velupillai Prabhakaran said, speaking on the occasion of the International Women's Day in 1992, "Today, young women have taken up arms to liberate our land...women can succeed in their struggle for emancipation only by mobilising themselves behind a liberation organisation. This will give them confidence, courage, determination and transform them as revolutionaries..."

There are more of such ideas contained in *Women Fighters of Liberation Tigers*, a book by Adele Ann, the Australia-born wife of senior LTTE ideologue Anton Balasingham and member of the Front. The decision of Tamil females to join the LTTE, she writes, "tells society that they are not satisfied with the social status quo; it means they are young women capable of defying authority; it means they are women with independent thoughts..."

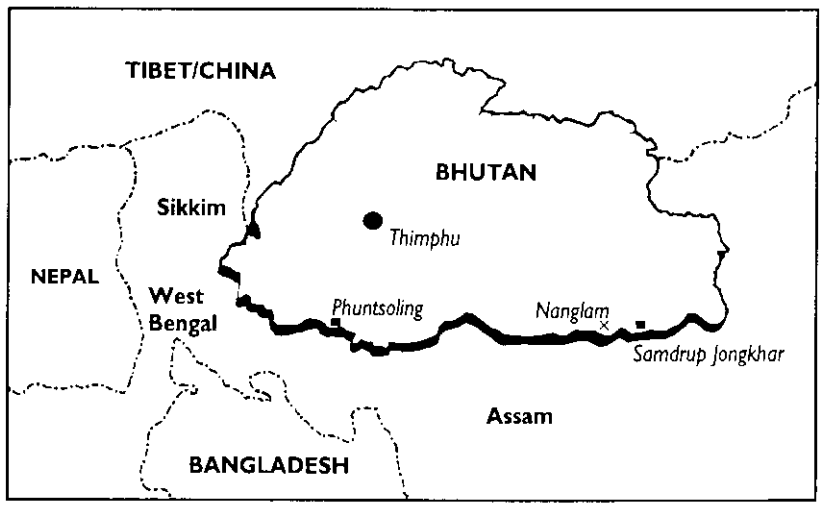
DON DOLL

Boys have died, girls take over.

Some observers, however, see the sudden prominence of women fighters in the LTTE ranks as evidence of shortage of male fighters and the scarcity of new recruits. This is true to a large extent, says Rajan Hoole of the University Teachers for Human Rights in Jaffna, and is because of the large-scale migration of Tamil men to the West. However, the fact that many more girls, some of them barely into their teens, are joining the Tigers is also a result of the "general fatalism" in the population, he says.

"General fatalism" perhaps explains the spirit of this letter from a young recruit to her brother in Colombo: "Dear brother, This letter may upset and anger you but my decision (to join the Tigers) was correct... Even though you could have done something, you failed. But I want to do something. Staying at home and getting widowed at some stage or waiting to be sexually abused by Sinhalese soldiers is no life. I do not want any part of that kind of life."

It's Now Bodo *vs* Druk Yul



"If Bhutan tries to throw out the rebels, it gets involved in what essentially are India's problems. If it shies away from action, it risks the wrath of Delhi."

by ***Subir Bhaumik***

When Bodo militants attacked a Bhutanese police post at Nanglam in Southern Bhutan one morning in September, the totally unexpected had happened. The attack defied logic, for why should Bodo rebel groups, who have used Bhutan as their main transborder refuge, attack Bhutanese policemen and invite retribution from the kingdom's administration?

It has been more than four years since Bodo rebels from across the border in Assam have used the jungles of southern Bhutan to regroup after attacks on Indian security forces. The Bodos are not the only separatists to have found sanctuary in these jungles. Following their lead, the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) too set up shop here in the mid-1990s. The kingdom's southern border zone, much of it astride Assam, has thus changed into a guerilla refuge.

Responsibility for the attack on the Bhutanese police post has not been claimed by either of the two Bodo rebel groups - the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), fighting for an independent Bodo homeland to be carved out of India, and the Bodoland Liberation Tigers (BLT), which demands a Bodo homeland separate from Assam but remaining within India.

The Bhutanese are in no doubt who was behind the assault. Said Phu Dorji, a policeman at Nanglam, "The attackers were obviously Bodos, they were not *ngolops*." The term means "anti-national" in Dzongkha, and is used almost exclusively nowadays, to denote Nepali-speaking dissidents, many of whom have found shelter in the refugee camps in southeast Nepal.

Meanwhile, ULFA's chief of military wing Paresh Barua claimed that the Indian secret agency, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), was behind the attack. In a telephone interview from an undisclosed hideout, Barua said that RAW maintains close links with the BLT, which is being used to undercut the NDFB's influence amongst the Bodos. According to Barua, New Delhi finds the BLT's objectives more acceptable than the NDFB's fullscale secessionist designs.

The RAW would have goaded the BLT to carry out the attack on Nanglam, says Barua, in order to agitate the Bhutanese and persuade them to act against the rebels along the southern border. The attack, he said, could also help India build up necessary pressure on Bhutan to allow the Indian army to launch a sustained transborder military operation. There was no response to these charges from RAW or the Indian government, even after Barua's interview was broadcast on the BBC.

Bhutan's Dilemma

India has been trying hard to get Bhutan's permission to launch a military offensive on the Bodo and ULFA bases within Bhutanese soil. Immediately after the United Command was set up in Assam earlier this year, the army started building pressure on the Gujral government in New Delhi to persuade Bhutan to allow the Indian troops in. While earlier, in 1992-93, the Thimphu authorities had allowed the Indian army to operate in the south, this time they have maintained a stoic silence. "We are surprised at Bhutan's response. It is India's closest ally in South Asia and it should help India finish off this rebel problem," said a lieutenant-general in the Indian army's Eastern Command, which is responsible for security in India's northeast.

It is not as if Bhutan has been ignoring the goings-on on its southern border, however. During its monsoon session earlier this year, the Tshongdu, Bhutan's national assembly, witnessed extended discussions on the militants' presence, with 14 members and several ministers taking part. The speakers expressed the fear that these groups may gang up with ngolops, and there was concern

that their presence in Bhutanese soil could jeopardise Thimphu's excellent relations with New Delhi. The deputy minister for agriculture Dorji said the rebels were trying to win over locals by over-paying for purchases (upto 500 Ngultrums, or USD 12 for a chicken, he claimed). The minister for forests said Bhutanese forest guards frequently encountered the heavily armed rebels but never challenged them for fear of a violent response.

Home Minister Dago Tshering rounded off the discussion by admitting the "serious nature" of the rebel presence. But, he reminded the Tshongdu, Bhutan lacked the capability to fight the well-armed rebels from Assam. "Tshering is right. Bhutan is caught between the devil and the deep sea. If it tries to throw out the rebels, it gets involved in what essentially are India's problems. And if it shies away from action, it risks the wrath of Delhi," says Gautam Basu, who heads the department of International Relations in Calcutta's Jadavpur University and has authored a well-acclaimed study on Bhutan.

The risks for Thimphu in allowing Indian military operations within its territory are obvious. "The rebels are no longer along the border, they have moved far too deep inside Bhutanese territory. If the Indian army is allowed to operate, it will call for a sustained military operation well inside the kingdom. Bhutan is India's ally and is dependent on Indian aid, but it cannot afford to be seen as a surrogate," says Sabyasachi Basu Roy Choudhuri, a Calcutta-based commentator on South Asian relations.

Things are additionally complicated for Bhutan, says Choudhuri, as at this very moment it is trying to settle a boundary issue with China. Beijing will hardly welcome the fact that Indian troops are involved in operations inside Bhutan. The Bhutanese know well that the Chinese objected to the presence of Indian troops in Bhutan (under cover of providing training to Bhutanese army) when P.V. Narasimha Rao was prime minister. China indicated its awareness that there was a much larger Indian military presence in Bhutan than required for training purposes.

Complications Galore

According to sources in Indian intelligence, the ULFA and the NDFB have upto 20 camps in southern Bhutan, including both their headquarters. When the Indian army overran the tactical headquarters of the ULFA near the Assam-Bhutan border earlier this year, Paresh Barua threatened to blow up the oil pipelines in Assam unless the military offensive was stopped. That was followed by an attack on the Assam Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, which he barely escaped.

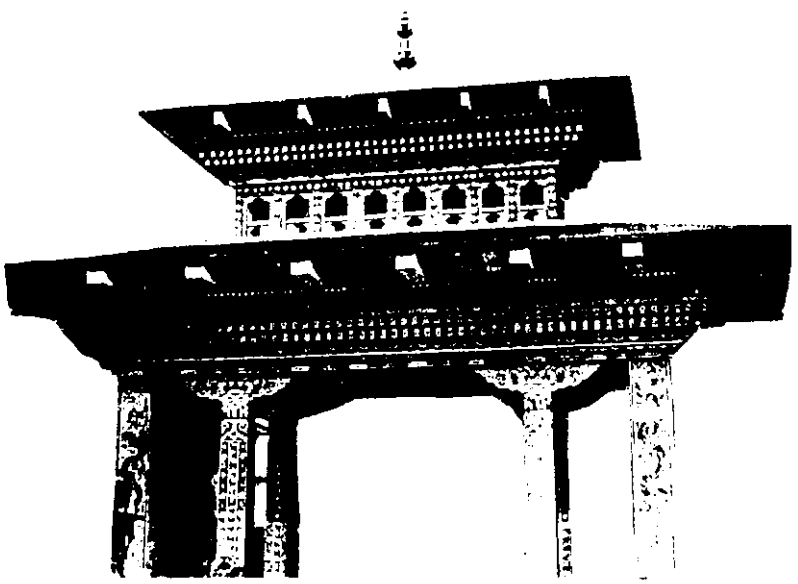
Says an Intelligence Bureau official, "Barua wanted to ensure that the Indian troops did not cross the border and attack their main base. After they were thrown out of Bangladesh by the Sheikh Hasina government, Bhutan has been the ULFA's main base area and of the Bodos as well. Barua had reasons to be desperate."

Barua is believed to have warned the Bhutanese government of "serious consequences" if they allowed the Indian army in, and it is well known that Thimphu shudders at the prospect of Assam-style militancy being unleashed within its territory. Dealing with motivated militants of ULFA or NDFB is a far cry from what they have been used to so far, i.e. skirmishing with unarmed or poorly armed Lhotshampa dissidents (Nepali-speakers of southern Bhutan).

Some officials in Thimphu, certainly, fear a tie-up between the rebels from Assam and the Lhotshampas. "If Bhutan continues to oppose any settlement with the democratic elements in the dissident movement, it will sooner or later be taken over by the hotheads," says military analyst Bharat Verma, publisher of the *Indian Defence Review*. "Since neither India nor Nepal will help them, it is but natural for the extremists among the dissidents to seek underground help."

Adding to the complicated nature of Thimphu-New Delhi relationship at present is what Bhutan considers to be India's refusal to extradite the Bhutanese dissident leader Rongthong Kunley Dorji, who is now in jail in India. New Delhi says he cannot be sent back to Bhutan unless the court in Delhi, where a petition was filed to stay his extradition, clears it (*see Himal July/August 1997*).

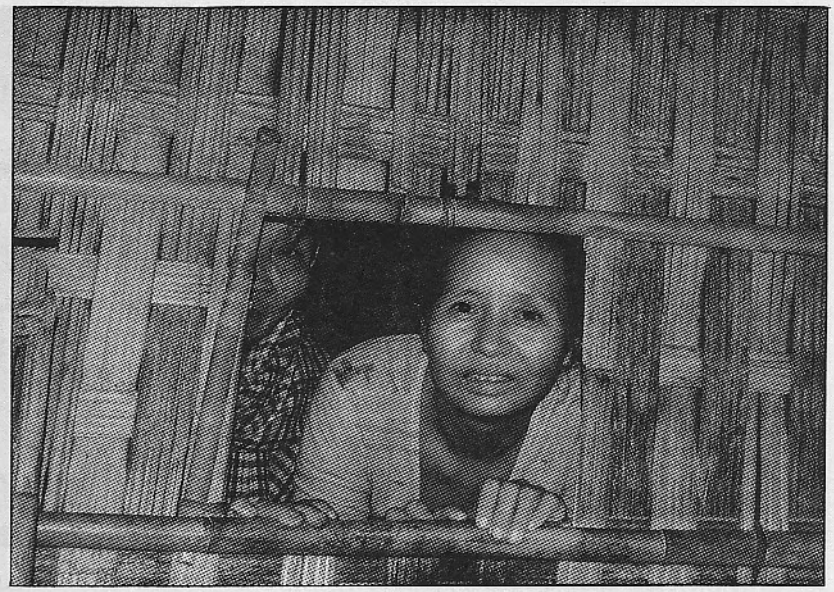
While the rebel presence in southern Bhutan may lead to fresh strains in Indo-Bhutan relations, people on either side of what once was South Asia's most peaceful border live in fear. Says Phub Dorji, a Bhutanese importer in the border town of Phuntsoling, "Our communications west to east lies through Assam. If this border region becomes disturbed, we have reason to panic." The unfortunate killing of four Bhutanese policemen may actually only be the beginning. For the arc between Phuntsoling and Samdrup Jongkhar - Bbutanese roadheads in the west and east - may well turn out to be South Asia's newest killing field.



Phuntsoling entry into Bhutan: Bodo and other militants keep out.

S. Bhaumik is the BBC's Eastern India correspondent based in Calcutta.

Refugees of Spirit



Self-help is the best help, even for refugees. The Chakmas in Tripura show how, while they wait for peace to return back home.

text and pictures by **Patralekha Chatterjee**

Hill women weaving colourful pinons (sarongs), their golden-brown skin glinting in the sun; clusters of bamboo and thatch huts; naked children prancing about; men huddled together, smoking or playing cards...

To eyes accustomed to the dirt and filth of urban India, these images are a soothing balm. It is easy to forget that these men, women and children are among the worst-off refugees in South Asia. The accompanying pictures show Takumbari relief camp, more than 100 km from Agartala, the capital of India's northeastern state of Tripura, where more than 2000 families of Jumma tribals, primarily Buddhist Chakmas, have been languishing in wretched conditions for over a decade. Takumbari is the largest of six camps set up in Tripura for Chakmas. About 15,000 refugees have returned home since 1994 following agreements between India, Bangladesh and refugee leaders. But around 44,000 remain here.

Every night, in the camp, the clang of the temple bells is punctuated by the staccato notes of the news bulletin. The refugee guards, marching round the camp, pause every once in a while to listen to the Bengali service of the BBC. Every bit of news on the latest negotiations between tribal leaders from the hill tracts and the Bangladesh government is discussed and analysed in detail.

Elusive Peace

Peace talks are nothing new between the Bangladesh government and the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samiti (PCJSS) - the political wing of the Shanti Bahini (Chakma guerrillas fighting the Bangladesh state). But this time, Sheikh Hasina's government in Dhaka seems keen on a political solution to the long-festering problem. Nearly 9000 people have been killed so far in the 20-year-old conflict, and an aid-dependent Bangladesh is under increasing pressure from donors to mend its human rights record in the hill tracts.

Land is at the heart of the conflict in the Chittagong hills. Traditionally, the tribals communally owned large parts of the land and used it for *jhum* or shifting cultivation (hence the name Jumma, used collectively for Chakma and non-Chakma tribals of CHT). During British rule, ownership of their land was protected under the 1900 Chittagong Hill Tracts Manual, which prohibited the transfer of land to people from outside the hill tracts.

That changed in 1950 when the Pakistan government violated the Manual and settled several hundred Muslim families in CHT. But that turned out to be only the beginning. The origins of the present problem are nicely encapsulated in a report by the Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission, an independent international body, which states: "The late 1950s saw the beginning of a process of large-scale and systematic displacement of the Jumma people. The first major shock came with the construction of the Kaptai Dam in the late 50s and early 60s, inundating 40 percent of the arable land and displacing more than 100,000 Jumma people. Subsequently, the (Bangladesh) Government Programme of population transfer to the CHT brought more than

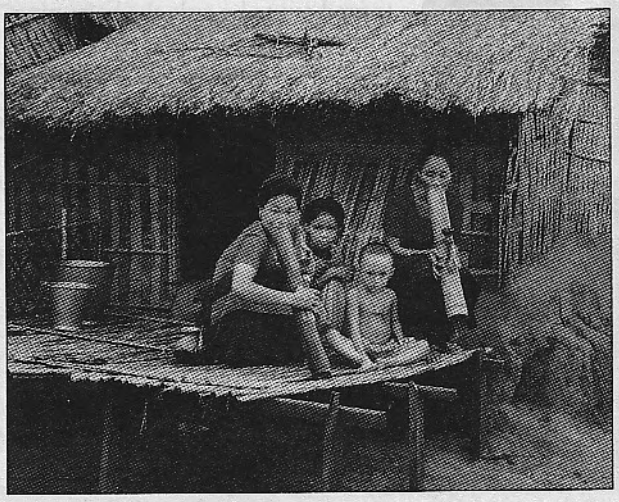
400,000 landless Bengalis to the hill tracts between 1978 and 1985, many of whom now occupy the Jumma people's land. Finally, the various counter-insurgency resettlement programmes which were implemented since the late 1970s moved a large section of the population to 'strategic villages'."

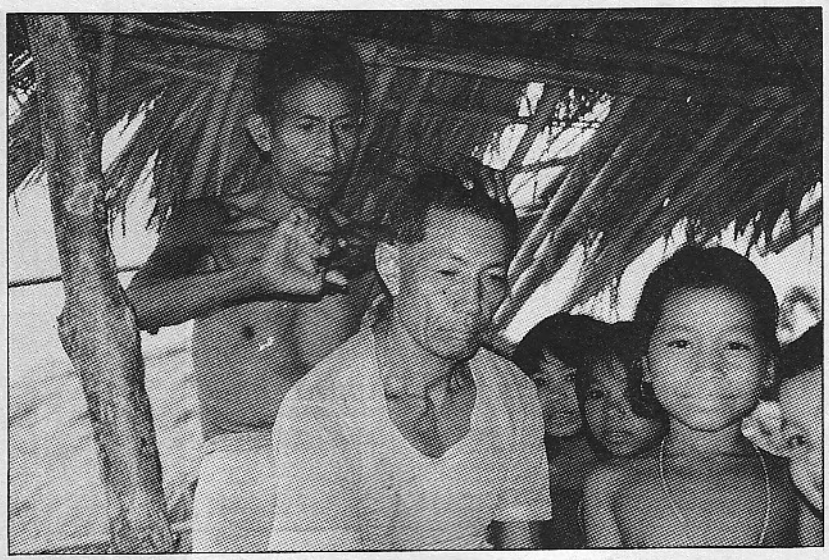
For a lasting peace, questions of land rights for the tribals in the 5000 sq mile CHT, regional autonomy, eviction of the Bengali settlers, role of the army, and proper rehabilitation of those who have already gone back have to be sorted out. The degree of autonomy the PCJSS wants would require an amendment to the Bangladesh Constitution. The Bangladesh opposition, which at present is that of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) led by Begum Khaleda Zia, has been quick to latch on to this issue *(see box)*. It has threatened to cripple the Government if troops are withdrawn from the hills or the Constitution amended.

No one knows what lies ahead. But there is a flicker of hope that the future will be brighter than these past few decades. Till then, the refugees have to cope with their camp life in India.

Indian Apathy

Among all the refugee groups in India, Chakmas are probably the worst off. Indian officials complain about the cost of looking after the Chakmas, but will not let Chakmas (or, for that matter, any other refugee group in the country other than the Afghans) avail of support from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Partly, this is due to the fact that India does not have a refugee policy.





Each refugee group in the country is treated differently, depending on its strategic value or political clout. But while Sri Lankan Tamils camping in southern India can count on fellow Tamils to plead their cause with New Delhi and the Tibetans have their own Dalai Lama along with Hollywood stars pitching for them, the Chakmas, holed up in a remote, neglected part of India, have nobody.

Since 1986, when the first batch of refugees from the Chittagong Hill Tracts arrived on Indian soil, the cash dole has been an incredible 20 paisa per person per day. That adds up to six rupees a month - the lowest amount given to any refugee group in the country. This is much too little to survive on, so the Tripura relief commissioner turns a blind eye to Chakma refugees working quietly on the side as labourers in nearby paddy fields or at construction sites. No doubt, local Chakmas of Tripura resent the refugees for undercutting them in the job market, but as the landlords are happy, not much fuss is created.

The Indian government also provides rice and salt to the refugees along with some extra money to buy other food. But even this disbursement has not been without problems. Between 1992 and 1996, the Chakma refugees of Tripura received rice and salt only. It was not until the New Delhi-based South Asia Human Rights Documentation Centre reported the matter in 1994 that the Indian National Human Rights Commission took notice and the outstanding arrears finally paid in March this year.

The problem is that in a poor and overcrowded country like India, refugees have to jostle for scarce land and resources with other disadvantaged groups. Any mention of non-functioning tubewells in the refugee camps to officials in Agartala elicits a predictable riposte: "How many Indians have access to potable water?"

Down but Not Out

The harshness of exile has not killed the spirit of the people of Takumbari camp. When the first lot of Chakma refugees arrived in Tripura in 1986, 20 to 25 families were herded together in barrack-like bamboo constructions without partitions. Slowly, the refugees started building their own huts. Now, some have their own kitchen gardens as well.

"The first few months, the camp used to be filthy," says Gyanpriya Chakma, one of the first refugees to have enrolled as a health worker with Voluntary Health Association of Tripura (VHAT). "Disease was spreading, so we started a health centre here. As health workers, we started an awareness drive to make the camp clean. Refugee volunteers would demonstrate how each family should keep its environs clean. We went from house to house, singing songs about diarrhoea in the Chakma language. We held corner meetings... you can

see the results with your own eyes."

There is even an eight-bed mini-hospital in the camp that was constructed by the refugees out of their own limited resources a year ago. At the entrance to the hospital, the names of each refugee donor is written in bold letters. This facility has saved them a considerable amount of money since the trip to the nearest hospital alone costs more than 25 rupees. The government doctor who comes every day marvels at the enterprise of the refugees and the growing health awareness in the camp. A mark of success, today even locals visit the refugee hospital.

The hospital has a stock of drugs, a stethoscope, forceps, scissors for minor surgeries, tapes, gauze, blood pressure instrument, and its own delivery ward. "More than 20 refugee women have given birth here," says Chittaranjan Chakma, hospital in-charge. But life-saving drugs are in short supply. The Refugee Welfare Association collects money for the treatment of those who are in real need. "When we really need money, we ask each refugee to contribute a fistful of rice. We take out a collection and then we sell it in the market inside the camp," say Upendra Nath Chakma, president of the Refugee Welfare Association.

The hospital is not the only example of the indomitable spirit of the Chakmas refugees. They have been running their own schools in the camps, against all odds. (Till last year, refugee children were not permitted to appear in the Tripura state high school examinations.) The schools are a refreshing sight: teachers actually teaching, even if the classrooms are make-shift bamboo sheds and the blackboards cracked. There are no chairs and tables in the primary schools. Each child brings a piece of sack cloth to spread on the mud floor.

Most refugee children cannot afford to buy text books. Twenty-one-year-old Gitali Chakma had to give up her studies because there was not enough money. Her father was no more, and she had to take up a job as a refugee health worker with VHAT. Gitali says she is determined to continue her education when she goes back to her native village in the hill tracts.

A similar determination can be felt in the women's committees of which there is one in each camp. With talk of repatriation in the air, the committees are busy preparing their members. "Women don't have equal property rights in our community. So, when we talk about land rights, we have to mobilise women to demand an equal share of that," says Sakyabala Diwan, a committee member.

Driven out of Bangladesh, neglected by India, ignored by the world, the condition of the Chakmas in their refugee camps shows that refugees can rarely be happy in exile. But they can do a lot to make the present more bearable. And going by the collective will they have shown, they can even be an asset to the host community.

Based in New Delhi, P. Chatterjee writes on migration trends.

An Agreement, Almost!

THE PEACE TALKS between the government-appointed National Committee on CHT and the Parbattya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samiti (PCJSS) seems to be nearing the end of a long road. Once signed, the agreement will end the 23-year insurgency that traces its roots back to the time of the previous Awami League government of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

The PCJSS has indicated that they would like to sign the final CHT peace agreement on 25 November to coincide with the tripartite (Bangladesh-Pakistan-India) economic summit and Indian Prime Minister I.K. Gujral's visit to Bangladesh.

Any agreement on the CHT would be a personal political victory for Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Only that the dialogue is facing hurdles in its final stages.

For starters, what has been reported as one of the highlights of the agreement - the PCJSS's long-standing demand that "unnecessary" army camps and border posts be withdrawn or dismantled in the CHT - is being strenuously opposed by Begum Khaleda Zia of the opposition BNP. Saying that this would be a grievous breach of national security, the BNP has called for a nation-wide strike on the day the treaty is signed.

The peace agreement had initially been expected to be signed earlier this year before the ceasefire agreement with the PCJSS expired on 30 June. But an attack in May by Shanti Bahini "regulars" in olive uniforms on a border outpost in Banderban killing a Bangladesh Rifles soldier and two tribals led to the postponement. The BNP has been using the example of this attack to term the PCJSS demand unacceptable.

The May attack underscores the complexity of the CHT problem. Two Marma insurgents were arrested in connection with the attack on the border post. The Marmas are the second largest tribal group after the Chakmas (who make up 24 percent of the one million CHT population) and the arrested two are known to have confessed to a scheme for a separate Marma state in Banderban because they do not recognise the peace negotiations as representative of all the CHT minority groups.

Disaffection among non-Chakma tribals aside, the Dhaka government faces greater challenges from Indian rebel groups that have been using the Hill Tracts as a base to launch attacks on Indian forces. After the Awami League government agreed that Bangladesh would support and participate in joint operations against Indian rebels, if asked, these groups have gone on the counter-offensive. The United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) has reportedly threatened to target Bangladesh if it helps India in this regard. It is also feared that militant groups from India's Northeast would try to scuttle any agreement by instigating the Marma and other tribes.

Meanwhile, there is as yet disagreement over the peace treaty itself. The PCJSS and the Shanti Bahini are demanding that Dhaka grant full authority to the proposed CHT Regional Council over land, civil and police administration. In addition, they insist that the government make a list of all the military camps that will be withdrawn and commit itself to resettling Bengali settlers who want to leave the hill districts. It is also known that the government has been slow in repatriating refugees from the Hill Tracts.

While the CHT peace talks are drawing to a close, nothing is as yet certain. The PCJSS and the government have been down this road before. But this is as good a chance as any that 23 years of conflict may yet draw to a close.

-Talat Kamal

Balancing Act at the United Nations

No side either admits it or takes credit for it, but fortuitously enough, India and Pakistan often have achieved parity in terms of bureaucratic power at the United Nations in New York.

by ***Farhan Haq***

UN/DPI PHOTO BY MILTON GRANT

Chinmaya Gharekhhan with Kofi Annan.

When Boutros Boutros-Ghali was the Secretary-General of the United Nations, some Pakistanis at the UN repeatedly voiced concern that he was too strongly influenced by then Under Secretary-General Chinmaya Garekhan, formerly India's Permanent Representative to the UN. Similarly, years earlier, the Pakistanis were miffed that another Under Secretary-General, Virendra Dayal, had the ear of his boss, Javier Perez de Cuellar. For their part, Indian diplomats have often complained that no Indian heads a UN agency - a complaint made more competitive by the fact that one such head, Nafis Sadik, Executive Director of the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), is Pakistani and has been in the position for 11 years.

On the whole, however, this kind of blinkered carping does not figure in the larger scheme of things at the United Nations in New York, where the Secretariat as well as major agencies such as UNDP (for development), UNFPA (population) and Unicef (children) are headquartered. Indeed, for all the nationalistic flag-waving that does exist even in the UN, there have been many examples of Indians and Pakistanis cooperating and rising together in the international civil service.

Indian and Pakistani diplomats alike point to the relationship between Iqbal Riza, a Pakistani, and Shashi Tharoor, an Indian, as a sign of how misguided the view of Indian-Pakistani "zero-sum" competition at the UN is. Riza and Tharoor both served under Kofi Annan when the Ghanaian diplomat headed the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. They worked closely together in handling UN peacekeeping work in Bosnia-Herzegovina. When Annan took over from Boutros-Ghali as Secretary-General at the beginning of 1997, both men rose to the Secretariat's top ranks, with Riza taking the coveted chief-of-staff (Chef de Cabinet) role and Tharoor in a prominent advisory slot. Indians and Pakistanis have no problems getting along, says a former South Asian staffer, pointing the finger in an entirely different direction in a show of regional solidarity, "The real problem is the Latin Americans always trying to get the top posts for their region." (The rise of the Latino in the United Nations Secretariat harks back to the period of Boutros Boutros-Ghali's successor, Peruvian Javier Perez de Cuellar, who served two terms as Secretary-General from 1982 to 1992.)

For many years, the number of Indian and Pakistani diplomats in senior UN posts have been more or less equal. In terms of senior Under Secretaries General - the rung that is immediately beneath the Secretary-General - the two sides are equal at present. If Iqbal Riza is Chef de Cabinet, Nitin Desai from India heads the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development, a position created after the Rio environment summit in 1992. Similarly, while Tharoor, perhaps better known

for authoring books such as *The Great Indian Novel* and *Bollywood*, is an executive assistant to Annan, Pakistan's Qazi Shaukat Fareed handles roughly a similar number of world crises as Director of the UN Department for Humanitarian Affairs. No side either admits it or takes credit for it, but fortuitously enough, the two South Asian neighbours have often achieved parity in terms of UN bureaucratic power.

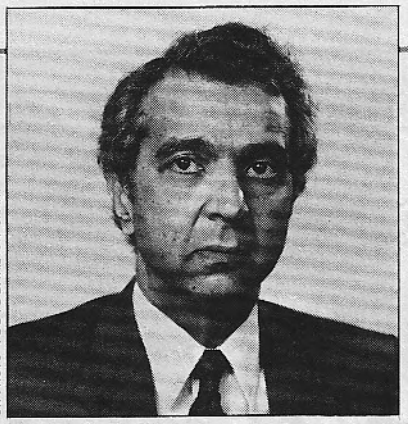
Some UN staffers believe that such parity is unnecessary, and insist that the lack of it would be not be objectionable to either side. "Countries don't really care how many of their nationals occupy certain UN positions, it's just the way things turn out," says one Pakistani diplomat - who, nonetheless, is well aware of all the senior spots occupied by his compatriots. The larger point is true enough: all UN employees are international civil servants who profess loyalty to the institution and not to their nations of origin.

One thing is certain: the India-Pakistan wrangling notwithstanding, all South Asians at the UN have an endearing attachment to their region as a whole. Two senior officials, Iqbal Haji and Amit Bhattacharyya, have been bringing together many of the South Asians at the UN for a somewhat-regular South Asia Forum, which offers feisty discussions on regional controversies in a collegial atmosphere more typical of a US think tank.

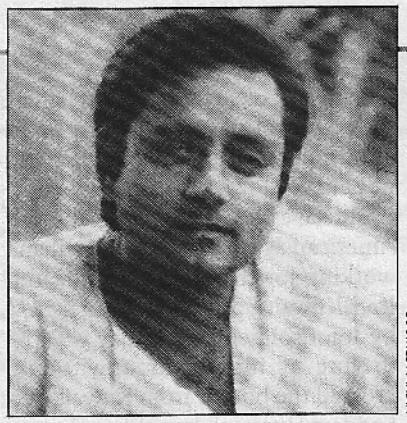
South Asians in North America

Perhaps what sharpens the sense of relative unity among diplomats from the Subcontinent is the pressure from the United States, which is known to regard staffers from South Asia as being a bit too independent-minded. Washington reportedly was anxious to see Virendra Dayal, considered an unrepentant leftist, depart from the UN's top ranks. It pushed for the Indian diplomat to obtain a "golden parachute" once Perez de Cuellar's term finished.

Two years ago, right-wing Republican Senator Jon Kyl put similar pressure on Riza, requesting that the Pakistani official, then Assistant Secretary-General for peacekeeping, waive the traditional UN immunity from testifying so that he could appear before the US Congress to ex-



UN PHOTO 166193/MILTON GRANT



COURTESY: INDIA

Top guns: Iqbal Riza (left) and his author-colleague Shashi Tharoor.

A Matter of Representation

THOSE WHO MAKE it their interest to study the posting of South Asians at the United Nations look not only at the seniority of nationals, but the numbers also. As jobs seen to have prestige and first world lifestyles in the heart of the West, UN positions are in high demand. Unfortunately, openings are few and far between, particularly due to years of budgetary crisis and the continuous threat of re-structuring that the UN Secretariat has suffered for a decade or more. Because of the very few jobs that come vacant, great store is kept by 'contacts' for anyone to get a job in the United Nations.

Those who get in at senior levels tend to be South Asians (mostly Pakistanis and Indians, due to the clout their countries command) who have served in their respective permanent missions to the United Nations. Those who join at the junior rungs tend to be sons and daughters of South Asian diplomats, or others, who have studied in close-by United States colleges and are able to get a foot in the door through internships and voluntary work.

Jobs in the United Nations are, firstly, divided into the General Services (GS) and Professional categories. Among Professionals, the categorisations are made between the 'P' levels (with staffers starting at the entry-level of P-1 and over the course of two decades, with luck, moving up to the P-5 category) and the Director-level 'D' categories. While one's professional abilities may be enough to ensure progress through the 'P' levels, to enter the 'D' level generally requires political push to overcome the competition for posts among all the regions of the world, including Europe, East Asia, West Asia, Latin America, Africa.

The following breakdown of South Asian nationals working above the P1 and D1 levels shows India well in the lead. But Pakistan has an equal number of high-level staff despite its smaller population size.

Country	P1 and above	D1 and above
Bangladesh	13	2
Bhutan	0	0
India	42	4
Maldives	0	0
Nepal	7	0
Pakistan	14	4
Sri Lanka	8	2

Figures above are as of June 30, 1996, when the last survey was done - and since then Pakistan and India have each had one high-level rise (Riza and Tharoor).

As to the question which South Asian country is over- or under-represented in the United Nations bureaucracy, the analysis can be complex. The UN has a formula whereby nations' post allotment is in proportion to its UN dues assessment. Under the formula, a fair distribution for Bangladesh would be 4 to 14 posts, India 27 to 37 posts, Nepal 2 to 14, Pakistan 4 to 14, and Sri Lanka 2 to 14. By that standard, India, with its 42 geographically distributed posts, is the only South Asian country over-represented in the Secretariat (this does not include the agencies such as UNDP and Unicef), while Bangladesh and Pakistan are on the high end of their range, and Nepal and Sri Lanka in the middle. Bhutan and Maldives have no staffers at the United Nations, only diplomats representing them in their respective missions.

Brian Urquhart and the late Erskine Childers, respected senior staffers at the Secretariat who continued to write about UN affairs after retirement, published a report in 1996 on 'representation' at the United Nations. According to them, the only countries really over-represented at the UN were the US and Europeans, which occupy the majority of top spots. Going by their analysis, South Asians should unite and root for more positions at the United Nations, regardless of nationality.

UN/FILE PHOTO

Nafis Sadik: no help from home.

plain what role, if any, he had had in the capture of two Americans by Iraq's government. Kyl never explained why he believed Riza, based in New York, could have played any part in the two Americans' ordeal. The two civilians working for the UN mission at the Iraq-Kuwait border had been seized by Iraqi soldiers when they got lost driving at night and unwittingly crossed the border from Kuwait into Saddam Hussein's lair. When the two were released unconditionally by Saddam (expecting US appreciation which never came), and no evidence of treachery by Riza ever materialised, there was a suspicion among a few UN staffers that the Pakistani diplomat had been singled out by Kyl because he had earlier refused a helicopter contract for a US firm, Evergreen, which the Iraqis claimed was a front for the Central Intelligence Agency.

There have been other officials who have been criticised more by the US than by any South Asian rival - most notable among them being Nafis Sadik. She has been the bugbear of some Congressional Republicans who contend that she has steered UNFPA to fund programmes, in countries like China, which allow abortion, involuntary sterilisation and other banes of the Christian right. (Sadik's profile on population issues even earned her a rebuke from the Pope when the two met in a bid to iron out differences before the 1995 population conference in Cairo.)

In contrast to the chill with many US politicians, Sadik boasts of friendly relations with Indian officials, even arguing that New Delhi had offered her its support in her current campaign to be elected Director-General of the World Health Organisation. Her positive image throughout South Asia, however, has not translated into significant political backing from the Nawaz Sharif government, confides a New York-based Pakistani diplomat. Instead, he said, "Islamabad has decided that it won't even post one official to campaign full-time for her to get the WHO job." As a result, Sadik is regarded as a distant second in the WHO race, to former Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland, who enjoys the political support and general goodwill that only a Scandinavian socialist could command at the world organisation.

Sadik's plight is in many ways typical of South Asian officials at the UN. For all the tussle over top spots and other UN goodies that India and Pakistan get into, both are woefully behind countries of the West in actually pushing the case for their own nationals. The fact that South Asian countries hardly ever push for their own kind is a truism that goes back decades - as far back as the early 1960s when King Mahendra of Nepal was cold to one proposal that his Permanent Representative to the UN, Rishikesh Shaha (who chaired the committee investigating the death of Secretary-General Dag Hammerskjold), be considered for the top job.

F. Haq reports for Inter Press Service from the UN.

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Interesting feature about **Lady Di's last days**, Southasiawise, was that Dr Hasnat, the Pakistani cardiologist with whom she had allegedly developed a "close relationship" disappeared from the news and gossip pages as soon as the late Dodi Fayed entered the princess's life. More interesting, however, was how even the Pakistani media did not give Dr Hasnat his due attention once the romancing couple perished. What did the doctor feel, what was his reaction? Or did I miss something? While still on Di coverage after her death, a Karachi lady educationist thought it awful of Charles to have betrayed his wife, for the reason that she was a virgin at the time of her marriage.

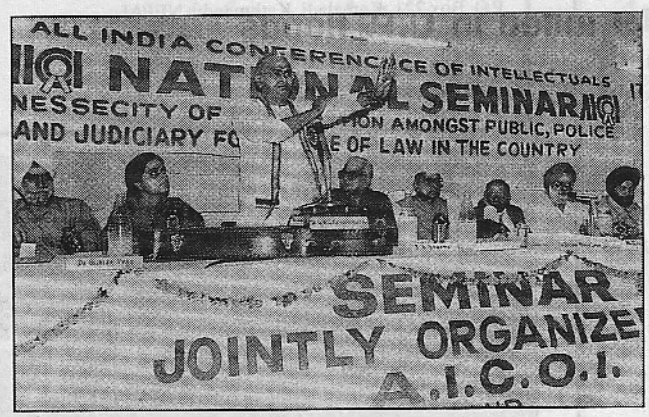
"Leghari draws world attention to Kashmir", announced the leader headline in the Lahore paper. Oh, how we do fool ourselves. Pakistani President Farooq Leghari did draw attention to UN Security Council resolutions on Kashmir at a banquet given in honour of Elizabeth Regina, but how could one think that the world was listening, when the news does not even cross the border to India in that form? A better perspective on world media and its interests should be had by all in South Asia, me believes.

Intellectuals who call themselves intellectuals are not intellectuals. Each country of South Asia boasts of organisations of self-proclaimed intellectuals, individuals who fail to recognise that like 'environmentalist', 'intellectual' is a term that others give one, never one to self. And so Chhetria Patrakar (a confirmed non-intellectual, and hoping to remain so) smiled smugly and superiorly to himself when he learnt recently of the existence of the All India Conference of Intellectuals, who recently organised a National Seminar on "The nessecity *(sic)* of *(something)* among public, police and judicialry *(something)* law in the country." (See picture - various persons blocking the banner makes it a hard read.)" Boy, with all those self-important males (and one female) on the podium, was I glad that I was not invited. Which of course I would not be. Ahem. Ahem.

Listen to what Arthur J. Pais, *India Today's* tried and trusted man in New York, describes a **Subcontinental architect** who has made good in the United States: "A first generation Indian American - he is a Sri Lankan Tamil..." Let's get this straight: you are either *Indian* or *Sri Lankan*, and you can be *Tamil* both ways. Or you can be *South Asian*. Let us not create hurdles where there are none.

Read in a *Hindu* item from Washington DC that **Karl Inderfurth**, newly-appointed State Department czar (read Asst Secretary of State) for South Asia has been given the additional job of US Special Representative of the President and Secretary of State for Global Humanitarian Demining. That is indeed a long and impressive title, but what is to be of South Asia. Are we South Asians going to revert back to the bottom of the barrel of Foggy Bottom concerns? *Helooo?* Anyone listening?!

I liked it that Yusuf Khan of Peshawar in the NWFP was awarded the **Nishan-i-Imtiaz**. I was also glad that the Hindu-first nationalist tiger in his home metropolis did not raise any great hullabaloo about Yusuf Saheb receiving the award, as he might have if it had suited his purpose. No, I do not mean Peshawar, I mean Bombay. For the recipient was none other than the actor Dilip Kumar, former Sheriff of that fair city.



This AFP picture was carried by many dailies. The **captions differed**, however. *The Telegraph* of Calcutta said: "Thirteen-year-old Rafaqat cries in pain in a military hospital in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. Pakistan claimed the boy was hit by a bullet fired by Indian forces near the border on Monday." The *Asian Age* (which actually has a "Pakistan/Bangladesh/SAARC" page, long may it prosper) wrote thus: "Thirteen-year-old Rafaqat cries in pain at a military hospital after he was hit by a bullet fired by the Indian forces near the line of control, 60 km southeast of Muzaffarabad, the capital of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, on Monday." I would vote for the *AA* caption.

In **marking the milestones** while celebrating the 50th anniversary of Independence, many Indian magazines harked back to the climbing of Everest by Tenzing Norgay in 1953. Quite forgetting the fact that at least till then Tenzing was known as "Tenzing Sherpa", and if he had a nationality at all, it would have been Nepali. This son of a Tibetan labourer who grew up in the Nepali village of Thame opted for Indian citizenship (and directorship of the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute in Darjeeling) sometime after 1953.

Which takes me to the widely mispronounced **Jallianwallah Bagh**, where the opportunity of a visit by Elizabeth II had Indian media pundits (as opposed to the Brahminical *pandits*) shouting themselves hoarse asking for an apology on behalf of those massacred under the orders of Brig Gen Reginald Dyer. Quietly and in all seriousness, let me ask if someone from the Punjab should also be asking for an apology from Balochistan and all former Gorkha lands for the same

action. You see, the soldiers under Dyer's command who actually pulled the trigger were all Gurkha and Baloch. Should Balochistan Chief Minister Sardar Akhtar Mangal and Nepal's King Birendra apologise, even if the queen does not?

I remember that this **"boyfriends and girlfriend"** thing really taking off in South Asia over the last few years when the Archies card-cum-trinket shop opened up in different cities of our fair subcontinent. And now Thimphu, not yet a metropolis of course, is clearly in for it. For, going by an ad in *Kuensel* weekly, Archies is looking for a salesperson, an assistant salesperson and a store incharge, each of whom should be "young, enthusiastic, motivated and charming". And Bhutanese, of course.

All chambers of commerce and industry, including the SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry, should go into **deep mourning** upon hearing this. The Commerce Minister of Pakistan, Muhammad Ishaque Dar, has said it in so many words that there can be no free trade with India unless political issues including Kashmir are settled. No chamber of commerce would be allowed "to implement any agreement with Indian counterparts", he said. Hey, over there, will you gentlemen (no women among you, that's for sure), you in the working group to make SAPTA and SAFTA happen, will you stop that sobbing?

Chhetria Patrakar is not a **knee-jerk privatiser**, but there are times when he will support privatising a government corporation, particularly when that corporation runs a newspaper. Governments have no business running newspapers, just as they have no business interfering with the supposedly autonomous electronic media. All this has to do with the announcement that two state-run papers, *Dainik Bangla* and *Bangladesh Times*, apparently are going on the anvil in Dhaka. Actually, since the news report is datelined 12 September, it might already have happened, which will have been a good thing.

Newspaper: *Kuensel*. Scene: a **formal Drukpa affair** in a Thimphu conference chamber. Caption: "A juvenile delinquent shares his impressions of the training." Subject: passing out of four youth offenders after learning household wiring and plumbing. Comment: If they have been trained and have promised to reform, we should not call them 'juvenile delinquent' any more, should we? Small nitpicky sort of point, I agree. *Sorry.*

I have here with me now a **SAARC Secretariat Press Release** that announces that Mohammed Sukur Salek of Bangladesh has won the first-ever SAARC Youth Award, for "Outstanding Service in Community Welfare". Good enough, and congratulations to Mister Sukur. Then I scan the press release to see why this award has been "unanimously" conferred on the gentleman, and I see that it is for "His impressive record of service and achievement in community welfare projects". Nothing more. And so a rose is a rose is a rose...

Loss of perspective also means bungled business, so the **Amul people** had better watch out. Otherwise rightly acclaimed for its timely cartoon commentary carried on billboards and magazine pages, the Gujarat doodhwallah seemed to have lost it with this tasteless ad with the tag line "Killer taste", which followed the gangland killing of Indian music moghul Gulshan Kumar in late August. For once, Amul tried to milk too much out of the tragedy, which is uncharacteristic.

My award for **Worst Film Title of the Year** goes to *Very Good Dunya Very Bad Loag*, which just opened in Karachi to what I hope are empty houses. Director Suleman should be hauled before the (we hope soon to be established) SAARC Tribunal on Rational Aesthetics (STRA) and asked to repeat a hundred times, "I will think up a better title next time, I will think up a better title next time, I will think up a better title next time, I will think up a better title next time..." But that 'loag' was inspired, much better than 'loge' which could be mispronounced with a 'j'.

–Chhetria Patrakar

Saint Teresa, Not Quite

by ***Vijay Prashad***

To open the life of someone like Mother Teresa to scrutiny is always a difficult task. First, there is an aura that surrounds her image, one which seems to disallow any form of criticism. Second, there is a sense of inadequacy in all of us because of her spartan life filled with a genuine sense of service. There are some similarities with Gandhi, who also made criticism seem absurd as he sat amongst the poor in their clothes and with a smile on his ineffable face.

Certainly, Mother Teresa was an extraordinary person, or else there would not be such attention paid at the time of her death. This critique of Mother Teresa is not intended to downplay her role in the amelioration of suffering among some of the world's poor. Our interest does not lie in the intricacies of her theology but in the limitations of her work. For, in the end, her work was part of a global enterprise for the alleviation of bourgeois guilt rather than a genuine challenge to those forces that produce and maintain poverty.

Proto-Saint of Calcutta

The problem with Mother Teresa begins with her glorifiers who have removed her from the realm of history and deposited her, during her lifetime, in the realm of myth. It all began with Malcolm Muggeridge's 1969 documentary and 1971 book, *Something Beautiful for God*, which transformed a local social worker into a saint. Soon, the entire panoply of media and professional mendicants descended upon Calcutta to put the city down in order to lift Mother Teresa up.

Calcutta became the ahistorical emblem of distress. Its imperial past and communist present did not enter into this representation of the city. There was no sense of the destruction wrought by the East India Company and, later, by the British Empire. Further, there was no interest in the events in East Pakistan (Bangladesh, after 1971), from where 12 million refugees descended upon West Bengal. Muggeridge and his ilk pay little heed to the creation and maintenance of poverty in Bengal.

Of Calcutta's poverty, the anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss noted in *Tristes Tropiques* that "they are more like a natural environment which the Indian town needs in order to prosper." India, for him, is a "martyred continent" whose people are not poor for any reason other than demography. Levi-Strauss, like Muggeridge, relies upon Malthusianism ("overpopulated"), a theory which cannot grasp the structural problems of the region, but which offers cheap slogans in the service of callousness. These writers turn Calcutta into a vile pit, oppressed by its teeming millions, rather than exploited by the forces of international capital, among others; the salvation of the city is not to be found in anti-capitalist movements, but in the intercession of the proto-saint.

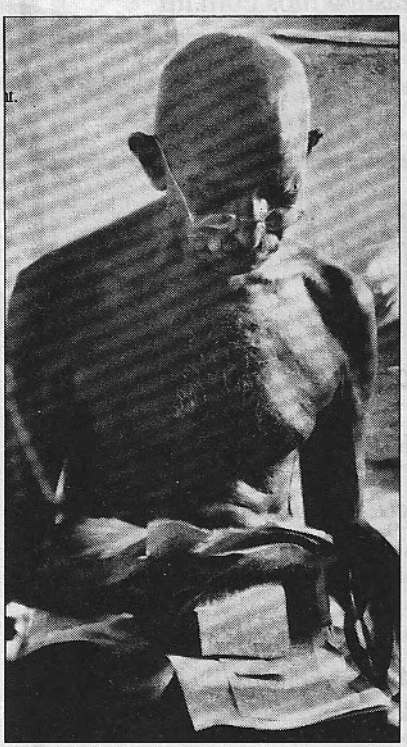
During the period of Muggeridge's visit to the city, the left forces of West Bengal formed a United Front experiment. They pledged to "govern and mobilise" the people, and to organise the peasantry and proletariat so as to devolve power into their hands. During these experiments, the Congress Party and its US allies conducted a reign of terror against the Communists. (Not many are aware of Senator Daniel P. Moynihan's revelation: "We had twice, but only twice, interfered in Indian politics to the extent of providing money to a political party. Both times it was done in the face of a prospective Communist victory in a state election, once in Kerala and once in West Bengal, where Calcutta is located.")

An important consequence of

the United Front's mobilisation was the raising of political awareness among the poor, a fact that has been widely acknowledged. But it serves the anti-communist pundits well to ignore these developments and concentrate on saintliness instead. To them, the only hope for the poor appeared to be Mother Teresa. Her own history (her past and present) was rapidly superseded by the myth that was Mother Teresa. This was compounded after the Indian government bestowed upon her the Prize of the Miraculous Lotus, the Vatican the John XXIII Prize for Peace in 1971, the US the Good Samaritan Prize and the John F. Kennedy Award, and the British the Templeton Prize in 1973. The United Nations struck a medal in her honour in 1975, and with 1979 came the *coup de grace*, when she received the Nobel Prize for Peace.

Cult of Suffering

With the Vatican's blessings, Mother Teresa founded the Missionaries of Charity in 1950 to continue "Christ's concern for the poor and the lowliest", as the 120-page constitution of the Missionaries puts it. The Missionaries set up homes for the dying, a leper village and a children's home. But Mother Teresa's sisters attempted to soothe the wails of the ill and the dying with the balm of love alone.



Many had only rudimentary training in the arts of allopathic medicine (or any medical tradition, for that matter).

In 1994, when Robin Fox, a medical doctor, visited the Missionaries of Charity in Calcutta, he found that the sisters did not utilise modern technology (notably study of blood to determine such common ailments as malaria from other illnesses). The sisters used no procedures to distinguish the curable from the incurable. Wrote Dr Fox in *The Lancet* (17 September 1994): "Such systematic approaches are alien to the ethos of the home." On the question of pain and its alleviation, the sisters offered no relief for the dying. "I could not judge the power of their spiritual approach, but I was disturbed to learn that the formulary includes no strong analgesics," was Dr Fox's comment.

That is precisely what Christopher Hitchens argues in *The Missionary Position: Mother Teresa in Theory and Practice*: "The point is not the honest relief of suffering but the promulgation of a cult based on death and suffering and subjection." Further, "helpless infants, abandoned derelicts, lepers and the terminally ill are the raw material for demonstrations of compassion. They are in no position to complain, and their passivity and abjection is considered to be a sterling trait."

The Beautiful Poor

The idea that poverty is the condition of saintliness is shared by the Christianity of Mother Teresa and the non-denominational saintliness of Mahatma Gandhi. Both identified the poor as the blessed and they both sought not to abolish poverty, but to valorise the poor and suggest that only amongst the poor can one find happiness. Gandhi wrote extensively of the "dignity of poverty" and he extolled people to see the joy of poverty.

Along these lines, Mother Teresa noted that poverty is "beautiful". Rather than something bad, poverty then becomes something to celebrate. The poor can be treated with condescension as those who will redeem the world by their acceptance of charity. This approach expresses no interest in the causes of poverty and in the condition of patronage demanded of the poor by the charity industry. Upon Mother Teresa's death, her successor Sister Nirmala noted that "poverty will always exist. We want the poor to see poverty in the right way - to accept it and believe that the Lord will provide."

The Missionaries of Charity preach subservience and fatalism, two habits that hold back any hope of the politicisation of the poor towards genuine social change. To be fair to Mother Teresa, when she was criticised in Latin America for her failure to grasp the roots of poverty, she said that "if people feel it is their vocation to change structures, then that is the work they must do". This is a rather noncommittal statement, but it does offer some suggestion of Mother Teresa's own inconsistent position on poverty. That is, if poverty is "beautiful" and if it is inevitable, is there any point in identifying and combating the structures that produce poverty?

Trough of Guilt

Perhaps the most disturbing aspect about Mother Teresa's life was the company she kept, partly, one would like to believe, for raising money to do her work. She was, of course, not alone, since many nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) are prone to cavort with the rich and famous from whom they secure funds to do their work. Think of those with whom Mother Teresa was often photographed: Diana Spencer, Michhle Duvalier (wife of Haitian dictator Baby Doc Duvalier), Nancy Reagan, Hillary Clinton, Robert Maxwell and, finally, Charles Keating.

Charles Keating is best remembered in the US as the person behind what is known as the Savings and Loans fiasco. In 1992, he was charged with 70 counts of racketeering and fraud and escaped a 10-year sentence on a procedural matter. Keating, who ripped off US workers of millions of dollars, and who bribed five US Senators (the "Keating Five") to prevent his prosecution, had during his halcyon days donated USD 1.25 million to the Missionaries of Charity. Mother Teresa also used to fly in his private jet.

When Keating was brought to trial, Mother Teresa wrote to the judge on behalf of her friend. She started her letter with "we do not mix up in Business or Politicts [sic] or courts,"

The Missionaries of Charity preach subservience and fatalism, two habits that hold back any hope of the politicisation of the poor.

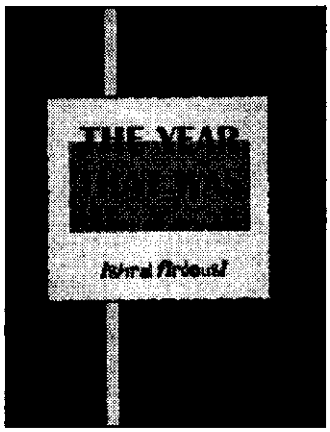
which was of course just what she was doing with the letter. The letter continues, "I do not know anything about Mr Charles Keating's work or his business or the matters you are dealing with. I only know that he has always been kind and generous to God's poor, and always ready to help whenever there was a need." She then asks the judge to go inside his heart, pray and follow the example of Jesus. Either the Mother was naive, which is unlikely, or she was not concerned about the means by which Keating made that money (by going against "God's poor"), only a fraction of which was returned as charity to earn the prestige of Mother Teresa's name.

Mother Teresa, like other "non-political" service organisations, ended up compromising her principles for her benefactors. There are other examples of her having two sets of principles: one for those in power, and another for those who are powerless. But this is not merely an essay about Mother Teresa, but also an attempt to explain the nature of the charity industry, which is more often than not a trough for bourgeois guilt.

There will be many Teresas in the future to assuage this sensibility of guilt, itself unresolvable under the cruel rule of capital. Mother Teresa's Sisyphian labour was meaningful to the proletariat, the peasantry and unemployed. Bengal's proletariat and peasantry are today in the midst of a process of politicisation. As lines of demarcation become distinct, and different approaches to poverty become clear, the admiration of the people will lessen.

V. Prashad teaches international relations at Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut.

Telling It As It Was



The Year That Was

edited by Ishrat Firdousi
Bastu Prakashan, Dhaka, 1996
hard bound, price not mentioned, 532 pages

reviewed by **Beena Sarwar**

Truth destroys all rosy notions of what a remembered war should be. War becomes a time where the expected becomes the remote and extremes rule the day. *The Year That Was* is not going to be an effortless read for many because it demythologises 1971, predicts Afsan Chowdhury in his eloquent foreword. Ishrat Firousi returns that period to the domain of ordinary people and their recollections. War becomes a series of personal experiences against the backdrop of a societal nightmare.

Chowdhury is right. This is not an easy book to read or to review. Its strength lies in raking up the human stories and issues revolving around the 1971 war between Bengali nationalists of what was then East Pakistan and the army of the then West Pakistan.

While the task of collecting these stories must have been formidable, the editor belittles the effort in the Editor's Note: "It was no big deal, just took five years." He admits readily that the recapitulation of events that took place over two decades ago has its problems, like generalisations, over-simplifications and exaggerations (and many will also contend, a few tall tales too!). Also, many narratives give second- (or third-) hand information. Firousi also notes that this is not official history, although it is probably the first collection of oral recollections of tbis depth from 1971.

Going for Grey

The collection of 71 interviews, perhaps symbolising the year 1971, randomly arranged and presented in the first-person narrative, shatters the national perceptions that have deliberately been built up around 1971, at least in Pakistan, and probably also in Bangladesh. While in Pakistan there has been a policy of whitewashing history, so that the events of 1971 and what led to them are not public knowledge (despite a growing demand for this), one can guess that in Bangladesh the 1971 war and its players have been eulogised to the extent that no criticism of them is allowed. On both sides there is a black-and-white attitude towards 1971 - them and us, good and evil.

The Year That Was de-bunks all mythmaking by narrating atrocities committed on both sides. At the same time, the book also presents stories of people showing compassion towards the enemy, again on both sides. But these are far fewer in number.

Chowdhury writes in his foreword: "This book is a collection of interviews of people who experienced 1971 in some degree of intensity or another. They cannot easily be categorised as heroes or victims or by any other such definition. Best would be to say that they experienced 1971 and survived. So this is a collective diary of survivors."

What stands out in the end rather than any literary style, are the bare bones of some of the stories. The reader wishes desperately to know where these survivors are today, and the editor has been thoughtful enough to include the information at the back of the book.

One wishes that Firousi had also been equally diligent in eliminating the many irritating errors and unnecessarily italicised hits that crop up throughout the book. The stories recounted, however, are so compelling that these unfortunate oversights are, however, easily overlooked. At least for this Pakistani reviewer, this is a book that contains stories which have not been related before. It is also clear that the proper approach to this book is to first set aside preconceived notions and biases about 1971. That having been done, *The Year That Was* is yours to be engrossed in, tragically so.

Twenty-five years after Bangladesh won independence from Pakistan, there is Mohammad Jafar Ali Khan narrating the gruesome violence by both sides which he witnessed as a 10-year-old schoolboy in 1971. Perhaps his young age then has something to do with the nightmarish quality of his recollections. A Bihari, he is one of the two narrators in the book who are non-Bengali.

Jafar's story is too macabre to re-relate, its finger of condemnation pointing at Bengalis and non-Bengalis alike. He remembers seeing Shamsu, the *razakar* (fighting collaborator) known as the Killer, licking a bloodied sword that had just been used to slaughter a Bengali. Some time later, the non-Bengali Jafar was himself stabbed by a Bengali who shouted: "There goes a *pargachha* (parasite)! Finish the bastard!" Never had I heard such cries or seen so much human blood, recalls Jafar, who is today a rickshaw-puller.

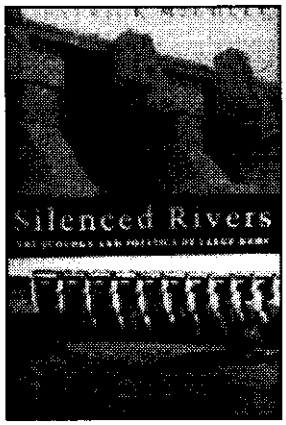
The detachment with which Jafar recounts his stories is frightening. There are no more tears left, especially after all these years. The matter-of-fact rendering of extreme situations lends the book an eerie touch. Neither Jafar nor any of the others who remember 1971 resort to polemics or outrage. Telling it as it was, is enough.

At the end, finally, there is some comic relief: a note on Errata written with a flippancy that is incongruous after such intense reading, but which indicates the editor's refusal to take himself seriously:

> *Anyway, this book is a veritable minefield of errors and the idio... er Editor and the cheap... er chief collaborator have agreed to blame each other, if it is of any help. It was also decided that we would leave it to the reader (why should we have all the fun was the reasoning) to take up the challenge: Enjoy yourself, sail your way through and think nothing of the zillions of extra commas, exclamation marks, periods, the insan... er interesting treatment of many illustrations (including an upside down map) and many, many others that make up this Errata.*

Right. Reading this note at the beginning rather than the end may have helped the reader enjoy him or herself more. But enjoy is not the right word for the experience of reading *The Year That Was*.

The Prosecutor's Brief



Silenced Rivers
The Ecology and Politics of Large Dams

by Patrick McCully
Zed Books, London, 1996
xvi+350 pp

reviewed by **Ramaswamy R. Iyer**

The book makes an overwhelming argument against dams; but it is equally possible to build a strong case against other symbols of 'development'.

At the outset it must be noted that the book on review is a severe indictment of large dams rather than an exercise in dispassionate judicial inquiry: the author is prosecuting counsel, not a judge. This is meant not as a criticism of the book, but as a definition of its nature. *Silenced Rivers* is clearly an anti-dam book; but it would be myopic to put it aside as 'campaign literature', as some might be inclined to do.

Starting with a brief history of the damming of rivers, author McCully deals comprehensively and systematically with the entire range of impacts and consequences of large dam projects. They include submergence of land and forest; violent disturbance of millennia-old ecological systems; severe impacts on flora and wildlife; damage to river morphology and to the quality of the water through the stilling of flowing rivers, with dire consequences to aquatic life; the emission of some greenhouse gases from reservoirs; the emergence and spread of disease vectors; the ecological and economic impact downstream from reduced flows and the trapping of silt and nutrients; the traumatic uprooting of people, their resistance, and the inevitable tendency of the state to respond with incomprehension and violence; the loss of valuable agricultural land through waterlogging; the salinisation from canal irrigation; the rapid siltation of reservoirs; the problem of reservoir-induced seismicity; the danger of dam failures....

All these and more are described in detail, their technical aspects lucidly explained, the issues analysed, and a wealth of illustrations provided from all over the world. The book brings out clearly the technological hubris, the giganticism, and the attitude of 'conquest of nature' that lie behind such projects. McCully then proceeds to show the dubious nature of most environmental impact assessment (EIA) studies. The claimed benefits (irrigation, hydroelectric power, drinking water, flood control, etc) are analysed, and found to be mostly overstated, as also in conflict with one another. Grave inadequacies (both technical and managerial) are identified in project planning and execution, corruption, enormous delays in completion and staggering cost over-runs.

The book brings out the serious infirmities in the process of decision-making in big building, the biases that engineers, bureaucrats and politicians bring to bear even in the best of circumstances, and of course the undoubted operation of vested interests, political motivation, power-seeking and sheer human cupidity. It draws attention to insidious relationships between engineers, bureaucrats and politicians on the one hand and contractors on the other; as also between project-planners/managers and consultants. Thereafter, the book gives an account of anti-dam movements in several parts of the world. Finally, the author proceeds to outline alternatives to such projects.

Among the many facile assumptions and glib claims which are examined and shown to be untenable are the following: that all adverse effects of dams can be 'mitigated'; that the loss of fish populations because of the disruption of their movement can be compensated by the development of fisheries in reservoirs; and that hydroelectric power from large dams is non-polluting and cheap. The book also highlights the enormous difficulty of satisfactorily resettling uprooted people. It breaks new ground in drawing attention to the unique problem presented by dams which have ceased (or may cease) to be useful, and the difficulties of 'de-commissioning' them.

Supply-Side Arguments

That was a very broad overview of the contents of the book. It is undoubtedly "a great scholarly work", a "*magnum opus*" (to quote opinions cited by the publishers), and it should certainly be "required reading for all politicians and a prime text in engineering schools". The appearance of this book is an important milestone in the history of the controversy of big dams. And yet, some questions and doubts remain in the mind.

A couple of minor points may be mentioned first. There is an asymmetry in the author's receptivity to the views and arguments of others. McCully maintains (quite rightly) a critical and sceptical attitude towards the claims, defences and justifications put forward by the supporters of large dams, but tends to accept adverse criticism rather more readily. For want of space, this comment cannot be properly substantiated here. Secondly, the author uses the expression "pro-dam lobby" more than once. Doubtless it exists. On the other hand, the supporters of such projects speak disparagingly of the "anti-dam lobby", and doubtless that exists too. However, there is a sharp divide on this issue, and there are at least some on either side who speak out of genuine conviction and do not belong to any lobby. This does not exempt them from error, and clearly one side in this important debate must be wrong. A constructive exchange between the two sides needs to be maintained at that non-lobby level.

Turning to more important questions, the crucial one is whether we can rule out large dams altogether. The author clearly believes that we can and should, but his advocacy of alternatives (watershed development, small hydro, solar and wind energy) is not as powerfully persuasive as his critique of large dams. He will probably

argue that in any case dams do not serve the projected purposes but do more harm than good, and that the establishment of alternatives cannot be a precondition for rejecting something we know to be bad.

He may well be right; but a more thorough development of this argument would have been useful, particularly because engineers and planners continue to project huge future needs of water and energy and to argue that large supply-side solutions in the form of "mega-projects" are inescapable. The answer to that will have to be partly that the needs can be met through alternative means, and partly that the needs themselves will have to be sharply scaled down; and that humanity will have to learn to make do with less water and less energy than it thinks it needs. This implies drastic changes in ways of living. What are the prospects of persuading the nations of the world to accept this?

Which leads us to our last and most difficult question. *Silenced Rivers* marshals an impressive array of evidence and makes an overwhelming case against dams; but it is equally possible to build up a strong case against other symbols of 'development': coal-burning and nuclear power plants; metallurgical, chemical, hydrocarbon and petro-chemical industries and mining complexes; monstrous megalopolises; the exploding automobile population; vast networks of railways and highways built by trenching into natural flood-plains, drainage channels, fields, forests and wildlife habitats, and by blasting hillsides and tunnelling through mountains; the onslaught on aquatic life by giant trawlers and whaling vessels; the staggering global trade in oil and the very real threat of oil-spills; and so on.

All these are manifestations of a certain conception of 'development' based on a glorification of consumption and accompanied by a strident belief in science and technology and a related attitude to nature. Can we continue with our current ideas of 'development' and give up only the practice of damming of rivers; or is the author implicitly recommending radical changes in our notions of what constitutes development? The issue is not squarely confronted in the book.

The question certainly bristles with difficulties. Where does one draw the line between acceptable and unacceptable interferences with nature? At what level does technology become hubristic or pathological? Even 'small' projects (as the author points out) can have significant environmental and ecological impacts; can one then make a simple choice between 'large' and 'small'? Again, we tend to distinguish between modern technology which is malign and traditional practices which are benign; but the Grand Anicut built by the Chola Kings in South India two thousand years ago, and the Maribu dam in Yemen, which is more than three thousand years old, were not small structures, and must have represented advanced technology in their time. These questions are not being raised in the spirit of debating points; the intention is merely to illustrate the complexities in which we are embroiled when we begin exploring these issues.

However, this is a book on large dams - a difficult enough theme in all conscience - and it cannot be faulted for not tackling a much wider canvas. On its chosen theme, it is virtually definitive. This review began by saying that the author is prosecuting counsel and not a judge. It is the reader who must assume the judicial role. To one reader, at any rate, it appears the prosecuting counsel has presented an unanswerable case against large dams. Will the defence counsel step forward?

R.R. Iyer is a former Secretary of Water Resources, Government of India, and is presently with the Centre for Policy Research in New Delhi.

Of Gods and Spirits

The Sacred Life of Tibet

by Keith Dowman
Thorsons, London, 1997
xii+324 pp
UK£ 12.99
ISBN 0 7225 3375 6

reviewed by **Sean Jones**

In Tibet, the concept of luck far pre-dates the theory of karma that was imported from India by Buddhist missionaries.

This vibrant compilation by a writer who has spent 30 years in the study of Tibetan religion gives a well-structured overview of much of what makes Tibet and its culture so fascinating. The numinous peculiarities of Tibetan culture pertaining to religion, spirituality and magic are catalogued and examined in detail, and methodically explained. It is to Keith Dowman's advantage that he has been able to employ an objectivity that not many Tibetans would have been able to command. Being so subjectively involved in their own culture and traditions, Tibetans would have found it difficult to present with such clarity to the non-Tibetan lay reader this aspect of their life.

Dowman knows the Tibetan religion well enough to be able to clearly illustrate to what great extent the pre-Buddhist, shamanistic culture of Tibet still supersedes the Buddhist culture that has been the ruling influence over most of Tibet for the last thousand years. On the average lay Tibetan Buddhist pilgrim's motivation, for example, he writes "while he recites Buddhist *mantras* and lives in awe and fear of the great Buddha-deities and protectors, his faith is focussed rather more on the local mountain gods, the elemental spirits with whom he feels more at home and to whom his father prayed."

Tibetans, Dowman notes, believe that these gods and spirits only require recognition to make them grant good luck. In fact, for the average Tibetan, all that happens in one's life is due to *tashi*, one's luck, the concept of which, in Tibet, far pre-dates

the theory of *karma* that was imported from India by Buddhist missionaries. Unlike *karma*, "luck is the gift of the gods and spirits, who are not influenced by virtuous conduct or social morality."

The motivation of the majority of Tibetan pilgrims is mundane. It is difficult for them to see how the acts of the gods are determined by personal moral behaviour, and impossible to know how conduct in past lives influences the present, so rather than accumulate merit for a better rebirth (an abstract concept), Dowman asserts, a Tibetan will undertake a long and arduous pilgrimage hoping to curry favour with the gods and spirits of 'power places' so that his luck might change, so his yak herd will increase, so he can make a fast buck, get a new radio, or gain the attention of the girl he fancies on the pilgrim truck...

Mandala Vision

The writer develops his overall theme by taking "the sacred life of Tibet", that is, the living spiritual culture of the people and their country, and dividing it into four categories: Visionary Tibet, Religion, Art, and Pilgrimage.

Visionary Tibet, the constructions of the Tibetan mind which have developed and been projected onto the daily activities of the people, and their environment, include the vision of the Bon shaman; Buddha-vision; the pegging of the earth and mountains and the binding of gods, demons and spirits; and *mandala*-vision. These visions range from minor visionary rock formations, through the collective visualisation of the whole country of Tibet itself as a supine demoness or primeval earth-mother, pegged down and subjugated by Buddhist worship at temples constructed at various power places, to visions of the pure-lands of the Buddhas and paradises such as Dewachan, Shambala and Guru Rinpoche's Glorious Copper-Coloured Mountain Paradise. All these sacred visions, plus other elements, are fitted neatly into the entire great three-dimensional mandala of Buddhist cosmology.

The review of Tibet's religious history traces the origins of the indigenous shamanistic Bon tradition and its development alongside the various Buddhist schools as they arose one by one. This is further complemented by Dowman's instructive appraisal of the sacred art of Tibet, explanation of what parts the various iconographic forms play in worship, and how they have developed. Also included is a revealing portrayal of the iconography and major figures in the Tibetan pantheon, the commonest figures and groupings with their forms and functions, and a brief history of style that lists the various influences on Tibetan art from India, Khotan, Kashmir, Nepal and China, over the centuries.

The rest of the book, well over half the volume, deals with the tradition of pilgrimage and power places. Detailed descriptions of the principles behind pilgrimages in Tibet, analyses of the motivations of pilgrims, their devotional practices, the sources of blessings and how they are conferred, are followed by equally detailed accounts of dozens of the most important pilgrimages to be made in Tibet - to lakes and mountains, caves, hidden valleys, gompas and temples, *chortens* (stupas), cairns, and sky-burial sites.

KEITH DOWMAN

A pilgrim performing prostrations around Lhasa's Jokhang Barkhor.

It is obvious that Dowman did his research on the spot, or at least obtained and translated the traditional Tibetan texts and guide-books for each place. Reading Dowman's text, resplendent with vivid description of every feature of the trail and topography, each complete with the mythic history behind the place as recorded from earliest times, is the next best thing to going there yourself. In many instances, this reviewer believes, Dowman's book will provide the kind of inspiration that caused so many readers of Alexandra David-Neel, Lama Govinda and Heinrich Harrer to aspire to go and see for themselves, while there is still a chance.

At the same time, it is clear from this book that the sacred life of Tibet is something that cannot be erased, despite the influx of millions of Chinese and the introduction of all that is inimical to what the Tibetans hold sacred. Throughout his book Dowman illustrates how this sanctity is more or less inherent in the hills, valleys, plains, peaks, rivers, rocks and caves of Tibet, even in the dust and the air as trodden and breathed by its people, and how, furthermore, it exists just as much in their language, their minds and in the very blood flowing in their veins. It can to some extent be suppressed, no doubt, but even so it remains latent, potent, gathering strength, re-emerging whenever and wherever circumstances permit.

The extensive section on pilgrimage includes a gazetteer of scores of major power places throughout Tibet, giving a brief summary of the lamas, lineages, history and features in each case. It all amounts to a staggering testimony to the accumulation of sacred power in Tibet over the millennia. Summing up with notes on the Tibetan diaspora following the Chinese occupation, and the growth of Tibetan Buddhism in the West, Dowman poses the question: "How has this tiny number from a nation of four million achieved such international renown? What is the secret of Tibetan success?"

For non-Tibetans who have developed a consuming interest in Tibet, what can often become a bewildering and sometimes conflicting, multi-dimensional profusion of spiritual, cultural and religious scenarios and compelling influences is here neatly labelled, classified and put into a well-ordered perspective. Moreover, the book, compared to some of the general guide books and other more academic works on the history and culture of Tibet, is a relatively easier and more enjoyable read, even in the wealth of nitty-gritty details provided. *The Sacred Life of Tibet* is fully accessible to anyone with a basic knowledge of and interest in Tibet and its culture.

S. Jones is a working trustee with The Appropriate Technology for Tibetans Trust, UK.

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India Turns Fifty

Erstwhile Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir, and Hindu scholar, finds that India has some problems, but will prosper.

by Karan Singh

If one date marks the ending of the age of colonialism that dominated the world polity for five centuries, it is the 15th of August 1947, the day India got her independence. The sheer scope, size, and momentum of the Indian freedom movement make this date unique. It marked the breaching of the citadel of colonialism and its ultimate collapse. Within a decade or so, dozens of countries in Asia and Africa became free and a new, post-colonial era dawned.

There is another reason for the date's significance. For India, shaking off the colonial yoke was only half of the story; the other half was that India chose democracy. Many countries liberated themselves from colonialism, but not necessarily with their people becoming free and securing democratic rights. But, for India, with its legacy of a mass-based freedom movement, the choice of democracy was only natural.

Since that day 50 years ago, we have had a vibrant democracy and are probably unique, in the developing world, in having maintained a fully democratic system with a free press and an independent judiciary. The fact that one-sixth of the human race lives in a democratic system is in itself a major accomplishment.

Minority Coalitions

One of the achievements of independent India has been the democratisation of its political psyche. Before Independence, vast sections of India's people were submerged and excluded from the political process. Today, people are aware both of their rights and that their vote can make a difference. In these 50 years, a process of 'inclusion' has been in progress. Today there is the positive feeling that every legitimate political party, i.e. a party that accepts the primacy of our Constitution and is prepared to work within its ambit, can share power. In the last 50 years, almost every such political party has shared power, either at the centre or in the states.

On the negative side, however, there has been no majority government since 1989. It is becoming increasingly clear that the era of the one-party government is in eclipse and that the age of the coalition is coming into its own. We have had six minority governments in a row. Not only has the majority eluded us, the coalitions that have been formed are minority coalitions. Coalition of political parties represents a well-established political strategy and may be good for a pluralistic society like India since it ensures representation of different views in civil polity.

A coalition is formed to attain a majority, whereas in India, a system of minority coalition governments with "support from outside" has evolved. This uniquely Indian contribution to the system of political governance is a contradiction in terms and inevitably results in disaster. One way out of it is the formation of principled pre-electoral coalitions that seek the people's mandate during election for their combine. That appears to be the pattern towards which we are moving. However, it may take an election or two before its contours become more firmly established.

Meanwhile, the process of electoral reforms, already begun, has to continue. Most importantly, the functioning of political parties has to come within the pale of a certain degree of regulation. At the same time, a system of compulsory voting should also be introduced. There is no reason why, in a democratic polity, the people should not be obliged to vote. At present, only 40 to 50 percent of the electorate turns out on election day. With the fragmentation among political parties and the low voter turn-out, people are getting elected with as low as 15-20 percent of votes. If voting were made obligatory, as in Australia, a clearer and more accurate profile of what people want would emerge. The right to vote should have the corresponding obligation to vote at election time.

Humane Liberalisation

When we began our journey as a free nation half a century ago, Jawaharlal Nehru's model of economic development gave government the commanding heights of our economy. This enabled us to invest in heavy industry and lay the foundation for the economic breakthrough that is now in progress. In time, however, the whole system ran into serious difficulties because government control of economy degenerated into statism, red-tapism, proliferating bureaucracy, unaccountability, inefficiency and corruption. But, with the emerging changes in free-market economy and economic globalisation, our policies are also undergoing a sea change.

We are now dismantling many of the controls, licensing systems and other regulatory measures that had become sources of corruption and were impediments to our economic development. The substantial changes in our economic policies have shown that we have flexibility and resilience to keep pace with the changing world environment. But, it is regrettable that while our economic policies may appear very liberal on the surface, deep down the decision-making structures the same old bureaucratic mindset is still at play. The lower levels of bureau-

cracy are yet to realise that an economic revolution is on.

What is even more important is that as the economy undergoes liberalisation, we must find ways to safeguard the vulnerable sections of our society. They are the ones to feel its impact first, and we do not have a safety net for them. The view of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund that transformation of economic system inevitably involves a temporary dip in living standards is not acceptable. Millions of our people live at subsistence level and a temporary dip will mean that the most vulnerable sections, the poorest of the poor, will get submerged. We cannot accept such a situation.

The World Bank and IMF view that change in economic system inevitably involves a temporary dip in living standards is not acceptable.

We have to evolve a liberalisation policy with a human face. Not a theoretical liberalisation, not merely financial or fiscal liberalisation, but one which recognises the fact that we are still one of the poorest nations of the world. The challenge before the Indian political leadership is to see how we can combine economic liberalisation, which is inevitable, with the welfare of the most vulnerable sections of our society. Can it be done? My answer is that it *has* to be done. Every Indian citizen is precious and none can be sacrificed at the altar of liberalisation.

New Social Equilibrium

India is a land of multiple religions where nine of the world's 12 major religions flourish: the four Indic religions that were born here - Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism and Sikhism, and the five that came from West Asia - Baha'i, Christianity, Islam, Judaism and Zoroastrianism. And while Hinduism may be the dominant religion in India, and though India was partitioned on the basis of religion, the architects of our Constitution not only did not react by setting up a theocratic state, they also took special care to establish a state where all religions would be treated equally. If anything, special provisions were made for minority religions.

This is something that is without parallel anywhere in the world; a country, partitioned on the basis of religion, adopts and strives to maintain a pluralistic and secular society. We still have inter-religious tensions. But, by and large, during the last 50 years, we have been able to grow out of many of the phobias and hang-ups of Partition.

At the moment, we are going through a process of social turmoil. The old social hierarchical structures within Hinduism are slowly disintegrating and new ones are emerging. The extended joint family system is giving way to the nuclear family. There are still many unhappy features, like casteism and violence in the name of caste. But, in India today, a tremendous transformation is underway, and an entirely new kind of society is evolving. This is difficult to view, however, as we are too close to the event to get a proper perspective, and it may take another decade or two for the new social equilibrium to fully emerge and be readily visible.

Modern Mahabharata

Soon after our independence, the Cold War began in earnest and India was at the forefront of structuring what came to be known as the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). Having just emerged from the yoke of colonialism, we saw no reason to take sides in a modern-day Mahabharata, of joining either the Kauravas or the Pandavas. Our view was that developing nations should not necessarily be influenced by either of the two major powers and should be able to decide their future on their own and safeguard their interests.

With the implosion of the Soviet Union, the old bipolar paradigm is no longer operative. But developing nations continue to have common interests in the present bipolar world of North and South. If anything, we require a new momentum towards a more effective South-South co-operation. But the need to energise regional groupings is even more important.

We have to think much more in terms of SAARC. Regardless of their religious persuasions, South Asians are essentially a part of the same civilisation. And yet, we have our differences. If France, Germany and England, who battled each other for 500 years, could sink their differences, we, who have had differences only for 50 years, should not find it impossible to overcome them. Some of the recent developments within the SAARC region have been very hopeful, such as the Mahakali Treaty with Nepal and the Indo-Bangladesh Agreement. We need to further strengthen regional co-operation as well as bilateral relations within the SAARC region.

For the moment India and Pakistan are both opening their economies. But they are opening them to the rest of the world, not to each other. If we are to liberalise our economies, we must start the process within our region. That is the path that we should take for the next decade or so. If we focus our energies and psychic powers on the SAARC experiment and make it succeed, it will be a major contribution to the welfare of the people of South Asia.

No Soft Options

India, by its very geopolitical position and size, will have to take the lead. But what kind of lead should that be? Sri Aurobindo once said that India will rise not when she rises to trample upon the weak but to share the light of the eternal *dharma* for humanity. Here *dharma* does not refer to any particular religion, it is the intellectual and the spiritual hase upon which a civilisation evolves and flourishes. Our civilisation has to blaze the trail, that is our next "tryst with destiny".

The challenge is to develop holistic philosophies that stress complementarity instead of competition, and convergence in place of conflict. There are no soft options left, either for individuals or for nations or civilisations. The path ahead is difficult, beset with dangers from within us and from outside, and sharp as the razor's edge. There is no other way.

The *Katha Upanishad* exborts us to move forward, individually and collectively, across this perilous path with confidence, determination and an indomitable will to succeed in our goal of building a regenerated human being, a new consciousness for the age that is dawning, and a new civilisation that would ensure a harmonious future for the human race:

Uttishathata, jagrata, prapyavaran nebodhata
Khurasya dhara nishita durattaya
Durgam pathastat kavayo vadanti.

K. Singh, philosopher, author, poet, educationist and Member of Parliament, was former Sadr-i-Riyasat *of Jammu and Kashmir, former Indian Cabinet Minister and Ambassador to the United States. He has adapted this article from a lecture given in Kathmandu earlier this year under the auspices of the B.P. Koirala Nepal-India Foundation.*

GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE NEGOTIATIONS

How Should the South Respond?

Developing country policy-makers should take close note of a not-so-subtle shift in US policy regarding climate change, understand its dire implications, and prepare to respond.

by ***Adil Najam***

Last month, US President Bill Clinton, Vice President Al Gore and half their cabinet met at the White House to discuss the US negotiating position for the climate change negotiations in Japan in December. The meeting could possibly not have had a higher profile, and besides the high administration officials included the leading lights of the US academia, corporations and labour movement. The meeting was significant for developing countries because it seemed to spell a new direction in US policy that might hurt them.

The message was: for the industrialised world (the North) to be able to do anything on climate change, the South would also have to do its "share". Although the exact magnitude of this share was never laid out, it was obvious that the US will look unfavourably at any treaty that does not slap binding emission restrictions for the developing countries. What this means is the unraveling of the finely crafted principle of "shared but differentiated responsibility" in international environmental policy.

If this turns out to be so, it would mean that developing countries would be asked to make 'similar', if not the same, percentage emission cuts. This, despite the fact that the historical and current responsibility for carbon emissions lies squarely with the North (80 percent of the emissions come from the 20 percent of the world population living in the North). Moreover, this will contradict the so-called "Berlin Mandate" of 1995 (which the US signed) that promises that the South will not be asked to forfeit its development aspirations in the name of global warming.

Doing anything to significantly combat global warming cannot be cheap. For the US (which produces 22 percent of all emissions), the costs could run into hundreds of billions of dollars. Even for developing countries which contribute a fraction, the cost would be big enough to put their entire economies in disarray. While the urgency of doing something is very real, the poor of the developing world cannot afford to pay the environmental bills of the industrialised rich. It is vital that policy-makers in the South - including in South Asia - recognise the not-so-subtle shift in US policy, understand its dire implications, and develop a concerted strategy to respond to it.

Southern Response

To be effective, any Southern strategy will have to dispel two common perceptions: first, that the developing countries are not really interested in the environment and, second, that they are merely using it as a new ploy for begging for money from the rich. This means that the developing countries need a strategy that is a) proactive in that it clearly states that they are interested in solving the issue and suggests concrete ways of doing so, and b) uses a principled stand instead of the begging bowl to further their developmental interests.

One such strategy could be to throw the proposals coming from the North back at them. To be specific, the proposal that the US and many European powers seem to favour calls for an "emissions trading scheme" merged with "joint implementation". The general idea is to devise a semi-voluntary trading scheme, based on current net emissions, allowing the rich to invest in poor countries to get "good behaviour" credit. On the face of it the scheme seems to have merit: the rich are able to buy cheaper abatement, and the poor get much needed resources.

However, for the South it has

many problems: it is akin to the medieval notion of "buying indulgences" by paying gold to have your sins absolved. It provides little incentive for changes in consumption, it does not penalise bad behaviour, it overlooks sovereignty considerations, and it ignores the long-term: what will happen when the efficiency gains dry up (which will happen soon enough) or as developing countries actually develop. The developing countries should do better than just raise these concerns. They should turn them around and suggest their own counter-proposal.

This is what the South should say to the North:

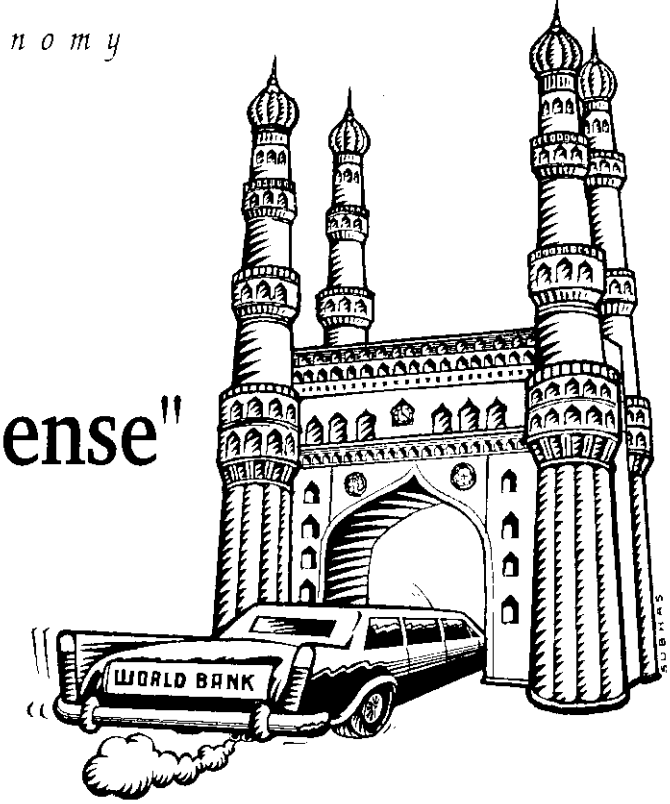
> *We think a trading scheme is a good idea and are willing to go along with it as long as it is based not on half-baked notions of joint implementation and voluntary arrangements but on the firmer grounds of a principle of 'per capita pollution rights'. If, indeed, the atmosphere is a global common then every individual, whether from the rich North or the poor South, should have equal rights over its use and equal responsibilities for its upkeep. Let us, then, give property rights to the atmosphere to the citizens of the world. Let us determine the average level of emission per person that the atmosphere can sustain and designate that as the per capita pollution right to be managed by the individual's country. Those who emit more than this would be required to "buy" pollution space from those who emit less than their quota. The 1990 numbers for both population and emissions could be used to keep the calculations fair for high emitting as well as high population countries.*

There are many advantages to such a proposal. First, such a scheme sends the right message to both North and South, encouraging the former to reduce emissions and the latter to keep them low. Second, it is based on moral principle rather than arbitrary allocation. Third, instead of turning developing countries into beggars it places them on an equal footing with the industrialised nations giving them the exact same rights and responsibilities. Fourth, it provides a viable mechanism for debt relief for the poorest countries. Fifth, it is based on a market instrument and meshes with the ideological template of our times. Sixth, it can bypass the sovereignty quagmire because countries are free to raise and spend the monies as they like. Finally, it is long-term in character: once established it can maintain itself until it dies out when all countries reach emissions that are at or below their per capita quotas.

The idea itself is not new. However, it is an idea whose time has finally come. Substantively, this has always been the best option for the South. Strategically, there are at least two reasons why this is the right time for the South to put forth this proposal. First, having themselves called for a trading scheme, the North cannot simply dismiss a proposal which is based on the exact same principle. Second, there could possibly be no better response to the new policy vibes coming from the White House. They are criticising the South for not fulfilling its environmental responsibility. This can be the South's way of retorting, "OK, if you want 'equal' we will give you equal - but equal means equal in responsibility as well as rights."

A. Najam, from Pakistan, teaches international relations and environmental policy at Boston University and is also the Associate Director of the MIT-Harvard Public Disputes Programme. He was present at the White House meeting.

"A States Focus Makes Sense"



The multilaterals have begun dealing directly with the state capitals and New Delhi does not seem to mind.

by ***Prabhu Ghate***

A new trend is afoot as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank seek to give their lending in India a stronger "states" focus. The ADB made a USD 250 million loan to Gujarat last year (with the horrendous title of the "Gujarat Public Sector Resource Management Programme") and is eyeing Madhya Pradesh and one of either Tamil Nadu or Kerala as additional candidates. The World Bank is developing a "restructuring" loan for Andhra Pradesh, and is also working on Rajasthan, Haryana, Orissa and Karnataka.

Fiscal reform at the state level is at the heart of the exercise, because without it all lending will he unfruitful. It seems a little late in the day to come to this realisation, but better late than never. As an official at the World Bank asked, "If we make a big educational loan to the states, how do we know they will continue to have the money to pay the teachers after we leave. We've poured a lot of money into the power sector, but is it sustainable?"

The central government in New Delhi sees the multilateral banks as allies in its effort to broaden and deepen fiscal reform countrywide. With attention focused exclusively on the central government's fiscal deficit (slated to go down to 4.5 percent of GDP this year) the fact that all the states put together add another 4 percent to the overall public sector deficit is completely lost sight of. "There hasn't been much action on the part of the states yet on fiscal reform," the World Bank staffer said.

The carrot of additional resources the multilaterals can offer the states is a powerful device New Delhi has at its disposal to get the states to undertake tax and public enterprise reforms and cut back on current expenditure. Only then will they be in a position to deliver the social services and provide the infrastructure that is constitutionally their responsibility. Health, education, power and irrigation are all "state subjects" under the Indian constitution. As Finance Minister P. Chidambaran said at the recent Fund-Bank meeting, "A states focus makes sense."

WB on Andhra

In its first full-fledged report on a state economy, the World Bank analyses how Andhra Pradesh is one of India's larger resource-rich states, but has a growth rate lower than the country's average, and considerably below that of India's six fastest-growing states. One of the reasons has been the plethora of poorly targeted welfare schemes (more than a hundred directed at the scheduled castes alone) spread too thin to make meaningful monitoring and control possible.

The largest such scheme is the one on rice subsidy which covers 85 percent of Andhra's population with a ration of good-quality rice that makes "self-targeting" impossible. The report points out that a much more sustainable anti-poverty strategy would be to rely on rapid labour-intensive growth, effective provision of basic services, and smaller, and self-targeted programmes for the very poor. Thus, if the rice were replaced with cheaper foodgrains, it would be easier to restrict ration cards to about 30 percent of the households, the population below the poverty line.

The Bank report contains a comprehensive agenda for reform for the tax system, public enterprises, the power sector, canal irrigation, roads, ports, primary schooling and public

health, all of which are state subjects. Will Hyderabad bite? Well, it has already started nibbling. It has raised the price of rationed rice from INR 2 to 3.50 per kg and reduced the allocation from 5 to 4 kg per person per month, with an upper limit of INR 20 kg per family. (However it is still loathe to restrict eligibility to the poor.) It has reversed full prohibition, raised power tariffs (but only a bit) and awarded the first contract to a private party to develop a port on a BOT (build-operate-transfer) basis.

Chandrababu Naidu, regarded as one of the more development-minded and technology savvy chief ministers (he is into computers in a big way), made a big pitch to World Bank President James Wolfensohn during a recent visit. World Bank staffers are understandably coy to discuss conditionalities, and claim they are only responding to requests from the states to help them out of the fiscal mess they find themselves in. As one of them said, "Well, we have had three or four states coming in and asking us to come and take a look." They are obviously pleased with the new Rajasthan scheme to give an immediate power connection to any farmer willing to pay INR 1.20 per unit (for which there is quite a rush).

That conditionalities can have some bite is shown by the ADB's Gujarat loan, under which the state must reduce its deficit to 2.7 percent of the state's GDP by the next (1998/99) financial year. However, the state will have to reduce its current level of power subsidy of about INR 15 billion by as much as two thirds if it is to get anywhere near this target, and avail of the final tranche of the loan.

The ADB Way

The World Bank is planning to lend for both social and infrastructure sectors in the restructuring packages under the state-focused loans. It is in a position to do so because it can include soft loans under IDA in the package (which are necessary for the social sector). The ADB, on the other hand, does not make soft loans to India and China, concerned that this would leave little for any of the other Asian countries. So there is likely to be less of a queue at the doors of the ADB.

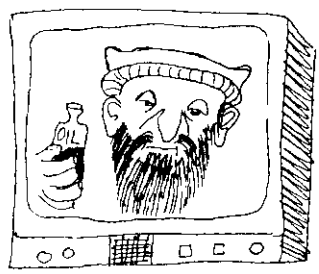
The ADB does make available its list of criteria for selecting states under the new approach, which it hopes will account for about half its lending to India soon. The criteria include commitment to policy reforms, infrastructure needs, a satisfactory record of project implementation in the past, and ability to borrow on non-soft loan terms. While it says it hopes to include a blend of high- and low-income states, it is hard to see some poor states meeting the last of these criteria in particular. On the other hand, who knows, if the fiscal crisis gets bad enough in states like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, they might just be moved to begin to put their houses in order.

Initially however, it looks like states-focused lending is going to stay mostly to the west of the emerging development divide running down the middle of the country.

Abominably Yours,

There is a wicked rumour going around in development circles that the Subcontinent is the world's least gender-sensitive region. As a female South Asian hominoid, I do not agree.

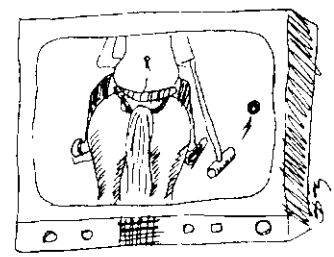
Just look around you. Till recently, three out of the seven SAARC nations had women heads of state (in Sri Lanka the president is actually the biological mother of the female prime minister). Bhutan has four queens, and the Kathmandu king actually worships a living virgin goddess. We are also the only region in the world where entire suburban trains are set aside for female commuters. There are special gender queues for women voters in our emerging democracies. In South Asia, men don't seem to be allowed to read weather bulletins - only women with long straight hair can tell us about approaching westerly disturbances. Then, there are female primates who are allowed to get away with columns like these.



And now, we even have countries where men are not allowed to share the television screen with women. A new edict promulgated by the PMO in Islamabad prohibits PTV from showing male and female newscasters together during the evening bulletin, obviously fearing some naughty-naughty during the credit roll. Next, we are told, commercials showing women lustily lathering their cheeks with soap, and hair-conditioner ads that display female follicles, and all other such will face the censor's razors.

There is a slight hitch, of course. How on earth are we going to depict Benazir without showing her male hangers-on? But we will cross that bridge when we come to it. Meanwhile, it is clear that affirmative action programmes such as these cooked up by the PMO for PTV will ensure that the voices and faces of South Asian women will be seen and heard, undefiled by the presence of masculine odours. This will lead, if I may borrow terminology of our North American sisters, to greater awareness and analysis of gender-based differential impact of events and processes.

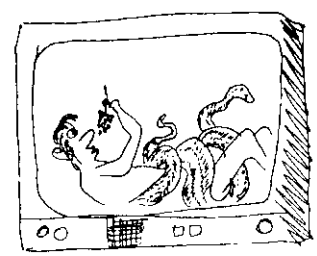
If all South Asian countries copy the proposed model, we may actually have wholesome television that treats women with the dignity they deserve, and in the process force advertising agencies to find creative new ways to do commercials. If women can't be shown in detergent commercials, all the better. Let's shoot the men doing the wash and hanging up bras on the clothesline. Let men model for vapourub commercials, demonstrating endearing soft-focus looks as they tuck sniffling children into bed as their coughs miraculously set about curing themselves. Male-only commercials have the potential of transforming gender roles in the Subcontinent, I say, and Unicef better listen.



Narrator: After a hard day's work selling AK-47s, Waheed's kameez and pantaloons are equally soiled with barrel grease. He puts his kameez into this blue bucket with ordinary washing powder found in any supermarket. And he puts his pantaloon in this red bucket with Ultrawhite Tide.

Waheed: Wah! I don't believe it! My pantaloons are as good as new. So bright, so white. Tide is the answer to all my washing needs.

Narrator (as camera pans across the rugged Afghan border): Keep the Khyber Clean and White with Ultrawhite Tide.



And not a woman in sight! This gender-reversal technique can be used for a whole range of household products and set an example for husbands, brothers and fathers across the Subcontinent who have not helped with household chores for the past four millennia.

Next commercial: A dhoti-clad brahmin (or thakur) male with holy thread firmly in place enters kitchen, burping loudly and scratching his belly. Cut to pressure cooker on the range letting off steam with a hiss. Brahmin (or thakur) male opens pressure cooker and samples the aroma. "Mmmm. I do not let my wife in the kitchen anymore. Cooking is a man's job." Highly nuanced messages like these can bring about awareness and behaviour change among the wife-beating, dowry-demanding gorillas in our midst.

More, there is more. The PMO shall decree that hair oil commercials will henceforth be modelled by men only. Macho man will be shown stroking his shiny black beard that could pass for a cascade of freshly-melted asphalt. Voice-over: "Me and wife both wear Amla Kesh Tel. We don't wear anything else."

I must admit, there will be a bit of challenge for the advertisers of sanitary napkins. How do you get around not being able to show women? Traditionally, tampon and pad manufacturers have used female models hopping, skipping and jumping with wild abandon in all manner of violent outdoor sports like bungee-jumping, sky-diving, space-walking and bharatnatyam. In South Asia, we have to be more culturally sensitive and show sports which are more down-to-earth, like perhaps horse-riding. And since we can use only male models, we have to be even more subtle. Viewers will have to be kept guessing till the end as to what it is we are advertising.

Lights, camera, action! Nawab of Pataudi canters into view on the Bangalore Gymkhana grounds getting ready to do battle. Brief close-up of mare's backside, cut to former cricket captain. Nawab in husky, threatening voice: "Giddi-up, Whisper, move your bloody butt." Whisper refuses to budge. Fade. Commercial ends with following message flashing across screen accompanied by Enya muzak:

"Whisper. Even Men Swear By It."

OK, OK. I didn't get it either when the PMO played it the first time. But just look at what we can do with some simple reforms in the broadcasting code!

And no more scandalous magazine ads like Milind Soman and Madhu Sapre modelling in that python commercial clad in nothing but their sports shoes. Henceforth, it will be only Milind, and he will be doing a Nastassja Kinski impersonation, concealing his manhood with a boa constrictor coiled around his groin.

With commercials like these, the status of women in South Asia will rise even higher than their presently lowly level and the female species will be able to fit into their true role in society. Men folk will then start getting up at the crack of dawn to broom the house, do the laundry, fetch water from the spring, raise children, and commute to work in their men-only trains. Our women will be left to pursue leisure seriously - and maybe even start appearing in whiskey ads or in commercials for fast cars. One small step for man, a big leap for womankind.

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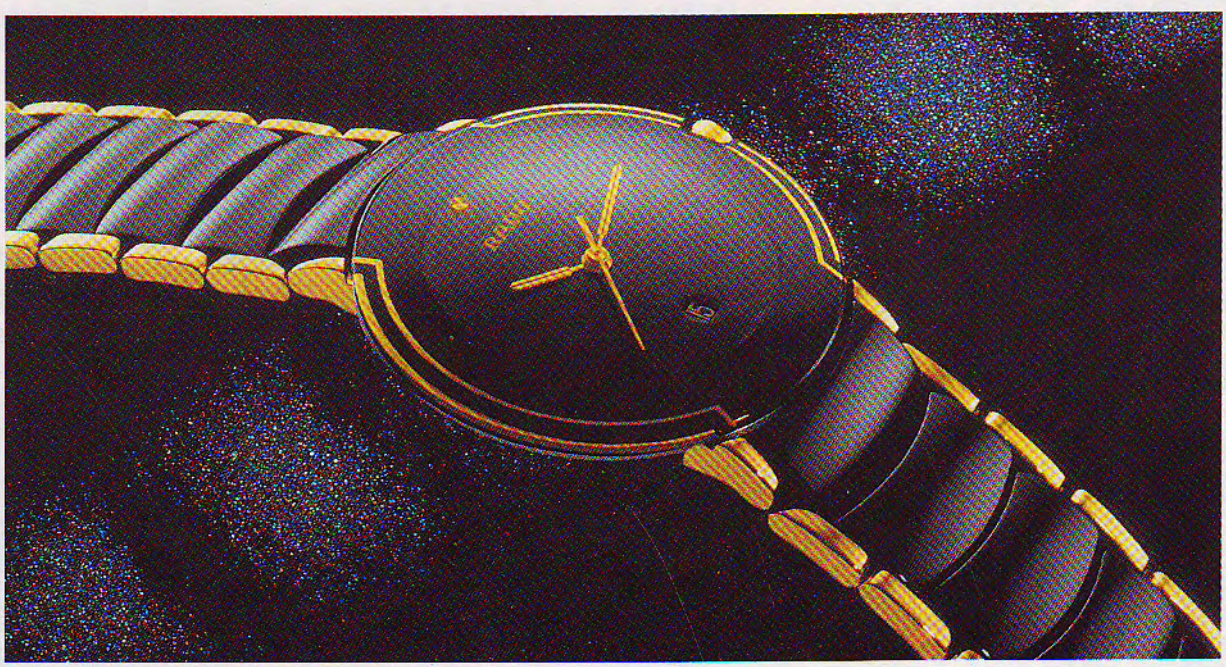
A different world



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