HIMĀL
SOUTH ASIAN

March 2001

Bangladesh BDT 60 Bhutan BTN 60 India INR 50 Nepal NPR 50
Maldives MLR 40 Pakistan PKR 80 Sri Lanka SLR 80 Elsewhere USD 4/GBP 3

Movie Wars in the Badlands
South Asian Clothesline
Work in Progress: Nepali Nationalism
Patents, Private Charity and Public Health

THE SECRET OF KATHMANDU

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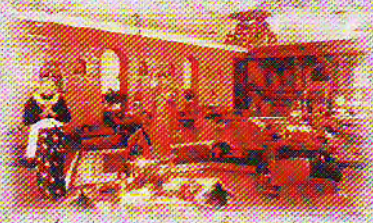

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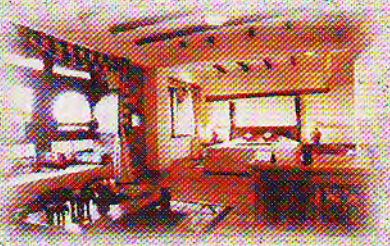

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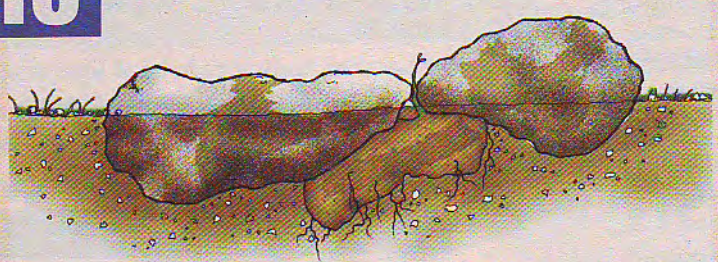

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South Asian Clothesline

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Himal is published and distributed by
Himalmedia Pvt Ltd
GPO Box 7251, Kathmandu,
Nepal
Tel: +977-1-543333/34/35/36
Fax: 521013
email: info@himalmedia.com
editors@himalmedia.com
marketing@himalmedia.com
circulation@himalmedia.com
http://www.himalmag.com
ISSN 1012 9804
Library of Congress Control Number
88 912882
Imagesetting at: Polyimage
Printed at: Jagadamba Press,
Kathmandu
Tel: +977-1-521393, 536390

Himal was a Himalayan journal from 1987 to March of 1996, when it became a South Asian magazine.

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Cover: An art-work depicting a *chaubandi cholo* (four-tie top) by Nepali renaissance man (poet, artist, dramatist) **Balkrishna Sama** (1903-1981). Design by **Bilash Rai**.

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India	Central News Agency (P) Ltd., 23/90 Connaught Circus, New Delhi 110001. *Tel: +91-1-7529385/777 0536*
Maldives	Asrafee Book Shop, 1/44 Chandhanee Magu, P.O. Box 2053, Male. *Tel: +960-32-3424*
Nepal (DEMAND DRAFT ONLY)	Himalmedia Pvt Ltd, GPO Box 7251, Kathmandu, *Tel: +977-1-543333-36*
Sri Lanka	Lake House Book Shop,100, Sir Chittampalam, Gardiner Mawatha, Colombo-2. *Tel: +94-1-432105/430581/430582*

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Subscribers sending payments directly to the Kathmandu office from countries other than Nepal should do so at the rate quoted for "Elsewhere" by demand draft/cheque in US Dollars/GB Pounds drawn in favour of "Himalmedia Pvt Ltd" at Circulation Department, HIMAL, GPO Box 7251, Kathmandu, Nepal.

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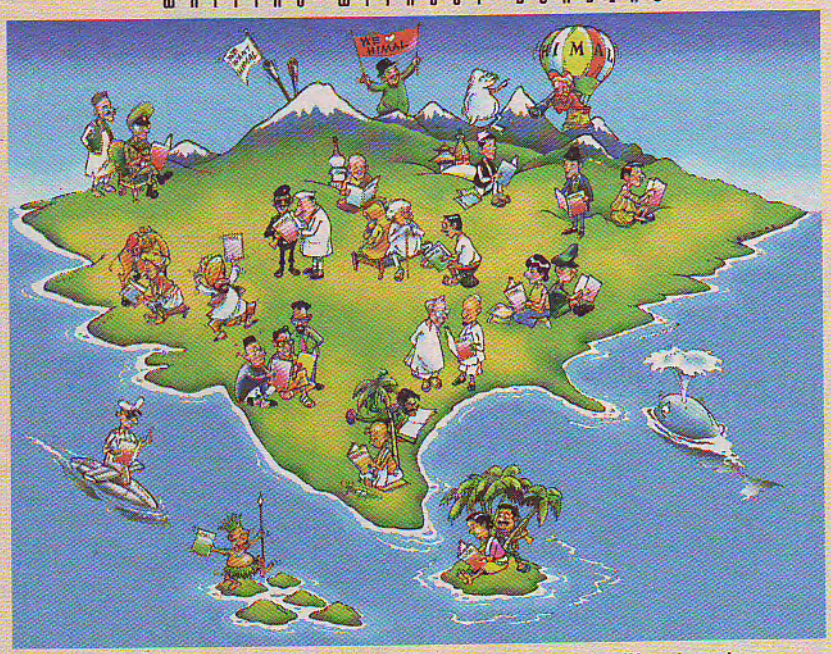

Petty nationalism and short-term geopolitics have kept South Asians apart and hindered progress. By highlighting rifts, an insular press has reinforced prejudice. Himal South Asian is an independent, world-class magazine for South Asians. A monthly that spots trends and offer analyses from a non-nationalistic, regionwide perspective. It tells Pakistanis about India, Indians about Bangladesh, Bangladeshis about Srilanka, and rest of the world about this long neglected region. Tapping the region's best minds, Himal serves as an intellectual bridge between divided peoples.

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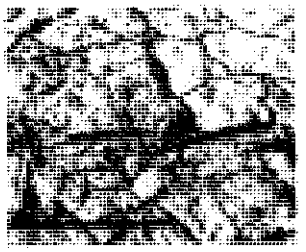
Why the dependency?

The February 2001 Himal provided very informative articles on Kathmandu's December riots, Kashmir, and health care in South Asia. However, the article "Deeds, declarations and desertification" was disappointing with its tone of the poor being victimised—again and again—by rich donor countries. Other than more meetings, seminars, conferences, consultancies and paper reports, the article did not elaborate funding needs to address desertification.



The author's attitude is that the poor countries cannot do anything without donor funding and donor-sponsored seminars. This is an unfortunate admission of dependency which may explain the poor transfer of technology and development processes (i.e., "traditional knowledge") that we see today.

Nepal's successful process of returning forest management to communities has not been transferred to other South Asian countries that are unwilling to abandon old colonial and vested interest policies of centralised forestry management. Is this the result of donor ambivalence? Or, is it government fear of people's participation, or of decentralisation, or of innovation and self-help?

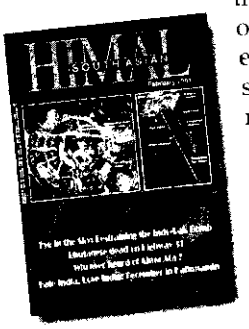
Tom Arens
Pokhara

Remote heartbeat

I enjoyed reading the "Hrithik Roshan" articles by Pratyoush Onta, Tapan Kumar Bose and Shanuj VC in Himal South Asia (February, 2001 issue). Well argued, very learned and lucid. However, I have a word of caution. Maybe we need not rely purely on the Western model/logic for analysing South Asian societies and events. Our discussion/dialogue has to extend beyond the set Western ideological parameters, and the consequent predictable conclusions.

An urban "liberal" elite (be it a politician, an academic or a journalist) based primarily in metropolitan cities (or trained therein) has been shaping the tone and tenor of this discourse. Well, this is not something new. But the cause for concern is that the urban elite of all hues is getting increasingly alienated from the heartbeat of the rural areas/small towns in South Asian countries. Thus, the remedies/solutions recommended for social conflict and challenges appear simplistic.

Here is an example. In the 1980s, when the Punjab problem was at its peak, the urban elite and the "parachute journalists" had no time to study the paranoid feeling among the Sikh peasantry. The farmers feared that the Green Revolution may reach a plateau, the farm inputs (fertilisers, etc) may become too expensive, and the soil may lose its fertility. This was compounded by a deep sense of insecurity among the Sikhs as many young men were turning to drugs and cutting their hair and beard. Meanwhile the urban elite was resorting to a peculiar analysis and setting up an esoteric agenda to "solve" the Punjab problem. It was only the genius of the people, especially those living in rural areas/small towns, which prevented a virtual communal bloodbath.



We are now living in extremely dangerous times. The different sections of the urban elite in South Asia (including important institutions), which at one time provided checks and balance against excesses, are now openly opting for an incestuous relationship.

The South Asian discourse/debate must also include basic issues of governance (simple things as maintaining law and order) instead of relating everything to royalists/saffron brigade/, ISI/RAW, or media/neighbouring country. Attention needs to be paid to the aspirations/viewpoints of the majority of population that live in rural areas. Also, other contributing factors such as environmental (which has a direct bearing on the complex response system of the rural and other sections of the society) must be studied.

Swaraj Chauhan
New Delhi

Errata

In Sandhya Srinivasan's article "Who's afraid of Alma Ata?" (February 2001), the lines, "The Kerala model is drifting far from its much-vaunted roots and towards the American model. In the process, 40 million people are losing their health care coverage." should read "The Kerala model of health care is drifting towards the American model, which deprives 40 million people of care."

Further, the sentence "In India the 1998-99 National Family Health Survey found that infant mortality rates in the nine states surveyed, had gone up." should read "The 1998-99 National Family Health Survey found that infant mortality rates in nine states actually went up since the 1992-93 survey."

- editors

Down with patriotism

The February issue of Himal was particularly enjoyable because so much of it was directed towards undermining petty nationalism of the kind cultivated at the mass level by politicians seeking short-term gains. The Focus section made a bold attempt at coming to grips with the phenomenon in Nepal. Barry Bearak's story on the massacre in Kashmir pointed to the complicity of the Indian security forces in aggravating the problems of that unfortunate state and heightening tension levels in the region. And Salman Shahid's nostalgic recounting of his visits to India, though flavoured with a dash of high-society life, is an example of the kind of domestically rooted cosmopolitanism that the people of the Subcontinent can aspire to.

Which brings me to the one jarring note in an otherwise faultless issue. Ayesha Akram's obituary of Noor Jehan makes a glowing reference to the singer's "fiercely patriotic" persona. I thought the purpose of a magazine like Himal was to get people to eschew "fierce patriotism". Noor Jehan's was a rare talent and deserves the praise of all music lovers, irrespective of nationality. But our evaluation of exponents of universal forms of human expression, like singers and musicians, do not have to be supplemented or contaminated by reference to sectarian virtues like 'patriotism' that are extraneous to the art form. Such references only serve to detract from their real achievements. Let us instead mourn the passing of her musical genius and leave it to the official machinery to celebrate her 'patriotism'.

Ashutosh Ganguly
Patna

BHUTAN

DARK CLOUDS BEHIND THE SILVER LINING?

FOR THE first time since Bhutanese refugees set foot on Nepali soil exactly a decade ago, a group of Bhutanese officials drove into the refugee camps in Jhapa and Morang districts in southeast Nepal this January. The euphoria and excitement generated by the joint verification team's visit among the nearly 100,000 refugee population housed in UNHCR-administered camps was palpable. And the refugees may rightly have cause to exult—after ten years in exile they see some light at the end of the tunnel.

But is this first glimmer of hope likely to lead to early, or even eventual, repatriation? Moreover, if the refugees do make the journey home, will they be allowed to pick up the pieces from where they left, or will they be expected to start all over again elsewhere? Even as the refugee community savours the moment, surely many among them are wondering whether this is finally the home stretch or yet another instance of the Bhutanese government skillfully tiding over a difficult time in the negotiations.

The establishment of the joint verification team seven years after it was first mooted and the actual visit to the camps come in the wake of a resurgence of concern in the international community over the problem of Bhutanese refugees in Nepal. Much as Bhutan may publicly claim otherwise, recent diplomatic initiatives have certainly contributed to the sudden conciliatory tone adopted by Bhutan, which has by now developed the diplomatic technique of prevarication to perfection against a hapless Nepali side led by bumbling politicians.

The continued presence of armed Bodo militants in the kingdom's southern forests and the rejection of persistent Indian pleas to allow their forces inside Bhutan to flush them out of hiding, has also had an impact on Indo-Bhutan relations, and has had its ramifications on the Bhutanese approach to the bilateral talks with Nepal. The framework of Indo-Bhutan understanding and equations in the Nepal-Bhutan dialogue may have been further altered with recent developments in this regard, particularly the killing of Bhutanese nationals in India (attributed by India to Bhutan-based National Democratic Front of Bodo Land and to India-friendly Bodo Liberation Tiger Force by Bhutan). (*see Himal, February 2001*)

Whatever the reasons behind Thimphu's sudden change of stance, the refugees are not complaining. Indeed, surprising all observers, Bhutanese officials were warmly received in all the camps. Despite concerns over their security there were reportedly even scenes of warm hugs between old friends. The visitors assured the refugees that the government was willing and eager to repatriate all Bhutanese very soon. The fact that the Bhutanese have assigned a fluent Nepali speaker to deal with the situation, till this assignment the director of tourism, is also taken by some to show Thimphu's conciliatory tilt.

The actual verification process is to start soon once offices are established in Jhapa in February/March. So does this mean the problem of Bhutanese refugees, who have languished in these camps for a decade now, is coming to an end? Has the beginning of the end finally begun? As much as the refugees and their well-wishers wish this were true, it will be good to be aware of what may yet be dark clouds behind the silver lining.

Foremost on the minds of concerned observers is the uncomfortable question of categorisation of camp residents into one of four categories—people who have been forcibly evicted, people who have emigrated, non-Bhutanese, and people who have committed criminal acts. The acceptance by the Nepali side of these categories, during one of the bilateral ministerial meetings led by Sher Bahadur Deuba of the Nepali Congress, is seen as a grievous mistake, for the categorisation should have had no bearing on Nepal's stand on the return of the refugees. The categorisation, and what to do about it, will be a major sticking point in the incipient repatriation exercise should Thimphu want to put a brake on the proceedings. Indeed, if the Bhutanese side does not drop its insistence on this sticky and messy issue, the verification exercise cannot be expected to go far. (Unless, of course, Nepal is willing to go by anything that Bhutan says.)

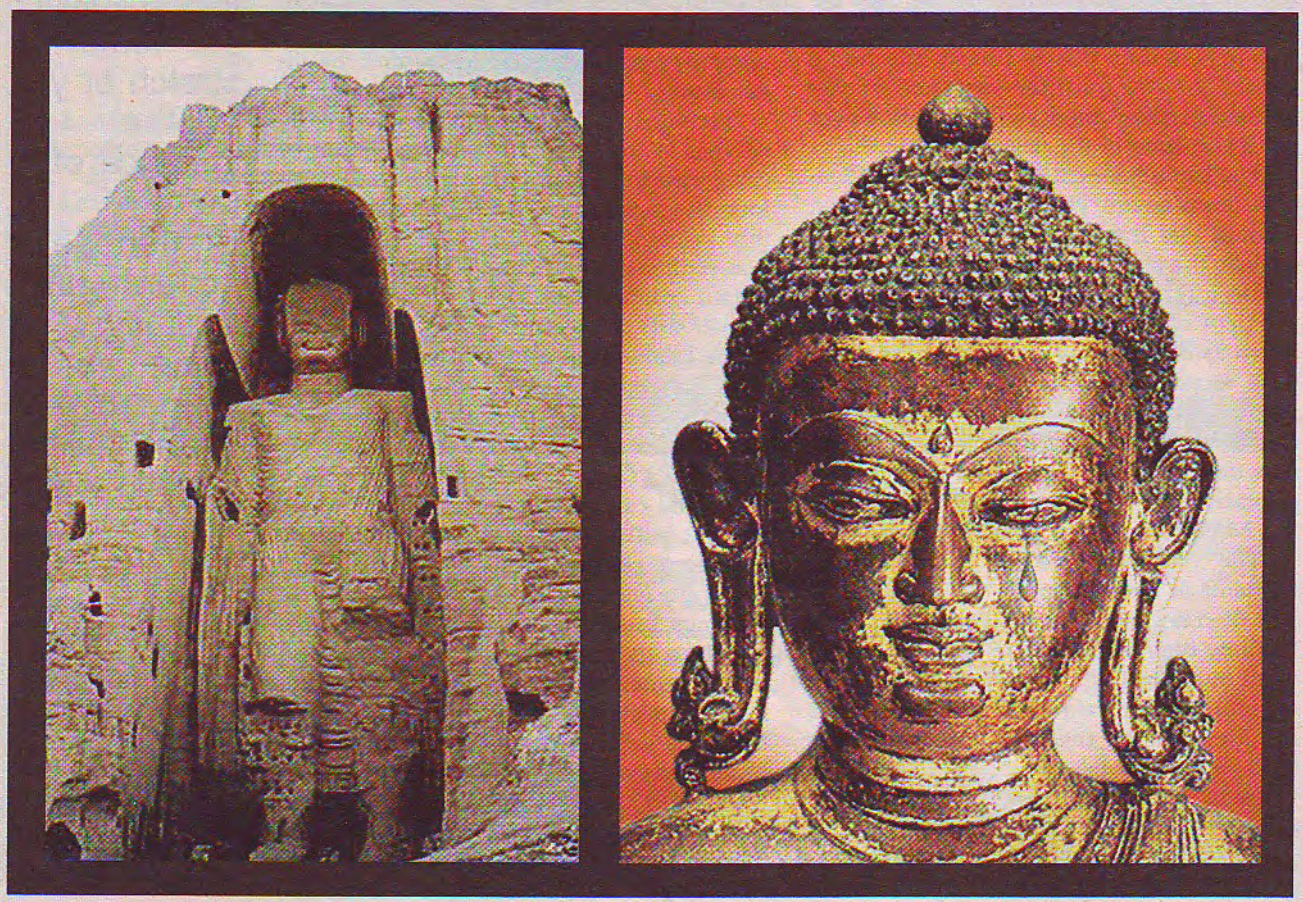
Should the categorisation hurdle be crossed somehow and there is agreement that simple verification to determine whether or not a person is a Bhutanese is sufficient,

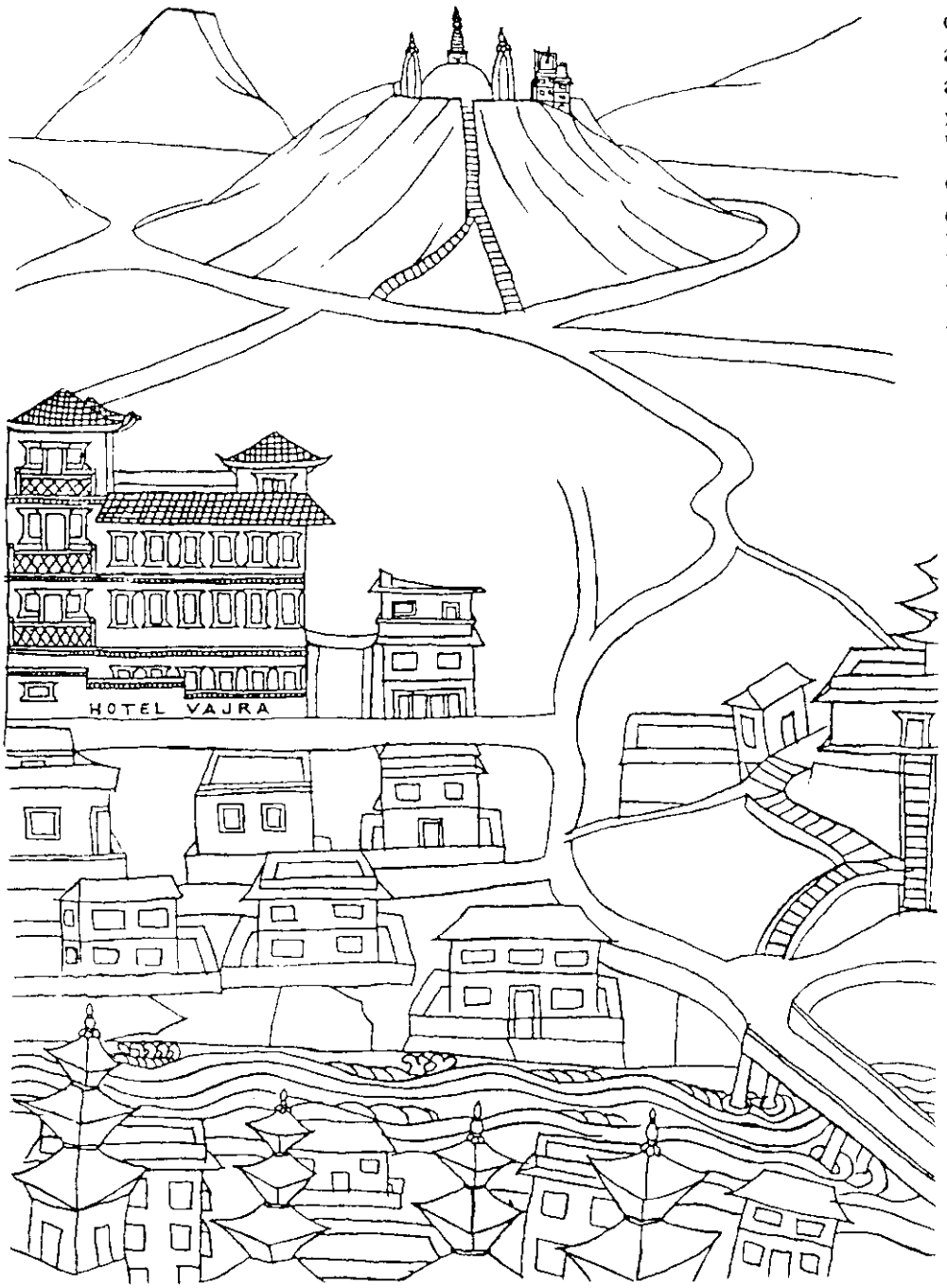
Even as the refugee community savours the moment, surely many among them are wondering whether this is finally the home stretch or yet another instance of the Bhutanese government skillfully tiding over a difficult time in the negotiations.

and that those found to be Bhutanese nationals will be repatriated, the next difficulty lies in finding a place for repatriation. Because, despite repeated concerns expressed over the Bhutanese government's resettlement of other people on land belonging to refugees, the resettlement programme continues and, tellingly, even overlapped with the visit of the Thimphu government delegation to the camps. This could either mean that the current Bhutanese goodwill is suspect or that they have other plans to resettle the Jhapa and Morang returnees. The comments by a visiting Danish delegation to Bhutan that their government stood ready to help the repatriation of refugees, in Bhutan, Nepal or a 'third country' is significant.

The stubborn manner in which the Bhutanese authorities have continued with the resettlement of northern Bhutanese on land the refugees left behind (although ofcourse the claim should be verified) is disconcerting for more than one reason. If, on the one hand, it creates doubts about Bhutan's sincerity of purpose, in the longer term it means that Bhutan will have succeeded in creating a problem she did not have and others are grappling with elsewhere to solve—violence in a mixed community. For, if the authorities are hoping that offers of compensatory land in the north is one way of making sure refugees do not return (in the past, southern Bhutanese have rejected government offers to shift them to the north, or alternatively the government made such an offer knowing it would be refused), they might be in for a surprise.

Ten years in humiliating exile have reinforced the refugee community's resolve to return home—anywhere where they have a right to call home. And if the refugee leadership is wise, it will not use this offer as an excuse to stop people from returning. Indeed, if they are vengeful, they will encourage returning refugees to settle outside of their traditional homeland in the south because such a move will give Bhutan what the rulers claim they wanted to avoid in the first place—domination of the north by southern Bhutanese.





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, ivycovered walls and Hindu statuary is a calm oasis over looking, chaotic Kathmandu.

Time.

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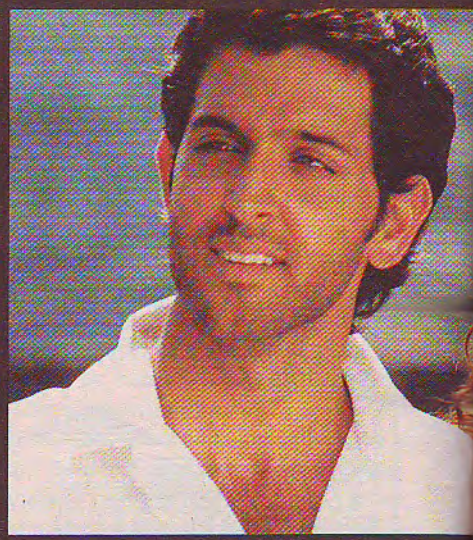


Popular Cinema and Conflicts in South Asia

Conflict as Masala

Hindi cinema feeds the mass imagination of most of South Asia, so what are we in for when Bombay's production houses start feeding lightweight Indian nationalism to this mass?

by ***Jaganath Guha***

Once upon a time there was a Hollywood film director named John Ford who wisecracked, "Whenever in doubt, I make a Western." Since Ford directed a phenomenal 150 pictures, both silent and talkie, it is no surprise that the horse opera became the staple diet of the American film audience. And once the film industry migrated from cloudy New York to sunny California, its horses could easily gallop through cacti-speckled photogenic deserts, its guns could roar along the Mesa Valley, and its baddies could bite the colourful red dust.

Then the Americans fought the first and second world wars on foreign soil, on the winning side, so horse operas were soon and easily enough supplemented by the other obvious addition to the Hollywood stable – the war movie. It was the same stew, only the garnishing was different. And Ford's wisecrack holds good even today, when we see a celebrated cult director like Terence Malik return to filmmaking after 18 years, with the war movie *The Thin Red Line*.

War movies and horse operas, cowboys and Red Indians, soldier against soldier, man against man. This is the right stuff for drama, because drama is conflict, and what better conflict than war, always so readily available? Heroes are created easily, myth built simplistically, life shown to be larger than life. Though they had witnessed the horrors of war at their own doorstep, the Europeans took a lesson from the American film industry in their own productions. The Soviet and East bloc countries produced war movies using almost the same recipe as Hollywood's. War movies became an important product in the worldwide film market.

Interestingly, the copycat Indian film industry could not, did not duplicate the war movie for a long time. The horse opera they successfully copied, though, with a plethora of films about dacoits, or *bhagis*, that earned the dubious sobriquet '*dal-roti* western', akin to the Italian spaghetti western. But war movies eluded their grasp for two reasons. One, the Indian audience had no experience of war, and therefore the filmmakers had no great nationalist hype to profit from. Second, Hindi film directors, unlike their American and European colleagues had no direct personal acquaintance with war, since they had never been conscripted. The Punjabis and Bengalis among them may have had some experience of the civil war that came with Partition, but that was hardly the stuff to make heroes out of – only villains all around. With both Hindus and Muslims in the audience, Partition could not deliver the right cowboys and injuns. Nationalist fervour is difficult to rouse when the story is about your own burning house, especially when the fire is always smouldering.

And so, Hindi war movies never really took off, neither did civil war movies on Hindu-Muslim clashes, the events of Partition, and the matter of refugees and mass migrations along paths defined by blood. It was also true that Partition was not a lived experience and meant almost nothing to Indians other than the Bengalis and Punjabis. There was no significant Punjabi film industry in the 1950s and Punjabi directors and writers working in the Hindi film world gave conflict a wide berth. Barring exceptions like Nemai Ghosh's *Chinnamool* and the films of Ritwick Ghatak, the Bengali film industry also avoided conflict as a theme to be explored. Even with Ghatak, the experience of Partition remained imprisoned in nostalgia, never a noble emotion, however painful its portrayal may be.

For decades, reflections of the major social-political crises of the Subcontinent, such as the conflict in Kashmir, or the clash of Indian and Pakistani arms, never appeared on the popular screen. Ofcourse, Kashmir did appear regularly, but strictly for is exotic locales, allowing moments for the lead male and female characters to yodel, and cavort amidst the glades and snowfields. Kashmir also had its belles, and the *Kashmir ki Kali* was the only admissible representative of a state that remained continuously a battlefront. Like the very real undercurrents in the Valley, every other potential subject for a war script was blocked out, as for example the takeover of Hyderabad Deccan or Junagadh. Popular cinema took an unshakeable position of studied silence towards events that could provide a backdrop for war, even civil war. Harsh censorship laws on films certainly helped to maintain the silence.

Stillborn genre

The pursuit of the Nehruvian dream of development created an anticipatory euphoria that also helped drive other important issues out of the story frame. The first jolt to that dream came in with the Sino-Indian border clash in 1962, and the second during the limited armed conflict between India and Pakistan in 1965. Nationalist fervour certainly came into play, with Hindi popular cinema responding with a few feeble jingoistic efforts like *Hindustan ki Kasam* and *Haqeeqat*. But they were doomed to disaster at the box office. Even the Bangladesh war of liberation of 1971 could not revive the stillborn war movie genre.

Images from Mission Kashmir, Fiza *(above), and Naseerudin Shah in* Sarfarosh.

Aamir Khan and Naseerudin Shah, too, have gone nationalistic.

After *Hindustan ki Kasam* and *Haqqeeqat* bombed in the 1960s, Hindi cinema did not attempt to reanimate the war movie during the 70s and 80s. In the 90s, however, the genre was exhumed, dusted off, and presented in technically slick packaging. It was the turn of political events in the Subcontinent which dictated this renewed interest of the production houses. The simmering situation in Kashmir came to a boil. After Operation Bluestar, Punjab erupted in turmoil. Civil war ignited in Assam, and fighting consumed the Northeast. The call for Tamil liberation in neighbouring Sri Lanka reverberated in the Indian mainland.

But these events remained localised occurrences in the periphery of interest, sending only small ripples into the Indian heartland where the Hindi film audience was concentrated. Popular cinema therefore ignored them all, for a long time. Meanwhile, state controlled radio and television churned out standard platitudes about India's 'sovereignty' and 'territorial integrity'. Yet, all the while hawks were on the rise in the Indian body politic, and so was the upsurge of Hindu fanaticism and militancy, leading to the razing of the Babri mosque in 1992. The political ground had shifted by the mid-1990s, and finally cinema too responded with vehemence.

War movies now found a niche in the Indian market, including films about 'civil war', focusing on the tensions within. An impressive list of productions hit the popular screen: *Dill Se, Bombay, Maachis, Border, Refugee, Terrorist, Sarfarosh, Fiza, Mission Kashmir*. Each of these films was expensively produced, lavishly mounted, and made by talented directors – ranging from Mani Ratnam and Santosh Sivan from the South, to J.P. Datta and John Mathew Mathan from Bombay.

These big-budget productions, which raked in sizeable profit from the great Indian Film Bazaar, marked a quantum shift in market conditions. War movies that peddled unabashed nationalism became suddenly acceptable. How did these happen so suddenly, and why not earlier during the five decades following independence? What nexus does this phenomenon have with the rise of religious fanaticism and militancy? These are important questions to ask today, and whose answers extend far beyond the confines of popular cinema and mass entertainment.

Civil war movies

Broadly, the answers emerge at two different levels. One is the macro social-political situation and the other the micro situation within media itself. Within the world of media, the opening up of satellite television and the broadening of competitive telecasts has introduced heavy competition for the motion picture market. Producers have been forced to look for new subjects and treatments to wean audiences who had all-too-quickly defected to the small screen, as well as innovative techniques offering a grandeur that the television screen cannot provide, and new ideas that have necessarily to be explosive and controversial.

There was no need for innovation as long as the audience was captive, and you could simply rehash the tried and tested formulas, nicely packaged with songs and dances. But now war movies, even civil war movies, with hitherto untouched themes like insurgency and cross-border terrorism, emerged from the production houses. These films provide the possibilities of competing with television, bringing together as they do conflict in the storyboard, action/fighting, and the pyrotechnics possible with new celluloid technology.

While all this was happening on the media front, Hindu fundamentalism was flexing its muscles in the Ganga heartland. The destruction of the Babri Masjid was its first explosive expression, and for the first time competing TV channels brought such events to homes throughout the Subcontinent, on the hour, every hour. These events could no longer be ignored as isolated incidents in the border regions. Both Hindus and Muslims were confronted with the blatant expression of antagonism that had long remained below the surface. Meanwhile, the onslaught of TV news did not allow apathy, nor ignorance. The big screen, already under pressure, had no option but to respond. And it responded, by going all the way.

However, by its very nature, popular cinema is unconcerned about either analysing or depicting the truth. This was purely commercial material – unadulterated nationalism makes the cash register ring. In the flock of films that used insurgency or cross-border terrorism to sell tickets at the box office, there are a few which have more serious intent, probably to provide what the directors think is 'meaningful' entertainment. Two such are Gulzar's *Maachis* and John Mathew Mathan's *Sarfarosh*. Let's take a hard look at them.

Love and gore

Maachis traces the conversion of the young male protagonist into a

terrorist in Indian Punjab. A young man encounters human rights violations by the state and the most affected victim is a member of his own family, very predictably innocent. The protagonist is soon inducted into the cloak-and-dagger world of a terrorist outfit. But this is popular cinema, so he escapes into some breathtaking mountain locations for training, and there is time for some haunting melodies. Enter the love interest, the female protagonist sent undercover to eliminate the leader of the outfit. Expectedly, mayhem ensues and there is much letting of blood and gore. The hero ends up in jail, and the girl comes to his cell. Her ultimate act of love is the cyanide pill that she passes to him through her last kiss.

There it was—no mention of the issues behind the Punjab crisis, no recurrence of human rights violations after that one time, no seeking to explore political questions. All that we are left with is the hint, or subtle innuendo, that the mountain location is in POK, or 'Pakistan Occupied Kashmir'. The visual clues are scattered about to indicate that it is the 'foreign hand' that corrupts innocent Indian youth. All said, Gulzar has used the situation in Punjab to give us a drama, but he does not scratch the surface of society.

The foreign devil is presented much more violently, blatantly and malevolently in *Sarfarosh*. Here, he is a Pakistani ghazal singer who carries arms into India for ISI, the dark Inter Services Intelligence agency. John Mathew Mathan—neither Hindu nor Muslim, neither Punjabi nor Kashmiri, but an extremely capable Malayali maker of ad-films—could have brought a more detached and, therefore, daring perspective to bear on the subject. Instead, his film openly subverts some of the very basic democratic and liberal-minded answers to the challenge posed by Hindu fundamentalism.

The 'Hindutva' leadership maintains that Muslims in India support a culture foreign to the soil, and the only way they can become loyal Indians is if they surrender, severing their links with pan-Islamic culture (read ISI). So absurd a contention can only be repudiated by a democratic-liberal response based on facts, and history, and the reality that Islam is inextricably a part of the mix that is today's Indian culture, everything from the graphic arts, to architecture, and of course to Hindustani music.

Sarfarosh as a film consciously and openly subverts all the democratic-liberal implications of the mixed heritage of Indian art and culture. The villain uses the cover of his popularity as a ghazal singer to smuggle arms into India. See this in the light of Shiv Sena supremo Bal Thackeray's refusal to allow the Ghulam Alis and the Mehndi Hassans to perform in his sacred Mumbai, and the subtle reactionary political-cultural position of *Sarfarosh* becomes amply clear.

The portrayal of the ghazal-singer-as-villain, ironically played by the Naseerudin Shah, very skillfully blends great artistic sensibility with mindless brutality. When he rips off a ear of a little goat with his teeth he reminds us of a Benvenuto Cellini, the Italian Renaissance artist whose diaries tell us of his double life as a brutal professional hitman.

It seems indeed a travesty that the script chooses a singer of the ghazal, which is the most popular form of Hindustani classical music, and the one form most accessible to the masses. This is where the travesty of *Sarfarosh* lies—carrying what must be construed as an anti-Islamic message through the very medium that catches the largest audience in India.

Celluloid subversion

It is easy to dismiss mainstream commercial cinema as mindless nonsense, and that is precisely the way India's intelligentsia and press treats it. This is why the insidious advance of cinema as ultra-nationalist propaganda has not been flagged as a most dangerous trend, one which is bound to lead to more Indian and South Asian instability.

The commercial visual medium manipulates images and situations to create and amplify enemity. It did not do so for decades, but now, responding to market dicates and political transformation, it has begun to. Yet the impact of ultra-nationalist cinema on the masses, and the depth and dimensions of its influence right down to the grassroots should never be underestimated.

Even more dangerous are the films that claim to be 'different'—like *Terrorist*, which tells the story of a Tamil Eelam woman guerrilla who volunteers as a human bomb. She crosses over the thin strip of sea from Sri Lanka to the Subcontinental mainland. However, she is unable to proceed with her destined role because she finds herself pregnant. Here again, terrorism is shown to be imported. Once again, the political issues relating to the Eelam struggle never surface.

Popular cinema, and often its 'serious' counterparts, never try to reach for the fundamental ideological or moral questions behind political movements. And when you take that away from a portrayal of war, or civil war, what do you have left? Dangerous sensationalism, and the easy opportunity to subvert a democratic and liberal consciousness.

Good popular films are made either from fact or fantasy. That has been true from the very genesis of the fiction film form—either a movie belongs to the genre of Edwin Porter's *Great Train Robbery* or Georges Melies' *Fantastic Journey*. But today the best popular films are being crafted using a dangerous cocktail of both fact and fantasy, which confuses the mass audience and easily leads it astray. Thus, with the rise of the hawks in the Indian political scene, one must be alert to how much of a destablising and war-mongering role the commercial film industry has begun to take on recently. No longer is it possible for the educated and sensible to ignore or vacantly enjoy Bombay's commercial output and say it is merely harmless opium for the masses. For the masses can get high on this stuff.

In which Lollywood gives Bollywood those ones

How Lahore is reacting to anti-Pakistan Indian films with anti-India Pakistani films, and how the Press Relations Department could not care more.

After fighting over Kashmir on the diplomatic front for decades, Pakistan and India have taken their disputes into the cinema hall, which can only fuel further animosity. Even as Bollywood learns to demonise Pakistan, a series of films released in the past few months by the Pakistani film industry, popularly called Lollywood for being centred in Lahore, have Indian human rights abuse in Kashmir as their themes.

"These movies are our rejoinder to a number of Indian films that linked Pakistani forces and intelligence agencies to subversive activities on Indian soil, particularly the insurgency in disputed Kashmir," says film critic Shahid Naqvi in the Urdu-language newspaper *Ausaf*. But not all associated with Pakistan's film industry agree that the medium should be used for political purposes. "We should be using the popular medium of films to reduce rifts and differences among people," says Ejaz Gul, managing director of the government-run National Film Development Corporation.

Gul believes that films do have the potential to create wars: "Since the people of India and Pakistan have access to each other's movies and television programmes, the producers should seize the opportunity to promote peace and harmony instead of promoting themes that fuel hatred." Pakistani journalist Najeem Haider Zaidi, who works with a domestic news agency, agrees, "Peace is not an isolated effort made by governments."

Cross-border love: Terey Piyar Mein.

However, a large number of cinema viewers in Pakistan who have been put off by portrayals of geopolitics in Hindi films think that Lollywood's new productions, *Terey Piyar Mein* and *Musalman* are a fitting response. "They have put down Pakistan and its forces over the last few years, (presenting) a bunch of lies," protests one cine-goer, a student at a girls college in Lahore.

Still going strong in the cinema halls after its release in December, *Terey Piyar Mein* is about an Indian Sikh girl who falls in love with a young Pakistani man during a visit to some of the Sikh holy shrines in Pakistan. The boy follows her to India, where he is caught by an Indian Army officer who himself happens to be in love with the girl. *Terey Piyar Mein* ends with Kashmiri militants helping the Pakistani boy escape jail and cross the border into Pakistan, Sikh girl firmly in hand.

In keeping with the government's allegations about Indian atrocities in Kashmir, the film shows the Indian officer torturing the Pakistani man in jail. "I am glad that we have finally started using cinema for rousing feelings of nationalism in our young people," said one elderly woman watching the film in Islamabad. "India has made many movies against freedom fighters in Kashmir that are viewed by our young."

She was referring to the popularity of Indian films *Roja, Border, Mission Kashmir* and *Refugee* in the Pakistani home video market. These films, which depict the Indian view of the Kashmir issue, are being secretly rented after a ban by the government, which ofcourse dubs them all as Indian propaganda. Video

rental stores in Islamabad report brisk demand for Bollywood films, including the 'anti-Pakistan' ones.

Terey Piyar Mein is not the first effort by producer Shahzad Gul to cash in on the 'anti-India' sentiment in Pakistan, quite naturally exacerbated by the rash of 'anti-Pakistan' films out of Bombay. A year ago, Gul produced the highly successful *Ghar Kab Aao Gey*, which centered on subversive activities of Indian intelligence agencies in Pakistan. "It was the success of that movie which has made me work on such themes, as I realised how a majority in this country thinks," Gul confesses. What Gul does not mention is the help he got from the Pakistani Army's Inter Services Press Relations Department in shooting many of the scenes. *Terey Piyar Mein*, too, was made with technical support from the military's public relations wallahs.

Proxy celluloid war.

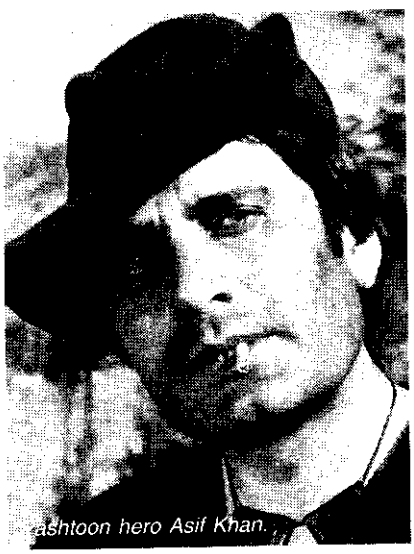
The military has provided financial and technical support to the state-run Pakistan Television in preparing the popular drama series *Angar Wadi* (The Valley of Flames), also dealing with the Indian military operations in Kashmir.

Critics and peace activists, however, are concerned that by exploiting and cashing in on nationalist sentiments the producers of these films and serials are hurting efforts to build trust between the people of Pakistan and India. "What are we trying to achieve through these movies? Simply, indoctrinating people with the idea that we cannot live in harmony with those across the border," says Lahore journalist Najeem Haider Zaidi. *(IPS)*

Pashtoons and the Terrorist Film

The success of the Pashtoon people in the martial arena has been offset by their defeat in the sphere of cultural representation. Just look at the new crop of Hindi films.

by ***Rahimullah Yusufzai***



ashtoon hero Asif Khan.

There is a strikingly curious paradox about the relationship of the Pashtoons, otherwise Pakhtoons or Pathans, with music and the performing arts in general. In this deeply religious and conservative society, the musician is held in a certain contempt. The use of the derogatory term *damm* (drummer) that is often employed against singers and performing artistes is an index of this low regard and social status. And yet, Pashtoon society as a whole is very music-minded. This fondness for music is almost on a par with their other legendary passions—guns, fine food and having a good laugh.

This paradoxical relationship has extracted a cultural price. For years, social stigma has deterred young Pashtoons from taking to the performing arts. Without Pashtoons being active in the cultural sphere of modern-day Pakistan, their society became susceptible to negative depictions on cultural screens dominated by other ethnic groups. Other ethnic groups, particularly those against whom the Pashtoons have fought in the course of their drawn-out freedom struggle, found it easy to depict them as uncivilised and aggressive. Thus, Pashtoon success in the military theatre was in a sense offset by their defeat in how they were represented culturally and in the media.

Perhaps the most notable in-

stance of this contradictory process was the Pashtoons' encounter with the British. The toughest resistance the colonisers faced in their conquest of the Subcontinent was in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP), the traditional territory of the Pashtoons. So it was but natural that the British would depict their most formidable foes in rather uncharitable terms. Once the seeds of such depiction were sowed, they acquired purchase in the wider cultural plane of British India. For the vanquished elite, desperate for Anglo-Saxon recognition and approval, it was a rare moment of privilege to join the victor in poking fun at the very people who had resisted conquest. This is how the caricature of the violent and unrefined Pashtoon was added to the inventory of cultural parody, readymade for the time when cinema came along.

When the British quit the Subcontinent after partitioning it, the opposition to Pashtoon independence and the caricature of Pashtoon society both remained in place. The dominant Punjabi- and Urdu-speaking elite of Pakistan could not countenance the Pashtoon urge to promote their political and cultural identity. In obviously conscious ways, attempts were made to question the patriotic credentials of the Pashtoons and to lampoon their tribal lifestyle. Caricature, once again, was how this opposition expressed itself.

The flowing *salwar kameez* and turban in which the Pashtoon men attired themselves, the idiosyncrasies of their Urdu diction, their conservative attitude towards women's rights, their penchant for settling disputes with the gun, and their prolonged blood-feuds stretching over generations, became the butt of much insensitive and vapid mirth. Comic Pashtoon characters in the role of *chowkidars* and *durbans*, speaking Pashto inflected Urdu, were needlessly inserted into Pakistani films (in the manner the 'Gurkha' chowkidar entered the Hindi film about this time), television dramas and radio plays to provide the light interludes. When the need became great, the Pashtoon was made to assume, unsurprisingly, the role of the villain.

Reversals

If this was the dominant trend, there fortunately was also a modest tendency in reverse. This was the result of a gradual change that overtook Pashtoon society over the recent decades—increasing levels of literacy in the community made a difference to the ways in which the Pashtoons could respond to the cultural lampooning. The subject people's awareness of the problem filtered to some degree the kind of imaging that was going on. There has also been an increasing presence of Pashtoon writers and artistes in Pakistan's mainstream audio-visual media. At the same time, to give them due credit, some non-Pashtoon authors and artistes also consciously avoided the tendency to caricature and condemn.

There has thus been a corrective trend in Pakistani cinema, with Pashtoons finally coming in for some sympathetic portrayal. Movies and dramas on the lives of freedom fighters, such as Ajab Khan Afridi, glorified the sacrifice and achievements of the Pashtoons.

The cultural scene in India, in stark contrast, provides an interesting reversal of trends. In Bombay's prodigious cinematic outpourings, Pashtoons used to receive sympathetic portrayals but now there is a rush to tar them with a vicious brush, as malevolent aliens.

Perhaps it was the impressive presence of Pashtoon artistes among the celebrities of the Bombay silver screen which helped in projecting a positive image of the community for a long time. Starting from the Partition generation and continuing through their offspring, Pashtoon celebrities nicely populated the Hindi film world—Yusuf Khan (Dilip Kumar to his fans), Gul Hameed, Feroz Khan and brother Sanjay Khan, Amjad Khan, Madhubala, and Gohar Jan Anbala Wali, were among the recognised Pashtoon Bombay celebrities of the past.

Even the Prithvi Raj Kapoor family (Raj Kapoor, et al) took pride in its Frontier connections and Peshawar origins. There is a substantial Pashtoon presence on the Bombay movie sets to this day. The popular contemporary Khans of Bollywood—lead actors Aamir, Saif, Salman and Shahrukh all—have Pashtoon ancestry. Beside films, music too is well served by distinguished Pashtoons. There are several Pathan *gharanas* of musicians from Bade Ghulam Ali Khan to Amjad Ali Khan, who are acknowledged maestros in a wide range of musical forms.

So impressive a presence no doubt contributed to the emphasis on such positive signifiers of the Pashtoon character, like loyalty, friendship, chivalry and tolerance in the various Indian media, most particularly cinema. Hindi movies like *Kabuliwala* and *Zanjeer*, which showed Pashtoons as good-natured, honourable and courageous, come easily to mind. Amitabh Bachchan's depiction of a Pashtoon character in *Zanjeer* is arguably one of his most memorable performances.

Pashtoon, the terrorist

But times are once again changing as geo-politics casts its shadow on South Asian culture. Hindi cinema has in recent years been held hostage by patriotic and jingoistic influences. There has been a sudden flaring up of nationalistic feeling among the emergent middle class, which now forms a formidable centre of economic power. The patriotic leanings of this segment has been seen as something to be exploited by Bollywood as well, and so it did at a time when Indian society became increasingly intolerant in communal and religious terms, and as the 1998 nuclear tests and the 1999 Kargil war added to the nationalistic fervour.

The result, as it affects the Pashtoons, has been a sudden rise in the production of films that deal with 'terrorism'. These films depict the community as part of the external

conspiracy against the Indian state. This tendency came to the fore with the rising levels of conflict in Kashmir from 1990 onwards, with the increasing involvement of the Indian military and the Indian state's finger-pointing at *agent provocateurs* sent in by malign neighbours to wreak havoc in the Valley. Film producers discovered that the unfolding real-life scenario in Kashmir could easily be integrated into the standard formula of the Hindi movie, and the heroic Indian male thus got innumerable opportunities to foil the designs of mercenary foreign hands bent on breaking up the Republic.

While Pakistan was significantly absent from the Hindi film screen for decades, the crop of new films has now taken it head on. These films, which target not only Pakistan but also the Pashtoons of Pakistan/Afghanistan, are now coming fast and furious. This trend started with movies like *Border* in 1997, followed by *Hindustan Ki Qasam* in 1998, and three more in 2000, *Mission Kashmir*, *Fiza* and *Refugee*. Directly or indirectly, these productions deal with alleged Pakistan-backed terrorism in India, particularly in the Indian part of Kashmir. Exploiting the nationalist sentiment for the sake of box-office receipts, these films pay scant regard to the consequences of such depictions for geopolitical relations in a nuclearised Subcontinent.

In more than one of the new genre of 'terrorist films', Pashtoons have come in for extremely negative portrayal. The central villain of *Mission Kashmir*, played by Jackie Shroff, is a Pashtoon mercenary who is godfather to militant infiltrators in Kashmir. The film builds up its case of the Kashmir uprising as being foreign- or Pakistan-sponsored, on the basis of Jackie Shroff's role. In the process, Pashtoons are presented as nothing more than lowly mercenaries. It is rare, in these days of communal political correctness, for a Bombay production to be so blatantly against an entire ethnicity, but this is perhaps possible because the target here is seen to be living outside Indian boundaries.

Pashtoon/Afghan tribesmen do have a long and enduring attachment to Kashmir, having ruled the Valley in the past. They also played a dominant role in liberating and occupying Pakistani Kashmir, or Azad Kashmir as it is called, in 1947-48. There is no doubt that some Pashtoons from Pakistan and Afghanistan have fought in Indian Kashmir and are still fighting. But their numbers are small: certainly not of the magnitude that warrants such an exaggerated portrayal of Pashtoons as terrorists and criminals.

There are good Pashtoons and there are surely a few bad Pashtoons, but nuances are rapidly being buried in the sweeping onrush of Bollywood generalisations. In a South Asia where we will ultimately have to learn to live together, let not this demonising of the Pashtoons irretrievably affect their image.

Nepali Nationalism
A Matter of Consolidation

by ***Harka Gurung***

Thirty-four years after Nepal achieved democracy, the golden jubilee of the Nepal Praja Parishad party was observed in Kathmandu in June 1985. On the occasion, "living martyr" Tanka Prasad Acharya made the following observation:

"Even to this day, we have to suffer from regressive policies. Nepal remains a very backward country. The rulers back then controlled and fooled the public at large with threats and enticements, and emasculated their self-respect. The policy of ruling by demoralising the people has not yet ceased."

More than a decade after the establishment of multi-party democracy, that statement by Acharya retains much relevance. A country or nation does not merely refer to its geographical space, it also incorporates the citizens' aspirations. The political dilemma, economic depression and social tension which mark the Nepali national scenario today do not bode well for the future.

Since consolidating Nepali nationalism implies conserving something that exists, it seems important to enquire into the extent to which the Nepali state/kingdom has evolved into a nation. This requires analysing the foundations of Nepal as a nation. Four dimensions will be examined in this context: the making of Nepal; neighbourhood entanglement; national identity; and consolidation strategy.

The making of Nepal

The status of countries are determined by the current of history. In the case of modern Nepal, one can recognise three incarnations: the 'proto Nepal' of Kathmandu Valley; the 'imperialist Nepal' which stretched from the Tista river in the east to the Sutlej in the west; and the 'feudal Nepal' confined by the Mechi and Mahakali rivers. The reference to "Nepaldeshe" in the "*Jambudwipe-Bharatkhande...*" incantation of the Hindu priest is not to today's extended kingdom but to the Newar state of Kathmandu Valley. Its rich religious and cultural heritage are eulogised in the Sanskrit *Himvatkhhanda* and the Tibetan *Dzam-gling-Getse*. The indigenous people of proto Nepal were the Kirant, but the Valley's agricultural productivity and mercantile wealth lured distant conquistadores.

Development assistance can be had from developed countries and international financial institutions. But from India, Nepal should strive for only genuine goodwill and friendship.

States grow around a nucleus and expand by conquest and aggrandisement. Proto Nepal, however, remained fixated on cultural creativity rather than imperial expansion. Whenever the Khasa of the Karnali region felt strong and powerful enough, they would invade the Valley and return with the loot. The Sen dynasty of Palpa succeeded in extending east to Bijayapur but were based in the foothills, and later broke up into four patrimonies. After the 16th century, the Khasa of Gandaki expanded eastwards after capturing the Magarant principalities. It took the Khasa expansionists under Thakuri chiefs (successively called Khan, Sahi and Shah) only 58 years to subjugate areas from Bhirkot to Gorkha. But it took another 185 years for them to cross the Trisuli river, and another quarter century after that to conquer the Valley of Kathmandu. In comparison, the Gorkha army took nine years to reach the Tista (1783), and 17 years to the Mahakali—and reaching all the way west to the Sutlej 23 years later in 1806. The Gorkhali kingdom then commanded a territory stretching nearly 1500 km, and it became difficult to maintain this vast tract. After the 1814-16 war with the British, the country was confined to its present day borders, between the Mechi and Mahakali.

Prithvi Narayan Shah, who laid the foundations of Nepal's political unification, in his *Dibya Upadesh* advisory refers to the country as a garden of "four castes and 36 ethnicities". That 'garden' was created not through voluntary consensus of the various communities but through the might of the sword. The country was under the feudal rule of the Gorkhali. After the Anglo-Nepali War, there was no fear of the powerful southern neighbour, as the British did not covet Nepali soil

once they got access to Gorkhali manpower as mercenaries. A principal reason why the British recognised Nepali sovereignty in 1923 was the valuable service rendered by the Gurkha forces in World War I.

It is now 232 years since the establishment of the Gorkhali state on 12 November 1769, with the capture of Bhaktapur. There were hundreds of kings and satraps in the Indian Subcontinent at that time but all succumbed to British rule. As the 20th century dawned, only four states remained in *Jambudwipe-Bharatkhande*, and they were India, Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan. In 1947, independence created India and Pakistan. With the independence of Sri Lanka in 1948, Maldives in 1965 and the formation of Bangladesh in 1971, South Asia had eight states. Since India annexed Sikkim in 1974, the SAARC organisation today has seven members. Of these, as testified by history, only Nepal and Bhutan have maintained their political independence throughout.

Neighbourly entanglement

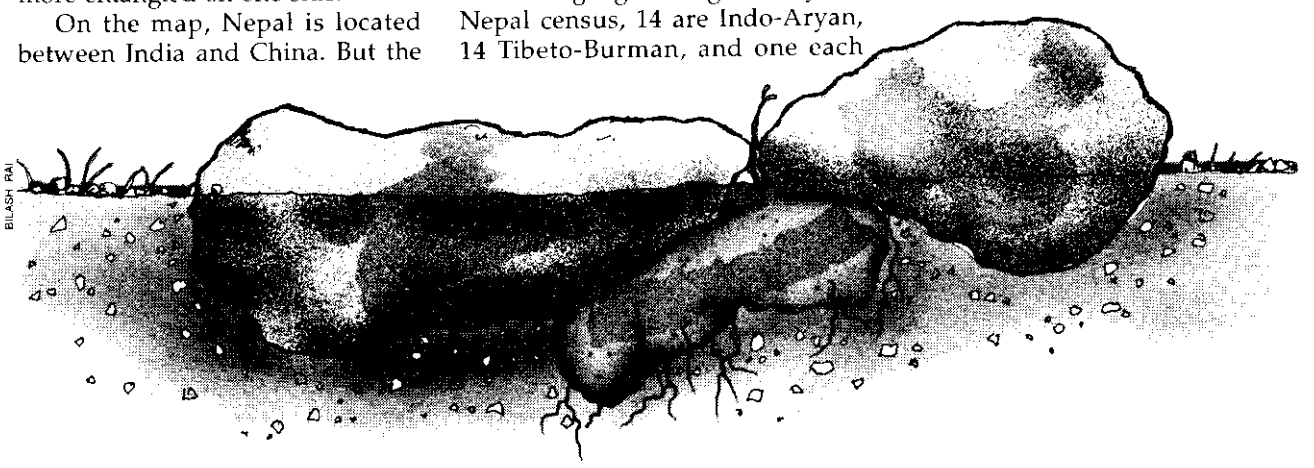
All states, by virtue of occupying territory, have neighbours. Accordingly, Nepal had three neighbours on its borders until 1974, and since then only two after the eclipse of Sikkim. Neighbourly interaction for contemporary Nepal is somewhat different from that of Prithvi Narayan Shah's reference to a "yam between two rocks". In effect, Nepal is more entangled on one side.

On the map, Nepal is located between India and China. But the relationship with the neighbours to the south and the north are not at the same level. The main reason for this is the Himalayan barrier along the northern border. Physically, the monsoon from the Indian Ocean cannot penetrate this barrier to provide succour to Tibet. Culturally, the Nepali people know largely nothing about Chinese leaders, its culture or its cinema, while they are quite conversant with India's local politics, customs and the Bombay film world. This last is evident from the fact that in December, Nepal experienced communal violence on the pretext of what an Indian actor was alleged to have said. It is to be noted that Indian films are banned in Bangladesh, a country established with Indian help. To say that Nepal and India have deep historical, geographic, linguistic, religious and cultural ties has become a well-worn cliché. It is this very 'depth' of relationship that allows a bigger country to exploit and take advantage of a smaller neighbour. The historical reality is that conflict is more prone between neighbouring states, just as competition for resources occurs between proximate countries rather than with distant ones. After the establishment of the Gorkhali state, all of its wars were fought with the neighbour: Sikkim (1783), Kumaon (1790), Tibet (1791-93), British India (1814-16) and Tibet (1855-56).

Linguistic and religious matters fall under the realm of culture that transcend national boundaries. Of the 30 languages recognised by the Nepal census, 14 are Indo-Aryan, 14 Tibeto-Burman, and one each Munda and Dravidian. The fact that today 80.3 percent of the country's people speak Indo-Aryan tongues, 17 percent speak Tibeto-Burman, and a negligible number speak Munda or Dravidian languages is due to the state's language policy. Even more ironic is Nepal's official entanglement with a particular region, an Indian heritage.

In order to gain the support of the ethnic group in his military campaign, Prithvi Narayan proclaimed, "I am the king of Magarant", referring to the region of ethnic groups. At the same time, he also labelled Nepal "the *asli* (true) Hindustan". The latter expression epitomises Nepal's concern to remain independent while erstwhile Mughal India was being overrun by Christian rulers. After the 1947 Partition, Pakistan was created as a Muslim state, whereas India opted to remain secular with the designation 'Bharat'. The Nepali state, meanwhile, retained a Hindu character with a civil code (1854) based on the conservative strictures of *Manu Smriti*. It is because of such a theocratic inclination that the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, the Rastriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the Shiv Sena and others, find Nepal such a fertile ground as relict Hindustan.

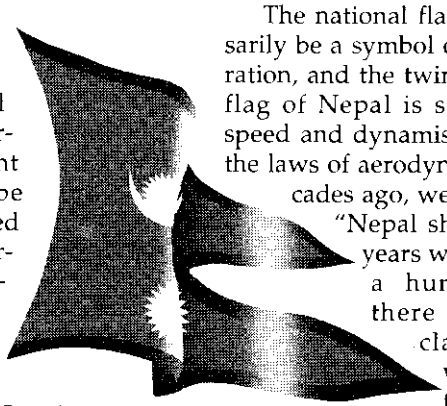
Cultural platitude is only one aspect of Nepal's neighbourly entanglements. More pervasive are economic domination and political influence of India. Landlocked Nepal has always remained a market



BILASH RAI

for India. The shackles were somewhat loosened with Nepal's joining of the Universal Postal Union in the 1950s, and currency autonomy achieved in the 1960s. However, the fact that today 25 percent of the Nepali market has Indian currency circulation indicates well the vulnerability of Nepal's monetary situation.

India has been generous in giving aid to Nepal in diverse sectors: roads, electricity, agriculture, education, health, culture and so on. However, there is a curious policy in the industrial sector—helping Nepal set up industrial districts but maintaining an embargo on their products to the Indian market. However, there is one positive aspect in that the name Indian Aid Mission was changed to Indian Cooperation Mission. Nepal should now strive to reflect this change of nomenclature in the reality of the bilateral relationship. That is, rather than take development aid from India, Nepal should seek cooperation. Development assistance can be had from developed countries and international financial institutions. But from India, Nepal should strive for only genuine goodwill and friendship.



Speed and dynamism are reflected only in the national standard.

Neighbourly influence has played a decisive role in Nepali politics. The agreement between the Rana regime and the democratic forces was brokered in 1951 by India. In 1990, the Indian economic blockade played a vital role in the tripartite engagement among the royal palace, the Nepali Congress and the Nepali Left. There is a general misconception that the democratic side is seen to be India-centric, and the Left Sino-centric. In reality, both democratic and communist ideologies came to Nepal through India. If the Nepali Congress was nurtured in Benaras, the comrades of Left opposition are beholden to Charu Mazumdar of Bengal. As an exception, it was only the Nepal Peasants and Workers Party which arrived in Bhaktapur town in the Valley, by way of Kodari highway.

National identity

Nepal's national identity has been distorted by external images. Modern Nepal is only 232 years old since the conquest of Bhaktapur, yet it holds on to the 2000-year-old Vikram Sambat calendar, one which has no link with any indigenous historical event. Meanwhile, even the India of emperor Virkramaditya has adopted the Gregorian calendar. Last year, Sankhadhar Sankhwa was finally recognised as a national hero of Nepal, but his Nepal Sambat calendar remains in limbo.

The national flag should necessarily be a symbol of national aspiration, and the twin-tailed national flag of Nepal is symptomatic of speed and dynamism according to the laws of aerodynamics. Four decades ago, we had heard that "Nepal should do in ten years what takes others a hundred". Then, there followed the claim that "we would achieve the Asian standard of living by 2000", which had a silent demise.

The only resource of the poor is time and its utility, and therefore the poor cannot afford to waste this resource. But the Nepali attitude is quite different. When the Congress is in power, the Left immobilises the country with numerous bandhs. For its part, the Congress party in power locks up the government offices for the 52 Sundays of a year. Rather than engage in the strenuous task of nation building, we make merry with bandhs and a plethora of holidays.

The image of Nepal after the two world wars commenced with the 'brave Gurkha'. Later, the country came to be recognised as the land of Everest and the Sherpa. But due to our increasing dependence on outside aid, the country's identification today is as a least-developed, poverty-stricken entity even after nine plan periods. In other poor countries, they distribute ration coupons. In Nepal, mobile teams distribute citizenship certificates, and passport processing is decentralised to export unemployed labour. Meanwhile, the prestige of the Nepali passport is diminishing progressively. Earlier, Nepalis did not need a visa for Germany. But this facility was withdrawn after the Nepalis going to Japan via Frankfurt became a crowd. Since then, other nearer countries have imposed visa—before arrival for Nepalis—Malaysia in 1993, Thailand in 1995 and Hong Kong in 1998.

Political boundary and citizenship are two basic indicators of the strength of the national image. On both counts, the situation of Nepal is precarious. The country's international border with China is 1111 km, and that with India 1808 km long. The northern border is regulated by high mountain ranges as well as the need for passport and visa. With India, however, while there are 27 designated customs check-points, there is no restriction whatsoever for cross-border movement of people. This is a peculiar international border, for there is no recording of how many foreigners enter or how many nationals exit.

Nepal's Home Ministry has a Border Administration Section, whose attention is confined to the northern frontier. The problems of border encroachment, however, are emanating from the other direction. According to knowledgeable sources, there are 53 points where Nepali territory has been encroached along the Nepal-India boundary. Among the 26 districts that adjoin India, only in five is there no such problem of encroachment—Baitadi, Dadeldhura, Bara, Dhanusa and Mahottari. Among the 21 districts where there are such problems, seven are in Kanchanpur and five each

in Jhapa and Saptari alone. The precondition to settle such disputes is that both sides have to be willing to hold discussions. The persistence of problems along the Indo-Nepal border must make Nepalis mull over the symbolism pregnant in Robert Frost's "Mending Wall" (1923), where he says that "good fences make good neighbours".

The other important aspect of national identity is citizenship, because it is after all the citizenry's emotions that make a nation. It is citizenship that differentiates between 'us' and 'other'. The citizenship problem in Nepal is not new and has become more intractable now. The 70-point recommendations of the 1983 report on migration included 12 on citizenship alone. The report's conclusion was that the citizenship policy of the country as well as the distribution of citizenship papers were too liberal. Between 1975 and 1993, eight citizenship teams and three investigative committees were formed. Meanwhile, by early 1994, nine million citizenship certificates had been distributed.

For a small country to give equal treatment to a larger neighbour can only mean one thing—to lose its own separate identity over time.

In terms of regionwise distribution, 44.5 percent of those who received citizenship cards were from the hills, 38.4 were from the tarai, 8.9 from the inner tarai, and 8.2 percent from the mountains. The largest number of citizenship papers were distributed in Kathmandu district (400,329) in the hills, followed by Sunsari (315,667) in the eastern tarai. The nine districts which gave out more than 200,000 certificates were Kathmandu in the Valley, Chitwan from inner tarai, and seven from the tarai. From this distribution pattern, one can see where there is more 'pressure' for citizenship.

Nepali citizenship can be had either by being born in Nepal, through descent citizenship or through naturalisation. Among the foreigners seeking citizenship, it is obvious that the majority will be from neighbouring countries. According to figures given by the Indian Ministry of External Affairs in 1980, among the 3.8 million people of Indian origin in Nepal, 62.8 percent had acquired Nepal's citizenship. The fact that only one-third of the people of Indian origin in Sri Lanka had received citizenship indicates that Nepal is very liberal in its citizenship policy. This analysis is also buttresed by the Population Census of Nepal. During the period of 1981-1991, there was a reduction of foreign citizens in Nepal from 483,019 to 90, 427, i.e. down by 81.3 percent. Among these, Indian citizens were down by 41.3 percent and Chinese citizens by 16.7 percent. Among those foreigners in Nepal, 75.7 percent were Indian citizens.

Looking at the data by region, the number of Indian citizens has increased only in the western tarai, western inner tarai and Kathmandu Valley. In the eastern tarai, there was a drastic decrease in Indian citizens, by nearly half. Regionwise, the number of Indian citizens declined by 84 percent in the mountain, 55.1 percent in hill, 35.6 percent in tarai and 27.2 percent in the inner tarai. According to the census data, only nine out of 75 districts had an increase in Indian citizens: Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, Dang, Chitwan, Kanchanpur, Kailali, Bardiya, Banke and Parsa. In all other districts, their number declined.

The question then arises, was there any policy implemented or were there some events which made Indian citizens leave Nepal in such numbers during the period 1981-1991? Two issues could be raised. Firstly, in 1987, Nepal tried an initial exercise to introduce work permits in Kathmandu Valley. This system could not be implemented because of India's objections. In fact, the number of Indian citizens in Kathmandu Valley increased by 57.5 percent during the period in question.

Secondly, the economic blockade implemented by the Indian government in 1988/89 led to a chill in the relationship between the two countries. The 1991 population census was carried out in June of that year, and the economic blockade had already been lifted with the reinstatement of democracy in 1990. Moreover, by that time the relationship between the two countries had even been qualified by the euphemism of 'common rivers' for border rivers.

The dichotomy of the census data showing decrease of Indian citizens, on one hand, and the obvious influx of Indian citizens visible in Kathmandu neighbourhoods, for one, can be resolved with one conclusion: the reason for the drastic decline of Indians in Nepal is not that they have returned home but that they have acquired Nepali citizenship. For example, the largest reduction in the number of Indian citizens was in Jhapa (8154 fewer) and Morang (5061), where more citizenship certificates, 256,257 and 288,897 respectively, were distributed.

There is not much variation between the sources on the number of Indians acquiring citizenship of Nepal: 57.7 percent in the 1983 migration report and 62.8 percent according to official Indian sources. What is distressing is that political parties are following their own narrow agenda even on a subject as critical as citizenship. The 1994 Dhanapati Upadhaya Commission set up by the UML government had the Congress member boycotting and the Sadbhavana Party member dissenting, and the 1995 Mahanta Thakur Committee set up by the Congress did not have a UML member. Therefore, the Citizenship Bill 2056, submitted without a broad

consensus, is a challenge to the country's national consolidation.

Consolidation strategy

There are three priority issues if we are to conserve and consolidate Nepali nationalism: security; treaty revision; and national integration.

Security. The increasing preoccupation of Indian policy with regard to Nepal has been security. It is natural for a large country to be concerned about protecting its extensive territory. Mere declaration of itself as a Zone of Peace by Nepal could never be an assurance for India. Nepal is indeed a country at peace because since the war with Tibet in 1856, the country has not fought in 145 years. And the fact is when you do not fight, the weapons get rusty.

The vast regular army-type of military organisation that the British introduced in India, and which was passed on to Nepal by India, is not appropriate for this small country. The national security structure of Nepal would be better modelled after that of Switzerland, where men between 20 and 50 have to do compulsory military service (voluntary for women). Altogether, the citizens spend about a year of their lives in military training and exercise, and at home they are equipped with guns and ammunition. Thus, the Swiss have not a regular army but one of citizenry, which has managed to keep the country independent for 700 years. Nepal, too, had this kind of a militia system in early 18th century. As a country with thousands of retired soldiers from the British and Indian armies, Nepal can easily set up a defence apparatus after the Swiss model.

Treaty Revision. The Treaty of Peace and Friendship, 1950, between Nepal and India was signed by the last Rana prime minister in extraordinary circumstances. A revision of that 50-year-old document is necessary in order to put the relationship between the two countries on a firmer and more realistic footing.

According to Article 6 of the Treaty, each country commits to according national treatment to the citizens of the other. Article 7 provides equal rights to citizens of both countries when it comes to residence, right of property, trade and movement. For a small country to give equal treatment to a larger neighbour can only mean one thing—to lose its own separate identity over time. Article 8, too, makes Nepal nothing more than an Indian hinterland, for the guarantee of freedom of movement across the international border makes it just an imaginary fence, or a decoration on the map.

This writer actually had some positive thoughts about the 1988/89 economic blockade by India, for he felt it gave Nepalis an opportunity to strive for self-reliance. Just as one closes the windows to keep the warmth indoors in winter, the chemistry of nation-building requires a clear defining of its own space. Therefore, it is necessary to regulate the Nepal-India boundary first through identity cards and later through passports. Owing to the different development levels of the two countries, Indians have skill and capital, while Nepalis have only brawn. Therefore, aliens cross the border for different economic opportunities. Such population exchange cannot be denied but needs to be regulated with a work permit system.

National Integration. The terms, 'state' and 'nation' have different political meanings. A nation is a more evolved condition than a state, for beyond territorial definition, it includes an emotional bond among the people within the state. The Nepali state/kingdom has maintained its independent status for a long period, but it is yet to emerge as a nation. The country has only been unified geographically, not socially or economically. The social model for national unification has been Hinduisation which goes against Nepal's multi-ethnic character.

How stultifying the hangover of Nepal's Muluki Ain can be gauged by comparing the state of neighbouring societies across Nepal's borders in the west and east. The social backwardness and exploitation of dalits in the Khasa region of west Nepal reminds one of the situation in Kumaon and Garhwal a hundred years ago.

If that is the past, the future of Nepali society can be conjectured by looking east, at the social dynamism of the Nepali-speakers across the Mechi. While the pandits under the Muluki Ain regime in Nepal busied themselves with rituals and sycophancy, the Nepali-speaking population across the Mechi river showed the path to genuine Nepali nationalism: Darjeeling's Gyawali and Kalimpong's Chemjong in history, Darjeeling's Koirala and Kalimpong's Pradhan in language, Kalimpong's Gurung and Subba in politics, and so on. In contrast to Nepal, the politics of Sikkim and Darjeeling is not the monopoly of the upper castes. In Sikkim, the chief ministership passes from a Gurung to a Basnet, Limbu and Chamling, while in Darjeeling the political contenders are Ghising and Subba.

The main pillars of nationalism are social and economic integration. No country is respected when it is poor and dependent on outsiders. Thirty years ago, this writer had proposed a regional development strategy to link the country's hills and tarai economies, but that concept was swept away by increasing centralisation. Today's wave of globalisation poses even more challenges to the country's economic autonomy.

The most important step towards consolidating the Nepali state and nationalism is to end economic exploitation and to bring about social equality. Caste hierarchy also perpetuates economic class division. Nepal's constitution that gives primacy to one religion and one language, provides substance to the perpetuity of social disparity. A multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic and multi-religious Nepal should have a constitution that is secular. That will be the beginning of national integration.

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100,000?

THAT'S WHAT *The Pioneer* headline screamed, echoing Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes' estimate of the death toll in the Gujarat earthquake. Yet another case of the National Indian English Media (NIEM) going berserk when tragedy or triumph strikes. Hyped-up numbers were also trumped up in the days immediately following the disasters in Latur and Orissa. In the end, is not exaggerating (even if innocently) the numbers of the dead and maimed somewhat like crying wolf?

■

THE NCERT (National Council for Educational Research and Training), India's premier syllabus-making body, now plans to include Sai Baba's teachings in the curriculum, says an *Asian Age* report. One can only worry for the young 'uns, is all I'll say. In the same item, Union Education Secretary M.K. Kaw is reported saying, in defence of the NCERT move, that Islamic and Christian theology were written by people who "had not heard of the Web or the cellphone or inter-planetary travel". Meaning the Sai Baba has. Kaw Kaw.

■

WHY DOES Bollywood have to prove that it is made up of patriotic Indians (Hindu and Muslim, no less)? Anti-Pakistan propaganda should be left for the government. And just as we have had enough of handsome Indian heroes and curiously Chinese-looking ISI agents prancing about Kashmir (and getting killed), it turns out that Lollywood is moving in for the counter-attack. One of its weapons is a film titled *Musalman*, and as one of its Musalman stars puts it, "will overshadow Indian movies made on the same theme". Har har, don't we know the quality of Pakistan's celluloid output? But since this one has Zeba Bakhtiar, I wonder if it is not worth suffering through. Lady once acted in a Raj Kapoor "banner", as they say, didn't she?

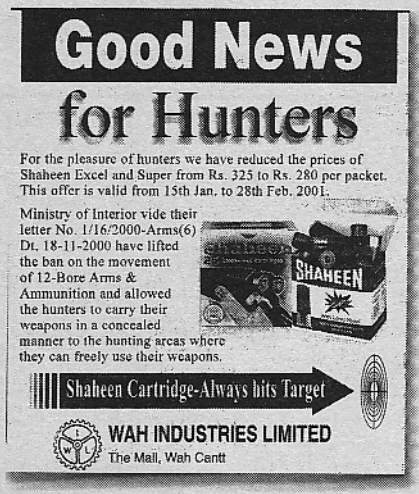
■

AN UNUSUAL competition deep down south in Bangalore. A certain Jaganath has won hands down in the milking contest organised by Bangalore Nagara Gopalakara Sangh. Hats off to the champion farmer who milked 35.95 kg at one go. But should this prize have gone to the human, or the bovine?

■

ACROSS THE breadth of unlettered South Asia, come election time(s) and the most cherished election symbol is the plough, for obvious reasons. So it was not unusual for two Bangladeshi parties to be fighting it out for this farming instrument, for a by-election in the Khulna district. Thankfully, neither of them got it. The Jatiya Party (Ershad) was given the butterfly, and the Jatiya Party (Mizan-Monju) got the television. Tee hee.

■



IF YOU thought game hunting is a barbaric sport and one that should be banned, you don't know Pakistan. Here's a three-column ad for Shaheen Cartridge, which promises to "always hit the target". Good news for bad hunters.

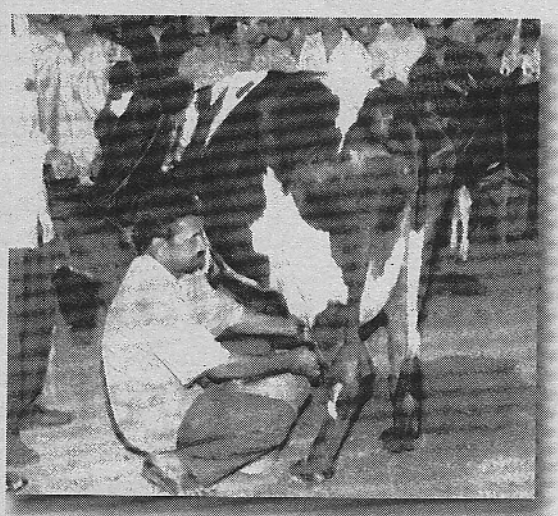
■

HAVEN'T COME across this one before: a donkey and pony show. So it's not only dogs who have their day, at least in scenic Swat Valley. But *The News* headline writer is properly cautious; the headline specifically mentions that only "well-kept" donkeys and ponies attended. Chettria Patrakar's sympathies to all the stray and shabby ones that missed out.

■

AH-HA, THIS one's a delectable survey. There's this body in Pakistan, Gallup Pakistan, as I told you last month, which excels in surveys of all kinds. The latest one says that it was *pakora* which was the most popular snack doing the rounds at iftar parties across Pakistan, followed closely by *chaat*. And it seems pakora was more sought after by the women than the men. Is there anything here for some research thesis on the lines of "The common pakora's role in gender relations"? If you don't see me, you can find me in the pakora line.

■



THREE CHEERS for South Asian unity! The good news is that all of South Asia will have uniform telephone rates, common driving

license and a similar cellular telecom system, as decided at a SAARC meeting. The bad news is that I will believe it when I see it happen.

■

THIS one's highly commendable, an inter-school debate contest held at New Delhi in the memory of Pakistani development guru Mahbub ul Haq. In the picture are the winners posing with Madam Sonia Gandhi.

■

THE EDITOR of the staid (actually by now, boring) old lady of Nepal's English language journalism, *The Rising Nepal*, was sent on a junket by the yanks, on their International Visitors Programme. The IVP has journalists salivating to be the chosen ones like no other junket. It is better than a Neiman, even, because it requires no work at all, just nodding heads and asking inconsequential questions. But even the IVP does pale after the 12th city and the umpteenth Holiday Inn, as I am sure our very serious editor will find out.

■

NEVER THOUGHT it would come to this. Kerala's famed Sri Krishna temple at Guruvayur is planning to sue Internet firms (poojaonline.com, poojaprasadam.com and sharnam.com) for selling the temple's prasadam online. Apparently, the temple administration is worried about the spiritual taintedness of these offerings, and so it is coming up with its own official Website to cater to the "high demand for sanctified offerings on the Net".

Guruvayur to sue dotcoms over sale of online prasadam

By Sanu George

Thiruvananthapuram, Jan. 16: The managing committee of Kerala's Sree Krishna temple at Guruvayur will initiate legal action against four Internet companies for accepting orders for "prasadam" or sanctified offerings from devotees through their websites.

Meeting Monday evening, the committee also urged the state government to conduct a [illegible] issue and desist any such [illegible]. Temple administrator [illegible] to meet the

Sathees[illegible] said, "There may be other sites also, but without identifying them we cannot do anything," he added.

"The committee also made it clear that we are against sites providing the prasadam because we are worried about the quality of the offerings. Even the own homepage takes orders only for the kalabham (sandalwood paste), plantains and [illegible]. prasadam (payasam) gets bad the next day. not send the prasadam [illegible] whether [illegible]

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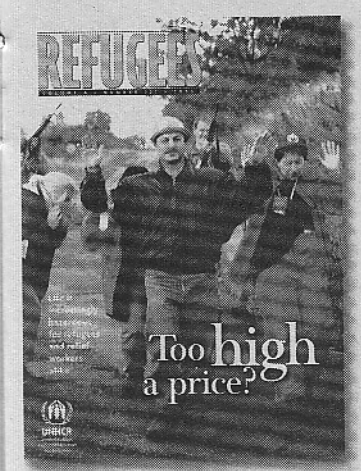
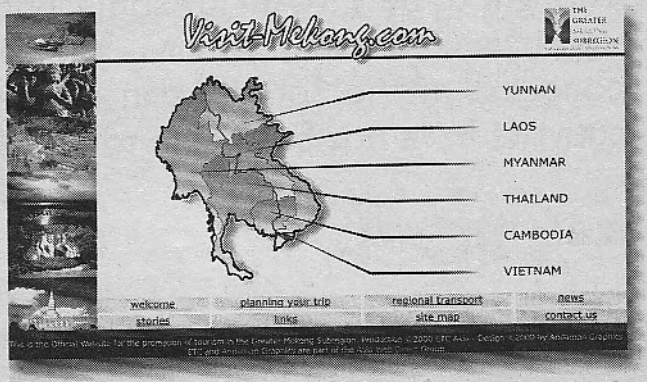


SORRY IF I repeat myself. But everytime I receive my complimentary copy of the official UNHCR magazine (a glossy, really) called *Refugees*, I riffled through the pages to see if at least this one has some story about the Lhotshampa, the Bhutanese refugees who are still camped there in Southeast Nepal. Five years it has been at least, and I may have missed a copy or two, but I have seen nary a mention of the hundred thousand refugees whom UNHCR supports. Why are they so invisible to UNHCR, I wonder? Now what if there were Nepali refugees camping out in exotic Bhutan? Now that would make a story, wouldn't it?

■

HERE IS something which should teach the South Block sahebs a thing or two, the next time Indian authorities



go blind with rage when they say inviolable Indian territory is being innocently mismarked by some publisher or other. They should know that self-confidence of a nation is shown when you pretend to overlook a mismarked map rather than threaten to set the dogs loose on the offending publisher. For true forward-lookingness, check this map of the Mekong Tourism Authority, which seeks to promote the travel industry in the Mekong watershed area. What you will be surprised to see is that a province of China, Yunnan, is included together with the other legitimate nations states, from Burma to Vietnam. In fact Yunnan is made to look like an independent country, and not a province of the larger PRC. Clearly this is okay with China, which, as I said, proves its self-confidence. It is only in South Asia that those weak at heart rant and rave as they do.

■

ABRACADABRA, CAN'T beat this advertisement for sheer cheek. Two percent of money made from selling bras going into the Gujarat Earthquake Relief Fund!

—Chhetria Patrakar

The Salwar Revo

Thought to be 'Muslim' by some, but originating in the land of the five rivers — Punjab, east and west — the *salwar kameez* has nearly completed its conquest of the South Asian clothesline. What politicians, diplomats and activists have not been able to do, this piece of stitched cloth has.

by ***Rita Manchanda***

Early on in her presidency, President Chandrika Kumaratunga wore a *salwar kameez* to a formal occasion. By the next morning, her attire had produced shrill headlines in the Colombo newspapers. How could a Sinhala woman, who, to add insult to injury, happens to be from Kandy, which is least sullied by colonial influences, wear an alien dress, instead of the frilly Kandyan saree? It was tantamount to denigrating the Sinhalese nation. The building of the nation state in South Asia manifested itself, in quite important ways, in the evolution of official cultural codes, including those concerning national attire. So long as such concepts evolved as a mark of political rebellion against the indignity of cultural dictation by the colonial power, there was little to cavil about. But in the post-independence period, the matter of clothing and attire has become enmeshed in competing communal and ethnic politics, majority-minority stresses and competitive nationalism.

Attire quite frequently is a signpost of identity for social strata, groups and communities. It therefore comes as no surprise that the elite of post-colonial South Asia, in the process of consolidating individual statehoods, felt the need to evolve a national dress. The national dress was meant to become the flag bearer of a unified nation, harking back to tradition as well as reflecting the values of modernity that are deemed to be appropriate to that tradition. But, in a region whose countries host such a multiplicity of communities and plurality of traditions, this begs the question—whose tradition and whose dress?

Not surprisingly, therefore, there is exclusionary politics stamped all over the choice (and imposition) of a national dress, as it often is with national language. What one wears makes one person belong and another feel distanced; an indication of proximity to the power centre to some, as well as a deliberate denial of that very power centre by others who reject the certified standard. The so-called 'national dress', the patriotic badge of pride in one's country and tradition, therefore, becomes all-too-often in itself a source of division and conflict.

Such dress codes are often unwritten, but are not, for that reason, any less mandatory. Imposition of a particular attire necessarily, and in every country of South Asia, will officially exclude a range of attires intrinsic to particular cultural groups. Women in the Indian Foreign Service know they cannot don the salwar kameez for official events, not so much because it is seen as informal but because it is understood to be a Pakistani dress. So where does that leave India's Punjabis or Muslims? The same is the case with

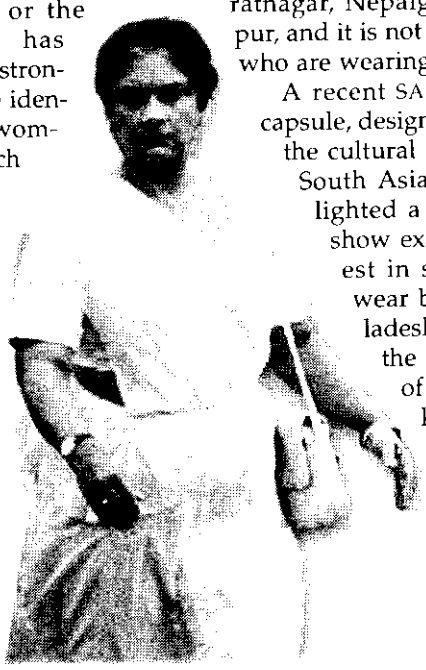
lution

government officials in Pakistan, who are not allowed to wear the sari because it is not seen as Pakistani or Islamic.

Such enforcement of collective codes is not restricted to state institutions alone. Movements that resist the centralising tendencies of unitary states are just as susceptible to the pull of standardisation. Sri Lanka does have a Muslim minority, and before the rise of ethnic violence the Muslim women's dress was not any different from that of the Jaffna Tamils, and they were not wearing the Kandyan *osariya* saree. But after the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) ordered the expulsion of Muslims from Jaffna, the community leaders endeavoured to construct a distinct god-fearing Islamic identity, mostly by way of a dress code for women. And so the women took to the veil.

A million sartorial mutinies

But while officialdom and ethnic politics draw markers that divide and regiment in the name of a constructed identity, there are "a million mutinies" that challenge such sectarian impulses. For women, one of the most visible among them is the salwar kameez or the "Punjabi suit". It has emerged as one of the strongest signposts for the identity of South Asian womanhood, a dress which has been accepted by women all over, all of it without planning or consultation. At any South Asian ngo conference, you will find most women participants wearing the salwar/*churidar* kameez—be they Sri Lankan, Bangladeshi, Nepali, Indian, Pakistani, or even Maldivian. Evidently, the South Asian ngo stratum has transcended the barriers of national and ethnic boundaries to opt for the salwar kameez, as both a convenient dress and signifier of a South Asian female identity.



But it is not just the ngo world that has been swept by the salwar revolution. Its is fast spreading to challenge the orthodoxies of culture, class and fashion, not only in the big cities but also in small townships and villages, and even beyond South Asian shores.

In the deeply stratified Hindu society, upper caste women are required by tradition to wear a saree. In Nepal, there was a time when after marriage no god-fearing caste Hindu woman would wear anything but a saree or its plebian counterpart the plain cotton *dhoti*. But today the situation is very different, as even upper caste women have taken to the salwar. Working women, in particular, have set the trend and it has now been picked up by the elite classes as well as the labouring poor. The choice seems to lie, first and foremost, in convenience, and the added revolution that Kathmandu women have brought is that when they ride pillion on motorcycles or scooters they sit astride the machine. The salwar kameez is by now ubiquitous not only in Kathamandu, but also in Biratnagar, Nepalgunj or Bharatpur, and it is not only the young who are wearing it any more.

A recent SAARC television capsule, designed to showcase the cultural diversity of the South Asian Seven, highlighted a Dhaka fashion show exhibiting the latest in salwar kameez wear by young Bangladeshi designers. So, the cultural bastion of the fabled Dhakai saree has fallen to the salwar kameez wave! And in the chic circles and among the development set, the Dhakai *dupatta* has become symbolic of this metamorphosis. On prominent display in the chic Aarong shopping outlets, the shoulder shawl has become all the rage, and is on the shopping list of the South Asian visitor to Dhaka. (Nepal, too, has evolved one of its traditional weaves—called, incidentally, Dhaka—to provide *dupattas* for Kathmandu's development set and women on the move.)

On the other side of the Bengal border, the *bhadralok* of Calcutta lament that their city is fast being taken over by Punjabis, such is the speed with which the salwar has spread. And the unkindest cut comes from their own young women happily slipping into various designs of salwar. The older generation is a bit more hesitant—my Bengali mother-in-law has resisted the salwar invasion largely, I believe, out of the fear of getting accustomed to the comfort and practicality, thereby letting go of a critical aspect of tradition. This, in any case, is what happened with my mother who hails from Multan.

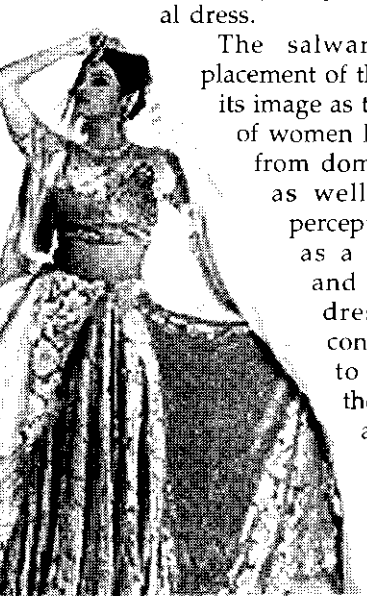
Subversion, renegotiation

The salwar kameez combines utilitarian and aesthetic virtues, which partly explains its quick spread across boundaries. In contrast to the flowing saree, the *maekla chador*, or the *ghagra*, the salwar kameez is a stitched, divided garment that facilitates mobility. The versatile dupatta that goes with it is both functional and decorative. The salwar kameez is therefore seen as eminently practical, democratic and modern—an alternative to appearing either Western or traditional.

There is another reason why the dress appeals to so many women. There is the definite perception of the South Asian salwar kameez wearer as a modern and empowered working woman. At a time when women are emerging more prominently in the public sphere, it is only natural that such an image contributes enormously to the

appeal of the salwar kameez, to the detriment of the saree and other forms of dress assigned to women by patriarchal societies. Take a look, again, at Kathmandu's middle and upper middle class women. Definitely, a part of their leanings towards the salwar had to do with the runaway success of Pakistani serials over the 1990s, which showed self-confident women, beautiful, smart and working in modern professions.

While the salwar epitomised rebellion, howsoever understated, the saree has represented the integrating factor in the modern history of the Subcontinent. It is a versatile wear, worn in different ways — Kandyan, Gujarati, Maharashtrian, Bengali, Parsee, as the maekla chador of Assam or as *dhawani* in South India. For many women the saree has also opened up windows into the cultural and geographic landscape of the region—South Indian silks from the weavers of Kancheepuram, cotton Chanderis from Madhya Pradesh, fine muslin from Dhaka. The variation in fabric is itself a study in diversity, and Andhra Pradesh alone offers the Dharmavaram, Narayanpet, Gadwal, Pochampalli and Venkatagiri varieties. Indeed, the saree is unique in that a single dress gave rise to a diversity of local expression and spanned a geographic landscape now divided by state and national borders. But the fact is that, increasingly, the saree is being folded away in cupboards, to be pulled out only as a rites-of-passage ceremonial dress.



The salwar's displacement of the saree, its image as the dress of women liberated from domesticity, as well as the perception of it as a Muslim and Punjabi dress, has contributed to the orthodox reactions it has evoked in parts of India. Rimi Chatterjee, a Calcutta working woman, recalls how her Bengali mother growing up in a traditional Hindu family in Bihar, was forbidden to wear salwar kameez as it was "*Musalmani*". Ironically, she and her sisters were allowed to wear 'frocks', even sleeveless ones, at home though it was always sarees when they went out.

The salwar is thus a subversion. After all, women are projected as physical markers of tradition and community identity. The reaction was therefore bound to be severe. Women's expansion of cultural choice, implicitly entailing a 're-negotiation' of tradition and identity, has been fiercely contested by the traditional forces. Battles have been fought every inch of the way. Two years ago, a college student, Shalini challenged the unwritten dress code of colleges in West Bengal. She wore a salwar kameez. The then principal of Ashutosh College debarred her. However, in the controversy that followed, public sympathy was with Shalini and the salwar now rules the roost.

Ethnic dress, ethnic stress

But parallel to this regionwide one-wear—let us call it the *salwar kameezisation* of South Asia—there are equally robust and even violent affirmations of cultural distinction. In the sporadic re-assertion of community identities, the focus of the male protagonists tends to fall particularly on what the women wear. South Asia's cycles of ethnic politics does not allow any neutral space for dress. It becomes a way of distinguishing one's own from the 'other'.

Writing about his work in Majuli, the island on the Brahmaputra's midstream in Assam, the social activist Sanjay Ghosh drew attention to the bitter criticism his organisation Urmil drew from militants espousing a separatist identity from mainstream India. The main charge against Ghosh, who was later killed by the ULFA (United Liberation Front of Asom), was that his work undermined indigenous culture. Local women workers and volunteers of the organisation had shed the traditional maekla chador to wear the salwar kameez or jeans, both of which allowed them to ride bicycles to work.

Of course, expediency makes even die-hard ultra-ethnicists relax on tradition, as in the case of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and its need to recruit women cadres. Before the "manpower shortage" hit them, the LTTE's identity politics was focused on reinforcing the traditional image of the Jaffna Tamil woman in full saree, bound by caste, and ritually seques-

As for the men,

THERE IS an unwritten code evident in what the male political class wears. In India, the Nehru jacket became an early standard, as did the *achkan churidar*. But newer cultural standards emerged over the decades. Southern politicians donned the 'Thiru' attire, consisting of a *veshti* or *mundu*, the characteristic 'undivided' flowing *dhoti* of the south, white shirt and the *angavastaram* or shawl draped over the shoulder. This was after the fashion of C. N. Annadurai, the fiery DMK leader from Tamil Nadu, who bore the standard for 'Dravidian' resistance to North Indian domination. The 'divided' *dhoti* and the *kurta* became the norm in the Ganga plains, but it did not extend north to Kashmir, nor to the Northeast. Under the circumstances, a single national dress for the Indian male could not emerge.

Pakistan however, has been remarkably successful in evolving a male national attire for ceremonial as well as everyday wear. The *awami* suit, both practical and democratic, is a salwar kameez, the dress we associate with the Pasthoons. In addition, Pakistan also has the Bhutto jacket for the more formal occassion. In Bangladesh, which has its own Mujib jacket, the style and colour of dress of politicians are imitated by rival student groups in Dhaka University as marks of their political affiliation.

Sri Lanka's Sinhala politicians have fashioned a national dress which owes much to the dress of the Jaffna Tamils, observes Nira Wickramasinghe. It is the white cloth or *sa-*

rong—banian and shawl—worn during ceremonial occasions. Former presidents J.R. Jayawardene and R. Premadasa, were particularly careful not to be seen in the Western suit. Politically, this is a most useful dress—the sarong hides the upper class identity while the banian emphasises the working class one.

In Nepal, while there are as many attires as the country's myriad enthnic groups, it is the *labeda* (or *daura*) *suruwal* introduced by the Thakuri rulers, who united Nepal two centuries ago, that has come up as the national dress. This attire, with its double folds held in place by strings (*tuna*) over tight round-the-calves suruwals, harks back to its origins in Rajasthan, from where the Thakuris claim their Rajput descent. The emphasis on creating national identity under the Panchayat system (which lasted 30 years till 1990) also led to *de rigueur* popularisation of the labeda suruwal; King Birendra in particular introducing the world to this ensemble during his international state visits. 'Ensemble' because the labeda top is covered by the Western jacket (called 'coat' in Nepal), which is unfortunate as it manages to completely hide the distinctiveness of the labeda, both the tying mechanism and its handsome front.

But the national dress is merely a costume, everywhere in South Asia. It is the Western shirt and trousers that make up standard wear for the urban working man, and the socially mobile rural man, whether it is in the Punjab plains, Kathmandu Valley, the Kandyan highlands, or the delta of the Brahmaputra-Ganga.

tered. But their need for mobility—it is hard to conduct guerilla warfare swathed in a saree—freed the LTTE women. Touted as 'Birds of Freedom', the female brigades of the LTTE, clad in trousers or salwar kameez, had the unintended effect of sartorially liberating Tamil women as a whole.

The image of Danu, the suicide bomber who assassinated Rajiv Gandhi, has fixed in the mind's eye the image of the Tamil woman terrorist in salwar kameez. In Sri Lanka, whether you are Sinhala or Tamil, chances are if you are wearing a salwar kameez, the security forces will be extra vigilant. Early this year, in the heavily guarded Fort area of Colombo, a young woman in a salwar kameez was sighted in the evening wandering up and down the avenue. Accosted and searched by security, this suspected Tamil guerilla did not have explosives strapped on her person, ready to detonate. She was actually a Sinhala sex worker from out of town.

In moments of ethnic stress, the dress one wears can become a dangerous identifier of one's background. Sushobha Barve, a Maharashtrian social activist, still remembers the words of a fellow traveller in the suburban train: *"Aaj galat kapre pehan ke ayee hai"* (You have worn the wrong clothes today). It was November 1984, and prime minister Indira Gandhi had just been assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards. Waves of anti-Sikh goons were on the loose. And Barve was wearing a salwar kameez. In the compartment were a couple of Sikhs. The mob was dragging them out, bent on killing them, which they did. She tried to stop them, but was instead badly roughed up by fellow passengers who believed she must be a Sikh, perhaps a relative, because of the dress she had on. It was perhaps the fact that she spoke Marathi that spared Barve, but those words, *"aaj galat..."* haunt her to this day.

It is precisely the meanings that dress conveys which makes the salwar kameez both an expression of choice and an object of disapproval. For us, women of the immediate post-colonial generation, there was the hangover of the Anglo complex, that is, the need to distinguish oneself from *'chi-chi'* Anglo Indians, and to valourise a nativist ethnic identity, rejecting Western clothes.

Our children, the inheritors of a globalising economy, in which our countries have become the sweatshops of the world's garment industries, more easily slip in and out of Western as well as 'nativist' ethnic clothes. Indeed, the spread of the export-oriented garment industry all over South Asia has made for an explosion in the availability of Western clothes. In Sri Lanka, the step-up for the second and third post-Independence generation, is more likely to be from the skirt to the saree, without the salwar kameez stage in between. Among the culturally differentiated peoples of Northeast India who are largely Christian, or the myriad hill ethnic groups of Nepal, there is a much greater propensity to wear Western clothes.

Which raises the obvious question: Is the salwar's takeover of the South Asian landscape just a transitional phase, a way station towards the even more free clothing favoured by the West and so easily taken up by the women of Southeast Asia? As the distance from traditional dictates increases, will the demure ladies who still try to protect their 'modesty' with the dupatta sbawl, fling the salwar away in favour of trousers, skirts and other imported dresses?

The men have long ago given up, of course. To put it differently, all over South Asia the males readily gave up their own national or ethnic attires for the basic shirt and trousers, while shifting the burden of cultural and ethnic sartorial responsibility on the women.

In a whisper then in a rush, as the Subcontinent's middle and upper class women make their way out of the home and into the marketplace, they will obviously experiment with more than one form of dress. And what they will wear tomorrow is what they would like to be seen in and what is comfortable. The variety of wear is bound to increase. But there is no question that the salwar, while it may have to share cupboard space with an ever-increasing variety of dresses both Oriental and Occidental, will remain a critical aspect of hundreds of millions of South Asian women for a long time to come. Besides, it will always have the pride of place of being the attire that helped in the process of the liberation of the South Asian woman.

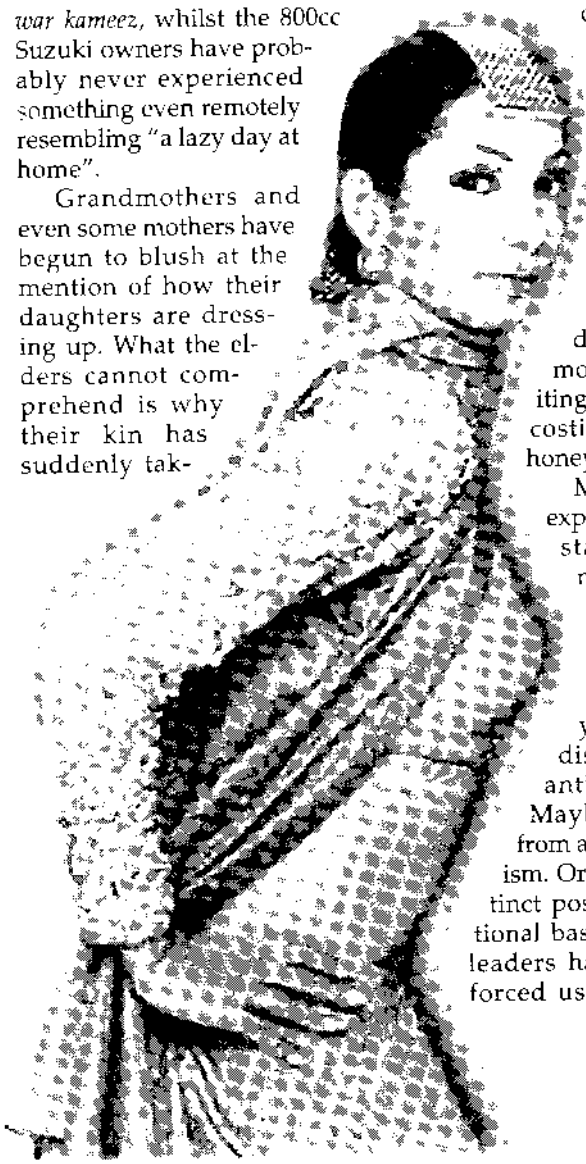
Retro-Reaction in Rawalpindi

There are those who have learnt to 'filter', and have emerged with a wardrobe which is Western in thought but *desi* at heart.

by ***Ayesha Javed Akram***

For quite some time now, people in Pakistan have started believing that fashion can be literally anything. The problem is that it ends up being just a few people's anything. Most women in Pakistan dress up not the way they want to, but the way others want them to. For a lazy day at home, the BMW Set will inevitably go for faded Levi's, the Toyota woman might decide on a sleeveless cotton *salwar kameez*, whilst the 800cc Suzuki owners have probably never experienced something even remotely resembling "a lazy day at home".

Grandmothers and even some mothers have begun to blush at the mention of how their daughters are dressing up. What the elders cannot comprehend is why their kin has suddenly taken to baring themselves? Though excessive skin exposure is still far from the norm in Pakistan, plunging necklines and seductive designs are fast becoming the accepted dress code at upper crust parties. One fashion journalist refers to this craze for showing skin as "a retro-reaction"—to the opulence Pakistani culture has been praised and, in some cases, condemned for.



What is wrong with opulence, you may ask? Nothing really, but at times Pakistanis have been known to forget that opulence should have its limits; what else would you call a five-day wedding celebration (where the bride is a divorcee and the groom a widower), during which the bride's mother had a hard time limiting her dresses to five, each costing the equivalent of a honeymoon in Singapore?

Maybe it is the increased exposure to the West (Pakistan does have a large number of Internet and satellite television addicts, and the super-elite travels easily to the West) that has made youngsters develop this distaste for something as anti-West as our culture. Maybe we're just suffering from a bad case of neo-colonialism. Or maybe (and this is a distinct possibility) all the international bashing that our country's leaders have been receiving has forced us to downplay our own worth and so blindly follow the West.

But not all are blindly following the West. True there are those who troop to "5th Avenue", wave wads of cash, and end up with what the shopkeepers confidingly disclose to them (and every other comer) as "the look everyone is sporting this season". But then there are those who have learnt to filter; they observe Aishwariya's dress (Rai, not the queen of Nepal), carefully pore over *Vogue*, turn half an eye to local fashion shows, and end up with a wardrobe that, though Western in thought could easily fool many into thinking that the wearer is a *desi* at heart.

Amongst these *gora mems* are those who are truly able to sport this East meets West trend, simply because they themselves are the products of an upbringing that symbolises the union of the Orient and the Occident (in the case of one such family, mother America-born, dad a national capitalist, yearly foreign trips...). Since these people were bred in Urdu but speak English, they can wear this look with all the ease and chic that it deserves.

But this 'foreign-Pakistani' look is far too tempting to remain within a limited realm of class. The rebel daughter of the *maulvi* and the graduate of the *madrassa* are both drawn to it and end up donning it with no understanding of the philosophy behind this dress code. These are the women the world sees swapping their *burkas* for tank tops en route to the US. Many might dub them hypocrites. They shrug and say: "Hey, it's simpler this way—everyone stays happy including me." Happiness, of course, has

always been the Pakistani's foremost priority.

Feminist *dupattas*

The explosive impact of Western culture via the electronic media has not merely brainwashed natives against their own culture but has also given an almost zealous angle to what has always been a gently murmuring movement—feminism. Feminists in Pakistan face one major hurdle—getting the men to listen to them. Every group of feminists has devised its own method to deal with this problem. There are those who would like to ignore the Pakistani men and what they are up to, and so they concentrate on international seminars and symposia. Their dress-code ranges from carefully faded *salwar kameez* in-country to tailored Gucci trousers (for meetings abroad).

Then there are the feminists who are interested in getting the native XY on their side as well as gaining the support of the international media. Consequently, their wardrobes host a wide spectrum of salwar kameez, some with *chaddars*, some with chiffon *dupattas* and some with neither—to be used according to demands of the time. A much smaller group of feminists believes that the only way to win is to make a statement that gets people (read men) traumatised and foaming at the mouth. They do this by puffing cigarettes, walking with a swagger, and donning spaghetti straps. So who exactly *are* the feminists of Pakistan? As a reputed local socialist once commented, "At this time, every educated Pakistani woman houses a feminist inside her." Which might explain why a walk down Lahore's Liberty Market provides all the above categories in abundance.

Real Armani, fake Paktel

A diverse culture will have its cultural extremists, and so we have ours, mostly among the male half. Some are known by the hold-all term 'fundamentalist'. Frustrated by joblessness, angered by the lack of opportunities, they start dressing up to suit their moods. Those who turn to god in this time of need are soon seen with turbans or topis on their heads and luxuriant beards, often left untamed for months.

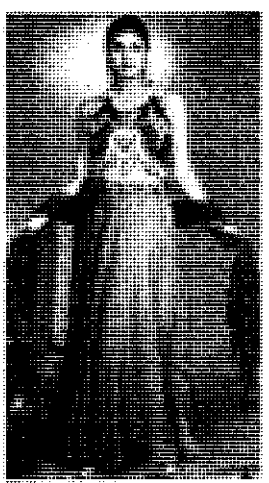
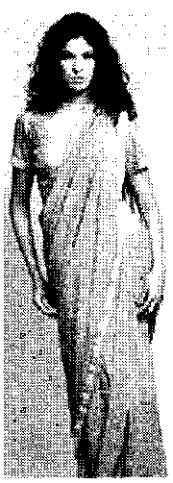
There are also the cultural extremists who turn to women and wine, but manage to emerge with bodies toned at gyms (or kept supple by street cricket), and wardrobes shipped from England. Don't be surprised if you see a young boy in a silver button-down shirt two sizes too small whip out his own fake Paktel on seeing an Armani-clad man barking into his cellular as he speeds past. Which one is Pakistan? Your guess is as good as mine.

Pakistan too has its share of the middle-class, whose members tread the safe line in both dress and mannerism, but are nevertheless conspicuous by their numbers more than any other attribute. Some claim that it is this middle class that is "the true representative of Pakistan", but don't you be fooled. Those who really know this land of the pure will tell you that no one class or group can be representative, which is probably why democracy has it so difficult here.

Perhaps the only fulsome praise that can be lavished upon the men and women of the middle class is that they exhibit more shades of Pakistan than all other classes combined. It is also clear, that it is here that one gets to see why proponents of Hindu-Muslim unity still enjoy a faithful following. In every era of Pakistani fashion, typical Rajasthani attire has always featured in the middle class wardrobe, in part or in whole. In fact currently, there is a craze for anything Rajasthani—from *bindis*, to *henna* tattoos, from innovative saree-*lehengas* to fitted *cholis*. Indian sarees count amongst those few outfits in our wardrobes that remain evergreen. Weddings in Lahore now come sprinkled with a heavy dose of Bombay.

Maybe I'm being a little too hard on us Pakistanis. It is not as if the transfer of fashion has merely been a one-way traffic. The West has taken more than its share of ideas and inspiration from our side. Madonna and her *mehendi* tattoos is just one example (though the debate over whether she was inspired by India or Pakistan will probably never be resolved). One of our fashion gurus, designer Rizwan Beyg, once dressed Princess Diana, while Libas' collection has steadfastly maintained its cult following in London. Tit for tat is what it has become these last few years.



Let's not please the men

by ***Durga Pokhrel***

My absence from Nepal over the last 17 years allows me to see clearly how much change has overtaken my countrywomen and men during this period in terms of what they wear today and what they have discarded. If I were to allow myself to think like a conservative, middle-aged woman, the change would seem shocking. Fortunately, I may be middle aged but not conservative by a long shot. I therefore am able to gauge the changes without the attitude of a woman frozen in the past. And certainly, the women of Nepal have changed the dress code, and this is obvious in what my mother wore, what I wear, and what my would-be young adult daughter would have worn (I do not have one).

After the editor of Himal asked me to write about the sartorial transformation that has overtaken the kingdom, I asked all of 50 provocatively-dressed young Kathmandu women why they chose to dress the way they did. Was the choice dictated by peer pressure, social demands or a need to display economic wellbeing? I, not conservative at all, did a double-take when, with the exception of one, 49 women replied that they selected their fashions to look "sexy".

To be more precise, most said that their boyfriends told them they looked sexy if they had a slim body and substantial chests, and those too enhanced by wearing tight, sleeveless, above-the-navel blouses, and tight, under-the-navel pants, dyed hair, heavy make-up, and high-heel shoes. Among these 'daringly' dressed girls, only five were from the Bahun, Chettri and Newar groups. Most of the girls came from Indian or British Gurkha families, or of parents engaged in the export-import business. Most were in college, some in high school, others working as secretaries, and a few were "doing nothing". I met all these young women within the space of a week in various restaurants around Kathmandu.

I wonder how I would dress up if I were in my late teens today. In my own case, I graduated to the saree after I completed my Masters and took up teaching. The saree was the social norm in the 1970s, even the dress code, of a college teacher. That did not mean I stopped wearing *kurtas*, trousers, or *lungis* at home. Now, almost 30 years later, with nearly a two-decade sojourn in the US, I even wear Western dresses in public. I am not sure what my mother's reaction would be to my wardrobe if she were alive, but I would certainly revolt against a boyfriend who insisted that I wear clothes to enhance sexiness. There's another factor to remember of course—whatever may be his inclinations while romancing, once married the man (now a husband) suddenly becomes more conservative than you are.

The Nepali Congress leader Mangala Devi Singh once told me that when she started a social campaign in the 1950s, asking young women to discard their shawls, she was accused of trying to disturb the social norm. The wedding "Bahiri Saree" (outer saree) of my mother—a mere seven-year-old then—was 40 *hath* long, all of 20 yards. My youngest aunt's was only 20 hath long, and she was married at 10. Twenty hath was the standard length for day-to-day use at that time. Back then, there was no custom of wearing petticoats, panties, or bras, but they did wear a ten-hath *patuka* around their waists to hold their sarees, and also perhaps to support the back during strenuous work. On top of their *chaubandi* blouse they wore a *khasto* shawl. Slowly, over time, my mother and aunt came down to 12-hath sarees.

The nightie/maxi

Back to the present—the Kathmandu fashion scene seems to be increasingly dominated by 'Western' dresses which would be considered rather unconventional and even risque in the real West. There, politically conscious women have understood that revealing clothes are to be discarded, as they are designed thus by men for women to look sexy. Men enslave women through fashion, and, take it from me, male fashion designers design clothes for the women they do not have to marry.

A year ago, I met a Nepali film actress at a party, and was rudely surprised to see someone else than the pretty Nepali girl in *chaubandi*-saree, *chura-pote*, and *dhago* I expected. Instead, she looked like a newly-arrived New York Hispanic with a cheap-looking midi and moccasin-type boots. When I asked someone from her modest entourage why she was not in a Nepali dress, he said, "What is 'Nepali'? Everybody wears American clothes in Nepal

चोलो बदल्ने तरखर

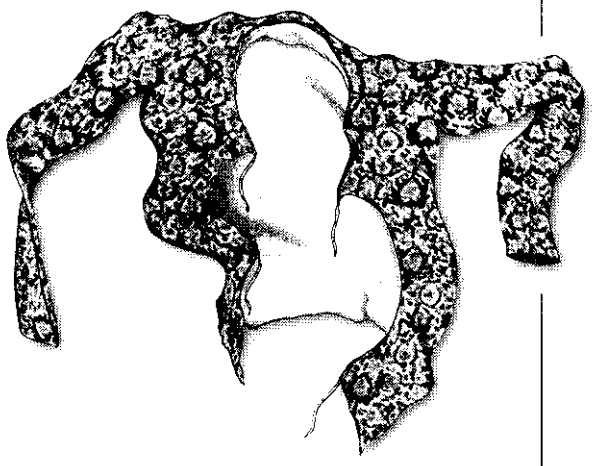
Amala said "here", and he spread his arms to catch

the cholo as it sailed down from heaven like a human soul

it glided through the window, settling gently on her breast

Sante folded his hands and made a nest,

He scooped up Gauri's heart, and Amala awoke with a start.



Stanza from 'Cholo Badalne Tarkhar' *(Whilst changing the* cholo*), by Nepali poet Balakrishna Sama, included in his collection* Chiso Chulho *(Cold Hearth). The poem is illustrated with the cholo image, also by Sama. Translation by Kunda Dixit.*

these days." Well, perhaps that was an overstatement, but it does seem that he is right to an extent, at least as seen in my own sampling.

On the Kathmandu streets, these days one spots very few women wrapped in the saree, while the *kurta suruwal* (i.e. the *salwar kameez*) is ubiquitous. Some kurtas are so long that you can barely see their suruwals. Others are so flappy and long-cut down the side, you never knew you could see so much leg in this dress.

At the other end of the fashion spectrum from the salwar kameez is the "maxi invasion". Women engaged in labour, whether it be the kitchen, the *bhatti* bar-house or the fields, have taken over the Western nightie and made it their own as a day-time working dress. All over Nepal, women spend their days in designs perfected for sleep, and who is to question their choice? The voluminous maxi, after all, is comfortable, an easy slip-on, and if there is one thing it does, it keeps the grasping male at bay by revealing nothing and indicating no desire.

While women should be left free with their choice, one can make some suggestions to add a dash of colour, class or style, however. For example, it is so easy to convert a maxi into an acceptable public dress. You could either wear a loose chaubandi outside your maxi and shorten the maxi by six inches, or do away with laces and have the platting under the breast rather than above. As far as the kurta is concerned, it should reach just below the knees—not too long, not too tight, not too loose. Women who are too thin or too fat need not wear the churidar shawl. My favorite is the Nepali *daura* style, knee-high kurta with churidar. And, no matter what kind of sexy, open, half-naked Western dress you choose to wear, with a Dhaka vest on top, you beat the competition to the prize and look sophisticated to boot.

Whether it be the long-slitted kurta, the halter top or the workhorse maxi/nightie, redesigned or not, in the end it is up to the individual woman of Nepal to decide what she will wear. As long as she is not acting to the dictates of a boyfriend, a husband, the larger malevolent society, or the male designer, she should feel free to wear what she chooses, when she chooses. The last thing she should do is to choose her *pahiran* to please her man, or men.

Writing without borders

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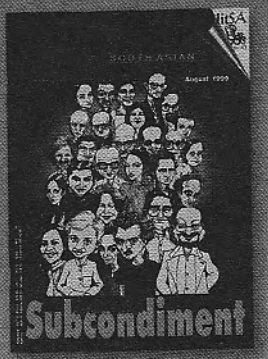

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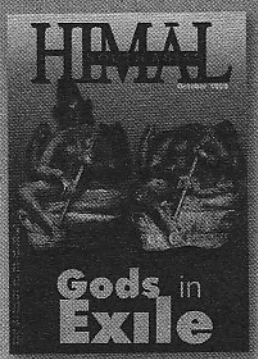

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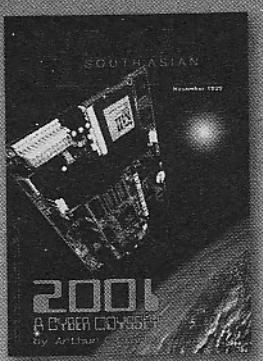

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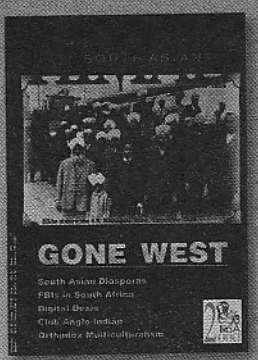

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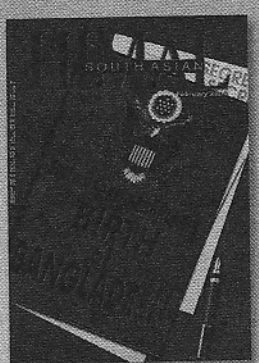

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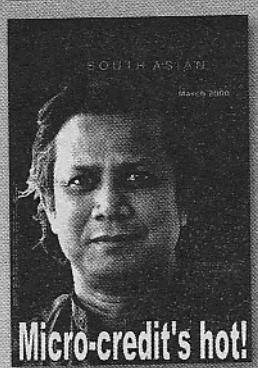

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Taliban Afghanistan
India's Diminished Politics
Indian Women in Pakistan

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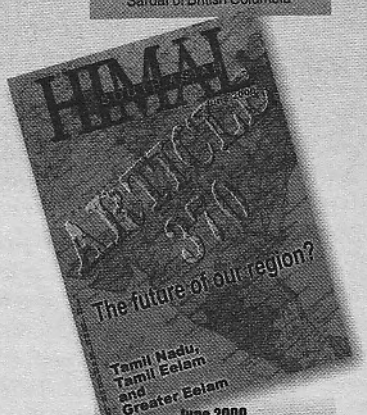
South Asia's Tourism
Civil Society in Mizoram
Peace Pipeline



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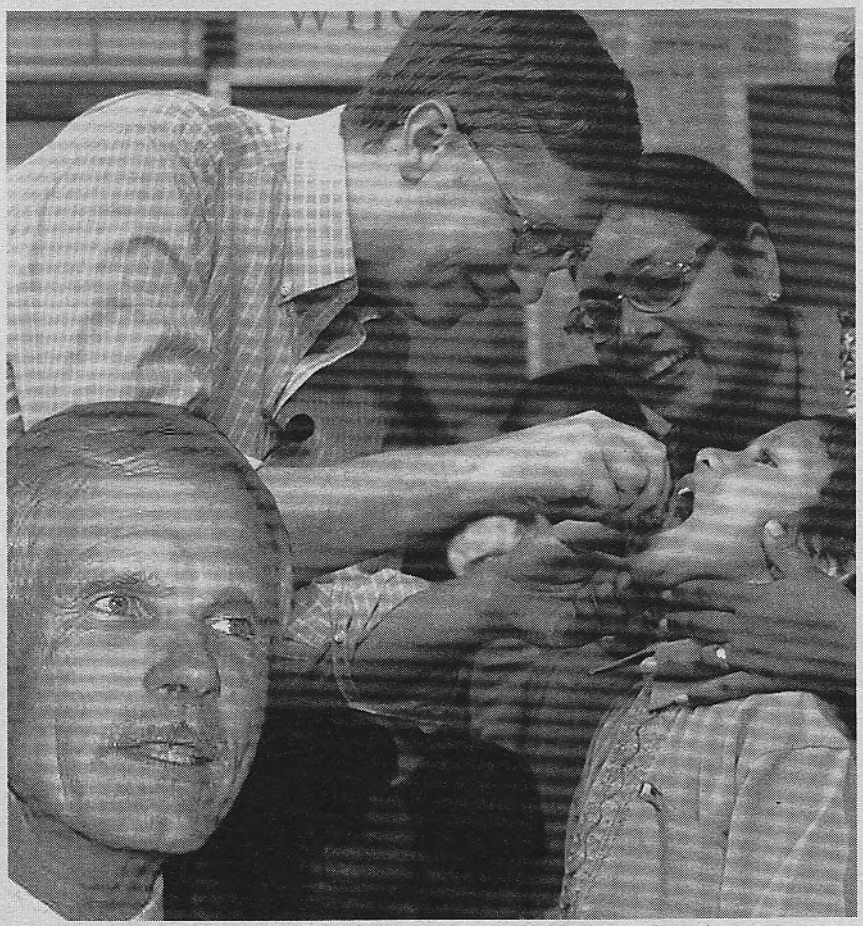
Lost Clause: Article 370
Tamil Nation
Beauty and the Drought

Himal South Asian, Patandhoka, Lalitpur, Phone: 977-1-543333, Fax: 977-1-521013 URL: www.himalmag.com



Patents, Private Charity and Public Health

The diseases are in the developing South, but the money and the patents are locked in the post-industrial North. The world's poor are in a free fall.

by ***Rajashri Dasgupta***

As governments of the developing world retreat from their welfare responsibilities and hive off public health functions to the private sector on advisement from international high finance, are we to begin depending on the charity and munificence of the multinational tycoons? When CNN founder and media magnate Ted Turner announced a billion dollars for humanitarian projects of the United Nations, everyone ooohed and aaahed without calling to account the many billions that are being wrested away from the social sector by governments of the developed and developing world.

Bill Gates, richest man in the world over in Seattle, then went one up on Turner and everyone else by endowing the largest philanthropic organisation ever, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Last year, outperforming the US government on this front, he donated USD 300 million to charitable causes, primarily aimed at 'reversing' the health crisis among the world's poor. This fund targets global threats such as malaria, tuberculosis and AIDS, and Gates' giving adds up to more than 25 percent of the total support given by the West towards health in the developing countries. What is the crisis in the globalised economy that governments both down here and out there, turn away so offensively from their public health commitments, leaving the field free for philanthropy and private benevolence—but most importantly to the rapacious market?

Since 1978, by the United Nations' reckoning, the number of countries that are 'least developed' has shot up from 28 to 48. This means that one country per year has slipped down the development ranking during the last two 'development decades'. The assets of the three richest people in the world are more than the GNP of the 48 least developed countries, and the three richest officers of Gates' Microsoft have more assets (upwards $140 billion) than the combined GNP of the 43 least developed countries. Meanwhile, health care eludes the poor who constitute 50 percent of the population of the least developed 46 poorest countries. About two billion people in the world live on less than a (US) dollar a day, and more than 800 million people have total lack of access to any form of basic health care. Nearly three billion do not have access to safe drinking water and appropriate sanitation.

The contributions by Turner and Gates underline the increasingly important role wealthy private individuals and philanthropists are playing in international development, but the fundamental question has not been asked with any sense of urgency—should private forces, however benevolent, be even permitted to draw up and drive the international health agenda, as is beginning to happen? Can donations and whimsical price reductions of

patented drugs, so-called private-state partnerships and corporate-community welfare programmes ever be viable, sustainable substitutes to the long-term responsibility of the state to protect, promote and ensure the right to health care? In the process of privatisation, not only of public health programmes, but also of public health funding, are organisations which have led in the past, such as the World Health Organisation (WHO) being further sidelined?

"Private charity is an act of privilege, it can never be a viable alternative to State obligations," said Dr James Obrinski, of the organisation Medicins sans Frontier, in Dhaka recently at the People's Health Assembly (see Himal, February 2001). In a nutshell, industry and private donations are feel-good, short-term interventions and no substitute for the vastly larger, and essentially political, task of bringing health care to more than a billion poor people.

Medical globalisation

Amidst all this poverty, squalor and ill health that affect the global poor, there is a specific travesty relating to the non-availability of (or "lack of access to") life-saving drugs, because of the very structuring of the international medical market and lack of conscientious activism from the developing world. The fact is, the vast majority of tuberculosis patients and the increasing number of those succumbing to the HIV virus today in Africa and South Asia did not—and do not—have to die.

Dr. Obrinski: "They die because they do not have access to essential life-saving medicines—not because the drugs do not exist but because the people with disease do not exist in the business plans of the major pharmaceutical manufacturers or of governments. The patented life saving drugs are beyond the reach of the poor."

The problem is that while the diseases requiring urgent treatment are in the developing South, the clout of money and the monopoly over drugs is with the post-industrial North. The need clearly is for mass mobilisation to force the state in the developing countries to re-assume the responsibility it has all but sacrificed to the market at the instance of the donor nations and international financial institutions. Side by side, activists must organise to overcome the access barriers which keeps essential life-saving medicine away from the poor in the developing world.

Access to basic drugs is a critical aspect of public health, and yet this is exactly where the emerging globalised pharmaceutical regime is going to hit the poor the hardest. The developed countries are using the WTO and the Trade-Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs) agreements to force those developing nations to change their patent laws so that the pharmaceutical multinationals can protect their products. The developing countries are being required to provide patent protection on chemical products and processes for 20 years.

Patently unfair

The effect of patenting on the availability and price of drugs will be devastating, taking critically-needed medications beyond the reach of most patients in South Asia, for example. Without patent obligations, local drug firms in India and Bangladesh, for example, are presently able to provide quality drugs at a tenth to a hundredth of the prices charged by the Western MNCs. "India, which has a strong indigenous drug industry, will now be forced to impose patents on all newly invented drugs," says Professor Sudip Chaudhury of the Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta." It means Indian companies will be confined to producing patent-expired drugs in the future."

The reason consumer groups and health activists find the 20-year rule so patently unfair is that modern drugs have short life spans because of constant and accelerating innovations in pharmaceutical research. Hardly any drug at the end of the 20-year moratorium period will be worth manufacturing because better ones will have been introduced, and so the wait for a patent to expire will be in vain.

There would be no reason to rail against the 20-year stipulation if the patented drugs were available to all and sundry at affordable prices. But that is not the case, for the price of patented drugs are fixed by drug MNCs with an eye on the Western clientele, supported as they are by social safety nets, health insurance and strong currencies. The result is a fast-emerging ethical violation of mind-boggling proportions, in which the drugs are being produced, but the price barrier erected by a patent regime thrust upon the supine governments of the Third World denies treatment to people who are poor.

"The drug industry is instigating the United States to use its power to force unworkable arrangements on poor countries which cannot afford US-priced medicines. This is bound to lead to millions of needless deaths over the years," says Amitav Guha, of the Medical Representative Association of India. The emerging scenario is such that even in emergency situations involving mass-trauma, such as in earthquakes, epidemics or floods, the supply of drugs will at some point be under the control of the MNCs.

The patent regime will have the developing countries held to ransom by the pharmaceutical multinationals, which have the resources, know-how and research capability to produce vital new drugs. Look at the data: Northern countries today hold 97 percent of the patents and the multinationals 90 percent of all technology and product patents. On the flip side, Third World countries where TB, HIV and malaria wreak havoc, never developed a pharmaceutical research base and have little to gain from the TRIPs Agreement. Even the economics does not seem to be in favour of drug development in the South. On average, R&D of a new drug costs approximately USD 150-200 million in the West. Even considering the lower costs of development in a developing country, the fact is that the total costs can rarely be offset from sales.

The fear of the Third World poor being denied access to critically necessary drugs is real and proximate. Medicine for HIV, for example, could have been manufactured at one

tenth of today's price if it were not for patent restrictions. As a result, 90 percent of HIV patients in poor countries, including all over South Asia, cannot afford the drugs which can cost more than USD 10,000 for a year's treatment.

One does not even have to refer to the Third World to study the impact of TRIPs patent regulations — a United States study estimated that just by increasing the patent moratorium by just three years from 17 to 20 (as per the TRIPs Agreement), American patients would have to pay USD 6 billion extra due to delays in the introduction of generic drugs. If this is true for the US, the scenario is nearly homicidal for the poor countries.

Though the pharmaceutical companies have assumed an international character, the industry is far from global in terms of ownership. Dr K Balasubramanium of Consumers International, who has extensively researched the drug industry, points out that the industry severely lacks "competition", which is ironically the main plank on which the United States and other developed countries are pushing the globalisation agenda.

Dr. Balasubramanium says the multinational pharmaceuticals are concentrated in ten countries, and a mere 50 of them account for more than two-thirds of the world's production and exports. The annual sales of pharmaceuticals worldwide add up to USD 320 billion, and in 1995 the sales of the top 50 MNCs stood at USD 273 billion. In fact, the sales of the top ten MNC drug firms amounted to USD 130 billion, or 40 percent of the global production.

The GDP of the 76 poorest developing countries put together is less than the annual sales of the top ten drug firms, each of whom sell upwards USD 10 billion to USD 19 billion each year. This financial clout gives the multinational giants power over the agenda-setting function in both the developed and developing countries. With the weakening of international commitment to stand behind public health—with agencies like the WHO losing clout and a backing away by others such as Unicef from the critical socio-political arena—the defence of the poor in the poor countries is left to the governments, which have themselves shown how little they care.

Their financial robustness also helps the MNCs to set drug prices without bothering too much about the Third World market, which is seen merely as a bonus to the larger takings in the developed world. In fact, there is even sometimes a topsy turvy situation in which the patients in the poorer countries pay more than those in the richer ones. Based on a survey of retail prices of selected drugs in some representative countries, the organisation Health Action International (HAI) charges that the pharmaceutical multinationals practice price discrimination. For example, HAI reports, 100 tablets of 150 mg Zantac (Zinetac in India) produced and marketed by the same manufacturer varied from USD 2 to USD 196 across the world market. And the prices in the two of the least developed countries, Mongolia and Tanzania, were much higher than in the advanced countries.

The drug giants have their allies in medical professions all over the world, in a line that extends from great hospitals of the United States to the roadside clinic in Calcutta. The habit of prescribing expensive, patented drugs, despite the availability of generic substitutes, after all, is universal. "The trend is to prescribe newer but not always effective and efficient drugs. Drug companies in developing countries tend to encourage doctors through various mechanisms to prescribe particular drugs," says Dr Zafar Mirza, Association for the Rational Use of Medication in Pakistan.

Viagra and vitamins

In the cold calculations of the pharmaceutical corporates, the diseases of the developing countries are to be neglected because this is no profitable market. This conviction, of course does not hold for other 'medications' where there is income to be milked, such as in the case of Viagra, obesity drugs, or inessential tonics and vitamin tablets. The

allocation of funds for developing pharmaceuticals and cosmetics for Western middle class consumption, dwarfs what is spent on research and development of preventive medicines for poor countries.

Of the USD 60 billion spent worldwide annually on health research by both the public and private sectors, only about 10 percent is spent on 90 percent of the world's health challenges, which also affect the poorest. The trend was obvious even in the 1970s with the drug companies unwilling to invest in research on more sophisticated drugs to tackle tuberculosis, the disease of the poor. According to *Lancet* 1998, only 10 percent of the bilateral and multilateral aid in the world is being spent on health. Tackling tuberculosis through a worldwide campaign would cost no more than an additional USD 700 million from Third World governments and donors, which is the cost of building and staffing one modern hospital in New York.

TRIPs and WTO are all about control over technology and access to markets and, according to Dr Balasubramaniam, the only way to beat the drug MNCs at the game is to ensure that raw material and finished products are available at competitive prices in the world market and that capable developing countries can freely import them. "This can be possible if countries have appropriate domestic legislation that will provide for parallel imports and compulsory licensing," he says. While parallel imports allow governments to shop around for cheaper generic drugs at the expense of patented ones, compulsory licensing recognises the right of governments to license the use of a patent within the country for public health emergencies and making drugs more affordable to the population.

Only a few developing countries like India, China, Argentina and Brazil have the technological capacity to have their own integrated drug industry and can make use of compulsory licenses to manufacture essential drugs, however. Other small and poor countries will need to import finished products. But what has also to be kept in mind is that the United States Government—regardless of whether the Republicans or Democrats are in power—has been notorious for using pressure on those who try to defy the patent regime. When Thailand attempted to manufacture and to import low cost AIDS and other life-saving drugs from third countries, its arm was twisted with threats of trade sanctions on some of its key exports.

However, there is also the example of the South African government, which, in view of the HIV epidemic, is determined to implement compulsory licensing and parallel imports that are legal and allowed in rich developed countries. The South Africans are talking with generic drug manufacturers in countries that operate without patent laws and produce drugs at one-half to one-tenth the price. Anxious that the wide use of generic versions of drugs will undercut their ability to charge premium prices for medicines, five of the world's largest drug firms have announced that prices of HIV drugs will be slashed in developing countries.

But, neither charity by monopolists like Gates nor cosmetic price reductions by drug multinationals will provide succour to the majority of the world's poor, neglected by the donors and abandoned by their own governments. With the US government supervising the country-by-country change in patent laws, the future looks far bleaker than over the last 50 years.

Simply put, holding a drug patent allows the owner of that patent to charge a significantly higher price than it would without a patent. That is simple economics. But the question is whether 'simple economics' can be allowed to hold sway when the issue is not consumer goods—garments, electronics or sports shoes where there is at least customer choice—but the lived life or excruciating death of tens of millions every year.

ICIMOD

VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), with headquarters in Kathmandu, was established in 1983 to address problems of economic and environmental development in the Hindu Kush-Himalayas (HKH): covering parts of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal, and Pakistan. ICIMOD is an independent organisation governed by a Board of Governors and funded by some 15 countries and donor organisations. Its mandatory activities are (i) Documentation and Information Exchange, (ii) Research, (iii) Training, and (iv) Advisory Services. Activities are implemented in close collaboration with partner institutions in the regional member countries. The Centre has 5 core thematic programmes.

- Sustainable Livelihoods for Mountain Household
- Gender Balanced Mountain Development
- Sustainable Development of Mountain Commons
- Capacity Building of Mountain Development Organisations
- Information and Outreach

The Centre presently has 20 internatianally recruited professional staff and 19 national professional staff. Staff are members of activity and project teams, and are currently organised in 7 work divisions for administrative purposes. During the first quarter of 2001, the Centre intends to fill in the following positions.

Senior Agricultural Specialist
(International Recruitment - 'P' level)
8 years' experience in farming systems' research; demonstrated managerial competence and a capacity for intellectual leadership.

Senior Gender Specialist
(International Recruitment - 'P' level)
6 years' experience in gender & social issues' research; demonstrated managerial competence and o capacity for intellectual leadership.

Planning Monitoring & Evaluation Specialist
(Local Recruitment - 'NO' level)
6 years' experience in PRA and M & E activities.

Mountain Forum - Asia Pacific Coordinator
(Local Recruitment - 'GS' level)
5 years' experience in communications. A knowledge of electronic networking and familiarity with mountain areas.

Water Resources Specialist
(Local Recruitment - 'NO' level)
5 years' experience in integrated water resource management, hydrology or in a related field.

Coordinator, International Year of Mountains
(Local Recruitment - 'NO' level)
5 years' experience in conference coordination, communications, journolism, or advocacy.

Coordinator, Research Programme on Equity and Poverty in the Management of Common Property Resources in the Hindu Kush-Himalayas
(Local Recruitment - 'NO' level)
3 years' experience in gender and social issues.

Requirements for all these positions are as follow.

a) Post graduate, PhD for senior positions, in related field
b) Demonstrated ability to communicate professionally in English and, preferably regional language.
c) Ability to prepare project proposals, progress reports, etc; skill in project plonning, negotiotion and assessment
d) Record of publications in related subjects
e) Experience in managing/working with multidisciplinory teams, particularly with international/regional agencies; part of the work experience should preferably have been gained in the HKH region
f) Computer and Internet literate with knowledge of specific technical programmes
g) Demonstrated commitment to mountain peoples and environment
h) Physically fit to undertake frequent travel to remote ond difficult mountainous regions.

Applications from women and disadvantaged groups ore highly encouraged.

Detailed Terms of Reference for the positions are available on request or visit our website at www.icimod.org.np. Interested persons should apply with a complete bio-dato and names and contact addresses of three referees to the following address by 9th March 2001.

Personnel Section
email: admin@icimod.org.np
ICIMOD, Jawalakhel, GPO Box 3226, Kathmandu, Nepol
Fax: (977-1) 524509 / 536747

INDIA & IT

Sitars play while humanit

A *desi* entrepreneur in Silicon Valley promises an Internet *gurukul*—for a fee of course. Online is the assembly line of the New Age, and the Indian-NRI bourgeoisie could not be happier.

by ***Vijay Prashad***

All the men are computer programmers, all the women are beauty queens, and some of us are humourless. So it seems in the land of Silicon India. Bill Gates says that Indians are the second smartest people on the planet, and the international consortium of beauty contests deems Indian women to be the most beautiful. Gates wants us to work in his computer monopoly, so he flatters us with technical complements.

The magnates that salivate before the Indian market (the size of France, we are told eagerly) complement the Indians by saying that we too should overconsume nonsense. The H1B visa quota has been increased to 300,000 per year, to encourage more of us to apply to work as cyber-coolies. Simultaneously, Lara Dutta won the Miss Universe title (May 2000), Priyanka Chopra won the Miss World crown (November), and Diya Mirza took home the Miss Asia Pacific honours (December).

Flattery opens hitherto protected markets and encourages labour to toil along in the service of a benevolent white dominance. And in the thick of all this is Kanwal Rekhi, godfather of Cyberyuga and President of The Indus Entrepreneurs (TiE, a network of almost 400 *desi* Silicon Valley entrepreneurs, founded in 1993).

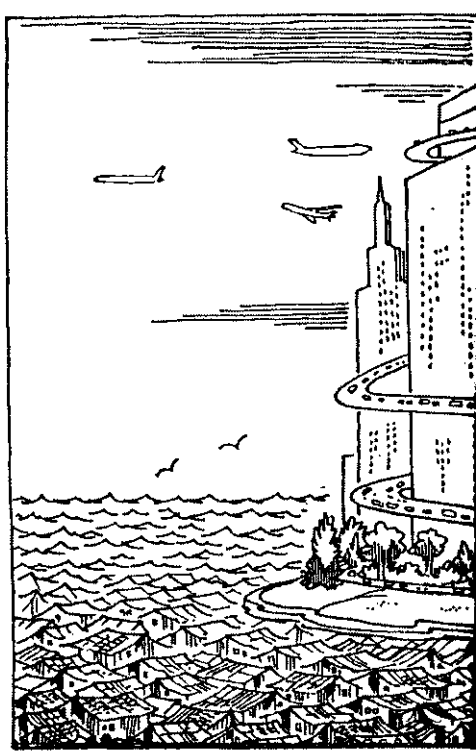
I don't care how much money he's worth or what he's done, or even if he is one of the wealthiest or most influential of people, or if he belongs to the winner's circle of our civilisation. Leave all that to the magazines which have no other way of filling their pages than making lists of the best and the brightest, or drool about the supposed eminence of those whom the editors envy most. I'm interested in Kanwal Rekhi because of his name. Or rather by the sound of his last name, Rekhi, like Reiki, the latest New Age craze of desi cities.

Rekhi, like Bill Gates and Naidu.Com, sells us the Internet as our Utopia, while Reiki teaches us to find Utopia in self-indulgence. Words like 'love' and 'fellowship' are the rhetoric of Rekhi/Reiki, but their orbit is severely narrowed in the world of bindaas.com, the world of "I care about others, but can I go online first and then reorder my *Chi*". We are in the information age, say the Rekhi-Reiki prophets, and with 'Thoughts' we can, like ancient wizards, bring forth paradise.

I met a Reiki master recently. A very nice man, he told me the story of Dr. Mikao Usui, the founder of the Usui System of Natural Healing (the proper name for Reiki, or 'Universal Life Force Energy'). Drawing from ancient Chinese mysticism, the Reiki philosophy believes that the world is governed by energy forces (called Chi in the tradition of *Quigong* or *Pran* in what is now called Pranic Healing).

The Reiki masters manipulate vibrations, or the range between the dense or low vibrations of the physical world and the high vibrations of the spiritual or astral plane. Until the structurally adjusted 1990s, most Indian cities did not find themselves prey to the ultra-commodified world of 'alternative healing,' nor the universe of the New Age, from Deepak Chopra (King of the Sly Babas) to Shahnaz Husain (Queen of the Ayurveda).

The rise of the Hindu Right provided some sense of order for the *dubashis* of the multinational complex: they struck a Faustian bargain with rapacious firms in the belief that the antidote to social ills lies (for the working class and the



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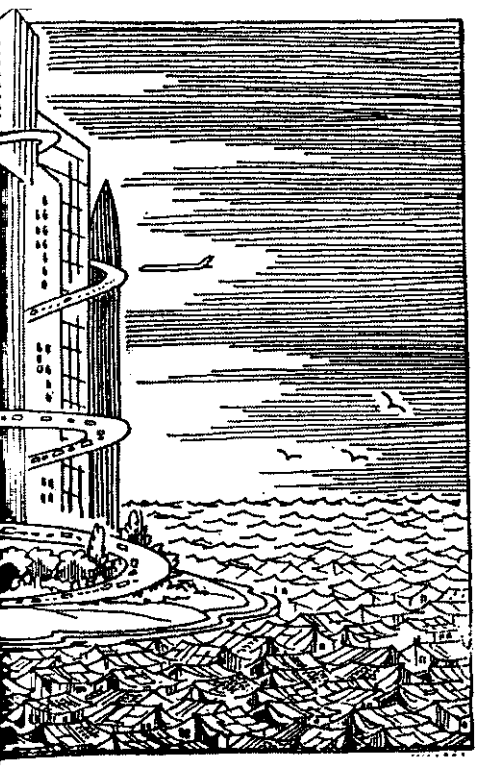
dispossessed) in the discipline of Hindutva and (for themselves) in the self-indulgence of the New Age. In 1993, the Reiki India Research Centre was set-up in Bombay, and its first project was the creation of Reiki World (Badlapur Ashram), where the enthusiast can "have rest, peace, fun and deep experience of Sadhana and sharing by being together".

After a leveraged buyout, with the carcass of the Old Economy lying before one's valiant feet, what better rest and relaxation than a massage, an astral session and the rearrangement of one's Chi? The language of Reiki utopianism is much like that of the Internet madness. Reiki masters tell us to "imagine the implications of the universe around us made from energy which can be shaped and manipulated by thoughts." The Internet gurus ask us to trust in the Information Age, where online is the assembly line, and the computer is the factory of the New Economy.



Inter Press Service

Work and value

Kanwal Rekhi has no time for the minutiae of public policy, because this big thinker believes that India lacks Thoughts and the Entrepreneurial Spirit. With more spirit, India will leap forward. "India is poor," says Mr. Rekhi, "because it is pro-poor. We have so many political statements like *'garibi hatao'* but no one does anything to change it. The reason is because in the US the emphasis is on productivity. In India, there is an emphasis on jobs. But people fail to realise that work performed doesn't add value."

Reiki and Rekhi Utopianism puts all its stock in the Ether, that mysterious substance that early modern people believed pervaded the universe. The activity of the millions who struggle hard to survive and to transform their lived reality is cast off indelicately by Rekhi in favour of the mystery of American productivity.

What is this productivity and whose interest does it serve? "Today," Rekhi announced to a few hundred desi Silicon Valley executives in mid-2000, "India's Third World is visible mostly, but slowly people are beginning to see India's First World—the entrepreneurs making it." Entrepreneurs are those people who live untrammelled by notions of social justice and community values, and it is these people who are the agents of the Rekhi Economy and the consumers of the Reiki Spirit.

Rekhi considers his firm, The Indus Entrepreneur, to be the "epitome of free enterprise spirit of Silicon Valley", and his aim is to start chapters of this "entrepreneur incubator initiative" across India. The country needs to move from "job preservation to job creation," he notes, and the Indian government needs to change its laws "to encourage individuals to come forward with risk capital." In the Hindutva vein, Rekhi adopts the gurukul concept, with his TiE the institutional guru, for a fee, to husband entrepreneurship in modern India. A free market for the free-spirited bourgeois entrepreneur.

With the highest incarceration rates in the world, and its jails full, the United States is hardly an economic utopia: the numbers look so good because the poor languish in jails (many for minor crimes related to narcotics), and because the US dollar, backed ably by military might, is the store of global wealth.

Millennium Dreams exhumed medieval ideas of the occult. Beside the pessimists who await the end of the world stand the optimists who hope that the astral plane will offer something miraculous for the blessed. In the early days of 2001, the World Reiki Weekend was held in New Delhi, where US and European Reiki Masters taught their Indian *shishyas* shadow meditation, the techniques of dancing hands for aura healing, and for the activation of the healing properties of stones with mantra.

One would think that India already contained all manner of such wisdom, but even this must now be imported, what with the customs barrier lifted on all manner of items, including the spiritual apparently. Meanwhile, Rekhi's TiE goes forth with its promotion of the entrepreneurial spirit through its workshops and seminars.

The Indian-NRI bourgeoisie once was an enthusiast for the technology of the IITs, but now it seems this genus is infected with a Californian variety of alchemy. In the Middle Ages, scholars of the occult tried to transform base elements into gold, or else to search for perpetual youth. Our contemporary bourgeois' attempt to make silicon into gold, or to make one's body immune from the ravages of age, is the alchemy of the modern age.

Meanwhile, our educated youth are propelled from one cybercafe to another, feisty for the fool's gold, and then eager for a bit of relaxation. Faced with the detritus of the information age, we are sold the *bindaas* philosophy: relax, chill out, don't get too stressed. The sitars play while humanity burns.

Census and sex workers

TWO MILLION census workers in India are counting more than a billion people. Census officials say by the time the month-long count ends on 28 February, they will have a fairly accurate idea of how most Indians live and what they do for a living. They say while everyone will be counted, some people on the margins of society, including those involved in illegal activities such as sex workers, will be classified as beggars. That policy has upset some women involved in India's huge illegal sex trade.

Several thousand prostitutes, or sex workers as some prefer to be called, and their children live on G.B. Road. They live and work in appalling conditions, calling out to men on the street below from behind caged balconies. They are just a few of the estimated two million sex workers in India. Now, as census workers fan out across India, some of the women are angry. They say because of their work they are being classified as beggars.

Sangeeta, a prostitute who has lived and worked on G.B. Road for the past 10 years, says the last thing she does is beg for her money. Sangeeta says she was shocked when she heard she would be classified as a beggar under India's census. She says she and her colleagues are not beggars. She says beggars come to her for money.

But to India's government Sangeeta is a beggar. Prostitution is illegal in India and therefore cannot be included as an occupation on the two-page, 25-question census form... Deputy Census Commissioner R.G. Mitra says the money sex workers earn is not considered part of the national economy. So, while the woman will be counted as part of the population, they will be classified as beggars as will all other people involved in the criminal underworld. "Sex workers—in fact prostitution as such—is not considered to be, even if it earns income for some people, part of the national income," said the census official.

"You have a production boundary and anyone who is economically active within that production boundary is considered to be working. That is the basic definition, and you cannot go out of that definition. Then anyone who is active within that boundary is supposed to be working," said Mr. Mitra. But he says if sex workers perform some other task, such as sewing or washing, and list that as an occupation on their census form they will be counted under those occupations.

India's sex workers and census workers agree on one thing: there would be no advantage to being counted as a sex worker in the census if such a category existed. No government benefits would flow to the women if they were counted as sex workers, and they would not receive any special privileges that members of certain castes and ethnic groups are entitled to.

Non-governmental organisations that work with India's sex workers are divided over whether sex workers should be included in the country's census in a separate category. Some who support the proposal say it would give India's sex workers much needed legitimacy. But Lalita Nayak of the Joint Women's Programme, a group that offers counselling and aid to sex workers and their children, says she opposes the proposal on the grounds that it could lead to legalising prostitution. She says that would only mean legalising the sexual exploitation of millions of women.

"On this issue, if we say prostitution is a job or employment, then it will be bad, both culturally and socially in the Indian situation," she said. "Girls are looked down on in India, and if we legalise prostitution then we are opening up a situation for girl children not to study, not to go to school. We will be saying this is a profession where you can go and earn money," said Ms. Nayak.

FROM A VOICE OF AMERICA REPORT BY JIM TEEPLE

No, thank you...

THIS IS with reference to the Order No.M.12015/6/2000-Edn. dated, 4th December 2000 nominating me as a member of the Working Group on Art & Culture for the formulation of the Tenth Five Year Plan. I am constrained to decline the nomination, as in my perception the cultural policy followed by the present Government tends to undermine the secular character of the nation.

I feel that the cultural policy of the government headed by the BJP is directed to privilege the Hindu culture as the national culture. The government has been pursuing a discriminatory policy of favouring the culture of some religious groups and marginalising that of others. It is a matter of grave concern that some of our reputed cultural leaders have been systematically denigrated and their works have been disfigured by organisations under the umbrella of the party leading the government. The government has also tried to fill cultural organisations funded by the state with those who promote a sectarian and communal cultural practice.

In the light of the above I would not like to associate with the Working Group as a protest against the partisan and divisive cultural policy followed by the present Government.

HISTORIAN K.N. PANNIKAR'S RESPONSE TO THE DEPUTY SECRETARY OF THE INDIAN PLANNING COMMISSION.

Q&A on Pakistan

1. Is Pakistan failing? (When will Pakistan fail?)

A: The wrong question. Some critical institutions have long since failed or never achieved coherence (the political system), others are faltering (the civilian administration); in some cases non-governmental institutions have risen to take their place (e.g. private universities, madrassas in the educational sector). A fuller answer to this question will emerge after a closer examination of key Pakistani institutions, and a study

of relevant comparative cases (Turkey, Indonesia, Egypt?).

2. Is Pakistan becoming Talibanised?

A: If taken literally, a firm "no". The Taliban may have some influence in NWFP and areas where Pushtuns have settled, but the question really is about other developments. As a Muslim society Pakistan is becoming more conservative, and to some degree, less tolerant of diversity—both within Islam and with regard to non-Muslims. Here there are some parallels with India. As for the Taliban itself the perspective of part of the "establishment" is that they are an instrument of Pakistani policy, and that Pakistan can "tame" or civilise them, without fear of blowback within Pakistan. This is challenged by many liberal Pakistanis who fear the influence of the "*jehadis*". A careful distinction must be drawn between the Taliban, the various jehadi groups operating in Kashmir, and various militant/sectarian Islamic groups.

3. Is the Pakistan army being taken over by extremists?

A: No. The army is more conservative—or rather there are fewer "liberal" officers than before, which means that it reflects changes in Pakistan itself—but it is still a corporate body, it is concerned about professional matters as well as the future of Pakistani society. I doubt if there are any radical Islamic cabals operating within the officer corps. Younger officers that I met seem identical to their forerunners in many ways. This does not qualify them to reshape Pakistan or to tell civilians how to run universities, research laboratories, schools, or businesses, but as professional soldiers they remain similar to those that I wrote about in the early 1980s.

4. How great is the risk of war with India?

A: One gets very different answers from different people. Some hard-liners are confident that they can press India in Kashmir without running a risk of a wider war, and that the outbreak of peace might endanger Pakistan because of its inferior resource base. Others (including some very senior officers) seem eager to settle Kashmir and establish a normal relationship with India, although there will never be trust between the two countries. I believe a peace process has achieved "liftoff" but it is fragile and the trend of recent months could easily reverse itself—but look for the revival of serious negotiations.

5. What about the risk of a nuclear war?

A: This is exaggerated here, but in South Asia there may be over-confidence that nuclear threats can be manipulated for political purposes, or that nuclear weapons stabilise the relationship. The risk of escalation because of wrong signals, misperceptions, bad intelligence, is unquantifiable, but not low.

6. What about the future of Pakistani politics? Will the military stay in power, will BB return?

A. The army needs a return to a "normal" political system for a number of reasons, but don't expect it to give up its claim as the ultimate protector of Pakistan, or its right to intervene when things really go bad. The army will continue to "play politics"—it has done this successfully in the past, but also at times with catastrophic results (the Hamoodur Rahman report came out while I was travelling through Pakistan—read it and weep). The kind of leaders that would engender confidence in the army do not seem to be in evidence, I saw no enthusiasm for any current leader; young Pakistanis are looking for a Nelson Mandela, or an Ayatollah Khomeini, or a new Quaid-i-Azam.

7. Will the reforms work?

A: The reconstruction of politics, undertaken by the National Reconstruction Bureau, is a pet project of Musharraf, I don't know if it will outlast his tenure; it is a sincere effort that may have complex consequences, although it will not throw up a new generation of political leaders at the provincial or national level. The National Accountability Bureau is working its way through a large number of cases, and most Pakistanis believe that corruption has been contained. I reserve judgment pending a few more visits to Pakistan.

8. Has the economy failed?

A: You can't pursue ruinous economic policies for 30 years without paying the price somewhere down the line. The formal economy is in desperate shape, and critical Pakistani institutions are being starved to death; there is a lively informal economy, however, but the trends are mostly negative. Again, I defer to the experts, but those that I met seemed to have very different prescriptions for the patient.

9. What should the US be doing?

A: There should be significant assistance for those civilian institutions that have deteriorated over the years, especially education. This would have a long-term impact and would be welcomed (but is it too late?). The practice of keeping the Pakistani economy on a short-tether may also be re-examined. We need to revive ties with the Pakistan military, resume training and education. There should also be a greater engagement on critical regional issues, but with the understanding that Kashmir, Afghanistan and the nuclear issue are linked and cannot be treated in isolation. A stable but restrained Pakistan is in everyone's interest—but are the negative trends reversible?

FROM "PAKISTAN: A TRIP BRIEFING"; INTERVIEW WITH STEPHEN COHEN, SENIOR FELLOW, THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION.

Alienated South India

MANY OF us Indians feel bewildered and also disgusted with what is happening at the national level especially in Delhi. I have found that this feeling is very

intense in the southern states of India. The younger people especially in that part not only talk with utter contempt but also with some desperation about what has gone wrong with these people from the North "living in the cow-belt"...

Delhi has been the capital of India for ages. The names maybe different but the geographical position has been more or less the same. Hastinapur was the capital in ancient times. Maybe for some time the seat of power might have shifted towards East but it again came back to Northwest around Delhi. The Aryan settlers entered the Indian Subcontinent through the northwestern passes and naturally settled in the vast and prosperous plains. The mughals naturally followed this tradition and made Delh-Agra their seat of power. For centuries Delhi was the seat of imperial power in India and therefore to capture Delhi was the dream of every rising power. Even the Marathas wanted to capture the imperial seat at Delhi so that they could formally rule all over India. So also the British who were compelled to take the same position when they shifted their capital from Calcutta to Delhi at the beginning of the last century...

But the geographical position of Delhi was rather incongruous. It is not necessary that the capital of India should be more or less centrally located. But it is necessary that it should not be located far on one side and that too in a geographical area which does not represent whole of India. Even though heritage-wise, culture-wise and history-wise India is one country, yet different parts of India are as different as different states and this difference can be simplified. Peninsular India is definitely quite different from North India and especially the 'cow belt'. Of course in this North India one would not like to include Bengal and the north-eastern states. And in 21st century if India is to march confidently, it has to be more or less what is now Peninsular India and Bengal.

But this is not happening or being allowed to happen because Delhi is geographically located in North India. Its surrounding proximate areas completely overshadow and influence life in Delhi. Delhi is very sensitive to what happens in these proximate areas where local politics, religion and backwardness are predominant. Not only this, but because of the huge population in these proximate areas. And this is the main reason why at the national level we are so influenced by religious and caste politics; and the Central government also decides major policy matters on the basis of how they would affect these proximate areas. These areas are feudal and heavily dependent on agriculture. They live in a more or less isolated fashion away from the sea-coast. The new electronic media have not affected them much. They therefore live in the past and find it difficult to live in the present.

Sadhus and *sants* move in large numbers all over. *Mahants* and *maths* are scattered liberally everywhere. People are not allowed to indulge and celebrate innocently as these are tarred as not in consonance with our religion or culture. Women are not given equal status. It is common knowledge that women and young girls cannot move freely and safely in urban areas, especially in the evening. Family planning is looked down upon and the North Indian states are now openly called *bimaru*. Backward classes form their militant groups called *senas* allegedly to protect themselves from other backward classes and the upper classes. *Mullahs, maulvis and imams* have a tight control over the Muslim population—like the Shahi Imam of Delhi who openly preached that if Ram Mandir is built, he would ask the Arab countries to boycott India.

Because Delhi the capital of India is so geographically placed, national politics naturally reflects its proximate areas—what their outlook is, what their aspirations are, what they think is proper, etc. At the national level, therefore, we waste time in discussing issues like Babri Masjid or how to safeguard Muslim vote banks by appeasing fundamentalism or whether we should debate conversion. The Women's Reservation Bill is not allowed to be even debated because of backward class reservation overtones. Parliament gives an impression that the nation is just not concerned with stark issues it faces, like national security, economic development, globalisation, population explosion, miserable human resource development, investments, etc.

The first reaction to this phenomenon would be to shift the capital to the South in a more centrally located place. But this is neither desirable nor practicable. The alternatives can therefore be:

- To hold at least one session of Parliament somewhere in the South. Of course, this would cost money but not much when IT communications are available freely and comprehensively. Even otherwise the benefits would far outweigh the expenditure as hopefully the representatives from North India would at least behave more responsibly in a South Indian atmosphere.

- There should be reorganisation of states to ensure that no state would have say more than 10 percent of seats in the Lok Sabha. This is absolutely necessary so that one state or group of states will not dominate Parliament and we do have a real federal India.

Unless something on these lines is considered on a priority basis, there is every likelihood of further alienation between North and South India. The younger generation in South India has already started voicing its free and frank opinion on these issues. It has openly expressed its bewilderment about Rajiv Gandhi's handling of the Shah Bano case; the demolition of the Babri Masjid; and V.P. Singh's appeasement of the Muslim vote bank and the decision to implement the Mandal Commission Report. Without hesitation, they argue that India's population problem is naturally due to the *bimaru* states.

I would like to mention a personal experience about such alienation. In 1972, I became secretary to

Vasantrao Naik the chief minister of Maharashtra. We found that the Central government was not looking adequately and sympathetically at the problems of Maharashtra and other southern states. Vasantrao had a close personal relationship with Brahmananda Reddy, chief minister of Andhra Pradesh and Devaraj Urs, chief minister of Karnataka. I distinctly remember attending some discussions amongst these three so as to form a group of the three states to safeguard their interest. Maybe this was one of the reasons why Indira Gandhi removed Vasantrao in 1975.

If therefore this alienation process between North and South is not tackled immediately, a very serious situation is likely to arise. The day will not be very far when the southern states collectively will bluntly ask the North to behave and not to waste national time and energy in futile, feudal and centuries-old issues, slogans and thoughts. All of us sincerely hope this does happen.

FROM "ON THE TAIL OF A COW"
BY B.G. DESHMUKH IN THE ASIAN AGE.

Eastern wisdom

IMAGINE FOR a moment something distant and unlikely. A village in Europe in what can still be called the Dark Ages. Barbarism. Desperate poverty. A deeply conservative social order with great gaps between haves and have-nots. Little regard for the value of human life. And the status of women? Forget about it, not on the map. Disease and ignorance are rampant, and wandering witch-doctors compete with fallen priests and monks to cure the sick, and take their money. On top of all that, it's northern Europe. The weather is lousy.

Into this non-Shangri La come strangers from distant lands. They are well-dressed, cosmopolitan, and at ease. They are concerned, shocked even, by the deprivation around them. They speak among themselves in strange tongues—Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, Chinese. It's clear that on their journey to this distant land, they have seen much of this sort.

In parts of this dark land, they say to each other, people still live in caves, paint themselves blue, worship objects in the forest. Our visitors, humane men all of them, decide to take action. They send messages back to Cathay, Samarkand, Vijayanagar, Damascus, Teheran. "We must do something. These poor benighted people need our help. They don't know about sewerage systems, public health, algebra." The Chinese member of the party makes a special note about the absence of gunpowder and writing paper.

Months later—this was pre-email, mind you—comes the signal from the head office: Do something then. Help them. But make it worth our while. Our mysterious but well-meaning party of wise men set up liaison offices and start importing technology and ideas from home to help the locals. It takes ages to get there, carried by porters and camel caravans. But eventually, in old barns on the edge of the village, supplies start to accumulate. Stacks of fine paper, carved quill pens, finely worked leather and iron implements, seeds from local plants, and folios of fine calligraphy, filled with the secrets of science, mathematics and medicine.

The locals take to this like fish to water. At first. They join the aid operations (for it is such) of the outsiders, signing-on as translators, cart drivers, labourers and willing participants in uplift programmes and joint ventures. They plant the outsiders' crops and harvest them with wonder and gratitude. They learn the languages of their employers and they embrace the concepts that have been imported with such goodwill and enthusiasm. All goes well. At first.

Then neighbouring villages, districts, kingdoms begin to wonder if they're losing out. Feudal lords in distant castles realise that despite local improvements, a lot of revenue is being spent on pointless things like schools, roads and water schemes. It should be accumulating in their coffers. Bandit leaders too eye the booty and recruit the resentful.

Worst of all, the sheer pace of change forces a local backlash. Old land disputes emerge with new vigour. The priests of the village church realise that control over social change is slipping away. And the adults worry about the impact of all this on the young. But even youth are having trouble adjusting. Instead of working in the fields, or the smithy, or just getting ready for future family life, young people want jobs, instant gratification; they develop the urban aspirations of those that help them. They feel they're not getting what they're entitled to, and they start blaming everyone but themselves.

The Asian benefactors are shocked and appalled. Sitting around an exclusive inn, amid steaming cauldrons of food from home, they express their resentment of the way things are going. They deplore the rising crime rate, the failure to rise to the occasion by local elite, the stubborn refusal of real, beneficial change to take root.

Of course, this is all a fallacious construct. But as I tour the developing world and see the almost ubiquitous presence of outside assistance, ideas, attitudes and technology, I wonder why the great civilisations of Asia didn't voyage through backwards to Europe (and North America) and try to change things with lashings of cash and goodwill. I am glad they didn't, and that they left my forebears to make their own mistakes, follow their own blind alleys, decide for themselves that meaningful change has to be indigenous if it is to be long-lasting.

Hail the wise ones of the East (occidentally speaking) for their wisdom was great. And I know they'll regain their greatness soon enough.

FROM "AID FROM ANCIENT ASIA"
BY DANIEL LAK IN NEPALI TIMES.

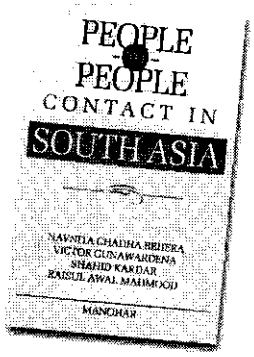
No visas: So what is the problem?

After spending much of 2000 doing research on the quality of interaction among South Asian academics, activists, and so-called "track-II" and "track III" participants, I sat down to read *People-to-People Contact in South Asia* in mid-January 2001. This is a book put together from a project executed by the Colombo-based Regional Centre for Strategic Studies (RCSS) with chapter contributions from four South Asian scholars. Working on the assumption that the existing difficult visa-regime is the main culprit blocking the flowering of people-to-people contact in South Asia, the contributors highlight different aspects of this problem and offer ideas to resolve them.

Raisul Awal Mahmood, a senior fellow at the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), looks at the difficulties faced by a Bangladeshi national in getting a visa to other SAARC countries. He argues that the "amount of paperwork involved, the time required to process it, uncertainties, and above all, the attitude and behaviour of concerned authorities cause great difficulties to obtain a visa to travel across SAARC countries." Such impediments have a negative effect on business travel and on transaction costs related to decisions that affect trade and investment.

In a useful analysis of the paperwork involved, Mahmood finds no consistent pattern between the various SAARC countries with respect to the information sought and documents required. These variations range from the no-visa requirement for a Bangladeshi to visit Bhutan to an eight-page form to be filled out in the case of India. Apart from the forms, the actual procedure and the time involved in obtaining a visa also vary, in part due to the location and the limited staff of the visa-issuing authority.

Difficult visa regimes, Mahmood reports, are justified by the state authorities by referring to colonial legacies, as well as "mistrust among nations, institutional rigidities, obsession with terrorist activities, illegal movement of people across borders, vested interests, and lack of alternative method of monitoring movement of people across countries." Difficulties for business travel lead to the inhibited flow of information necessary for the current methods of doing business in the Subcontinent. The lengthy procedures to obtain visas also prevent business executives from responding in time to market needs. Members of the academic community are similarly affected, Mahmood adds, but this argument is made unconvincingly. Mahmood ends his essay by calling for relaxation of visa procedures. His is a very concise article that is strong on details.



People-to-People Contact in South Asia
by Navnita Chadha Behera, Victor Gunawardena, Shahid Kardar, Raisul Awal Mahmood
Manohar, Delhi, 2000, 143 pp., INR 270.

reviewed by ***Pratyoush Onta***

Shahid Kardar, a chartered accountant-cum-consultant from Lahore and the honorary treasurer of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, argues that the "nature of Indo-Pakistan relations is the main obstacle to people-to-people contact in South Asia". Explaining this perceptual constraint, he adds that the other countries in the region can not build more extensive relationships with Pakistan because such an effort will be interpreted as "alliances with India's enemy". It works the other way around too, namely, when relationship between India and the other countries improve, it gives reason for the Pakistani establishment to worry. A whole host of perceptual differences between India and Pakistan are reproduced in school curricula and by the media of the two countries. They influence the policy-making procedures and the implementation of rules that eventually make the free flow of people between the two countries difficult.

Interest groups that actually benefit from the continuation of these tensions between India and Pakistan do their best to aggravate the situation as their own positions on the domestic turf remain elevated in the presence of the tensions. Kardar also discusses the obstacles created by legislation and administrative procedures regarding the granting of visas. In the true style of a consultant, he ends his article with a long series of prescriptions to overcome the perceptual impediments, but only some of these are related to his preceding analysis. The rest consists of the usual laundry list of ideas often repeated in such articles.

Victor Gunawardena, a media trainer from Colombo, refers to the 1986 SAARC Summit in Bangalore, which called for five special initiatives to promote people-to-people contact: the SAARC Audio-Visual

Exchange program (SAVE), SAARC Documentation Centre, Scheme for Promotion of Organised Tourism, a Chairs, Fellowships and Scholarships Scheme and Youth Volunteers Programme. He notes that little publicity was given to these programs, and that they have had little impact in promoting people-to-people contact between the regional countries. With respect to the SAARC visa exemption scheme which currently contains 21 categories, Gunawardena reports that the scheme received such niggardly promotion that many people included in the exempt category end up applying for visas. Despite the recent expansion of this scheme, it is biased towards the government sector.

Ideologies of hatred

Navnita Chadha Behera, a social scientist based in New Delhi, argues that popular interactions in South Asia are shaped by the choices of the states that have pursued a "modernist agenda in building nation-states." She adds, "the drive for preserving state sovereignty, national security and the search for national identity has resulted in emasculating people-to-people contacts in the region." Examining the case of Pakistan and India, she argues that visa controls were put into place with Partition at which time other measures (open border, visa exemptions, etc) were not even considered.

Nationalist discourses generate ideologies of hatred where Pakistan becomes the *other* of India and vice versa. National security is operationalised in terms of territorial security via military means, writes Behera. Difficult visa regimes, inadequate infrastructure, and nationally biased media make up the additional structural constraints that influence the tenor of people-to-people interaction in South Asia. Although South Asian states have nominally committed themselves to promoting such interaction, Behera argues that a "radically different agenda"—what she calls a "post-modernist" one—which privileges civil society over the state is necessary.

The writing of post-nationalist histories and establishment of a South Asian University that puts the people before the individual states in its discourses will be on this new agenda, according to Behera. She argues that such an agenda has a fighting chance because of the ongoing communications revolution that helps to transcend state boundaries, growth of ngo's and communications channels opened by them, and the track II and track III dialogues. Behera ends in a positive note by stating people "are clearly beginning to assert their choices and ultimately, they wield the power to realise the post-modernist agenda of popular interactions in South Asia."

Behera's analysis of the state-oriented structural constraints will not come as a surprise to students of South Asian history, and her section on the current state of popular interaction in South Asia repeats much of what she has written before. In ending optiinistically about the future of people-to-people interaction in South Asia, she does not even refer to the weak points of these initiatives noted by her and co-authors Paul M. Evans and Gowher Rizvi in *Beyond Boundaries: A Report on the State of Non-Official Dialogues on Peace, Security, and Cooperation in South Asia* (1997). Hence, the most theoretically promising chapter of the book—Behera's—is nothing beyond a rehash of older writings.

Nepal-India paradigm

It is regrettable that no analyst was invited by RCSS to look at the case of people-to-people interaction between India and Nepal. There are two reasons to say this. First, the Indo-Pakistan scenario dominates too much of the discussion in this book, as elsewhere, and tension between these two countries is conveniently used by track-II participants from India, Pakistan and others as an excuse for not doing their homework. Given the open border between Nepal and India, and the absence of passport controls and any other kind of restriction on movement, there is something to be learnt by everyone in analysing this bilateral situation, formalised by the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship between the two countries. Nor is there a recognition, in a book devoted to bringing South Asians together by pulling down barriers, of how Kathmandu is rapidly emerging as a South Asian meeting point precisely because Nepal allows visa-on-arrival to all comers.

It is also a matter worth considering whether scholarship is really affected that badly by the hurdles that exist in each of the visa regimes in South Asia. After all, one would have thought that a little bit of inconvenience (such as processing delays, long forms, and questions at the consular counter) can easily be suffered for the cause of a South Asian future, particularly by scholars and activists who are doing most of the travelling these days. Indeed, some invitees to regional meets do not show up because they wait until the very last minute despite knowing about the cumbersome procedures.

It does seem to this writer that the larger hurdle for people-to-people contact is the airfares required to transport the seminarians and workshop participants to and fro, particularly given that they prefer not to take the more ground-based forms of travel even when it is feasible, such as between Calcutta and Dhaka. Also, let us not forget that the people who bemoan the time and effort it takes to get visas to South Asian countries are more than willing to undertake even humiliating procedures to join interactions in New York, Geneva or Brussels.

Going back to the Indo-Nepal open border, it would have been useful if the contributors had tried to juxtapose the cases examined in this book to that of the regime between the two countries—if only to test the link that is assumed to exist between troublesome visa procedures and the lack of mutual understanding at the people-to-people level. Several hundred thousands Nepalis work in India and the number of Indians in Nepal is hardly insignificant. While members of the labouring classes might be hassled at the border cross points, members of the middle and upper classes

mostly do not even notice that they have crossed over from one country to another. Under such easy conditions, one would have thought that there would be a large reservoir of understanding between the people of the two countries. That is hardly the case.

The level of mutual ignorance and the willingness of the people to believe rumours and half truths reported by an illiterate media in both Nepal and India about the other country have been amply demonstrated in the last two years. Ignorant academia in both countries are also responsible for this state of affairs. I would therefore argue that even if the visa regimes between the other countries of the region were overwhelmingly relaxed, people-to-people understanding would not flower automatically as a result. Participants in people-to-people initiatives are not necessarily known for their commitment to the fostering of democratic cultures at home. They might not even be the most effective network builders for the region in their home turfs, a point this writer argued at some length in an earlier article (Himal, February 2000).

Academics in each of our countries have not done enough to develop the conditions for the promotion of regional scholarship in their respective countries. I have made this point for the case of India and Nepal previously (Himal, March 1998), and it holds true for all the other countries of the region. That is why one remains unconvinced by Mahmood's point noted above about how visa regimes have prevented the growth of regional academia, or pious wishes related to a "South Asian University" producing someone with a "South Asian mind". This is being too simplistic, even naïve, about the conditions in which social scientists currently work in our countries.

Regional people-to-people contact must contribute to further democratisation in each of our countries. That can happen only when such popular interactions draw people who are committed to the concerned themes in their own home turfs and have demonstrated willingness and skills to work as part of civil society networks. Otherwise, such initiatives will draw people who do not contribute a single sensible word to the interactions but who will animatedly compare hotel facilities in Colombo and New Delhi. Sadly, too many second and third track-wallahs of the latter kind have crowded the people-to-people agenda in South Asia. ∆

Reverse anthropology and controlled subjectivity

Anthropology was born in sin and still struggles to absolve itself. Self-reflexivity and all attempts to overcome the circumstances of its birth, and transform the practice of anthropology into a more egalitarian rendition of other cultures are still ridden with problems. New techniques, some of them bordering on the gimmicky, surface in anthropology as ways of writing culture. From participant observation, to thick description, to letting the 'object' speak, various methods have been attempted and advocated in the effort to rectify the hierarchy between the anthropologist and the subject.

Since imbalance is inscribed into the practice of the anthropologist (literate and more powerful) observing another set of human beings (illiterate and relatively powerless), it is seldom that such sophistications of method in fieldwork and narrative technique manage to overcome the inherent problem.

Anthropological brilliance usually goes hand in hand with a developed individual sensitivity. It is the successful meeting of this challenge of subjectivity that redeems anthropology, and enables it to express itself in numerous ways—in monographs, photographs, diaries and films. Film is a particularly useful medium of anthropological expression, but it is also a tricky one for obvious reasons. Cinematic anthropology must resist more temptations than its traditional counterparts.

CHICKEN SHIT AND ASH: A VISIT TO PARADISE

Huhnerdreck and Asche, Austria, 1997/98, colour, Beta/SP PAL, 68'
Original language: Nepali, Tamang. By Karl Prossliner, Gabriele Tautscher and Peter Friess

reviewed by ***Bela Malik***

The film *Chicken Shit and Ash* is a bold enterprise but does not quite manage to resist the temptations. The production is bold because it does what normally does not happen, which is a kind of anthropology in reverse; where it fails is that the narrative is not equal to the demands of such an enterprise. The 'other' remains the 'other', and the 'self', though concealed from the camera, is very much in the foreground.

The film records the visit of two Tamang men from east Nepal's Dolakha district to Vienna (Austria), and in the process captures a Western, foreign world through their eyes. In this sense, the film tries to reverse Orientalism, by 'exoticising' the developed world. In order to silence the voice and perhaps even the perspective of the observer, and to allow the observed to 'speak', the film is almost entirely in the Nepali and Tamang languages. English subtitles make the dialogues comprehensible to a wider audience.

The first part focuses on the rhythm of life in the village of the two men. Close-up, lingering shots, like the sequence on the coarse fingers of a woman sifting grain, or the dust kicked up by a child ambling along a path, draw attention to the pace and laboriousness of everyday life. The fields, houses, settlements,

footpaths, sources of water, agricultural operations, rituals and forms of medicine (traditional) are shown along with the social world of the inhabitants ('in their own words').

The unhurried shots are punctuated by accounts of the village's old and young, women and men. All of these make for a commendable effort at recreating the context to which the two protagonists belong. The extraordinarily long duration of this part of the film suggests that the production as a whole is directed at a Western audience, since for someone from the East (in cultural terms) or South (in developmental terms), barring the specifics of language and ritual, the details of life in the village are more or less familiar and could have been summed up in a few frames.

The other problem with this section is that, on the face of it, the villagers seem to be speaking *suo motu*. But on reflection, they are answering questions put to them off camera. The inhabitants of the village are aware of at least some part of the worldview of the questioner. One of them says, "...people marry at a young age, between 15 to 16". 'Too young' and 'too old' for this or that is usually informed by a context. Fifteen clearly is too young to get married in the context of school education, professional qualification and career. None of this is in evidence in the village. Yet the person knows that 15 or 16 is too young an age to get married. Obviously, the village is not so isolated or untouched as its socio-economic circumstances suggest, neither is the person interviewed unaware of the social world of the investigator. The answer is informed by this reality. Since the questions are never presented (only the answers), nor the faces of those interviewing the villagers, one can begin to wonder at the extent of editing that went into presenting the 'subject's' voice. It is in the editing that controlled subjectivity encounters one of the most dangerous pitfalls of anthropological presentation.

Bir Bahadur and Jeet Bahadur in Vienna.

Seeking starkness

The elaborate focus on life in the Tamang village was perhaps also intended as a juxtaposition. The two men are flown to Vienna and the rest of the film records their reactions to what they see—from the view from the glass windows of the prefabricated hut on an Austrian mountain, to the traffic, the streets, and the way of life—and these would be those of any poor villager when confronted with the sights of advanced capitalism.

It is all a little bewildering for the two Tamang men. But if their 'reactions' to modernisation had to be recorded, some of it could have been had in Kathmandu city or by the apron of the Tribhuvan International Airport. However, for the juxtaposition to 'succeed', the contrast has to be stark. Kathmandu is after all at an intermediate point between the subsistence economy village and service-sector dominated Vienna. It has a bit of everything and in the melting pot the contrast can never really be that presentable.

The experience of the two Tamangs in Vienna presents a series of sharp differences: the ease of buying food at the department store, as opposed to back-breaking labour on the fields; the old-age homes in Vienna contrasted with the social support systems offered by pre-capitalist systems; the Church, as opposed to the rituals and practices in a Tamang village; the slaughter house, as opposed to the killing and cutting of chicken for ritualistic purposes; and the pace of life on the streets in contrast to the slow tempo of life back home.

There is a particularly striking aspect of the film—the robust and witty responses of the two Tamang men. They are at ease in Vienna and there is an endearing forthrightness to their reactions that is so vastly different from the demeanour and conduct of those who go to the cities of the Western world in search of work, mostly as illegal immigrants. In the landscape of the world order, it pays to be an escorted guest. But such hospitalities can only be extended one way, because life at that level is mainly about the hard currency and the visa. And it is because of differences of this kind that the camera must be especially sensitive. Unfortunately, *Chicken Shit and Ash* neither does well on this count, nor does it have any great point to make. Occassionally, there is that sinking feeling that a spectacle has been contrived for a Western audience.

By the end of *Chicken Shit and Ash*, one is left to wonder at its purpose. Is it to critique modern civilisation through the Tamang village and its two delegates to Vienna? Is it to show the starting and culminating points of a developmental process? Or is it to express a certain agnosticism about both 'tradition' and 'modernity', in the sense of pointing to the virtues and vices of both. None of these points comes through with sufficient force. What then is it all about?

The engaging title of the documentary refers to a Tamang myth of creation, in which, as the elder of the two Tamang delegates to Vienna points out, god tried to make the human out of various exotic materials and nothing worked—until the model in which an exasperated god tried chicken shit and ash came to life.

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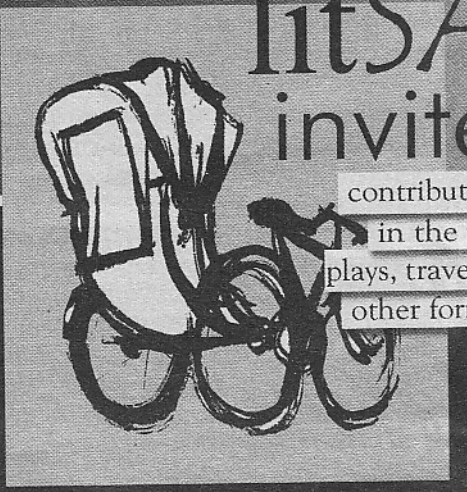

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The Queensberry Rules of Discourse

essay by Iftekhar Sayeed

T H ISSUE S

The Queensberry Rules of Discourse

America will rule the world forever." This was my uncle sloganeering. He, an oncologist in the United States, had come to visit us with his family. Being younger than many present during this imperial diatribe, I stayed silent. I heard one of my other uncles—one who had not abandoned the homeland for exotic places—mutter words crafted to perforate the stoutest ego in an undertone that was clearly audible.

"You left the sticks for the States just the other day, and now you think you're a big shot!" Notwithstanding the popularity of this repartee and the titters it fetched, I disapproved of its logic.

I would have said something like: "Well, Uncle X, it is entirely possible that what you have said may turn out to be true. After all, it is a prediction, and we cannot know whether it will turn out to be true or false. Think, however, of all the empires that have come and gone, and the confidence each had in its own perpetuity, and then perhaps, on the basis of the analogy, you will be less confident of the eternal prospects of your adoptive country. Of course, you could be right..."

That is to say, I would have argued with him, rather than against him. The particular type of argument that my stay-at-home uncle used is of a very pernicious variety—and perhaps for that reason universal—the argumentum ad hominem. And the sub-specious that was deployed on that evening was of the even more odious argumentum ad hominem (abusive) kind.

Although I have so far never had sufficient cause to regret the day I taught myself logic, I fear the event may not be too far into the future. For I have found that men and women are as apt to hit below the belt in argument as a pair of unrefereed pugilists in the ring. And, of course, the experience can be excruciating! The analogy fortunately ends before one reaches the lower parts of the anatomy; it is a cultivated soft spot. Only through study can one develop such a weakness; for what is not perceived as an injury in conversation is not counted as a blow.

I fear the event—regretting the study of logic—may not be too far into the future because the scars are getting too numerous. It appears that one cannot converse without concurrence, or one invites abuse. It is tempting to conclude, and repose in the false security, that people in other places—far, far away—do not commit informal fallacies. Experience with heterogeneous assortments of humanity has disabused me of this notion. For thinking is a chore, and no mortal will engage in such chores if a suitable factotum is at hand. And fallacy is a sly servant.

I began this essay with the abusive variety of the ad hominem kind. That is not because it is the most painful; in fact, in many ways it is the most anodyne. One instantly loses all respect for one's adversary, and once that occurs, the enemy is as good as de-

feated. No, the more painful fallacies are the ones that fail to remove the other to a safe mental distance, but rather permit him to penetrate the epidermis, much as a mosquito bite continues to irritate the skin long after the incision.

Take the argumentum ad verecundiam, for instance. It is the perennial appeal to authority under which minions take cover. When wielded by the man-in-the-street who cites some authority to support a particular bias on an arbitrary occasion, it annoys, but does not cause any gritting of the teeth. But it is the academic who hides behind an esoteric point of view completely at variance with all decency and commonsense who generates a furious and seemingly automatic motion of the molars, canines, etc. For he basks not only in the confidence of his own degrees, but the reflected glory of the institution he happens to serve. And what could be more authoritarian than an institution? The smugness of such people discombobulates to an extent that one is tempted to repudiate education for the rest of one's life!

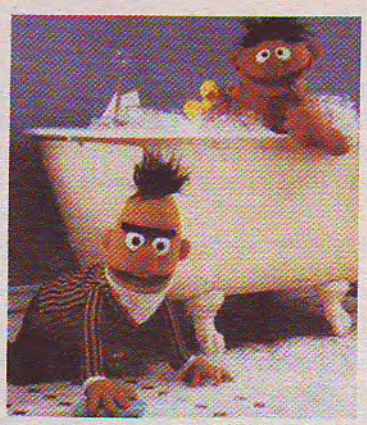
If the ad verecundiam sets one's teeth in motion, the fallacy of accent stirs the innards. It is a fallacy guaranteed to irritate the bowels and set one retching intellectually. Most common in advertisements, and there it is the most innocuous. LOSE WEIGHT IN 7 DAYS is relatively harmless even when followed by "after two months at our gym" in tiny print. More sinister is the caption under a photograph of two women in chadar and sunglasses, laughing at the camera: Not gloom and doom all the time. The implication of gloom and doom almost every living second (except when photographed by a Western journalist) in a Muslim country is artfully suppressed. One is reminded of the story of the captain and the first mate. The captain, a stout teetotaller, and the first mate, an inveterate old toper, got along miserably on board. Exasperated with his bibulous subaltern, the captain entered the following in the log: "The mate was drunk today". The mate discovered this and got his own back by recording, when it was his turn to enter the log: "The captain was sober today".

Of course, the universal favourite is the argumentum ad populum. The man who does not love adulation is as rare as a cuckoo in winter. But—wonder of wonders—men are as fond of tailor-made flattery as of mass flattery. Bespoke blandishment—blandishment delivered face-to-face, keeping one's individual configurations clearly in sight—is understandably, if not justifiably, popular; but the blandishment of men and women in the mass, faceless, anonymous, blurred—this challenges understanding. And when one contemplates the fact that such a principle is the basis of democracy, one comes to appreciate the patrician contempt felt by Plato and Marx for such a form of government.

The living room scene depicted in the opening lines of the essay shows a kind of ad populum at work. My patriotic uncle courted cheap and transitory popularity to counter what, admittedly, was an obnoxious point of view. The faith that an obnoxious view deserves an obnoxious counter-move reduces the opposing parties to a level of equality. And when we leave the commodious confines of the living room for the ampler amphitheater of an election speech, where the intellect of the speaker must ferret out the least enlightened member and elicit his vote—much as Shakespeare's jokes sought as target the least cultivated yokel for his penny but without any of the compensating sublimity of expression or action—we have the perfect forum for the incendiary speech which leads ultimately to incendiary acts. Nor is the fallacy reserved exclusively for oral purposes. The written—or, more frequently, the printed word—adulates the 'democratic' 'progressive' 'modern' 'forward-looking' man, woman, or nation. These adjectives represent qualities the writer appreciates; and since this particular collection happens to occur most frequently in Western newspapers and magazines, they represent qualities which make foreign individuals and foreign nations 'Western'. The art of the huckster has been perfected, not where the sun rises, but where it sets. There must surely be a moral there.

Then there is the petitio principii, begging the question. President Clinton has recently announced that the nuclear defence shield will be extended to 'civilised nations'. And who decides whether a nation is civilised or not? Answer: the civilised nations.

This sort of reasoning hovers perilously close to the argumentum ad baculum. Those nations who have the power to define themselves as civilised are civilised, just as money is accepted because it is accepted. Just as there is no gold standard for the currency, so there is no logical underpinning for most declarations. They circulate because some authority —the equivalent of a central bank—has by fiat declared them legitimate. Thus, the party that wins through force of arms or superior financial prowess announces itself to be 'democratically elected'. The individual who can afford a retinue of lackeys—sometimes a whole national elite—stamps his (her) backside 'Legal Tender'. And in this he (she) all too often receives on that same secret zone the signature of 'civilised' nations—a sort of fallacious International Monetary Fund. Power has a logic of its own which merits study; but the student of logic learns to distinguish the power of logic from the logic of power. And, like Socrates, he would never overpower an opponent into a knockout. His aim is not to defeat but to inspect. The "Queensberry Rules of Discourse' is a figurative rubric for the intellectual callisthenics that logic is.



Do you know what your child is watching?

Ernie is the prankster who loves to play with his rubber ducky in the bathtub. Bert is the whining pinhead, his character a bit like R2D2's. Big Bird is young, innocent and bumbling, and Cookie monster devours, well, cookies.

Ernie, Bert, Big Bird and Cookie Monster all speak Urdu.

These innovative creations of the master puppeteer Jim Henson (1936-1990), probably the furthest advance anywhere in children's television programming, is now available in South Asia to all who understand simple Urdu, Hindustani or Hindi. The only problem is that the Sesame Street in Urdu airs on Pakistani Television, one of the least-watched channels in the rest of the Subcontinent outside Pakistan. Besides, it is not publicised.

The Pakistani carrier of Sesame Street is unpopular because it is filled with dull talking heads, duller government news, and unslick presentation compared to the Indian satellite channels. But besides putting on the occasional qauwaal or ghazal artiste who shine above the tacky sets, what PTV should be thanked for is Sesame Street in Urdu.

Even though the Sesame Street episodes are made for American kids, there is not much lost when they get translated and dubbed for our young audience. There is enough in the little stories, educational interludes and introduction to letters and numbers for children anywhere to learn and enjoy at the same time.

Sesame Street in Urdu reminds, by standing alone among all the programmes being beamed down on us, of the dreadful situation that exists in the Subcontinent—South Asia's children have nothing good to watch on television even though they are hooked. And no one is doing anything about it. Even the media activists who call strenuously for public service content on the government and private channels are mostly calling for documentaries and other serious gown-up fare.

QUESTIONS: 1. If satellite television is a gift of the market and new technology, how come the pre-teenagers are being so completely ignored? 2. Okay, our media analysts and activists are unconcerned or too conservative, but what of Save the Children or Unicef— which even has a regional office for all of South Asia? Why are they looking the other way as South Asia's unwitting parents shove their wards in front of the television set to ingest local and Western commercial trash? ANSWER: timidity, absence of creativity and caring, and an unwillingness to rock the boat.

Till such time that we wake up and force the production of good children's television programming in each of our countries and regions, here's an idea. We must start a campaign to publicise the Urdu Sesame Street that airs on PTV, and is so easily and ubiquitously available on cable. Even the Shiv Sena and Bajrang Dal should have no problem if Indian households start tuning in to PTV to watch Big Bird learning to count cookies as Cookie Monster devours them. Sure it is in Urdu, but at that target level, it makes no different if it is Urdu, Hindi or Hindustani.

If it is okay for Nepalis to make watching Hindi films a national pastime, and for everyone to hang on to every word said (and unsaid) by Hindi film stars and starlets, let there be no nationalistic pretence as to why Nepali children should not be served Sesame Street in Urdu. The government-owned Nepal Television has shown Hindi films for decades on end, so what's wrong with this? Nothing, only that South Asia's adults are in a time warp and have no understanding of a dramatically changed childhood need—for age-specific stimulation and excitement on tv.

What Sesame Street provides is everything that South Asia's media barons have not bothered to give, "creative, innovative, engaging, optimistic and educational content that leverages children's natural attraction to media in constructive and productive ways". A Pakistani Silicon Valley millionaire, Safi Qureshey, seems to have understood however. And it is he who is behind Sesame Street in Urdu, together with Tahir Andrabi, an academic living in the US. Here is what else I have found out: the producer of the Urdu version is Ghazanfar Ali, the writer is Shoaib Hashmi, and the voiceovers are done by Khalid Anum, Najaf Bilgrami, Ahsan Rahim, Amna Khan and Amir Agha.

So, if all these good Pakistanis have found it worthwhile doing Sesame Street in Urdu, let the campaign begin to get people to watch the programme outside Pakistan as well. Later, we should get copyright clearance and start Sesame Street editions in Nepali, Bangla, Sindhi, and Asamiya. Once we get the hang of it, we can begin producing original children's programming in Nepali, Bangla, Sindhi, and Asamiya.

Kanak Dixit

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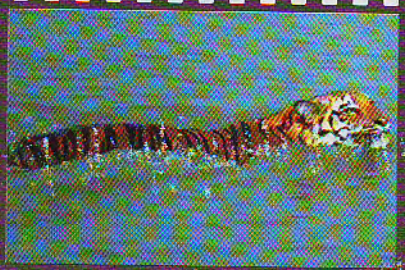

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