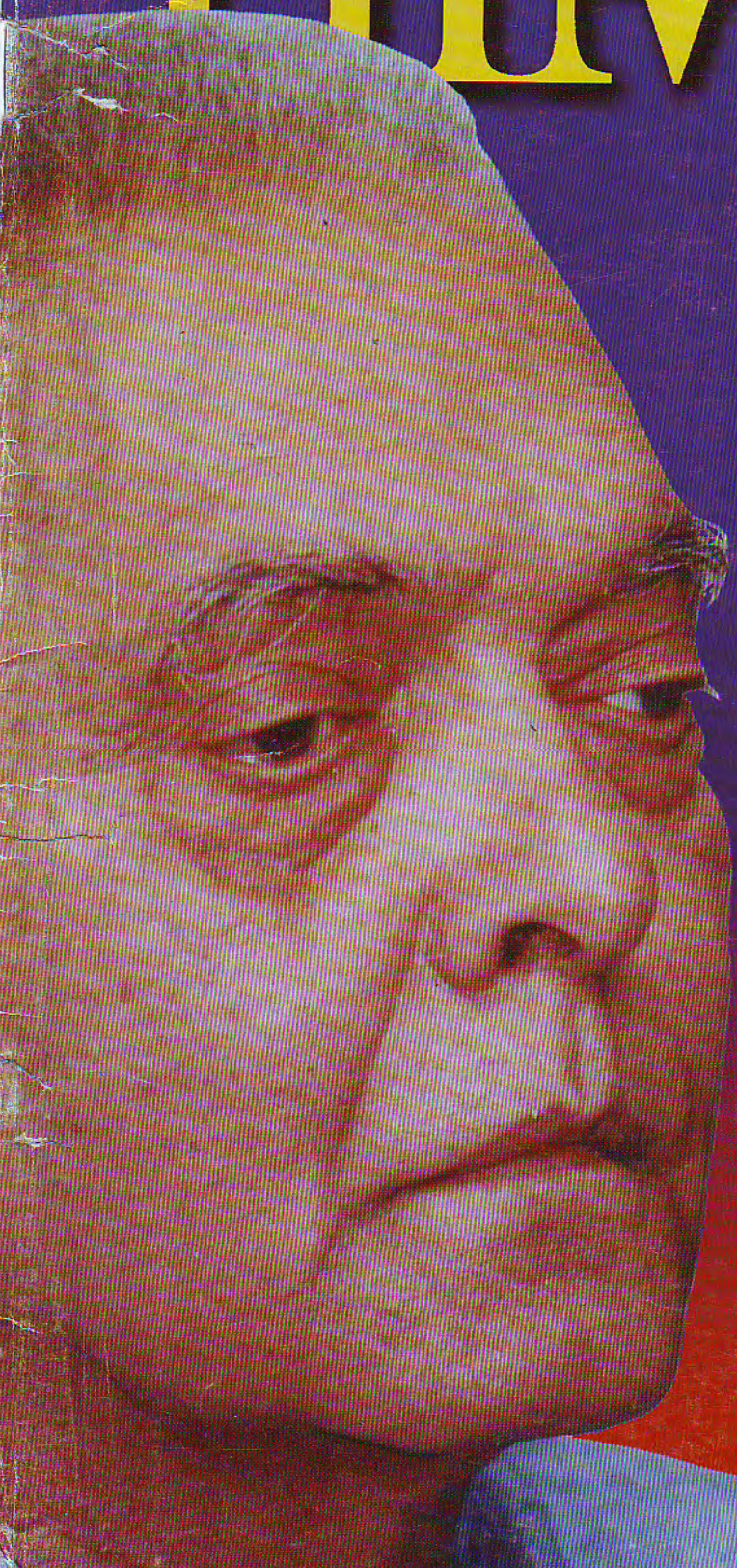


HIMAL

SOUTH ASIAN

March 1999



**Eqbal Ahmad
on nationalism,
nukes and
Naipaul**



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Eqbal Ahmad on Distorted Histories

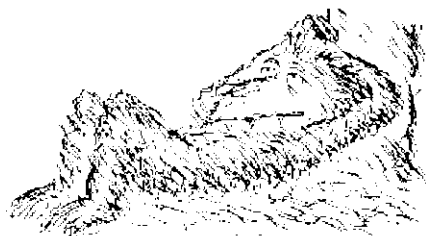
"The biggest problem are political minds rooted in an earlier time... minds that are distorted, rooted in distorted histories."

SAARC's return to realism

Some have the romantic notion that SAARC can do anything, while some look at it with 'SAARCasm', says the new Secretary General Nihal Rodrigo.



Yeti is back.



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Lollipop dams

The cover story "Hell or high water" in HIMAL's January 1999 issue was thought-provoking. The role of embankments and dams in flood control is being increasingly questioned not just in Bihar, but also elsewhere in the world. The Dutch going about dismantling dykes, and Venice abandoning a plan to construct more embankments to protect the city, are some recent examples.

In eastern Uttar Pradesh, it was after the floods of 1998 that we found the story was only beginning to unfold. The embankments here were built some years after those in North Bihar. The floods in eastern UP have totally changed their character. The most destruction is caused by the sudden and prolonged nature of floods, both of which are easily attributable to embankments. It is also most significant that the worst floods here were not accompanied by heavy rainfall.

But in the political economy of these "flood control" or "flood management" methods, whatever the authorities may call it, the end result is noticeable for the extraordinary convergence of interests of contractors, bureaucrats, engineers, politicians, and multilateral and bilateral aid. The latest entrant to this list in this era of privatisation are the multinational companies. Combating these forces and bringing in some sort of ecological, economical, social and developmental sense into the scenario, will require an extraordinary effort on the part of individuals and organisations.

It is remarkable that most dams in the region are planned, and are under implementation, in the most fragile of all environments, the Himalaya. The sellers of dreams tell Bangladeshis that the only solution to the country's flood problems lies in high dams upstream in the mountains. This fits well with the Indian government's agenda of pushing for high dams in Nepal although here flood control is not

the most attractive of lollipops. Then there are the Japanese and Western companies which are only too happy to fish in these troubled waters.

Exposure of this nexus is the least we all can attempt to do. For this reason, the HIMAL cover story is all the more commendable.

*Himanshu Thakkar
New Delhi*

True myths?

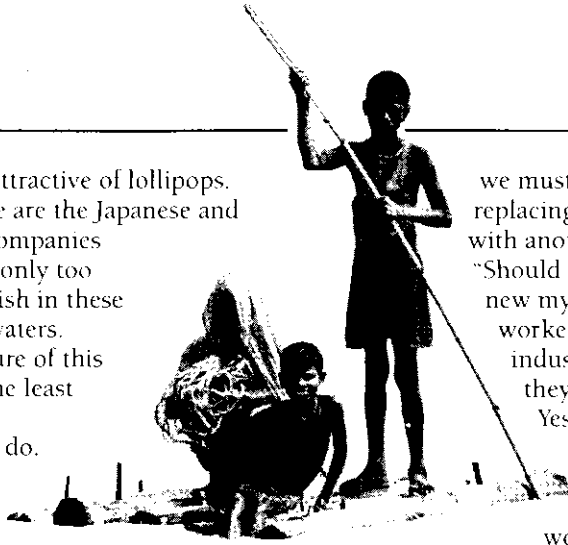
John Frederick should be applauded for challenging us to critically consider the over-simplified picture (the Frooti story) of trafficking offered us by NGOs, various governments, and the media (HIMAL, October 1998). His article serves as a much-needed correction in the wider discourse on the subject, and hopefully will cause us all to pursue a "more realistic understanding of trafficking" in the future.

Frederick has done well to point out the existing (perhaps overstated) myths, but at the same time,

we must beware of replacing one myth with another. He asks, "Should we then create new myths about the workers of the sex industry and how they got there? Yes, we should. Myths need not be untrue." I

would agree wholeheartedly with Frederick when he later concludes that our discourse on the subject "should be based on a realistic appreciation of how and why women enter the sex trade". In other words, our discourse should be based on conclusions drawn from "bona fide research" on the topic, not speculation. Again, I wholeheartedly agree.

It seems, however, at many points throughout the article, that Frederick has encouraged us to believe that his discoveries are the norm without providing us any hard data to support his conclusions. It seems, in fact, that he often resorts to his own sort of "suspect journalism" when he offers rhetorically loaded comments such as "there is evidence that many,



probably the majority, of the girls send money home", "many, perhaps most, of the brothels contain girls from the same village", "it is known that recruitment of new girls is often done by older prostitutes", "it can be safely said that debt obligations play a significant role", "large networks probably account for a small percentage of trafficked women", "besides the likely majority that is willingly or unwillingly sold", etc.

How do we know that the majority send money home? How many is most? How is it known? Why can it be safely said? How many is the majority? The author asks us to reject the former myth and accept his new rendition as a "greater reality", yet he has supplied us with few hard facts throughout the article with which to support his own speculative contentions.

Again, I applaud Frederick for encouraging us to conduct thorough research into the topic of trafficking before reaching any further conclusion. It is always good, however, to practise what you preach. The author is to be congratulated for calling us to a critical analysis of the trafficking discourse, but let us begin with his very own article found in the pages of *Himal*.

Dave Beine

Department of Sociology/Anthropology,
Tribhuvan University,
Kathmandu

Arrogant Deepa

I read your interview of Deepa Mehta in the on-line edition of *Himal* (December 1998). I thoroughly enjoyed *Fire*, which I was fortunate to have seen at the Washington DC International Film Festival, and at which Mehta graciously fielded questions after the film. Unfortunately, your interview shows a curt, arrogant

woman, probably on Prozac. Why is it that intelligent, thought-provoking and insightful South Asians exude this arrogance. Come off it sister. We all squatted once!

Yogesh Dungal
McLean, Virginia

Mountains out of molehills

Your September issue contained an "Analysis" by Nigel J.R. Allan of what he termed "a failed mountain book", referring to *Mountains of the World: A Global Priority*. It is so very easy to criticise a book, an article, a term paper, and academics are adept at this, from long practice with student writings or examinations, where the tendency is to mark what is wrong rather than what is correct, and deduct points to arrive at a grade. In my opinion however,

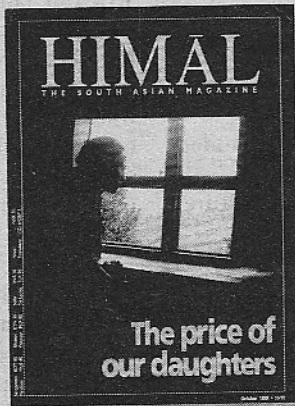
Allan has taken this critical approach to the extreme and has faulted many aspects of the book improperly.

Allan intimates that editors Bruno Messerli and Jack Ives use the book "to promote their own agenda" and that the book is "their latest effort to command and control knowledge about mountains and their inhabitants". Many readers of *Himal* are acquainted with these two scholars, and know that the long volunteer hours and sincere commitment they give to mountain research and sustainable development is not a personal agenda of aggrandisement or control. For those readers who do not know Messerli and Ives, let me state that Allan's imputations are unbelievable. I have seldom encountered or known two more selfless and straightforward persons. If there is an unprofessional agenda lurking somewhere, it would seem to be what amounts to a personal vendetta by Allan.

He repeatedly denigrates the idea that mountains have special problems (and opportunities) as compared with the lowlands, and states that the idea that mountains and their inhabitants are different from the plains is an old shibboleth. Strange words from a person who edited a book entitled *Mountains at Risk* (1995) and co-edited another on *Human Impact on Mountains* (1988). His assertions are puzzling and certainly out of step with action taken in November 1998 at the United Nations, when without dissent all countries joined in approving a resolution initiated by the Government of Khyrgyzstan to declare the year 2002 to be the International Year of Mountains. I would venture that a poll of readers of *Himal* would strongly assert that mountains are different from the lowlands and that many development aid projects or other programmes have foundered because this was not recognised.

One of Allan's major criticisms is that there are only three non-European chapter authors or co-authors (I count 17 non-Europeans for sure, and one hybrid), and all drawing salaries from Western sources. Aside from this counting error, one has to admit a great under-representation from developing world countries. A conscious and honest attempt was made, under instructions from the Editorial Advisory Committee to obtain authors and co-authors from developing countries, and to try to secure women authors (two of the Advisory Committee were women). It is of interest to note that in the two books edited by Allan *all* but one of the authors and co-authors are either Europeans or North Americans and the one Indian was employed at a Western university.

Allan should know well the difficulties of securing geographic and gender representation, especially when on a tight timetable (essentially six months). While there are indeed a host of gifted and competent developing country scientists and practitioners, the pool



shrinks greatly when the requirement for wide-ranging global experience is mandated for a book on the world's mountains. Those who meet this requirement, especially women are extremely in demand for a myriad of international activities, badly overcommitted, and unable to meet such a tight schedule (the date on the Rio Plus Five Special Session was advanced and created the urgency which permitted only six months from award of writing contract until deadline).

In an attempt to include more writing by developing country individuals (and women), the editors asked that each chapter include a substantial number of "boxes" which were mini-case studies or write-ups of experience. This was done, but Allan criticises these (about 60 of them in the 495 pages) as making reading a chore, and that they overwhelm the chapter contents. In my opinion this is searching rigorously for something to criticise.

I do not share Allan's faith that breeding new transgenic foods, having plant germplasm banks and biotech companies, and the presence of genetic engineering nerds relieves humans of the concern over biological diversity loss. There are surely ethical as well as practical reasons why we should share Jan Jenik's alarm in Chapter 10 over loss of species with whom we share this planet. Where does Allan get his "best count for loss of biodiversity in the world today is only *one* species per year"? In the decade 1980-90, in the USA alone, at least 34 species or unique populations of plants and vertebrates have become extinct (Council on Environmental Quality, 1990 State

of the Environment). Worldwide, over 700 extinctions of vertebrates, invertebrates and vascular plants have been recorded in the period 1600-1980, and these are only known extinctions (Reid and Miller 1980). How many have been lost and are unknown to science? There has also been significant loss of genetic diversity, which adversely affects species viability.

I take issue with Allan's assertion that mountains do not constitute a barrier. The Webster Dictionary defines barriers as "obstacles in a passage or way, as a mountain barrier"; just because trade routes have managed *with difficulty* to cross mountains does not change the fact that mountains are major physical barriers.

There are many other items on which I could comment, but I have already gone on too long. I simply could not sit silently while the dedicated editors and authors of *Mountains of the World: A Global Priority* were unjustly criticised. Allan's review is a polemic rather than a critique.

Lawrence S. Hamilton
Emeritus Professor
Cornell University
Vice-Chair (Mountains)
World Commission on Protected
Areas/WCN

Desperate destruction

We welcome your invitation to respond to the highly critical 'review' by Nigel J.R. Allan of *Mountains of the World: A Global Priority* under the title "A failed mountain book" (September 1998).

Normally, we would ignore such obviously subjective writing, part of a uniquely personal agenda. However, we, as editors of the volume, do feel responsibility to the large number of our contributors, our publishers, and supportive

institutions. A Russian edition of *Mountains of the World* is scheduled to appear early in 1999, an Italian edition later in the year, and negotiations are underway for French, German, and Spanish editions. If this represents "failure", we must hope that we "fail" in all our future efforts.

Primarily, the essay by Allan appears to be destructive. It contains numerous irrelevant and unprofessional comments incompatible with what we assume to be the high standard and professional editorial policy maintained by Himal. It is also merely the most recent of a series of destructive essays and reviews by Allan that constitutes most of what he has published over the past decade—despite claims and inferences to the contrary, he has never written a single book of his own.

The Himal 'review' is also full of factual and interpretative errors, too numerous to catalogue here. (Any reader interested in obtaining a fully documented record of these errors and misrepresentations is invited to write directly to JDI at 412 Thessaly Circle, Ottawa, Ontario, K1H 5W5, Canada. email <jackives@pigeon.carleton.ca>.)

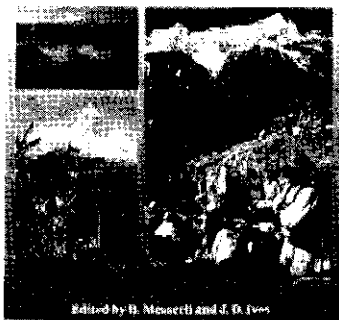
No editor can be expected to recognise errors of fact and interpretation, especially when the periodical, as is the case with Himal, handles such a wide variety of topics submitted by worldwide contributors. Yet we feel saddened that the desperate destructiveness of Allan's writing did not prompt a request for our viewpoint before, rather than after, publication.

Gratuitous and irrelevant comments about researchers or their work based on their nationality, sex, or age, have no place in a polite society, nor do they contribute to useful discussion. Rather they indicate the emptiness of the perpetrator.

Jack D. Ives, Ottawa
Bruno Messerli, Bern

Mountains of the World

A Global Priority



George and Burma

I am using the pages of Himal to respond to some recent reports in the press that have tried to link the support given by Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes to Burmese dissident groups with the receipt of arms by separatist rebels operating in India's Northeast.

First of all, I want to make it clear that the struggle for democracy in Burma is essentially non-violent. The second point is we are not to be lumped together with any anti-Indian armed groups. The third is that support by George Fernandes to our struggle cannot be interpreted as being extended by the defence minister of the Republic of India.

To elaborate on the first point, our struggle is being carried out by three groupings: the NLD (the National League for Democracy, which won 82 percent of the seats in the 1990 elections that was not respected by the military junta), the NCGUB (the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma, formed by the duly elected MPs of the 1990 election) and pro-democracy activists around the world. Neither the NLD nor the NCGUB carries arms. The means adopted by both organisations are purely political and does not involve violence. The NLD, led by Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, is a legally registered political party, and

does not represent any armed group. The NCGUB, the exile government does not have an army and it follows the policies and views of NLD. The various groups based near the border with India and Thailand, both ethnic and student organisations, operate on their own agendas even as they all support Suu Kyi and consider her the leader of the movement.

On the matter of links between anti-Indian outfits and Burmese pro-democracy groups, I would like to point out that we are in no way linked to the former. Our interests cannot be their concern. The two sides are neither friends nor enemies. And the arming of the Northeast militants has nothing to do with us or with George Fernandes, for I don't believe that the defence minister would do anything against the interests of his country.

On the third point raised above, Fernandes has been backing the Burmese opposition ever since the 1988 Burmese military crackdown on unarmed demonstrators. Burmese students have been staying at Fernandes' 3 Krishna Menon Marg residence since much before he became defence minister.

The issue that has now been



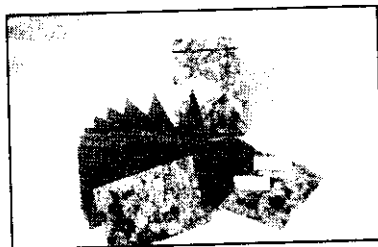
George Fernandes

raised is that the joint Indo-Burmese military operations in the border areas against separatist rebels of both countries is being endangered due to Fernandes' support to pro-democracy Burmese students. While that may be true, the question I would like to pose is: Is India going to forget its long-time commitment to democracy and acquiesce to the demands of one of the most brutal military regimes by expelling members of the Burmese opposition simply for the sake of the joint military operation? I would like to remind everyone that political problems cannot be solved by military operations, whether it be in Kashmir, Burma or the Indian Northeast.

Tint Swe
Member of Parliament (NLD)
New Delhi

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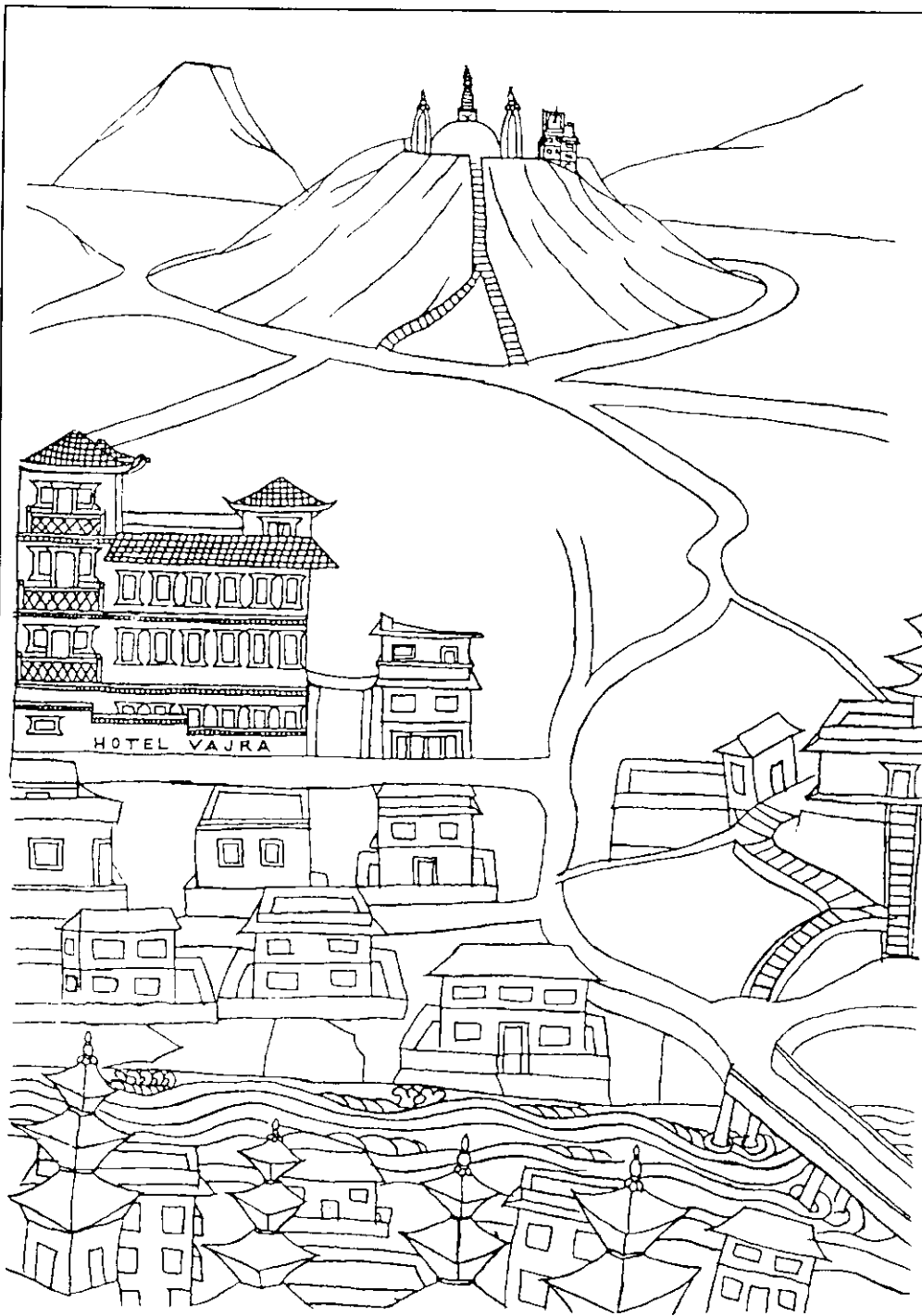


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Vajra (literally--flash of lightning), is an artists' condominium, a transit home for many, providing a base during months of hibernation and creative inspiration. Its isolation, graphic splendour and peaceful ambience, make an ideal retreat from the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

Vajra, a serene assembly of brick buildings, grassy courtyards, ivy-covered walls and Hindu statuary is a calm oasis over looking, chaotic Kathmandu.

Time, February '99



in Kathmandu, the Vajra

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PAKISTAN

JANG'S WAR

THAT A conflict was simmering between the Nawaz Sharif government and the Jang Group of Newspapers, became known to the Pakistani public only after front-page announcements in two of the group's dailies, *Jang* and *The News*, proclaimed that "after demolishing other pillars of the state, the government has now targeted the freedom of the press". Jang's decision to go open about the dispute created quite a stir and took most people by surprise, given the group's general policy of non-confrontation.

The first quarter-page advertisement, appearing on 25 January, claimed that Saifur Rehman, head of the Accountability Bureau and close aide of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, had demanded that: the news organisation, the country's largest, sack 16 journalists and replace them with "our people"; not print anything against the Shariat bill (the controversial 15th Constitutional Amendment); support the government on the Karachi situation; not print anything about the Sharif family's loans, tax arrears, business and private affairs; and extend unconditional support to the government on various other issues.

The consequences of not falling into line had already been made clear by the government with the re-opening of several cases of wealth and income tax irregularities against Jang. For good measure, a case was also registered against the group for the alleged illegal selling of its newsprint quota.

It was obvious to all that by going public, the Jang group, known for its moderate and pragmatic attitude, was playing the greatest gamble of its more than half a century's existence. For, this meant open confrontation with a prime minister whose wars of ego had resulted in the dethroning of a president, an army chief and a chief justice of the Supreme Court.

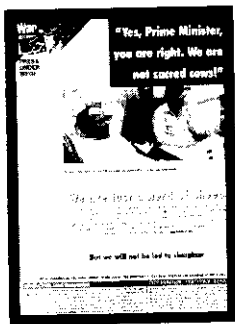
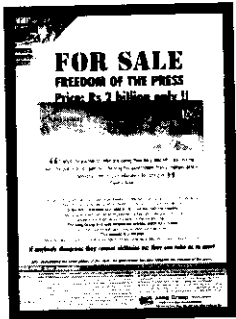
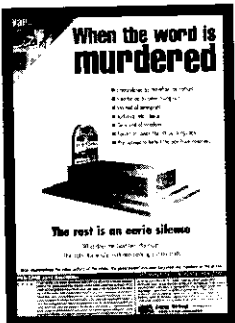
Following Jang's disclosures, Saifur Rehman admitted that he had asked the Jang proprietor and Editor-in-Chief, Mir Shakilur Rehman, to support the government on various issues because the country needed "an atmosphere of understanding and support from all spheres of life to get the country out of the economic crisis". But he denied having asked for the sacking of certain journalists and claimed: "It is a simple case of tax evasion of a sum as huge as 4 billion rupees and as the chairman of the Ehtesab [Accountability]

Bureau, it is my responsibility to eradicate corruption wherever it is present." (It is a different matter that both Saifur Rehman and his boss, Nawaz Sharif, themselves have been accused of not paying taxes commensurate with their fabulous wealth. If opposition Senator Aitzaz Absar's famous 'open letter' is to be believed, the prime minister paid only 477 rupees tax in 1998, while Rehman nothing at all.)

In pursuit of the "simple case of tax evasion", the government made full use of the state power. Jang's bank accounts were frozen, government advertisements pulled, supply of newsprint disrupted, and the secret services and various other agencies let loose on Jang's management as well as on senior journalists. What hurt the most was the stoppage of newsprint, which is imported under tight government control and allotted to newspapers under a quota system. The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) 'hijacked' truckloads of Jang's newsprint and, later, the customs delayed release of the paper stock in defiance of a Supreme Court order. The group was forced to temporarily close several of its weekly publications and reduce *Jang* and *The News* to mere skeletons. Meanwhile, the state-owned electronic media went on a tirade against the newspaper group.

That was the situation when Jang chief Rehman dropped a bombshell. On 28 January, he called the press in Karachi and played a recording of one of his conversations with Saifur Rehman, Information Minister Mushahid Hussain and others. The newsmen present heard Rehman demanding the dismissal of 16 journalists, including that of Maleeha Lodhi, former Pakistani ambassador to the US and editor of the Islamabad edition of *The News*, and if that was not possible, placing them in other positions until they could be. Rehman also suggested substitutes for these journalists; he "recommended" a speech writer of the prime minister in Lodhi's place.

At that time, it became clear that at stake was nothing less than the hard-won freedom of expression in the country. It was no longer a lone publishing group against the government, but the Press plus Civil Society against Government. Journalist organisations joined hands in support of Jang. Meetings were held, processions taken out, and hundreds of journalists took part in hunger strikes in all major cities of the country. Political parties set aside their mutual differences to form an All Parties Press Freedom Committee and held rallies in Karachi and Islamabad. It was for



Serial front page ads in *The News*.

the first time perhaps that workers of political parties as divergent as the Pakhtun Nationalist Awami National Party (ANP), the Islamist Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) and the Pakistan People's Party joined hands to stage joint rallies.

The battle of nerves finally ended with what appeared to be saner elements in the government prevailing upon the prime minister to relent. On 10 February, the Jang group announced that it had started talks with the government and hoped that "all issues would be solved soon". It also announced that its newsprint had been released and bank accounts de-frozen. Two days later, the journalists "temporarily" closed their hunger strike camps. There were suggestions that the two sides had struck a deal, but Mir Shakilur vehemently denied any "give and take".

For now, the match appears to have ended in a victory for the press, but there's no saying when the next round will start and who the victors will be then.

▲
— Zaigham Khan

BANGLADESH

DYING IN DHAKA

THE CAPITAL of Bangladesh, Dhaka, is a killer city and shows no sign of letting up on its homicidal spree. Every day, newspapers report of one death or another as people fall to everything from bullets, berserk trucks, to less prosaic ones like slum fires. Nevertheless, such a dangerous place has not deterred a high migration rate to the city from the rest of the country. Either the state of life in Dhaka has not been well advertised or it's really much worse out there.

And Dhaka doesn't just kill people or murder them through conventional mayhem. There is a more dangerous killer at work and one that works at a slow but sure pace: pollution. Air quality has reached a point where parts of Dhaka have deservedly earned the distinction of being among the most lethal places to breathe in the entire world. The only people who seem to be glad about this killer pollution are the mask makers, as hundreds of Dhaka residents go around sporting this useless protection against the foul air; the one thing it does well is hide the citizens' grimaces. The mask is also a symbol of the state of things: the protection the people can access can't save them.

The matter most deserving of attention, lead pollution, has been there for years and the cause is known to all. The imported petroleum, used primarily by autorickshaws, is of a cheap variety and has extremely high lead content. It is sold in the market under the label of "octane" without being detoxified. The "autos" use two-stroke engines which spew large volumes of lead into the air. There were protests aplenty, but nothing was done for long. Not even when medical evidence was presented by doctors and activists to show that children and adults were being seriously affected by lead poisoning.

Apparently few are bothered by the mortality and morbidity caused by this pollution. There is no scope for legal relief, and far worse, other pollutants may be lurking around the corner. Hacking down tress, destroying water bodies along with the rivers that keep Dhaka going, and the filling up of the city's natural canal system to provide for much-in-demand housing, are the stuff of nightmares. These are no secrets and by repeating them, one runs the risk of sounding not concerned, but banal.

It took months of intense media pressure before the authorities took the simple decision to ban the present grade of fuel, and import a better grade which will considerably reduce the lead poison emission (what really pushed the government, some say, was a loan commitment by the World Bank). Meanwhile, it is said, the autos will be phased out in another four years.

But for all this, Dhaka's pollution problems are soon going to go out of focus because Bangladesh is gearing up for yet another round of political turmoil—a result of the ceaseless, low-grade conflict between the ruling Awami League and the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party, a conflict that has given *déjà vu* a bad name. Since few can discern any tangible reason for the animosity between the two, one is forced to assume that personal or personality factors play a major part in it.

Politics and social concern have become alienated from each other and issues of governance don't include matters relating to social or environmental management. South Asian governance in the last 50 years has always been largely a result of external compulsions. Doles and donations have overwhelmed the social responsibility of politicians who see politics as management of the state and not necessarily of habitats, something that has been downgraded to the realm of "non-government" activities.

Dhaka doesn't just kill people or murder them through conventional mayhem. There is a more dangerous killer at work and one that works at a slow but sure pace: pollution.

That would have been quite all right, except that the NGO movement is itself suspected of having lost much of its announced idealism. The non-governmental sector is beginning to resemble more and more the unofficial face of the government's own delivery system and has even become part of the conventional political scenario. They want to be more official, more establishmentarian, and so the people are left facing a social and environmental crisis without a committed ally.

The fact that donors have to step in and demand that something be done about the state of pollution means that issues that should have been handled by the governments now flash across foreign computer screens to be identified as problems that need immediate attention.

It is easy to say that the entire process of donor-driven development and its attendant lack of context and competence is responsible for the accelerating crisis. The capacity of national governments to tackle emergency issues is diminishing as the whole situation is being turned into a matter of funding and repayment, and needs of donors, lenders and recipients.

It is also easy to say that national governments are looking less and less capable of improving the lot of the people by taking bold and meaningful decisions because political considerations overrule all other factors.

If it's easy and seems right to most, why shouldn't it be said again, again and again? ▲

— **Afsan Chowdhury**

INDIA • NEPAL

GOT ANY INGOT?

AFTER YEARS of profit-making, smugglers sneaking in gold from Nepal into India had been rendered jobless by the latter's liberalisation of gold imports in 1997. But now things are looking bright again for the smugglers, thanks to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government's increasing of import duties on gold by 60 percent. The current 6 to 7 percent price difference between gold prices in Nepal and India now makes gold-running worthwhile all over again.

At least one smuggler in Nepal was ecstatic about the new duty regime. "A Maruti Gypsy can take up to 40 kg. I have 'lines' through Mahendranagar, Nepalganj, Bhairahawa, and even Birgunj. From there we can choose any

destination, Delhi, Patna, Calcutta. We are back in business. One trip a month is all one needs." By 'lines', he means the officials along his chosen route who help him get the consignment to its final destination. Smugglers make an estimated INR 500,000-600,000 (c. USD 13,000) per trip.

India is a bottomless pit for gold, claims the World Gold Council (WGC). It is the largest consumer in the world and irrespective of boom or depression, demand never shows signs of receding. In 1998, India imported close to USD 8 billion worth of gold—a figure that is more than 2.5 percent of its GDP and higher than all its oil imports.

There were two reasons why gold demand was so high last year. First, the shortage of other financial instruments available to channel savings. Equities had been beaten to death, real estate was still on a downward spiral, and interest rates offered on debt instruments were barely above the retail price inflation. Gold, at least, is like buying dollars, and even if the underlying price varies a bit, dollar appreciation of 10-15 percent per year makes up for it. "For those who thought UTI (Unit Trust of India), the largest Mutual Fund that nearly went bust, was safe, last year was a terrible shock. Now they will touch nothing but real safety," said an investment analyst with a Bombay brokerage. "Indian households are investment savvy, now that Harshad Mehta has taught them their lesson. Gold has everything. Returns, shine, safety, inheritance."

The second reason for India's gluttonous gold consumption was the tax amnesty declared by the Indian government. This was an offer which gave people the opportunity to convert black money into white, in exchange for taxes that were to be levied at a flat rate. However, since the scheme taxed declared cash income at rates far higher than for assets, cash hoarders rushed and bought gold.

Panic stricken at the foreign exchange outflow on gold imports, the BJP government could not have done worse. It hoped (and still does) that the hike in duties will bring in about INR 2.5 billion in revenue, and curtail demand. But that looks unlikely. Dick Ware of the WGC believes that the raising of duty will not really reduce demand, it will only trigger a resumption of smuggling. So the Delhi government stands to lose on both counts: it will neither see declines in foreign exchange outflow, nor increases in tax collections.

After the liberalisation of gold imports in 1997, the black market for gold shrank by

nearly 60 percent. More Indians bought gold from legal channels, which meant that the *hawala* market (black market for US dollars) also collapsed. No one wanted to buy smuggled gold, so no one wanted *hawala* dollars and the black market no longer seemed attractive. This meant that the NRI savings channelled into India started taking the official route—selling NRI dollars through banks rather than the black market, which was not really offering better rates. This boosted foreign exchange reserves and made bank balance sheets healthier. Smuggling gold was simply bad business, and smugglers had to diversify their product line.

So when it came to renewing the trade and transit treaty between India and Nepal, the Indian government decided to try and plug the loopholes. Nepali traders are restricted from using random routes to trade with India. Routes, even highways, have to be specified in advance. Nepali importers must furnish bonds and bank guarantees for importing goods that have limited use in Nepal (cellular phones, raw silk yarn, high-tech telecom equipment, etc). And what does the smuggling fraternity on the Indo-Nepal border think of all this? In the words of the smuggler mentioned above: "It's farcical. There are enough loopholes. And why point here? Look at the amount directly getting in from the Middle East. It's even better business there and they are the ones who control the business here."

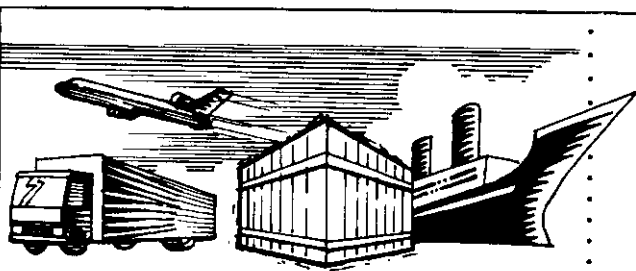
The Nepali government is all for increasing border control as long as the Indians are willing to shell out the cash. The Indians will not, because, until now, the perceived threat was not here, it was up at Siachen. Now things have changed. Nepal has seen a remarkable increase in the influence of the same mafia that operates so ruthlessly in Bombay (which included the murder of a sitting MP near his Kathmandu home, who himself was said to have deep mafia links). With the bosses in Dubai, this mafia makes money through smuggling and extortion, though not of the scale of its Bombay operations.

The solution lies in making smuggling unprofitable by rationalising duties (for instance, between India and Nepal), which reduces arbitrage and makes the risk not worth the reward. It is also fairly clear that the Indian government must try and root out the mafia dons from Bombay and Dubai, a task which is made tougher by politicians who have a direct stake in extortion and smuggling revenues. Until that happens, more cities will fall under the control of the mafia, which, for the time being, is only getting richer.

Meanwhile, given the funding requirements of Nepali political parties in the run-up to the general elections in early May, there is no saying that income from smuggled gold will not make a distorted polity even more so.

— *Shantanu Nagpal*

"India is a bottomless pit for gold."



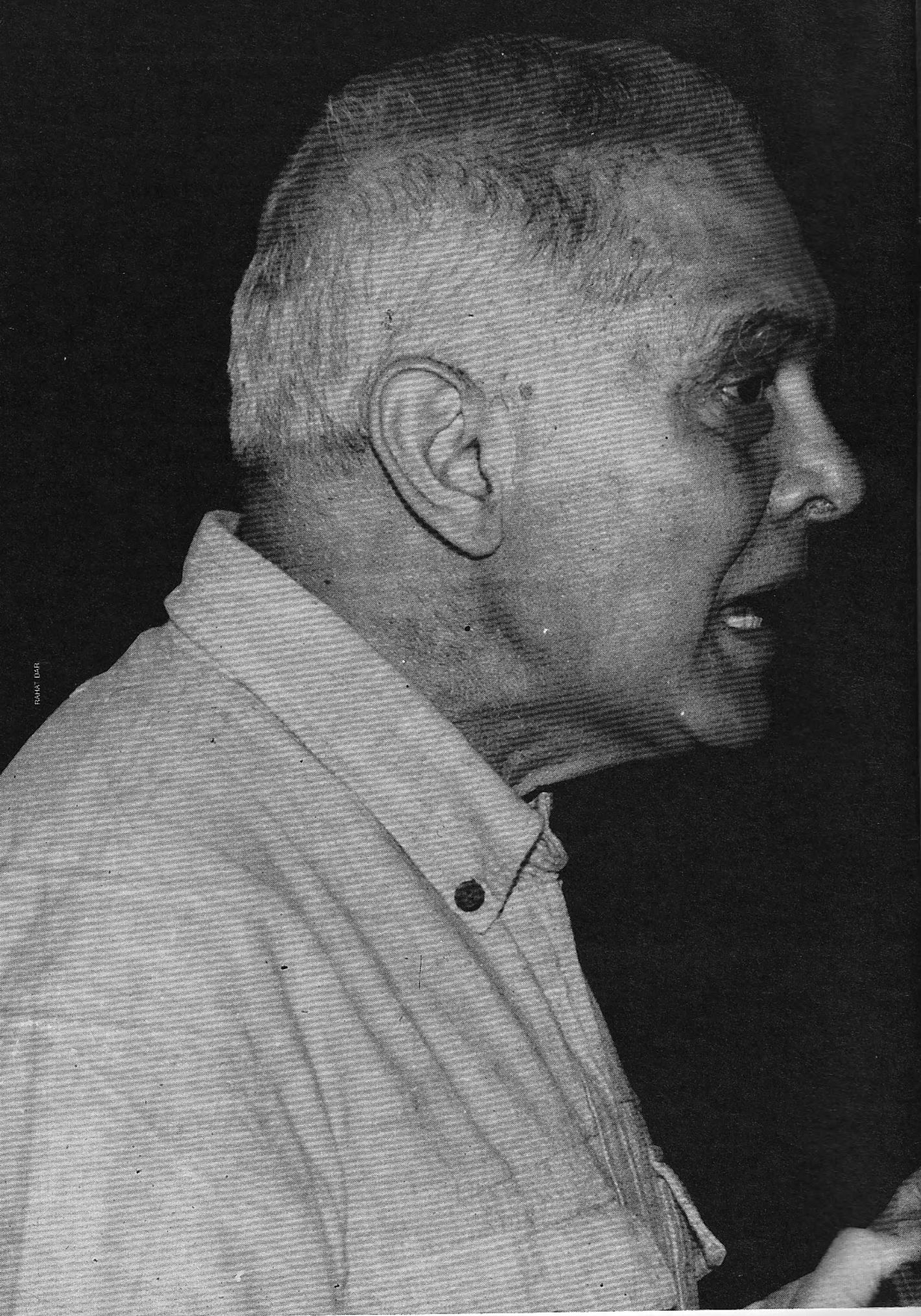
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RAHAT DAB

Distorted Histories

interviewed by David Barsamian

Eqbal Ahmad, activist scholar, was born in India probably in 1934. He's not quite sure. In 1947, he left with his brothers for the newly created state of Pakistan. He came to the United States to study at Princeton in the 1950s, and then went to Algeria. Ahmad worked there with Frantz Fanon during the revolt against the French. He was active in the civil rights movement in the United States and the anti-Vietnam War movement. In 1971, he was prosecuted (along with the Berrigan brothers and several others) on the trumped-up charge of trying to kidnap Henry Kissinger. The case was dismissed.

Ahmad has long been active on the issue of Palestinian sovereignty. This work brought him into a close friendship with Edward Said, who dedicated *Culture and Imperialism* to him. It also brought him to the attention of Yasser Arafat, who met him several times but, Ahmad says, never took his advice.

In the 1960s, Ahmad taught at Princeton, the University of Illinois, and Cornell. After making a speech to a group of students about the Six-Day War between Israel and the Arab states in 1967, in which he argued that the conflict was more complicated than the media were portraying it, he found himself ostracised in the academy. "A large majority of the faculty at Cornell took great exception to that," he told me. "For the next year, I found myself increasingly so isolated that sometimes I would sit at the lunch table and large numbers of people would be lining up for a table and nobody would sit at mine."

Ahmad left Cornell, did some freelance work and helped found the Transnational Institute in Amsterdam, which is affiliated with the

Institute for Policy Studies in Washington DC. From 1982 to 1997, he taught International Relations and Middle Eastern studies for a semester each year at Hampshire College in Amherst, Massachusetts.

Ahmad's retirement ceremony from Hampshire College in October 1997 was a memorable two-day affair. Entitled "Celebrating Eqbal Ahmad", people had come from places as far away as California, Canada, Algeria, Morocco, Turkey and Pakistan to be part of it. Speakers included Noam Chomsky, Howard Zinn and Edward Said, all close personal friends of Ahmad's. The establishment of the "Eqbal Ahmad Distinguished Lecture Programme" was also announced during the event. (The first Eqbal Ahmad Lecture was delivered by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan at Hampshire College in September 1998.)

Now Ahmad spends most of his time in Islamabad, Pakistan, where he is trying to establish an alternative university. He also writes a weekly column for *Dawn*, Pakistan's oldest English newspaper. His work in Pakistan consists chiefly of trying to bridge differences with India on the issues of Kashmir and nuclear weapons.

The first time I ever interviewed Eqbal Ahmad was in the early 1980s at his apartment in New York's Upper West Side. It was memorable. On my way home, I thought, "Wow, I've got a great interview!" But when I sat down to listen to it, the tape was blank. I had failed to turn the machine on. With considerable embarrassment, I explained to Eqbal what had happened. He invited me over the next day, and we did another interview, and this time I pressed the button.

The major portion of the current interview is the product of two marathon sessions in his small apartment in Amherst (sections have been added from a later interview in Boulder, Colorado). The last session at Amherst began in the afternoon and ended with an Urdu poem at 2 am. It was punctuated by a couple of wonderfully spicy meals and a hike around nearby Mount Holyoke.

A streak of opportunism in Gandhi led him to pursue a politics that spiritualised and sectarianised the politics of India.

• *You, personally, saw the beginnings of the tensions between Pakistan and India when you were young. How did that affect you?*

Witnessing the partition of India had a very lasting impact on me because what I saw then was the case with which humanity, perfectly good humanity, can descend into barbarism. I saw the extent to which ideas, ideology, political affiliations change human behaviour.

• *And what about the murder of your father?*

That played an important role because in addition to leaving a very deep scar on me as a child, it made me unconsciously absorb certain conclusions about life. One is that property is more dear to people than friendship or blood ties. Some relatives of my father were involved in his murder because they felt their property rights were being threatened by his politics.

• *Was he involved in the Gandhian movement?*

Yes, he was involved with the Indian National Congress, and he was giving away some of his land to the poor.

• *Were you with him when he was killed?*

We were sleeping in the same bed. He tried to protect me and obviously succeeded. I'm still sitting here.

• *When you look back at Gandhi and the movement to free India from colonial rule, was there any way to prevent the partition of India and the bloodbath that followed?*

I think so. When two communities have actually coexisted with each other for 700 years, it is impossible not to find ways not to separate. I just don't understand why the leadership of India, both Muslim and Hindu, including Gandhi, failed to ensure that its two communities, one Hindu and the other Muslim, could continue to live side by side. There were tensions in this relationship, as there are tensions in, frankly, all relationships. But, by and large, these two peoples had lived collaboratively with each other. A civilisation had grown, a new language, Urdu, had emerged, new art, architecture, music, and poetry developed.

Partition could have been avoided, but it could not have been avoided unless Indian anti-imperialist movements also understood the necessity of avoiding the ideology of nationalism. Nationalism is an ideology of difference, and Gandhi is at least as responsible for contributing to the division of India as any-

one, if not more. Lest Gandhi is understood as sort of a Hindu communalist which is the Pakistani nationalist line against him, a line I do not share, I should say that he was, above all, an anti-imperialist opportunist. It is that streak of opportunism in Gandhi that led him to pursue a politics that spiritualised and sectarianised the politics of India.

Gandhi began to take on Hindu symbols because they were the symbols of the majority people. They had the most capacity, the most power as mobilising symbols. In the process, the Muslim community got very frightened that its own cultural traditions were being shunted aside. Gandhi would do anything within the framework of his non-violent philosophy that would mobilise the masses.

• *What about Britain's role?*

World War II exhausted Britain's imperial will. When the war was over, Britain halfheartedly engaged in a holding pattern and then kind of suddenly gave up. The British were careful only to not renounce their energy holdings. They doggedly controlled the areas where energy resources were concentrated in World Wars I and II. They had come to a rather deep, respectful realisation of the importance of oil. They cared about places like India much less. They seemed to care about two things: oil and English people. Wherever there was a large English colony, such as Kenya, they hung on to it. Where there was oil, they hung on to it. The rest of it, they were almost irresponsible.

I was a child of about 12. I have this vivid memory of my brothers, all nationalists, talking in 1946 about the worst that can happen would be the British pulling out prematurely. They did not even have the staying power to ensure an orderly withdrawal. I think what we witnessed in 1947 in India and then again in 1948 in Pakistan were hurried, unthought-out, irresponsible, and, frankly, cowardly withdrawals.

• *What do you make of the politics of the Bharatiya Janata Party, which came to power in India in March 1998?*

It is anti-minorities, mainly because it seeks to create out of India, which has for thousands of years been a rather multicultural, multireligious, pluralistic society, a kind of unified, uniform Hindutva. Hindu society in the state. Once you have that vision of India, a number of things follow. They are very resentful of that history of India which is not specifically Hindu from their point of view.

That excludes the Buddhist part of Indian history. It excludes 750 years of what they view as the Muslim part of Indian history, Muslim-dominated history, and it excludes the colonial part. It is not merely an ahistorical but an anti-historical movement. The destruction of the 16th-century Babri mosque was an expression of that anti-historicism, anti-historical outlook. They would destroy all in Indian history that was not specifically Hindu.

This entails imagining a different history of India. When those in power imagine a different history, they tend to create a different history and destroy an old history. We have seen that with the Zionist movement, which proceeded to create a different history of Palestine and to a certain extent, at least in the Western world, has succeeded in doing so. It held good of the racist movement in the 19th century that proceeded to create a different history which ascribed such things as the city of Istanbul to Western creations. Even the Taj Mahal was described as having been built by Italian artists.

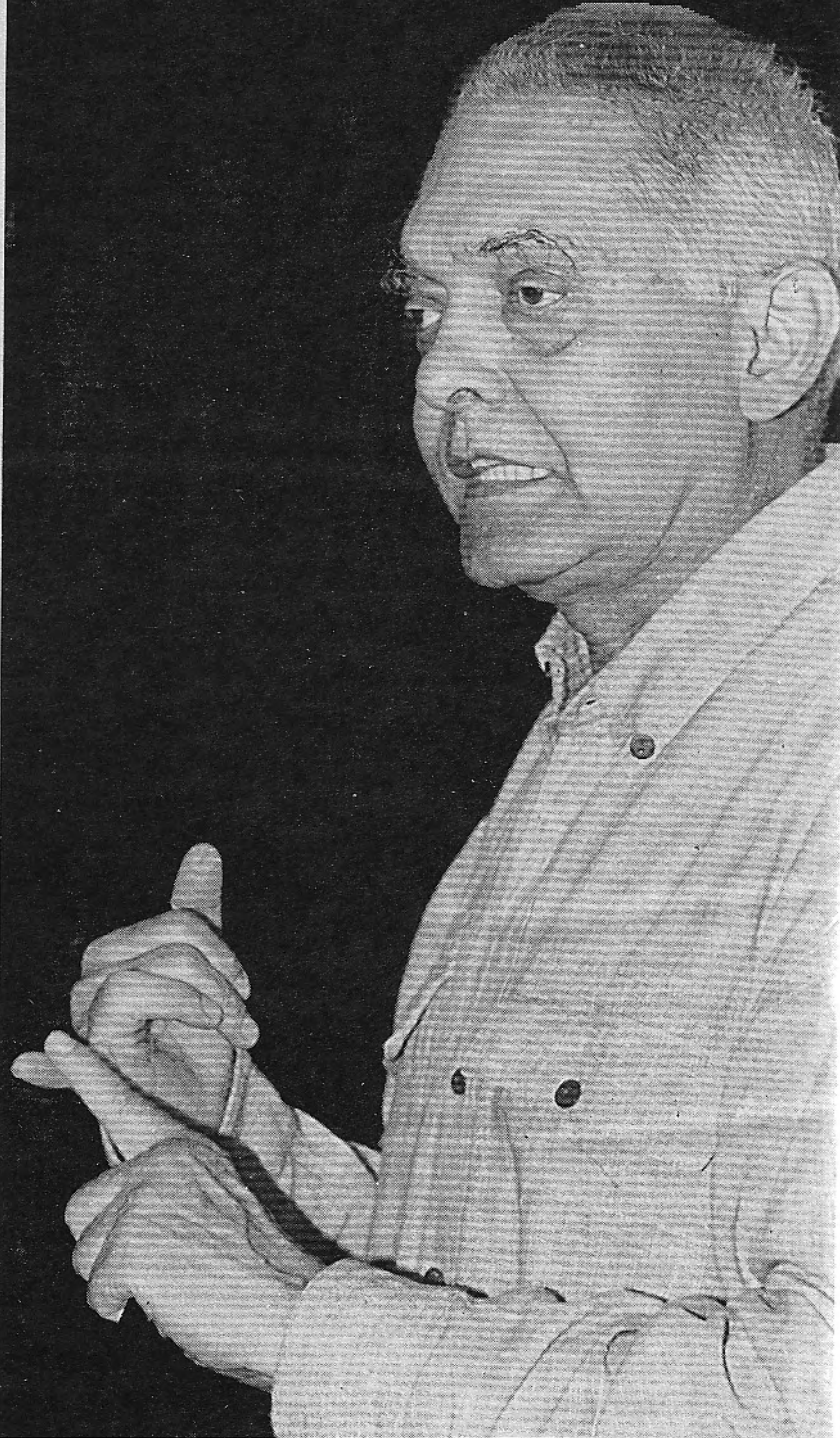
This mindset necessarily turns hostile to minorities. Minority groups in India, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists, all feel fearful that in its drive towards cleansing India of non-Hindu elements it would commit extreme excesses. This anti-minority mood, is rather reminiscent, fortunately hasn't reached that point, and hopefully will not do so, of the fascist campaign against Jews in Europe or the Serb campaign against Muslims in former Yugoslavia.

Finally, this tendency would mean, among other things, increasing militarisation of India as a country. India has been pulled, since the emergence of the colonial encounter, in opposing directions of organised violence and non-violence, of Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Gandhi. It seems that with the BJP now in power, a certain, hopefully not a final, ascendancy has been achieved by the militaristic wing of Indian nationalism.

• *In the BBC documentary about you entitled Stories My Country Told Me, you say that "all sorts of historical truths and untruths are mixed then, and you organise collective emotion on the basis of difference and that's going to promote extremes and hatreds".*

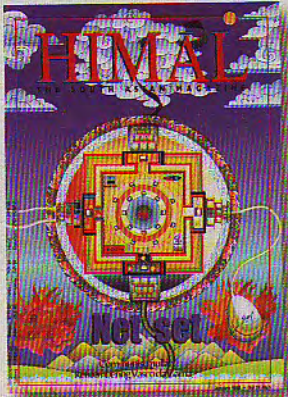
It's happening. In that documentary I was speaking of nationalist ideologies *per se*, which generally have those tendencies. What you are seeing now with the BJP and its allies, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, the Shiv Sena, most importantly the Rashtriya Swayamsevak

"The biggest problem are political minds rooted in an earlier time ... minds that are distorted, rooted in distorted histories."



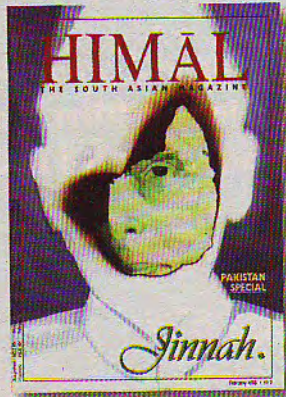
PARVATI DAVE

Did you miss any of these?



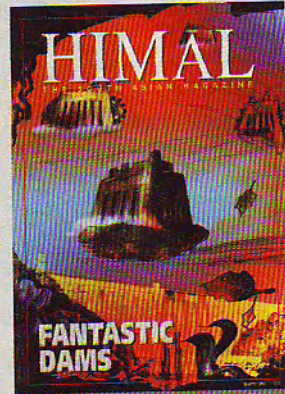
January

The Net in South Asia
Legend of Vasco da Gama
Communist mullah



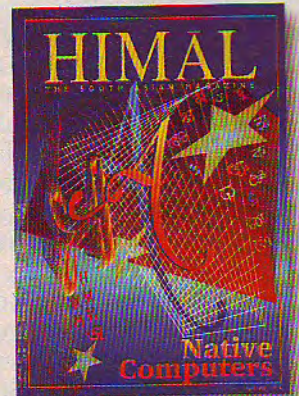
February

The 'conversion' of Jinnah
Secularism and Bangladesh
South Asia against Rushdie



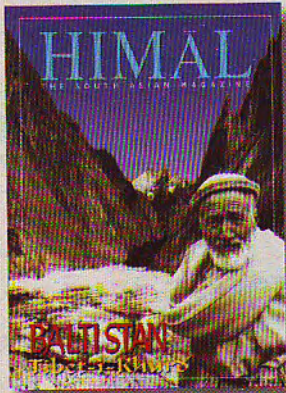
March

The dam debate
Academic SAARC
Insights of a Kashmiri poet



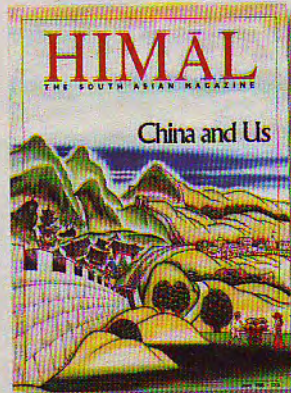
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Native computers
UN's South Asian club
Governor Prabhakaran



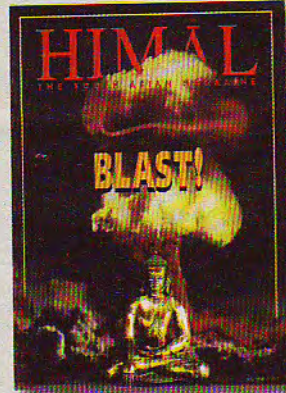
May

Everything about Baltistan
Among the Naipauls
Cardboard swadeshi



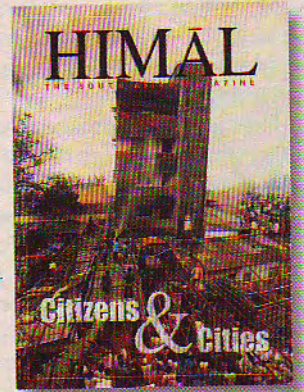
June

China and South Asia
Defiling Lumbini
Miss Beautiful Bangladesh



July

Best in anti-nuke writing
Censorship in Sri Lanka
Yeti on male remote control



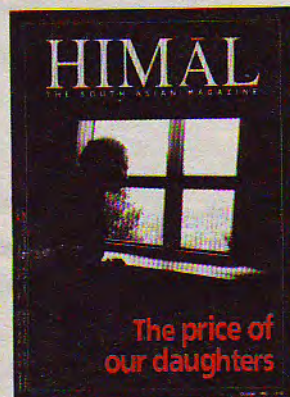
August

Exploding megacities
Vanishing volunteerism
Pakistani cinema



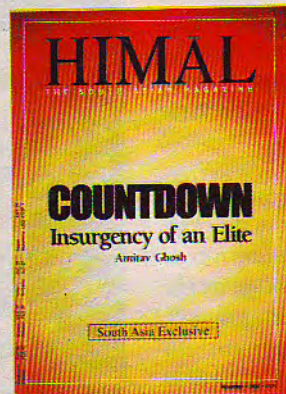
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Unwell SAARC
Lessons from Ladakh
Sex and marriage in Nepal



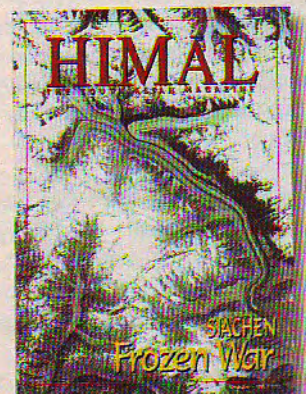
October

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The Taliban and the Hazaras
Bhutan's refugee crisis



November

The bomb cult
The beauty pageant myth
Palk Strait fishermen



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The Siachen war
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Sangh, they are pushing this major party, the second largest party in India today, to extremes of an ideology of difference. Hindus are different from Muslims. Christians are different from Hindus. Sikhs are different from all. This is producing extremes, such atrocities as the destruction of a historic mosque, or such excesses as the communal riots that were promoted in various places, and such extremes of militaristic thinking that led to the testing of the nuclear device last May. So a militarisation occurs with this ideology of differences. It could lead to wars and violence, both domestically and abroad.

- *It seems that nationalism as an ideology requires an expanded and solidified identity. You have said that "If you're going to build collective identity, you're going to distort history."*

Not only building collective identity. Building collective identity and abusing the Other. We are so-and-so because we are not the Other. We are what we are because we are different from the West, or from the Muslims, or from the Hindus, or from the Jews, or from the Christians. This necessarily leads to extremes of distortion.

Examples abound. You see in India today a portrayal of Muslim rule, Mughal rule, for example, in ways that never existed. Historians point out that majority of the noblemen, feudal lords, nobility of the Mughal empire, were Hindus, not Muslims. They have pointed out that the Muslims of India were by and large a poorer class throughout the 700 years of Muslim rule than the Hindus were. Of course, there was more of a propertied class among Hindus, while Muslims had mostly converted from the 'untouchable' class to Islam in search of gaining a measure of freedom and equality, since Islam does not have in principle a caste system. But all that is being distorted by the day. To their credit, though, I should underline that the large body of the most renowned Indian historians are combating this tendency in the case of India.

- *What were the triggers that ignited India's decision to set off the nuclear explosions?*

Rationally speaking it made no sense whatsoever for India to have tested its nuclear weapons a second time, and it made equally no sense for Pakistan to follow suit. The only way you can explain India's decision to do so is this particular brand of nationalism which the BJP represents. Their notion of power is military power. Their notion of influence, the influence that is attained by force, by the

show of force.

I am not sure at all that considerations of Pakistan played any role at all in their decision to test nuclear weapons. I think they were testing to become equals of the other nuclear powers. They tested in the expectation of joining this silly abstraction called the "nuclear club". What are the privileges of this membership are not clear to me or to anyone. If it is clear to somebody, nobody has explained it to me.

There are many reasons why the tests made no sense. After nearly 30 years of failure to improve relations with China following the India-China war of 1962, bilateral relationship was improving rapidly. All India's and China's neighbours were starting to think that closer friendly ties between the two great giants of Asia would be to the benefit of all Third World people. It had reached a point where the Chinese president and prime minister were very active when they visited India and Pakistan. They came to Pakistan urging the Pakistani leadership to make peace with India even if it meant making compromises on such issues as Kashmir. This was the greatest single achievement of Indian foreign policy of the last 10 years. In a single day the BJP leadership destroyed this achievement and turned China once again into an adversary. The Pokhran test was preceded by a huge amount of anti-China rhetoric. But India cannot afford an arms race with China. It will be disastrous for India, just as Pakistan cannot afford an arms race with India.

Secondly, India has been economically a surprising country. In the last 40 or 50 years after decolonisation, its economic growth had hovered around 3.5 to 4 percent despite the fact that it is a country with massive human and material resources. It had a good administration, a good bureaucracy, a good army, a strong state. Economists couldn't figure out why, so as social scientists do, when they can't find a real explanation for something, they found a phrase. They started calling it the "Hindu rate of growth", as if there was something cultural about it. Then in the last seven years India broke out of its "Hindu rate of growth" and its development curve started to climb. In 1997, its growth was 7.5 percent, and in 1998 it was projected to be 7 percent. This explosion, this testing, brought India's rate of growth back to 4 percent. Why did they hurt themselves so?

Thirdly, India has ambitions to be a regional power. One basic principle for a regional power is that it should have better re-

The privileges of nuclear club membership are not clear to me or to anyone. If it is clear to somebody, nobody has explained it to me.

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lations with its neighbours. The government of Inder Kumar Gujral had been successful in improving relations with Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal. By exploding this bomb, once again they have increased tension in the region and frightened their neighbours.

• *Indian commentators such as Prem Shankar Jha lay the blame for India's action on Pakistan's doorstep, claiming that India went ahead with its test only after Pakistan changed the power equation in the Subcontinent by launching its intermediate-range ballistic missile, the Ghauri. They also refer to the aggressive intent behind the very naming of the missile.*

I think the testing of the Ghauri was a mistake. It was not necessary. The naming of this missile, which had previously been called Hatif, was outrageously crass, crude and in some ways provocative. In fact, it is also totally ignorant. The naming of the Ghauri was based on total linguistic ignorance on the part of the Pakistani government and its officials.

Before Ghauri, India had already deployed a missile system called Prithvi along the Pakistan border. The Pakistani rulers didn't know that *prithvi* means "earth" in Hindi. They thought Prithvi was named after Prithvi Raj Chauhan, the 12th-century Hindu king who had defeated Shahabuddin Ghauri several times and was finally defeated by Ghauri. So they were thinking that the Indians had named it after Prithvi Raj Chauhan. They decided to name their missiles, which came after the Indian missiles, Ghauri.

What this illustrates is that we are dealing with medieval minds, with distorted histories. Prithvi Raj Chauhan was not fighting Shahabuddin Ghauri because he was a Hindu. Shahabuddin Ghauri was not fighting Prithvi Raj Chauhan because he was a Muslim. These were medieval rulers, conquerors, invaders—invader in one case and king in another case, fighting for land, territoriality.

Shahabuddin Ghauri did not fight Prithvi Raj Chauhan until after he had defeated half a dozen Muslim rulers who came in his way. But distorted histories have created a new kind of medieval history that is Hindu history and Muslim history. These distorted ways of looking at it created these two misunderstandings, Prithvi on the one hand, Ghauri on the other. All this is indeed provocative, but it suggests a medieval mindset and a generalised problem that includes Pakistanis and Indians.

Secondly, there was already a missile race on when the Pakistanis tested the Ghauri. The Prithvi was already deployed by India, and the

more advanced missile system named Agni had been tested before the Ghauri. It is not useful for supposedly independent journalists to come out and ply nationalist lines. We should begin by recognising that Pakistani and Indian rulers are caught in a medieval militaristic warp, that they are no more modern than the Clintons and the Bushes, who see power in terms of military prowess. Throughout the world, we are living in modern times, and dominated by medieval minds—political minds that are rooted in distorted histories.

• *After the explosions in May, Nawaz Sharif said that Pakistan had no choice, that it had to even the playing field. Do you think Pakistan had a choice?*

Of course it had a choice. The evidence before us is that after testing their weapons, the Indian leaders became panicky that they would look very bad if Pakistan did not test. The Indian foreign minister said Pakistan should reconsider its position in South Asia because the strategic equation had changed. L.K. Advani, the home minister, said: We are going to go into Pakistan and take over those parts of Kashmir which are in Pakistani hands. Atal Behari Vajpayee said the strategic equation has changed, the Pakistanis should understand it. This kind of provocative statement was made every day. Some fighting also started along the border in Kashmir.

However, to respond to such provocation is not the act of responsible leadership. I had argued then that there was no need for Pakistan to test. I'm arguing now there was no need to test. By being provoked, we are actually confirming what the most racist part of the world says, that we are not capable of, not qualified, to have nuclear weapons. This is ridiculous.

I don't know at what level I should argue here. I do not believe in nuclear weapons. Therefore, first of all I believe that just because India has nuclear weapons, Pakistan does not have to have it. I believe in unilaterally not having to compete with India in the nuclear arms race, number one.

Number two, even if I didn't believe that, supposing for a few minutes I was thinking like the Pakistani policy-maker, I would say: Why? Pakistan is a smaller country. It had a nuclear capacity. India knew it had a nuclear capability for the last 10 years. The world knew it had a nuclear capability. For this smaller power it is best not to show that capability. They could have kept quiet about it, and that would have been more effective.

I do not believe in nuclear weapons. Therefore, first of all I believe that just because India has nuclear weapons, Pakistan does not have to have it.

The Indian Muslim feels that he's Indian, and he's going to bloody well stand up and fight for it. That is an important achievement, I think...

- *Sharif used a couplet by Mohammed Iqbal while announcing Pakistan's nuclear explosions: "Love plunged into Nimrod's fire without hesitation. Meanwhile, Reason is on the rooftop, just contemplating the scene."*

A greater vulgarisation of Iqbal or of Sufi thought is difficult to imagine. The prime minister of Pakistan, in announcing the Pakistani decision to test its own nuclear weapons, puts down his decision as an act of love. Contrast it with the argument of people like me, who were saying: Reason demands that you don't do it. To elevate the bomb, then, to the level of divinity, to the level of morality, to the level of the spirit and the spiritual act, is vulgar. It's a vulgarity of which I'm quite sure Pakistan's prime minister was not quite aware, yet it's regrettable.

- *Nawaz Sharif has said that he thinks the introduction of the Shariat would be a good thing for Pakistan. Do you agree?*

Of course not. I wrote about it as soon as he had proposed a 15th amendment to the Constitution. I argued that in modern times Islam has been in Pakistan and in other Muslim countries a refuge for weak and scoundrel regimes and rulers. Whenever they feel threatened, they bring out Islam from the closet and use it as a political weapon.

That's what Nawaz Sharif is doing. He has been in office now for nearly two years. The economy has not improved. He tested the nuclear weapons and Pakistan's security has not improved. Our basic disputes with India have not been resolved. He supported the Taliban in Afghanistan, which has brought us into conflict with Iran, as if we needed one more hostile neighbour. Under these conditions, he pulls Islam out of the closet and starts the process of Islamisation. This is typical use of religion for purposes that are less than moral.

- *What is at the root of what so many see as a deep sense of insecurity among Pakistanis? You could see it in the demonstrations in the streets after the explosions in Pakistan.*

The Pakistanis' sense of insecurity is there, but let me clarify two things. There were expressions of joy at the testing, both in India and in Pakistan. In this respect the Pakistanis were not very different from the Indians. Secondly, in both countries it was a microscopic minority that expressed joy. In the case of Pakistan, I am a witness to the fact that most of the pictures that appeared on television in the first three days after the Pakistani

testing on May 29 was due to the extraordinary hunger of Western media for photo opportunities.

One of the pictures that you saw most often on television, including CNN, I personally saw how it was taken. The world media didn't quite descend on us until the day after the announcement of the Pakistani explosion on the afternoon of the 29th. The next morning after news conferences that officials gave to these media people, government agents ran around up and down Abpara market in Islamabad saying: Close your shops, come out to show your support for the bomb. These were police officials running up and down. Probably a maximum of 50 or 60 people gathered. They were handed bouquets of flowers. Two persons went into a *halvai* food shop, bought a whole lot of sweets and started distributing them. They were both officials. Then they said to the camera people, you can now take pictures. That was the demonstration in Islamabad. I did not see any expression of spontaneous joy either in Islamabad or in Rawalpindi.

A week later, Nawaz Sharif went back to Lahore. There his party, the Muslim League, officially organised a mass demonstration to welcome the prime minister and therefore the bomb. That was all official. It was a state-sponsored event which the Western media did not know or did not recognise as entirely staged. Whether or not the same thing happened in India, I do not know, but I wouldn't be surprised if it did.

The Indian public and the Pakistani public, even those who felt joy about it, know that this was too serious a matter to go about celebrating. This was not a moment of celebration. In both countries, on Hiroshima Day in 1998, large demonstrations took place. In India the demonstrations were much larger than in Pakistan. In Calcutta 250,000 people came out against nuclear weapons. In Delhi, 30,000.

But back to Pakistani insecurity. The country feels insecure for a number of reasons. I think most important is that the country has emerged from a partition of India. Many of the issues linked to that partition have not yet been resolved. Kashmir is one of them. The insecurity that arises out of this is that India has not quite accepted the fact of Pakistan's existence. This view is wrong. From what I can see, India has accepted the fact of Partition, including the internationalists.

Secondly, the country broke up once, when Bangladesh seceded from Pakistan, arousing

a sense that maybe things are not final yet. Lastly, a sense of stability hasn't developed. Out of 50 years, 25 years have been spent under military rule and 25 under very unstable, very corrupt and very inefficient civilian rule. People who have been living in that unstable fashion, facing a very large, hostile neighbour, created out of historic India, therefore not certain whether their status is permanent or not—will feel insecure. That's another reason I feel we should have avoided the possession of nuclear weapons.

• *What about the state and condition, both materially as well as psychologically, of India's vast Muslim population? What about their sense of belonging, particularly in this atmosphere of communalism?*

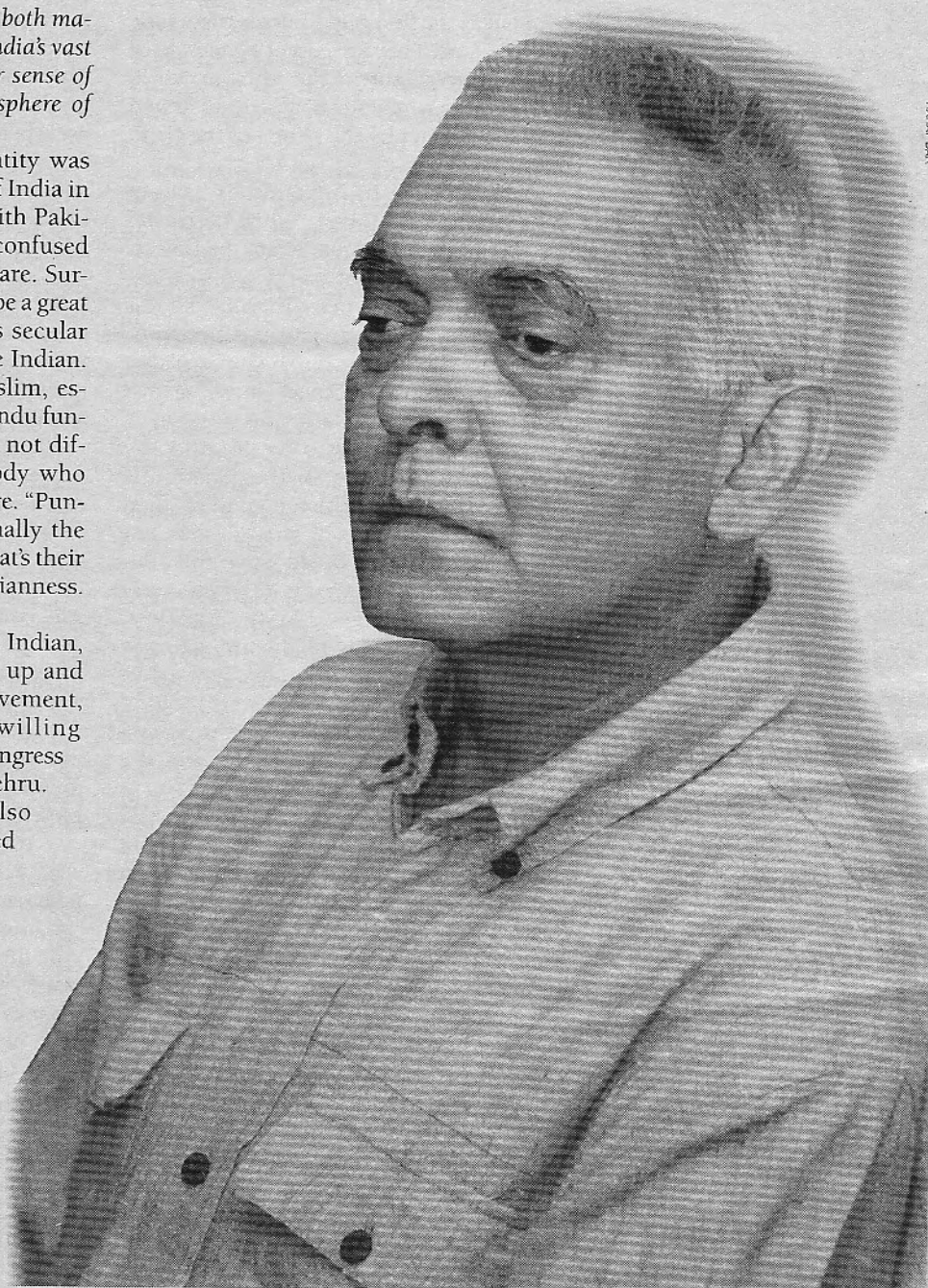
I think the Indian Muslim identity was very much shaken by the partition of India in 1947. Many of them sympathised with Pakistan and its creation. They became confused about what it means, and who they are. Surprisingly, 50 years later, and this may be a great achievement of Nehru and Gandhi's secular ideals, the Indian Muslim feels quite Indian. Insecure on grounds of being a Muslim, especially because of the rise of these Hindu fundamentalists, but Indian—not alien, not different, not an outsider, not somebody who should think of going away somewhere. "Punishments will be taken here, and finally the day of counting will be done here." That's their outlook. They have that sense of Indianness. It's very impressive.

The Indian Muslim feels that he's Indian, and he's going to bloody well stand up and fight for it. That is an important achievement, I think, which people are not willing to recognise of the Indian National Congress and the leadership of Gandhi and Nehru. It is an important achievement also of that Muslim leadership which stayed in India and which opposed the idea of Pakistan, people like Abul Kalam Azad.

• *But that leadership also included the maulanas and the moulvis.*

The religious class of Islam, the ulema, did not support the Pakistan movement, by and large. Ironic, but that is true. Just as the greatest Judaic scholars in the 1920s and 1930s did not support the Zionist movement. They thought it was inimical to the notion of Judaism, to the

In modern times Islam has been in Pakistan and in other Muslim countries a refuge for weak and scoundrel regimes and rulers.



universal idea of being a Jew.

- *But today in Pakistan the Muslim fundamentalist parties are decidedly nationalist?*

I don't think they can be called "nationalist". They are decidedly Islamist. They are out to capture state power. In that sense, they are nationalist. They are not quite nationalists in the sense that we use the word. They are pan-Islamists.

- *They wish to establish a theocratic state?*

They wish to establish a theocratic state in Pakistan as the first step towards theocratic states elsewhere. They are part of a generalised theocratic movement in the Muslim world today which was given a massive push and an armed character by the efforts of the US in Afghanistan.

What happened in Afghanistan has not been discussed in the West. When the Soviet Union intervened in Afghanistan, the US saw in it an opportunity that was two-fold. One, to tie the Soviet Union in a Vietnam-like war in Afghanistan. Two, they saw in it an opportunity to mobilise the entire Muslim world in a violent way against the Soviet Union, against communism.

American operatives went around the Muslim world recruiting for the *jihad* in Afghanistan. This whole phenomenon of *jihad* as an international armed struggle has not existed in the Muslim world since the 10th century. It was brought back into being, enlivened, and pan-Islamised by the American effort. I saw plane-loads of them arriving—from Algeria, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan and Palestine. These people were brought in, given an ideology, told that the armed struggle is a virtuous thing to do, and the whole notion of *jihad* as an international pan-Islamic terrorist movement was born. The US spent 8 billion dollars in producing the bin Ladens of our time. That camp they hit in Afghanistan, I visited it in 1986. It was a CIA-sponsored camp.

Then the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan, but US support for these people continued because communism was still alive. The Soviet Union collapsed in 1990 and from 1991 you see a new phenomenon. The US broke faith with a lot of these people. Worse, the US moved in on the issue of drugs. Afghanistan and Pakistan had become the largest centres of the drug trade in the 1980s. Many of these people who were supporting the CIA were also engaged in the drug trade. Now the US did not need them, so it started pushing the Paki-

stani government and the governments of Turkey and Saudi Arabia to clamp down on these groups that were previously working with the US. They suffered from a double betrayal. There was a failure to continue to fulfill promises made, and there was a turning on old friends.

Who are these people? These are all Afghanistan-connected, CIA-connected people. They are also tribal people. Tribal people have a tribal code, and two words are central to that code: loyalty and revenge. The tribal ethics works around the notion of loyalty and revenge. When your friend to whom you are loyal has betrayed you, you will take revenge. These people have enough of a grudge now on the basis of having been loyal and having been betrayed.

Number two, they have been socialised and trained and equipped to carry on a war of terror against occupiers, foreign occupiers, which was the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. And so, bin Laden is merely carrying out the mission to which he committed with America earlier. Now he is carrying it out against America, because now America, from his point of view, is occupying his land. That's all. He grew up seeing Saudi Arabia being robbed by Western corporations and Western powers. He watched these Saudi princes, this one-family state, handing over the oil resources of the Arab people to the West. Up until 1991, he had only one satisfaction: that his country was not occupied. There were no American or French or British troops in Saudi Arabia. Even that small pleasure was taken away from him during the Gulf war and its aftermath.

The militants of the Islamic movement almost everywhere have all been trained in Afghanistan. The CIA people call it "Islamic blowback".

- *Why do you think the West is so ready to treat Islam as the enemy?*

After the Cold War, the West had no viable threat around which it could organise its policies. All powers, all imperial powers—especially democratic ones—cannot justify their uses of power only on the basis of greed. No one will buy it. They have needed two things: a ghost and a mission. The British carried the White Man's Burden. That was their mission. The French carried *la mission civilisatrice*, the civilising mission. The Americans had, first, Manifest Destiny, and then found the mission of "standing watch on the walls of world freedom", in John F. Kennedy's ringing phrase.

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Each of them had the Black, the Yellow, and finally the Red Peril to fight against. There was a ghost. There was a mission. People hought it.

Right now, the United States is deprived of both the mission and the ghost. So the mission has appeared as human rights. It is a very strange mission for a country that for nearly 100 years has been supporting dictatorship, first in Latin America and then throughout the world. And in search of menace, it has turned to Islam. It is the easiest because the West has encountered resistance here: Algeria, then Egypt, Palestinians, the Iranian revolution. And a portion of it is strategically located: It is the home of the oil resources for the West.

• *What is your view of the Taliban of Afghanistan?*

The Taliban is as retrograde a group as it is possible to find. In 1997, I spent two weeks in Afghanistan. One day, I heard drums and noises from the house where I was staying. I rushed out to see what was going on. There was a young boy who couldn't have been more than 12 years of age. His head was shaved. There was a rope around his neck. He was being pulled by that rope. There was one man behind him with a drum. He slowly beat the drum.

I asked, "What has the boy done?"

People told me he was caught red-handed.

"Doing what?" I asked.

"He was caught red-handed playing with a tennis ball."

I went off to interview one of the Taliban leaders. He said, "We have forbidden boys to play with balls because it constitutes undue temptation to men." So the same logic that makes them lock up women behind veils and behind walls makes them prevent boys from playing games. It's that kind of madness.

These people are anti-women, anti-music, anti-life, and some of the highest officials of the United States were visiting them and talking to them. The general impression is that the US has been supporting them.

• *Why would the United States do that?*

When the Soviet Union fell apart, its constituent republics became independent. The Central Asian republics, whose majority population is Muslim, happen to be oil-rich, gas-rich states. Their gas and oil used to pass through the Soviet Union. Now a new game starts: How is this oil and gas going to get out to the world?

At this point, American corporations move in. Texaco, Amoco, Unocal, Delta Oil—all of these are now going into Central Asia to get hold of these oil and gas fields. They don't want to take any pipelines to Iran because Iran is, at the moment, boycotted. It is an enemy of America. So Afghanistan and Pakistan become the places through which you lay pipelines. And you cut the Russians out. Just look at the story here: President Clinton makes personal telephone calls to the presidents of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Azerbaijan, urging them to sign pipeline contracts. And the pipeline had to go through Afghanistan. In this game, both Pakistan and the US get into the business of saying who will be the most reliable conduit to ensure the safety of the pipelines. And they pick the most murderous, by far the most crazy, of Islamic fundamentalist groups, the Taliban, to ensure the safety of the pipelines.

In this situation, the US concern is not who is fundamentalist and who is progressive, who treats women nicely and who treats them badly. The issue is, who is more likely to ensure the safety of the oil and gas resources.

• *What is behind the rise of fundamentalism not just in the Islamic world but also in the United States, Israel, Sri Lanka? What gives power to these movements?*

There are a number of factors. The first is the fear of—and reaction to—homogenisation. Globalisation of the economy, the shrinking of spaces through modern technology, the power of the media in creating common tastes, everybody eating McDonald's hamburgers or wearing jeans—all this has made a whole lot of people uncomfortable with what is receding from their own way of life. That discomfort is used by right-wing ideologues to say, "Come to us. We will return you your old-time religion. Come to us. We will give you back your old ways, your old memories." And people who don't know any better often follow.

There is a second factor, and that is a disappointment with modernism, a sense of disillusionment with life as it is constructed in our time. It seems empty, void of meaning. It feels like families are breaking up but there is no substitute for the proximities, the comfort, the security of family life. These are changes that occur from technology and from the expansion of the tentacles of capitalism into every aspect of human life. In many ways, advertisers are deciding the colour of underwear we wear, the kind of sexual advances that we

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make our wives and lovers. Once that starts happening, people feel a loss of individual autonomy. In search of autonomy, we look for some specific, unique way of relating to ourselves. Fundamentalism offers that. Old-time religion offers that. New-time religion also offers that.

- *The media critique of fundamentalism seems to be very selective in its targets. What about Saudi Arabia?*

This is a very interesting matter. Saudi Arabia's Islamic government has been by far the most fundamentalist in the history of Islam until the Taliban came along. Even today, for example, women drive in Iran. They can't drive in Saudi Arabia. Today, men and women are working in offices together in Iran. In Saudi Arabia, they cannot do that. Saudi Arabia is much worse than Iran, but it has been the ally of the US since 1932, and nobody has questioned it. But much more than that is involved. Throughout the Cold War, starting in 1945, the US saw militant Islam as a counterweight to communist parties of the Muslim world.

- *You have coined a term "pathologies of power" in post-colonial states. What do you mean by that?*

I mean the fact that Third World politicians and institutions, individuals who hold power and the institutions which they run, do not express themselves most of the time rationally in reasonable ways. Saddam Hussein requiring the typewriter to be licensed. It is pathological. It is almost as if their behaviour is an expression of a sickness, a disease, rather than of some natural aspect of human behaviour. These are deviations from the norm.

Saudi Arabia opening universities is a good thing. But fearing students getting together and talking to each other—because if they talk they might talk politics or revolt—and therefore doing everything to prevent the students from discussing matters, from meeting together, from collaborating, is the exact reverse of what universities should be.

Third World writers are among the most endangered species in the world. Nearly all Arab writers today are living in exile of one form or another. The only great novelist Saudi Arabia has ever produced in its entire history is Abdelrahman Munif. He has been divested of his citizenship and is living in exile in Damascus. It is as if a body politic, a social body, is cutting itself off from something important,

something creative. Adonis is a Syrian. He lives in exile in Paris or sometimes in Beirut. So it goes. In Pakistan, I think since Independence, there has not been a major literary figure who has not served time in prison. To me these are all examples of sickening behaviour on the part of the state which expresses an illness, a pathology. These are not natural ways of behaving.

- *There is the case also of the Bangladeshi writer Taslima Nasrin.*

Taslima Nasrin is one of the recent examples of what is happening. This is not normal, especially when you think of the fact that most of these writers, a majority of them, are really not saying or doing anything that is threatening to society. Taslima Nasrin wrote a novel. She is not a great writer. She wrote a novel in which she is portraying the risks that the Hindu minority runs in a majority Muslim Bangladesh.

She is alleged to have given an interview in which she said something to the effect that she does not believe that the traditions of the prophet Mohammed are binding on Muslims. Whether she said it or not, we do not know. She denies it. And for that she's been driven out.

These are all pathological behaviours, and I can cite many more. Benazir Bhutto, in the space of three-and-a-half years as prime minister, stealing nearly 2 billion dollars from a poor country like Pakistan. That's pathology. She doesn't need that kind of money. She was already a rich woman.

- *In Beyond Belief: Islamic Excursions Among the Converted Peoples V.S. Naipaul seems to make rather sweeping generalisations on the topic of Islam and Muslims. What is your take on his assessment?*

The central thesis of Naipaul's latest book is that Islam in India and Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia and Iran is the Islam of converted people. He calls Islam an Arabic religion. Everyone who is not an Arab is a convert to Islam. A convert's view is distorted, nihilistic. It produces disturbances. It is a condition of neurosis. The central thesis rests on the impact of conversion on the converted.

Throughout this book Naipaul identifies a problem in Pakistan or in Malaysia and he says it exists because they were converts to Islam. For example, at one point he describes quite correctly that some of the greatest historical monuments in Lahore, are criminally,

carelessly neglected. He describes the neglect and says: How can a people allow such neglect? Clearly it is because these people have no relationship to their history. Converts don't care about the past. That is his conclusion.

But it is an unfortunate fact that historical monuments and environment are being neglected in India, in Pakistan, in Egypt, in Jordan, in Africa, in Latin America, in Cambodia. They are being neglected in many European countries and in America also. So what does that have to do with converts? There is that problem. His central thesis is wrong.

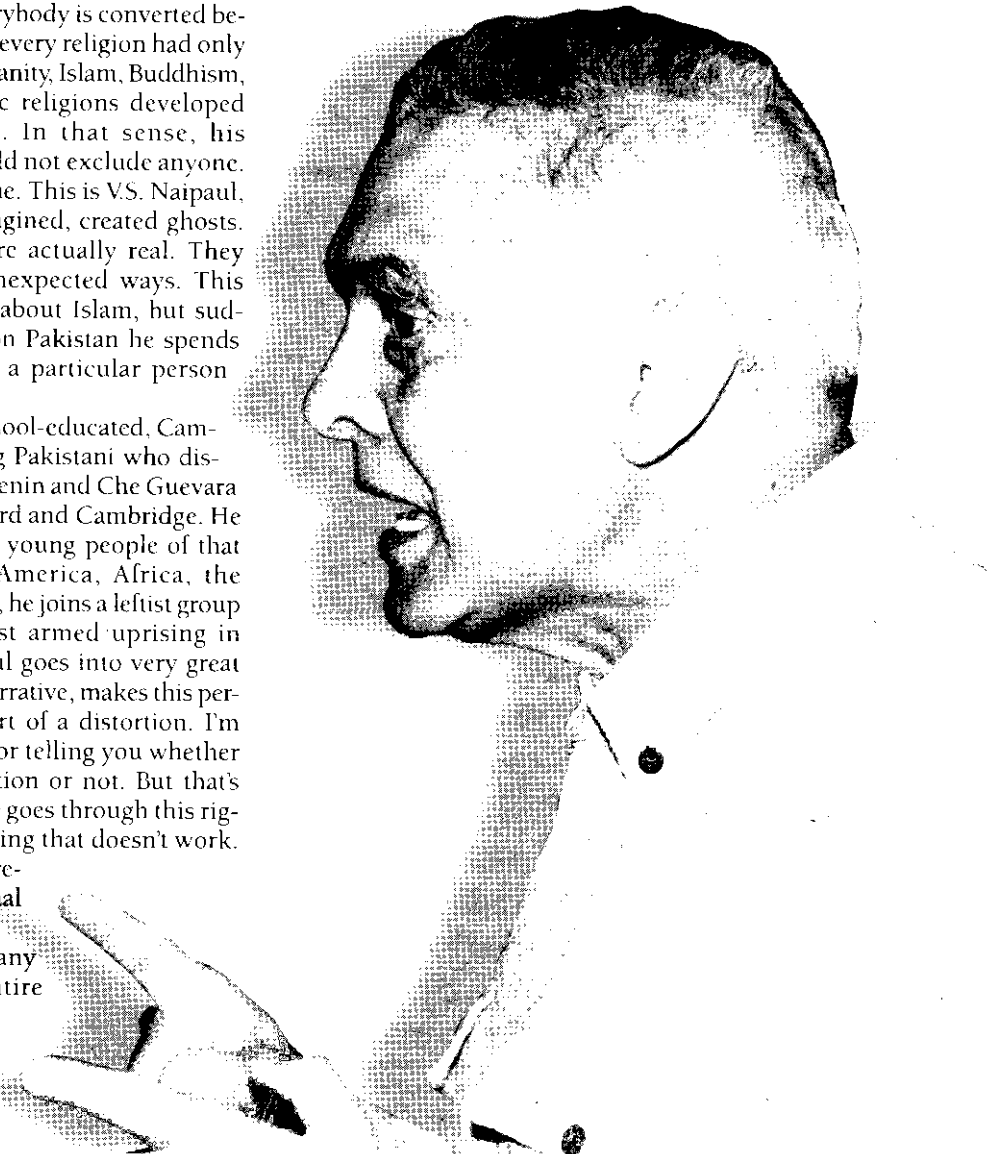
There is a second problem that is even greater. Who is not a convert? By Naipaul's definition, if Iranians are converted Muslims, then Americans are converted Christians, the Japanese are converted Buddhists, and the Chinese, large numbers of them, are converted Buddhists as well. Everybody is converted because at the beginning every religion had only a few followers. Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, all prophetic religions developed through conversion. In that sense, his organising thesis should not exclude anyone.

You are wasting time. This is V.S. Naipaul, a man haunted by imagined, created ghosts. None of his ghosts are actually real. They haunt him in very unexpected ways. This book, for example, is about Islam, but suddenly in the chapter on Pakistan he spends the major portion on a particular person whom he calls Shahaz.

Here is a British-school-educated, Cambridge-educated young Pakistani who discovers Karl Marx and Lenin and Che Guevara while studying at Oxford and Cambridge. He returns home and like young people of that generation in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East or America, he joins a leftist group and ultimately a leftist armed uprising in Balochistan. So Naipaul goes into very great detail of this person's narrative, makes this person look like some sort of a distortion. I'm not debating with you or telling you whether this person is a distortion or not. But that's how Shahbaz looks as he goes through this rigmarole of a leftist uprising that doesn't work. His friends die and he re-converts back to normal life, etc.

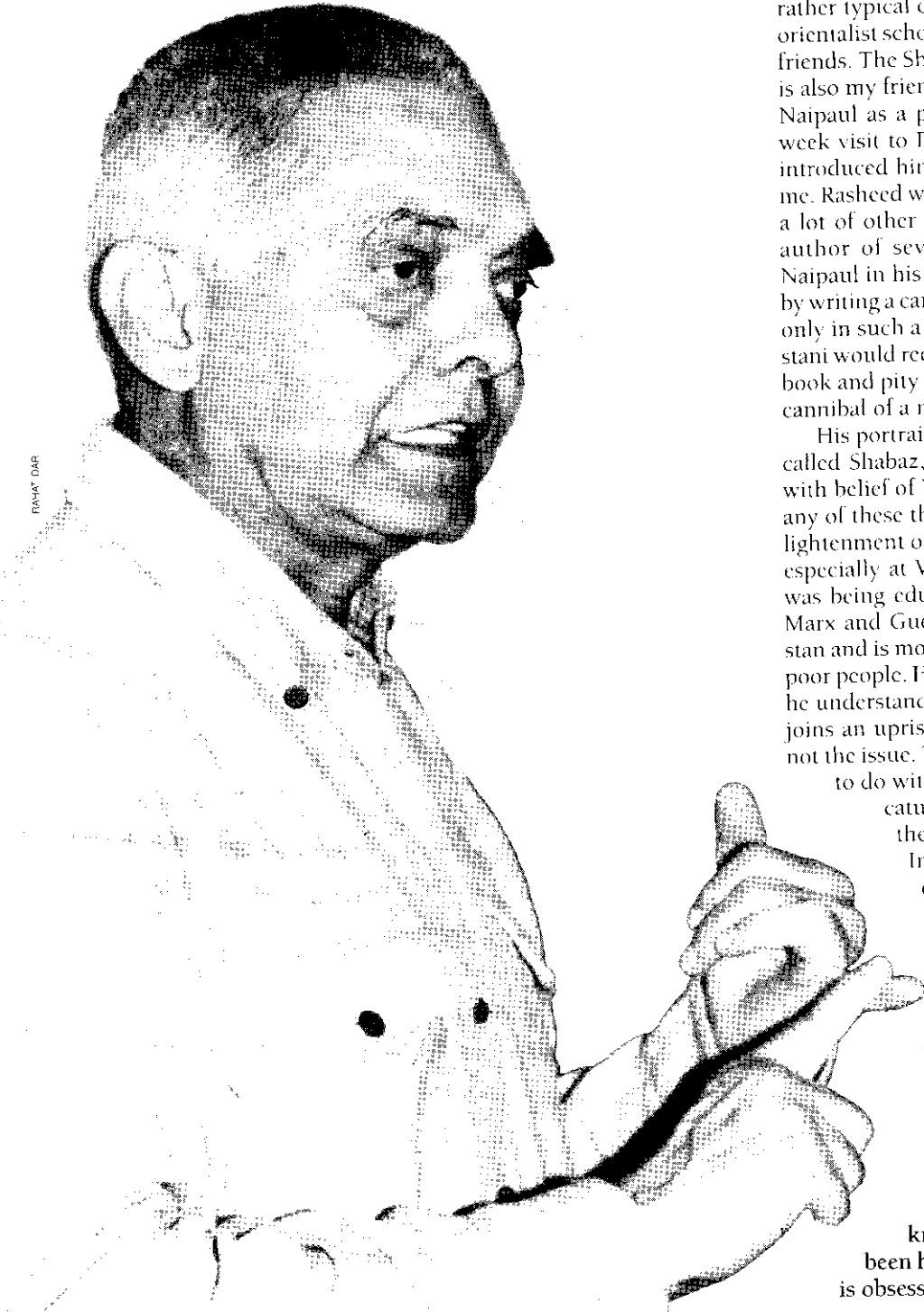
Nowhere is there any suggestion in this entire chapter that Shahbaz was a believing Muslim or that Islam had any role in his life or in his education or in

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HAN-NU DAM

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his thinking or had any role in the narrative on which Naipaul spends 35 pages. He comes in for only one reason—because Naipaul is haunted by his hatred of everything leftist. He finds an opportunity to discover his ghost. As soon as he discovers his ghost, whether it fits his narrative or not, he vomits it out: his fears, his hatred, his disgust.

But there is another aspect to it. This is rather typical of the way of this cannibalistic orientalist scholarship, i.e. he cannibalises on friends. The Shabaz of his book is a man who is also my friend, Ahmed Rasheed, who took Naipaul as a personal guest during his six-week visit to Pakistan, showed him around, introduced him to a lot of people, including me. Rasheed was generous to a fault, dropped a lot of other things he was doing, he's the author of several books himself, to help Naipaul in his work. Naipaul has repaid him by writing a caricature, changing his name but only in such a way that every educated Pakistani would recognise Ahmed Rasheed in that book and pity him for having befriended this cannibal of a man.

His portrait of Ahmed Rasheed, whom he called Shabaz, has absolutely nothing to do with belief of Islam, religion, Islamic society, any of these things. It has to do with the enlightenment of the 60s in the Western world, especially at Western universities, where he was being educated, where he has learnt of Marx and Guevara. He comes back to Pakistan and is moved by the sight of poverty and poor people. He wants to do something. What he understands best to do is what he did. He joins an uprising. Is it right or wrong, that's not the issue. The issue is, one, it has nothing to do with Islam. Two, he has been caricatured. And three, he gave Naipaul

the opportunity to caricature him. In other words, Naipaul, and it doesn't please me to say so, is a very sick man. Islam is one of his ghosts. Yet he continues to pursue it. He's like Captain Ahab.

• *Islam is his white whale?*

Islam is his white whale, and he is really after it. The only difference is Ahab at least had a good reason to go after the whale, that is, the whale had hurt him. To the best of my knowledge, Naipaul has never been hurt by Muslims or Islam. Yet he is obsessed.

• *Isn't it curious that he marries a Pakistani woman?*

It's not so curious. There is a history; that a lot of people marry among those whom they regard as enemies. All the anti-colonialists, most of the anti-colonialists of the Third World, especially those who became armed revolutionaries, married white women from the metropolis. It is a revenge of sorts, and this is particularly true of misogynists. Have you thought of that? It is rather remarkable.

What was your encounter with Naipaul like? How did he engage you?

I saw him several times but there was an absence of engagement. I was wondering why. I think one, I didn't look like somebody who was going to give him a subject to write about. Two, he asked me what I thought of his earlier book, *Among the Believers*. I said I disliked his book. He said: Why? I said: Because you are not interested in reality. He got very agitated and said: What do you mean, I'm not interested in reality? That's what I write about. I said: You wrote nearly 60 pages on Pakistan in *Among the Believers*. You describe Pakistan as an Islamic state under General Mohammed Zia-ul Haq. You describe it throughout as if this government represented that country and was supported by its people. It was your responsibility to at least report, mention, that the state of affairs you are describing there was being opposed at great risk to themselves by hundreds of thousands of people, including all the known poets and writers and artists of Pakistan, without exception. That our best writers of that time were in prison or in exile, our best poets were in prison or exile. Thirty thousand people had been flogged in a public square. Nearly 30 or 40 thousand went into prisons, and you don't make one mention of it. You describe that regime as Islamic. The least you could have done was to say that this was a contested space.

He disliked hearing that. And it is really rather scandalous. Faiz Anmed Faiz, the greatest of poets since Iqbal, one of the two greatest of this century living in exile, Habib Jalib lived in prison. And in the 60 pages, a serious writer coming from London describes the regime of General Zia-ul Haq and the society he was creating without mentioning that we were all suffering in prisons or exile. This is not writing. He should stop writing. He should be selling sausages.

• *In the BBC documentary, you travelled for the first time back to your native village in Bihar*

and you trace the steps along the Grand Trunk Road. Why did you select this highway?

Because I lived along it. It was very simple. The Grand Trunk Road was built in the 16th century by the Emperor Sher Shah. It ran from Calcutta to Peshawar. For me, it symbolised the unity of India. Then the two nationalisms, the Indian and the Pakistani together, broke up the Grand Trunk Road. It lost its continuity only in 1947. It is rather strange that you suddenly come to a particular point in India where the Grand Trunk Road stops. Then you pass the Pakistani and Indian checkpoints and the Grand Trunk Road resumes.

Secondly, I had a childhood association with it in multiple ways. I lived around it, grew up around it, travelled on it throughout my childhood, then romanticised it from reading Kipling. You remember Kipling, a colonial writer but a good writer nevertheless, wrote a lot about the road. So I thought that the road would be a defining symbol of both the unity and the breakup, of disappointment and of my life.

• *You go back to your village, Irki, which you last saw when you were 13. It is a very happy scene. All the kids are around you as if you were a returning celebrity?*

The first thing I saw as I was approaching the village was the mosque. I recognised the village from the mosque. It was very touching to see how much the villagers, both Hindus and Muslims, 50 years later, had remembered, loved and revered my family. They kept running in as the word passed, they kept coming in, presents came in, kids came in, Muslims came in, Hindus came in. The older people were particularly touching because they remembered particular individuals they asked about. But it is a poorer village than I had left, very poor now. It was not a poor village. We had a great library. My grandfather had built a library of nearly 5000 books which included about 3000 manuscripts. All of it was destroyed during the killings and riot of 1946 and 1947.

• *There is a poignant scene where you visit the village graveyard and comment, one of both pleasure and pain.*

My father's tomb has disappeared. Just across the graveyard you see some peasant homes that are built of bricks and stones taken from the graveyard. It was very painful, but also a pleasure to see that they were giving life to the living, making their lives better. It's much better to use those stones in a home

Gandhi was obeyed, listened to, because they loved him, not because he was charismatic or because he exuded power. He was a gentle figure.

than in a tomb. I think my father would have been happy:

• *The film starts in Calcutta. You also recalled visiting Rabindranath Tagore.*

Tagore was very much a revered figure throughout India, although he was an internationalist. He gave prophetic warnings against nationalism catching up with the Indian psyche. Tagore was very old then. He must have died within six months of my visit. There were a lot of people visiting him. He lay on a cot wearing a white robe-like dress. He spoke very clearly, put his hands on my head and mumbled something like: Be a good boy. That's about all I can remember. I read him later. I discovered his work only recently, the last six years or so. I'm astounded by how clear-headed he was.

• *You recall in the film that in 1946, Hindu-Muslim riots broke out in Bihar and that Mahatma Gandhi visited and took Hindu and Muslim children along with him through the devastated villages as an example of unity. You were one of those kids.*

I travelled with Gandhiji for about six weeks.

• *Did you have any personal contact, any kind of impression?*

Daily contact. I wish my mind was clearer than it is now. At that time, at age 13, I was very much in the group of Pakistani nationalism and viewed Gandhiji as not a friendly politician because he was a Congress leader. That was under the influence of my brothers, who had turned to the Muslim League. I went because my mother and father had Congress connections. So I think I was not in as much of a learning mood as I should have been.

But some things were very clear. One was the continuous, almost infectious, love, not the power, the love in which people around him held him. He was obeyed, listened to, because they loved him, not because he was charismatic or because he exuded power. He was a gentle figure. I'll tell you one story, and then I don't want to go on talking about it.

My brothers had said to me as I was going: Since you are going with Gandhiji, might as well ask him to teach you to write English. They said Gandhiji writes superb English, and later on I would realise they were absolutely right. He wrote superbly. So I said: Gandhiji, my brothers have told me that you write superb English. Oh, that's very kind of those boys. So I said: They have told me to learn

from you the principle of learning good English. Oh, he said, my boy, there is only one principle. Read the Bible over and over again, the King James version. I always think of that, because if you read his writings and speeches, there is a biblical quality to his English prose, very typical. Simple, short sentences, simple narrative, homilies, very interesting.

• *Was he aware that your father had been murdered, essentially for supporting the Congress?*
He knew the history. Of course.

• *Then you made a very painful decision...*
No, I didn't.

• *It was not painful for you? Leaving your mother must have been tough.*

I didn't make any decisions. Decisions were made for me. I was 13 years old. In India, you don't make decisions when you're 13.

• *Your brothers', your going to Pakistan. What did your mother have to say about that?*

She was against any of us going. At one point in her anger she said: Go if you must, but you must know that you have all become Muslim Zionists. She was angry about it.

• *Did you see your mother again after you left?*
She died in 1972. I saw her before she died, but she wasn't able to talk to me. She was dying.

• *It seems in some ways you too have in your practice spurned promise of material wealth and the attraction of fame and acceptance.*

You are being very kind. I think I have been very selfish in seeking my happiness. I am a very happy man in many ways.

• *I'm talking in the sense of ruhaniyat, spiritually rich.*

I know what you are saying. What I said was that there was no sacrifice on my part. It has all been to my benefit. I don't own very much, but I'm rather happy.

• *Faiz Ahmad Faiz is one of your favourite Urdu poets. Why do you like him so?*

Faiz was so prescient and so early in catching the mood of disillusionment with the decolonised post-colonial states. He wrote this poem just about six months after India and Pakistan were independent. He, in fact, was talking of both of them. He saw with exceptional clarity the defective character of what we were at that time calling liberation, call-

ing *azadi*, freedom. That makes it an extremely powerful thing.

An analogy I can make was that it was just on the eve of Algeria's Independence after a long and bloody war of liberation that Frantz Fanon wrote *The Wretched of the Earth*. In one chapter, "The Pitfalls of National Consciousness", he argued the risks that a post-colonial state runs. But the difference between Faiz the poet and Fanon the writer and revolutionary is that Faiz had not seen any previous examples of such failure. Fanon had actually lived in Ghana, visited Guinea, known the Egypt of Nasser, and seen how rotten was the post-colonial state, or how colonial was the post-colonial state. Do you want me to read it to you?

• Please.

There's a translation from Agha Shahid Ali, who is a published Kashmiri poet. "The Dawn of Freedom, August 1947".

These tawnish rays, this night-smudged light

*This is not that dawn for which,
ravished with freedom,
we had set out in sheer longing
so sure that somewhere in its desert
the sky harboured a final haven for*

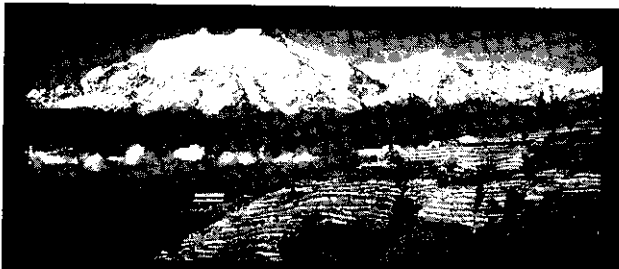
*the stars
and we would find it.
We had no doubt that night's vagrant wave
would stray towards the shore
that the heart rocked with sorrow
would at last reach its port.
But the heart, the eye,
the yet deeper heart still ablazed for the
beloved
their turmoil shines in the lantern by
the road.
The flame is stalled for news.
Did the morning breeze ever come? Where
has it gone?
Night weighs us down.
It still weighs us down.
Friends, come away from this false light.
Come, we must search for that promised
dawn.*

• There's another favourite couplet by Iqbal. How about a translation of that?

That would be hard for me. For a thousand years, *narges*, which is a particular desert flower, weeps for its infertility. With much difficulty in the garden there is born someone capable of seeing inside.

• On that poetic note I thank you very much. ▲

A PART OF THIS INTERVIEW HAS ALSO APPEARED IN THE *TRIBUNE* NEWSPAPER, MADISON, USA.



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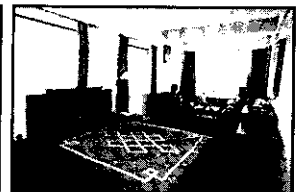


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Among

You can take "Beyond Belief" to mean: I can't imagine these people can be so ignorant and stupid. Or, "Beyond Belief", let's talk about matters which go beyond belief and faith.

by *Nasir Abid*

ore than a decade and half after *Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey*, V.S. Naipaul was on the prowl again in Indonesia, Iran, Pakistan and Malaysia. The result is *Beyond Belief*,

which can be taken to mean—"Beyond Belief"—'I can't imagine how these people can be so ignorant and stupid.' Or, "Beyond Belief"—'let us talk about matters which go beyond belief and faith—transcend faith.' Take it as you will, how Naipaul takes it is very predictable.

Naipaul has an almost pathological hatred for Muslims which, even marriage to a Muslim, Nadira Khannum Alvi, to whom this book is dedicated, has not been able to lessen and try as he might to hide it or fight

it, it comes out in statements like the one which says Muslims reduced the cultural life of India into the "Light of A Dead Star".

In his foreword, Naipaul warns us that in 1979 when he wrote *Among the Believers*, he knew almost nothing about Islam and that that is the best way to start on a venture. I hate to tell him this, but regardless of what he might think, he still doesn't know much. The only difference is that the caustic humour with which the earlier book was laced is now gone.

In *Among the Believers*, he talks about Jamaat-e-Islami leader Maulana Maudoodi's death while undergoing heart by-pass operation at Houston in Texas: "**On his way to meet his maker, he went at least a part of the way, on a modern device.**" And writing about President Zia's whipping boys who went from jail to jail whipping recalcitrant dissidents into submission, he calls it, "**Islam on**



SUBHAS RAI

Disbelievers



wheels". Naipaul is altogether much too serious now. The 'malaise' of Islam has spread far too deeply to take lightly or make jokes about.

"This book is less of a travel book," Naipaul tells us, **"The writer is less present, less of an enquirer. He is the background, trusting to his instincts, a discoverer of people, a finder-out of stories. The reader should not look for conclusions."**

This is a very dishonest statement to make. Firstly, let us be clear that it is quite legitimate for a writer to appear in his book, especially in a travel book. After all he is the host, he is the one taking us around and introducing us to the characters that people his book. We expect him to tell us about them and give us his opinions. But while Naipaul disowns any attempt to do so, he does it again and again. Naipaul is indeed a clever writer and there is no denying his craft, but the subtlety with which he tries to influence our thinking, after lulling us to put our guard down, is patently dishonest.

Here is Naipaul's basic thesis: The Arabs are the original Muslims as Islam started there, and therefore, all other Muslims who are not Arabs are converts. What an original discovery! We are all converts. You think, Mr Naipaul, that your beloved English are not converts? But for you, it is only the Muslims who wipe out their past completely after conversion and accept the Arab past as their own.

Since all Muslims are converts, we find that all their holy places are in Arabia, and they develop fantasies about who or what they are. I sup-

pose what Naipaul wants to say here is that all Muslims are "scheduled caste" converts but are now behaving like upstarts and pretending to be Arabs by denying local origins. Converts have to turn away from everything that is theirs. They have to shun their past. If such was the case, why did the Muslim police trainee refuse to pick up his officers' dirty dishes saying he is a "Rajput". Islam does not recognise differences of race and if he had completely shunned his past, he would not have taken such pride in his Rajput ancestry.

Perhaps Naipaul should have met Mr Faruqi of Lahore in Sitapur district of Uttar Pradesh. When Partition came, he migrated to Pakistan. But the memories of childhood were so strong that even after so many years in Pakistan, he had this wish to be buried in his ancestral graveyard in Lahore. But to his horror, he found that it was not possible for a Pakistani body to be sent to India. So Mr Faruqi took British nationality and instructed his sons to take his body to Lahore, where he now sleeps peacefully alongside his ancestors. So much for Naipaul's theory that only the deserts of Arabia are sacred to Muslims. If somebody dies and is buried away from his homeland, there is a saying in Urdu: *Kahan ki mitti, Kahan dafan* (The earth that belonged here is buried far from home).

"Islam in its origins is an Arab Religion," says Naipaul. So are Christianity and Judaism. What can the poor Muslim do about that? Are we to understand that a religion should stay confined to its country of origin?

Islam, like Christianity, is a "world religion" in its outlook.

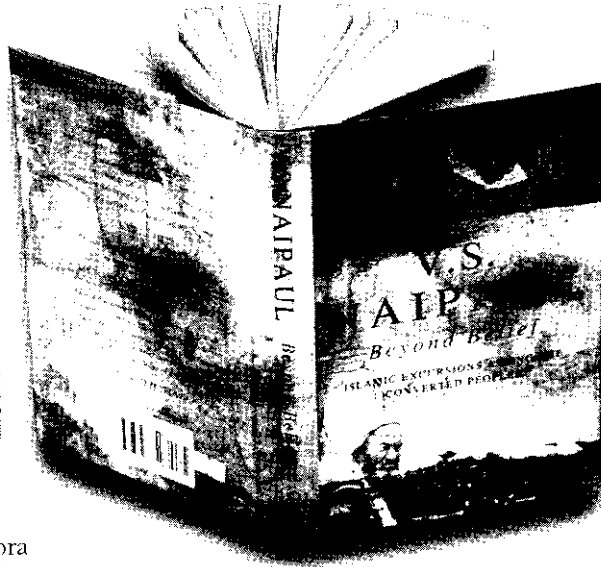
"His sacred language is Arabic." Indeed, the language of his sacred book is Arabic and it is true that Islam has gone farther than other Semitic religions in discouraging the use of translations of the *Qur'an* in an attempt to prevent distortion, but in which Muslim country out of the four Naipaul visited were the people speaking to each other or to him in Arabic?

Like others, Muslims too have great pride in their mother tongues. Is it possible that the erudite writer does not know that one of the reasons for the breakup of Pakistan was due to the West Pakistani insistence on thrusting Urdu down the throats of Bengali-speaking East Pakistan? And in present-day Pakistan one of the great sources of friction is the Urdu of the Mohajir against the Sindhi of the local inhabitants. The plethora of languages that exist in Pakistan—Sindhi, Urdu, Pashto, Baluchi, Saraiki, Hindi, Punjabi—would have surprised Naipaul, if he had only moved out of his 5-star hotel room and mixed with the people other than his English-speaking admirers.

"The convert has to turn away from everything that is his. The disturbance for societies is immense and even after a thousand years can remain unresolved, the turning away has to be done again and again." Frankly, it is difficult to know what the author is talking about here. To me, Muslims seem quite comfortable with their past, even those who have lost their faith and are Muslims only culturally. Presumably, what Naipaul means here is that the convert has rejected the holy books of his ancestors, because, more or less, this is what history meant in ancient times.

"There is an element of neurosis and nihilism. These countries

can easily be set on the boil." True, sadly, but this is in all of us in South Asia for example, Hindu and Muslim alike. Naipaul probably got the theory that Islam is nothing but a manifestation of Arab imperialism from a Brahmin convert to Islam, Anwar Sheikh, who is now settled in Glasgow. Imperialism in any form is bad, and the British variety, which was based on the inherent inferiority of



MIN BAURACHARYA

the conquered people, was of the worst kind. Arab imperialism, if it was such, was the imperialism of ideas. They were so fired up with the truth as they saw it that they spread it like wildfire till their energy petered out.

And if Naipaul had delved a little deeper, he would have realised that Islam does not recognise the nation state, being a pan-regional religion. The original conquests, at least in theory, were for spreading the faith, not for looting and territory. Maulana Maudoodi and his Jamaat-e-Islami did not want Pakistan, they hoped to proselytise the whole of India, and then, the world.

What Naipaul wants to repeat here, but is not brave enough to, is the favourite Western shibboleth that Islam was spread by the sword and all conversions to Islam were an alternative to death. Quite unlike the British Empire, which was spread by

love and affection, and by following the 'Golden Rule' of doing unto others as they would do unto you. Only doing it first.

"The sacred places of the Muslim faith were connected with the Prophet or his immediate successors." I say to Naipaul, venture out of your hotel and mix with the *hoi polloi*. You will find Ajmer Sharif, the tomb of Baba Farid Gunjeshaker, Haji Waris Shah, Makdhoom Main of Khairabad and others' too numerous to mention, and at their tombs he would find *qawalis* and *naaths* being sung in praise of the prophet and Ali, and of the holy man buried there, all in the local language, none in Arabic. He could have swayed to the earthy rhythms of Saraiki if only he would go and listen.

In these four countries, Naipaul meets many people and out of them he chooses the meatiest who will make good copy and reinforce the pre-conceived theme of his book. They are good stories as stories go, but in the end you are left with a feeling of exhaustion. You have a feeling

of having listened to too many of them.

In an interview with the BBC's Nisha Pillai in the "Hard Talk" series, Naipaul said that he had been scrupulously honest. That, certainly, is untrue. Firstly, the very act of choosing Muslims as a group to write about influences the readers' feelings against them in general, and these four countries in particular. Secondly, too clever to put words into people's mouths, which would have led to angry denials, Naipaul has put his own thoughts in "asides" which makes a mockery of his claim to have kept himself out of the book altogether.

Take the example of Fazl-ur-Rehman, member of the National Academy of Pakistan, and now professor of Islamic studies in the University of Chicago. Naipaul calls him the "Pakistani, fundamentalist fanatic, enjoying, bizarrely, academic

freedom at the Univ. of Chicago and sleeping safe and sound protected by laws." Strong words and every one of them loaded. If Naipaul had bothered to find out, he would have discovered that Fazl-ur-Rehman had once cast the slightest of doubts on the divine origins of the *Qur'an*, which had led to the fundamentalists' baying for his blood. It was only his friendship with those in high places that saved him and he managed to escape to the US.

Naipaul's play of words is nothing short of brilliant. On the way to Ayatollah Khalkhali's house, Naipaul sees "an open fronted book stall or shop. Persian books in a glass case, two very young students in turbans and tunics and gowns, excitedly buying what appeared to be a concise textbook from the stall keeper, and looking like people who had found treasure. Perhaps the little book was a simple question and answer book. The scene was like a

stage set, with props, a shop of such books that had ceased to be props and with costumed actors, bookseller, students, who had become their roles. It would have been nice to stop and look and to play with some of the fantasies the scene suggested, but we were late..." He creates a mood and makes us feel pity and contempt for the children for buying religious hooks. Somehow you feel that these students are going to waste their lives. What we are seeing is the childhood of a fundamentalist. I suppose a similar scene elsewhere would be teenagers buying *Playboy* or *Penthouse* from a kiosk.

It is for Pakistan that Naipaul reserves his greatest ire. His analysis of the creation of Pakistan is fairly correct in that the main reason was Muslim insecurity. But to take his argument to its logical conclusion, wasn't it the duty of the majority community, the Hindus, to allay those fears and provide safeguards? He feels that

since 1947 Pakistan has only regressed, while India has grown by leaps and bounds and built a sizeable intelligentsia and that it is this difference, rather than religion, which separates the two countries now. He calls Pakistan a "criminal enterprise...No real thought had ever been taken for the running of the country. Everything was supposed to flow from the triumph of the faith. The Muslim invaders, and especially the Atrahs would become the heroes of the Pakistan story. Too much has to be ignored or angled, there is too much fantasy. This fantasy isn't in the books alone it effects people lives."

The tragedy is that this hook only pretends to be a detached work, and with the wide readership that Naipaul commands, will only help strengthen the prejudices of those non-Muslims the world over who are only too willing to believe the worst about Muslims. ▲

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Memory and invention

Finding a diary proves that there is no need for a diary.

by **Paul Theroux**

Not long after my book *Sir Vidia's Shadow* was sent to the printer I was fossicking among some papers and found an old notebook labeled "Diary" with a date and a sort of title, "When I Was Off My Head". This was an unexpected discovery because, except for some letters and a few notes, I had depended on memory alone for my book.

Thirty-two years ago, in Africa, V.S. Naipaul had made me promise never to keep a diary. Such an activity, he said, was an obstruction to the imagination. In the year or so it took to write my book about our friendship, I was amazed by how clearly conversations and scenes returned to me. I started each day with a period of meditation, pressing my fingers to my temples as though mimicking Johnny Carson's clairvoyant "Carnac". By degrees I could hear and see Naipaul. And the activity of writing an episode helped, since all writing is itself a memory-jogger. It seemed like a conjuring trick, to write such a book without any notes, yet it worked.

When I finished the book, I had two shocks. The first was that the friendship kept unspooling in my mind. I had developed such intense habits of concentration and remembering, I found I could not switch off my active memory. I recalled Vidia ritually pronouncing, "I am going to open an account with him"—meaning settle someone's hash; and "Women of 60 think of nothing but sex"; and how driving with him in Kampala he had once said about the road bumps that rocked my wheels, "They call those 'sleeping policemen' in Trinidad." Some of these memories

were whole episodes rather than one-liners—for example, a fairly disastrous lunch in London with one of my relatives that did not surface into my consciousness until it was too late to include.

Then there was the diary. The many closely written pages in this newly disinterred notebook contained the feverish garrulity as well as the busy sentences of a troubled mind. It was not odd, in my experience, that I had forgotten having kept it. My diary-keeping is rare, and nearly always associated with distress. Far from being an aid to memory, a diary has often been my way of forgetting; the consigning of anxious thoughts to a notebook is akin to dumping them into a bottom drawer.

The self-mocking suggestion of derangement in the label "When I Was Off My Head" (which was framed in saner handwriting than the screwball scribble in the notebook) referred to a time of uncertainty in my life, one of those non-writing periods when I was penetrated to my soul with a sense of being superfluous. I was a wraith, a wisp, a leftover; I did not matter. At such times I have done no work and I have not been reassured when my older son, Marcel, a Russian speaker, has said to me: "It's a recurring theme in 19th-century Russian literature. *Lishni chelovek*. The Superfluous Man, Dad!"

Was that why this diary had a Russian texture and tone, a bleakness composed of cold streets, late nights, littered rooms and dusty answers, and the unanswerable "What is to be done?" I am smiling as I write this, seeing my disturbed other self as a version of a bulimic Oblomov; but I

wasn't smiling then. The irony was that although I had made a solemn promise to V.S. Naipaul not to keep a diary, this notebook was full of Naipaul encounters.

If keeping a diary was my technique for forgetting, then I had been successful. Here, in the notebook, described over four pages, was a dinner Naipaul and I had in Kensington that I had utterly forgotten. Naipaul sat down and at once told me that he was having problems with his agent.

"I want you to help me with my business problem, and then I'll listen to your sentimental problem."

His concern was money. He was being undervalued, he felt. He had a book idea. He was looking for a contract.

"Will you write to someone?" he asked me. All this was before we even had menus in our hands. I liked his directness, and said I would send a letter, offering his travel book idea to my own publisher. Then I told him my dilemma.

His advice was for me to go away—drop everything, leave the country, begin a new life. He was so certain about this that there was no discussion. He ignored my two cents' worth and pressed on, talking about his reading. He said that he wanted to write a piece contrasting Proust's essay "Contre Sainte-Beuve" and Somerset Maugham. I said that I found much of Maugham old hat and anaemic.

Vidia said snappishly, "I'm not interested in the work, I'm interested in the man."

In a sudden panicky *non sequitur*, I said I was thinking of seeing a psychiatrist.

Naipaul said, "No, no, no, no, no."
 "Then what's the solution to my problem?"

"There is no solution. You will always be divided."

The next day (and this is the great thing about diaries, the punctilious chronology) he called me in the afternoon and asked me what he should do about his agent's dereliction.

I said, "Do nothing."

This was perversity on my part, just the sort of nonadvice he had been giving me. Perhaps he suspected this, because he alluded to my "sentimental problem".

"I'm worried," I said.

"Don't worry. Enjoy the drama of it."

Enjoy the drama of going off my head?

A few weeks later, the Nobel Prize in Literature was announced. Such announcements were always hard for Vidia, who was constantly mentioned as a possible candidate. I remembered our discussing it: how the Nigerian Wole Soyinka had been given the prize, how Vidia had said that the Nobel Prize committee was, as usual, befouling literature "from a great height". But from my diary I saw that the conversation had been longer than I remembered.

"I am losing faith in the profession," he had gone on to say. "I think I have been foolish. It's like suspecting your mistress has been unfaithful to you."

On a later page of the diary we talked about London bookstores, which in my state of mind were a source of solace to me.

Vidia said: "I go into bookstores. It's all rubbish! They are like toy shops!"

Was anything lost, I wondered, by these afterthoughts and discoveries being missing from my book?

When I decided to write the book I realised that there was no model for it. Some books existed in which a writer described his or her friendship with another older writer, but these were always glowing accounts in the manner of the scrupulous diarist Boswell writing his *Life of Johnson*. Joseph Conrad, *A Personal Remem-*

brance, by Ford Madox Ford, was perhaps the closest of all to what I was attempting, for Ford's account of his friendship with Conrad described a similar age difference, he being young and on the make, as I had been when I first met Naipaul.

Long before its publication, mention of my book began to appear in gossip columns, for the notion of a quarrel between writers—or anything that looks like a quarrel—is like catnip to literary philistines. In one of these lazy accounts, a journalist used the word "feud" in connection with my book. But a feud is a protracted thing, with endless cuts and thrusts. The beauty of my book, as I saw it, was in the simplicity of the denouement. It was in effect a happy ending in which I was liberated to look back upon 30 years of friendship, and I saw them as "desperate, earnest and funny", as Conrad said of his years with Ford.

Other journalists have accused me of "revisionism." (How Maoist the language of criticism has become!) Of course, I saw some events differently in my book; but that is what happens with the towering vantage point of passing time. The word "betrayal" was also used. But that is just laughable in this regard. Meditating upon the world and what is most familiar is the preoccupation of writers. Sometimes that includes re-creating our nearest and dearest, and our secrets, as imaginative subjects.

Transforming is what writers do. Only the whole truth helps us to understand the world. The best writers are the most fanatical; so the truest portrait of a writer can never be a study of virtue. The hagiographer is a belittler. Any book that shrinks from the enchantments of this fanaticism and invites the reader to see its subject as simple and lovable is a confidence trick. I saw that my book had to be a truthful creation, made from memory. All memory is inevitably incomplete, which was why the discovery of the old diary had riveted my attention. But finding that diary proved that I had never needed a diary.

(REPRINTED FROM THE NEW YORK REVIEW OF BOOKS.)



The economic imperative

The new Secretary General of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) spoke to HIMAL editor Kanak Mani Dixit soon after assuming office.

• *Do you feel confident about taking up this new South Asian assignment?*

Reasonably so. I have handled South Asian and multilateral work and was actually the first director general of the new multilateral and South Asia desk when it was set up at the Sri Lankan foreign ministry. Both in that position as well as in assignments to the United Nations in New York, I have had the good fortune to work with my counterparts from all the other South Asian countries, and to immerse myself in the issues of the region. I had also been to all the capitals in the course of my work.

• *As you come in, what are the trends you detect in the working of SAARC?*

To begin with, as a delegate I used to be on the 'other side' and critical of the organisation for its obvious drawbacks. Now that I am within the system, I am able to discern the various challenges it faces. These are being addressed. Overall, there are clear signs that SAARC is maturing.

The Secretariat functions under the direction of the political leadership. Among the political leadership, there is a movement away from cautious, shy and modest goal-setting. This has been seen in the resolve to tackle the core issues of trade, commerce and economic cooperation, whereas earlier we were limited to "soft issues" such as health, animal husbandry or telecommunications. In the international arena as well, SAARC has begun to establish functional contact with the ASEAN and the European Union. It is important for South Asia

to respond collectively to the globalisation of the world economy, that is, developing its promise and avoiding its pitfalls.

• *Was there a negative fallout for SAARC from the Indo-Pakistan nuclear tests?*

The tests did seem at first to augur dire prospects, and the Colombo Summit itself came close to being postponed. However, the position of Sri Lanka, as the incoming chair of SAARC and the host country, was that the summit must be held precisely because of the fall-out—political fall-out—of the tests. In a sense, the tests 'tested' South Asia's solidarity as well. The summit was the first meeting of the prime ministers of India and Pakistan after the tests, and it was the prelude to a series of bilateral talks that continued at the non-aligned summit in South Africa and at the General Assembly in New York. The very fact that a summit could be held during such a crisis period indicated

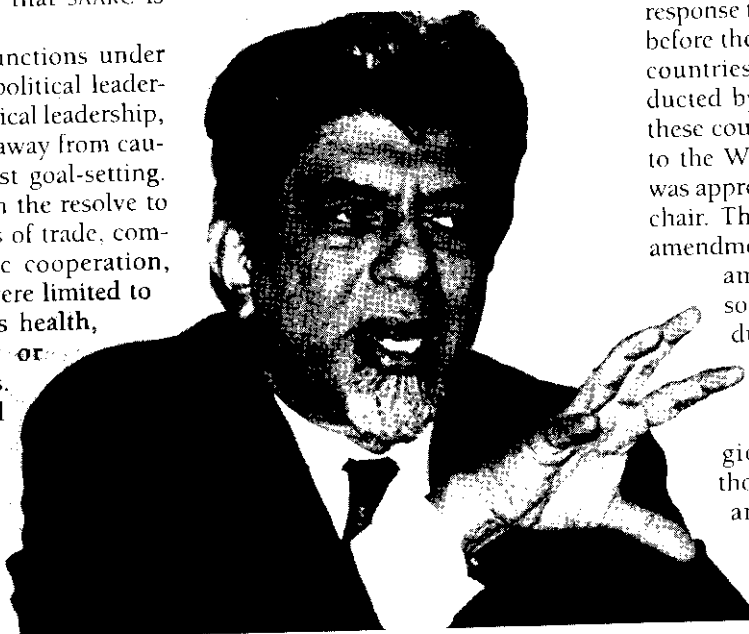
a more mature attitude in a region where summits have been postponed for much less in the past.

• *How true is it that the South Asian countries are beginning to evolve a common stance in international venues?*

There is evidence of formal SAARC positions emerging in international fora. Instead of ducking issues, the seven countries are coming out with agreed points of view at international meetings, even if they may initially sound a bit bland. This common approach can be seen evolving in such issues as the environment, trade and intellectual property rights. However, perhaps more significant was what happened at the UN General Assembly in September, where a joint position among SAARC member states was negotiated quietly on a matter as sensitive as the Indian and Pakistani nuclear tests.

• *Could you elaborate?*

Gladly. The joint position was a response to a draft resolution brought before the UN by a group of Western countries, deploring the tests conducted by India and Pakistan. Both these countries wanted amendments to the Western draft, and Sri Lanka was approached as the current SAARC chair. The seven agreed on a set of amendments. As it turned out, those amendments, jointly sponsored by the seven and introduced by Sri Lanka, did not pass, but for those who watch trends it seemed quite significant that the regional countries, including those perceived to be the most antagonistic, had come together to present a joint position at the United Nations on a highly emotive and



MIN. BAIRACHARYA

for South Asia

political issue. While one should not exaggerate, this definitely represented a quiet victory for SAARC cohesion, even though the amendments were defeated—by a mere three votes.

• *Today, the chairman as well as the secretary general of SAARC happen to be Sri Lanka. How much will it help the organisation?*

That's a coincidence—happy or not, SAARC will judge. The most important position in SAARC is that of the rotational chairman. It is the dynamism and interest of whoever is in that position that provides much of the impetus and initiative for the organisation. When the chairmanship changes, the leadership changes, and this sometimes could hamper continuity if the focus shifts drastically. Sri Lanka's chairmanship began well, for the Colombo summit made some significant impact, I believe. SAARC is very much a creature of the political leadership. The Secretariat's role is to coordinate the agreed areas of work, to monitor progress, to service the meetings that are held and to implement policy decisions. The secretary general sheds his nationality and is at the service of South Asia while he holds office.

• *What was the significant impact made at the Colombo Summit?*

Without doubt it was the decision to emphasise the pervasive economic imperative for South Asia. An imperative both within the region and in relation to its global economic and technological environment. This was the special focus introduced by the host leader, President Chandrika Kumaratunga, for the summit. We are at a stage where the developed world has begun to recognise the entity of SAARC, and it seems clear that even India, with its powerful economy, would see benefits in approaching the developed markets under the SAARC umbrella.

• *Will this primary focus on economics be seen as a sell-out on the social and humanitarian front?*

The focus of SAARC in areas such as poverty alleviation, health, children, or gender issues, is important, and should continue. At the same time, the importance of economics is obvious. Advance in the economic sector will lead to a whole series of ripple effects which will help the individual economies and their populations. Also, the Colombo Summit has set up mechanisms for a Social Charter to be drafted, which will keep the momentum on social and humanitarian concerns alive.

• *How did the Colombo summit get so involved with economics?*

The Colombo Summit took place in a situation of economic and financial uncertainty, internationally. This required informed responses from South Asia. The Male Summit of 1997, with the enthusiastic backing of Indian Prime Minister I.K. Gujral, had decided to set up a free trade area in South Asia by the year 2001. Even though it was a well-meaning goal, many officials were surprised when they learnt of it. At Colombo, so to speak, there was a return to realism. The optimistic decision of Male was converted into a more practical programme and negotiations have now begun to carefully address all the concerns and complexities involved in the creation of a free trade area. Following that, a treaty would be in place by 2001. This would allow for the phasing in of its provisions, take account of the special plight of the LDCs, work out compensatory measures for revenue loss—that is, ensure equitable benefits for all seven shareholders.

• *Does it do to continue to keep contentious bilateral issues outside the organisation's purview?*

Well, the taboo on discussion of

bilateral and contentious matters remains in the SAARC Charter, and the reality is that the organisation is not yet ready for a political mechanism to formally go in that direction. Although, since Male, there has been clear acknowledgement that a process of informal political consultations would be 'useful'. However, there is more than enough work remaining to be done regionally in the economic and social spheres, where cooperation and joint activities are vitally important and possible.

• *What about the "growth quadrangle" idea that is being pursued among Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal, which has seen some criticism?*

I think that has to be permitted. There are, after all, very few projects that can include every country of South Asia. Maldives will have no interest in a rinderpest project, while Nepal and Bhutan may see no benefit in work to combat sea erosion. The Charter does say that more than three countries may cooperate under the SAARC umbrella on matters of mutual concern. The Male Summit did resolve that issue. However, the Secretariat's role in the matter is not yet spelt out.

• *Should the job description of the secretary general be enhanced?*

It would help for the position to be invested with more authority, to take certain careful initiatives. For continuity's sake, the tenure of the secretary general could from my successor's term be increased to five years. I would like to limit myself to a two-year term, as has been the case, except in the case of my predecessor who alone had a three-year term. There is no formal mechanism within SAARC for the Secretariat to press new ideas into the agenda. Annually, an "Analytical Report of the Secretary General" is presented to the Standing Committee, but that is largely a re-

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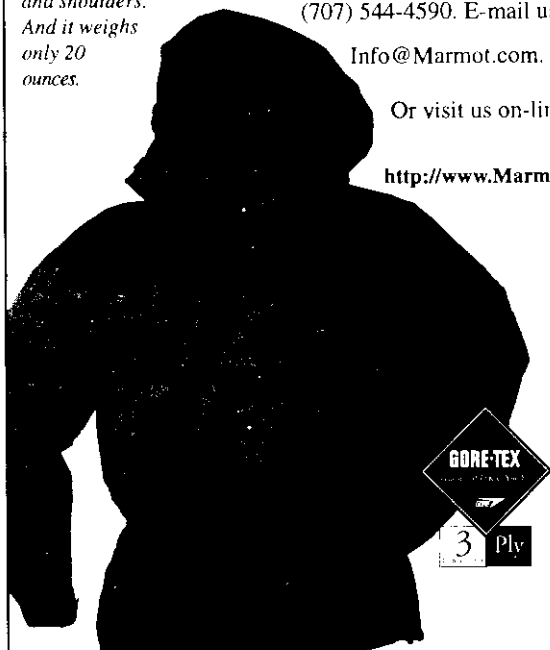
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view. On the other hand, there is nothing to stop the secretary general from presenting new proposals to his political bosses who may, in their wisdom, choose to accept them if they are credible, practical and would advance SAARC goals.

• *How do you see yourself as secretary general?*

As a man of transition, hoping to help and facilitate an acceleration of the organisation's activities in the next two years in which period, incidentally, we cross over into Millennium III. This is, after all, a critical period when the need for an effective regional response to crucial economic issues is pronounced. By the next cycle of secretaries general (starting again with Bangladesh), the role and authority of the secretary general would be clearer and could be 're-designed' with a fresh job description based on a very pragmatic assessment of the last few years' experience. I emphasise "very pragmatic".

• *Do you intend to be a 'daring' secretary general?*

Cautiously daring, if that's possible. The secretary general can come up with ideas and initiatives, but then he must have the hacking of all the seven members. He can stick his neck out a little bit, but if you are adventurist or push too hard, it would be counter-productive and bad for the organisation. Certainly, I would do nothing which would invite objections from any member state, be it Maldives or India. You may say that I am still feeling my way here, but I hope to be daring in conceding shortcomings and attempting to contend with them.

• *Is your budget adequate?*

For the functions and responsibilities as defined, it is adequate. But it is not over-generous. We are facing some challenges right now because of the additional economic tasks devolved on the Secretariat. We are in the process of hiring an economic expert, which is the first time that the

Secretariat has gone beyond the seven nationally-nominated directors who are part of our executive staff. We need to upgrade our data-bases, and improve the capacity to play a more professional role in imaginatively carrying out our leaders' policy.

• *SAARC summits get a bad press for being big on ceremony.*

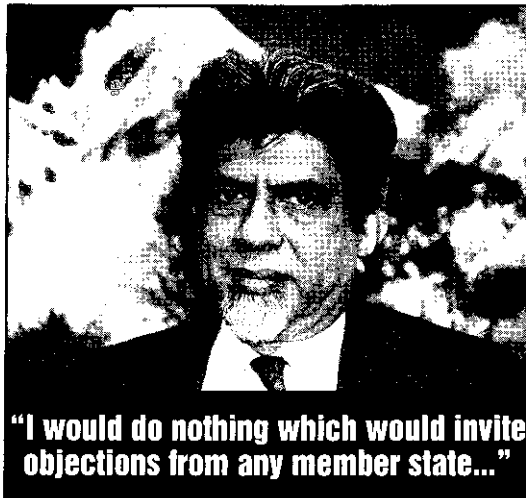
The summits actually have a tremendous value. Perhaps they could be better organised, with less ceremony, and less dancing girls and drummers on airport tarmacs. But then every summit has a made-for-television character. At the same time, the summits have a very definite, very central role because the really major policy

of an image problem, given that people's expectations are based on looking at older organisations like the ASEAN. On the economic front, there are great losses because comparative advantages are not being developed, leading to duplication and what Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina calls "unwelcome competition". Just as trade and economic linkages have to be encouraged, we are also emphasising more people-to-people contact, and more cultural connections among the member states. Despite great cultural and religious diversity, South Asia through SAARC, has recognised that the region is heir to a great common civilisational continuum.

• *From which group outside government do you see the most support coming for SAARC?*

There are those with the romantic notion that SAARC can do anything, whose counterfoil are those who look at SAARC with some 'SAARCasm', a term that a cynic or two in the Sri Lankan foreign ministry coined. However, in between, a realistic, balanced approach to the organisation seems to be gaining ground. This is particularly evident in the enthusiasm that professional organisations have shown for a regional vision, including the business community, architects,

surgeons, town planners, parliamentarians, lawyers, and so on. The interest shown by the business community, particularly through the SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and national groups like the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), is quite heartening. At a time when we are just scratching the surface in terms of economic cooperation, these businessmen are running way ahead of the governments and bureaucracies. Captains of industry do, after all, wield a certain amount of leverage, and their friendly persuasion could help in bringing the possibilities of a regional trade and commerce regime a little closer to reality. It is they who are actually in the business of commercial and economic activity. ▲



decisions are taken there. As mentioned already, the Colombo Summit was held amidst heightened tension between the two bigger member states. The value of togetherness, family, if you will, seems to have overcome any tension, and the members were confident enough to meet despite the problems. Most important, that confidence was once again vindicated. The summits bring the leaders together in a neutral, helpful setting. That is the main thing.

• *So you think that the organisation has grown?*

SAARC is younger than the EU or the ASEAN. For all the criticisms that it receives, you have to realise that the organisation has never stood still between 1985 and 1999. There is a bit

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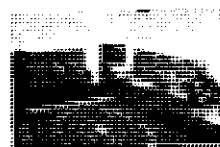
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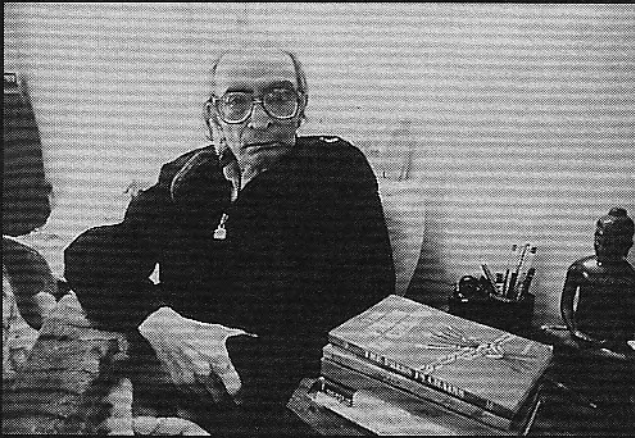
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Zamir in Urdu means “conscience”, and since his book *Press in Chains* (Karachi Press Club, 1986) came out, Zamir Niazi has been the voice of conscience of the Pakistani press, its society and government. *Press in Chains* is a detailed history of government control and coercion of the

press in Pakistan since 1947, and is distinguished by its thorough documentation—no incident was cited without attribution, a feature which is lacking in much of the history written in Pakistan. The book became an immediate bestseller and went into many reprints, both in Pakistan and India.

Niazi followed his pioneering work with two more: *The Press Under Siege*, a look at the violence against and intimidation of the press from non-government sources, and *The Web of Censorship*, which exposed the culture of self-censorship in the press.

Now 67 and stricken with cancer, Niazi remains very much a fighter for press freedom, and is preparing his fourth book. Himal caught up with the author in his Karachi home, against the backdrop of the very public row between the Sharif government and the Jang Group of Newspapers. (See Commentary page 8)

Interviewed by Hasan Zaidi

• How do you view this ongoing tussle between the government and the Jang Group?

Jang has always been a loyal follower of each and every government. It has been a very docile institution. Its circulation in various cities is more than the combined circulation of all the other papers. From the beginning, its founder and father, Mir Khalilur Rehman, who single-handedly made the paper into an institution and became an institution himself in his own life, knew how to run a business. Some 15 years back, in an interview, the *Far Eastern Economic Review* had asked him what his paper's policy was. He replied, our policy is to have no policy. He meant: We are with everybody, we don't believe in criticism or an adversarial role, we just do what the government and the people want. After his death, his very able sons have faithfully carried out this policy.

The present battle between Jang

and the government has been going on for the last seven months. At first we thought it was a superficial fight. But then I read about the Jang Group Editor-in-Chief Mir Shakil's press conference [in which he released tapes of his conversations with government officials including Senator Saifur Rehman] and I was shaken. The senator asks Mir Sahib to dismiss journalists, not to write anything against the prime minister, to support the Shariah Bill. On BBC, the senator admitted this in so many words and criticised Mir Shakil for taping the conversations. I think he [Shakil] did the best thing. This was the only proof. He was pushed to the wall. What else could he have done?

• So you think that whatever Mir Shakil did was justified?

Yes! He did great service not only to Jang but to the entire profession. Today the government is pressurising

Jang and if Jang surrenders, tomorrow they will pressurise *Dawn*. Then *Nawai Waqt*. We have to fight this thing. This is not a fight between Shakil and Saifur Rehman. This is a fight between the press and the government.

• There have always been government attempts to influence or control the press. How do you compare past attempts with this one?

This time the attempts have become ruthless. They've forgotten all norms of decency. The government wants to turn *Jang* into a *Pravda*.

• The South Asian press has frequently been accused of adventurism. Governments have blamed the press for going beyond the call of constructive criticism. There are such allegations against *Jang* now.

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been in the profession since 1954. Each government says the same, "We welcome constructive criticism." Who decides what is constructive criticism?

I'll give you examples of limits in different periods. After the imposition of the first martial law, during Ayub Khan's period, criticism of the defence forces was out. In the same period, after [Zulfikar Ali] Bhutto became the foreign minister, you couldn't write anything on foreign affairs. In Bhutto's era, the limits changed—if somebody was Bhutto's friend, you couldn't criticise him. In Zia-ul Haq's period it was something more. Because of the long period of dictatorship, every small guy in his institution became a dictator. Then you couldn't even write about the railways or the PIA or the civic bodies such as the Karachi Municipal Corporation or the Karachi Development Authority. So who is going to define the limits?

• *How do you compare press freedoms in Pakistan with that in other countries of the region?*

In the entire SAARC region, the press is free in India only. Sri Lanka and Bangladesh are the same as Pakistan. In India, except for the 17 months' Emergency during Indira Gandhi's rule, the press remained free. But our press has remained in chains for 40 years. Despite that, Kuldip Nayyar told me that the Pakistani press is bolder than India's, because we people have learnt the art of saying things between the lines.

For example, April 4th, the day Bhutto was hanged in 1979, is also the day that Martin Luther King Jr was assassinated in 1968. On the first anniversary of Mr Bhutto's execution [because we could not write on him], we wrote articles paying tributes to Martin Luther King. An influential member of the Ministry of Information told me, "We know that you are telling people, today is the death anniversary of Bhutto, we know it."

Our press has been ruthlessly suppressed in our short history of 50 years. And look at what is happening even now. This is a so-called demo-

cratic era and the man [Nawaz Sharif] who claims every week to have a 'heavy mandate', look at what he is doing to the press.

• *Did this tradition of muzzling the press start very early on in Pakistan's history?*

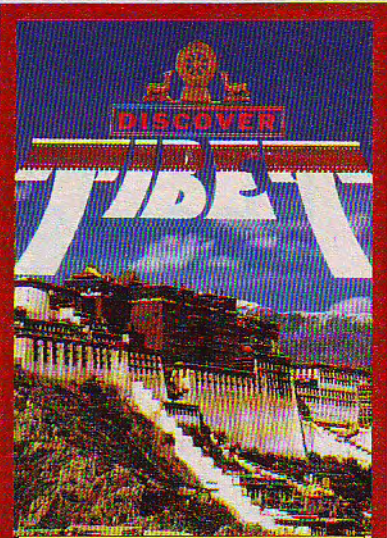
I have mentioned it in detail in my first book. Three days before Pakistan came into being, on August 11th 1947, Jinnah made his first speech. In that speech he explained the secular nature of the polity of the new nation. Some people, with the backing of some bureaucrats, tried to censor that portion of the speech. So this thing started right from the word go.

• *The press attempts to evade governmental influence by seeking revenue from the private sector. If it faces censorship from that sector as well, what can a newspaper do to survive?*

It's a walk on a razor's edge. There are journalists who are trying to fight both forms of censorship. But one must remember that for a good cause you will always find only a minority. The redeeming thing, however, is that this minority ultimately triumphs. It takes time but it does happen. One should always dream. Dreams should not die. Your dreams are your identity. So many utopias have proved to be nightmares. But there is still a utopia.

• *You have written about government attempts to curb press freedom and of other forces within society which intimidate the press. Which of these is more sinister?*

Some six months back I thought the darkest period for the press was Zia's martial law, and that perhaps even more dangerous was when he lifted censorship and we fell into self-censorship. That destroyed our faculties. But seeing what has been happening over the last week or so, I am in much pain. I used to say that now the worst is over. But I think I was wrong. Something terrible is happening. We have to stand united. Every citizen must stand up for their rights. It is our right to know. You can't take that away. ▲



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The 'late' president

CHATTING TO a journalist at a recent National Day party in Colombo, a newly arrived high commissioner mentioned that she had not yet presented her credentials. "You'd better take along something to read at the credentials ceremony," advised the journalist. "Our president is notorious for keeping people waiting."

In fact, such is Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga's habitual unpunctuality that the Colombo foreign office has re-arranged the credential presentation ceremonies so that arriving ambassadors will no longer have to cool their heels waiting for the president. Under the new arrangement, the envoys need not go to the presidential palace on the appointed day until summoned by phone. Till the call comes, they make small talk at their own residences with a government official who comes and sits with them.

During a two-day state visit to India in December, the 'victims' included Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, Vice-President Krishna Kant, former prime minister I.K. Gujral, Home Minister L.K. Advani, captains of trade and industry, religious leaders and the media.

"True to form—Chandrika does it again," proclaimed a prominently displayed front-page piece in the *Island* when Kumaratunga returned to Colombo. The newspaper's New Delhi correspondent reported that Kumaratunga had kept a total of at least a thousand distinguished Indians waiting for her for varying periods of time during this visit. "Those who suffered—in horrified silence—because of her astounding habit included some of the most important people in the land," the report said. Kumaratunga, whose signature smile is said to charm most people, was said by a Delhi paper to have left the Indian diplomatic establishment "red faced". Vajpayee was said to have been fortunate according to the paper—his wait was only of about 20 minutes.

Vice-President Kant and Home Minister Advani were not so lucky. They could not meet Kumaratunga because she was "simply not available" at the appointed time. Advani then tried twice to call on her, but in vain. A new meeting was fixed, but she was still not available and the meeting was rescheduled by embarrassed protocol officials. Advani went to seek Kumaratunga in the Rashtrapati Bhavan where she was staying, only to be politely told that "Madam President had extended her

discussions" with Sonia Gandhi at the latter's home.

Earlier, the president was even late for her ceremonial welcome at the forecourt of Rashtrapati Bhavan, and was tardy by over half an hour for a ceremony at which she and Vajpayee jointly laid the foundation stone for a pilgrim's rest-house near the New Delhi railway station. She kept Indian business leaders waiting for an hour at a scheduled luncheon meeting at the Taj Palace hotel. On the day of her arrival she was late by almost an hour at a dinner hosted in her honour by Sri Lanka's high commissioner in New Delhi, and the nearly 400 people, including 300 Japanese Buddhists and a hundred very important Indians, could do nothing but wait patiently.

The *Island* report got under official skin, it seemed. For, two weeks after it appeared, the foreign ministry issued a statement explaining that the president had had to work very hard in India, till 2.30 am on one day, "directing complex final preparations that led to the signing of the free trade agreement between India and Sri Lanka."

The ministry accused the report of being "a gross distortion of the true picture" and said that a great effort had been made to "demean the results of the [India] visit". The *Island* hit back

saying that its correspondent had simply reported an "extraordinary happening in diplomacy" which had also been reported in India's national newspapers. "To say that the article in question attempts to 'demean' the president defies logic and reason and could be considered only as an expression of bureaucratic toadiness."

The fact is the Indians should have known that back home, Kumaratunga is habitually late for almost every appointment. It is news when she is anywhere on time. One example of uncharacteristic punctuality was in last April when the highest ranking US delegation since Kumaratunga took office, visited Colombo, led by UN Ambassador Bill Richardson. One news agency reported that "she stunned the guests with a rare display of punctuality" and that "the gesture paid instant diplomatic dividends".

But Commonwealth Secretary General Emeka Anyaoku was not so lucky. He was kept waiting nearly an hour and a half the same evening!

— Manik de Silva ▲



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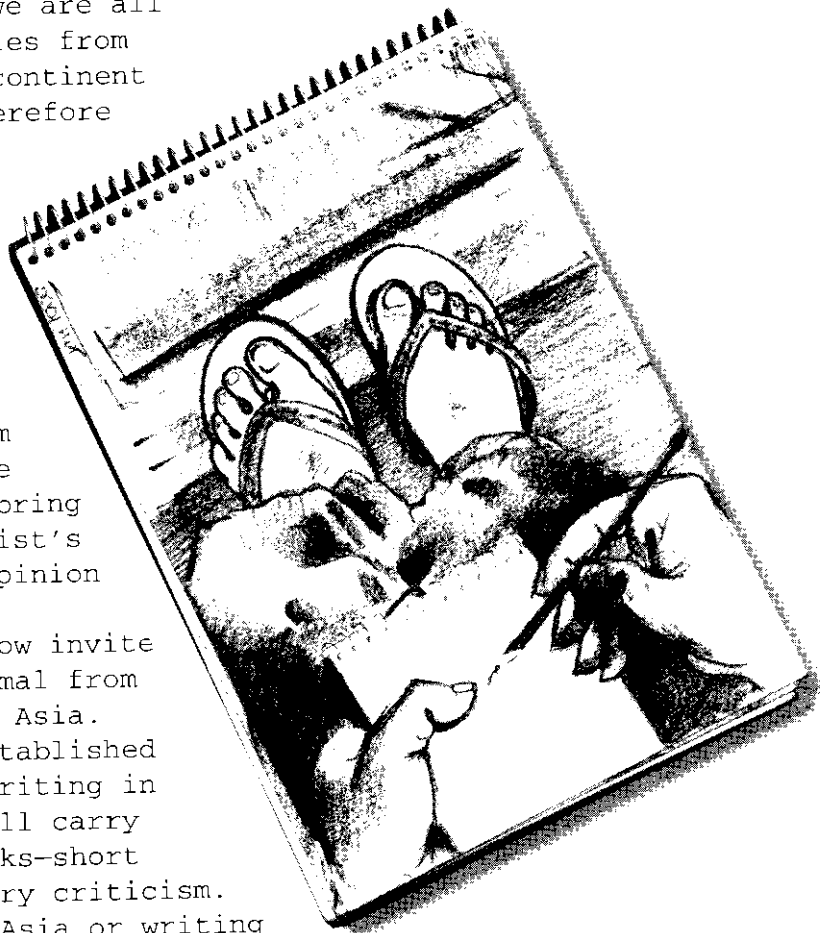
short fiction and poetry in Himal

At Himal, we believe that we are all losing something when stories from different parts of the Subcontinent are not shared. We have therefore decided to start a new department in this magazine, **litSA**, Literary South Asia, which seeks to bring together the literary rivers of South Asia in these pages. The creative voice of women and men from across the Subcontinent, we feel, are as necessary to bring to the fore as the journalist's presentation of news and opinion or the social scientist's analysis. This is why we now invite literary submissions to Himal from writers and poets of South Asia. **litSA** will feature both established writers and newer talent writing in English. The department will carry original or translated works—short fiction, poetry and literary criticism. Writers may be from South Asia or writing about South Asia.

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Manuscripts will not be returned unless requested and accompanied by self-addressed postal requisites. Translations should preferably be accompanied by a copy of the original work and (where possible) the author's permission.



Laden with terror

An attempt on the life of a poet lays bare sinister links and madrassah skeletons.

by **Afsan Chowdhury**

While most people were preparing to celebrate Eid in Dhaka on 18 January, members of an Islamic extremist group called Harkatul Jihad were attempting to axe to death Shamshur Rahman, Bangladesh's leading poet and avowed opponent of communalism. Rahman survived, and so did his wife, who took an axe blow in the scuffle while shielding her husband. The 18 January incident at Rahman's home shook Bangladeshis, not only because no one had really expected the poet to be marked for such an attack, but because the organisation behind it, as admitted by the police, is patronised by none else than the Afghanistan-based Saudi Arabian mafioso Osama bin Laden. The group is apparently awash with men and money and has a well-planned agenda on hand to foment violence.

Harkatul Jihad suddenly became what many political parties dream becoming—a household name. It was reported that the extremists had set up an extensive network across the country and training centres were operating in several districts to churn out various types of cadres, including of the armed variety. The thousands of religious seminaries or *madrassahs* (many run with government funds) were identified in the ongoing investigation as where the 'holy warriors' were springing from.

That bin Laden had a foot in the mushy soil of Bangladesh had been rumoured for months, the daily *Prothom Alo* reported that a number of Islamic activists had been arrested on charges of reprinting and distributing bin Laden's agitprop. A printing press was raided and 'holy war'

materials, such as manuals on conducting "terrorist activities", were seized.

Newspapers have published the book covers of 'training manuals' which have been linked to the Taliban, and it appears that the Islamists have connections in Pakistan. Books and training guides, and Pakistani currency, to be used for propaganda as well as armed activities, have been recovered by the police. Many of those arrested are said to have been trained at Sadekahad in Pakistan, while at least one said he was trained in Afghanistan.

Alo's report was interesting, but was neither taken seriously nor with alarm. The assassination attempt on the poet changed all that. The fact that a network reportedly having 15,000-25,000 active members could have been raised without the authorities knowing anything, only heightened the fear.



Rahman, still alive.

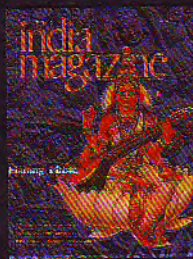
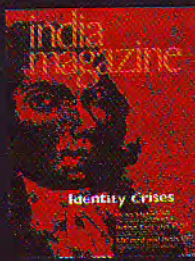
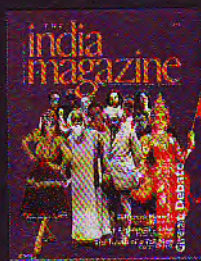
The investigations into the attack on Rahman are unravelling Harkatul Jihad's foreign connections. Large amount of funds in bank accounts held by one Maulana Bakhtiyar of the Jihad and an organisation called the Servant of Suffering Humanity International have been found and frozen by government order. The arrests that followed the attack included that of a South African passport-holder of Gujarati origin and a Pakistani, while one of the alleged masterminds behind the plot has reportedly fled to Dubai.

Mudslinging

Reports say the largest training centre was a major *madrassah* in Chittagong and armed insurrection camps were run in the hilly areas of Cox's Bazar (falling in the Chittagong Division) on the coast bordering Burma. The armed presence of Islamic extremists in the area, a traditional stronghold of Islamist parties, is nothing new. A large number of West Asia-based or -funded NGOs were allowed to operate after the Rohingya refugees settled there in the early 1990s, and at least two raids in the past hauled in a large supply of sophisticated weapons. Indian and local intelligence sources have it that the Pakistani intelligence agency, ISI, has a hand in the matter.

The size and scale of Harkatul Jihad has, however, been questioned by a section of the media, especially by the anti-Awami League (AL) and the pro-Islamist press. They argue that if the charges are true and the arrested people are actually trained militants in the Taliban mould, they would surely have done better than be over-

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come by two non-militant housewives (Rahman's wife and daughter-in-law). And if they were part of a well-trained terrorist outfit, their arsenal would have been more sophisticated than axes and crude pipe guns. What seems implausible, and not only to the anti-AL and pro-Islamist press, is that the police should have been unaware of the existence of what by its own accounts is a huge organisation.

Such a situation then readily presents itself for political mudslinging. The opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) supporters and its press went to town saying that the attackers were actually members of Students League (SL), the student wing of the Awami League. They hinted that it was a "set up" to find an excuse to take action against the Islamic groups who, under BNP leadership, are gearing up for agitations against the ruling Awami League. The opposition weekly *Holiday* published a report quoting police sources apparently

confirming that the attackers were SL members.

Be all that as it may, the attack has caught the nation's attention. Practically every socio-cultural organisation has issued statements of condemnation and protest rallies have been held across the country. While committees to counter the extremists have been formed, the government has set up an investigation cell as proof of how seriously it has taken the incident.

The madrassah education system, with millions enrolled and supervised by a separate education board of the government, has come under fire and scrutiny. The alleged involvement of the seminaries in criminal actions has meant a cloud hanging over the livelihood of many people generally from the rural areas, which both supply and consume the seminarist "propaganda".

The spotlight now is on the Harkatul hit-list, which is said to name Bangladesh's leading intellectu-

als. In a country that observes 14 December every year as Martyred Intellectuals Day in the memory of the intellectuals killed by Islamic extremists on that day in 1971, the incident has struck a heavy chord of apprehension. Shamsur Rahman himself has said that anybody who takes a position against communal extremism will have to face such attacks. He has vowed to continue his struggle. All the others named in the hit-list, both men and women, including Maulana Awaal (director general of the Islamic Foundation of Bangladesh) and octogenarian Begum Sufia Kamal, who is the symbol for all deeply religious Bangladeshi women who oppose extremism, have not budged from their stand or departed for safer shores. The only one who has left the country is Taslima Nasreen, who declared that she felt too unsafe in Bangladesh and has again sought refuge in Europe. The rest are staying back to fight back. ▲



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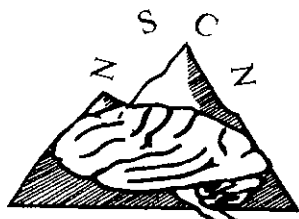
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The political correctness of bowling

A goniometer was used to measure the angle of "fixed deformity" in Muralitharan's elbow...

by **Kalinga Seneviratne**



The recently concluded tour by the Sri Lankan cricket team to Australia will certainly rank as one of the most controversial tours in the history of the game. At the centre of the controversy was Sri Lanka's champion off-spinner Muttiah Muralitharan, whose bowling action caused extensive worry among the Australians (and the English).

The heat on the over-80-test-old Muralitharan, rated by many to be the world's best off-spinner, was intense: the media hounded him—some calling for his ban from cricket; the Australian spectators jeered and called him a "chucker" every time he came on to bowl; and the umpires, including even the South African match referee, only added fuel to fire.

Matters came to a head in Adelaide on 23 January during the one-day fixture between Sri Lanka and England, when the Sri Lankan captain Arjuna Ranatunga almost led his team out of the game after umpire Ross Emerson 'called' Murali for throwing. Ranatunga declared half-way through the tour that Murali, Sri Lanka's highest wicket-taker ever, would not visit

Australia again.

Commented Mark Nicholas of *The Telegraph* of London: "For the last month a witch-hunt has followed Muralitharan around Australia. Crowds have heckled him and newspapers have put him in the dock. Australia has appointed itself as judge and jury. The hostility to an innocent, gentle man who possesses an intriguing cricket talent, whatever its legality, has been extraordinary."

This was Murali's second run-in with the Australians, actually. He was first 'called' for throwing by umpire Darrel Hair in the now-infamous Boxing Day incident during the 1995-96 Sri Lankan tour. Following that call by Hair, ICC chief executive David Richards—an Australian—had faxed a 'dossier' on Murali to the ACC to be distributed to the media. Sri Lanka refused to be cowed down and continued with Murali in the attack.

Two weeks after the Hair incident, Murali was 'called' again, this time by umpire Ross Emerson. The Lankan team management called Emerson's bluff by shooting its own videotape

of the action to show that the umpire called Murali six times for "throwing", when he had in fact been bowling leg-breaks. And anyone who knows his cricket knows that you cannot throw a leg-break, as it comes out from the back of the hand.

With this evidence of umpiring incompetence and possible bias, the Sri Lankans summoned leading Melbourne-based surgeon, Barclay Ried, to use an instrument known as goniometer to measure the angle of "fixed deformity" in Murali's elbow to check whether it prevents full extension. The medical report said that the deformity was congenital. This was followed up by a bio-mechanics test at Australia's leading laboratory for this technology at the University of Western Australia, where slow-motion video was used to study the movement of his bowling arm. The evidence was presented to the nine-member ICC panel set up to judge suspected bowling actions. Murali was cleared by the panel, and went on to set up new howling records for Sri Lanka.

Despite the ICC clearance of Murali's bowling action, and the fact that he has since bowled in almost all major cricket-playing nations, in front of over 40 umpires, including leading umpires on the ICC's international umpires' panel, most Australian experts refuse to accept his bowling. Wrote Patrick Smith of *The Age*, "For a man who cannot straighten his right arm, he howls a wonderful leg-spinner and when he claims a wicket, his arm points straight up when rejoicing." Given sentiments like these, it was only to be expected that the last had yet to be heard on Murali and his bowling.

Cricket's hell

The latest Murali episode began last August, set off by comments of the English coach David Lloyd, after the Lankans humbled his team on its home turf. During the test match at Lords, international cricket's official headquarters, Murali hagged a lethal haul of 16 of the 20 English wickets. Lloyd's outburst was followed by umpire Hair's autobiography, *The Decision Maker*, in which he called Murali's action "diabolical", and threatened to 'call' him again in Australia in the coming season.

The Board of Control for Cricket in Sri Lanka (BCCSL) was quick to take issue and complained to the ICC that Hair had breached its code of conduct for umpires and demanded disciplinary action. In early January, the ICC agreed that Hair had indeed acted against the code of conduct and asked the ACB to take disciplinary action against him. Hair was stood down from umpiring in the recent triangular series involving Sri Lanka, Australia and England, but later the ACB judge acquitted him, which allows him to umpire in the forthcoming World Cup in England.

Sri Lanka's poor performance this season in Australia has been attributed by team officials and its sports commentators to the treatment the team received from the media, spectators and officials. After the Adelaide controversy, veteran Sri Lankan sports journalist, Elmo Rodrigopulle, who

accompanied the team on the tour, described the whole experience: "The tour of Australia...has been one helluva nightmare for Sri Lankan cricketers. On this tour the Lankans must now be experiencing what it is like to be in cricket's hell."

It is a hell that others have been through before and may have to do with the deep-rooted racism which exists in Australian sports and media. The former West Indian captain Viv Richards in his autobiography, *Hitting Across the Line*, had this to say about their tours to Australia:

The force of their hostility was nothing sort of frightening. We had to take so much! The verbal abuse, in particular, left our team completely stunned...as soon as we wandered out on that field, we had to face their taunts. It did not prove easy to concentrate when someone was snarling at you and saying, you f... off, you black bastards!

On the issue of chucking itself and what the umpires' role should be, many cricket writers argue that it does not matter what the ICC says, the umpire on the day has the right to 'call' a bowler. Cricket law 24.2 says that for a delivery to be fair, the ball must be bowled, not thrown. If either umpire is not entirely satisfied with the absolute fairness of a delivery, they can call or signal "no ball" instantly upon delivery. The throwing law was obviously devised to protect batsmen from unscrupulous fast bowlers who could gain an unfair advantage from throw-

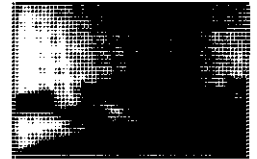
ing the ball and intimidate batsmen or put them at risk of serious injury. Interestingly, this rule has lately not been used to book fast bowlers; instead it has gone against spinners of the Subcontinent. Most recent cases of complaints to the ICC panel involve spinners Rajesh Chauhan and Harbhajan Singh of India, Shahid Afridi of Pakistan and Kumar Dharmasena of Sri Lanka.

In the end, whether there has been a "throw" or not is a matter of opinion, and Muralitharan's experience has shown how this can lead to subjective decisions against a particular cricketer or even a cricketing nation. Perhaps the last word on this should be allowed to Peter Roebuck of *Sydney Morning Herald*: "It [Murali's action] is a matter of opinion. Sometimes people see things they want to see... It's scarcely to be expected that they [Sri Lankans] will bowl like some stiff Anglo-Saxons." ▲

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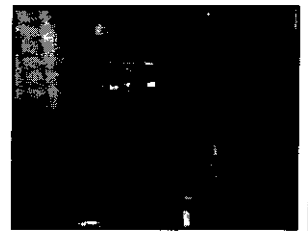
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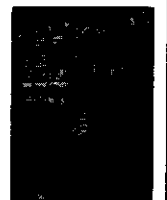
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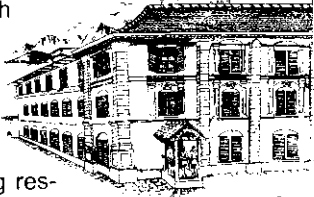


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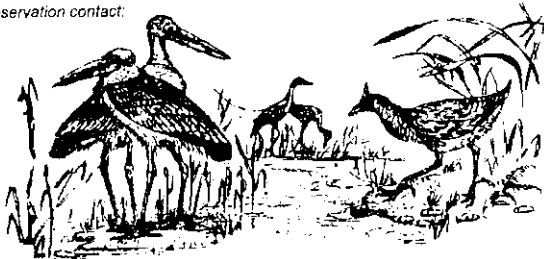
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Boi-mela



RANJITA BISWAS

United by language, West Bengal and Bangladesh meet at the Calcutta Book Fair.

A book fair that can make people buy tickets in the black market to avoid the wait in long queues, must indeed be special. But then, this is Calcutta, and it is the Calcutta Book Fair. What was conceived 24 years ago over a casual cup of coffee, has now assumed the role of a cultural *tamasha* of international significance.

One of the major attractions at the latest fair was the India Pavilion put up by the NBT. While showcasing Indian regional literature in 14 languages, the pavilion drew large crowds at its unique idea of the *adda* (informal meets). Eminent writers, poets and artists got together at this *desi* chat-show. At other corners of the huge fair ground, seminars took place on subjects like the translation of regional literature and how it could work as a unifying force.

This year's theme was closer to home, and something long overdue: Bangladesh, which shares with West Bengal a cultural ethos, language and

border. Twenty-three Bangladeshi publishers of the Bangladesh Publishers' Council (BPC), came armed with the latest and 'best' works. And they were not disappointed; many visitors were visibly impressed by the quality of the Bangladeshi publications.

But the fair did have its unsavoury moments. While the local press was irked by the behaviour of the police when Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wajed was doing the inauguration honours, the Bangladeshi publishers were none too happy with the arrangement of stalls. There were also less than happy exchanges between the publishers of the two countries on the question of piracy.

As books by famous West Bengal writers sell well in Bangladesh, unscrupulous publishers have been flooding the Bangladeshi market with pirated copies within days of a new publication, robbing the original publishers in India of their due. This has been a matter of much contention

between the publishers of the two countries for some time, and one that has eluded solution till now. BPC President Mofidul Hoque admitted that the Indian publishers are sore about it, but added, "There has not been a single instance of formal protest by them." He also alleged that some Indian publishers are also part of the book piracy racket.

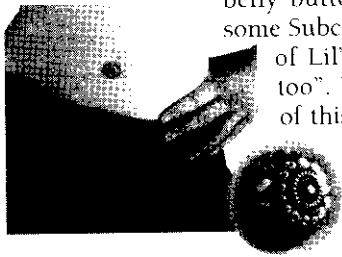
Irritants apart, the Bangladeshi team felt good about the whole experience of such a big *boi-mela* (book fair). Said the BPC spokesman M.R. Khoka, "We've been here in the past but not in this big a way. We know there is a big readership of Bangladeshi books here. We have come to see, and get the intellectual feedback to assess future ventures."

These future ventures will include marketing tie-ups with their Indian counterparts as the two Bengali language publishing industries would stand to gain from inter-dependence rather than from the cut-throat ways of intruding into each other's market. The Bangladesh publishers also do not have to depend solely on Calcutta. There is a big Bengali readership in places like New Delhi where regular book fairs are held. Another stop for the Bangladeshi publishers will now be the new Northeast Book Fair in Guwahati, which has invited BPC to participate in its next fair in November.

In the meantime, the organisers of the Calcutta Book Fair are planning the silver jubilee of the fair in the millennium year with some changes. One of them is the ban on the small-time magazines produced by enthusiastic amateurs with little expectation of monetary returns. Some believe that this will take some of the charm off the fair next year, but the organisers defend their decision saying that the 'little magazines' divert attention from the main event. ▲

— Ranjita Biswas

"A BUTTON for your belly", announced the style section of *New York* magazine, and displayed the Navel Bindi Bliss (NBB) in action. Apparently coming hot on the heels of the navel ring, which is already *passe*, the NBB is a "bejewelled, adhesive-backed nugget that sits inside the belly button". It has "already brought some Subcontinental chic to the midriffs of Lil' Kim, Brandy, and Madonna too". Funny thing is I do not know of this as a Subcontinental artefact, even though the marketeer in New York, Melody Weir, claims that "the bindi's little mirrors attract light and stimulate the third chakra, known to bring wisdom, energy and insight". The NBBs apparently fit both "innies and outies" in terms of navel contours, and—get a load of this—"are supposedly made by blind Nepalese."



known to bring wisdom, energy and insight". The NBBs apparently fit both "innies and outies" in terms of navel contours, and—get a load of this—"are supposedly made by blind Nepalese."

THE MOST popular couple for Indian photojournalists in the third week of February were the father-daughter-



combo of Panditji and his daughter Anoushka. Take a look at the (good and bad) photography as reflected in the various Indian national English dailies. *The Asian Age*, obviously, could have done better, *The Hindu* saw it fit to advertise a television programme.

WILL CHHETRIA Patrakar invite an Islamic *fatwa* upon himself (there are also Hindu *fatwas* out these days) if he dares label as despicable, atavistic and barbarous the new round of baying for the blood of the unfortunate person of Salman Rushdie? From Iran's nastier ayatollahs all the way to one Mr Abu Asim Azmi, president of the Maharashtra unit of the Samajwadi

Party (see him spitting in the picture), they are all involved in calling for the head of a man. Is there no court of law that dares take cognisance of

this oral bloodletting? What will the stupor-laden justices of the International Court of Justice in The Hague do if suddenly confronted with a referral? In the meantime, here's hoping that the bullets and daggers will never hit

their target, and may Salman die of natural causes, many, many years hence.



THE MOST-USED picture in the press in February, Subcontinent-wide, was probably that of a pregnant Brazilian lady, Luciana Gimenez. She is six months gone, and mothering a child whose father is allegedly Mick Jagger. Lest I too be accused of voyeuristic leanings (willy-nilly, I may become that, the number of times I am having to comment on use of Northern flesh by our Southern editor-sahebs), the picture of Ms Gimenez is reproduced here only in miniature.

FOR ONCE, a volunteer development group without a godawful acronym (although there is a ferocious tantric goddess as 'logo'). Solar Sisters is a Kathmandu-based programme which takes contributing (Western) participants to remote locations in Nepal, by bus and on foot, and introduces renewable solar energy technologies in rural households.

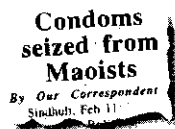


"BOO" TO Reuters for lifting from a *Kuensel* story and reporting on "mercenaries" from eastern Nepal active in anti-government demonstrations in early February in Southern Bhutan. "Mercenary" means person from another nationality fighting (a government) for pay. Well, these people from "eastern Nepal", were most likely Bhutanese Lhotshampa refugees from the UNHCR-run camps located there. Not likely that they would have to be paid by anyone to go demonstrate for their eviction nearly a decade ago by Thimphu. Loose second-hand reporting from Reuters, an organisation one expects a bit more from than this.



THE MOST down-home products these days have some of the best advertising tag-lines. I love this "Nothing else matters!" in favour of Mother India biri. I just miss the statutory warning, but what the heck. Anything to beat Marlboro in the game.

THE DISTRICT police of Sindhuli in south Nepal in mid-Feb seized a rifle, six pistols, two automatic guns, hand-made guns, 150 detonators, binoculars, explosives, as well as (sic) "several pockets of condoms and other means fo family planning along with the portrays of Mao, Lenin and Stalin" from Maoists. The sub-editors of the *Rising Nepal* daily decided the condoms deserved the headline, perhaps influenced by rumours that the Maoists of Nepal are for free sex. Well, at least they are modern and careful.



"WHY DOES so happen?" If you have not been cured of disease, if you have been a failure in love marriage and

court cases, and most importantly, if there are "no foreign tours" coming your way, all you need to do is to trundle along to Baba Raza Bengali Tantrik, opposite Mother Dairy, Greater Kailash Market in New Delhi. Long time, no foreign travel for me, too. Perhaps I will drop in. But no. Delhi requires foreign travel to begin with, for Chhetria Patrakar. *Kya Karay?*

IN DHAKA, if you were free at 5 pm on 9 January, you would have had the choice of going to the Progressive Nationalist Party's *Iftar party* at Hotel Purbani Jalsaghar, or the Crime Reporters' *Iftar party* at Flesh Pots restaurant, Topkhana Road. Between the Progressives and the Crime Reporters, it would have been a fine balance for me, other than the fact that the flesh is weak, so you can imagine where you would have found me, had I been in Dhaka on 9 January.

THERE ARE ghosts, and there are ghost schools. No, not where you don white sheets and learn to say "boo". Ghost schools, in the Pakistani Punjab and the North West Frontier Province, as reported by *The Nation*, are institutions that are there but not quite there. And now the Pakistani army has been given the job by the provincial governments "to thoroughly check records of the provincial education department and to point out existence of ghost schools and other wrongdoings". But if these schools are mere phantasms, then they could not exist, right?

MIX OF culture (Rabindra Sangeet, Lalon Gecti), nationalism (Nazrul Sangeet), religion (*Qur'an*, Bible readings) and development verbiage, are the daily offerings of *Radio Dhaka*. Notice how nationalism (Nazrul Sangeet) just edges ahead of culture (Rabindra Sangeet), four programmes to three.

DEVELOPMENT HAS its price, we all know, and no one knows it better than the boat people of the *Buriganga* river, which girds the Bangladeshi capital. The plan is to build a road bridge over the river (there is already one), which will deprive thousands of boat people of a livelihood. Oars in hand, they organised a rally in Dhaka on 11 January. *The Independent* suggested that the "authorities" (who else?) "do their best to minimise the sufferings of the aggrieved people". How exactly to do that, the paper would not divulge.



FROM THE classifieds in *The News*, one hears that Dr Atique Mufti of the Society for Prevention of Human Exploitations (SPHE) gives "free legal advice (without obligations or strings) against Human Exploitations

including Human and service rights". He is a phone call away for Pakistan's aggrieved, but I presume anyone in the world can send him an email at <amufti@apollo.net.pk> to ask what exactly falls under the rubric of "human and service rights".

VENERABLE PIA is looking for Pakistani designers to develop new summer and winter uniforms for its cabin crew. While looking for "modern and functional clothing" incorporating values and design elements of Pakistan, the airline wants the designers to keep in mind "the work environment, climatic conditions and the general height and build of our air hostesses". Only indigenous material and trimmings should be used, and the uniform should be practical, easy to maintain and durable, "while clearly being extremely attractive to look at". Quite a challenge, all this. Why not open the competition to all South Asians? If Atal-bhai can take a bus to London, a Bhutanese can design for a Pakistani airline. Write to Ms Farhat Jamal, Directorate of Public Affairs, PIA Head Office, Karachi Airport.



THE CAUSE *celebre* over the course of February, of course, was the *Jang* group's battle with the Nawaz Sharif government. The whole affair has been covered enough by the press everywhere that I need not go into it, and of course I stand firmly on the side of the journos and against big bad governments as represented in this instance by Senator Saif, head of the Ehtesab Cell. What made Chhetria Patrakar just a wee bit uncomfortable, however, was the ad-man's savy with which (trademark banners proclaiming "War on Jang", "Press under siege", and "Victimisation, Vengeance, Vendetta") the group went about its counter-attack, with daily quarter page ads on the front page.

NO MEDIA column for this month would be complete for this month without noting the passing away in a US hospital of Ashok Jain, proprietor of *The Times of India* Group, whose last couple of years was given over to fighting the Enforcement Director of the Indian government. Whether there was an unfair hounding of Mr Jain, I cannot say, but he certainly did more than his share to bring down the credibility of his own hallowed paper, using it as a bully pulpit to get back at the government (including using a newly-started human rights column to focus exclusively on himself). In any case, the good that Ashok Jain has done will doubtless live after him, but his role in the slow but inexorable marketisation of the Indian national English media will not be remembered with the same level of appreciation.

– Chhetria Patrakar

Officers of the Raj

SELECTED FROM the best of backgrounds, educated and trained to British standards of an officer and gentleman, commissioned Indian officers' loyalty to the Raj came from both their identification with the ruling elite and desire, especially as pioneers in this profession, to perfect their professional expertise and corporate izzat (honour). A trickier notion was that of professional responsibility for if not internalised as an explicit principle, it may encourage a military coup by leading officers to understand their duty as loyalty to the nation rather than the legal government.

This confusion of loyalties was potentially explosive with the rise of the independence movement's challenge to British rule. Just who would commissioned Indian officers perceive as the legitimate voice of the Subcontinent? This question proved somewhat irrelevant as, except for some youthful involvement in nationalist activities, the struggle for swaraj barely touched commissioned Indian officers. The non-violent nature of the independence movement, the indifference of public and nationalist leaders to military matters, and the privileged backgrounds and physical separation of commissioned Indian officers all contributed to ensuring their loyalty to the Raj throughout the interwar years.

The creation of various Indian national armies from Indian military POWs and civilians during the Second World War appeared to offer another potent challenge to the professional responsibility of commissioned Indian officers. Yet these forces proved both militarily ineffectual and professionally irrelevant to those officers—and jawans—on active service in all theatres of the war. Although the post-war trial of the Red Fort Three created some sympathy for Indian national armies' personnel, commissioned Indian officers of the British-led Indian armed forces remained free from (overt) doubt as to their ultimate loyalty to the legitimate government of the day.

When independence arrived, Nehru's seemingly naive assumption that with political control would come civil supremacy-of-rule proved true. That this astonishingly smooth transference of professional responsibility took place despite the multiple challenges of the transfer of power and partition was due to commissioned officers' demonstrated confidence in their own professional competence and in the skills of the new political and administrative elite, all of which continued to be practised largely according to British norms. India would not flounder on the path to modernisation. Politicians continued to lead, bureaucrats to administer and the country to develop. That, for the most part, officers, politicians and bureaucrats continued to be drawn from the

same socio-economic strata and believed in the same values of democracy, secularism and development further ensured the security of civil supremacy-of-rule in India.

APURBA KUNDU IN *MILITARISM IN INDIA: THE ARMY AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN CONSENSUS* (TAURIS ACADEMIC STUDIES, 1998)

Indian Railways provides facility for travel by rail at concessional rate for several categories of people, details of some classes are tabulated below

S. No.	Category of persons eligible for concession	Percentage of concession 2nd Class/Sleeper Class	Authority on which concession is allowed
1	(a) Teachers honoured with National Award by President of India on Teacher's Day	50%	Photocopy of Identity Card issued by the District Education Officers of the State Government concerned
1	(b) Industrial Workers honoured with the Prime Minister's Shram Award	75%	Photocopy of Identity Card issued by Ministry of Labour Government of India
1	(c) Father of the parents (only one) accompanying the child recipient of National Bravery Award	50%	Photocopy of Identity Card of the Child recipient of National Bravery Award issued by the Indian Council for Child Welfare
1	(d) Eminent Coaches in games and sports who have received Dronacharya Award	75%	Photocopy of Identity Card issued by Sports Authority of India
2	(a) Widows of Defence personnel killed in war	75%	Photocopy of Identity Card issued by District Sanik Boards, Ministry of Defence, Government of India
2	(b) Widows of P.K.F. personnel killed in action in Sri Lanka	75%	Photocopy of Identity Card issued by concerned Superintendent of Police or Deputy Commissioner of Police and in the case of C.R.P.F., Additional Deputy Inspector General of Police/Commandant/Assistant Director of C.R.P.F.
2	(c) Widows of Policemen/Paramilitary personnel killed in action against terrorists and extremists	75%	Photocopy of Identity Card issued by concerned Superintendent of Police or Deputy Commissioner of Police/Commandant/Assistant Director of C.R.P.F.
3	Children recipients of National Bravery Award are eligible for totally free travel in Second/Sleeper Class till they complete the age of 16 years. For this purpose concession to the parent is admissible only when he/she is accompanying the child		Inspector General of Police/Commandant/Assistant Director of C.R.P.F.
4	Concession to the parent is admissible only when he/she is accompanying the child		Inspector General of Police/Commandant/Assistant Director of C.R.P.F.
5	Note: 1. The holder of a concession ticket is not permitted to change the ticket to a higher class by paying the difference, treating the concession ticket as a fully paid ticket. However, categories of persons eligible to the grant of concession in First Class will be permitted to travel in A.C. 2-Tier Sleeper Class on payment of First Class fare plus difference between A.C. 2-Tier Sleeper Class fare and the normal First Class fare		
6	Categories of persons mentioned are not entitled to concessions straight-away from Stations, Booking/Reservation Offices by producing necessary documents		
7	Categories of persons mentioned can avail their concessions straight-away from Stations, Booking/Reservation Offices by producing necessary documents and the normal First Class fare		
8	Recipients of Param Vir Chakra, Mahavir Chakra, Vir Chakra, Shaurya Chakra, Kin Chakra and Ashok Chakra and widows of such posthumous awardees and Police Medal awardees are given complimentary passes, which are issued by the office of the concerned Divisional Railway Manager as well as Headquarters Office.		
9	For further details, kindly contact the Station Master of the nearest Railway Station, in case of difficulty the Senior Divisional Commercial Manager of the concerned Railway Division may also be contacted		

For further details, kindly contact the Station Master of the nearest Railway Station, in case of difficulty the Senior Divisional Commercial Manager of the concerned Railway Division may also be contacted

Maoist Tibetans

NO INTERNATIONAL issue is more neuralgic than Tibet and nothing recently published on Tibet will cause more outrage than *The Dragon in the Land of Snows* (Pimlico, 574 pages, GBP 12.50). There will be indignation in Beijing, Washington, the Dalai Lama's exile headquarters in Dharamsala, and in support-Tibet circles. At the book's London launch Tibetans and friends of Tibet loudly cheered its author, Tsering Shakya; I asked him afterwards how many would still cheer him after they read his book. A realistic man, he chuckled.

The outrage will ignite at once. In his introduction, Mr Shakya, a research fellow at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, characterises Beijing's description of pre-1950 Tibet as a "hell on earth ravaged by feudal exploitation," and the pro-Tibet version of a "land of happy and contented people" as "both part of political myth-making." Neither Chinese nor Tibetans, Mr Sbakya asserts, "want any complexities to intrude on their firmly held beliefs".

Instead of simply depicting the Chinese as the sole monsters during the Cultural Revolution in Tibet, Mr Shakya writes that thousands of Tibetan youths, under Mao Tse-tung's spell as deeply as young Chinese in China, became Red Guards; they sacked monasteries and drove monks and nuns into secular life. (That young Tibetans often led the way in these depredations was confirmed to me by monks in several monasteries.)

I had no idea that traditional Tibetan sources regularly referred to the Manchu emperors as Buddha-incarnations, defining them, therefore, not merely as secular

protectors of Tibet but as occupants of the Buddhist pantheon. This puts paid to the common assertion by many Tibetologists that the Dalai Lama-Emperor relationship was merely that of priest and patron.

But outrage will be most acute in Beijing. It will condemn Mr Shakya's claim, confirmed by most historians of Tibet outside China's control, that Tibet was independent between 1913 and 1950 and that for most Tibetans the Chinese are not liberators but intruders who have caused "the sky to fall." It was even the private view, he shows, of the British Foreign Office in 1950 that Tibet "must be regarded as a State". Nonetheless, ambassador to the UN Sir Gladwyn Jebb telegraphed London that Britain must "create a situation which does not oblige us in practise to do anything about the Communist invasion of Tibet," and should argue the legal status of Tibet was obscure. (Such has been Britain's dealing with Beijing on most issues ever since.)

JONATHAN MIRSKY IN "THE LAND OF SNOWS AND POLITICAL MYTHOLOGY" FROM *THE WALL STREET JOURNAL*.

Vegetarian suit

TACO BELL has paid a confidential sum to settle a lawsuit by a devout Hindu who sued the fast-food chain for serving him a beef burrito rather than the bean one he ordered.

The company settled the suit filed by Mukesh K. Rai, 33, of Carpinteria as the case approached trial in Ventura County Superior Court last month. Rai said that biting into the beef burrito and chewing the meat violated his religious scruples. The "trauma" caused him to seek advice from his spiritual guru in Britain and eventually to journey to India to purify himself by bathing in the holy waters of the Ganges River.

Rai had filed suit after Taco Bell refused to give him a refund or apologise for the April 1997 incident. He was seeking as much as \$ 144,000 for his expenses and damages.

"The principles to me are far more important than the actual settlement," Rai said Wednesday. "But Taco Bell has trivialised the importance of this suit. They still haven't shown any remorse whatsoever."

Taco Bell's attorney did not return a call seeking comment.

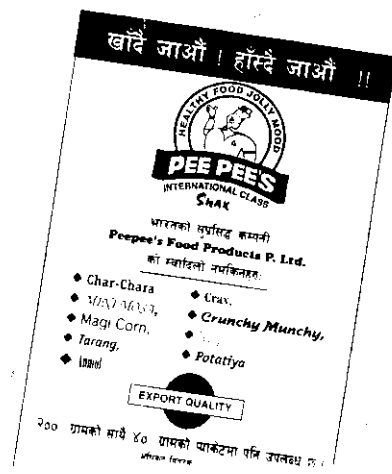
DAVAN MAHARAJ IN "TACO BELL SETTLES SUIT WITH HINDU OVER MEAL ORDER" FROM *THE LOS ANGELES TIMES*.

The Bubu lexicon

BY 1852, when he conceived his pilgrimage to Mecca, [Sir Richard] Burton had already made a minor reputation for himself in India as a polyglot Orientalist and an expert in manipulating the complexities of cultural exchange. He had "attacked Arabic" at Oxford and been

tutored in Hindustani in preparation for his Indian service. He made such rapid progress in London and on his voyage to Bombay that he was, as he claimed, able upon reaching India in 1842 "to land with eclat as a raw griff and to astonish the throng of palanquin bearers that jostled, pushed and pulled me in the pier head, with the vivacity and nervousness of my phrasology". In Bombay he resumed his language lessons, learning Gujarati, Hindustani, and some Persian from a Parsi munshi (teacher), eventually finishing first out of twelve candidates in the Hindustani examination given by the government of the East India Company; later he was to achieve similar honours in the Gujarati examination. During his seven-year Indian sojourn he also learnt, with differing degrees of expertise, Sanskrit, Marathi, Sindhi, Punjabi, Telugu, Arabic, Persia, and Toda. His schooling in Indian languages and the Indian social text appears to have been further supplemented by a liaison, or a series of liaisons, with Indian women, which were not at all uncommon at the time. "The Bibi (white woman) was at this time rare in India; the result was the triumph of the Bubu (coloured sister). I found every officer in the corps [at Baroda, where he was stationed initially] more or less provided with one of these helpmates. We boys naturally followed suit." These were liaisons whose pedagogical usefulness he underlines: "The 'walking dictionary' is all but indispensable to the Student, and she teaches him not only Hindostani grammar, but the syntaxes of native life." And, further, "It connected the white stranger with the country and its people, gave him an interest in their manners and customs, and taught him thoroughly well their language." To him the bubu system was configured as the arena of mutual exchange and diplomacy. He was to regret as politically damaging the onset of Victorian morality, and the arrival in India of Victorian women, that disallowed such interracial sexual arrangements: "The greatest danger in British India is the ever-growing gulf that yawns between the governors and the governed, they lose touch of one another, and such racial estrangements leads directly to racial hostility." But he also noted the occasional perils of such individualised instruction and of any unthinking and inappropriately gendered mimicry of what is presumed to be nativeness: "It was a standing joke in my regiment that one of the officers always spoke of himself in the feminine gender."

PARAMA ROY IN *INDIAN TRAFFIC: IDENTITY IN QUESTION IN COLONIAL AND POSTCOLONIAL INDIA* (SAGE, 1999)



Western Indian press

WHILE THERE is no doubt that the ghastly murder of Graham Stewart Staines, the Australian missionary, and his two innocent sons, should be universally condemned and that the culprits should be severely punished, the massive outcry it has evoked in the Indian Press raises several important questions, which can only be answered by a Westerner, as any Indian who would dare utter the following statements would immediately be identified with the Sangh parivar:

1) Is the life of a white man more important and dear to the Indian media than the lives of a hundred Indians? Or to put it differently: Is the life of a Christian more sacred than the lives of many Hindus? It would seem so. Because we all remember not so long ago, whether in Punjab or in Kashmir, how militants would stop buses and kill all the Hindus—men, women and children. It even happened recently, when a few of the last courageous Hindus to dare remain in Kashmir were savagely slaughtered in a village, as were the labourers in Himachal Pradesh. Yet, very few voices were raised in the Indian Press condemning it; at least there never was such an outrage as provoked by the murder of Staines. When Hindus are killed in pogroms in Pakistan or Bangladesh, we never witness in the Indian media the like of the tear jerking, posthumous 'interview' of Staines in Star News.

2) This massive outcry on the 'atrocities against the minorities' raises also doubts about the quality and integrity of Indian journalism. Take for instance the rape of the four nuns in Jhabua. Today the Indian Press (and the foreign correspondents—witness Tony Clifton's piece in the last issue of *Newsweek*) are still reporting that it

was a 'religious' rape. Yet I went to Jhabua and met the four adorable nuns, who themselves admitted, along with their bishop George Anatil, that it had nothing to do with religion. It was the doing of a gang of Bhil tribals, known to perpetrate this kind of hateful acts on their own women. Yet today, the Indian Press, the Christian hierarchy and the politicians continue to include the Jhabua rape in the list of the atrocities against the Christians.

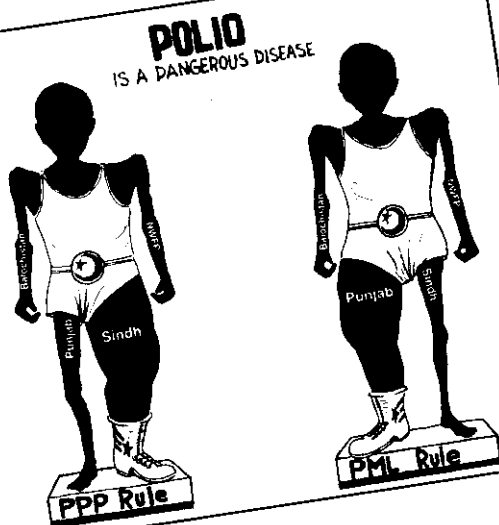
In Wyanad in northern Kerala, it was reported that a priest and four women were beaten up and a Bible was stolen by 'fanatical' Hindus. An FIR was lodged, the communists took out processions all over Kerala to protest against the 'atrocities' and the Press went gaga. Yet as an intrepid reporter from the Calicut office of *The Indian Express* found out, nobody was beaten up and the Bible was safe. Too late: the damage was done and it still is being made use of by the enemies of India.

Finally, even if Dara Singh does belong to the Bajrang Dal, it is doubtful if the 100 others accused do. What is more probable is that like in Wyanad, it is a case of converted tribals versus non-converted tribals, of pent-up jealousies, of old village feuds and land disputes. It is also an outcome of what—it should be said—are the aggressive methods of the Pentecost and seventh Adventists missionaries, known for their muscular ways of converting.

Why does the Indian Press always reflect a Westernised point of view? Why does India's intellectual 'elite', the majority of which happens to be Hindu, always come down so hard on their own culture, their own religion, their own brothers and sisters? Is it because of an eternal feeling of inferiority, which itself is a legacy of British colonisation? Is it because they consider Hindus to be inferior beings—remember the words of Claudius Buchanan, a chaplain attached to the East India Company: "...Neither truth, nor honesty, honour, gratitude, nor charity, is to be found in the breast of a Hindoo"! Is it because the Indian Press is still deeply influenced by Marxist and communist thoughts like it is in Kerala, where the communists have shamelessly and dangerously exploited the Christians issue for their own selfish purpose?

Whatever it is, the harm is done. Because, even though it is not the truth which has been reported from Jhabua, from Wyanad or from the Keonjhar district in Orissa, it has been passed off as the truth and it has been believed to be so by the masses. And the result is that it has split India a little more along religious and castes lines. And finally, Christianity has always striven on martyrdom, on being persecuted. Before the murder of Staines, the Christian story was slowly dying; the culprits of the Jhabua rape would have been condemned and the Wyanad fraud exposed. In one stroke the burning of Staines has insured that it does not die for a long time.

SOUTH ASIA CORRESPONDENT FOR *LE FIGARO FRANCOIS GAUTIER* IN "A WARPED INDIAN MEDIA?" FROM *THE HINDUSTAN TIMES*.



Tick Yes or No.

ITEM NO. 34 in the US non-immigrant visa form asks for some interesting confessions:

34. IMPORTANT: ALL APPLICANTS MUST READ AND CHECK THE APPROPRIATE BOX FOR EACH ITEM:

A visa may not be issued to persons who are within specific categories defined by law as inadmissible to the United States (except when a waiver is obtained in advance). Are any of the following applicable to you?

- Have you ever been afflicted with a communicable disease of public health significance, a dangerous physical or mental disorder, or been a drug abuser or addict? Yes No

- Have you ever been arrested or convicted for any offence or crime even though subject of a pardon, amnesty, or other such legal action? Yes No

- Have you ever been a controlled substance (drug) trafficker, or a prostitute or procure? Yes No

- Have you ever sought to obtain or assist others to obtain a visa, entry into the US or any US immigration benefit by fraud or wilful misrepresentation? Yes No

- Were you deported from the USA within the last 5 years? Yes No

- Do you seek to enter the United States to engage in export control violations, subversive or terrorist activities, or any unlawful purpose? Yes No

- Have you ever ordered, incited, assisted or otherwise participated in the persecution of any person because of race, religion, national origin, or political opinion under the control, direct or indirect, of the Nazi Government of Germany, or of the government of any area occupied by, or allied with the Nazi Government of Germany, or have you ever participated in genocide? Yes No

- Are you a member or representative of a terrorist organisation? Yes No

A YES answer does not automatically signify ineligibility for a visa, but if you answered YES to any of the above, or if you have any question in this regard, personal appearance of this office is recommended. If appearance is not possible at this time, attach a statement of facts in your case to this application.

Second best bad writing

UNIVERSITY OF Chicago professors are accustomed to winning the leading prizes in their fields, but there are a few awards that they would just as soon not receive, as Homi Bhabha found out last month.

The professor of English and Literature earned second-place in the annual Bad Writing Contest sponsored by the journal *Philosophy and Literature*. Held annually since 1995, this contest invites readers to single out "stylistically lamentable" sentences or short passages from published scholarly works.

Bhabha, was recognised for this 55-word-long sentence from his book, *The Location of Culture*:

If, for a while, the ruse of desire is calculable for the uses of discipline soon the repetition of guilt, justification, pseudo-scientific theories, superstition, spurious authorities, and classifications can be seen as the desperate effort to normalise formally the disturbance of a discourse of splitting that violates the rational, enlightened claims of its enunciatory modality.

John Peters, an associate professor at the University of Iowa, nominated the sentence calling it "quite splendid: enunciatory modality, indeed!"

It is unclear whether Peters meant to poke fun at the sentence's cryptic nature or if he was unfamiliar with the phrase, first coined by French deconstructionist Michel Foucault.

Judith Butler of University of California-Berkeley, a close associate of Bhabha's whom he calls "probably one of the ten smartest people on the planet", took first place for a sentence from an article in the journal *Diacritics*.

While he said he was unconcerned that the contest might tarnish academic reputation, Bhabha did note that "to take bits of writing out of context is neither good literary nor philosophical practice. I would have expected more from this journal."

ANDREW KIM IN "PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH HAILED FOR AWFUL WRITING" FROM UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO WEEKLY NEWS.

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Abominably yours



Now that I've been dragged kicking and screaming back to our beloved Subcontinent, what I miss most isn't the bandwidth for Internet connectivity in Boston, it isn't sipping margaritas in a cafe in Macau at dusk, I wouldn't even say it is the freedom to watch lesbian movies without large-bellied little men clad in S-front undies trying to set fire to the box office. I do miss the loos, but.

When god in her infinite wisdom decided to bifurcate the human race into at least two sexes, she laid down the rule that men can do it standing up whereas womyn have to sit down. No fair! In one swell foop she had ordained that Lady and Gentleman would henceforth be unequal, an arbitrary biological edict that has been the cause of countless gender indignities in times to follow. So, as we enter the fourth millennium after creation, we still find that most men are at attention in the loo, although they can sit if they so wish, whereas us girls mandatorily have to squat, except if we are rockclimbers taking a pee break. Boys have a choice, girls don't.

In medieval France, for instance, there was no taboo against men publicly baptising the wheel of an ox-cart while women had to duck behind the vineyard—this is a practice that seems to have been genetically welded into all higher mammals. My he-dog Snot's urinary etiquette is non-existent, and like medieval Frenchmen, Snot seems to be partial towards hub-caps and axles which he will publicly anoint with carefully calibrated squirts so

that he does not run out of juice while half-way through the parking lot. My she-dog Mirinda, on the other hand, like a medieval French lass, will duck behind a bush to discreetly take care of business. Although she can't resist publicly displaying the symbolic kicking-back-the-sod routine at the end.

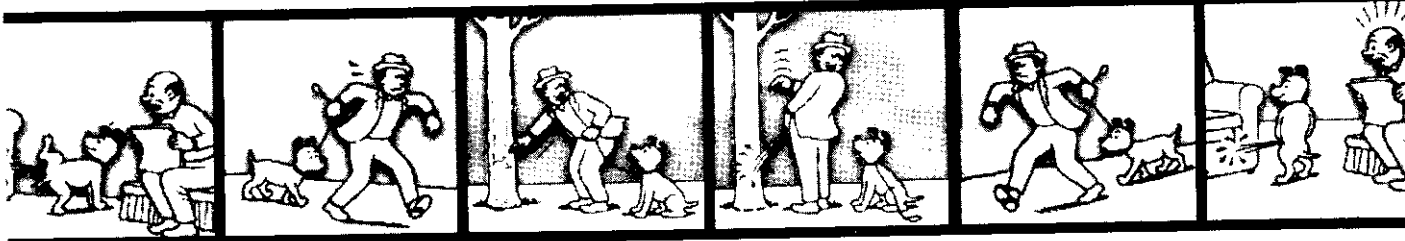
Where was I? Oh, yes, Females Find a Bush is a practice still followed along the Grand Trunk Road. And while doing my footprint rounds in Tibet recently I noticed that male hominoids on the high plateau actually sit down, even when they just have to go for a short. This you may find hard to believe, but I saw it with my own eyes. It probably has more to do with the intricacies of taking off the *chuba* while on a tight deadline, or it may have to do with protecting the sprinkler from wind chill. Be that as it may, it would nicely explain why the Chinese would want to occupy the autonomous region—so as to bring Tibetans into line with the rest of a mainland of 500 million men wearing zippers.

In a No-fly Zone like Tibet, things are relatively straightforward. But designing the optimum unisex water closet for the rest of world is not easy, and calls for the same skills that are needed to mould an optimum ergonomically unisex bicycle seat. Any woman who has driven for some amount of time on a Hero bicycle will tell you that it is not designed for heroines. I don't know about you, but after two hours on one of those things I feel like I have just given birth to quintuplets, and need stitches.

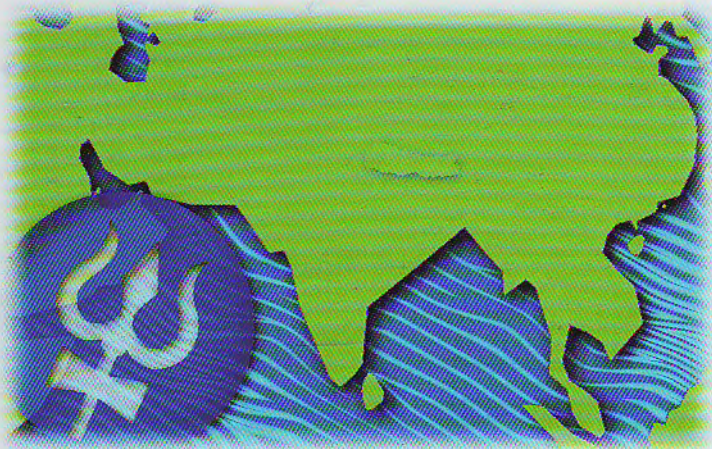
My so-called male friends, on the other hand, don't seem to mind being nearly castrated by every pothole, of which there are many. These men are the true Heros of Modern India.

Lavatory engineers throughout the ages have grappled with the conundrum of a sex-no-bar bathroom. At lav labs in industrialised countries, they made a major breakthrough when they installed those smart urinals with laser-guided flushes. No such high-tech stuff for girls. What I want to ask the engineering fraternity is: when are you guys going to design a toilet seat that is gender sensitive, automatically detects the persuasion of user, thereby raising or lowering itself? When are men going to have smart wee-wees equipped with satellite Global Positioning System so that they can hit the bull's eye every time with little or no collateral damage to innocent civilians?

It's no piddly matter. For one thing it will restore harmony within my own conjugal life since my present bedmate has poor aim and relies too much on gravity. The Japanese are most advanced in toilet technology. (And in toilet humour, I may safely add, having once had a meal with a Japanese colleague who, I realised just as the wasabe hit my sinus with some force, had a repertoire of wisecracks that were sexist, ageist and dealt with bodily functions—all in one joke.) Our only hope is for the Japanese to come up with a Sitman—a loo robot that will automatically put the seat in an upright position when it detects an approaching male.



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