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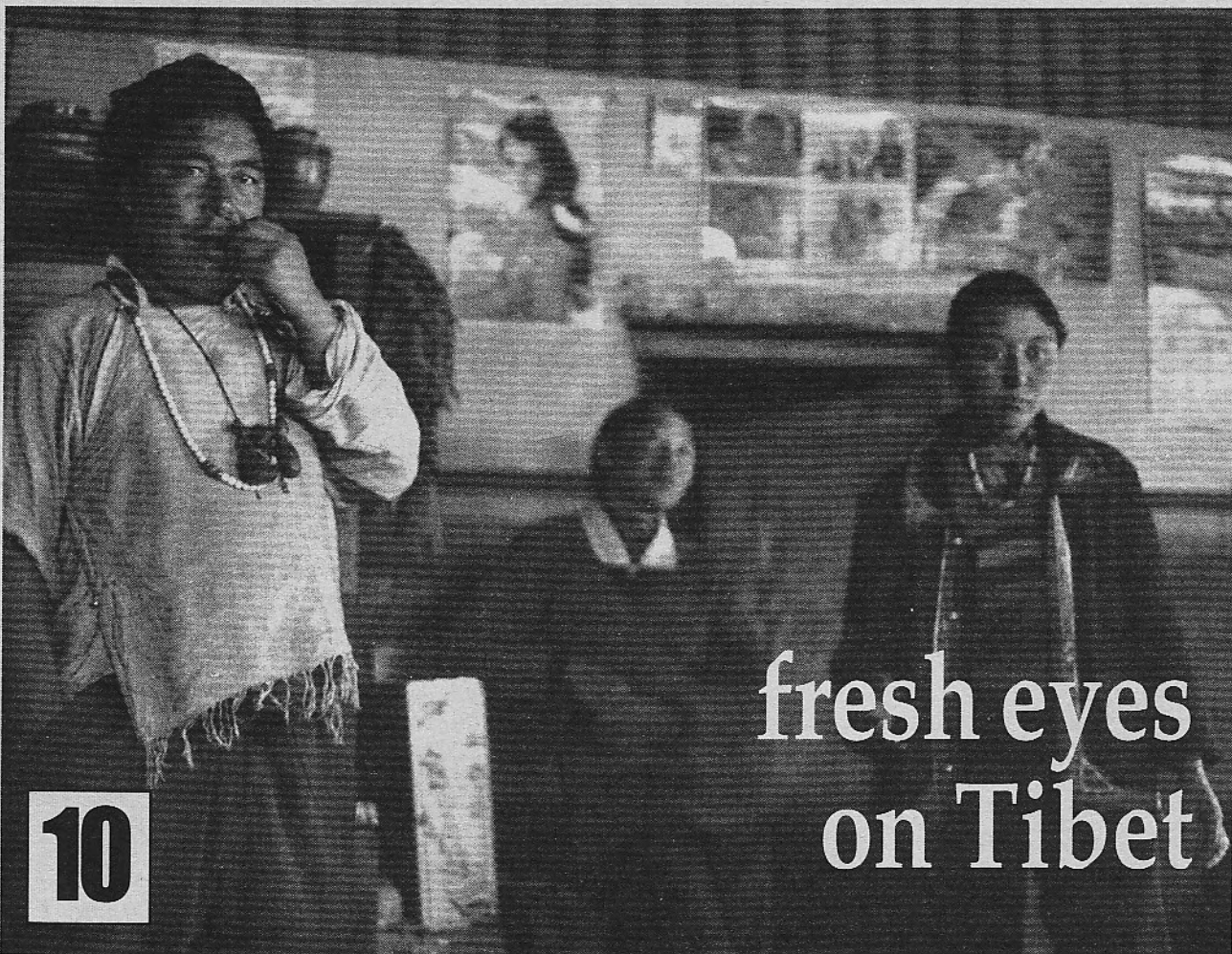
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KABIR MANSINGH HEIMSATH

**10**

## fresh eyes on Tibet

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**ANY ATTEMPT AT UNDERMINING THE SELECTION PROCEDURE WILL LEAD TO THE DISQUALIFICATION OF THE CONCERNED CANDIDATE**



# A negative image of Pakistan

THE JULY 2002 *Himal* issue on the Pakistani political economy has half-a-dozen articles that seek to provide a "comprehensive overview of the country's political economy" at the start of the fiscal year. Normally, the publication of such a special number from the friendly neighbouring country of Nepal, which hosts the headquarters of SAARC, should be welcomed as a gesture of goodwill that would serve not only to enlighten readers, but would also promote closer relations between the two countries.\*

Unfortunately, a perusal of the articles published in the issue leaves the reader with a vision of Pakistan that is tailored more to the biased perceptions found among the ruling circles in South Asia's largest country, than to an objective presentation of realities on the ground. The objectives of fostering goodwill or promoting a better understanding of the challenges that Pakistan faces seem to have been subordinated to the purpose of maligning the country's leadership, and of casting doubts about its future. This is highly regrettable, because the neighbours of the two major countries of South Asia, whose armies are locked in confrontation over the disputed state of Jammu and Kashmir, should be playing a more positive role than that reflected in the contents of this *Himal* issue.

The very first article in the section devoted to Pakistan describes the two-nation theory, which provides the ideological basis for the establishment of Pakistan, as a "fallacy" that is used by Pakistan's elite to exercise social control. The author, Aasim Sajjad Akhtar, who is described as a "Rawalpindi activist involved with people's movements", apparently belongs to the miniscule minority that has doubts about the very creation of Pakistan. As such, he is hardly the type of person who should have been entrusted with the task of writing the lead article in the issue.

Akhtar's premise that the secession of the eastern wing in 1971 has disproved the two-nation theory is not borne out by facts. After separation that was facilitated by India's armed intervention, Muslim Bengal did not rejoin India, but chose independence as Bangladesh. If he were to follow the latest pogroms against the hap-

less Muslims of Gujarat by the extremists of the Sangh Parivar, who are occupying the seat of power in India, he would not need additional proof of the validity of that theory.

He may be justified in expressing the view that the Kashmir dispute has led to inordinately high defence expenditures and an "unnatural rise" of the religious right in the past 25 years. But who is occupying the state of Jammu and Kashmir by force, violating its commitments under UN resolutions, and resorting to genocidal violence to suppress the indigenous struggle of the people of Kashmir, some 80,000 of whom have sacrificed their lives in their struggle for "azadi"?

Akhtar goes into details of the sad state of the people of Pakistan, and one cannot disagree that a genuine regeneration of the country must come through the efforts of the people, rather than a foreign dispensation.

But in his implied preference for the social order in a democratic India, he is oblivious of the mistreatment of the lower castes, and of the minorities, behind the facade of secularism. He cites the right facts about the neglect of the social sector in Pakistan, and rising poverty levels, but places the fault with the military, whereas power was held by incompetent politicians during much of the period cited. He also voices doubts about whether elections will be held by the military regime. The latest public statements by President Pervez Musharraf leave little room for such doubts, and the rapid pace of preparations further confirm that Pakistan will have an elected government within the period specified by the Supreme Court.

Sushil Khanna, who has written the main article on Pakistan's economy, is a Calcutta-based professor of economics and is also the General Secretary of the Pakistan-India People's Forum for Peace and Democracy. Titled "Growth and Stagnation in Pakistan's Economy", his paper is a comprehensive survey of Pakistan's economic record over the past three decades. He underlines that Pakistan's future growth depends upon domestic savings and resources. The mobilisation of forces on the India-Pakistan border is likely to worsen the fiscal crisis, as it also drives away foreign investors.

Khanna, too, focuses his criticism on the military regime in Pakistan. His conclusion is that Pakistan can resume its march towards growth and prosperity only through the restoration of democracy and an end to militarisation. However, the massing of forces on the border is due entirely to India's resort to coercive diplomacy, despite Pakistan's repeated offers of a dialogue. One unmistakable purpose of this measure is to weak-

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**The objectives of fostering goodwill or promoting a better understanding of the challenges that Pakistan faces seem to have been subordinated to the purpose of maligning the country's leadership, and of casting doubts about its future.**

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\*Though published in Kathmandu, *Himal* is a South Asian magazine which provides regional coverage and, as such, could be published in any city in the region. - editors



en the economy of Pakistan. Given Khanna's position on people-to-people interaction between the two countries, one would have expected him to give a more balanced appraisal of the current standoff, rather than blame the military government, which is only acting in response to India's aggressive policy.

The article by Abid Qaiyum Suleri of the Sustainable Development Policy Institute, Islamabad, on "Deficits of Knowledge" is also critical of Pakistan, this time on its "schizophrenic" response to the new WTO regime. A writer has been found who finds fault with the performance of Pakistan's economic policymakers. Two points need to be made. Firstly, WTO policies have come in for widespread criticism, especially from developing countries, on account of the failure of the organisation to respond effectively to the need for a more equitable global order. Its strategies are under constant review. Secondly, even before the events of 11 September, Pakistan had received high marks for its economic management, and Shaukat Aziz, the finance minister, was voted the most outstanding minister among his international peers.

The remaining three articles provide a more objective survey of developments in banking and water management. The overall impression left by this issue of *Himal*, however, is a negative one, of political uncertainty, and incompetent economic management, both attributable to the lack of democracy under a military government. There is a seemingly deliberate neglect of positive aspects that are visible in statistics. Despite the challenge, initially of many layered sanctions, and, after 11 September, of the war against terrorism at its doorstep, Pakistan's economy has been managed with responsibility and widely acknowledged success. The implementation of efforts to restore democratic governance has proceeded according to plan. Following the completion of local elections by 14 August, when the process of devolution was completed, there is visible progress towards holding national and provincial elections by the target date of October 2002, following an intensive debate on constitutional amendments. The election schedule has been announced.

The manner of presentation of economic achievements also gives an unflattering picture, and emphasis has been placed on a relatively low growth rate without due recognition of the daunting circumstances. The government has managed to bring the fiscal deficit down to below 5 percent, to keep inflation also below 5 percent and foreign exchange reserves have crossed USD 7 billion, the highest in Pakistan's history. Exports have risen despite a global recession, and persistent drought

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**A correct perspective on Pakistan's achievements would serve to foster optimism in the entire South Asian region that known problems of poverty and poor governance can be tackled successfully, and a return to democracy is on the horizon.**

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has not prevented the country from achieving impressive results in agriculture, with exportable surpluses in wheat and sugar, apart from the traditional item of rice. Most significantly, the debt issue has been successfully tackled, and overall indebtedness brought down by USD 2 billion. This has enabled increasing allocations for development and social sector plans.

Pakistan has achieved progress towards restoration of democratic institutions, improvement of governance, and economic regeneration despite the challenges arising from the ongoing war against terror in Afghanistan that has increased the domestic terrorist threat. The massing of forces by India has not helped, and has added to the economic burden. Yet Pakistan has remained steadfast

in seeking a dialogue whereas the Bharatiya Janata Party government finds it expedient to maintain the tension for domestic reasons, and to keep Pakistan under pressure. A correct perspective on Pakistan's achievements would serve to foster optimism in the entire South Asian region that known problems of poverty and poor governance can be tackled successfully, and a return to democracy is on the horizon.

*Maqbool Ahmad Bhatti, Islamabad*

#### The authors respond

### Missing points

MAQBOOL Ahmad Bhatti, former Pakistani ambassador to China, has raised several objections to the article written by me in the July *Himal*. He suggests that a primary objective of the magazine should be to promote goodwill and understanding between Nepal and Pakistan and furthermore to make a contribution towards reduction in tension between the two nuclear states in the region. Unfortunately, Bhatti himself seems unwilling to sow the seeds of reconciliation between India and Pakistan.

The two-nation theory is undoubtedly the ideological basis for the formation of Pakistan. However, contrary to Bhatti's claim, my analysis does not at all challenge the creation of Pakistan. Instead it highlights how the two-nation theory has subsequently been employed to perpetuate an unequal and undemocratic polity. It is unfortunate that Bhatti is suspicious of the "kind of person" that makes this assertion.

The carnage that has taken place in Gujarat does not prove or disprove the two-nation theory as Bhatti



contends. What is borne out by facts is that Pakistan was created out of the Muslim-majority states (with Kashmir the obvious exception) of British India, and it did not survive past its 24<sup>th</sup> year. That religious minorities in India, whether Muslim or otherwise, are suffering at the hands of Hindu supremacists is inexcusable. But Muslims in East Bengal suffered at the hands of fellow West Pakistani Muslims during the tragedy of 1971. That sad reality is evidence enough of the fundamental contradictions of the two-nation theory.

The atrocities committed by the Indian state in Kashmir have been acknowledged and noted in the article. Bhatti and I do not disagree on this point.

There is absolutely no implied preference in the article for the social order in India. At the same time, Bhatti would do well to remember that the social order in Pakistan is quite similar to that of India's, a reflection of thousands of years of shared culture. The plight of scheduled castes and religious minorities in Pakistan is much the same as in India. The claim that poverty levels have risen during the tenure of politicians rather than the military is accurate, but also clearly indicates that Bhatti has failed to understand the basic assertion that the military's stranglehold on resource-allocation and decision-making has been independent of whether it has directly held the reigns of power. Bhatti says that doubt is expressed in my article about the military's commitment to holding general elections in October. There is no such doubt expressed in the article at all, but the reality of Pakistan's politics is that the military can put off elections if and when it feels like. And that is the point.

Finally, Bhatti repeatedly claims that the military regime deserves credit for its performance over the past three years. He makes special reference to the fact that the country's economic strategy has been widely-acknowledged as successful. Considering Bhatti's agreement that a "genuine regeneration of the country would come through the efforts of the people, rather than any foreign dispensation," it is telling that he should spend much time dwelling on the international praise heaped on Pakistan's economic managers, rather than acknowledge the fact that poverty levels in the country have skyrocketed since the military coup. Bhatti starts off his contribution with the contention that the articles that he has critiqued do not make an "objective presentation of realities on the ground". Bhatti should know that his faith in the military government is not shared by the majority of Pakistanis who continue to be victims of a dispensation that caters to everyone but them.

*Aasim Sajjad Akhtar, Rawalpindi*

## Growth and democracy

I READ with interest Maqbool Ahmad Bhatti's response to *Himal's* issue on Pakistan. Bhatti seems to have a quarrel with only the last few paragraphs of my article on Pakistan's economic crisis, in which I argued that the economic reconstruction of Pakistan is contingent upon the restoration of democracy and an end to the militarisation of economy and society. Nowhere in my article did I try to apportion blame to either the ruling elite of Pakistan or India for the current mobilisation of forces on the border, though I believe both are equally guilty.

The recent so-called improvement in the macro-economic parameters of Pakistan's economy (an increase in foreign currency reserves and a decrease in fiscal deficit) under Shaukat Aziz's stewardship is a mixed blessing. Let us not forget that, as a rule, finance ministers who become the darlings of the IMF and the World

Bank usually lack support within their own country. Pakistan's reserves have increased partly due to liberal aid from the USA and multilateral agencies and the rescheduling of loans by the EU. In addition, the recent global crackdown on *hawala* operations has diverted remittances to official banking channels. But the most significant reason for increasing reserves is the deepening stagnation in industry, which has resulted in a contraction of imports. In 2001-02, imports will be lower than the 1995 level of USD 12 billion by 25 percent. Hardly a sign of

a resurgent economy. Exports this year are likely to touch the 1995 level of USD 8.5 billion, or zero growth in seven years. The severity of the crisis facing Pakistan becomes obvious if one keeps in mind that, between 1995 and 2001, Nepal's exports grew by 135 percent and those of Bangladesh by 88 percent.

I do not share Bhatti's assessment that India alone is to blame for the increasing military expenditure leading to a decade of stagnation in Pakistan. Let us not forget that the Pakistani army's and secret services' deep involvement in Afghanistan during the decade after withdrawal of Soviet forces was largely responsible for the militarisation of Pakistani society. This also drew large resources away from development into military mobilisation and aid to favourite factions in the Afghan civil war.

I beg to differ with Bhatti about on view (and those of many other Pakistani bureaucrats and military officers who have been the main beneficiaries of long periods of military dictatorships in Pakistan) that democracy in Pakistan has been responsible for the crisis. That democratic institutions in most South Asian countries, including those of India, Bangladesh and Nepal, are

**Let us not forget that, as a rule, finance ministers who become the darlings of the IMF and the World Bank usually lack support within their own country.**



frail and often fail to check their being hijacked by the powerful elite of these countries cannot be used to justify military dictatorship. General Musharraf's recent amendments only go to show the barriers to genuine democracy where military establishments have routinely shackled civilian governments.

The Pakistan-India People's Forum for Peace and Democracy, with which I am associated, believes that genuine peace between the two neighbours has democracy as a pre-requisite. My article did not provide me with an opportunity to discuss the shortcomings of economic and social development in India, which I hope to in *Himal* some other time. May I add that my assessment of Pakistan's social and economic crisis is shared by a large number of my Pakistani friends and comrades. We, on both sides of the border, are engaged in a bitter struggle to establish genuine democracy and peace. I am confident we will not fail.

*Sushil Khanna, Calcutta*

## Undeniable contradictions

**REFERRING TO** my article in the July *Himal* on Pakistani responses to the WTO, Dr Maqbool Bhatti says, "a writer has been found who finds fault with the performance of Pakistan's economic policy makers". I do not wish to enter into a debate with him on what exactly he means by the dubious phrase "a writer has been found", but will confine myself to some basic facts which, as a researcher, I am bound by the methods of my discipline to raise. The fact is that there are two completely divergent points of view which dominate discussions on the WTO. Both proponents and opponents happen to occupy the extreme ends of the spectrum and none of them is willing to accept a position that is based on serious and systematic research on what precisely the economic implications of the WTO are. My plea in the article was that we try to understand the spirit of the different agreements so that an attempt can be made to rectify the anomalies.

I cited the example of the "development box" to illustrate the contradictory stands adopted by the commerce and finance ministries of the Government of Pakistan at the Doha Ministerial, and that which was shown in negotiations with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) soon after. By signing the agreement on Agricultural Structural Reform Loans with the ADB, the finance ministry voluntarily committed to forego the flexibility granted to developing countries by the WTO's "agreement on agriculture". This was clearly to Pakistan's detriment. Does this qualify, by any stretch of imagination, to be regarded as part of the country's "outstanding economic policies" that Bhatti is at such pains

## Those who criticise the double standards of the government of Pakistan are not "agents of a neighbouring state"

to defend?

On the issue of "outstanding economic policies", allow me to cite at least one more instance of a policy inconsistency, in the hope of persuading die-hard sceptics that I am talking about a recurring malady and not just an occasional aberration. The "Corporate Farming Bill" directly contradicts what Pakistan committed to the international community through its report to the secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat De-

sertification (UNCCD). The report, submitted in April 2002, spelt out the Islamabad government's intention of distributing three million acres of state land among landless farmers and the poor. Just two months after submitting the report to UNCCD, the cabinet approved the Corporate Farming Bill, inviting investors to purchase state land. The same environment minister who signed the report for UNCCD was a party to this new bill. Dr Bhatti should realise that those who criticise the double standards of the Government of Pakistan are not "agents of a neighbouring state". Do Pakistanis not have the right to question the government about policies that directly affect their livelihood?

Bhatti argues that the overall effect of the July *Himal* was to portray a negative image of the country. An elementary distinction needs to be reiterated here. Criticism of the way the affairs of state are being run in Pakistan is not a criticism of 'Pakistan'. Well-wishers of Pakistan want policymakers to think for the masses and to think of long-term sustainability. This is surely very different from portraying a negative image of Pakistan. The problems of globalisation are global and all South Asian countries face similar challenges. The only way to cope with these global problems is to formulate strategies on a regional basis even while being mindful of local realities. As I see it, the purpose behind bringing out the *Himal* issue was not to target any specific country. The only objective that I could discern was to share the experiences and problems facing Pakistan with other South Asian partners and then to come up with a joint strategy.

*Abid Qaiyum Suleri, Islamabad*

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SRI LANKA

## WRONG TIME FOR POWER STRUGGLES

**THE DATES** for the peace talks in Thailand between Colombo and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) have been fixed for 16-18 September, according to a statement issued by the Norwegian facilitators. The prospective talks have attracted considerable international attention both in South Asia and overseas. US Undersecretary of State Richard Armitage's late-August visit to Sri Lanka, and especially to Jaffna, is only the most recent indication of the importance that the international community attaches to the Sri Lankan peace process.

In South Asia alone there are at least a half-dozen major ethnic conflicts that could benefit from the example set by Sri Lanka. If Sri Lanka can find a peaceful solution to its longstanding ethnic conflict, it will be a powerful example to other countries facing internal strife, and a major victory in the US-backed war against terrorism. Irrespective of this external attention, however, much of the public attention within Sri Lanka itself has been devoted to the power struggle between the two major parliamentary groupings of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe's United National Party (UNP)-led government and the People's Alliance (PA)-led opposition of President Chandrika Kumaratunga.

There are two reasons for this focus on politics in Colombo. One is that most Sri Lankans know very little about what is actually transpiring in the peace process. They know that it is happening, and that the ceasefire is holding, but little beyond that. Media commentators, civil society groups and even most government politicians (let alone opposition politicians) appear to be unaware of the details of the peace process. Only the Norwegian facilitators and those at the very highest rungs of the government and the LTTE are participating directly in the peace process. Given the success up to now, perhaps this is how it should be.

The second reason for the present public

focus on the power struggle is that its outcome will determine whether the ongoing peace process moves forward or not. The success of the peace process up to now is owed in large part to the positive relationship between the top leaders of the government and the LTTE. It is notable, for instance, that there has not been even a single acrimonious vocal exchange between government and LTTE leaders since Wickremesinghe assumed office in December 2001. This is remarkable when compared to the frequent and bitter exchanges that used to take place between the leaders of President Kumaratunga's former government and the LTTE. More remarkable still, the LTTE's top leadership has gone out of its way to praise the leaders of the present government led by the prime minister.

Unfortunately, the parliamentary opposition is not part of this positive relationship. In particular, sections of the opposition persist in describing the LTTE as a fascist and terrorist organisation. While this rhetoric may please substantial sections of the population, such charges are not based on any principle of conflict resolution, a process which requires relationship-building between antagonists.

### Opposition failure

With the opposition's present frame of mind it is difficult to imagine that it would be able to continue the peace process with the LTTE if it were to manage to topple Wickremesinghe's UNP from power. Therefore, the outcome of the present struggle between the government and the opposition is not simply one of Tweedledee or Tweedledum enjoying the seat of power, but rather an issue of considerable significance.

The success of the peace process is of the utmost importance to the country, and a responsible opposition should give it constructive support. The opposition should acknowledge that the government has succeeded where it failed during its seven-year tenure in office. Moreover, the opposition has not shown that it has a better alternative to its failed conflict resolution methods of the past.

Leading opposition politicians have publicly stated that the primary task of an opposition party is to replace the sitting government as soon as possible. There is some truth to this assertion from the perspective of the competitive party political system. But it is also a half-truth. The

In South Asia alone there are at least a half-dozen major ethnic conflicts that could benefit from the example set by Sri Lanka



opposition must not simply seek to replace a government, especially not an opposition the people soundly rejected in a general election just over nine months ago. A responsible opposition can seek to replace a government only when it has demonstrated an improvement on its failed policies of the past.

Opposition politicians have been threatening to bring people onto the streets to protest concessions that might be made to the LTTE during the forthcoming Thailand talks. In the meantime, government spokespersons are cautioning the public against expecting too much from the initial phase of negotiations. Certainly it would be unrealistic to expect the LTTE to renounce its goal of Tamil Eelam or to agree to demobilise its military cadres at the initial phase of talks. It is important that people do not get carried away by unrealistic expectations about what peace talks will bring. At this initial phase what is possible for the government is to negotiate with the LTTE a political and legal framework to which they can jointly agree. An important step in this direction will be for the government to lift its legal ban on the LTTE, which Colombo has announced will be done on 6 September, 10 days before the commencement of peace talks.

At present, the LTTE operates outside the framework of Sri Lankan and international law. The lifting of the legal ban on the LTTE will make it more accountable to the legal system and to the people at-large. Legal rights and responsibilities are two sides of the same coin. The opposition's task is not to oppose the de-banning of the LTTE. By seeking to bring the people onto the streets in protest, the opposition will only be destabilising the country and making it a less attractive place for investors.

### Constructive role

All available evidence suggests that the government is fully committed to the present peace process and what it entails. Therefore, regardless of opposition protests the government is expected to lift the LTTE ban and engage in peace talks in Thailand. The opposition should not pose obstacles to this process, but should instead find ways to ensure that both the government and the LTTE are more transparent and accountable in what they do.

A recent social survey carried out by the National Peace Council in collaboration

with local and international academics revealed that the vast majority of Sri Lankans support negotiations as the way forward to solve the ethnic conflict. However, an area of clear polarisation between the ethnic communities involves the prospective establishment of an interim administration in the North-East province.

It is generally believed that the Thailand talks will revolve around the setting up of an LTTE-dominated interim administration in the north and east. Most Sinhala and Muslim respondents in the recent survey were apprehensive about this, fearing that it would lead to more problems in the future. Most Tamils, on the other hand, expressed their belief that an interim administration would help to evolve a permanent solution. This finding suggests the need for a public education campaign about the benefits of an interim arrangement.

A key conclusion arising from the survey was that the ethnic conflict is less about cultural differences than it is about political power. Over the past few decades, the differences between ethnic groups have been politicised. Nevertheless, the survey points to the existence of, and the further potential for, positive relations between persons of different ethnic communities.

Peace-making is a long-term process. Another significant finding of the survey was that even in remote places people were keen to gather information about the peace process from newspapers, radio and television. Therefore interpretation, transparency and forthcoming explanations are needed not only from the Sri Lankan government but also from the LTTE.

Meanwhile, the opposition could help to assuage public concern about the prospective interim administration by insisting that both the government and the LTTE agree to uphold human rights. The survey revealed that people in the north and east were in favour of international monitoring, specifically concerning the protection of human rights. These are the issues that the opposition led by the president should be devoting its attention to, rather than engaging in a power struggle with the government at this crucial stage in the peace process. ▽

– Jehan Perera

Colombo has announced it will lift the ban on the LTTE on 6 September



# Roads to Lha

Notwithstanding years of Chinese rule Tibet remains Tibet. There is no grand strategy to extinguish the nation but Beijing's misinformed policies lead to the misplaced suspicion that there is.

*Text and photos by  
Kabir Mansingh Heimsath*

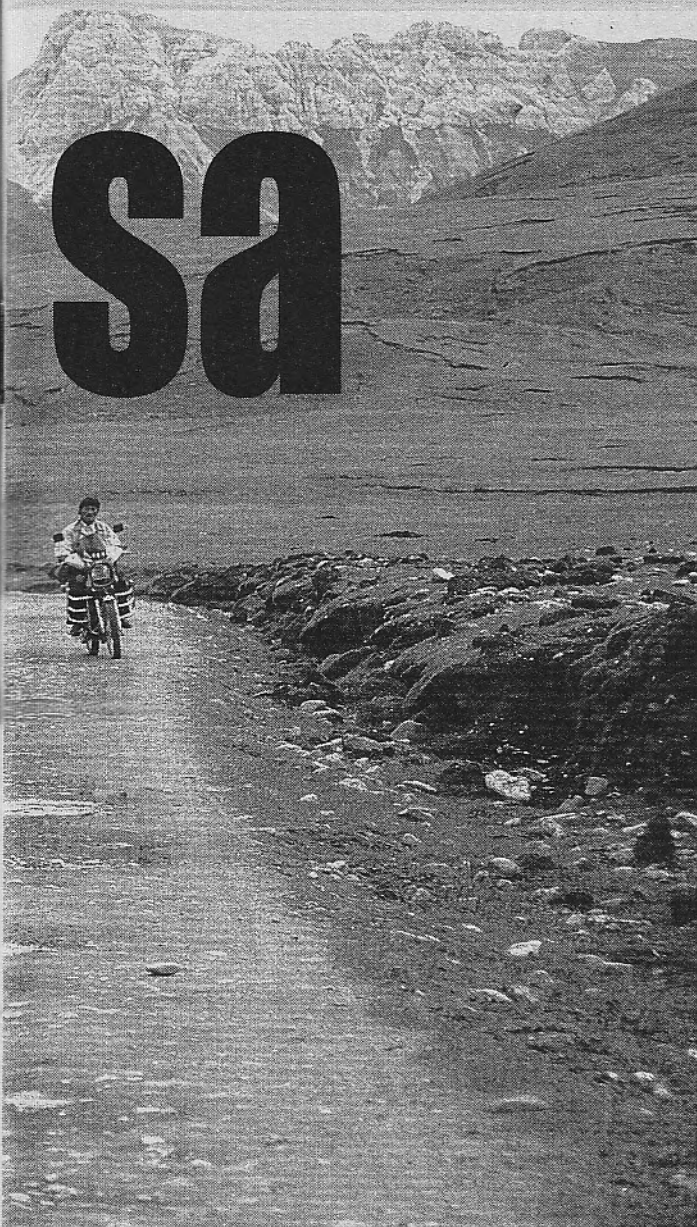


All but one road to Lhasa comes from China. The remaining one, from Nepal, was also built by the Chinese. Given this overwhelming monopoly on the avenues leading to the centre of Tibet it is striking how limited the discussion is regarding the Chinese perception of, and attitudes towards, Tibet. In the numerous exile and international reportages concerning policy and implementation within occupied Tibet, the Chinese motivation is generally taken for granted: to suppress and, if possible, get rid of Tibetans. Whether Tibetans are denied the benefits of Chinese modernisation or whether they are subsumed by it, China is still accused of "attempting to exterminate Tibet's unique way of life" (statement by Samdhong Rinpoche, Kalon Tripa: Head of the Central Tibetan Administration, Dharamsala. 2001). Rather than con-

fine ourselves to this insular view, I think it is valuable to try and understand just who these "Chinese" are, what "China" is, and rethink the possibilities for discussion on the Sinification of Tibet.

Although trade between Tibet and China has continued for centuries, the vehicular roads leading to Lhasa are all constructions after 1950. These various highways are not only remarkable for sheer engineering determination but also for the political, social and economic change that followed their construction. As such they are a microcosm of the Chinese occupation of Tibet. The first road to Lhasa (from Xining) was finished in 1954, and a second road from Sichuan was completed shortly after. This route from Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan province, recently burst through a tunnel from the Chinese to the Tibetan side of Erlan





silver coins because they would not accept the new paper currency of the People's Republic. This flow of silver marked the introduction of a cash-wage system in Tibet and this was the first time that ordinary Tibetans (in contrast to businessmen and officials) had access to disposable income. The discipline and fair generosity with which the occupying forces conducted themselves was widely acknowledged and may have played a part in the Tibetans' initial attempts to cooperate with the communist Chinese. A couplet from that period is still remembered, "The Chinese are like our parents/ Silver Dayang falls like rain". Sarcasm and ambivalence is evident even with this early song. The roads also allowed PLA troops to be supplied from the mainland rather than from the already strained local resources, which ensured that they were quickly and substantially reinforced when needed.

By the end of 1954, in the Siliguri-Chumbi Treaty, apart from other things India had signed away her unique trade and communication access to Tibet, and the Lhasa business community looked for opportunities to the east. The Dalai Lama drove out of Lhasa on the new road for his state visit to Beijing in 1954, and China consolidated its military, political and economic hold over Tibet. The era in which Tibet operated with de facto independence ended. The new dependence on China was constructed along with the highways to Lhasa.

Today, the same Da yuan coins are peddled as souvenirs along the road to Lhasa by Tibetan workers looking to make some extra cash. Small ramshackle towns have sprung up along the highways with shops and restaurants catering to the road-crews as well as truckers and travellers. The crews are made up of units numbering around 20 men and some women who get paid 10-20 yuan (roughly 1.2-2.4 USD) per day. In the eastern areas of Kham, which today fall under the provinces of Yunnan, Sichuan and Qinghai, the work-units are often mixed Hui Muslim, Sichuan Chinese and Tibetans from different districts. Further west in the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) there tends to be less integration and units are generally made up of all Tibetans or all Chinese from a similar background. Whether in the east or in TAR, it is striking that the workers, Tibetan or Chinese, are generally migrant workers from elsewhere. The Tibetans usually set up tents and the Chinese patch together shacks of scrap-wood and plastic tarpaulin on the side of the road; everyone moves when the construction or reconstruction is finished. Most of Tibet is wide-open grassland, high desert, or rugged mountains where habitation is minimal and the roads pass through long stretches of uninhabited landscape. The nomads about in the summer have little interaction with the road except for when they need to cross it.

When the road does reach habitation, it usually runs through the middle of a new road-town, or past a local village. Towns like Lhatse and Damshung are typical

Shan and the entire route to Lhasa is scheduled to be metalled by 2003. Judging by the rate of construction over the summer of 2002, it will in all likelihood be completed on time. Warehouses in the Sichuan town of Yan'an are stacked floor to ceiling with long bricks of tea, still packaged the way it was centuries ago for the long trek to Tibet. Yan'an is also the town in which the first Tibetan communists were trained after the long march in 1936 and thus, represents the ideological as well as economic beginnings of the Chinese incursion into Tibet.

Invasion and occupation by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) took place on horseback and by foot in 1950-51, and road construction immediately followed. Over 30,000 Tibetans worked with the PLA in this initial construction and were paid generously in special Da yuan



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of the new settlements, with concrete buildings lining the road and doors facing traffic. Just across a river or open space is usually a traditional village with houses that face a courtyard and the sun. The new towns are overwhelmingly Chinese with Hui Muslim and Sichuan restaurants dominating them. The Chinese establishments are bright with full-length glass doors while a few Tibetan teahouses marked with heavy door-curtains are tucked dimly between. But even these are often run by Tibetans from elsewhere – a day or even weeks away on the road. The concrete towns all have bathroom-tile facades, big government complexes and public toilets and they use electricity, phones, running water, pool tables and blue-tinted glass. Slightly beyond where the road turns to dirt in the original village there is a stream for water, mud-brick courtyards, painted wood-framed windows, and dogs staked beside gateways.

Nali Xian was built at the end of the good road half a day's drive from the district centre. It is the extremity of Chinese immigration and on the other side of the hill from the original town of Lha'i Dzong (not real names since the area is normally restricted). There is a vast community centre with about 10 pool tables and behind these is a row of restaurants all run by Chinese but with almost exclusively Tibetan clientele. The place with the best dumplings is run by a Muslim couple from Gansu who drifted here a year earlier from the main Lhasa highway. The rent was too high there, and in three years they could not save much money, so they moved to this more distant town to set up shop. Now they save a couple hundred yuan a month and should be able to move to a more comfortable city, maybe Lhasa or maybe back to Gansu, after a few more years of earning. They spend all day and night working in the small restaurant – a group of young Tibetan men playing pool yells for another plate of dumplings; some grandparents and kids dressed in rough wool chubas peek in and look around but do not order anything; a group of Tibetans from the police post takes a table and demands

a variety of food in vast quantities; the lady of the establishment runs out to buy supplies, which have been trucked in from the main highway. Apparently it is impossible to hire porters since none are around. They are supposedly out gathering wood for the winter though many seem to be playing pool just outside. This is a remote capillary of the road system, but even here there is an evident segregation between those involved with the town system and those who are not. Chinese are making and saving money, Tibetans are lounging about and spending it. Officials (most are Tibetan) are transferred from one area to another and conscientiously spend government money. Locals are detached in their observations of this. This scene is strikingly persistent around lunchtime in towns ranging from Dartsedo (Chinese: Kangding) to Ngari (Chinese: Ali); the characters are stereotypes, but the relationships are illustrative.

### Go west

There is no question that beginning with those first silver coins in 1951 vast amounts of money have gone towards the 'development' of Tibet. At first this development consisted of model socialist government projects designed to 'liberate', but today it consists of a slightly more sophisticated idea of promoting private enterprise and consumerism in a way similar to what has been accomplished in mainland China. In either case the programmes have been characterised by a lack of participation by, or significant benefit for, the vast majority of Tibetans who live in rural areas. 50 years after the roads were built, the disparity between Tibetans who have continued in the tradition of agricultural activity and the corridors of roadside and urban development remains a graphic feature of the socio-economic landscape.

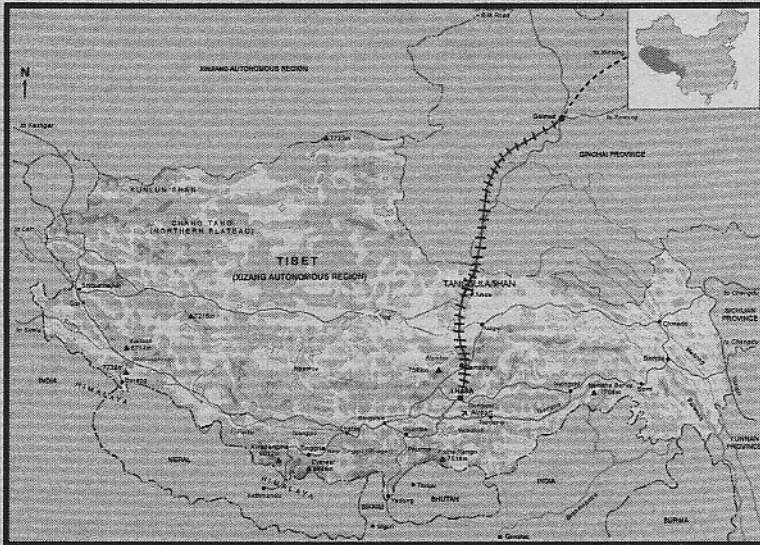
After the famine of the early 1960s induced by the Great Leap Forward, and the chaotic destruction of the Cultural Revolution of the 1960-70s, Beijing's new leadership admitted grave mistakes and instituted

## Editorial Note

### South Asia and the Tibetans of Tibet

ON THE map, Tibet is part of Central, East and South Asia. But, even as the rest of South Asia neglects Tibet, changes are afoot in the high plateau, brought about by a surge in economic activity and demographic shifts. With upcoming rail and highway links, the knot with the Chinese mainland is set to be that much tighter. The South Asian mainland has ignored its Tibetan hinterland, if we may call it that, forgetting the close geographical proximity (the Himalayan divide is no longer the barrier it once was) and historical links of culture and economy. True, India, Nepal and Bhutan have provided refuge to Tibetan exiles, but otherwise South Asia has sacrificed Tibet to China. Even in terms of hardheaded long-term strategic, cultural and economic cost-benefit considerations, this seems foolish. When the economic exploitation of Tibet begins in earnest, will we find that a better appreciation of Tibet, even as, if necessary, a singular entity with the People's Republic, would have served 'South Asian' interests better? We tend to think of Tibet only in relation to the Himalayan rimland, but remember that it is inextricably linked to the Pakistani Punjab by the Karakoram highway, and is but a day's drive from Rangpur in north Bangladesh if you take the road up from Siliguri.

*Himal* has had its gaze away from the 'trans-Himalaya' since it converted from a Himalayan to a South Asian magazine in the spring of 1996. With this issue's special focus on Tibet and the Tibetans of Tibet (rather than the relatively small number living in exile), we are correcting this oversight. *Himal* hopes to continue to cover Tibet in the days to come, regarding it as much a part of South Asia as any other.



*The highways of Tibet, and the projected Mainland-Lhasa railway line.*

comprehensive social, administrative and economic reforms at the end of the 1970s. The initial strategy directed administration into the hands of local officials, and during the 1980s this led to a dramatic rise in Tibetan cadres, the rebuilding and reactivation of monasteries, and a certain amount of optimism among Tibetans. However, the hands-off policy of the 1980s was not especially effective in terms of socio-economic development, and the political protests in Lhasa at the end of the decade indicated to Beijing that they had done something wrong.

The Chinese administration changed its stance again, and the 1990s were characterised by increased central government expenditure combined with more severe political restrictions. Efforts to develop Tibet during the last decade concentrated on large-scale centralised infrastructure projects, such as roads. And there was a pressure to keep things politically quiet. In 1994, the Third Work Forum on Tibet put forth 62 projects that have been widely criticised for their lack of local participation and effectiveness. The Fourth Work Forum in 2001 instituted 117 projects along much the same lines. But overall, the message is clear: Beijing will allocate money if Tibetans will keep quiet.

The billions of yuan that have poured into Tibet flow almost exclusively along the roadways, pool in the few towns along the way, and finally end up in the few major cities – Lhasa, Shigatse, Chamdo. A quick glance at a map of Tibet shows the limited extension of roads and also the limited extent of China's development practices. The towns along the roadways and the three cities are the only places in which serious development has taken hold and consequently, these are also the only places where Chinese form a majority. The vast rural areas of Tibet, where the majority of Tibetans live, are not linked with the road and urban systems. Even where there is a road, uprooted workers who are able to

dedicate long and continuous hours to work provide labour for construction projects while local populations take care of fields or livestock. The services that such a labour pool requires are also fulfilled by itinerant entrepreneurs who have the knowledge of and access to the necessary supply channels. The cash paid out on such projects is spent minimally on immediate sustenance and generally saved for investment or families elsewhere. Trucks make the gruelling drive from Xining or Chengdu to Lhasa laden with food staples, consumer goods and building supplies, then they turn around and rush all the way back empty for another load. What has developed is a tertiary economy and lifestyle that has little interaction with the local villages or populations and is utterly dependent on mainland goods. There are plenty of urban and itinerant Tibetans participating in this secondary commercial

system but the huge majority live an agrarian life in areas without roads or even if they live beside a road, they have only minimal interaction with it.

In China, the urban boom of the eastern seaboard prompted, and depended on, the creation of a vast unskilled and mobile labour pool. With the reforms of the 1980s, and the dismantling of the Maoist era work unit system in favour of 'household responsibility', a free labour market came into being, which provided the human capital behind much of the economic growth of the last decade. But in recent years the over-saturated industrial cities of the east such as Heilongjiang, Jilin, Shanxi and Henan are full of unemployed and laid-off workers. The forced downscaling of state-owned industries pushed through by Prime Minister Zhu Rongji in the last five years has also contributed to the unemployed pool. The recent labour riots in northeast China combined with demonstrations in certain areas of rural western China demand the most urgent attention from Beijing and it is no secret that the administration is not reconciled on how to deal with them.

Following a lack of prospects elsewhere, millions of labourers from this unskilled floating population have already moved into Tibet. The same Sichuan woman who has no land, no skill or insufficient papers and connections to find work in a big city will join a road-crew in Tibet (or hair salons if she is young and urbane). She will have to work 12-16 hours a day, but there will be a place to sleep, food to eat, and money to save. The man who would otherwise be relegated to menial "shoulder-pole" status in mainland cities can move along the highways to Tibet and set up a little shop or restaurant of his own with a bare minimum of cash, without worrying too much about formalities. These are the Chinese that proliferate in Tibet, men and women (very few children or grandparents) who have already been marginalised by the same system in the



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mainland. They come to Tibet because there is opportunity and maybe a chance to save some money and set up a home somewhere. These Chinese do not come to preach Maoism or even Han-ism and are concerned about Tibetans only in as much as a Tibetan might endanger or increase their chances to make money. With some exceptions (notably greenhouse cultivators who have a local supply and demand), their opportunities depend on huge government-subsidised projects that fuel Tibet's tertiary economy. Without these they would be left floating again and would drift to the next prospective region.

### The path of development

To illustrate the selective assimilation of Tibetans into the new market and social system it is worth taking a glance at Kham and Amdo. Although the bulk of these eastern Tibetan areas have been incorporated into other Chinese provinces since 1956 their development has proceeded as an accelerated version of that outlined above. However, without the political paranoia

that exists in the TAR, these areas of Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan and Yunnan provinces have been allowed more local autonomy and hence religious freedom. Although many Tibetans have drifted to cities or work crews, these areas are still predominantly rural and traditional life has not changed much despite the proximity and increased access to mainland economic and social systems. In fact, the overt cultural manifestations in the forms of monasteries, festivals, literature, and lifestyle suggest that these eastern areas have been able to assert their Tibetan traditions to a much greater extent than has been allowed in central Tibet. Looking at it another way, despite much greater contact and entwinement with mainstream Chinese systems, Tibetans in Amdo and Kham have not become Sinified. Rather, they have channelled their energy and whatever prosperity they get from the Chinese systems into reinforcing their own culture and identity. The most active monasteries are in the east, there are several celebrated lamas teaching to followings of thousands in Kham and Amdo, and the most dynamic Tibetan literary movement anywhere (including exile) is coming forth from Amdo. There is also a significant group of successful businessmen from Kham and Amdo operating in Chinese cities as well as Lhasa, but their home counties of Derge, Golok or Nangchen still have a reputation for being bastions of Tibetan Buddhism and traditional culture.

This indicates that socio-economic prosperity trucked in from China has not and will not "extermi-

nate" cultural and religious identity within Tibet. Two aspects of this identity are troubling to Beijing: religion and a social system independent of mainland strictures. The largely repressive, but recently ambivalent relationship between the administration and Buddhist institutions is an all-important topic that has received almost exclusive attention internationally. It is worth noting that since 1980 the administration has worked with lamas and monasteries and seems resigned to the fact that nothing will go forth in Tibet without the allowance and support of Buddhist institutions. While monasteries are still destroyed (notably Khempo Jikhpun's centre with upwards of 10,000 followers at Serta in 2001), they are being rebuilt officially and unofficially at a much faster rate with a vitality that clearly has not waned even after decades of Chinese occupation. The recent brutal crackdown on Chinese Falun Gong members illustrates that it is the organisational capacity of religion that Beijing fears, not Tibetan Buddhism itself.

In terms of social systems, it is clear that the roadways network has been unable to incorporate the bulk

of Tibet into first its communist and now its capitalist agenda. Much of this has to do with flawed development policy but some of it also has to do with the Tibetans' own priorities. As seen with the nomads around Nali Xian, making a significant amount of extra cash (the fee one would earn for five days' walking with two yaks would be roughly equivalent to a month's income for a roadworker) or cooperating with



the officials is not going to take them away from a good game of pool. The various policies promoting Tibetan language, Tibetan quotas in schools and administrative positions, and less strict birth-control limits and enforcement also indicate that "extermination" is not an accurate assessment of the Chinese attitude. One could, and should, criticise the actual effectiveness of these affirmative action policies but one also should not ignore that they exist when, politically speaking, China need not make such gestures.

There is a sense among large administrative institutions (the UNDP no less than the Chinese Communist Party) that a standardised equation can be applied to measure the contentment of a society, and now Beijing is worried about unrest caused by drastic economic disparity. This is a valid fear in mainland China (as illustrated by recent labour riots and farmer protests), but I would propose that it is not necessarily a crucial concern in rural Tibet. Certainly Tibetans should have the means, and would probably choose (as many have) to gain a level of conventional prosperity not available to



most of them at this time. But what the examples of Kham, Amdo, selective roadside and urban participation, and monastic reconstruction have shown is that cash prosperity, or the lack thereof, is not the foremost concern for most Tibetans. At a popular tourist restaurant in Lhasa, I overheard a group of Western rangeland specialists complaining that the nomads with whom they were working in Nagchu district did not want to accept the cash-generating plans these specialists had devised. The Tromsikhang marketplace in Lhasa sells a variety of butter and the most expensive is still Tibetan butter, out-pricing even that imported from Australia. Clearly the subsidies, taxation and market system favours commercial contact with the mainland. Yet there are Tibetans who refuse to be incorporated into the grand economic schemes of Chinese development even if it means remaining at a "subsistence level" lifestyle and not being able to buy noodles from Chinese restaurants. Economics does not account for these choices on the part of Tibetans, yet Beijing administration insisted on viewing the situation in economic terms.

Beijing takes a common sense view that a more economically and socially prosperous country will give rise to less political discontentment. The most serious protests since Tiananmen Square in 1989 have taken place in eastern cities during the last year and in each case the promise of increased employment, salaries, and benefits have quelled the discontent. Unfortunately the administration is divided on how to continue its modernisation drive while preserving stability and the power of the party. Now there is even less cohesion than usual amongst party elites who are struggling for their own positions leading up to the party restructuring scheduled for the end of 2002; the provincial administrations have become more assertive since Beijing has emphasised a decentralisation of economic policy; there is an increasingly strong and savvy business class; and, international business interests with WTO standards in mind have got into the act as well. All these factors have an influence on the policy-making process and there is no consensus on how China will proceed in the coming years. With regard to Tibet, it may be assumed that all these players would like to see the problems of rural poverty, urban unemployment and labour problems solved as quickly as possible. Shipping as many Chinese as possible off to the sparsely populated plateau, to lessen the burden on mainland resources and to kick-start economic activity in Tibet, might seem like a viable solution, but it is not.

Ironically, it is flaws in the development strategy in Tibet that have saved it from inundation. The fast track "develop the west" programmes that Beijing has been trying to push in Tibet since 1994 have been overwhelmingly unsuccessful in creating any real economic base for the Tibetans, or even Chinese immigrants. Since there is only a limited potential for tertiary development without a primary foundation, the qualitative and quan-

titative incorporation of Tibet into the commercial system can only be partial. Consequently also, Tibet can only sustain so many immigrants and no more. The Chinese who come to Tibet are often itinerant workers who will leave as soon as a better opportunity presents itself. The ones that stay remain in urban areas or beside the roads. They do not integrate with, and are not integrated into, the local society or primary agrarian systems. The Tibetans involved with the roadways are officials, truck drivers or businessmen who again are not linked to the primary agricultural system of a particular area. While the division between the 'developed' roadway and the 'un-developed' rural sphere means that most Tibetans live in what has been called 'poverty' and do not reap the benefits of modernisation that China flaunts in its urban centres, it also means that Chinese labour and entrepreneurs and the cloud of 'Sinification', which is greatly feared, stays clear of the vast extent of rural Tibet.

### Which way forward?

Does the urban-rural economic imbalance signal an official disdain for rural Tibetans and a cynical desire on Beijing's part to benefit only the urban areas that consist of a Chinese majority? China has the same problems with growth imbalance in its impoverished rural areas with totally Han populations, and the reforms of Jiang Zemin and Zhu Rongji have been widely criticised (by Chinese and the international community alike) for leaving much of the rural Chinese population behind. It may be that these economic-social policies simply follow the classic (much criticised but still prevalent) white elephant style of development that has been practiced with much the same results worldwide.

The current disparity between rural, "impoverished" Tibetans and urban, "developed" Chinese then, is a problem for the Beijing administration. It is neither the result of a coherent and successful policy, nor a carefully crafted plan to keep Tibetans down. The dominant point of view in Beijing is that Tibet has been a messy backyard that remains an embarrassment. No one in Beijing is terribly worried about international pressure regarding the situation (they know that the time for real international involvement regarding Tibet passed when the PLA built the roads almost 50 years ago), but they realise that a radically under-developed Tibet tarnishes the image of a new China.

Construction of the much hailed and hated Golmud-Lhasa railway was inaugurated in 2001 and has gained the attention of Tibet watchers worldwide as the most recent, and most grand, attempt to decimate Tibetan culture. However, it is more likely another major blunder on the part of planners in Beijing, not distinct in motivation, foresight or impact from the existing roadways and similar infrastructure projects (several new airports have also been announced). The roadways only provide a narrow corridor of development, Chinese immigration and relative prosperity on the way



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back and forth from Lhasa. The railway represents an extreme version of this with even less dispersion along the way. There is no question that it will significantly ease transport to and from Lhasa, but other than the cash opportunities involved with construction work it will have no direct bearing on the majority of Tibetans. The railways project suffers from the same tertiary development isolation as the roadways and as long as there is no primary economic substance in Tibet these projects are only scarring the surface. There is nothing produced in Tibet (other than medicine) that has a significant demand outside its borders. Even animal products – wool, dairy and meat – are consumed within Tibet's borders and, as shown with butter prices, even here Tibetan commodities are not competitive with their Chinese (or imported) counterparts. The railway in and of itself will not create any substantial integration for Tibetans, or anybody else in Tibet, with the Chinese economy, and will only increase the disparity between primary rural and government-subsidised urban economies.

The main concern then, is how the railway will affect natural resource exploitation in central Tibet. At the moment there is no large scale industry in Tibet (the devastating timber harvesting in Kham has stopped; a chromate mine in central Tibet and illegal gold mines on the Chang Tang are exceptions), but the railway could change the economics of mineral extraction to an extent that might make it viable in the future. This would be an economic development that would not depend on subsidies, may well attract mainland private and foreign investment, and will have more long-ranging and widespread consequences that the roads, railway or airports cannot have. It is important for the TAR administration, run mostly by Tibetans beholden to Beijing, to devise creative ways in which they can control the development of these resources as other locales have retained control of their own economic prosperity (Shanghai and Shenzhen are striking examples). International expertise involved in Tibet directly may well be helpful in achieving this end. Foreign voices raised in mass protest against yet another Chinese incursion into Tibet come 50 years too late, provide no insight, and facilitate nothing other than paranoia.

The unrest that has occurred in Tibet, and that Beijing fears, has not been focused on socio-economic concerns but on religious and political rights. The pride that Tibetans feel purely on the basis of being Tibetan is only heightened with the consciousness of proximity to China and Chinese. While waiting for a landslide to be cleared this summer in Derge county, a young and

obviously well-off policeman got out of his car and sauntered to the front of the line. As he walked past the various trucks and buses in his sunglasses and carelessly worn uniform he reached into his unbuttoned shirt collar and pulled out a rosary. He was not murmuring or turning the beads but seemed to consciously take out the rosary as a mark of his Tibetan-ness (he was thin, fair-skinned, and in uniform might have passed for Chinese). A friend from central Tibet commented that you would never see that in Lhasa – a figure of authority so ostentatious with his/her Buddhist identity. When even a young police officer takes the trouble to show he is Tibetan through a Buddhist ritual object it is clear that his identity has not faded with prosperity or entwinement with a Sinified administrative system. You would not see this in Lhasa because Tibetan officials in the TAR who are too overtly Buddhist do not get promoted.



In neither case – with suppression or prosperity – has the communist administration been successful in eradicating Buddhist belief or identity. The complaint by some Chinese administrators that whatever wealth Tibetans gather goes “up in smoke” during religious festivals is akin to the complaint by the foreign rangeland specialists that Tibetans will keep a yak and watch it die rather

than sell it for slaughter and money. Policies that intend to curb religious tradition, as well as development practices that do not appreciate the local priorities are equally unsuccessful in bringing about genuine change. Instead of pretending to alleviate ‘poverty’ in Tibet with yet another grand white elephant such as the railway because they are worried about economic disparity, Beijing would do well to rethink its evaluation of the socio-economic priorities of Tibetans and instead find ways to accommodate their religious and cultural identity.

This may already be happening in a less than intentional way with the shift in Chinese popular opinion regarding Tibet. The Chinese images of Tibet, like the Western or South Asian images, have little to do with Tibet itself. They often contain a romantic ambivalence towards one extreme – barbaric – or the other – glorious. A recent Chinese film (released in 1996, a year before Hollywood productions *Kundun* and *Seven Years in Tibet*), *Red River Valley* aka *From the Sacred Mountain*, represents this attitude by portraying a stunning landscape, with stunning yaks, and stunning men and women who are not too shy to let down their tops (while the camera discreetly moves to back view). The good/bad roles of Westerners (in the person of Younghus-



band and his fellow invaders) and Chinese (as an undercover arms dealer) are expectedly reversed but otherwise the role of Tibetans (and it is a role) is much the same as that put forth in *Seven Years*. Tibetans are a bit savage, but sexy and noble nonetheless. The portrayal of the Tibeto-Mongolian character "Do" in Ang Lee's international hit, *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*, is also loyal to the stereotype. This exotic portrayal is played out in countless art magazines, travel publications and music videos avidly consumed throughout the mainland. The popular press and official image-makers of China (Xinhua Publications and CCTV) have left behind the Maoist rhetoric of banishing the "Four Olds" and are relishing the little bit of old left within the political boundaries of the "New China".

Official statements by the Beijing administration also speak of this "brilliant and distinctive culture" (the white paper on modernisation, State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2001). Whether or not it is sincere, Beijing wants to be seen as promoting, not hindering, Tibetan tradition. This is cultural appropriation at its best-worst; but at the popular level at least, Chinese are proud of their minorities, and especially their Tibetans. This imagining, if led in the right way, could certainly promote an appreciation for the alternative traditions and lifestyle of Tibetans in the same way that new-age popularity has led to an appreciation of alternate or ethnic styles from the Western point of view. This is a long way from the impressions of Mao after the Long March, when the cultural distinction of Tibetans shocked him so much he began devising plans to "liberate" the savage land. I do not suggest that twirling ribbons or yak dances are genuine traditions, but what this popularisation could mean is that a new generation of policy-makers in Beijing might lose some of their paranoia of under-developed and under-privileged Tibetans rising up in protest. They might understand that any Tibetan protest of Chinese occupation has little to do with socio-economic circumstances but is rooted in a very basic fact that Tibetans are not Chinese, and that they are not going to become Chinese regardless of being rich or poor, well educated or uneducated. Once this understanding has reached the policy makers in Beijing and Tibetan regions, they can begin to facilitate plans more appropriate to the needs of Tibetans. And thus, they will be more likely to promote at least goodwill and stability, though probably not integration, between Tibetans and their Chinese neighbours.

China and the Chinese are not monolithic in the way they are depicted worldwide in Tibet-related media and the general press. The central government certainly has interests and policies directed towards Tibet but it has admitted its lack of effectiveness in determining the outcome of those policies, and it has shifted its emphasis several times since the occupation. There is no big hand that manages all affairs in China and the days of revolution-method management passed with

Mao. There is a certain self-absorption that leads Tibet-specialists to think that China has some insidious plan for eradicating Tibetans. "China" is rent with many of the same socio-economic disparities and problems that occur in Tibet. The prostitutes draped on the couch of the new hair salon in Ngari have drifted to a far-off, cold and desolate place because they need to make money and cannot find opportunities elsewhere. They are not related to Hu Jintao, the former Chairman of TAR and President Jiang Zemin's expected successor, nor are they interested in converting Tibetans to socialism (unless they get paid in advance), but are resigned and also sometimes bitter towards the system that has brought them to this eventuality.

The Chinese still produce and package tea the way Tibetans like it, and while the tea moves out of Yan'an by the truckload nobody takes communism seriously anymore. The problem with China's development of Tibet is not a special plan to destroy Tibetan culture but simply the lack of decent and consistent means that take this culture into account. Tibetans are also not a passive unit of "tradition" composting under Chinese domination; they are diverse, urban, rural, regional, institutional or marginal but definitely very much Tibetans, alive and in Tibet. △

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# Facing Chinese facts

South Asia continues to appease the People's Republic, to its own detriment.

By Matthew Akester

First of all, the bitter facts of history: in the political tumult of post-Second World War Asia, newly independent India found its strategic and security interests dramatically compromised by two equally momentous and unforeseen developments, the creation of an Islamic state in the north-west of the country (1947-48), and the full-fledged occupation of Tibet and East Turkestan by communist China (1949-50). New Delhi's inability to prevent or reverse either development effectively ceded the initiative to China in both regions. In particular, it allowed China to exploit South Asian rivalries, and draw all of India's neighbours (except Bhutan and the Maldives) into its diplomatic camp. More than 50 years later, still enduring the tremendous toll of defending thousands of kilometres of hostile land borders, New Delhi has yet to come to terms with this disadvantage and find a way forward.

Many Tibetans who lived through the 1959 uprising will tell you how, during the holocaust of repression which followed, they fully expected mighty India (which Tibetans, like Buddhists in other neighbouring countries, regard as the *Arya-bhumi*) to come to their aid. They were living in another world, and paid the heaviest price imaginable for their isolation from modern geo-political reality. But so too were the new rulers of India if they thought that Chinese military occupation of the heart of the Asian continent would be compatible with Jawaharlal Nehru's 'Panchshila', and that Tibet would effectively remain a neutral zone separating two friendly giants.

In 1957, when the People's Liberation Army (and their cohorts of prison labourers) had completed a highway linking Yarkand (in Xinjiang province) with west Tibet across Indian territory in the trans-Karakoram at elevations of above 5000 m, one could barely drive an



Ambassador up to Mussoorie. Over the next five years, however, roads were hastily built under impossibly demanding conditions all over the Himalayan valleys (with destitute Tibetan refugees providing much of the labour) that Indian troops had to defend from a position of weakness. Their maintenance still costs the country millions of dollars every day.

In other words, independent India's failure to address the occupation of Tibet as an issue of national and regional concern at the time turned out to be a staggeringly costly miscalculation, which it is still paying for. There are a number of reasons why this fact is not widely recognised in Indian politics and public life. For one, relations with China are the preserve of a bureaucratic and military elite with no discernible strategy other than appeasement. While Beijing has the very nerve to question Indian sovereignty in Sikkim, New Delhi cannot even secure reasonable terms for its citizens making a pilgrimage to Sri Kailasa-Manasarovar. The foreign policy establishment seems to hope that quiescence will bring improved relations, an inscrutable misperception if so, of which China continues to take advantage. In reality, it is startlingly obvious that Tibet is the substantive issue between the two governments of Beijing and New Delhi, and their relationship can scarcely improve in India's favour until it takes the yak by the horns.

## Chinese landslide

After militarisation, perhaps the most serious consequences for South Asia of Chinese misrule in Tibet are environmental. It is a truism that most South Asians depend on rivers of 'trans-Himalayan' origin, from the Indus to the Mekong. The Tibetan plateau is not only the fountain-head of Asia but the guarantor of the south-





west monsoon, and ecological changes there such as deforestation have a discernible effect on regional weather patterns. For decades there have been unconfirmable reports of nuclear waste dumps and long-range missile bases in occupied Tibet. More recently, the economic boom and increasing mobility of migrant labour in China has ignited an explosion of state-funded infrastructure projects in the 'western regions', including the exploitation of river waters. The Chinese regime has a penchant for insanelly ambitious mega-projects symbolising the supposed 'mastery over nature' to which Stalinist socialism aspires, hence the Three Gorges and now the diversion of Yangtse river waters (with or without nuclear assistance) to the parched north. Another such project, the construction of a massive hydroelectric power station on the great bend in the Brahmaputra recently won central government approval.

There is no evidence to suggest that the interests of those living downstream will figure prominently in the Chinese planners' calculations. After heavy flooding in mainland China in 1998, the central government was prompted to impose a total ban on logging, notably in the 'Yangtse watershed', which is made up of the mercilessly deforested mountains of eastern Tibet. This was the first time the state had addressed the environmental fall-out from the over-exploitation of Tibetan timber, and this represented a definitive innovation of policy. In contrast, no such ban was imposed in the Kongpo or Powo regions bordering Arunachal Pradesh, where the downstream consequences of over-exploitation are not China's but India's problem.

The events of July 2000 in that region could be a harbinger of things to come: in April that year, there was a massive landslide at the mouth of the Yiwong Tso lake in Powo, an area which has been plundered by Chinese logging since the 1960s. The slide created a natural dam across the outflow of the lake some 60m high. This eventually burst in early July, releasing a giant surge into the Brahmaputra, which caused the worst flood damage ever recorded in Arunachal Pradesh. When the Arunachal state government made representations to New Delhi about the necessity of reaching an agreement with China on the management of Brahmaputra waters following this incident, they were given no reassurances and the issue has not been raised at national level. A similar surge-flood hit the upper Sutlej valley later that year, causing extensive damage in Kinnaur and Rampur areas of Himachal Pradesh.

### Railway to Lhasa

The most significant mega-project of all in this context is of course the Qinghai-Tibet railway, a high priority for the Chinese leadership ever since the invasion, but at that time an unattainable one. Even in this age of over-development, the railway remains an extreme technical challenge. Such are the natural barriers between

the two countries that China will have launched astronauts into space before it runs passenger trains to Lhasa, even if the railway is completed on schedule in 2006.

Railways were instrumental in Chinese colonisation of Inner Mongolia and Xinjiang, slightly more accessible territories whose indigenous populations have been decisively outnumbered by Han migration under communism. There has always been a sense among central planners and the military that Tibet cannot be fully assimilated without one, and their inability to build it has been the main reason for the *relatively* low numbers of civilian Han migrants in most of Tibet until now. These days there are frequent direct flights to Lhasa from a number of major Chinese cities including Hong Kong, the Qinghai-Tibet highway has been significantly upgraded, and there is a road tunnel under Erlang Shan cutting hours off the drive from Chengdu to Dartsé-do (Kangding) and east Tibet, but for sheer logistical capacity, the movement of goods and people, none of this can compete with a railway.

Now that the Beijing government has embarked on a no-holds-barred campaign of economic and demo-



graphic assimilation, the long-mooted railway has become – more than just a logistical necessity – a symbol of China's heroic struggle against the forces of nature and moderation. Since the launch of the current construction phase of the railway in 2000, official statements and propaganda seem to have abandoned rational, technocratic justifications and cost-benefit analysis altogether, reassuring the nation that no expense will be spared, with a missionary zeal reminiscent of the Great Leap Forward. The implications for Tibet itself are thus rather clear, for the railway represents the physical erasure of all the notions of autonomy which have haunted Sino-Tibetan relations since 1951. However, such an acceleration of China's capacity to 'develop' Tibet is also bound to aggravate regional tensions with South Asia, as long as Beijing remains bent on hegemony rather than neighbourly relations. This can already be seen from recent concerns over the infiltration of Chinese goods into north



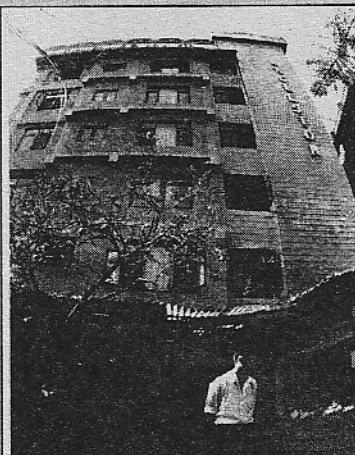
## The Great Game

Indian markets.

There is one other fact for the cynical to consider, especially those who tend to disregard the Tibet issue as an over-indulged plaything of the West. Certainly, hybrid versions of Tibetan Buddhism and culture have become fashionable in the industrialised countries, but one has to distinguish between popular socio-religious trends, however colourful, and concrete political support by Western governments, which has stood at zero ever since the US military backed out of large-scale assistance to the eastern Tibetan resistance in the mid-1950s. (Indeed, by granting political asylum to HH Dalai Lama and the exile government, India has given the Tibetans much more valuable support than any Western country.) At that time, the onus was very much on Britain, as the former colonial power, and the US, as the non-communist superpower, as well as free India, to stand up for Tibet, at least in the United Nations. They failed to do so, as is well known, but unlike India these powers had no strategic interests in the region and could shirk their responsibility with impunity. Now, since the mid-1990s, it is precisely the growth of Western economic collaboration in China's occupation, in the form of investment, bilateral and non-governmental aid that has done most to embolden the regime, and take the sting out of international protest. After the Tibetans themselves, their South Asian neighbours are the main losers in this scenario.

In conclusion, Tibet is inescapably a South Asian

issue, but one effectively quashed by Beijing's paranoid refusal to countenance anything like the free flow of people, goods and information across the Himalayas, and by New Delhi's policy of appeasement. As strategic construction, resource exploitation and urbanisation intensify in occupied Tibet, however, tensions with neighbouring states are likely to grow and to attract attention beyond elite foreign policy circles, given that we live in a world fast shrinking under the impact of global economic development, overpopulation, increased mobility and dwindling natural resources. During the 'post-Cold War' 1990s, China's regional profile became more aggressive, its leaders showed no willingness for improved relations with India but maintained and enhanced their posture of strategic containment (Pakistan, Burma), one of the main justifications for increased defence expenditure (particularly on the navy) in India during this period. There have been numerous lesser irritants, such as Chinese support for the insurgent United Liberation Front of Assam, its indulgence in chequebook diplomacy elsewhere in South Asia, border incursions and smuggling, and failure to support India at the United Nations. In 1962, the patience of India's leaders snapped after their policy of generous deference to the new China was taken for all it was worth, and they ended up going to war in outraged sentiment, ill-prepared and for the wrong reasons. To avoid repeating that history, new thinking is required, including re-evaluation of the status of Tibet. ▽



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# Tolerance and totalisation Religion in contemporary Tibet

While the depth of faith in Buddhism and the Dalai Lama has not changed after five decades of occupation, the adaptation and reinvention of religious expression have become key to the survival of Tibetan Buddhist faith.

By Matteo Pistono

Adaptation is the primary tool Tibetans use to maintain the practice of religion in China-occupied Tibet. The people have been forced to remain malleable in their expression of religious faith and yet they are today, over four decades after the Dalai Lama fled to India in 1959, as faithful to Buddhism and to the Dalai Lama as a spiritual leader, as they were before the 1949 invasion. And this is so despite what the People's Republic of China (PRC) leaders and Chinese media may say, in articles such as the one in *Xinhua* newspaper entitled "Support for Dalai Dwindles" (March 2001). The state mouthpiece reported a poll in which 86 percent of Tibetans in Lhasa considered the Dalai Lama a "separatist and a politician". This is propaganda that few China- and Tibet-watchers take seriously.

There is often an assumption by Tibetan support groups in the West, the Tibetan Government-in-Exile, and writers on current Tibetan affairs that there are blanket policies emanating from Beijing that cover all elements of Tibet's religious life. This myth of 'totalisation', the false belief that one situation represents the whole of the experience, is counter-productive, giving, as it does, a false impression of the state of affairs. One example is reporting of the kind that implies that because a few nuns at one convent in Lhasa were expelled, all nuns in the Tibetan Autonomous Region are at risk. This kind of myth is created by repeated generalisations that propose a homogenous policy of religious suppression is carried out dutifully in all corners of Tibet by government cadre. Repetition makes the myth self-perpetuating and soon it passes into the realm of 'knowledge' on Tibet.

It is not always so readily apparent what policies are brewing behind the high walls of the offices of the Chinese Communist Party and Religious Affairs Bureau in Beijing even though analysts abound world-



A "separatist and politician"?

wide whose job it is to decipher these signals. Clearly, when it comes to on-the-ground application, whatever policies may emerge from Beijing, these policies are not implemented uniformly throughout the monasteries, nunneries and other religious institutions across the Tibetan plateau.

Tibetans are attempting to quietly carry out their religious practice in the face of formidable obstacles set up by China's state bureaucracy. These obstacles include the United Front Work Department, the

Religious Affairs Bureau, the Tibetan Buddhist Association and the Democratic Management Committees in monasteries, political education teams, work inspection teams and a host of security organs. While there is much speculation on what it must be like to be a Tibetan Buddhist in Tibet today, there is little known that is not inspired by either the Chinese state or by counteractive perceptions of the Chinese state. Certainly, much can be said about Tibetan Buddhist expression, and the often brutal repression of it in Tibet today, but a few anecdotes from Tibet should illuminate the resilience of religious expression and the nature of Tibetan Buddhism as it is practised in its native land.

## Gar

In the eastern region of Tibet traditionally known as Kham, now incorporated into Sichuan province, the phenomenon of 'monastic encampments' (*gar*) has developed over the last decade. These camps that house monks and nuns from across Tibet, and have a significant number of Chinese students as well, have formed around charismatic lamas in remote areas far from, but not out of the reach of, local government cadre. None of them have significant ties to pre-1959 monastic institutions, hence there is no history of conflict. Neither are they "rebuilt" monasteries that had been destroyed before or during the Cultural Revolution. Moreover, the



# The Great Game

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Cassettes for sale in a back alley of Barkhor, Lhasa.

gar are not administered or run as traditional monasteries but function more as secluded meditation retreat centres. The number of monks and nuns that they house vary greatly. From a couple hundred at the smaller ones to 3000 at Yachen Gar in Payul (Chinese: Baiyu) county in Sichuan, by last year an estimated 10,000 monks and nuns lived in small meditation huts at Larung Gar near Serthar in Kardze (Chinese: Ganzi) prefecture.

Yachen Gar was home to a few hundred Chinese students and Larung Gar hosted nearly 1000 Chinese-speaking students from China, Taiwan, Singapore and Malaysia. All were expelled on order of Chinese government officials in the summer and fall of 2001. Before the expulsions, Chinese-speaking lamas at both encampments oversaw the Chinese language curriculum, which included simultaneous translation of the teachings by religious leaders like Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok (at Larung Gar) and Achuk Khen Rinpoche (at Yachen Gar). While the Tibetan and Chinese students followed the same teacher, there were ethnic tensions. As one Chinese nun who studied at both encampments before being expelled said, "Some Chinese at Larung Gar say that the Chinese and Tibetan monks and nuns at Larung Gar are like shining stars in the night sky; we are both beautiful in our own space but if we collide, then there will be a large explosion. Perhaps they are right".

There are around a dozen gars in Kham. Nevertheless, the earthen and mud adobe homes of the encampments, spacious teachings halls, and apolitical teachers that comprise the encampments have become the only place anywhere in Tibet or China where students can receive a comprehensive Buddhist education. In addition to receiving teachings and instructions on philosophy, students are introduced to the core of Tibetan Buddhist meditation practices. Essential to these meditation practices are the oral transmissions of scripture and meditation texts, empowerments into tantric practice, and the pith instructions for meditation.

For decades since the Dalai Lama and most other senior teachers fled Tibet, the focus of monks and nuns in search of religious education had been on how to

evade border authorities and escape to India to the monasteries in exile. Today, the gars serve as centres for spiritual gravitation; a draw for thousands of monks and nuns who are restricted by Beijing's polices from searching out adequate Buddhist instructions in their home areas.

## Patriotism test

While there were monastic camps in pre-1959 Tibet, the particular formation of the current ones as well as the sheer numbers found in eastern Tibet is a recent phenomenon. This boom can in part be attributed to the strict controls that have been placed on traditional monasteries and religious practitioners. One of the most relentless efforts to control religious institutions and practitioners began in the Tibetan Autonomous Region in 1996 with the "patriotic education" campaign. Government-driven patriotic education is still in full force today across the Tibetan plateau including Kham and Amdo.

Patriotic education aims to instruct and test all monks, nuns and teachers in every monastery and nunnery across the Tibetan plateau on the correct view of religion, law, history and the Dalai Lama. Work teams of Communist Party cadre, both Chinese and Tibetan, conduct study sessions lasting a few weeks up to many months at the monastic institutions. Often work teams become a permanent feature at those monasteries that are historically significant, high profile to tourists or politically active. Examples of this include Labrang Tashikyil in Amdo (Qinghai province), Litang monastery in Kham (Sichuan province) and Tsurphu monastery in central Tibet, home to the teenage Karmapa who fled Tibet in 2000. In March 1998, the patriotic education programme was extended to schools and to the 'citizens' of Tibet.

One of the primary aims of the patriotic education programme is to encourage disavowal of allegiance to the Dalai Lama and to discredit him as a religious teacher. This includes signing written statements condemning the Dalai Lama as a fraud and "splittist". At a July 2002 meeting of the Directors of People's Management of Monasteries, Li Ligu, Deputy Party Secretary in Lhasa and leader of the Regional Group for Monastery and Religious Affairs, stated clearly what the duty of monastics is with respect to the Dalai Lama. The Lhasa Xizang Ribao daily newspaper reported Ligu as stating, "Monks and nuns... should be bold in exposing and criticising the Dalai Lama in order to clearly understand the Dalai Lama's political reactionary nature and religious hypocrisy and to enhance their awareness of patriotism". Discrediting the Dalai Lama is one of the most pernicious aspects of the PRC's patriotic education because it contravenes a fundamental monastic vow of not disparaging one's root teacher.

Patriotic education and other such coercive measures aimed at religious practitioners have proved to be difficult to carry out in the gars of eastern Tibet.



The encampments are unconventional, remaining outside established patterns of religious institutional and organisational structures that Chinese officials are used to controlling. There is no formal admission to the encampments and monks and nuns often return to their home monastery after attending a series of teachings. The monastics here do not gather for daily chanting sessions as they do in traditional monasteries and nunneries. Rather, the monastic body gathers as a whole only when teachings and empowerments are being given. A loose organisational hierarchy prevails at the gar, as opposed to the more rigid system of traditional monasteries in Tibet. The prominent incarnate lamas who give religious authority to the encampments attempt to remain outside any administrative role that would place them in contact with local and provincial government cadre. Nearly all the teachers offer teachings in an ecumenical style, as opposed to the sectarianism that is found among some Tibetan Buddhist teachers. This teaching style allows for a much wider pool of disciples because students can come from any region and any 'school' (including Nyingma, Gelug, Sakya, Kagyu, Jonangpa, Bon as well as Chinese Chan Buddhist), and then return to their home areas to practice and often teach themselves.

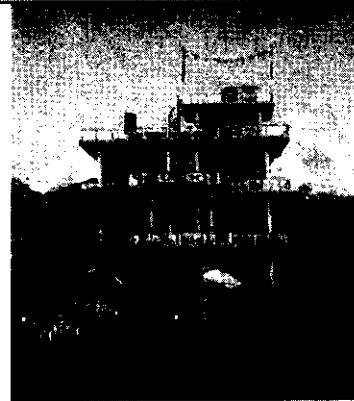
Chinese government officials are confounded by a system whose organisational formation they do not understand, and by the sheer numbers living under institutions that fall outside the pale of their administrative system. Because of their enigmatic nature, places such as Larung Gar and Yachen Gar and the lamas who teach there are often seen as uncontrollable and thus a threat. In spite of this suspicion, many lamas have developed a close relationship with local government leaders, and this often translates into political currency. Larung Gar and Yachen Gar, however, are examples of what happens when there is a perceived threat and political currency runs dry. Both encampments experienced mass expulsions of monks and nuns, and both saw the demolition of thousands of meditation huts. The destruction at Larung Gar in particular was on a scale not witnessed since the Cultural Revolution and has been well documented by non-governmental organisations, human rights watchdog groups and foreign governments.

### **Banning Wednesday**

"The so-called issue of Tibet is the main pretext for western countries, including the United States, to westernise and split our country. Western countries, including the United States, want to topple our country and further the cause of their own social and value systems and national interests. In order to achieve this, they will never stop using the Tibet issue to westernise and split our country and weaken our power. The Dalai clique has never changed its splittist nature; it has never stopped its activities to split our country. Therefore, our struggle against the Dalai clique and hostile

western forces is long-drawn, serious and complicated" – Zhao Qizheng, minister in charge of the Information Office of the State Council at a meeting of National Research in Tibetology and External Propaganda, 12 June 2000.

The PRC makes it abundantly clear to foreign governments and Tibetans and Chinese alike that the Dalai Lama is the most problematic of their problems in Tibet and a concern for their international image. State-sponsored media and government leaders express this quite publicly. Because the PRC accuses the Dalai Lama and those who work with him with attempting to "split the motherland", any activity whatsoever that has to do with the Dalai Lama is by extension seen as "splittist" activity. In 1995, a renewed offensive was made on the Dalai Lama, which included banning his photographs and intensifying media attacks on the Dalai Lama as a religious fraud. This was a change from the 1980s when the Dalai Lama was attacked primarily as a political leader. In Tibet today, religious devotion to the Dalai Lama, including acts such as listening or watching audio or video cassettes about or by the Dalai Lama or conducting any secular or religious ceremony in the Dalai Lama's name are seen as acts of political rebellion. Hence, local government departments regularly issue and enforce strict regula-



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## The Great Game

tions on politically sensitive dates such as 6 July, the Dalai Lama's birthday, or 10 December, International Human Rights Day and on the anniversary of the Dalai Lama's Nobel Peace Prize. On 24 June 2001, the Lhasa City Government posted citywide notices which stated, among other items: "The People's Government... forbids any person, any group, or any organisation, in any form or in any place to use any situation to represent celebrating the Dalai's birthday, to pray to the Dalai for blessing, to sing prohibited songs, to offer incense to the Dalai, or to carry out barely-flower-throwing illegal activities".

While authorities and security personnel in Lhasa on 6 July and other dates keep a keen eye open and the detention cells ready for use, a contrary event occurs every Wednesday. On that day, Tibetans across Tibet and in particular in Lhasa carry out intensive popular religious practices, more than on any other day of the week. These include devotional practices such as circumambulating and prostrating in front of the Potala and Jokhang temples, making offerings of burning juniper incense, pouring alcohol in traditional vessels in front of the Tibet's protector deity, Palden Lhamo, and tossing barley flour into the air. Why Wednesday? According to the complex Tibetan astrological calendar, the Dalai Lama's birth sign falls on that day. As with many days in the Tibetan calendar which are deemed to be auspicious, pious and devoted behaviour is believed to carry special weight on these days.

This unorganised yet massive expression of devotion to the Dalai Lama that is evident on Wednesdays took place in a similar fashion before the Dalai Lama fled Tibet in 1959. But because of the political climate now and the volatility that surrounds the figure of the Dalai Lama in Tibet, according to elderly Lhasa residents, the Wednesday observances are carried out with even more vigour than before 1959. When asked about the possibility of police questioning prompted by these observances a 65-year old Tibetan man responded, "What do you think, will they ban Wednesdays?"

### Lamas and comedians

Innovative ways to express religious ideals can be seen in Tibetan pop culture as well. Religious expression is well apparent in the many bootlegged music cassette recordings of pop and folk songs. Stand-up comedians also bring to light religious ideals through their humour. Across the Tibetan plateau, from dusty wind-swept small towns to the large Sinocised cities in Tibet, one will find music cassettes interspersed with

those of Tibetan Buddhist teachers giving teachings or simply chanting Buddhist scriptures. The cassettes are recorded and informally distributed by students of the specific lama whose voice and name appear on the cassette. Some of the more popular teachers' cassettes found throughout all regions of Tibet are Lamrim Rinpoche from Drepung monastery, the previous Panchen Lama, Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok from Larung Gar, and Achuk Khen Rinpoche from Yachen Gar. Invariably, the cover of the cassette tape will depict the individual lama in a celebrated form with various Buddhist deities hovering over him.

The mixture of pop and folk music with Buddhist teachings in these cassettes represents more of young Tibetan monks' interests and less a marketing ploy.

Nonetheless, it is a new kind of expression of popular religious practice. When a monk in Kandze (Chinese: Garze) was asked if the cassette recording of him playing the *dramyin*, a traditional Tibetan guitar, was a violation of the monk's vow not to indulge in mundane music and dance, he responded, "All my music is an offering to my lama. That is why I put his photo on the cover of the cassette".

In addition to low budget cassette bootlegs, professionally produced video compact discs and digital videodiscs of Tibetan pop music videos that have stars singing and demonstrating devotion to lamas are prevalent throughout Tibet. In the classic karaoke VCD and



Jowo Shakyamuni: Can he take a joke?

DVD style, the words of the song (in Tibetan and Chinese language both) run continually on the bottom of the television screen. In monasteries throughout Tibet, monks gather in the evening after their nightly prayers in front of the television to watch the Tibetan equivalent of Hrithik Roshan or Bono singing Tibetan pop tunes that intermingle with long life prayers to Tibetan lamas and praises to Manjushri, Chenrezig and other Buddhist deities.

### Joke

On Lhasa television, as well as recordings on VCD and DVD, two of the most famous Tibetan comedians use humour in subtle skits to emphasise the importance of symbols of Tibetan Buddhism. One particular joke involves the most revered statue in all of Tibet, Jowo Shakyamuni. Hundreds of devotees daily, and on special occasions, thousands, make traditional butter lamp and silk scarf offerings and prostrations to the statue of Jowo Shakyamuni. The Jowo statue portrays the historical Buddha in his youth and was part of the dowry of the Chinese wife of Tibet's King Songtsen Gampo, Princess Wen Chen, in the seventh century. The Jowo is



located today in the inner sanctum in the Jokhang, Lhasa's central and most important temple. Tibetans often say that one must see Jowo Rinpoche at least once in their lifetime.

The joke is told by two stand-up comedians, Migmar and Thubten. The latter pretends he is the Jowo statue. Migmar is a cunning Tibetan art thief who enters the Jokhang late at night to lure Jowo out of the temple. "You must be so bored. All these long years here in the same cold, dark temple. You have to breathe all this butter lamp smoke, day after day", Migmar, the art thief, commiserates with Jowo. "Year after year you sit here in the same clothes, listening to same ol' prayers. Say, why don't you come with me on vacation. I'll take you to a nice place in Hong Kong and then to a really nice cosy home in America. You will be able to visit all your other statue friends who left many years ago". At this point in the joke, the laughing crowd has understood the poking of fun at illegal antique dealers and art thieves and know that their Jowo is not going to have anything to do with the enticements offered. The skit continues in this vein until the gilded statue exclaims to Migmar, "You silly little man, who do you think you are? I'm staying here with the Tibetan people!"

Article 36 of China's constitution states, "Citizens

of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of religious belief... The state protects normal religious activities". Crackdowns at monastic encampments in eastern Tibet, the continuation of patriotic education, and the Chinese government's intransigence towards religious devotion to the Dalai Lama are but a few examples demonstrate that Tibetan Buddhists do not enjoy freedom of religion under Chinese rule today. Yet, the innovations of Kham should remind those outside Tibet that there is still today, in some areas, authentic transmission of Tibetan Buddhism. Popular religious practice in the name of the Dalai Lama in Lhasa and other communities is still happening on a weekly basis. And Tibetans are finding new and innovative ways in monasteries and popular culture to express and communicate the importance of Buddhism in their lives.

This adaptation of Tibetan religious expression is analogous to the power and fluidity of a river. Dropping steeply off the Tibetan plateau into Asia's major river systems, Tibet's waters trickle through the rocky alpine mountains, flow into the arid valleys, and crash into the Himalayan foothills and jungle, overcoming the obstacles in their way. So it is with Tibetan religious expression; adapting to the current environment keeps the river of Tibetan Buddhism flowing. ▽

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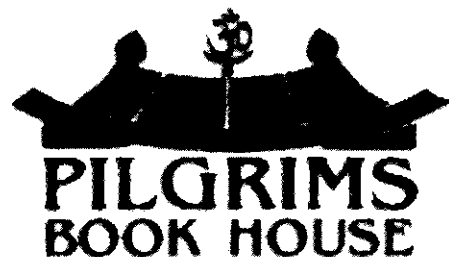
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# Living in the rubble

By *Matthew Akester*

Few governments, international institutions or religious organisations missed the chance to condemn the Taliban militia for their wanton demolition of the massive rock-cut Buddha statues at Bamiyan in March 2001, even those, such as the United States, which had failed to deplore the devastation of the country by civil war during the previous decade. But there was one conspicuous absentee from this facile chorus of international protest. It took a long week after the defiant iconoclasts had carried out their threat before the government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) published a statement in the English-language edition of its official newspaper expressing mild regret over the incident on behalf of the Chinese Buddhist Association – hardly an organisation representative of the party or government, but one which nonetheless functions exclusively in their interest.

Taliban vandalism had put the Chinese Communist Party in an embarrassing quandary: as a permanent United Nations Security Council member and ardent aspirant to world-power status, it was loathe to remain silent over such a flagrant violation of universal values, but to speak out would have been to risk attracting the aroused indignation of the international community towards its own, incomparably more heinous record. The muted press statement was a belated compromise masking this official discomfort, which it was hoped would go unnoticed in the wider world. Not for the first time in its dealings with China, the wider world unwittingly obliged.

The party leadership, and the Beijing regime at-large, is still in denial about the unspeakable crimes of the past against Tibet because it was never forced to own up to them and make amends. The party has retained power in the post-Mao era through the ruthless, relentless surveillance and intimidation of potential dissent, and in the last instance, as in the nation-wide student movement of 1989, by resorting to the use of massive state force. In the first decade of 'liberalisation' (prior to 1989), some reformist voices emerged within the top echelons of the leadership, but no clean break with the past was ever made. This has allowed the persistence of a certain neurotic, make-believe aura surrounding the official view of recent history.

In Tibet, for example, traditional settlements were typically clustered below the hilltop castles, or 'Dzong's, of local rulers. Every Dzong in the country was destroyed after the 1950s occupation with one exception, Gyantsé Dzong, which had been besieged and badly damaged during the 1904 British invasion. These days,

this, the only surviving building of its kind in central Tibet, has been restored as an 'anti-British museum'. At the Bezeklik caves in the Turfan oasis in east Turkestan, a modern cement monument commemorates the pillage of 'Chinese' cultural treasures by Western imperialists. German explorer Albert von le Coq had the abandoned cave's frescoes removed and shipped back to Dresden shortly before the First World War. But for these European escapades, neither Gyantsé Dzong nor the Bezeklik paintings would have survived the communist invasion and Maoist terror half a century later, but that is irrelevant. The point is that foreigners must take the blame for ransacking China, and the party must be credited with restoring her honour. It is well illustrated in the 1990s propaganda epic, 'Birth of a Shooting Star', a eulogy of China's atom bomb programme in the early 1960s, wherein the shrewd, rough-edged but golden-hearted PLA commander (Li Xuejian) in charge of logistics rejects the designated test site at Dunhuang in the Gansu desert because of the threat to the nearby T'ang dynasty cave paintings. Rather than endanger China's ancient heritage, he subjects himself and his men to the hardships of the Gobi at Lop Nor. To accuse revolutionary heroes of cultural insensitivity, the film admonishes us, is slanderous nonsense.

### De-civilisation

Outsiders have tended to assume that the wholesale desecration of temples and annihilation of traditional architecture and artefacts was a temporary phenomenon associated with the madness of the so-called Cultural Revolution after 1966, but the evidence suggests otherwise. Monasteries in eastern Tibet were systematically looted and destroyed from the early 1950s onwards. When Mao was briefly dislodged from power in 1961-62 following the disastrous outcome of the Great Leap Forward, one of the measures instituted by his opponents was an ordinance for the protection of listed national monuments, in an attempt to stem the already high tide of cultural cannibalism. What distinguished the period of the Cultural Revolution from earlier attacks, was the policy of forcing ordinary people everywhere, particularly the educated and the devout, to destroy their heritage themselves. Many refused and paid with their lives. Those who survived did so amid the rubble and ashes, and with the bitter knowledge that every vestige of their past, their collective identity and values, had been taken from them not simply by a marauding army, but by their own involuntary hands, or those of their relatives and neighbours, terrorised by fear and desperation. It was in





this frame of mind that China and its subject peoples re-emerged from decades of Maoist rule in the late 1970s.

Since then, the refusal of the party to loosen its grip on power has entailed that there is a similarly stubborn refusal to come to terms with the legacy of de-civilisation under communist party rule. In the case of Tibet, the state claims all the credit for the nominal re-construction efforts that have taken place since 1980, but except for the handful of 'national monuments' covered by the 1962 State Council ordinance, the funds (including taxes and bribes paid to predatory officials) and labour have been donated exclusively by ordinary people. Even where state funds were allocated, bureaucratic 'leakage' and sheer incompetence resulted in work so shoddy that fresh repairs became necessary within a few years, most notably in the much-vaunted 1991-94 restoration of the Potala palace. Or the great assembly hall at Ganden monastery built in the 1730s and pulled down by official order in 1969. The central government granted funds for rebuilding in the mid-1990s, work was completed in 2000, and already the foundations have begun to subside. Incidentally, most of the monks have meanwhile been expelled for resisting a draconian political re-education programme introduced in the same period.

Indeed, so far-fetched is the arrogance of current official presentations to the outside world on this issue that the PRC now routinely claims to have restored *more* Tibetan religious sites than were maintained by the Dalai Lama's erstwhile 'slave-owner' government. To judge

from a 'white paper' on 'cultural preservation' in Tibet put out on 22 June 2000 the central government has more than compensated for any losses "in such a special period as the Cultural Revolution" with lavish expenditure on the restoration of temples, the reprinting of Tibetan literature, the construction of a museum, the funding of Tibetan-language television broadcasts, and so on. The white paper on 'development' in Tibet (8 November 2001) refuses even to acknowledge such "special periods". During his landmark visit to the region in 1980, party secretary Hu Yaobang issued a tentative apology to China's Tibetan subjects for two decades of "leftist" misrule. But Hu's outburst is now considered to have been quite uncalled for. 'Development' in Tibet, says the 2001 document, has been on a steady upward curve ever since 'liberation' in 1950.

What is evident is an echo of defensiveness, the sense of denial and insecurity underlying the self-satisfied, cocksure bravado of current propaganda, and indeed policy. The party feels justified in dismissing any and all criticism of its record because it has retained the monopoly on force and effectively silenced dissent (at least in such sensitive margins as Tibet). But the peoples of China and other subject territories of the PRC still live in the rubble, psychological or actual, of their former civilisations, and the reality is that no amount of force can erase the memory of what has been destroyed, no amount of 'development' can legitimise such destruction. ▽

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# Satyagraha in exile

After years of taking steps towards democratising the Tibetan government-in-exile in Dharamsala, the Dalai Lama in the summer of 2001 pushed through one of the most significant political reforms to date; the Tibetan diaspora would for the first time hold direct elections for the Kalon Tripa, or prime minister of the cabinet-in-exile. With the Dalai Lama stepping aside, at least on paper, as the political head of Tibetans in exile, an election followed on 29 July 2001. Tibetans in India, Nepal, Bhutan and around the world voted in overwhelming numbers for 62-year old monk Samdhong Rinpoche. In July, *Himal* interviewed Samdhong Rinpoche, and here we present excerpts.



**Himal:** What does it mean that Tibetans in exile have elected a monk rather than a secular leader, and where does this leave the Dalai Lama?

**Samdhong Rinpoche:** It was a curious question for me too. Basically my nature is anti-establishment; I have always opposed the establishment. Not on personal grounds but on principle and philosophical grounds. I have not been much of a public figure and I have never tried to become popular among the people. So, when I was nominated, I considered withdrawing my name. However, I was moved by the messages sent from inside Tibet that were very emotional and particularly asked me not to withdraw my candidacy. They had heard about it by very clandestinely listening to radio broadcasts. And His Holiness was not willing to allow me to withdraw because it would have disrupted the election process.

**Himal:** Were the Tibetans inside Tibet calling on you to run because they sense that the system in Dharamsala is nepotistic and corrupt?

**SR:** I have not analysed it in depth but my first-hand experience is that they did not consider who is a monk or who is a secular leader. From the feedback from people who voted for me I gather they trust me not to disobey His Holiness. Therefore, they have not chosen me as a great democratic leader but they have chosen me as a faithful follower of His Holiness...

**Himal:** If the Dalai Lama passes away during your tenure, what role will you have in the selection of the next Dalai Lama?

**SR:** During my tenure of five years, His Holiness will not leave the world. This much I know. Having said that, I am conscious that there is a need for clearly written rules and procedures on the part of the government-in-exile, or Tibetan government inside Tibet when we get genuine autonomy, for the searching and recognition of the next Dalai Lama, the 15<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama. All procedures right now are in oral tradition and not in written documents. Now we have a legislative parliament and that parliament can

legislate and make laws, and that law, if made in exile will be followed by all Tibetans in exile. And if we are able to go back, these types of important national legislations will be re-legislated inside Tibet.

**Himal:** How do you see the Tibetan government-in-exile viewed inside Tibet?

**SR:** The Tibetan people, in general, whether inside or outside, want a government headed by His Holiness. This is considered the legitimate government for them. The dissatisfaction among Tibetans inside and outside with the functioning of the Tibetan government-in-exile is because of the consistent Chinese propaganda and also the underground network to make people hate it. Many of these issues are enlarged through Chinese propaganda. For example, the corruption and nepotism within the government-in-exile, in the past or current, has been negligible. The reason they were able to blow it out of proportion was because there was not as much transparency in the government as there should have been. My cabinet's top priority is to make everything transparent with nothing confidential or secret.

**Himal:** How can the government-in-exile authentically represent the Tibetans inside Tibet when they, inside Tibet, are unable to express their views?

**SR:** There are two different things here. To represent their views and to represent their faith; these are different things. The government-in-exile represents the faith of Tibetans inside Tibet, and we cannot represent their view. If we did say we represented their views, then we could not call ourselves a truly democratic society because only those who have freedom and a vote live outside of Tibet.

**Himal:** After 50 years of Chinese rule, education and cultural assimilation, may some Tibetans inside Tibet question the Dalai Lama himself, as well as not believe in the legitimacy of your position?

**SR:** I think it is quite the contrary. I am sometimes surprised by how strong the faith and devotion to His Holiness is in the minds of those people that were born and brought up in the occupied Tibet, in particular, those individuals who



where educated in the Chinese system and indoctrinated by the communist party. They have not given up the devotion to His Holiness. Of course it is not a rational faith, it is a sort of blind faith. Year after year, more than 2000 Tibetans from Tibet, the majority of them youngsters, flee occupied Tibet. I meet them and I talk to them. They carry vastly different viewpoints on politics and social and economic issues but one point that they agree on is in their devotion to His Holiness.

**Himal:** What is the greatest threat to Tibetans inside Tibet right now?

**SR:** Marginalisation and Sinocisation. It is very dangerous where we are at right now in terms of assimilation of the Chinese culture and language. This follows the population transfer and is the greatest threat.

**Himal:** The Chinese do claim that there are more schools now than there were before the Dalai Lama fled Tibet.

**SR:** That is true, the number has increased and we do not challenge that statement. But, one, the rate of literacy has not increased among Tibetans. It is still very low. Common Tibetans cannot afford to send their children to school because of the cost. Two, at government schools, the education and language is not Tibetan, nor are the students examined in Tibetan but in Chinese. Thirdly, the schools are built in the towns and larger cities and the remote areas where nomads dwell do not have schools.

**Himal:** You are a champion of the non-violent approach known as *satyagraha*. Do you see *satyagraha* as political?

**SR:** *Satyagraha* may be political. Again, here it depends on how you define political. If you ask me if *satyagraha* is *rajniti*, then yes, I would say it is. Politics is English and is a broad term and can be interpreted in many ways. *Rajniti* means a system or activity which is related to the governance of a human society. In that case I would say *satyagraha* is definitely part of politics.

**Himal:** What is the difference between your *satyagraha* approach and the Dalai Lama's middle way approach?

**SR:** There is no difference. The middle way is the concept and philosophy. *Satyagraha* is the method to implement it.

**Himal:** What is the status of *satyagraha* inside Tibet? In 1997, you were planning to train *satyagrahis* at ashrams in India and place them inside Tibet.

**SR:** My concept of *satyagraha* is not only for Tibetans inside Tibet. *Satyagraha* is on principle opposed to all kinds of violence and all forms of injustice. The non-acceptance of injustice and violence is *satyagraha*. I am of the opinion that independence or autonomy for Tibet is a question of larger geo-political issues. *Satyagraha* is about day-to-day living. What I have spoken about for years is that Tibetans should perform their human responsibility inside Tibet. This includes non-cooperation and disobedience to the unjust Chinese rule. We always say we are more than willing to remain under Chinese rule, but the quality of rule that prevails at present is absolutely unacceptable. We do not oppose Chinese people. We do not oppose the Chinese becoming sovereign over us. We only oppose the method and way in which the Chinese are ruling in Tibet and this

has to be changed. If that is not change

d, we will not obey it. And for that, we may lose our lives but we should be ready to accept any punishment and suffering that may come. That is the basic idea of *satyagraha*.

**Himal:** Do you believe there is a significant population of Tibetans, especially young Tibetans, who are willing to go back to Tibet to carry out *satyagraha*?

**SR:** Gandhi said, "If I have a hundred *satyagrahis* then I can overthrow British rule within 24 hours". There were a lot more of his countrymen than there are Tibetans.

**Himal:** At present there are over 200 political prisoners in Drapchi prison in Lhasa, mostly monks and nuns, jailed for carrying out completely non-violent political demonstrations in the 1980s and 1990s. What does this say of *satyagraha* as an effective tool of protest?

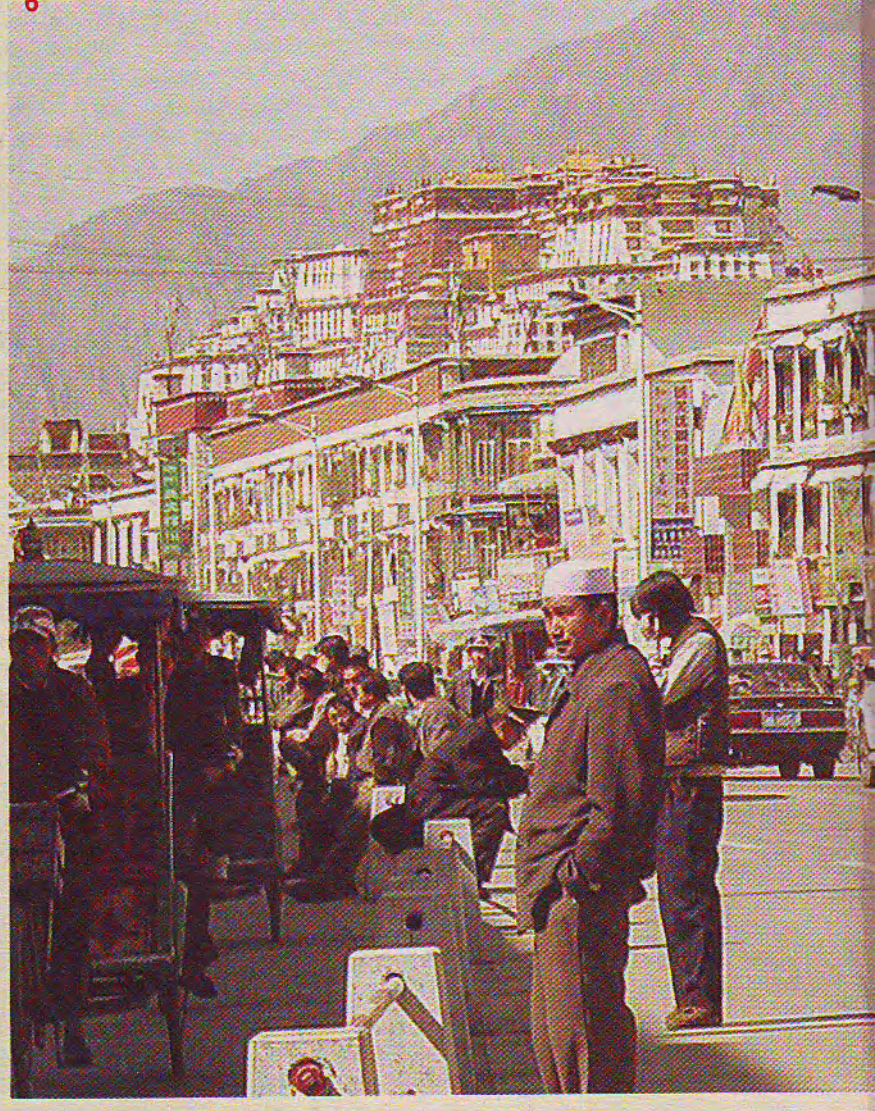
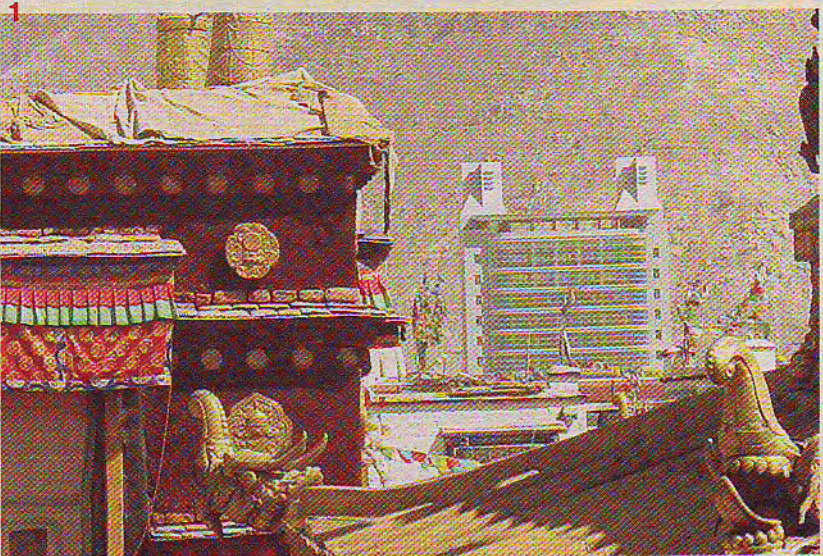
**SR:** I think the non-violent nature of action was fine. But I think a small mistake with their actions was that they did not know what to demand from the Chinese. They only yelled 'free Tibet' slogans, and were easily labelled 'separatist' or 'splittist'. As the Chinese consider their national integrity with utmost importance, they can be blamed and imprisoned very easily. If their demands had been more specific, and on a smaller scale, then their *satyagraha* could have been more effective. For example, say nuns come to Lhasa to ask for permission to be admitted to a nunnery. If they are not allowed, then they must still stick to that demand for their admission. And if they are not allowed admission, they must stay at that nunnery whether they get food or no food. If action was carried out like this, then perhaps the authorities would not be able to imprison the nuns for such long periods of times, or they may not think there is a need to imprison them. *Satyagraha* needs to move through the grassroots level and step by step. It cannot ask immediately for the highest thing.

**Himal:** With all due respect, it is easy to talk about *satyagraha* for someone like yourself who speaks with freedom, unlike in the case of Gandhi or Aung san Sukyi. It seems that those who are calling for peaceful protest in Tibet are all outside Tibet.

**SR:** The Tibetans inside Tibet should do exactly three things. Number one, they should keep their Tibetan-ness intact, and try and bring up their children as Tibetans. This means more than just culture. It means preserving the core of being Tibetan against the huge influence of the Chinese. That is a difficult *satyagraha* to do. The second thing is that they should stop cooperating with the Chinese and the implementation of Chinese policies and have, if nothing else, an inner non-acceptance. Even if they are not able to express it with words or actions, there still must be a rejection and disassociation of these things from the core of their mind. This must be done without any hatred or intention to harm the Chinese people. Thirdly, everybody should do constructive work that is not dependent upon anyone telling them to do so, even if it is small. By these methods, everyone should become self-sufficient for their food, clothing and shelter. These basic needs must be produced by oneself so that one does not have to depend on the Chinese economy. These three things are important and dangerous. But if one is careful, they can do it. ▽



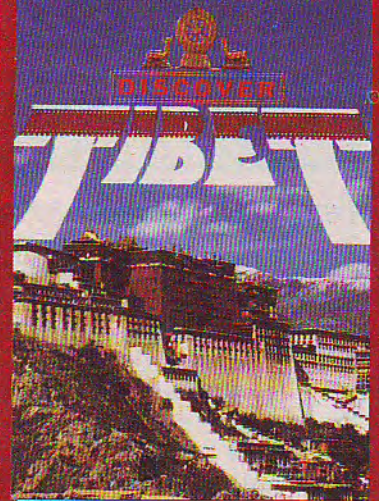
PHOTOS BY SCRUFFY SQUIRREL PRINTS







1. From the top of the Jokhang, the brand new Public Security Bureau, 13 stories of security in the historic area just north of Ramoche Temple. UNESCO has asked the bureau to provide information about this and other construction in the UN World Heritage protection zone. 2. Night clubs in Lhasa known as Nangma Bars are a mixture of live music and stand-up comedy and karaoke. Patrons are almost solely Tibetans. Performances are conducted in both Tibetan and Mandarin (October 2001). 3. New electric mixies that promise to make traditional Tibetan butter tea more hygenic and tastier, Barkhor (November 2001). 4. These signs are more to convince the Chinese who reside in or are tourists in Lhasa that Tibetans are content with the 'peaceful liberation' of Tibet. 5. A recently painted wall mural depicting a young Dalai Lama. This painting is hidden from view as images of the Dalai Lama are banned in Tibet (October 2001). 6. A Chinese Muslim immigrant in Dekyi Shar Lam (Chinese: Beijing Lu), Lhasa. 7. Prostitution is rampant in Lhasa. Hair dressing studios act as fronts for the thousands of small brothels (April 2002). 8. The Mona Lisa in a tourist cafe near Barkhor. The painting is by a local Chinese artist who resides in Lhasa.



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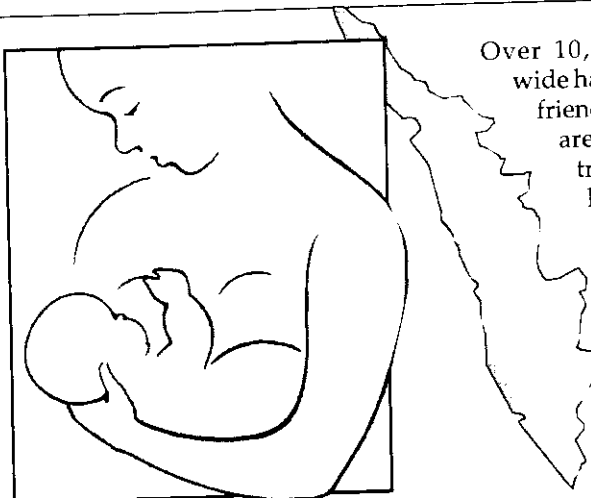
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**Baby boomers in Kerala**

THE BFHI of the WHO and UNICEF has declared Kerala the first baby-friendly state in the world. This honour comes to it because over 90 percent of the maternity hospitals in this state in the south of India that never ceases to astound with its HDI figures, have successfully implemented the '10 Steps to Successful Breastfeeding' of the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative programme. If over 80 percent of the total hospitals in a state are 'baby-friendly', the state is declared a baby-friendly state. So, tacky though it may sound, Kerala is it – it is official.

In the late 1980s, UNICEF realised that simple promotion was not enough to get mothers to breastfeed their babies. The result, in 1990, was the Innocenti Declaration, which adopted the 10 steps to easy-breastfeeding, in the hope that this "nice round number" (as per Dr Felicity Savage, Medical Officer at the WHO) would result in both protecting and supporting breastfeeding, apart



from promoting it. The idea is to get hospitals to shoulder the responsibility of advocating the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding for the baby until it is 6 months old. A sure-shot way of not being declared baby-friendly is if feeding bottles, teats, low cost or free breastmilk substitutes are made available on the premises of the institution. The programme also seeks to publicise that the practice of separating mother and infant just after birth so that she cannot feed it has evolved from nonsense notions of neonatal care.

Over 10,000 hospitals worldwide have been declared baby-friendly thus far, 622 of these are in "Gods Own Country", which is how Kerala advertises itself to tourists.

A worthwhile project: a little sugary in choice of nomenclature and fittingly 'developmental' in its acronym-happy formulation. The glad thing though, is that in spite of being in the region that clings to second last place in the Human Development Index with dogged determination, the identity of the pet of the programme has not caught anyone by surprise. Kerala's infant mortality rate is 13 deaths per 1000 live births (compare with the figures for India – 63.19 per 1000, Singapore – 3.62 per 1000). With 97 percent of all childbirths taking place in a hospital or a health centre, Kerala also has the highest rate of institutional childbirths in India.

**Environmental politics and the Asian Brown Cloud**

THE HOOPLA over the ozone hole died down with competing theories on whether the phenomenon is natural or manmade, and *el nino* became so stale, it was trotted out as the reason behind every climatic aberration. Besides, there were always other more pressing matters on the Asian mainland to busy governments, media and people. But, in mid August, while giving out the Green Leaf awards in Male, President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom expressed his concern about the Asian Brown Cloud. Maldives has had its finger on the ecological pulse of the world even though it cannot do much, by its own admission, except voice its anxieties (about survival, no less) at various international fora.

Only some years ago, scientists

discovered that for about four months in winter a haze hangs over the northern part of the Indian Ocean, over the heads of three billion people, the smoke from the burning fossil fuels below of a rapidly industrialising part of the world that is still too far behind in high technology to be able to afford cleaner energy. This haze was initially thought to be the localised smog of some urban and industrial centres. But it has now been discovered that this nasty piece of work extends from Pakistan to China, blanketing much of South and Southeast Asia, and is particularly thick in winter when the atmospheric temperature is higher than the temperature on land. This 'inversion' causes pollutants to get trapped in the atmosphere – causing in this case the phenomenon now recognised as

the Asian Brown Cloud, which blocks the sunlight from the ocean disturbing, among other things, usual rates of evaporation.

Of course, Gayoom is worried. He should be at least a trifle irritated too considering the mess is not even of Maldivian making. And he should be more than a trifle irritated about how messy it is to even determine whether there is a mess or not. Apparently the case is not as simple as ABC (as the phenomenon has been acronym-ed); the United States has reacted with a we-told-you-so, meaning that they are actually not responsible for global warming, UN sceptics see this as yet another attention grabbing move on the part of the United Nations Environment Programme just before its big Johannesburg party. As usual, it is tricky weather in international environmental politics.



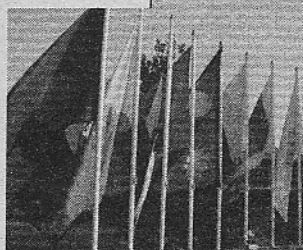
## Sorry business

**THE HABIT** of demanding and tendering apologies is catching. At least in some cases, it is welcome. And so it should have made more news than it did when Pervez Musharraf in his visit to Dhaka last month visited the Shahid Minar, which commemorates the 1971 Liberation War and expressed distress at the mayhem of three decades ago. Meanwhile, back in Pakistan, the following was the statement brought out by the undersigned organisations plus some more. Will not someone give well-deserved credit to Musharraf, who has been getting a lot of beating lately including in this magazine, for having acted on humanitarian instinct?

'We the citizens of Pakistan welcome the statement of regret by President Pervez Musharraf in Bangladesh on the atrocities of 1971 and would take this opportunity to make a public apology to the citizens of Bangladesh, for all the excesses and atrocities that were committed upon civilians. We feel sad and burdened by what we know was a violation of people's human rights. Though this apology should have come a long time ago, and some citizen groups did make attempts to do so, we deeply feel that a message from us is necessary to acknowledge historic wrongs, to express our sincere

apology and to build a bond based on honest sentiments. We hope that we can build solidarity in future and move towards a peaceful South Asia, where people can find solutions to poverty and social injustice through a healthy political process and an empowered civil society rather than military force.'

HRCP (Human Rights Commission of Pakistan), SUNGI (Sungi Development Foundation), PILER (Pakistan Institute for Labour Education & Research), AAPK (Action Aid Pakistan), WWO (Working Women Organisation), BEDARI, LHRLA (Lawyers for Human Rights & Legal Aid), DAMAAN (Damaan Development Organisation), SDPI (Sustainable Development Policy Institute), SAP-PK (South Asia Partnership Pakistan), SPO (Strengthening Participatory Organisation), SHIRKAT GAH, PAT-TAN, Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum, SINGOF (Sindh NGO forum), DCHD (Democratic Commission for Human Development), Inter Press Communication, Roshan Khyal Zamindari Tanzeem Sindh, Haari Rabta Council Sindh, Bhandar Haari Sungat Hyderabad, Bhit Shah Coordination Council, Sindh Development Society Hyderabad ▽



## Policing the Subcon

SAARC, LONG criticised for being a weak organisation that has neither done wonders for regional trade nor contributed to enhancing regional security, has been most successful in the area of creating new acronyms. And so now, to add to the SAARC Terrorism Offence Monitoring Desk (STOMD) and the SAARC Drug Offence Monitoring Desk (SDOMD) we have SAARCPOL. Because we are all in 'it' together in these terrorism-ridden times, we have to together battle the ever-present dangers to civil society by ensuring that the police chieftains of the seven countries band together. It has taken three conferences and six years (meetings in 1996, 1997, 2002) just to get to a point where it is now up to the seven governments to grant approval to the scheme. Thus far, in spite of the best intentions, police chiefs from member nations have not had the time to meet annually as had been decided initially. Something apparently has changed that makes the powers that

be believe that they will now have it.

SAARCPOL is modelled on the lines of other regional police cooperation bodies like the ASEANPOL and EUROPOL. Its agenda is cooperation in crime, terrorism, drug and female trafficking. In a region where borders are blurred and much hanky panky occurs across them, the cooperation between the police is absolutely essential, but it is also a fact that the police is the outfit in uniform that is the most under the politician's thumb. However, with a healthy dose of South Asian optimism, one can always hope that since this is the Subcontinent, the region with an unparalleled penchant for producing surprises, perhaps the police will come up with a level of cooperation and daring that politicians have been unable to display. ▽



# Critical mass for an Asian television news network

David Hazinski, a professor of communications from Georgia (USA), wants to see the end of the Western networks' media monopoly.

By Beena Sarwar

The government-controlled media in Pakistan is being given a run for its money by upcoming private satellite television, which is providing viewers with independently produced news programmes. This is also the case in Bangladesh, where the satellite-cum-terrestrial channel Ekushay has established itself as a force to be reckoned with, while India's Zee, Star and Aaj Tak have been giving stodgy old Doordarshan stiff competition for some time now.\*

But the time has come to take all

this technology and information a step further, reckons David Hazinski, the larger-than-life associate professor of communications and media consultant from Georgia, USA. Sent to Vietnam as a sailor in 1969, he spent 14 months there trying to "string for whomever would read anything I wrote", he says with characteristic good humour. "I ended up sending some stuff to a correspondent I met from *Newsweek*... can't remember his name now, but never got any byline credit. It still helped me with perspective... of see-

ing what I saw, sending in what I sent in, then reading something else".

Hazinski's present dream: to see the news networks of Asia team up and break the media monopoly of the Western networks.

"What's needed", he says, "is an Asian news network that has a cultural flavour, not necessarily a bias, and a uniquely Asian perspective, with an international standard for what news should be".

Having worked with major US networks such as NBC and CNN,



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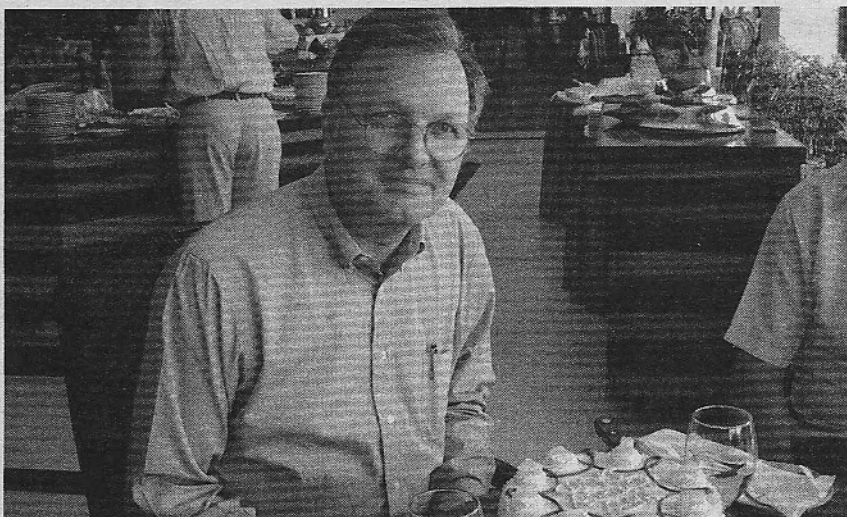
Hazinski, 54, currently heads the Broadcast News Program at the University of Georgia's Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication – currently ranked fourth out of 150 such programmes in the USA. He was recently in Karachi as a principal partner with Intelligent Media Consultants, a communications system design consulting company, along with a small team of television journalists like himself who between them have helped launch about a dozen television networks in Asia and Europe. In Pakistan, they are training media people for Geo, Pakistan's first 24-hour news network, being launched 'some time this year' by the media giant Jang, which owns the country's largest group of newspapers.

Obviously, the governments of the region, caught up in their hostilities and politics, may not be able to cooperate enough to come together for such a purpose, says Hazinski, "but the capitalistic organisations can".

One of these organisations is Aaj Tak, the 24-hour Hindi news network in India that has garnered some 60 percent of the country's television audience. Hazinski was project manager for the Aaj Tak launch last year. "They have 45 cameras, and 40 sub-bureaus, and a viewership of 17.1 million in just a year and a half. That's a major network already. America's biggest networks, ABC, NBC and CBS, together, have a viewership of 32 million; CNN has one million only".

Hazinski does not see why Geo in Pakistan should not share resources with India's Aaj Tak, Qatar's Al Jazeera, Hong Kong's TVB or Indonesia's Gramedia. He has floated the possibility to the Aaj Tak and Geo people already, and believes that something can be worked out. "They'd need a third partner to make the network workable", he says. "Together, these networks could pose a real challenge to the domination of broadcast information by giants like the BBC and CNN".

Not, he adds, that the Western



*Hazinski instructing Asian journalists: Why shouldn't South Asian satellite television outfits share their resources?*

media corporations are evil or bad, "and it's not a question of competence; they just have the majority of the money. The problem is that the majority of the people and most of the growth is in Asia or the Subcontinent. So this is the same cultural filter that the Africans complained

### Geo in Pakistan could share resources with India's Aaj Tak, Qatar's Al Jazeera, Hong Kong's TVB or Indonesia's Gramedia

about in the 1950s, when news of Tanzania would come into the country via London. Effectively the same thing is happening now. It is in fact a filter, a kind of cultural imperialism".

Hazinski points out that CNN has done a good job of leveraging other entities, such as CNN Turkey or Canal Plus in Spain, pulling in many local journalists and workers. "But the economic advantage still goes to CNN".

So why have not these Asian television networks taken the initiative and started such a network? First of all, says Hazinski, they have got their own parochial interests. Secondly, they are all clients of Re-

uters or CNN. "Why don't they become their own clients? Share resources? Cost goes down. They all have the same interests in many cases".

"The Asian networks are still fairly new, the oldest being about 10 years old, versus the 50-plus years that the Western corporations can boast of", says Hazinski, coming back to the question of why an Asian television news network has not been formed. "A critical mass needs to be achieved with private broadcasting. The Asian networks have a bit of an inferiority complex, in a business where the Western networks have been doing this for so much longer. There is a cost-performance ratio involved. For an Asian channel to send a correspondent to Washington means a lot of money. So for now they just depend on news from Washington to come from Western sources".

"But part of what Aaj Tak is doing, what Geo will do, is making money, doing well journalistically, expanding. It needs a critical mass, it needs organisation. Partner news organisations can be efficient, with less overhead expenses".

"It would be a really big deal if it does happen. And, I think it will". ▽

*\*As of going to press, Ekushay's license was revoked by a court order for problems said to be related to the company's registration papers. – editors*



**Press Predator?**

The Nepal Federation of Journalists is on the warpath against the government for actions taken against journalists under the state of emergency that lapsed on 28 August after nine months of operation, and Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba has been labelled a "press predator" by an international reporters' watchdog group. Fair enough, for the South Asian country with arguably the freest media till just a year ago today trembles under multiple body blows from the Maoists and the government. The journalists most in danger from extra-judicial methods of punishment are those with Maoist or far-left leanings, and everything should be done to protect their life and limb. The federation members and Nepal's mainstream journalists can be justly criticised for not being bold enough in the face of authoritarian strictures. It is easier to do a 'relay *ansan*' (fast) than to write an article that dares the military or police to respond. But that is what the federation was doing as of press time, conducting a relay fast, which in reality is nothing but a mild dietary exercise.



class difference between big land-owners and small marginal farmers when we speak of 'farmer's struggle'. He writes, "Small and marginal farmers with holdings of land up to two hectares represent about 73 percent of the land holdings but are cultivating only about 23 percent of the cropped area. Thus three-fourths of Indian farmers are able to cultivate less than one-fourth of the total land". Clearly, *Grassroots* is worth subscribing to. So, do. Send INR 180 in cheque/draft/money order or USD 10 (overseas) to *Grassroots*, Press Institute of India, Sapru House Annexe, Barakhamba Road, New Delhi 110 001.

**Grassroots**

*Grassroots*, published by the Press Institute of India, a monthly journal that prints original and reprinted material on all matters of social, economic and developmental issues at the village and *tehsil* levels throughout India, is courageously completing its third year. It is available in Hindi and English, and the latest 16-page issue has all manner of stories: water harvesting in Rajasthan, Delhi and Madras; 'woman power' in the villages of Karnataka; a 'mystery disease' that is linked to the spraying of the pesticide endosulfan in Kerala; the impact of fluorosis in Rajasthan; successful

agriculture in western Madhya Pradesh; a translated piece by the Gandhian Anupam Mishra on the foolishness of modern water supply authorities. The end-piece by the relentless grassroots journalist Bharat Dogra reminds the reader that the majority of the Indian people rely on agriculture as a source of livelihood, and of the need to remember the

**One World South Asia**  
Go to [www.oneworld.net/southasia/](http://www.oneworld.net/southasia/) and check out OneWorld South Asia, which is a site that culls information on the Subcon and updates itself weekly. A recent week had the following titles that you could download fully: 'Indian democracy throwing up grassroots leaders' from the Inter Press Service; an Indian think tank analysing future India-Pakistan relations, by Radio Netherlands Wereldomroep; 'Communicating through cartoons' by the Charkha Development Communication Network; 'The toxic towns of India' by Toxics Link; 'The illegal bird trade in Nepal' from the Environment News Service (ENS) of the Centre for Science and Environment; 'Maoists for talks with Nepal government' from the Human Rights and Peace Campaign, Nepal; 'Narmada protestors to return to village' from the Narmada Bachao Andolan; 'Bangladesh NGO develops new technology to purify water' from PROSHIKA; 'Reading storms and cyclones and saving lives' from the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers; 'Industrial park in south India comes under attack' from CorpWatch; 'Karachi residents protest construction of road' from Alternative Media Network Asia. Now that is what I call a real South Asia-wide lens. Those who want to know more about OneWorld South Asia can write to Nitya Jacob, regional coordinator, OneWorld South Asia, in Delhi.

**Kamasutra and Us**

Mira Nair's *Kamasutra* is not a very original film, and is pretty voyeuristic when you come to think of it. But that is not what concerns me. Neither is Chhetria Patrakar a stuffed shirt, but s/he was surprised to see an unpurgated version of the film being shown on B4U satellite television on the night of 26 July, well within primetime, for all South Asia to imbibe and salivate over. The frontal nudity and coital positions that are more than permissible-viewing in over-18 cinema showings were being shown at full-length, accessible in any







living room of the Subcontinent that is under the satellite footprint.

Okay, this is the *Kamasutra* and it is part of our 'heritage', and perhaps the ability to slip through such fare even helps South Asian society to overcome its prudery in matters of sex and sexuality. But at least there should be debate. That is what shocked Chhetria Patrakar. While the censors go hammer and tongs (scissors, actually) at any anti-violence topic Anand Patwardhan puts his finger into in his documentaries, and while there is much huffing and puffing over foreign-ownership in Indian media, should not media commentators at least be discussing this topic? Upon discussion, it may well be decided that (be-

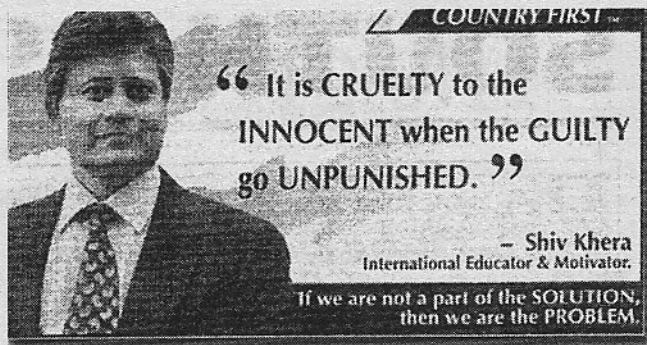
cause of our great and grand traditions of variety-laden sexuality – which I quite disbelieve) that it is okay to show an un-cut *Kamasutra* on family television. But at least we should discuss it, right? It is the dissonance and distance between the classes who decide on what is shown on television and the masses that consume that allows this to happen, and even the media critics in the capitals are not sensitive enough (removed as they are from villages and district towns) to speak on behalf of the people.

**Shiv Khera**

CP is getting tired of Shiv Khera's rantings in the Asian Age. for eg:

Weak people can never be SINCERE — COWARDS can never practice MORALITY.

Unprincipled ALLIANCES keep generating recycled TRASH and fresh TALENT.



Anyone who PROFITS from CRIME is a part of it. No crime is VICTIMLESS.

Bad leaders take MONEY from the rich, VOTE from the poor, promising to protect one from the other.

TOLERANCE beyond the point of absurdity is not a VIRTUE but COWARDICE.

WINNERS don't do different things, they DO THINGS DIFFERENTLY.

*Logical problem. What if Bad leaders are only doing things differently?*

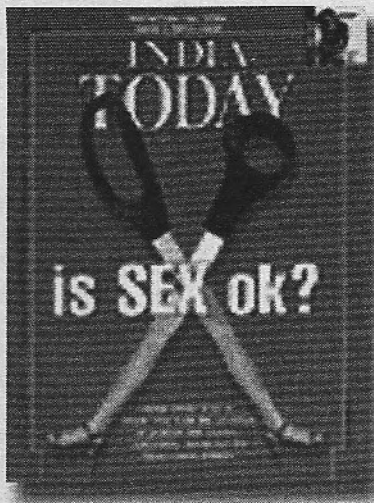
**Slicing SEX**

True publishing whorishness: spreading your legs to sell more. Or rather, as the 5 August 2002 issue of *India Today* did, spread a pair of stiletto-ed legs, replace the top half with the handle of a pair of scissors and then, to really rub it in, cover the crotch area with a 'bold' screamer headline: "Is SEX ok?"

Forget the inanity of the question and focus instead, as we were no doubt intended to do, on the sheer baseness of the cover. We all know what SEX means, and short of real pornography or really innovative and suggestive art, no illustration can match up to the simple, expressive elegance of the word on its own.

And even if you accept the cover for being dumbed down to just below that fine line of intelligence and aesthetics that is normally the domain of slugs, and where, no doubt, the majority of *India Today* devotees can be found, other questions pertaining to the specifics of the design remain. The glimpse of an ankle is sexy. A well-toned full-on silhouette of a leg is, too. But the top of a pair of blah thighs? Really.

– Chhetria Patrakar





# The great genetic scandal

By *Devinder Sharma*

Some years back, Oman made an unusual request to India. The oil-rich West Asian country was interested in acquiring four pure-bred animals of the Tharparkar cattle breed found only in the dry, arid regions of Rajasthan. The Tharparkar species derives its name from a unique genetic endowment that enables the animal to traverse the massive Thar desert in western India, an ability which provoked the interest of the sun-soaked Gulf state. However, the frantic search to procure four genetically pure Tharparkar males failed. Only then did Indian authorities realise that the indiscriminate cross-breeding of domestic cattle with exotic Jersey and Holstein Friesian breeds under the Intensive Cattle Breeding Programme and the well-known Operation Flood had rendered more than 80 per cent of Indian cattle a place in the nondescript category. In a country home to the largest population of cattle in the world – and some 26 recognised breeds of cattle – genetic contamination has taken its toll. More than a dozen Indian cattle breeds have by now disappeared, eroding the country's unique genetic diversity and cattle wealth.

There can be no remedy for the genetic pollution of cattle, since unlike vehicular pollution from diesel-exhausts, genetic pollutants have the ability to multiply. Unlike the automobiles which have jammed New Delhi's streets, the nondescript cattle which also throng city roads have the ability to reproduce and pass on their genetic contamination from generation to generation. The Supreme Court of India can crack down on erring vehicles and force the government to bring in less polluting fuel but it has no means to check genetic pollution.

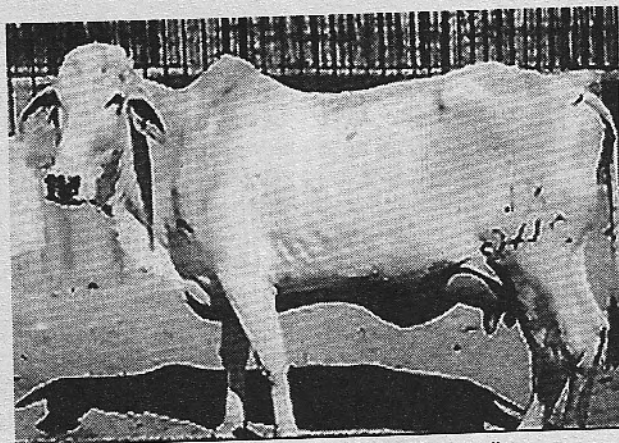
The genetic pollution of cattle, however, has evoked no protest – nor have any lessons been learnt. The scientific and administrative machinery responsible for safeguarding the genetic purity of India's massive plant and animal genetic resources, which are so vital for future generations as well as for economic growth, has simply turned a blind eye to the way genetic contamination is being justified. The same scientific community which has all along told us that genetic diversity is

humanity's insurance against future threats from disease, pests, climate change and biotechnology mishaps, remains silent when it comes to deliberate genetic contamination by the sunrise genetic engineering industry.

## Unnatural problems

Soon after India approved commercial cultivation of Bt cotton in March 2002, a factory that used to purchase organic cotton from Maharashtra and convert it into knitting yarn and garments for exports to Japan was faced with a peculiar problem of genetic contamination. It could no longer locate 'straight variety' seeds

from the Vidharba cotton growing belt. 'Straight variety', which is an indication of the stability of the genetic character of the plant, is an essential requirement for certified organic cotton production. DNA tests have shown that cotton varieties, including high-yielding ones, are contaminated by hybrids which destabilise their genetic make-up. With Bt cotton now introduced, the resulting genetic contamination can only grow



*Tharparkar cattle: now extinct in India*

worse. Despite this unfolding crisis, the Indian ministry of agriculture as well as the Cotton Corporation of India have preferred to remain silent and inactive. In fact, the Indian council of agricultural research, the umbrella organisation that oversees the country's agricultural research, refuses even to acknowledge that genetic contamination is a serious problem.

However, it is a serious problem, and one which has been well documented internationally. In Canada, for instance, genetically modified canola has spread widely, finding its way into conventional seed through pollen or accidental seed mixing. Rene Van Acker, a plant scientist at the University of Manitoba, admits that the country faces a serious problem. She says, "I think it's very significant and I also think it's a formal recognition that genetic pollution does happen". For farmers it means adding a second herbicide to their regular spraying to kill plants that have been genetically modified to resist their regular herbicide. For organic growers it is a devastating issue; any contamination of

seed stock with genetically engineered crops destroys organic production. Traces of alien genes have also been identified in three cereal crops, two maize and one of soya, in the Navarre region of the Basque country, Spain. Analysis by two independent laboratories revealed that the polluting agent in one of the maize crops was Bt 176 maize, better known as the Compa CB variety of genetically modified maize, commercialised by the Swiss company Novartis, currently known as Syngenta following its merger with Astra-Zeneca of the UK.

More recently, the biotechnology industry orchestrated a mischievous campaign to discredit research by Ignacio Chapela and David Quist of the University of California, Berkeley, which established the spread of transgenes in maize crops. So powerful was the deafening chorus in opposition to this research by the key protagonists of the biotechnology industry that even the prestigious scientific journal *Nature* was forced to succumb to pressure. Such genetic contamination could ultimately destroy the world's available genetic purity, especially in hotspots of diversity. Despite *Nature* disowning the research paper, the National Biodiversity Commission of Mexico accepted the findings. Soon thereafter, the discovery of transgenic DNA by two separate teams in around 10 percent of crop plants sampled in Oaxaca province, which they described as "the world's worst case of GM contamination", only added weight to the Berkeley researchers' argument. The source of the contamination appears to have been transgenic Bt maize imported for food consumption from the neighbouring US, which apparently was cultivated and therefore spread by cross-pollination.

*Nature* was not the only one to stumble; the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Centre (CIMMYT) in Mexico, one of the 16 international agricultural research centres being run by the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), was the next to exhibit a similar lapse in judgement. Asserting that such contamination would not spell doom, the CIMMYT oddly claimed that diversity could actually increase as a result "if plant scientists find a desirable trait in a contaminated variety, they can easily breed plants that contain the desired trait but lack the Bt gene". CIMMYT's defence of the genetic contamination unleashed by the private seed industry in the heartland of the Mexican maize gene pool is a clear indication of the alarming breakdown in scientific discourse. In fact, CIMMYT's assertion is in complete variance with the principles of conservation and utilisation of plant genetic resources. The official position of the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), for instance, holds that "genetic diversity per se is valuable in that it evens out yield variability", provides insurance against future

changes and is a 'treasure chest' of as yet unknown resources". The FAO also accepts that plant genetic resources are seriously threatened with erosion, "the consequences of which will be serious, irreversible and global".

And it is primarily for this reason that the CGIAR centres are engaged in collection, storage and conservation of plant genetic resources in genebanks. World food security depends in general on the 30 crop species that provide most of humanity's dietary energy and protein and in particular on the three crops – wheat, rice and maize – that together provide more than half. Other major crops, such as cassava, sorghum and millet, are also essential for food security, particularly for resource-poor people. Genetic diversity within all these species is important for their continued stable production.

### Protecting purity

If genetic diversity can be made to 'actually increase' as a result of genetic contamination – the argument that CIMMYT forwards – and thereby 'make the overall mix that little bit richer', it is time to overhaul and possibly disband the international effort by the FAO, the CGIAR and the multitude of plant genetic conservation centres to collect and store available plant variability. Contrary to what CIMMYT says, agricultural scientists have made a tremendous effort in the past two decades to make global *ex situ* collections of over 6 million plant accessions. This all began when the FAO recognised the threat posed by genetic erosion and set up the Panel of Experts on Plant Exploration in 1963. The number of

## Genetic erosion coupled with genetic pollution will destroy the world's unique genetic base and thereby create an unforeseen crisis on the food front

storage facilities has increased dramatically over the past two decades. Before the Second World War, the earliest plant germplasm collections were started by the legendary scientist NI Vavilov in the former Soviet Union. By 1970, there were about 54 seed stores, of which 24 had long-term storage capacities. Today, there are over 1300 national and regional germplasm collection centres operating in countries around the globe. India, for instance, has one of the largest plant collection programmes, and collections are stored in 70 different locations. Hundreds of millions of dollars are being raised every year to maintain the viability of these collections, as any disruption would be disastrous.

Given the importance of wild and semi-wild food plants to the livelihoods of many poor communities, an additional effort is also being made to conserve these species in protected areas. In Mexico, genetically unique wild populations of perennial maize are being specially conserved in a small portion of the Sierra de Manantlan Biosphere Reserve. The importance of this collection can be gauged from the fact that in Mexico only 20



percent of the local varieties of maize known in the 1930s is now cultivated because of replacement by more profitable crops. How much damage the Bt maize contamination has inflicted on the limited genetic diversity that exists is something that should be a cause for worry.

For some strange reason, the CGIAR has refrained from commenting on CIMMYT's unscientific claim that such contamination actually adds to the available genetic diversity. If CIMMYT, which houses the world's largest collection of wheat and maize germplasm, remains unperturbed at the pace and speed at which genetic contamination is growing, is it not time to take a fresh look at the policy of conserving plant germplasm? After all, if genetic pollution 'actually increases' available diversity, much more biodiversity can be added to the world's declining genetic wealth by encouraging genetic pollution. Why use taxpayers' money to maintain plant genetic collections globally when more efficient results can be achieved by allowing for indiscriminate genetic contamination?

To say that genetic contamination is nothing to be worried about is to ignore the reality that old varieties and wild relatives of crop plants are valuable resources for researchers and farmers, and are disappearing fast. Genetic erosion coupled with genetic pollution will destroy that unique genetic base and thereby create an unforeseen crisis on the food front.

The biotechnology industry, however, is not even

remotely concerned. "It is better to acknowledge that a minimum of cross-pollination cannot be avoided, and not to panic", Guy Poppy of the British Biotech Association told the British science magazine *New Scientist*. Amidst the growing incidences of genetic pollution worldwide, the 'shouting brigade' of the biotechnology industry – comprised of distinguished scientists and their political masters – has already browbeaten governments to accept genetic pollution as inevitable. Governments have been made to believe that the likelihood of such 'inadvertent' genetic contamination in the future will grow along with the increasing number of GM crops being grown around the world. If one is puzzled as to why the industry, and its 'mouthpieces', remain immune to the crisis that is unfolding on the genetic pollution front, the answer is simple. The industry is in reality making serious efforts, whether legally or illegally, to contaminate cultivated species all over the world. From Canada to New Zealand, and from Greenland to Cape Horn, the industry is busy spreading genetic pollution. Aided and abetted by a 'distinguished' class of agricultural scientists, and backed by financially-starved governments, the industry goes on merrily destroying crop diversity. And once genetic contamination reaches a 'significant' level, the world will be left with no other choice but to accept the sad reality. Genetically engineered crops will then be pushed with impunity. The great genetic scandal is only beginning to unfold. ▽

# The intersecting crises of capitalism

By Walden Bello

The first meeting of Asian Social Movements took place against a background of what is shaping up as the worst crisis of global capitalism since the Great Depression 70 years ago. Charting our direction for the future is greatly dependent on understanding the nature and dynamics of this crisis. We are talking about a crisis that is actually an intersection of four crises.

The first of these involves the crisis of legitimacy and the increasing inability of the neo-liberal ideology that underpins today's global capitalism to persuade people of its necessity and viability as a system of production, exchange and distribution. The disaster wrought by structural adjustment in Africa and Latin America; the chain reaction of financial crises in Mexico, Asia, Brazil and Russia; the descent into chaos

of free-market Argentina; and the combination of massive fraud and the spectacular wiping out of USD 7 trillion of investors' wealth — a sum that nearly equals the US' annual GDP — have all eaten away at the credibility of capitalism. The institutions that serve as global capitalism's system of global economic governance — the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) — have been the most negatively affected by this crisis of legitimacy and thus stand exposed as the weak link in the system.

Intersecting with the crisis of legitimacy is the second crisis, one of over-production and over-capacity that could portend more than an ordinary recession. Profits stopped growing in the US industrial sector after 1997, a condition caused by the massive over-

capacity that had built up throughout the international economic system during the years of the US boom in the 1990s. The depth of the problem is revealed by the fact that only 2.5 percent of the global infrastructure in telecommunications is currently utilised. Over-capacity has resulted in investment moving from the real economy to the speculative economy, to the financial sector, a development that was one of the factors behind the stock market bubble, especially in the technology sector. Enormous surplus capacity continues as a global condition and thus the continuing absence of profitability. The global recession is, as a result, deepening. But precisely because severe imbalances built up for so long in the global economy, this recession is likely to be prolonged, it is likely to be synchronised among the major centres of capitalism, and there is a great chance that it could turn into something worse, like a global depression.

Running alongside and intersecting with these two crises is the third crisis, one of liberal democracy, which is the typical mode of governance of capitalist economic regimes. In places like the Philippines and Pakistan, popular disillusionment with elite democracies fuelled by money politics is rife among the lower classes and even the middle class, being in the case of Pakistan one of the factors that allowed General Pervez Musharraf to seize political power. But the crisis is not limited to the South. In the United States, there is a widespread popular perception that President George W. Bush stole the election and, thanks to current revelations about his questionable ethics as a businessman, he serves mainly as the president of Wall Street rather than of the country. In Europe, there is also much concern over corporate control of political party finances, but even more threatening is the widespread sense that power has been hijacked from elected national parliaments to unelected, unaccountable Euro bodies like the European Commission. Electoral revolts like the Le Pen phenomenon in France and Pim Fortuyn in the Netherlands are manifestations of deep alienation with technocratic democracy.

The fourth crisis might not be immediately discernible, but is operative as well. The recent expansion of US military influence into Afghanistan, the Philippines, Central Asia, and South Asia may communicate strength. Yet, despite all this movement, the United States has not been able to consolidate victory anywhere, certainly not in Afghanistan, where anarchy, and not a stable pro-US regime, reigns. It is arguable that because of the massive disaffection they have created throughout the Muslim world, the US' politico-military moves, including its pro-Israel policies, have worsened

rather than improved the US strategic situation in West Asia, South Asia and Southeast Asia. Meanwhile, even as Washington is obsessed with terrorism in West Asia, political rebellions against neo-liberalism are shaking its Latin American backyard.

These intersecting crises are unfolding even as the movement against anti-corporate globalisation is gaining strength. During the 1990s resistance to neo-liberalism was widespread throughout the South and the North. In few places, however, were they able to become a critical mass at a national level so as to decisively reverse neo-liberal policies. But although they were not a critical mass nationally, they could become a critical mass globally when they came together at certain critical events. This was what happened in Seattle in December 1999, when massive mobilisations

contributed to bringing down the Third Ministerial of the WTO. The other global confrontations of 2000, from Washington to Chiang Mai to Prague, also shook the confidence of the establishment. When the World Social Forum was launched in Porto Alegre in January 2001, with 12,000 people, the ideological challenge became a very real threat to global capitalism.

Today, we may be witnessing a second moment in the trajectory of the resistance as many anti-neo-liberal movements become a critical mass impacting on politics at the national level. This appears to be the case in Latin America, where espousal of neo-liberal economic policies is now a sure-fire path to electoral disaster and progres-

sive movements have either won electoral power or are on the cusp of power in Venezuela, Brazil and Bolivia.

The immediate future promises a very fluid situation. In this regard, the Fifth Ministerial of the WTO in Cancun, Mexico, is shaping up as a confrontation between the old order and its challengers, suggesting another Seattle. Because of its decision-making structure, which is based on "consensus" among all member-countries, the WTO is shaping up as the weak link of the global capitalist system, much like Stalingrad was the weak link in German lines during World War II. For the establishment, the aim is to launch another ambitious round of trade and trade-liberalisation in Cancun that would rival the Uruguay Round. For its opponents, the aim is to reverse globalisation by turning Cancun into the Stalingrad of the globalist project.

In the space of just a decade, global capitalism has passed from triumphalist celebration of the passing of the socialist states of Eastern Europe to a fundamental loss of confidence. It is entering a "time of troubles" much like the second and third decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Its successful emergence from the developing crisis is by no means assured. △

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# Community Development Reinventing the Square Wheel?

By *Simon Mollison*

Fish and whales both evolved remarkably similar swimming devices (in the form of their shapes and the arrangements of their fins) even though their nearest common relative could not swim. The wings of birds and bats are aerodynamically very similar although their nearest common ancestor did not have wings at all. The eye is known to have evolved separately on numerous occasions. Evolution is not only about what you can inherit from your ancestors through genes. It is also about finding optimal solutions to problems of living in, and fully exploiting, a given environment. There are very few optimal solutions to the problems of swimming, flying or seeing so it is no surprise that the same solution has been hit upon separately by a number of very different species. In evolutionary biology this phenomenon is termed convergence.

We see the same tendency in the world of manmade phenomena. It is more than likely that the wheel was invented and reinvented on numerous occasions across different societies of the prehistoric world. Nothing rolls better than something round. Even if square – or oval or triangular – wheels were sometimes invented it would only have been a matter of time before someone discovered that round wheels work better. Round wheels would always tend to replace oval, square or triangular wheels and any society faced with a haulage problem in a relatively flat environment is likely to have stumbled upon the idea of round wheels without having had to copy the example from others. This seems to be true even for the non-mechanical: writing has been invented many times during our global history, for example.

Convergence in evolutionary biology can be contrasted with the divergent shape of the tree of life which shows a spreading and ever-increasing variation in forms of life as they evolved through the ages. Convergence occurs when there is a clearly optimal solution to a problem. The dominant, divergent trend of the tree of life, however, represents life's stumbling upon and exploiting new niches within the environment.

In the seminars, conferences and workshops so beloved of development agencies one often hears development workers bemoaning the phenomenon of struggling to "reinvent the wheel", meaning having to learn how to do something by trial and error when others elsewhere have already been through the struggle and have found the answer to the problem. This

phenomenon is said to be a symptom of imperfect communication between development agencies and projects – perhaps caused by information overload. Or it may be that it is a function of development practitioners' inability to abstract lessons from the experiences of others working in an environment entirely different to the one they work in.

But what about the phenomenon of development projects which "reinvent the square wheel"? There must be hundreds of thousands of development projects in the world today, but how many of them exhibit the sort of excellence which might lead to our calling them "optimal solutions"? Not very many. Projects which have achieved fame and a reputation for excellence are rarely replicated let alone stumbled upon independently by other agencies. At the same time, however, there is a convergence in many development projects upon a number of common weaknesses and failings. Even when the dangers of these are well-known, this knowledge is not enough to inhibit an accidental convergence upon them.

It sometimes seems that development projects do not converge upon optimal solutions to development problems so much as on sub-optimal non-solutions. Why? It may be because the laws of evolution – as they can be applied to the tree of life or to design problems in – cannot be applied to social development and, indeed, history teaches us that evolutionary lessons should be adopted with caution in the social sphere. However, what if the convergence upon the sub-optimal in development practice is in fact a convergence upon optimal answers to some other hidden (rather than the explicitly stated) problems?

## Replicating failure

Leaving aside the problems implicit in the term "progress" it is safe to say that development projects are concerned with creating changes that are believed to be desirable. But it is commonplace that (sustainable) change is often elusive. Further, many projects that seem to be valued in their locality – and, thus, seem to work – are never implemented on the scale that would be needed to bring about a meaningful change in the overall environment. These two problems of development projects are related.

It is common amongst NGO community development projects in South Asia to find community volunteers

paid a "stipend" that, while being little when compared with the money paid to salaried NGO staff, vastly exceeds the wages commonly paid for work in poor rural communities. Typically, a relatively educated local is employed (to give the practice its true name) to organise (or, to use NGO-speak, "to facilitate") community level activities that are aimed at establishing some new and needed institution. The project runs well and seems to be a success. Then, when the NGO or its donor becomes tired of the project – or, perhaps, seeks to replicate it on a wider scale (and surely there is little point in projects that cannot "go to scale" – see, for example, Rondinelli's seminal book on development planning, *Development projects as policy experiments: An adaptive approach to development administration*) – it is suddenly realised that there is no hope of the community taking over the running of the project because they cannot see the sense or justice or means of paying five times the local market rate for the facilitator or in doing the work that he (or occasionally she) was paid so much for.

It is also still relatively common to find projects that pay substantial parts of communities to do things (ostensibly) for themselves. Thus, a development agency might decide that toilets are a priority for a certain "backward" area and then go about paying the communities in some villages within the area to construct toilets for themselves. All goes well until it is observed that the "backward" people are even more "backward" than had been suspected – they do not use the toilets – and that neighbouring communities are looking for opportunities to be paid to build toilets (which, one suspects, they will not use either) but are extremely resistant to the idea of building them voluntarily. I have even heard a story – perhaps apocryphal – of an INGO in India which desired to promote the care of the elderly. They did so by paying incentives to families in some villages for doing what they had always done: caring for and respecting the elderly within their family structures. According to the story, things went well at first but slowly other communities started to threaten that they would eject their own elderly unless someone was willing to pay them for the care and respect they had been providing. Eventually, after several years, the INGO got tired of its project and decided to phase it out, resulting in the new (and perhaps sustainable) institution of families refusing to care for their grandfathers and grandmothers because they could not afford to. I cannot resist commenting that this story seems also to exemplify the trend of development projects reproducing essentially Western values in practices in the East!

It matters little if the last story is not true for it sums up in many ways what is all too frequently done by

community development agencies. I could go on with similar stories and case studies but there is, I think, no need to. Readers will be all too familiar with the sorts of problems I am writing about. My point is not to draw attention to such problems but to ask *why*, when we all know about them, we keep making the same basic mistakes.

At another level I could point to another common phenomenon whereby attempts to reformulate development practice – for example, to make it more participatory or more empowering or to treat it as based upon a conception of human rights – lead only to the most superficial changes in practice. The new terms get blurred as they are brought in and come to mean all things to all people. Even the experts of the supposedly new movement or paradigm can sometimes be observed acting against the basic principles that they have helped to hammer out. (An interesting example can be found in C Jackson's article in *Development in Practice*, vol 7,

no 3, 1997.) The new approaches or paradigms are usually presented in the context of a strong critique of previous practice and, thus, the need to move on so as to find a more effective means of promoting real change. But rather than trying out the new approach the practice quickly reverts to something resembling the old approach. Only the names are different. Again, many readers will be familiar with this phenomenon and my point is not to note it – but, rather, to ask *why* it keeps happening.

In South Asia – and most notably in India – there are numerous examples of successful development projects which have grown from small seeds to take on a life of their own and, thus, to bring about enormous changes. Such examples are truly inspiring and their superiority vis-a-vis the norm in community development projects is easy to demonstrate with simple data. But they are rarely replicated by other development agencies.

Two years ago I spent a couple of days looking at a remarkable project/organisation in Bombay called Pratham. Pratham was started less than a decade ago with the aim of getting "all children in school and learning" throughout the metropolitan area of Bombay. It has nearly succeeded in this aim without recourse to traditional donor funding or to traditional community development methods. By conceiving its task as a "societal mission" it has mobilised vast numbers of people from all walks of life as well as funding from Bombay's vibrant corporate sector. All this started slowly but, as people started to see that it worked, it exploded. (A brief, unpublished monograph written on the subject for Save the Children (UK) in Nepal is available with the author.) As I write, Pratham Bombay is sup-

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porting (while resisting the temptation to control) numerous citizen-owned Pratham-inspired initiatives in other Indian cities. But during my visit I became aware that many NGOs and official development agencies were tending to pooh-pooh Pratham's achievements, expressing vaguely articulated concerns and worries about the approaches taken. There were veiled and unsubstantiated references to Pratham's being "too political" or "too concerned with scale" or simply "given to hyperbole". When challenged with data and objectively verifiable facts such critics retreat a little while insisting that "something somewhere is wrong". Why this convergence on rubbishing an exciting and successful project? It is not as if Pratham's objectively verifiable achievement is so commonplace that development practitioners can afford to ignore it.

I worked for a few years in Bangladesh. Bangladesh is, of course, famous for its huge NGOs like Bangladesh Rural Action Committee (BRAC) and the Grameen Bank (to name only the two largest). These organisations have developed an orthodox approach to poverty alleviation, an approach which has attracted praise from the US president and which, having "conquered" Bangladesh, is now rapidly spreading to other countries. Few NGOs in Bangladesh these days attempt to do more than replicate this model (and most are less good than the big super-NGOs at it). This seems at last to be an example of convergence upon or replication of development success. But is it?

This is not the place to go into critiques of microfinance models. Still, we need to note that despite massive investment over the last 25 years in credit and savings projects in Bangladesh the country still has a huge proportion of its huge population living in extremes of poverty. While I am sure that many poor families in the country are much less vulnerable, and lead generally more rewarding lives, as a result of this type of project, I have never met anyone who has actually escaped from poverty – and from its stigma and its restrictions – as a result of the conquest of development in Bangladesh by the Grameen Bank model. Surely more could have been achieved with so much financial and human investment? Could it be that the convergence of all upon this seductive model represents yet again a convergence on the sub-optimal? Is the Grameen Bank also a square wheel?

Further, regardless of whether the model itself represents a less than optimal response to poverty reduction, the convergence of all upon this model is arguably a mistake. It has resulted in the vast majority of development agencies – including the smallest Com-

munity Based Organisations (CBOs) and many of the major INGOs – replicating the same model regardless of where their comparative advantage and strategic competence lies. The creativity of what could have been a vibrant NGO sector is thus being compromised.

### **The evolution of the sub-optimal?**

Looking at the tendency of NGO projects to converge on, or replicate, mistakes (sub-optimal solutions to development problems), a biologist might question whether these "mistakes" are indeed sub-optimal. Perhaps they represent optimal solutions to different problems. A biologist might even look at the pattern I described above – whereby apparent initial success ends in a stalemate and failure which was always inevitable from the start – and wonder if some parasitic organism was not at work.

We need to differentiate here between the project (which ostensibly aims at solving some development problem) and the organisation (which ostensibly exists to conduct development projects). Projects may fail while the organisations conducting them, if not "succeeding", thrive. One of the problems of NGOs is that their thriving does not depend directly on their being successful agents of change. Rather, their thriving depends upon their success in raising money. If money supply is only loosely linked to actually succeeding in bringing about change then successful NGOs are likely to have de-prioritised successful projects so as to prioritise fund-raising (image promotion, lobbying, public relations, etc). From this viewpoint it is the donors (institutional and private) who

must focus more on ensuring that the projects they fund will not reinvent square wheels. But this merely shifts the responsibility "up" a level without identifying what it is that causes the replication of the sub-optimal.

One way of looking at development problems is to see them as being concerned with a transition from a past characterised by more or less exploitative feudalism and patronage to an idealised future characterised by accountability, governance, justice and equity. Within this framework, one can describe the examples given above as being concerned with flows of money from donors to the poor beneficiaries, with NGOs unambiguously in the role of middlemen. Their task might be described as getting hold of money – by proposing to do something which a donor is interested in – and spending this on activities which aim at in some way, empowering the "poor", "needy" or "backward" community. Paying better educated community members to implement the activities may in this context be seen as an almost sinister attempt to benefit local represen-

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tatives of NGO workers' own class. Or it may represent merely the attraction of easy results bought through patronage rather than through a community conviction that the work is worthwhile.

Even the great NGOs of Bangladesh can be understood as acting within a patronage framework. It is they that have grown over the years (rather than a people's movement) and the ever-growing numbers of beneficiaries who they "serve" remain dependent upon them for access to their credit services. It is known that the excellent repayment rates achieved by organisations using the Grameen Bank model is a result of their beneficiaries being keen to retain the relationship with the credit giving organisation - in the same way that a landless labourer in Bangladesh will invest respect and even money in maintaining a good relationship with a patron/employer. If a loan is lost on a failed venture it is normal for a new and bigger loan to be taken to repay it. However, as soon as the prospect of future loans is removed - for example, through the project being phased out - all beneficiary respect and compliance will be lost and the loans will not be repaid.

Note the contrast between this situation and the Pratham example. Pratham has mobilised internal resources - financial and human - and is using these for the development of the next generation of human resources. Far from dispensing patronage, Pratham requires real sacrifices from its members - but they still join in large numbers. Pratham as an organisation in the formal sense hardly exists - you will not find a Pratham office anywhere in Bombay or managers sitting in comfortable offices or driving around in fancy Pratham cars - but as a force for change it is very tangible for all that. When I introduced Pratham, above, I found it difficult to decide whether to call it a project or an organisation. Whatever it is, it seems to belong to its members.

**Does it matter?**


Parasites can be benign - they can provide a useful service to the creatures they live off - or more or less malign. The only thing that a parasite cannot afford to do is kill off its hosts too quickly! There are two ways of thinking about the situation I have sketched above.

Firstly, it may be that the patterns that are evolving are doing so out of recently existing social patterns - feudalism and patronage - and that they represent a more benign form of these. We may say that it is a necessary evolutionary process - and perhaps a necessarily slow one - and we might predict the slow development of increasingly effective development institutions. In this context, the buying of results may have more to do with a rather sentimental - but no less genuine - sympathy with the poor and backward. There is no reason why this should not, in time, grow into a more radical change-oriented motivation. The same seems to have happened during the evolution of social work in, for example, Britain although an analysis of

this history also tends to uncover a desire to control and to normalise - as well as sympathy for - the ignorant poor (see, for example, FK Prockoska, *Women and philanthropy in nineteenth century England*, 1980).

Alternatively, we might suggest that development NGOs are evolving from existing social patterns which benefit elites and which represent part of the problem rather than part of the answer. Such a process, we might say, will not and cannot evolve into an effective force for social change. Rather, if we wish to see such a force we should look to the masses and encourage their participation at all levels of the development agenda. (Said Hashemi of the Grameen Trust in Bangladesh has argued along these lines on historical grounds.)

In the first scheme, the Grameen Bank and BRAC are wonderful examples of a growing force for social justice in Bangladesh, just as Pratham might be - only in a different way - for Bombay. In the alternative view the Grameen Bank and BRAC may better resemble parts of a new system for exploiting - and redistributing amongst the middle classes - aid flows intended for the poor. They are unlikely to deliver significant social change as a result of this activity. Pratham, on the other hand, might still represent an inclusive union of all for building a better society.



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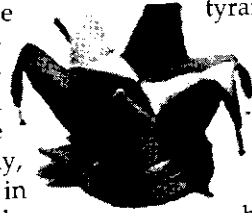
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# Geography is not history

**CHAWENG BEACH** on Samui Island in the Gulf of Thailand and the Thamel tourist quarter in Kathmandu Valley have a lot of common, most obviously in those trying to sell wares to tourists. Like all exotic places where tourism is the mainstay of the local economy, trinket-wallahs of Samui, like their breed in Kathmandu, seem to be on a perpetual holiday – chatting up Western tourists in Italian as if they had no intention of selling anything at all. Before you realise it, however, you have bought things you never even knew existed – how often do you use a backscratcher shaped like a hand with fingers in perpetual rigor mortis, or a ‘crazy hat’ in velvet?



Another similarity between the hawkers of Thamel and Chaweng is that they talk to each other in Nepali. This is a pleasant surprise for the Indian or Pakistani – and there are many of them these days in Thailand with Bangkok having emerged as a major venue for all kinds of South Asian seminars and workshops (due to Indian and Pakistani flight bans back home) – for the Nepali will invariably understand some Hindi/Urdu. How pleasant to be able to bargain in your own language when even English sounds like Thai. But the question that begs asking is: how did these ‘Nepalis’ ended up in Samui Island, which few Nepalis have even heard of? Actually, the story is not very different that of other South Asian diaspora since the time of Girmityas to the Caribbean Islands in the 1840s.

## Threatened identities

Nepali migrants started to find their way to Burma soon after the fall of Awadh in the wake of the brutal suppression of the 1857 ‘Sepoy Mutiny’ by the British, which was achieved with some assistance of the Gorkha forces led by Jang Bahadur Kunwar. The Kathmandu satrap proved to the British rulers that they could depend on the loyalty of Gorkhalis should the need to subdue pesky natives arise again. Consequently, the colonisers actively encouraged Gorkhali settlement in the troubled regions under their control.

Meanwhile, in Nepal, Rana oppression was so ruthless that many Nepali peasants found British-administered India relatively more liveable. Out-migration of Nepalis to the hills of Assam continued right until the end of Second World War. Many, many war-weary ‘Gorkhas’ decided to settle down in the frontier regions of the Empire rather than go back to Rana-ruled

tyranny. But when the British packed up their bags and retreated to their cold isle barely two years later, the fate of their former loyal subjects was in the hands of the chauvinistic local elites everywhere.

The heat and humidity of Burmese jungles were always going to be hostile towards highlander Nepalis, but it became impossible to live on in Burma only when, in the 1960s, intolerant regimes in Rangoon started using immigrants as a scapegoat for their own failures in administering their resource-rich country. In the 1970s, the Burmese generals expelled a large number of Nepalis. Thousands of them ended up in resettlement colonies set up by King Mahendra back in the Tarai of Nepal. In retrospect, it was a decision that set a bad precedent for repatriation of people of Nepali-origin to their home country, but that is another story, of thousands of Lhotsampas from Bhutan who have been languishing in refugee camps in eastern Nepal for more than a decade now.

Like so many Sikhs and Marwaris who were also expelled from Burma, many Nepalis crossed over into Thailand. Today, they continue to eke out a living in Thailand as a people without land or political identity. They carry their culture on their tongue, and proudly boast of their Nepali-ness even though most of them have never set foot in the land of their ancestors. One haberdasher told Saarcy on Chaweng Beach, “Our land is in our hearts”.

There is no dearth of people in and from South Asia who carry their lands in their hearts, but the most heart-rending story of them is that of the so-called Biharis of Bangladesh. These are the progeny of those Muslims in British India who had campaigned for an independent homeland and migrated to the then East Pakistan. The dreams of these Urdu-speaking migrants turned sour. Religion failed to bridge the linguistic divide, and when Bangladesh became independent in 1971, the non-Bengali Muslims lost their identity once again. Despised for their loyalty to the cause of Pakistan and abandoned



Thanks, Khansaheb

The monthly column Southasiasphere is written by CK Lal, Kathmandu-based engineer and *Nepali Times* columnist. He was earlier identified in these pages as ‘Saarcy’.

by the truncated nation that they had migrated to, these Bihari Pakistanis have continued to languish in the slums of Dhaka for more than 30 years now. Ignored by the governments of South Asia and forgotten by the rest of the world, they have nowhere to go even though it is impossible to stay where they are. That is why Saarcy salutes Imran Khan for making the plight of the Bihari Muslims stranded in Bangladesh an election issue in Pakistan. Khansaheb is the only Pakistani politician of any consequence who has boldly advocated that Pakistan must bring its loyalists to their adopted land.

Despite the romanticisation of suffering and jingoistic overtones characteristic of most Hindi movies, *Refugee* is a realistic portrayal of the desperation of Pakistanis trapped in Bangladesh, and the extent they can go to make it to the land they want to be in. The dream of one homeland for the Muslims of the Subcontinent died in 1971, but it continues to kill people to this day all along the India-Pakistan border, and the Line of Control in the two parts of Kashmir — one under Pakistani occupation and the other under Indian control.

There are so many other distinctly South Asian cultural identities that are on the verge of extinction — the Sindhi Hindus, the Ahmadiya Muslims, the Malayali Jews, the Bombayite Parsis — the list can be endless. The histories of all these cultures have one common feature: none of them ever had independent control of the destiny of their geography. In this sense, the story of the Tibetan diaspora is strikingly different. In the memory of our own generation, Tibet had an independent identity with its own geography, history and culture. To twist an Agha Shahid Ali metaphor about Kashmir, Tibet was a land with its own 'post office'.

**The last sky**

The agony of a person with a lost identity is too intense to describe in words. It was over two decades ago, but my encounter with a Tibetan person in the railway compartment of the Brindavan Express between Madras and Bangalore is as fresh as if it took place only yesterday. Like most South Asians in such a situation, I had asked my fellow traveller what her nationality was. "Tibetan", she had said. "When did you come to India?" I asked to continue the conversation. "When I was just 10 years", was her answer. "And when are you going back", I queried in all innocence. She gave me a painful stare, and replied after a long silence, "I don't know". She did not speak another word for the rest of the journey.

When there is no home to go back to, the world becomes too small, just as Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish bemoans in "The Earth Is Closing on Us":

Where should we go after the last frontiers,  
where should the birds fly after the last sky?

Like the Palestinians in West Asia, Tibetans too seem to have scanned the last sky. Their nests continue to be occupied by predators. However, unlike Palestinians, Tibetans have refused to take resort to violent means to liberate their land. Perhaps peace is an integral part of the Geluk order of Buddhism. But for how long can the collective patience endure, if the world continues to ignore the plight of one of the most peaceful cultures of the world? It is a troubling question, but a question that the regime in Beijing must face sooner or later.

Padma Sambhava, the Buddhist sage who brought Dhamma into the Great Plateau in the 8th century, is believed to have prophesied, "When the iron bird flies, and horses run on wheels, the Tibetan people will be scattered like ants across the world, and the dharma will come to the land of the red man". Since the occupation of Tibet in 1949, Tibetans have indeed



Padma Sambhava

scattered all over the world. Of about 150,000 Tibetan exiles, nearly 100,000 are said to be in India. Nepal is the temporary home of another 25,000. That leaves only about 25,000 Tibetans in the rest of the world. With the Nobel Peace Prize for Dalai Lama, dharma indeed seems to have reached the land of the red man. But tell us, Soul of Guru Rinpoche: is it not now time for the ants to come back to their own hill?

Perhaps dharma has not yet truly reached the land of the red man. The world takes notice when an Ayatollah Khomeini declares war on Satan, or when a renegade Islamist Osama bin Laden turns against his own mentors in Langley, VA. After nearly 65,000 lives were lost and 1.6 million people were displaced, Sinhalas and Tamils decided to talk to each other under Norwegian cover in Sri Lanka. But South Asia is still waiting for an initiative from the world community to restore Tibet to Tibetans.

The Dalai Lama's rightful place in Potala Palace as the spiritual and temporal head of the Tibetan Nation need not even challenge the fundamental unity and integrity of the People's Republic of China. After all, the Qing Dynasty's arrangement of having an Amban in the Tibetan court is not much different from the "One Country, Two Systems" policy of the present regime in Beijing towards Hong Kong and Macao. There is no reason why Kashmir and Tibet cannot be two autonomously governed nation-states in South Asia. If Bhutan can manage it, certainly Kashmir and Tibet should be able to, distinctive postage stamps included. Maybe then the Tibetan lady that I offended 22 years ago will write me a letter forgiving me my insensitivity.

—CK Lal



# Jomosom Passage

The excitement of flying in and out of an airstrip in Lower Mustang, particularly when the flight is late, the wind is up and there are clouds about...

By *Shastri Ramachandaran*

They were all on the tarmac, an assorted group of locals. Standing around, chit-chatting, shaking the hand of a passenger here, patting someone else good-bye there, or exchanging the last word with a relative climbing into the small aircraft. They were assembled as casually as any group seeing off friends or family on a railway platform or bus terminal. They remained on the airport tarmac for the 20 to 30 minutes it took us 15 passengers to board and settle ourselves in the small plane.

I could not believe the scene: that this was happening in an airport after 9-11. I could never have imagined, after 11 September 2001, that this would ever happen again given the nightmarish paranoia that air travel and airport security have become the world over.

Yet it was happening. And happening in a country at war; where a besieged government's armed forces were waging one of the bloodiest military campaigns against insurgents; where 20 months before 9-11 terrorists had hijacked a civilian airliner; and where 'terrorism' was still a real enough danger for the government to clamp down an emergency and declare a formal suspension of the formal freedoms of formal democracy.

Welcome to Nepal! Where domestic airports are still what we remember of international air travel till some years ago. In the first anniversary month of 9-11, I cannot think of a more uplifting experience; an experience that is the stuff of dreams in a security-stricken world where faith in man's humanity is fast fading.

This was my passage to a different Nepal. A Nepal where my boarding card was delivered, around 6 am, with my bed tea in my hotel room. These came with the advice that I could take it easy because there was little chance of the flight leaving that day. In fact, it was unlikely if the flight would be able to even come in from Pokhara.

I was in Jomosom, a rain shadow area several thousand feet above sea level on the 'other side' of the Annapurna mountain range. This is 'Lower Mustang', where the Thakali culture of the Kali Gandaki Gorge (renowned as the 'deepest in the world') slowly merges with the Tibetan culture of the principality of Mustang proper, which lies just to the north of here. Within sprinting distance from the airport is the Royal Nepalese Army's famed School of Mountain Warfare, a school which must be straining every resource to put down the Maoist rebellion that is sweeping the Nepali countryside. The school is located where the famed Khampa insurgents from Eastern Tibet once (in the late 1960s) received CIA support and ran a camp to conduct raids into the Changtang plateau across the Nepali border.

Jomosom is more famous for things other than the School of Mountain Warfare, and the Khampas are only a memory, other than in the forests that they denuded which have yet to grow back because of the low growth rates in this cold desert. Jomosom is the staging ground for treks in and around the valley of the Kali Gandaki. Once a ragtag frontier town by the banks of the river, its ticket to prosperity was its flat real estate, which got converted into an airstrip (which used to be dirt but received macadam a year ago). Jomosom, incongruously, seems to have benefited from the Maoist war. Or, at the very least, it has taken the tourist traffic diverted from what is known as midhill Nepal, wracked as it is by the Maoist bloodbath and the government's and army's response. Perhaps the reason Jomosom remains free of Maoists is also the forbidding presence of the School of Mountain Warfare.

Down-valley from Jomosom is the country of the Thakalis, who make up a community of no more than 30 or 40 thousand, but are among the most accomplished entrepreneurs of Nepal and have by now fanned



*Dornier at Jomosom airstrip, looking down valley, Nilgiri as background*



KINVA DIXIT

out all over the country as mercantilist traders. A day's walk will take you to well-known Thakali settlements such as Marpha and Tukuche, which are known to host some of the best mountain restaurants and lodges in Nepal, also serving the famous Marpha apple brandy. This was also where Ekai Kawaguchi, the famous Japanese spy-monk, lived as he sought access to deep Tibet a century ago.

Up-valley from Jomosom, up the Kali Gandaki and through the barren mountainscape, the terrain and culture is both 'Tibetan'. Starting with the riverside settlement of Kagbeni, these Tibetan-speaking villages of Nepal lead up four days of walking past the villages of Chuksang, Gemi and Charang, all the way to the seat of the principality of Mustang with its own raja, in Lo Manthang. Just above Kagbeni is the 3800-metre high tiered-pagoda temple of Muktinath and the adjacent Tibetan-Buddhist place of worship where devotees confront tongues of flame shooting up from beneath the rocky ground, where water flows in an unending stream above and underground. Beyond Muktinath, many trekkers go over the high Thorung La pass to enter the other Tibetan-speaking area of Nepal known as Manang. From there they go on down to the midhills, thus completing the two-week (at brisk pace) trek that is titled 'the Annapurna circuit'.

Jomosom Valley, overhung by the fluted ice ridges of Nilgiri (a minor peak of the Annapurna range, going by elevation), actually allows you a stupendous view of the distant Dhaulagiri to the west, at 8167 metres the seventh highest mountain in the world. It is a stand-alone massif whose glaciers tumble down to the Kali Gandaki Gorge deep below. There is certainly no road up here from the midhills of Nepal, although the locals continue to dream of a motor link down to the town of Beni, which is connected by road to Pokhara. For the moment, people either have to trek the four to five days

that it takes to make it to Jomosom, or fly in. Incongruously, the motor vehicle has arrived in Upper Mustang, with Chinese trucks making deliveries across the flat plateau. This is said to be making Thakali traders nervous, for they have historically controlled trade and access to the Tibetan-speaking regions of the north.

Currently, this area of Nepal is truly cut off from the world. The Maoists have blown up the telephone tower in Jomosom and Nepal Telecommunications Corporation seems to have decided not to rebuild, for the moment at least. Asked why they could not restore the demolished links, an official said that it would serve no purpose because the Maobaadi would blow them up again. There is one satellite phone in Jomosom which can be used in the event of an emergency.

During the monsoon period, flight arrivals and departures are iffy. The only air connection is with the tourist town of Pokhara, and clouds regularly prevent flight and strand passengers, tourists and locals alike. That perhaps explains why the atmosphere in Jomosom is so festive and celebratory when a flight takes off or lands. Because it is an event even if it is routine, it is an exception even if it is the norm. Now if that sounds contradictory, try taking in the fact that unless the flight from Pokhara lands, there would be no aircraft to take off from Jomosom.

The 20-minute flight in airlines with names such as Royal Nepal, Skyline, Shangri La and Cosmic, sometimes as many as four or even five of them during the monsoon (and more than a dozen during 'peak' tourist season), are rarely scheduled after 9 am. This is because the battering winds that blow through these parts start picking up by mid-morning and by mid-afternoon they reach gale force. The Kali Gandaki Valley is like a sluice which carries the air from the Subcontinent into the low-pressure regions of the Tibet plateau.

While Jomosom is a rain shadow area and the skies tend to be clear throughout the year, the Pokhara region to the south bears the full brunt of the monsoon and receives the most rainfall annually in all of Nepal. The flights that come in to Jomosom and leave for Pokhara therefore have to be careful as they tackle the Kali Gandaki terrain in cloudy conditions. True, accidents are rare because of the high caliber of flying, but just a few days previously a group of German tourists flying down from Jomosom died together with the air crew when their Twin Otter failed to clear a ridge on approach from Jomosom to Pokhara airport.

The 'mountain flight' from Pokhara to Jomosom is one that stays in memory. Soon after departing the Vale of Pokhara and its Seti River Valley, the aircraft hops over the Ghorepani Pass, famous for the challenge it poses to trekkers, and enters the Kali Gandaki Valley to turn north. On both sides, the ramparts rise, from the midhills to alpine meadow and headstraight up to the mountains so well known in mountaineering lore – Dhaulagiri and its smaller cousin Tukuche to the left (west), and the peaks of Annapurna lining up to the





The snows of the Annapurnas, with the peak of Machhapuchhre (6993 metres) at right, as seen from the comfort and relative safety of the Jomosom-Pokhara flight.

right (east). They include Fang, Annapurna South, Roc Noir, and the broad peak of Annapurna One. So real and so frighteningly close, these mountains part as we pass over Tukuche, and before long looking through the pilot's windshield up front you can see the airstrip of Jomosom come up to greet the aircraft.

It was on my return trip that I woke to how much the flight schedule depended on the wind up here in Jomosom and the rain and clouds down in the midhills. Having checked into the lodge hotel in Jomosom on the way back from Muktinath, I felt no anxiety about my departure the next day for Pokhara. The brother-in-law of the lady in charge of the hotel told me to leave my ticket with him for reconfirmation of the flight, which was to leave at 6:30 am. He said, "This morning the flights did not go. If the flights are likely to arrive tomorrow, I shall wake you up in time". The airline office was next door, next to which was the airport itself.

Next morning I was woken up around 6 am and served my tea, and on the tray was an envelope with my air ticket and the boarding card. The boy announced cheerfully, "The flight is late or it may not go today because it is raining and there are clouds on approach. You can go back to sleep". Unable to do as advised, I came down to the foyer where there was an animated conversation underway about the uncertainties of flying. Would the flights come in at all today? Remember that time when planes did not come for 12 days? And that other time when the wind blew so hard the plane nearly landed up in the Kali Gandaki?

It was getting to 11 am and the possibility of evacuation from Jomosom that day had receded to nil. There was no whine of turbo props overhead, nor was the siren of the control tower showing any sign of life. A local elder insisted, "The flight never leaves after 11 am. But today the flight have not even come in". Then he proclaimed jovially, as an afterthought, "All flights cancelled".

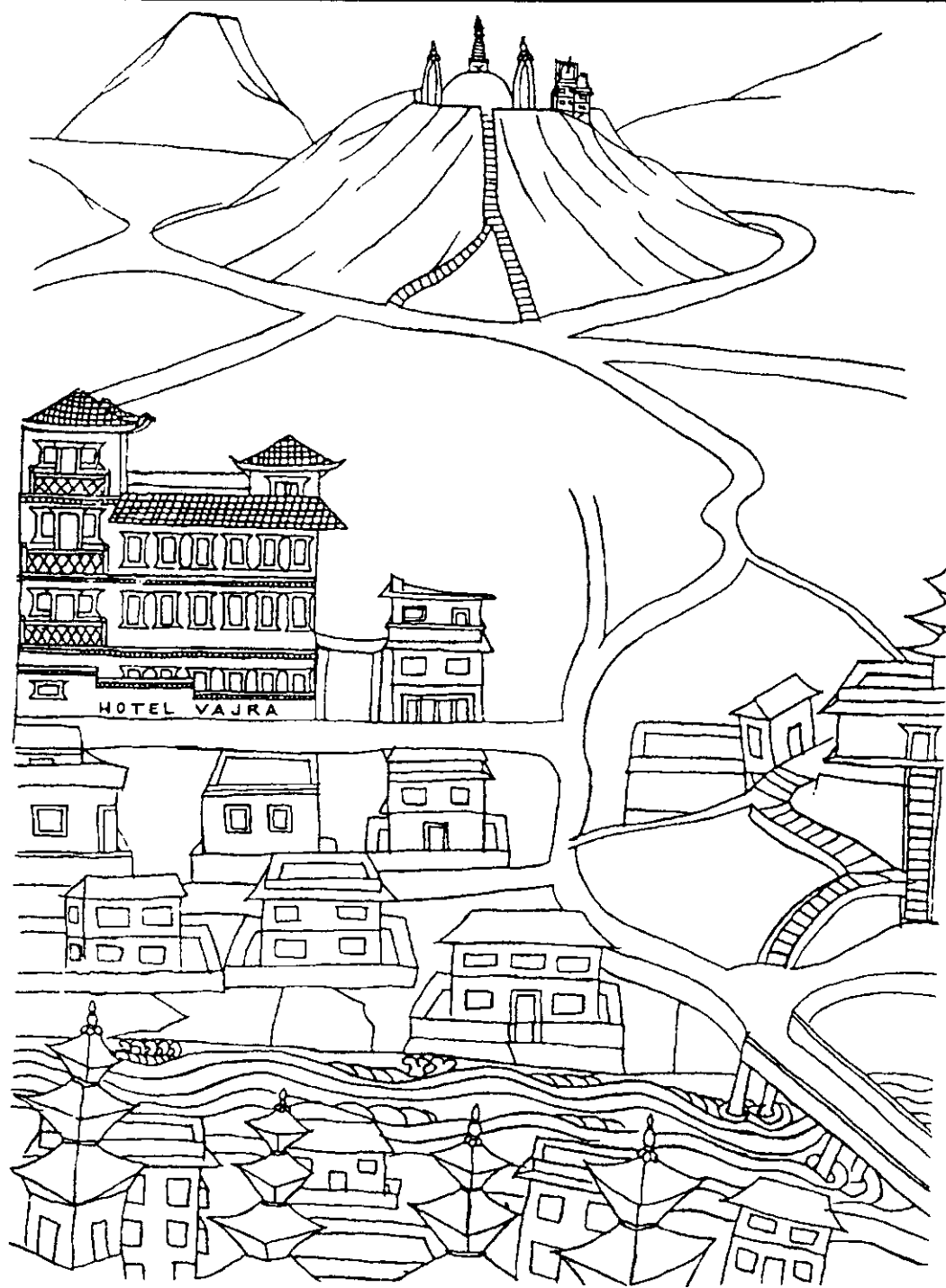
Just then, a gentleman from the airline rushed in to announce that his aircraft had just left Pokhara and that I must hasten towards the airport. No one took him

seriously and he became irritated. He left, telling the hotel owner's brother to ensure that I reached there on time. I walked across with my backpack and saw from the hustle and bustle around the airline counter that the possibility of departure was serious. I went through baggage security, but just as I was about to be frisked, a uniformed chap came running to say that the flight had gone back because it could not descend through the cloudy atmosphere.

This was just before noon. Surprisingly for Jomosom the winds had held off, but the rain clouds were conspiring. After announcing cancellation of the day's flight, the airline official told us to come back at 2 pm with our boarding cards, to have our tickets reissued for the next day's flight. We would be waitlisted behind those who had been waiting yesterday. I was walking back stoically to the lodge when I met the hotel owner's wife walking briskly the other way towards the airport terminal. "Go back, the flight is coming. The armyman has told me".

By now the atmosphere at the airport was that of a full-fledged *mela*, with excitement running high. It was the kind of atmosphere of air shows and gliding contests in other continents. After another couple of false alarms, the aircraft appeared around the bend in the mountains, dipped, and landed with a burst of reverse-thrust roar. There was cheering and applause from the gallery, as if the pilot were a conquering hero. Which in a way he was. And as we moved towards the aircraft, so did many others who had come to the airport. They stood near the aircraft as one stands near a bus before it leaves the terminal. And I could see them waving amiably as our aircraft taxied out and rushed down the runway.

As the plane climbed, banked, and made its way through the blinding clouds, I remember wondering why the only thing I was looking forward to had been a seat in a plane that would take off. Meanwhile, it was a privilege to have flown out in the latest flight that had ever arrived and taken off from Jomosom. Or so they told me. △



**Vajra** (literally-flash of lightning), is an artist's 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 Seth  
*Inside Outside*

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

John Collee  
*The London Observer*

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

*Time*

Heaps of atmosphere, smog-free air, splendid little manicured terraces, unquestionably the finest view of the city... and much more.

*Business Traveller Asia Pacific*



# in Kathamandu, the Vajra

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# The revolutionary and the shudratishudras

This elegantly produced book captures, through the writings of Jotirao Phule, the problems and dilemmas of the dalit movement in contemporary India. Phule, who is regarded as the founding father of the movement, was one of the foremost anti-caste activists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and carried out his crusade against upper caste domination and exploitation at a time when several other social reform and nationalist organisations had also just begun to emerge. Some of these were the Sarvajanik Sabha, the Arya Samaj and the Indian National Congress, which tried to initiate social reform and instil nationalism at the same time. These organisations voiced the need for Western education, the social empowerment of women and the need for electoral reforms so that Indians could exercise their democratic rights. This social-intellectual ferment was the broad context in which Phule founded the Satyashodhak Samaj in 1871. The Samaj itself was a culmination of long years of work that focused on improving the conditions of *shudratishudras*, the most discriminated segment of society caste-wise.

A part of this effort was the founding of a school for dalit girls in 1848. This was followed by the founding of a school for girls of all castes in 1851. This act signified not only the revolutionary character of Phule's movement but also its uniqueness in being the first to introduce practical attempts to break caste oppression, an aspect that was ignored by the social reform movements of that period. Writings on Jotirao Phule have generally tended to describe his movement as an exclusively anti-caste campaign for the rights of the shudratishudras. In the process, most writers sympathetic to Phule

have posited a dichotomy between him and other high caste leaders of his time who were considered brahminical and anti-shudra. This over-emphasis on the caste question has blunted the revolutionary content of Phule's ideology. Many of the existing historical works have seen Phule merely in terms of his opposition to brahminical nationalism on the one hand and the crystallisation of a non-brahmin identity on the other. In all these writings Phule is seen as either a social reformer or



## **Selected Writings of Jotirao Phule**

Edited with annotation and an introduction by  
GP Deshpande  
LeftWord Books, New Delhi, 2002  
Price: INR 490  
Pages: x+247

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**reviewed by  
Archana Prasad**

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a popular political organiser, but never as a revolutionary. Such a narrow interpretation of Phule is quite unsatisfactory, especially in the current phase of Indian politics. It is imperative that those mounting the challenge to globalisation and communalism in present-day South Asia remain united on questions of egalitarianism, secularism and the rights of the poor if they are to succeed in securing the future of a majority of the population in the region. This is only possible if those aspects of dalit ideology which create the scope for joint action are

retrieved from the oblivion that they have been consigned to by contemporary politics.

*Selected Writings of Jotirao Phule* attempts to do precisely this. The book includes the unabridged translations of two of Phule's major works *The Cultivators Whip Cord* and *Slavery*, besides other important tracts on women's equality, education and religion. The introduction to the volume by the well-known Marathi critic and playwright GP Deshpande brings out in stark detail the different strands of Phule's thought, particularly the revolutionary edge of his writings that is generally lost in the restricted discussion of his caste reformism. Placing his own interpretation in the context of the existing historiography, Deshpande examines the ideas that enabled Phule to have "a broad sweeping vision" and become a "system-building activist" (p 5). Deshpande's understanding of Phule not only revises the existing histories of the non-brahmin movement in India but also gives Phule's ideas a much wider scope and context.

The editor's introduction argues that Phule was first and foremost a revolutionary who viewed the society of his time in terms of a bipolar opposition between shudratishudras and brahmins. In this sense, Phule's construct was quite similar to the way in which a bipolar opposition was created by Marx between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat in his analysis of modern society (p 8). The methodological similarity in the works of these two important thinkers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century from very different societies is striking. Phule's introduction to *Slavery* (1873) illustrates this point. He writes, "The institution of caste, which is the main object of their [the brahmins] laws, had no existence amongst them originally. That this was an after creation of their own cunning is evident from their own writings. The highest rights, the highest privileges and gifts, and everything that would make the life of a brahmin easy, smooth and happy – everything that would con-

serve or flatter their self pride – were especially inculcated and enjoyed, whereas the Sudras and Atisudras were regarded with supreme hatred and contempt and the commonest rights of humanity were denied to them". (p 29)

This dichotomy is further exemplified when Phule discusses this contradiction in *Cultivator's Whipcord* (1883), where he explicitly states that all labouring farmers belong to one caste, and that is the caste of the sudras. It is significant that Phule makes no distinction between pastoralists, peasants and gardeners who he considers a part of the larger shudra farmer caste (p 118). In this context, it would appear that the opposition that is posited between dalit and Marxist ideologies may not be as irreconcilable as is being made out today by some thinkers and activists. Another interesting and important aspect of Phule's writings is the manner in which he conceptualised caste. For him caste was dual in character, being both a category of the production process, and an ideology used by brahmins to dominate others. Most selections in this volume show this dual aspect of caste.

Phule highlights this dualism by retelling the stories of Hindu mythologies and answering questions about the nature of oppression that they embody. In *Slavery*, Phule recounts the famous myth of the brahmin hero, Parasuram, in a manner that ridicules brahminical theology. In an imaginary letter to the "immortal Brahmin" he challenges the latter's claim to chaste and moral stature and attempts to demystify the brahminical order. He does this by showing that the brahmin is cunning, a cheat and cowardly in character (p 70). There are several other instances where Phule exhibits his mastery in showing the varieties of political and cultural forms of brahminical manipulation. This is most evident in the *Cultivator's Whipcord* where he demonstrates how brahmins dupe sudras, take over their land and make them bonded labourers. Further, they also

create rituals in order to deprive sudras of their meagre income and produce (pp 141-49).

The *Book of True Faith* (1891) is Phule's last seminal work and the epitome of his revolutionary thought. Here Phule set out to demolish the myths created by the brahmins and argued that true Hinduism is bereft of caste discrimination. In his arguments with his adopted son, Yashwant Phule, he advocated a world with one caste and one god. It is significant that he described Islam and the Islamic rulers of India as people who should have liberated society from the caste system, but instead they chose a life of luxury and its attendant corruptions. He saw the advent of British rule as another opportunity that could achieve the aim of a complete overhauling of Hinduism and the eradication of caste differentiation (pp 235-36). This is mainly because he considered Islam and Christianity as monotheistic religions which postulated the equality of all people.

### Central contradictions

Phule's writings on women, education, literature and his defence of Pandita Ramabai's conversion to Christianity also reveal the radical content of his thought. In all these documents Phule describes the main social, economic and cultural conflicts of his times in terms of the central contradiction between brahmins and sudras. While the similarity between Phule's method and that of Marx is evident in these writings, there is one important difference between the two, namely in the understanding of imperialism and colonial government. As Deshpande points out, both Marx and Phule viewed British rule historically, in that they felt that it would shatter the traditional fabric of Indian society. But the important difference between the two was that Phule and his successors did not see imperialism dialectically (p 19). This means that their caste perspective often blunted their vision of the class contradictions that existed

between the elites and the toiling masses, thus ignoring the dual character of imperialism. Hence they took softer and softer positions on British imperialism, and ended up believing that only the British and the missionaries would create conditions that would liberate the shudratishudras from their plight.

As Deshpande points out at the end of his introduction, despite the important contribution of Phule's revolutionary thought, the genesis of the dilemmas of the dalit movement today can also be found in Phule's thought. The tendency to overlook the sins of imperialism as the single most exploitative force in the past and the present has led to the absence of any discussion on the nature and the impact of globalisation and 20<sup>th</sup> century imperialism amongst the dalit intelligentsia of today. This is reflected in the Bhopal Document of January 2002, which charts out the transformatory agenda of a significant and influential section of dalit opinion in north India. A large segment of this intelligentsia in India has accepted globalisation as a solution to the problems of the community.

Deshpande argues that the tensions inherent in Phule's writings are present in the dalit movement in Maharashtra today in a more accentuated form than ever before. Instead of seeing Marxists and leftists as their allies, the current dalit leadership sees them, rather than rightwing chauvinism, as their prime enemy (p 20). He, therefore, pleads that Phule's revolutionary thought should not just be retrieved but also applied to contemporary circumstances. In other words, Phule's desire that the oppressed shudras (not necessarily a caste category in his terms) would lead a struggle against an oppressive system should provide a plank for the unity of the contemporary struggles against imperialism and caste oppression. In this sense, this volume provides a unique opportunity to initiate a dialogue between dalit and leftist thinkers. ▽





# Arrival of the native



Ethno-entrepreneurship gets cracking as the well-settled generation of Non-Resident Indians begins to accumulate culture.

by **Bela Malik**

Invented India has begun to encroach on the cultural landscape of London. The West End musical, *Bombay Dreams*, produced by Andrew Lloyd Webber (*Jesus Christ Superstar*), The Really Useful Group and Shekhar Kapur, has begun its run at the Apollo Victoria where tickets range from £14 to £40. The musical track of *Monsoon Wedding* is selling briskly at Tower Records on Piccadilly Street. At the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A), the exhibition "Cinema India: The Art of Bollywood" opened on 26 June and will continue till 6 October this year. Tube stations across the city sport posters of one or another Bollywood-related 'event'.

In this new outbreak of culture, India has been abridged to a caricature from Bollywood, whose allure now matches that of yoga as a niche-market commodity. The crowds that throng to rediscover India are not drop-out flower children looking for *karma*, *dharma*, *ganja* and themselves. It is a clean-cut mob of Anglo-Saxon yuppies seeking ethnic discovery, and angst-ridden, identity-starved British Indians who are never allowed to forget the roots they cannot have. The first generation Indian immigrant was too preoccupied with the accumulation of assets to be diverted by trifles. For the well-settled generation that has come of age, it is time to balance the account and accumulate culture. Pedigree is the wannabe's sign of arrival, and this ethnically pastless generation has turned to the figments of Bollywood imagination to invent the realities of its forgotten homeland. In the process, this enforced nostalgia gives ethno-entrepreneurship a promising bottom line.

*Bombay Dreams* is inspired by the colour, magic, and profligacy of Bollywood aesthetics. The musical deals with the contradictions between the reality of Mumbai, the relentless city, and the illusions of Bombay, the tinsel town. Its score is by AR Rehman, whose music for the film *Bombay* sold 50 million copies. The story is based on a book by Meera Syal (of BBC2's *Goodness Gracious Me*). The lyrics are by Don Black and the director is Steven Plimlott.

## Non-resident nostalgia invariably reduces India to some familiar and ostentatious denominator

The enormous star cast includes Raza Jaffrey, Preeya Kalidas, and Dalip Tahil. It has been advertised as "a fusion of fantasy and glamour, epic spectacle and heart-aching romance", which promises a "uniquely new musical voice for the West End". There was a time when the Hindi film was the cultivated Indian's guilty secret. Now that it has arrived in West End, alongside *The Full Monty* and *My Fair Lady*, and been certified by London's cultural establishment, it has not only invested the emigre bourgeoisie with cultural refinement, it also seems to have released the rest of us from the burden of our erstwhile guilt.

If *Bombay Dreams* is only a relatively tame replica of some of Bollywood's more egregious follies, the

exhibition "Cinema India" is rather more insidious as an exercise in presenting an escapist history of Hindi cinema. This exhibition is part of the British Film Institute's ImagineAsia project and is only the second event to be held in the V&A's new Contemporary Space Exhibition Gallery. But it is not just the history that is all wrong, even the atmosphere is. The opening on 26 June betrayed the desperate immigrant longing for cultural respectability. The attempt was clearly to create an 'Indian' ambience at the venue. No mean task even for the well-versed, the attempt proved to be far too ambitious for those who undertook it at the V&A. Non-resident nostalgia invariably reduces India to some familiar and ostentatious denominator, which in this case proved to be the garish New Delhi marriage hall, decked in marigold.

Marriage and marigold are prominent artefacts in that peculiar traffic of values and other intangibles between Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) and their market-led cousins in urban north India. The former give the latter lustre and leverage in the neighbourhood by the mere act of expatriate existence. The latter in turn organise standing ovations for the former on their annual pilgrimages home and give them cultural ideas of recent vintage, which on reaching England become Indian practices of great antiquity. Both *Monsoon Wedding* and *Bend it Like Beckham*, two recent NRI productions influenced by this traffic, owe their content and success to the affluent and flamboyant urban north Indian marriage.

With such a customised pedi-

gree, manufactured from the raw material of life-cycle rituals, it is not surprising that the organisers of "Cinema India" felt compelled to dress up the V&A like the venue of their kin's marriage, complete with a decorated car, and an overdone ethnic programme card with tassels, announcing the details of a variety show. For a card of modest proportions it managed to convey a great deal of pointless information, including the florid assurance that visitors are "very welcome to Cinema India", which could be accessed "via the marble steps in the main entrance". The card also hinted at dire and nameless consequences for those who defiled the inner sanctum by carrying the alcohol being served near the marble steps into the exhibition area. The cultural programme itself consisted of dance performances, rangoli art design, the screening of the film *Sholay*, more dances and a recital of "Indian instrumental and percussion music" by Davinder Singh.

The selective appropriation and packaging of such cultural paraphernalia was just a prelude to the more audacious tailoring of Indian cinema to suit the sensibilities and needs of expatriates on a home-bound historical junket. "Cinema India" proved to be an exhibition mainly of Hindi film posters. The history of Indian cinema had quietly but drastically atrophied into a potted history of Bollywood billboards. The idea was to recreate various visual images as works of art inspired by 'Indian cinema'. Painters of larger-than-life hoardings were flown in from Bombay to give live demonstrations of their otherwise invisible craft. According to Divia Patel, curating the exhibition, these "hand-painted wall-murals", as she called them, are becoming extinct as 'Indian cinema' went global and began to embrace computer-generated images taken directly from film stills. The aim of the exhibition was therefore to also recognise and preserve both the art and the graphic artists, before they disappeared from history. "Cinema

India" was clearly then a three-month long cultural preservative, permitted ingredients only.

If this exercise gives short shrift to the wide regional diversity of Indian cinema, it also makes a hash of presenting Hindi cinema by imposing on it a tailor-made path of evolution. The pattern of the exhibits implies a steady linear movement that culminates in the eventual convergence of Bollywood fantasy and expatriate desire in the more recent genre of films, whose milieu is the Hindu NRI paradise.

### Prefabricated ideology

The posters fall in five chronologically-arranged typologies. The first section, "Towards Independence, Images of Nationalism from 1913 to 1947", takes the viewer through the early stage of film advertising, the transition from text to image-based publicity, and ends with posters depicting the nationalist movement. This is followed by the next typology, i.e. the post-independence period, stretching from 1947 to the 1960s, which is described as a "lav-

ish and innovative" phase, with "stunning imagery reflecting the epic character of these blockbuster films". Much space is devoted to *Mother India* (1957), which was nominated for the Oscar. The rationale of this typology is beyond comprehension, and seems to have no real function other than serving as a contrived chronological filler in an exhibition hurrying towards a more narcissistic purpose.

This narcissism begins with the third section titled "Internationalism and Images of Youth 1960s-70s". This is where NRI pride in its newly adopted icon begins to bloom. This allegedly is the phase when India began to look beyond its national boundaries and films reflected a more international outlook. Consequently the classic films of this period, we are told, emphasised youth culture, fashion and romance. The striking psychedelic poster for *Bobby* (1973) is supposed to have captured this cosmopolitan ethos. Films that do not fit this bill obviously had to be excluded.

The fourth phase is designated

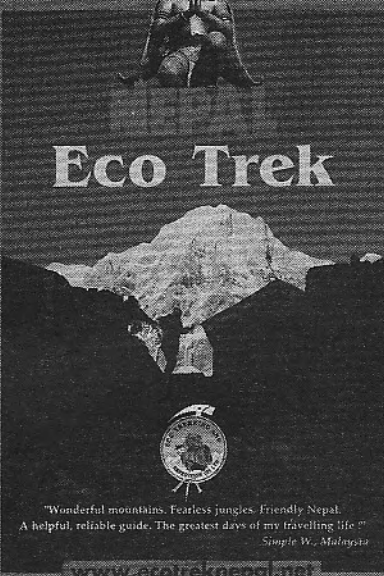
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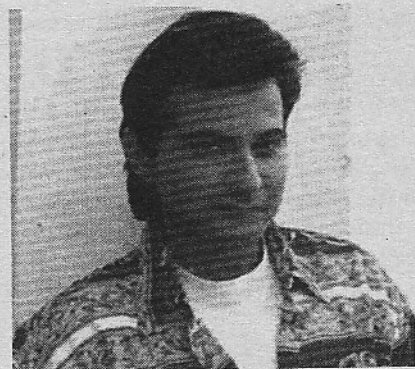
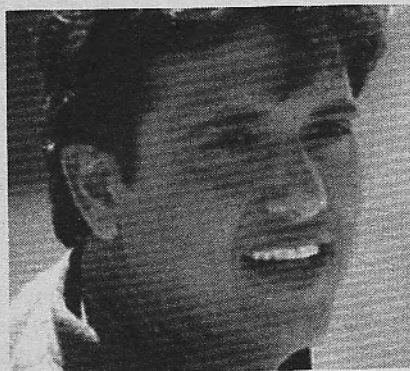
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Dada Kondke, Govinda, Sanjay Kapoor: Among those who didn't make it to London

"Crisis in India, Images of Violence and the Rise of the Male Hero 1970s-80s". The films of this period are said to reflect the turmoil of 1970s India, a time of political unrest and increasing levels of urban poverty and crime. The exhibition describes the posters of this period as heralding a new era of design, dominated by images of violence and weaponry along with complex montages of portraits and figures. *Sholay* (1975), it is claimed, was a landmark film of this genre and the distinctive typography of its advertising was particularly influential. Other commercially successful non-violent films like Basu Chatterjee's *Chotisi Baat* (1975) with a mild-mannered, lower middle class hero (Amol Palekar) out to woo a bus-commuting lower middle class working heroine (Vidhya Sinha) just cannot figure in the pre-fabricated typology of the exhibition. This section also applauds the rise of one of Bollywood's most essential and endearing elements, Amitabh Bachchan, and the posters take time off to chart his ascent. Customised history has no place for the numerous other Indian actors or actresses who despite their outstanding performances did not quite make it on the expatriate horizon.

The culminating genre is the technically slick Bollywood film, which the exhibition chooses to classify under the rubric "Global Perspective Films". These films, like *Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge*, signal the arrival of the chocolate-box expatriate hero committed to nationalism, machismo and orthodox fami-

ly values. This is the moment of celebration and the entire period leading up to this is just the pre-history during which Indian cinema was preparing itself for the historic revelation of the "global perspective".

Clearly the global perspective Hindi film is the vehicle in which non-residents wish to launch themselves in the culture market. Films belonging to this category create the essentialised India that matches the make-believe Indian-ness of expatriates reclaiming their roots. The hunger for material and spiritual comfort is fulfilled in these films, which reconcile NRI paradoxes by simply refusing to admit uncomfortable social realities. Poverty, caste, Islam and all the other inconveniences of modern expatriate life are extinguished to present Hindu family sagas, which extol an idealised upper-caste life. If the new genre of Hindi films tampers with the realities of Indian sociology, the exhibition plays havoc with the realities of Bollywood history for the same self-serving purpose of promoting the NRI way of life.

Of all the variety of the enormous number of films rolling out of Bollywood, select films are picked up and made to fit a narrative that is both thematically and chronologically convenient. Through this selection and presentation, the exhibition contributes to making the pre-history of Hindi cinema acceptable. Censored out are the Dada Khondkes, Dara Singhs, Jayshree Ts and Govindas.

The thematic sections of the exhibition are equally stereotyped.

The section titled "Love and romance", is a carefully sieved choice of Bollywood figures to be showcased to an international audience - Raj Kapoor and Nargis, and Guru Dutt and Waheeda Rehman and such other polished figures. The section on women claims that in films of an older vintage, the vamp donned Western clothes and the heroine was clad in chaste outfits, whereas today, it is the heroine who wears Western clothes. There are any number of older films which decked out the heroine in Western clothes. The section also omits to mention that in both the old and the new films, by the last scene, usually, the heroine switches to a traditional wardrobe. Accompanying all this window-dressing are wall projections of clips of fight routines and song-and-dance sequences, which complete the picture of 'Indian' cinema's unique virtues.

And, lest it be mistaken that NRI culture is only about Bollywood aesthetics, the exhibition also features cinema-inspired art by representatives of high culture like the eminent painter Ghulam Sheikh, Catherine Yass, Annu Palakunnathu Mathew and Adam Bartos. This section sounds more like a whispered aside to the Anglo-Saxon cognoscenti that Bollywood creativity has the endorsement of genteel folk. The presence of Satyajit Ray and a few other urbane film-makers among the exhibits serves the same purpose. In all this gilt-edged packaging of Hindi cinema, the exhibition, quite apart from its deliberate exclusion of details that do not

validate its stereotypes, also chooses not to draw attention to aspects of the exhibits that range from the scandalous to the offensive. It had no comment to make on the fact that the Urdu script has, in recent years, disappeared from the poster (and in the rolling credit) and that Sanskritised Hindi rather than Hindustani is the language of today's hero. Nor does it seem to be aware of the strong critiques that have been emerging on the more repellent social aspects of the new clutch of expat-oriented films (for example, see *Himal*, August 2001 and March 2002). It is also noticeably silent on the possible connection between underworld funds and the financing of the slick new films in which principled NRI boys and girls gambol. Shorn of its dark and realistic side, the Bollywood film appears in a sanitised form to fulfil its historic mission of dignifying the arriviste immigrant with contemporary art and ancient culture.

### Cultural confluence

The ambience of the V&A and of the new genre of films have to be similar if the "marriage, marigold and rangoli" leitmotif of Indian-ness is to be perpetuated. To create an acceptable broad-spectrum commodity called 'India', it becomes necessary to minimise the definition of an otherwise complex entity by restricting it to some essential attributes that have been made prominent over a period of time. These include 'traditional clothes', dances forms that incorporate folk and western traits, baroque edifices which house the protagonists, garish ornamentation, extravagant rituals, unrelenting opulence and loyal family retainers. It matters little that all these caricatured claims on history are unrecognisable to the average Indian, whose culture this is being marketed as.

If this represents a kind of cultural confluence, NRI affluence also ensures that it is a specie of economic convergence. At the exit are some

smartly-dressed youngsters handing out cards advertising Café Lazeez, "London's premier Indian restaurant group". The exhibition, it turns out, is sponsored, along with Cobra beer, by Café Lazeez, Sippy Films Private Ltd and Sholay Media and Entertainment. Clearly the corporate merger of curry and *Sholay* is a savvy one and in the process Indian culture, whatever that means, has been rewritten to mean Hindi films premiered in London, 'masala raan' at the Café Lazeez, and Cobra beer, made in England. The effort to create this hyper-idealised Indian form is enabled by a conjunction of economic and cultural motives. The visual spectacle produced by the Hindi film in the age of globalisation caters to the cultural gluttony of the NRI and the commercial gluttony of Bollywood. And as a windfall gain, multi-cultural Anglo-Saxon aesthetes have also lent their voice to the chorus of approval for the most visible art of the Subcontinent. ▽

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Translation, Text  
and Theory  
The Paradigm of India

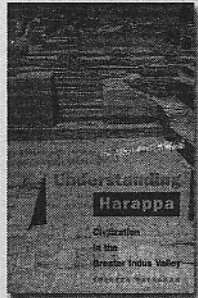


Edited by Rukmini Bhaya Nair

## Translation, text and theory: The paradigm of India

Edited by Rukmini Bhaya Nair  
Sage, New Delhi, 2002  
pp 356  
ISBN 0 76 199587 0  
Price: INR 540

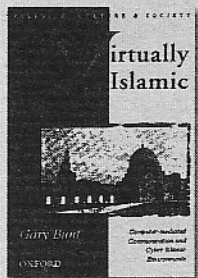
Setting out to “re-evaluate the paradigm of translation within the multilingual and cultural context of the Indian subcontinent”, this collection of essays edited by Rukmini Bhaya Nair of the Indian Institute of Technology, New Delhi, brings together a diverse assemblage of writings on various aspects of South Asian translation and linguistic theory. In addition to an essay by editor Nair on the philosophy of language and translation, notable contributions include pieces by K Ayyappa Paniker, Jhumpa Lahiri and Ritu Menon. Divided into sections on cultural attitudes, historical perspectives, pragmatic considerations, linguistic descriptions and philosophical foundations, this volume seeks to contextualise translations as not simply bridges between languages but as interfaces between different theoretical and cultural perspectives.



## Understanding Harappa: Civilization in the Greater Indus Valley

By Shereen Ratnagar  
Tulika, New Delhi, 2002 (first reprint)  
pp x+165  
ISBN 81 85229 60 0  
Price: INR 250

Beginning in the third millennium BCE and lasting for more than six centuries, the Harappan Civilisation is considered to be the most extensive of ancient cultures, at its peak covering an area extending from present-day Haryana to Balochistan and Afghanistan. In this volume written for non-specialists, archaeologist Shereen Ratnagar offers readers a wide-ranging discourse on Harappan religion, settlement patterns, trade, art, social formations, historical development, and ultimate collapse. With numerous diagrams and maps, many in colour, this volume provides a concise and accessible overview of pre-historic development in the Indus plains.



## Virtually Islamic: Computer-mediated communication and cyber Islamic environments

By Gary R Bunt  
OUP, Karachi, 2002  
pp 190  
ISBN 0 19 579784 1  
Price: PKR 350/USD 15

Despite their large influence on the modern world, Islam and information technology (IT) have not been studied in depth as they relate to one another. Even as the internet increasingly becomes a

source of information on Islam and a facilitator for discussions on that religion – both among Muslims and non-Muslims – the implications of this technology on Muslim social, political and religious spheres have not been explored in great detail. In this volume, University of Wales scholar Gary Bunt considers topics ranging from the role of IT censorship in Muslim societies to IT facilitation of social organisation and the formation of trans-boundary Muslim identities. This is a creditable effort to assess the impact of technological change on Muslim societies.



## The Hindu widow in Indian literature

By Rajul Sogani  
OUP, New Delhi, 2002  
pp ix+265  
ISBN 0 19 565844 2  
Price: INR 525

Despite being traditionally ignored in Sub-continental literature, Hindu widows became figures of significance in 19th century South Asian writing. In *The Hindu widow in Indian literature*, University of Delhi researcher Rajul Sogani considers the role of widows in modern prose written in eight South Asian languages, including such seminal tomes as Rabindranath Tagore's *Chokker Bali* in Bangla and Mohan Rakesh's *Antaral* in Hindi. Arguing that fiction allows a glimpse into the evolving and often contradictory attitudes of upper-caste Hindus, Sogani examines the gamut of roles assigned to widows in 19th and 20th century South Asian literature as a basis for wider social observations.



## Slouching towards Ayodhya

By Radhika Desai  
Three Essays Press, New Delhi, 2002  
pp xvii+163  
ISBN 81 88394 07 6  
Price: INR 150/USD 18

Arguing that Hindutva is essentially a fascist mode of mass politics responsible since 1998 for war with Pakistan, communal violence, nuclear tests, de-legitimation of the Indian constitution and communalisation of Indian institutions, commentator Radhika Desai posits that this movement's rise was the “single most fateful development in Indian politics in the closing decades of the twentieth century”. By placing the Hindutva movement in international, national and regional contexts, and by taking into account structural changes in economics and social organisation, Desai portrays India as a society deeply scarred by chauvinist communal identity-building, in which Hindutva is an evolutionary outcome of the ‘post-Congress’ political order, with dangerous implications for the state and society. ▽

Compiled by Deepak Thapa, Social Science Baha, Patan



# There he go again!

Exasperation is expressed differently in different languages, but the *ufff!* of large parts of South Asia is only a relative of the *ooof!* of the Anglophone West. There are some South Asians I know, in particular a lady in Delhi who works in Defence Colony and lives close to Karol Bagh, who refuses to see the distinction between the two.

I find it rather strange that the said lady and others who think like her do not see the semantic uniqueness of the South Asian *ufff!* in comparison to the occidental *ooof!* Let us start with the vocal technicalities. *Ooof!* starts with a longish and un-aspirated 'oo', ending in a short and weak 'f' sound. *Ufff!*, as the Romanised spelling itself indicates, is short and gruff on the 'u' sound, and goes in for a long, aspirated and meaningful 'fff', with the upper front row of teeth connecting with the lower lips, the air being released from in between.

It is a fact that when Madhuri Dixit is exasperated with Salman Khan in *HAHK (Hum Aapke Hain Kaun)*, she *ufffs* – never once does she *ooof*. When Saira Banu tried to take back her *dupatta* from Rajendra Kumar in *HKGM (Himalaya Ki Gond Mey)*, she *uffed*. But, when Clint Eastwood takes a punch in the tummy in *Dirty Harry*, does he *ufff*? No, he *ooofs*, and as we all know, he does not even know the meaning of *dupatta*.

Rolling of the eyes is not a South Asian phenomenon, as we all know, but rather an implant in the upper classes and among the upwardly mobile brought in through the medium of Western film and television. And yet, the rolling of eyes is a perfect complement to certain kinds of *ufffs!* You cannot, however, imagine rolling your eyes with *ooof!*, thus indicating the latter's lack of versatility.

Remember, we have referred to certain kinds of *ufff!*, because unlike the *ooof!* which is a very secular expression that is so bland and unidimensional, *ufff!* covers an emotional spectrum from the mildly irritated to the maddeningly sharp riposte. If I were not to have been accused of South Asian chauvinism, I would have stated that the *ufff!* represents the cultural diversity of the Subcon as opposed to the modernised mundanity of the West, where the *ooof!* serves only one narrow purpose of expressing mild emotional distress. This may well lead me to proceed to draw the existing distinction between the South Asian *aiyah!* and the Anglophone *ouch!*, and the superiority of the former in expressing the relevant emotion, but we can let that hang fire for

the moment.

To demonstrate the obvious distance between *ufff!* and *ooof!*, photographic proof is presented. You can see how the mouth puckers up for the occident, and how it is prim and horizontal for the orient. Photojournalist Min Bajracharya, who took the pictures, confirms (and he should know) that the contrast between the two images is as clear as the skies in monsoon. "There is no question of the difference between the two expressions, there is an ocean between them", says Mr Bajracharya in this concocted quote.

So let us consider the matter closed on *ufff!* and *ooof!*, and those wanting a duel to settle the matter may get in touch with the ICJ at Den Haag. But, friend, there

are many more battles that loom on the horizon in the South Asian fight to ensure that spellings remain matched to sound, and that the aural specificity of particular terms be adequately reflected in the English alphabet.

One particular battle that looms, and it may well escalate into full-blown war unless one of the parties shows restraint, is how to spell in English the name of a most delectable Bengali confectionary made of evacuated milk with a hint of divine aroma to it. Clearly, to do justice to the mellifluousness (or mellifluity, as long as we are inventing words to fit intended meanings) of spoken Bangla, the proper Romanised spelling of the heavenly *mithai* should be '*shon-*

*daishe*'. You would have thought so too, but aha!, there is a certain gentleman in Dhaka, who lives between Lalmati Housing and Shere-Bangla Nagar and scoffs at the suggestion. He insists that the spelling that the English left behind, '*sandesh*', be retained. He insists that the colonial leftover is more than adequate for the confectionary at hand.

Now this is conservatism so bad it is reactionary. To think that the amiable Bengali sweet – certainly it would have been the favourite of Rabindranath not to mention Michael Madhusudhan – having to suffer the ignominy of the colonial stamp, and my friend from between Lalmati Housing and Shere-Bangla Nagar willing to take it lying down! Where is the spirit of Ekushay?! Where is the Bhasha Andolan?! Was this what our ancestors expected of us, to create, proffer and eat *shondaishe* but never to learn to spell it properly in English? I ask you. The shame of it all. Case rested.

*Kanah Prasad*





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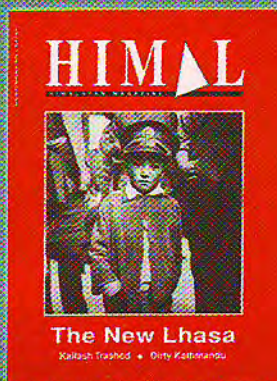


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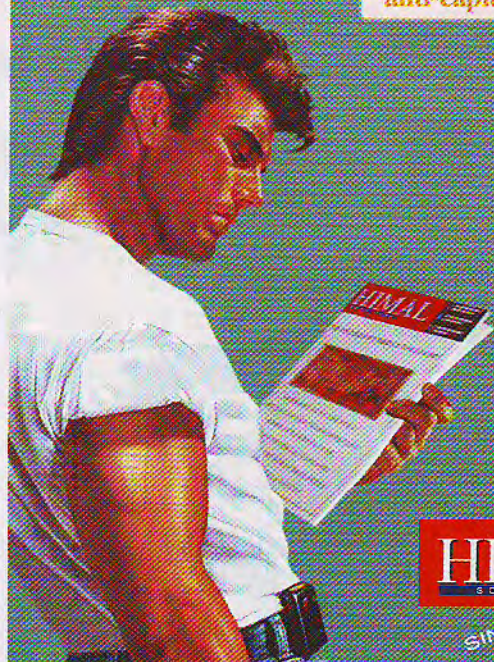
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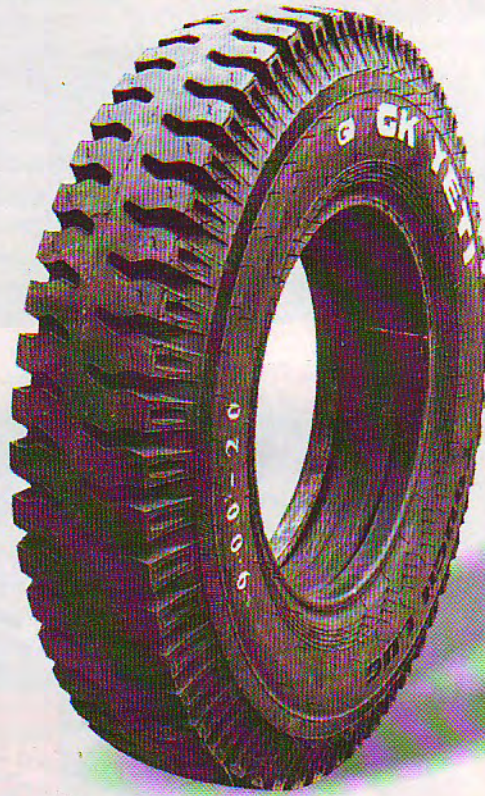
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